



Fight for the Communism of Lenin and Trotsky

Left Reformists in Existential Crisis

ISO Implodes

*Documents from Left Oppositionists
in Socialist Alternative and the
International Marxist Tendency*

Leon Trotsky as commander of the Soviet Red Army, by Yuri Annenkov

An Internationalist Group Pamphlet
June 2019

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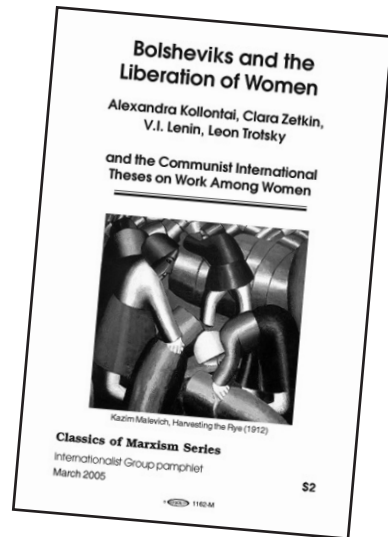
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Introduction

On one stage, Donald Trump ranted “America will never be a socialist country,” as he strutted and blustered his way through last February’s State of the Union address.

On another, backed by a sea of American flags, stood Bernie Sanders, pitching his 2020 run for imperialist commander-in-chief in a major campaign speech on June 12.

A full-throated paean to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Sanders’ speech called to revive FDR’s New Deal. Along the way, he praised other Democratic icons, imperialist war criminals all: Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, the list went on... “This is the unfinished business of the Democratic Party and the vision we must accomplish,” he proclaimed. Joined by much of the media and shamelessly cheered by supposed leftists, the senator from Vermont presented this call to arms for imperialist liberalism as his “vision” of “democratic socialism.”

The “Democratic” part is patently true, as Sanders, New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others channel widespread discontent yet again into this, the world’s oldest capitalist party. As for those who help Sanders & Co. sell this sales pitch as having anything to do with “socialism,” they are brazenly deceiving the working class. “Democratic (Party) socialism” is *for* the Democratic Party – and *against* everything Karl Marx meant by the word, as he and his comrades called the workers of the world to unite for socialist revolution.

Subjugation to the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism is and has been for generations the central mechanism shackling the workers and oppressed to the capitalist ruling class and its state. This means chaining their power and binding them to their exploiters, who are mortal enemies of the oppressed worldwide. Unchaining that power is more than ever a question of life and death today. To fight for socialism means fighting for the *political independence of the working class*; fighting to overthrow capitalism and establish workers rule. Only this can lay the basis for a classless socialist society worldwide.

Today in the U.S., forthrightly exposing and opposing the political operation for the Democrats carried out by Sanders and his supporters on the opportunist “left” is a crucial part of this fight for working-class political independence, for a break from all the bosses’ parties and forging a revolutionary workers party.

The Background to This Pamphlet

The recent growth of the “Sanders socialism” brand of capitalist politics has brought with it two connected phenomena. One is the mushrooming of the Democratic Socialists of America as the biggest, most effective purveyors of “Democratic (Party) socialism.”¹ Positioning themselves as the best, biggest builders of all-out Bernie boosterism, they attracted large numbers of millennial youth shaped by the 2008 economic crisis and repelled by the election of Trump. Favorable publicity reached mega proportions with the electoral victory of “AOC,” the “Justice Democrat” who declared herself a

¹ See the Internationalist Group pamphlet, *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats*, February 2018.

member of the DSA when it hopped on board her campaign.²

A second, parallel phenomenon has been, quite literally, the *existential crisis* that a range of groups on the left have experienced in the recent period.

It wasn’t supposed to be that way, many are no doubt telling themselves. Basking in the glow of “Sanders socialism” was supposed to help them grow and keep on growing. Every advance was breathlessly enthused over and cheered. While the several groups each had its own “tactical” prescription, supposed “theoretical” pretext and/or rhetorical nuance, they all boil down to this: *Here is the bandwagon – Jump on!*

What did “success” at the game of presenting Democratic “progressivism” and bourgeois populism as supposedly some kind of socialism mean for these sectors of the reformist left? It wound up cutting the ground out from under their feet. Posing as “critical” fellow travelers of the DSA, while still claiming some distance, however slight, was a recipe for irrelevance. As we have noted, the opportunism that was always the basis for these currents’ politics has meant making themselves more and more openly “Democratic” and less and less “socialist.” This above all is the political background to the dramatic crisis and collapse of left reformism which is taking place before our eyes. Rejecting the very concept of a class line in politics, today they are streaming into the DSA and the Democratic Party outright.

What’s in The Pamphlet

The present Internationalist Group pamphlet brings together a range of materials. These include articles on burning issues of Marxist politics today, analyses of the implosion of “left” social-democratic tendencies and particularly documents and correspondence from those who resisted and fought against the liquidation into “Sanders socialism.”

The *first section* analyzes the spectacular collapse and formal dissolution this spring of the International Socialist Organization, which not long ago styled itself the largest organization on the U.S. left. We take up the politics and practice of the ISO, which it summed up in the mantra of “socialism from below.” As we explain, this “Third Camp socialism” was fashioned by the likes of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper and Tony Cliff, who all broke from Trotskyism, soon embracing Cold War social democracy as increasingly open apologists for imperialism. Along the way we comment on the centrist evasions of Left Voice, the U.S. affiliate of the media project sponsored by the “Fracción Trotskista” led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo.³

The *second section* is made up of materials from former left oppositionists in Socialist Alternative (SAIt), most widely known for its “socialist city council member” Kshama Sawant

² See “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018, reprinted on page 76 of this pamphlet.

³ For more on the PTS, see “The Left Front in Argentina: A Reformist Electoral Cartel,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018.

in Seattle. Opposition to SAlt's embrace of the Sanders campaign, known internally as the "Bern turn," led them to break with the social-democratic program and outlook of SAlt and its co-thinkers in the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). This current's origins go back to the British Militant Tendency, an ostensibly Trotskyist tendency that was led for decades by Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe. In the early 1990s, disputes centering on whether to continue as a current within the British Labour Party led to a split in Britain and internationally. Taaffe (who wanted to practice the Militant brand of economism outside Labour) headed up the CWI, while Grant formed the International Marxist Tendency, which since his death

in 2006 has been headed by his longtime associate Alan Woods. Today, the CWI is immersed in a rancorous, semi-public fight pitting Taaffe against much of his own organization.

Comrades who made their way from SAlt to genuine Trotskyism were centered on the former New Hampshire/Lowell, Massachusetts branch, creating the Class Struggle Education League, which in June 2018 fused with the Internationalist Group (IG), U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. The impact of their documents was felt on the other side of the country by young comrades (high-school students at the time) who were in and active with the Spokane, Washington branch of SAlt. Taking up the struggle for the political independence of the working class led them to break from the SAlt/CWI line. Along the way, they explored and rejected the politics of another ostensibly Trotskyist organization active in Washington state, the Freedom Socialist Party, as documented in their debates and hard-hitting response to the FSP published here. Forming the Spokane Marxist Group, they, together with the Marxist Student Group at Central Connecticut State University, fused with the IG's youth section, the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, on International Women's Day (March 8) of this year.

The pamphlet's *third section* consists of materials from the political struggle waged by another young comrade, who was a member of the other wing of the "Grantite tradition": the International Marxist Tendency. Active in the Minneapolis branch of the IMT's U.S. section, James B.'s questioning of its tailing of Sanders and its calls for this bourgeois politician to form a "mass socialist party" led him to deepen study of the history of the Trotskyist movement and the key programmatic issues it has confronted. Notably, the question of the class line led him to challenge the IMT's support for police and prison guard "unions" and "strikes."

In this society born of slavery, racist police repression



Andrew Hamik/AP

Bernie Sanders presents his star-spangled Democratic Party "socialism" as the continuation of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, as well as Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson – imperialist warmongers one and all.

and mass incarceration are central issues on a daily basis. The IMT often keeps mum about its longstanding position, nurtured on the social-democratic mythology of British Labourism. Thus an important accomplishment of these documents has been to help bring the IMT's grotesque position to the forefront, and to confront it with the principled class position of Leon Trotsky and his adherents in the U.S., notably in the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamsters who faced the issue of the nature of the police point-blank in their historic 1934 strike.

The *fourth section* of the pamphlet reprints brief writings by Trotsky and James P. Cannon on bourgeois "Third Parties." These are important given some leftists' claims that backing the Greens and similar formations is supposedly an alternative to "mainstream" capitalist politics as practiced by the Democrats and Republicans. Here, too, the fight for working-class political independence from *all* bourgeois parties is front and center, key to forging a revolutionary vanguard party of the working class. This final section of the pamphlet also brings together a number of key articles from the press of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.

"Socialism: What It Is (and Isn't)" was the title of a widely read article from our youth press reprinted as part of the above-mentioned pamphlet on the DSA and "Sanders socialism" published last year before the current existential crisis of the reformist left broke into the open. As that January 2018 article noted: "Going back to the *Communist Manifesto* (1847), polemics – political arguments aimed at achieving political clarity on an issue – are an important part of the Marxist tradition." Contributing to revolutionary political clarity, so essential to the fight for what socialism means in our era – the communism of Lenin and Trotsky – is the objective of this new pamphlet today. ■

Section I: SAlt Splinters, ISO Implodes Left Reformists In Existential Crisis

Buffeted by social and political crises that make the phrase “capitalist decay” palpable on a daily basis, the United States is already neck-deep in the muck of the next presidential campaign. With Republicans firmly congealed around that embodiment of vileness, Donald Trump, by June no less than 24 Democratic hopefuls had entered the field for the 2020 nomination. While most “progressives” would vote for anything, including maybe even an actual donkey, if it won the Democratic nomination to oppose Trump, Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign has once again drawn the hopes and illusions of the majority of self-identified leftists.

As in 2016, the political and social function of Sanders’ campaign is to renew and refurbish the subjugation of workers, youth and the oppressed to U.S. imperialism’s Democratic Party. Crossing yet another “t,” in early March he signed a “loyalty pledge” demanded by the Democratic National Committee to run as a Democrat and govern as one if elected. And once again, the reformist left jumps to do its part in presenting this bourgeois politician, running for the nomination of the oldest capitalist party in the world, as a “socialist.” What does this mean? As a headline summarizing comments by the senator from Vermont put it: “Bernie Sanders: ‘Democratic Socialist’ Is Just a Synonym for New Deal Liberal” (*New York* magazine, 23 April).

Indeed, together with fellow star of Democratic (Party) “socialism,” Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Sanders takes every opportunity to present his positions as the continuity of Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR’s New Deal politically and militarily rearmed U.S. imperialism in the midst of the social upheaval of the Great Depression. It brought about the so-called “New Deal coalition” that for generations cemented Democratic hegemony over labor, African Americans and many urban whites plus the left, subordinating their struggles to this main party of U.S. imperialist capitalism.



New York Times

Kansas congressional candidate James Thompson with “democratic socialists” Senator Bernie Sanders and future Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in Wichita, July 2018. One calls to “abolish I.C.E.” the others don’t, but they all are for “secure borders.” And they all run for office in the Democratic Party of imperialist war, racist repression and mass deportations.

DSA Growth Posed Existential Challenge

Sanders’ last campaign, together with revulsion at the election of Trump, led to the mushrooming of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). This long-stagnant social-democratic pressure group on and in the Democratic Party rocketed from an official 6,500 (actually much less) to a formal membership of over 50,000 members, largely “millennials.” This posed an existential challenge to reformist socialist groups like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAlt) which occupied political space a bit to the left of liberal Democrats.

These organizations, together with the ephemeral “DSA left” and a range of smaller groups, joined in hailing the surge of “Democratic (Party) socialism” as the birth of a “new socialist movement.” Last year, their excitement boiled over with the primary victory and subsequent election to Congress of DSA member Ocasio-Cortez. As we wrote in August 2018:

“The influx of new members, they insisted, was radicalizing the DSA in a process that would push it away from and eventually out of the Democratic Party. The scientific Marxist term for this is: bullshit. As shown by the Ocasio-Cortez campaign ... the DSA and its new members are moving further *into* the

Democratic Party. And this, in turn, helps push the fake-left groups cheering them on further to the right, as they seek ever deeper unity with the mainstream social democrats.”

–“Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018

The rise of Ocasio-Cortez (“AOC”) and the accompanying non-stop media hype “have deepened the dilemmas that Bernie Sanders’ ‘political revolution’ posed for the opportunist left,” our article noted. “Pushed and pulled to be more and more ‘Democratic’ and less and less ‘socialist,’ they’re scrambling to figure out how best to enthuse ... but still justify their own existence.” While claiming to have something in common with Leninism and even Trotskyism, groups like SAlt and the ISO “gush over the DSA’s growth and ‘successes,’ rightly seeing themselves as part of a social-democratic confraternity. But grabbing a piece of the action won’t be so easy.” It was clear that SAlt, like the ISO, “faces more internal turmoil as it inevitably confronts the question: ‘All the way with the DSA?’”

In fact, the ensuing period has been one of growing crisis for reformist groups nominally to the left of the DSA. The one that most unabashedly threw itself into the Sanders campaign, Socialist Alternative, has dwindled and split, losing a huge chunk of its membership and a whole series of locals. More circumspect, the International Socialist Organization hailed the bourgeois politicians Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez as fellow socialists while hovering at the edge of formally endorsing them, leading to extensive public debates. Its political travails fueled an organizational crisis that terminally catalyzed in a #MeToo-type scandal early this year. Its implosion took place in a matter of weeks – amid a torrent of convulsive soul-searching – and on March 29 the ISO, which for many years described itself as the largest group on the U.S. left, declared its own dissolution.

In common with a number of other reformist outfits, including the Workers World Party (which has been decimated in a three-way split) in the U.S., the ISO and SAlt have been devoured by their own opportunism.

SAlt, CWI In Crisis

Socialist Alternative, affiliated with the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) long led by British pseudo-Trotskyist Peter Taaffe, has since its inception in the 1980s centered its activity on one low-level reformist campaign after another. It made a splash in November 2013 when SAlt member Kshama Sawant was elected to the Seattle City Council on a program of liberal/populist reforms. Sawant spearheaded a single-issue campaign that led to the city passing a law in 2014 that would, over several years, phase in a minimum wage of \$15 an hour. The group expanded rapidly, boasting of building new branches in “dozens of cities.” Sawant’s deepening alliances with local Democrats paved the way for her voting last year to support the new chief of police.¹

In the spring of 2015, when Bernie Sanders announced his

¹ See “SAlt’s Sawant Backs Seattle’s Top Cop,” *The Internationalist* No. 53, September-October 2018, reprinted on page 82 of this pamphlet.



Twitter

Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative with Bernie Sanders, 2016.

candidacy for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, SAlt’s leadership thought positioning themselves early and enthusiastically as Bernie’s “socialist” best builders would be their ticket to the big time.² Jumping in with both feet, the group quickly sank up to its eyebrows in outright bourgeois politics, coming up with one supposedly clever “tactical” pretext after another to justify it all.

Launching what came to be known as SAlt’s “Bern turn,” they formed a “#Movement4Bernie,” parroting Sanders’ populist slogan about a “political revolution against the billionaire class.” The fact that it was all about recycling New Deal rhetoric to renew and refurbish the Democratic Party (as Sanders explicitly proclaimed), was on display when SAlt’s Sawant gave Sanders “a socialist welcome” to Seattle at a Democratic campaign event in August 2015 commemorating Roosevelt’s establishment of Social Security and Lyndon Johnson’s establishment of Medicare.

The fig leaf SAlt used to justify its support to Sanders’ capitalist campaign was its claim that it would push him to run as an independent if he did not win the Democratic nomination. But as he said all along he would do, Sanders gave his support to Hillary Clinton in the general election. Building Sanders’ campaign with ever-expanding pretexts and rationalizations, SAlt succeeded in helping him rope new and younger forces into the Democratic Party.

What SAlt’s political acrobatics did not succeed in doing was pole-vaulting them into the big time as the group’s leadership had imagined. With the Democratic Socialists of America growing by leaps and bounds, cheered on by much of the bourgeois media, SAlt’s frantic boosterism looked downright pathetic. If this is what “socialism” meant, why not join with those who were bigger and better at the game? Soon enough, whole branches of the organization decamped further to the right, toward the DSA or the Greens.

As SAlt threw itself into campaigning for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other DSA Democrats last fall, a section of its leadership and membership, headed by former national secretary Philip Locker and former Sawant campaign manager

² See “Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left” (June 2015), reprinted in the Internationalist Group pamphlet *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats*, February 2018 and on page 67 of this pamphlet.

Ramy Khalil, took the next logical step and took off for the DSA. (They now call themselves the “Reform & Revolution Caucus”!) In contrast, a number of left dissidents were drawing opposite conclusions, as their fight to uphold the political independence of the working class led them to fuse with the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.³

Meanwhile, Taaffe’s CWI is in a deep crisis. With Taaffe and other leaders of the International Secretariat accusing the Irish section of capitulation to identity politics and petty-bourgeois feminism, only a minority of the International Executive Committee has supported the faction formed by Taaffe. Opposition groupings emerged, including one referred to by the Taaffeite minority as the “Non-Faction Faction,” and the Spanish and Portuguese sections have now reportedly walked out. Further turmoil and divisions are clearly on the agenda. For the CWI as for its U.S. supporters, the fruits of opportunism are proving increasingly bitter.

Yet as the crisis of reformist left organizations has escalated, some former members have responded by joining in cobbling together, undifferentiated “broad socialist” groupings (Philly Socialists, Marxist Center, etc.) dedicated to maintaining “unity” by evading clear lines of demarcation on contentious issues. Former ISO branches have reappeared as Chicago Socialists, Madison Socialists, Central Ohio Revolutionary Socialists, etc. For some activists this involves what they call “base-building” – low-level social work based on the paternalistic idea that the oppressed will only be drawn to socialist groups that “do something concrete for them” (like fixing brake lights) right now. Others have sought to revive the anti-Leninist doctrines of Karl Kautsky, the “pope” of the social-democratic Second International that blew to pieces when its parties supported their “own” bourgeoisies in the first imperialist world war.

But in any case, such amorphous groupings, whatever their particular “points of agreement,” are based on rejection of the revolutionary communism of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks, and thus *cannot* lead the class struggle forward.

Behind the ISO’s Collapse

Amidst the crisis of much of the left, the most spectacular

³ See “An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present” and “Class Struggle Education League Fuses with Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist* No. 52, May-June 2018; “Socialist Alternative Is No Place for Revolutionaries,” *The Internationalist* No. 54, November-December 2018; and “Spokane Marxist Group and Marxist Student Group Fuse with Revolutionary Internationalist Youth,” *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019. (These materials are reproduced in Section 2 of this pamphlet.)



Socialist Alternative marches during Democratic Party convention in Philadelphia, July 2016.

Marcus Yam/Los Angeles Times

occurrence of the recent period has been the collapse of the International Socialist Organization, culminating in its dissolution in late March. This was an anguishing experience for hundreds of its former members. Although the final act of the ISO’s demise was marked in particular by its embrace of #MeToo, its collapse is fundamentally due to its overall opportunist politics and the predicament it found itself in as the burgeoning DSA occupied its hoped-for political space. The post mortems by various left groups skirt or downplay the political issues and underlying causes of the ISO’s political self-immolation. This is natural enough for analyses coming from other sectors of the left that largely share the ex-ISO’s tailist approach and social-democratic program. Many clearly hope to cash in on its collapse without challenging its former members’ basic outlook (which does no favors to any among them seeking a revolutionary way forward).

The ISO claimed to be a Marxist organization and on occasion, when convenient, even to have something to do with Trotskyism. During and after its implosion, a range of commentators and some former members attributed its demise to “Leninism” and/or Lenin’s organizational principle of “democratic centralism.” But mistaking the label for the contents is never a good idea, least of all in politics. The actual politics of the ISO were far indeed from revolutionary Marxism and Leninism, and entirely counterposed to the program and outlook of Trotsky and the Fourth International he founded as the world party of socialist revolution.

Instead, the approach and method of the ISO was to position itself a step to the left of mainstream liberalism and try to nudge the liberals, and the “movements” of the day they dominated, in that direction. Its members were trained in the idea that this meant “reaching people where they’re at” since going through the experience of the movement *du jour* would wind up radicalizing them. As for Trotsky’s call to “speak the

truth to the masses, no matter how bitter,” this, for the ISO, was a hallmark of much-reviled “sectarians.”

Paternalist justifications for adapting to existing consciousness are the stock in trade for left groups that, like the ISO, have spread illusions in everything from SYRIZA in Greece to the “Arab Spring” – but in the United States, it means above all tailing and reinforcing illusions in the Democratic Party. The ISO’s formula for recruiting liberal youth was that socialists are the most “consistent” liberals on every issue, whereas liberal Democrats are “unreliable” and inconsistent. The fundamental Marxist conception of the *class line* was profoundly alien to this view of politics as a continuum in which socialism is the most consistently “progressive” variant of bourgeois liberalism.

Maintaining illusions in the Democratic Party, and the subordination of the workers and oppressed to it, is the daily bread of the leaders of the labor movement as well as almost all other social movements in this country. The Democratic Party is the keystone of liberal *imperialist* politics, and over the recent period the ISO echoed its propaganda themes from the “Syrian revolution” to “Rus-siagate.” This was prepared by the entire political tradition of the ISO rooted in Cold War “Third Camp socialism” (see accompanying article).

As the Niche Dwindled

All of this meant that the rapid growth of the DSA and the identification of Bernie Sanders, AOC & Co. with “socialism” deprived the ISO of the political niche it had long occupied. Entirely imbued with tailism, the ISO itself could not help but contribute to this process. Always hoping to get in on the action, its praise of the Democratic “socialists” instead helped cut away the basis for its own existence.

Issue after issue of the ISO’s *Socialist Worker* hailed Sanders, AOC et al. as putting “socialism in the air,” chimed in with the willfully deceptive claim that these imperialist Democrats are socialists (while giving some tips on how to do it better), and breathlessly applauded their electoral advances – while pretending for the record not to actually “endorse” them.

The pretense was less than paper-thin, and could not hold. It didn’t. Our August 2018 article on Ocasio-Cortez and Democratic “socialism” described in detail the roiling public controversy among ISO leaders over how to relate to this “movement” of and into the Democratic Party. The ISO might well be facing a “hemorrhage of members, perhaps a split,” we wrote. “Whatever, things certainly aren’t looking good for the ISO.” We can scarcely be accused of overstating matters.

A telling glimpse of what things looked like on the ground as the denouement approached is provided by events at the City University of New York’s Brooklyn College in early March. This was the location that Bernie Sanders chose to launch his new campaign, for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. “Remembering his roots and connection to the borough, Sanders chose his alma mater as the first stop” on his campaign trail, the college’s website proclaimed on March 2, after “huge crowds turned out” for the rally that day.

The ISO’s student group on campus was “Brooklyn



Opportunism was always the name of the game. ISO theoretical journal hailed Obama’s 2008 election, cynically echoed campaign slogan, proclaimed Wall Street Democrat brought “new era.” Members were taught this meant “meeting people where they’re at.”

College Socialists,” devoted to promoting the organization’s standard-issue liberal/reformist themes. Its recruitment event at the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester was “Are You a Socialist Too?” and featured a picture of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. What, then, would be their response when Bernie Sanders’ March 2 rally, on their very own campus, was announced? It could only have seemed natural when they hosted a “Banner Making for Bernie” event the day before the rally, then bedecked their Facebook page with photos of themselves “mingling” at the campaign launch accompanied by the hashtag “#bcfeelingthebern.”

The Final Conference

The beginning of the end was the ISO national convention in February that ousted virtually the entire long-time leadership centered on Ahmed Shawki and Sharon Smith along with other veterans like Paul D’Amato and Lance Selfa. A subterranean revolt had been brewing for some time, as accumulated grievances against this ingrown, domineering circle grew increasingly bitter. A “Steering Committee Majority” faction was put together to oust the old guard, which found itself reduced to a small minority. We have little reason to doubt the overall charge of bureaucratism directed against them: the fact that the organization had been run by a clique was perfectly obvious

even from the outside.

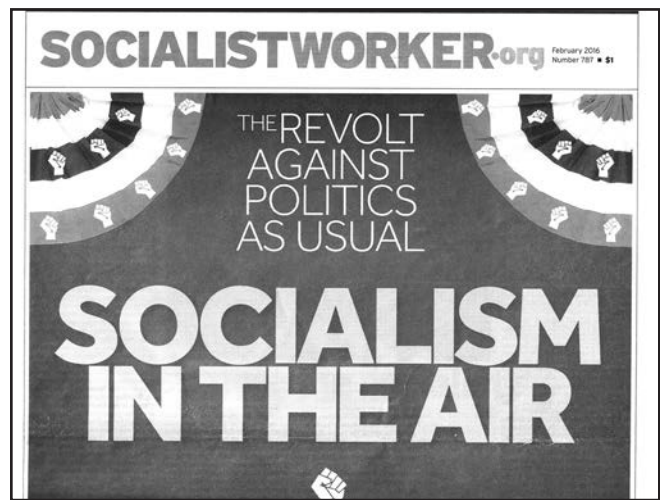
Reformist parties are necessarily bureaucratic, subordinating the membership to what is acceptable to bourgeois “allies” while suppressing any stirrings of a radical challenge. As the ISO veered from one opportunist campaign to another, pumping up ever-new predictions of success (and churning through members at a rapid rate), the leadership doubtless feared that some might take the opportunism “too far,” at the same time as it could not tolerate even the possibility of any real political balance-sheet.

Genuinely revolutionary organizations must be self-financing; a working-class party depends on the hard-earned material support of its members. One of the characteristics of opportunist organizations around the world is their dependence on government subsidies, parliamentary paychecks and/or private-sector bourgeois largesse. While no one in the ISO apparatus was making a mint, its leadership was intertwined with and to a large degree financially dependent on the Center for Economic Research and Social Change, largely funded by liberal bourgeois foundations. This material and political reality could only mean that talk of accountability to the ranks would be pie in the sky.

Sundry social democrats posthumously dissecting the ISO’s debacle try to pin the blame on “Leninism.” As they know and is patently obvious, what the ISO actually did and stood for in real life bore no resemblance to Bolshevism. As for “democratic centralism” as put forward by Lenin, this is the organizational form for advancing a *revolutionary program*. Counterposed to the bureaucratic machinations of social-democratic and Stalinist parties, it corresponds to the needs of a proletarian vanguard party that can lead the workers, at the head of all the oppressed, to power.

To serve the goal of overthrowing capitalism, such a party requires genuine internal democracy and debate to defend, develop and sharpen the revolutionary program, and correct its course when needed; it requires centralism, unity and discipline in action to bring that program into the class struggle and lead the combat against the class enemies of the proletariat and the oppressed. The ISO’s continual tailing of bourgeois liberalism and existing (bourgeois) consciousness could only stand in the way of a real struggle against oppression. Its reformist politics and evasion of sharp political demarcation (as well as genuine internal struggle) were antithetical to the task faced by genuine Marxists: forging revolutionary cadres able to fight the oppression and reactionary backwardness bred by capitalist society, and to win the working class to this fight.

For Leninist revolutionaries, the struggle for black liberation and the emancipation of women, and against all forms of social oppression, is the task and responsibility of the *entire party* and all its members. As part of this task, a genuinely revolutionary party must give sustained, special attention to developing women, African American and Latino leading cadres, all the more so as in this country born of slavery, the “black question” is key to virtually every aspect of politics and strategic to socialist revolution. In contrast, for reformist parties faced with demands to take issues of special oppression



Bedecking red-white-and-blue Democrats with little fake-socialist fists pretty much sums it up. Meanwhile ISOers were supposed to pretend they weren’t actually “supporting” Sanders et al. The deniability was never plausible. Growth of DSA has made left reformists irrelevant.

seriously, the response is tokenistic sectoralism, parceling the task out to caucuses “representing” each oppressed group. As the ISO sank into the swamp of bourgeois liberal “identity politics,”⁴ it also faced growing accusations of stifling the development of members from specially oppressed groups. The response was to proclaim a “people of color caucus,” a “trans caucus,” etc.

Most directly connected to the impending dissolution of the ISO, and the extraordinary rapidity with which this was carried through, was the formation of a “#MeToo commission” as well as a “survivors’ caucus.” Together with hailing the women’s marches centered on “getting out the vote,” the ISO had fully embraced the “#MeToo movement” that has harnessed outrage against real crimes against women in this violently oppressive society to the political objectives of Democratic Party feminism. This involved adopting the feminist dictum that one must *a priori* “believe all women” – or risk being branded an apologist for the horrendous crimes of rape and sexual assault. All the more so in this racist and homophobic society, this is a recipe for witch hunts.⁵

⁴ As we have written, “This form of bourgeois ideology feigns a fight against oppression through ‘check-your-privilege’ liberal idealism.... It is used to deepen the wedge between different sectors of the workers and oppressed, claiming to unite those who share a sectorally defined identity, including members of the exploiting class.... Ostensibly radical versions ... give left cover to this bourgeois ideology rather than forthrightly explaining how it can never be a program for actually winning liberation” (“Founding Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth,” August 2017) reprinted in *Revolution* No. 14, January 2018. The ISO’s embrace of identity politics meant renouncing even its own prior critique, such as the well-researched article by Sharon Smith, “Mistaken identity – or can identity politics liberate the oppressed?” *International Socialism*, Spring 1994.

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of these vital issues, see “Democratic Party Feminism and the ‘#MeToo Movement’,” *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019.



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How things looked on the ground on eve of ISO dissolution. “Brooklyn College Socialists” make banners for Bernie rally launching his bid for Democratic 2020 presidential bid.

Denouement

When the new Steering Committee received and circulated a March 11 letter by a former member on the organization’s handling of a 2013 rape allegation, the ensuing uproar ripped to shreds the official optimism proclaimed by the February convention. The person accused of rape (who had been elected to the new Steering Committee) was expelled, and all the individuals who had been part of the Steering Committee in 2013 were suspended from leadership positions on the basis that they had allegedly protected him by pushing to reverse a disciplinary committee finding of guilt, on grounds that he was denied the opportunity to make his case to the investigating body or to rebut witness testimony.

On March 15, the new Steering Committee published on the *Socialist Worker* website a “Letter to the ISO Membership” that, among other things, pledged

to “study how the ISO can relate to socialist campaigns [sic] run on Democratic ballot lines.” Central to the statement was denunciation of the organization’s “damaging political culture,” depicted as a longstanding pattern of abuse. As activists who had devoted years to the organization struggled to understand the events, widespread resignations ensued in an atmosphere of mass panic. Though a few still sought to keep some semblance of the old edifice together, a March 24-29 online poll of the remaining members and recently resigned ex-members resolved to dissolve the ISO and cease publication of *Socialist Worker*.

On April 19 the ex-Steering Committee issued a last declaration. Reporting that the “final steps” in the ISO’s dissolution had been completed, it stated that “the highly unusual step of voting to dissolve the organization” had been “guided by the recognition that the ISO’s demise was inevitable.” The statement ended with one last pitch for the populist slogan of “socialism from below,” the calling card of groups embracing the ISO’s spiritual godfathers, Tony Cliff and Max Shachtman (see accompanying article).

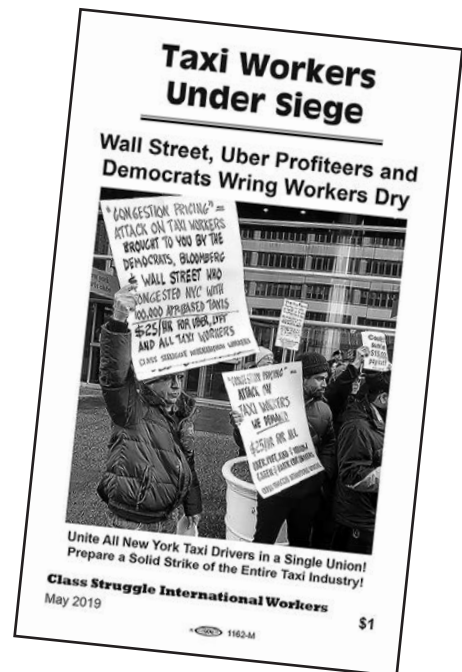
Like the rise of “Sanders socialism,” the fall of the ISO is part of a broader crisis of the reformist left. Just as the growth of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America is no “new socialist movement,” the debacle of groups on the left flank of social democracy is no “crisis of Leninism.” Quite the contrary, it is a dramatic reaffirmation of the indispensability of genuine Leninism for building a revolutionary leadership. Against capitalist barbarism, communism lives in the worldwide struggle of the workers and oppressed, and the Trotskyist program for carrying it through to victory. Those who want to contribute to making this happen should study and learn from these events. ■

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Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, Tony Cliff... The ISO and “Socialism from Below”

“With all its flaws,” claims one post mortem, “the ISO remained for several decades a bulwark of Marxism in the U.S. political landscape.” Lamenting the “sudden and rapid demise of the International Socialist Organization” as “bad news for the U.S. left,” the lengthy analysis by Left Voice (4 May) calls the ISO, which dissolved in March, “the once-largest Trotskyist organization in the United States.” Seriously? The ISO, whose program and practice trampled Marxist principle from its inception, was the antithesis of Trotskyism.

That Left Voice would nonetheless make such claims speaks volumes about its *modus operandi*. The grouping bills itself as part of an “international network of revolutionary online publications.” If you keep following the links and scrolling down, you will eventually find that this network is the media outlet of the “Fracción Trotskista.” Led by the Argentine Partido de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (PTS – Party of Workers for Socialism), the FT is an example of what Trotsky called centrism, which sometimes poses as “revolutionary” in words, while opportunist in deeds. In the case of the FT and Left Voice, we are dealing with a form of right centrism whose endless maneuvers require sidling up to larger, reformist groupings. This means scoring as “sectarian” the revolutionary duty to tell it like it is.

Reality Check

In fact, the politics of the ISO were counterposed to Trotsky’s on every key issue. Against the Marxist struggle for political independence of the working class, it avidly campaigned for anti-immigrant populist Ralph Nader, supported the bourgeois Green Party and ran on its ticket. As Bernie Sanders was pulling millennial youth into the Democratic Party, the ISO proclaimed that he put “socialism in the air.” Leninism calls for building a revolutionary workers party as tribune of all the oppressed, for the proletariat as a class to take on the struggle to uproot racial, gender and all other forms of oppression. Counterposed to this, the ISO’s tailing of Democratic Party-aligned “movements” led it to embrace the liberal sectoralism known as “identity politics.” Far from fighting to mobilize the power of the multiracial working class to defeat fascist and racist provocations, the ISO went so far as to ally with Democratic politicians against such efforts.¹

To the degree that the ISO had an organized presence in the labor movement, it was to build deeply unprincipled groupings like Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which ran to the U.S. Labor Department and the capitalist courts to win the leadership of the truckers union, which it then handed over to the feds. More recently, the ISO was the prime mover of the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE), which runs the Chicago Teachers Union. CTU then vice president Jesse

Sharkey, at the time and for many years a prominent ISO supporter, played an essential role in selling out a 2012 school strike, while the union regularly endorsed Democrats from local aldermen and mayor up to the White House.

In New York, the ISO was central to the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE) in the United Federation of Teachers. In August 2014, MORE notoriously denounced the union from the right for endorsing a Staten Island march against the racist police murder of Eric Garner and called to “unite” with the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association and “our brother and sister officers” of the NYPD. In Los Angeles, prominent ISOers have joined the ruling pro-Democratic Party teachers union bureaucracy, helping ram through the sellout contract that ended the L.A. teachers strike this past January.² These are but a few key examples of what ISO politics meant in reality on its home turf.

“The Decisive Criterion”

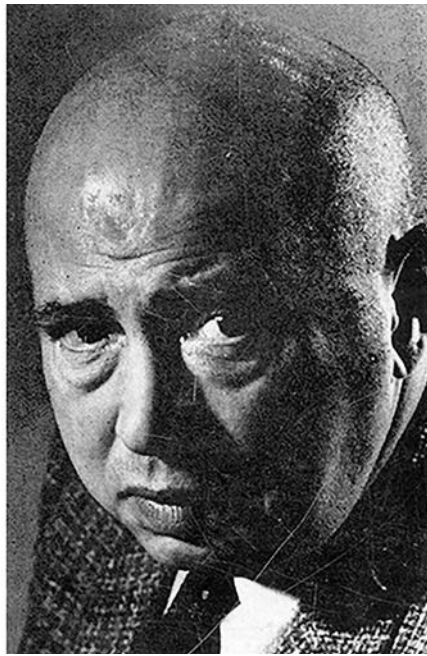
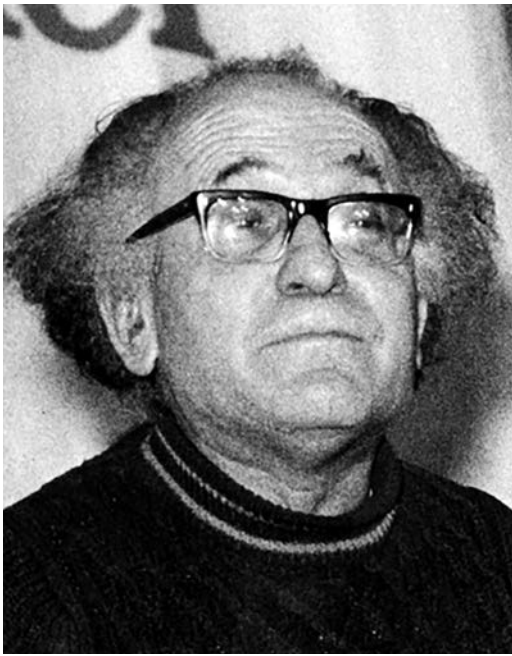
Echoing key themes of U.S. imperialism from the Cold War to today, the ISO was created in visceral opposition to what Trotsky always considered central to the movement he founded. This was the revolutionary Marxist position on the “Russian Question,” which the founder of U.S. Trotskyism, James P. Cannon, called “the decisive criterion separating the genuine revolutionary tendency from all shades and degrees of waverers, backsliders and capitulators to the pressure of the bourgeois world” (“Speech on the Russian Question,” October 1939). Though this is dismissed by “left” philistines as ancient history, the world we live in today was shaped by the revolutionary creation of the Soviet state in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, its Stalinist degeneration under the relentless pressure of world imperialism, and the wave of capitalist counterrevolutions that were hailed by the ISO.

For Trotsky, Cannon and their co-thinkers, the duty of every class-conscious worker was intransigent defense of the Soviet Union, a bureaucratically degenerated workers state, against world imperialism. The capitalist class internationally, and U.S. imperialism above all, viewed the very existence of the USSR – derived from the biggest victory the working class had ever achieved, the October Revolution of 1917 – as a threat to its domination. Trotsky and his Fourth International explained that their “unconditional military defense” of the USSR went together with the struggle for a “proletarian political revolution” to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy that treacherously undermined the gains of the revolution. Only this, restoring the proletarian democracy of the soviets (workers councils) and the program of world revolution, could prevent capitalist restoration and open the way toward socialism.

Against Trotsky and Cannon, anti-Soviet “socialists”

¹ See, for example, “Portland Labor Mobilizes to Stop Fascist Provocation” and “How Do You Spell Class Collaboration? ISO,” in *The Internationalist* No. 48, May-June 2017.

² See the article by Class Struggle Education Workers, “Powerful L.A. Teachers Strike Was Betrayed in Settlement,” *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019.



Two ghouls of socialism. (Left) Tony Cliff. (Right) Max Shachtman.

such as Max Shachtman in the United States and Tony Cliff in Britain broke with Trotskyism to proclaim what they called a “Third Camp” (“Neither Washington nor Moscow but international socialism”) that time and again lined up with U.S. imperialism. What has the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR meant for the working class and oppressed peoples around the world? This historic defeat – cheered on by the ISO and its British co-thinkers at the time – brought massive impoverishment and nationalist fratricide, while emboldening the U.S. ruling class for mass murder abroad and an onslaught on workers and the oppressed “at home.”

Cliff and Cold War “Socialism”

Left Voice’s article refers to what it correctly calls the ISO’s “Cliffite tradition” – that is, the fact that the ISO was created, shaped and led by followers of the late Tony Cliff, founder of the “International Socialist Tendency” (centered on what is today the British Socialist Workers Party). It focuses on Cliff’s recipes for party-building in a “downturn” of class struggle. It favorably cites a related article by Cliff’s fellow proponent of “Third Camp socialism,” Hal Draper. For decades a lieutenant of Max Shachtman, who led the anti-Soviet opposition to Trotsky and Cannon in the historic 1939-40 split over the Russian Question, Draper founded one of the ISO’s predecessor groups, and coined its motto of “socialism from below.”

Yet Left Voice’s article is an exercise in evasion. This almost 4,000-word piece manages to say *not a word* about the central defining feature of the ISO’s “Cliffite tradition” and so-called “socialism from below”: virulent opposition to the Trotskyist position of defending the former Soviet Union, and the remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states, against imperialism and counterrevolution. ISOers were taught to revile as “ortho-Trots” the upholders of Trotsky’s position, put forward in crucial works like *The Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defense of Marxism*, the record of his final struggle, against

what he rightly characterized as the “petty-bourgeois opposition” of Shachtman, Draper & Co.

The calling card of Cliff and his followers was his “theory of state capitalism.” This was such a vulgar pretext for anti-communism that it literally stated that the USSR participating in the “arms race” – against the U.S. imperialists who dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and repeatedly threatened to use them against the Soviet bloc and colonial peoples – constituted “competition,” thereby “proving” it was a capitalist country. Indeed, the Cliff tendency’s demonstrative break with the Trotskyist movement came during the Korean War, which it grotesquely characterized as a war between

two “imperialisms,” publicly denouncing the Fourth International’s elementary revolutionary position of defending North Korea and China against the genocidal onslaught of U.S. imperialism.

As for Mr. “Socialism from Below,” Hal Draper, he was the editor of Shachtman’s *Labor Action* (28 September 1953) when it boasted that propaganda leaflets by Shachtman and the Socialist Party of Norman Thomas had been dropped “by U.S. bombers ... presumably through the sponsorship of the State Department,” during that war. This was cited as evidence by the Shachtmanites to show that as an anti-communist group, the Independent Socialist League of Shachtman and Draper should not be included on the government’s “subversive list.”³

Once Again, “Left Voice” of Social Democracy

Of course, while shamelessly burnishing the ex-ISO’s credentials as a supposed “bulwark of Marxism,” Left Voice does chide it for some things. These include what Left Voice calls “missteps around Obama’s election” such as the infamous cover of the ISO’s journal *International Socialist Review* (January 2009) celebrating the election with a rising sun, clenched fist and the title “Politics and Struggle in a New Era. Yes We Can!”⁴ In large part, their critique of the ISO centers on its failure to pursue an orientation to labor based on what Left Voice calls a “rank-and-file strategy.” In reality, “rank-and-fileism” has characteristically been a pretext for opportunist blocs counter-

³ The leaflets were stuffed into canisters that were otherwise used in germ warfare and dropped on the Koreans. See “The Real Heritage of Michael Harrington’s DSA,” in International Group pamphlet, *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats* (February 2018).

⁴ See our article: “The ‘Obama Socialists’,” *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009. The day after Obama’s election the ISO plastered NYC’s Hunter College with posters bearing his catchphrase “yes we can” (see “Yesterday’s ‘Obama Socialists,’ Today’s Bernie Boosters,” *The Internationalist* No. 42, January-February 2016).

posed to building a revolutionary leadership based on a clear class-struggle program. On its own home turf, Left Voice avidly promotes the aggressively anti-communist “CUNY Struggle” grad-student grouping at the City University of New York.⁵

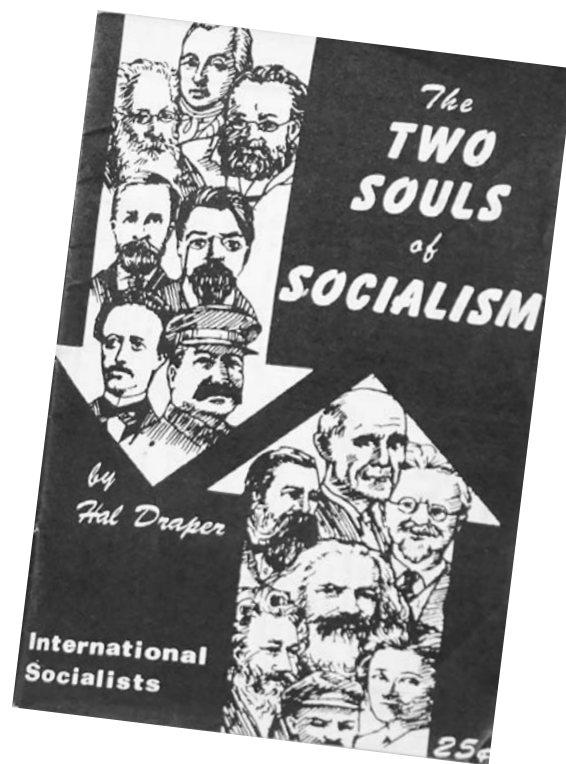
No doubt, what Left Voice does and doesn’t say about the ISO is partly a matter of flattering former members in the hopes of gaining some recruits on the cheap. Yet that is only part of the story. More fundamentally, Left Voice presents itself as part of a confraternity of well-intentioned soft “socialists” to whom it can offer helpful pointers because, despite pretensions to “Leninism,” it is largely on the same wavelength as its social-democratic cousins. It joined the ISO in enthusing over the growth of the DSA and its electoral successes, lightly saucing this with “comradely” critical commentary and friendly suggestions. Like the ex-ISO, Left Voice assiduously tails every new “movement,” notably the feminism that the ISO embraced and which wound up putting the final nails in its coffin.

At the level of theoretical abstraction the Fracción Trotskista, of which Left Voice is the U.S. affiliate, postures as more “orthodox,” but its day-to-day political work is governed by opportunism and tailism. If the reformist ISO’s political method was to place itself a step to the left of the liberals and nudge them in that direction, the right-centrist FT’s is to do the same with each new “movement” and the reformist left. In line with this, it presents its denatured “Trotskyism” as part of a continuum with fellow “socialists” like the ex-ISO, the DSA et al. Far from a sharp break with the reformists, drawing a clear line of demarcation against their phony “socialism,” it graces them with advice, critiques and suggestions for doing a better job. As Trotsky noted, a centrist organization, always dependent on groupings to its right, “views with hatred the revolutionary principle: *state what is*,” substituting “maneuvering and petty organizational diplomacy” for the principled policy of revolutionary Marxism (“Centrism and the Fourth International,” February 1934).

The Left Voice/FT “project” of making their claims to represent Trotskyism amenable to anti-communist social democrats cannot, to say the least, be squared with Trotsky’s position on the Russian Question. The “anti-Trotskyist ‘Fracción’ links arms with the latter-day Cliffites of the ISO and the left-over Shachtmanites of the DSA” over North Korea, as we noted in “‘Socialists’ Who Capitulate to Imperialism” (*The Internationalist* No. 50, Winter 2017). Left Voice has repeatedly chimed in with scare-mongering imperialist war propaganda against North Korea’s efforts to develop a nuclear deterrent in the face of threats by the U.S., which flattened all its cities and murdered 3 million in the Korean War.

This goes back to the origins of their tendency. As we wrote: “When it comes to bedrock Trotskyist principles, the PTS and FT were marked from their inception by their rejection of Trotsky’s intransigent defense of the USSR against world imperialism, as they tailed the capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet-bloc degenerated and deformed workers states in 1989-92.” In this they were following in the footsteps of their progenitor, the Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel

⁵ See “How They Rammed Through Anti-Red Ban,” *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.



The gospel according to Hal Draper.

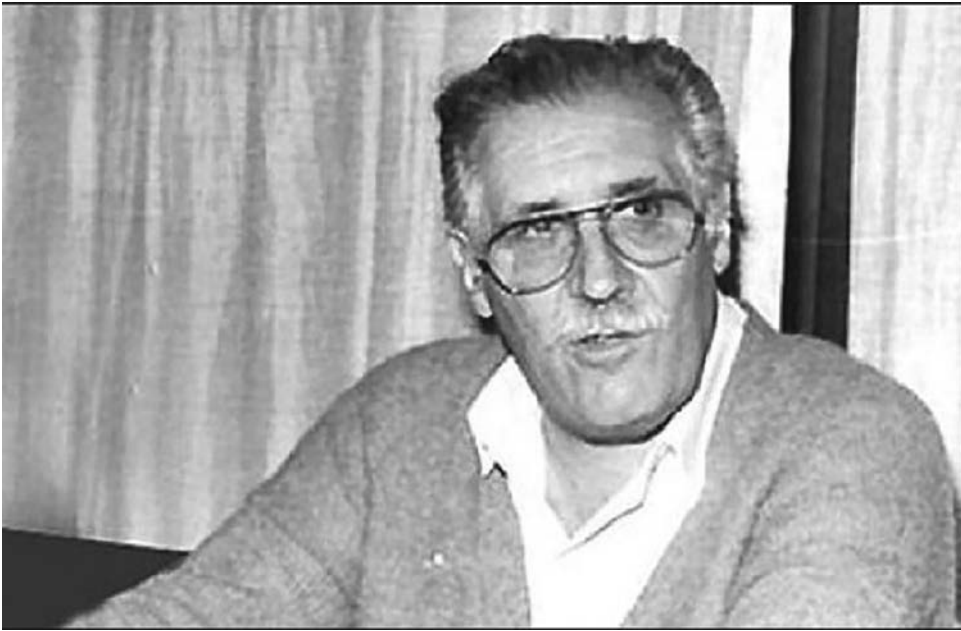
Moreno, who was so viscerally anti-Soviet that he hailed the (U.S.-armed, trained and financed) Islamist *mujahedin* in their “holy war” against Soviet intervention in defense of a reform government in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

In his famous “Speech on the Russian Question,” Cannon emphasized that it draws “a sharp dividing line through the labor movement of all countries.” Lauding the Cliffites of the ISO as fellow supposed “Trotskyists” is one more example of which side of that line the misnamed “Fracción Trotskista” is actually on. Today, as China faces growing military threats and trade war from U.S. imperialism, the FT joins a host of other anti-Trotskyists in echoing claims that China is supposedly capitalist. In contrast, having intransigently defended the former USSR during the anti-Soviet Cold War, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International uphold the Trotskyist program defending the Chinese bureaucratically deformed workers state against imperialism and counterrevolution.

The Low-Down on “Socialism from Below”

“We must continue to fight for socialism from below” was the title of one of the final pieces on the International Socialist Organization’s website (socialistworker.org, 29 March). This was a common refrain from many who had been its members and were bidding adieu upon its demise. From its inception, the ISO summed up its politics with the motto “socialism from below.” To understand how far those politics are from genuine Marxism, it is important to look at where the mantra comes from.

Its author was Hal Draper, who had served for decades as a key lieutenant of Max Shachtman, and followed him into



Nahuel Moreno. The Trotskyist Fraction claims to have broken with Morenoism but maintains its “democratist” strategy.

arch-Cold Warrior Norman Thomas’ Socialist Party in the late 1950s. But when his mentor supported the Bay of Pigs invasion, Draper, together with future ISO leader Joel Geier (then a student at UCal Berkeley) and others, parted with him and founded the Independent Socialist Committee (subsequently International Socialists), one of the predecessors of the ISO.

In the mid-’60s, amidst the growth of the New Left, Draper coined “socialism from below” to repackage Third Camp “anti-totalitarianism” for sectors disillusioned with standard Cold War liberalism but loath to risk association with “the other side.” Marketing this toxic content with a simple, catchy phrase, the slogan was the political equivalent of an advertising jingle. It sought to sell the same old “socialist” anti-communism in friendlier-sounding form for the New Left generation. (Most – repelled by decades of anti-red propaganda and inspired by defeats inflicted on U.S. imperialism by the Cuban Revolution and the heroic “Viet Cong” – weren’t buying.)

The “socialism from below” motto was rolled out in “The Two Souls of Socialism” (1966), Draper’s best-known work. This short course in revisionist history was promoted by the ISO to the bitter end. (See, for example: Joel Geier, “Hal Draper’s contribution to revolutionary Marxism – Socialism from below,” in the ISO’s *International Socialist Review*, Winter 2017-18.)

Draper’s piece is a morality play of totalitarian-minded bad guys standing for “socialism from above” versus democratic good guys advocating “socialism from below.” For the purposes of this construct and its dumbed-down motto, no amalgam is too crude or ahistorical. Founders of anarchism like Mikhail Bakunin are tossed into the “socialism-from-above” bag (together with Joseph Stalin, Mao Zedong and others). Draper casts Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels

among the “from below” crowd, though Bakunin denounced them as seeking to transform society from “above,” since they insisted on the need for the working class to seize power and build a workers state. Thus, against those who counseled the workers to put their confidence in enlightened bourgeois rulers, Marx and Engels underlined that the “emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself.” Only workers rule, the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” they explained, could lay the basis for a classless, stateless socialist society. And this requires revolutionary leadership.⁶

Engels demolished *Bakunin’s* vapid demagoguery about how “all revolutionary action from above

was an evil, and everything should be organized and carried through from below” (“The Bakuninists at Work” [1873]). As for Lenin, opponents of Bolshevism have long pushed the anti-communist claim that his insistence on a democratic-centralist vanguard party, and on the role of the workers state as a weapon in the class struggle, both domestically and internationally, supposedly led “logically” to Stalinism.

Lenin’s classic 1904 polemic against the Mensheviks, “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back,” denounced their “hostility to the idea of building the Party from the top downwards, starting from the Party Congress and the bodies set up by it,” and their empty chatter about building it “from the bottom upwards, allowing every professor, every high school student and every striker to declare himself a member.” The fight for revolutionary leadership has nothing in common with the advertising jingle that Draper came up with to sell “Third Camp socialism” – that is, capitulation to the U.S. imperialists who ran roughshod over the world and rained death “from above,” from Hiroshima to Korea to Vietnam.

Today, resolving what Trotsky’s “Transitional Program” of the Fourth International called the “historical crisis of leadership of the proletariat” is the central, urgent task. Unmasking the fraud of “socialism from below,” and the anti-communist heritage of Max Shachtman, Hal Draper, Tony Cliff et al., is an element of that struggle. ■

⁶ In 1973, Draper left the International Socialists, renouncing any pretense of trying to build a Leninist party in an article titled “Anatomy of the Micro-Sect.” Instead, he argued, “the individual socialist who wants to ‘do something’” should make contact with some kind of loose “political center that makes sense from your own point of view,” in hopes of “a genuine socialist movement arising out of such a hang-loose complex of relationships....” The article was favorably cited by a number of those seeking to pin the blame on “Leninism” as the ISO collapsed this year. For many, this will be one more rationale for gravitating to the DSA.

Section 2: From Socialist Alternative to Trotskyism

As noted in the Introduction, this section consists of documents from and about struggles for genuinely Marxist politics waged by left oppositionists within Socialist Alternative (SAIt), the U.S. organization that supports the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI).

While claiming – mainly for internal consumption – to be Trotskyist, SAIt and the CWI are thoroughly reformist organizations. This has led to their effusive promotion of the bourgeois politician Bernie Sanders (known within SAIt as their “Bern turn”) and other Democratic Party “socialists.” Another vividly manifested aspect of SAIt/CWI’s social-democratic politics is the record of their Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant. This and related topics are further addressed by materials in the Appendix of this pamphlet.

This section begins with a series of documents by

comrades who led Socialist Alternative’s branch in New Hampshire and Lowell, Massachusetts. Their struggle for Marxist principles led them to form the Class Struggle Education League, which fused with the Internationalist Group (IG) on 3 June 2018.

Following that are materials from young comrades who were active with the Spokane, Washington branch of SAIt. These include not only documents from their oppositional struggle inside SAIt, but also correspondence with representatives of the Freedom Socialist Party, another reformist organization falsely claiming to be Trotskyist. The comrades formed the Spokane Marxist Group, which – along with the Marxist Student Group in Connecticut – fused with the IG’s youth section, the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, on International Women’s Day (March 8) of this year.

Statement of the Class Struggle Education League Where We Come From and Where We Are Going*

(January 2018)

The Class Struggle Education League seeks to take our place as revolutionary working-class activists and cadres in the fight to reforge an authentically Trotskyist Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. As part of that effort we are presenting this brief statement on the CSEL’s origins, development and perspectives.

The Class Struggle Education League has its roots in the Lowell/New Hampshire branch of Socialist Alternative (SAIt). The establishment of the CSEL grew out of our efforts to deepen, generalize and draw the lessons from struggle against the politics of class collaboration within SAIt and its parent body, the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI).

At the time that our two founding members resigned from SAIt in September of 2017, we had eight and five years’ membership, respectively, in the organization. We were part of the inchoate internal opposition to SAIt’s blatant tailing and building of the Bernie Sanders campaign for the presidential candidacy in the Democratic Party of racism, war and exploitation, the oldest and most experienced capitalist party in the world.

This inchoate opposition never coalesced into a faction. Nor did it have any theoretical consistency, as its supporters

ranged from defenders of CWI “orthodoxy,” including formal opposition to the Democratic Party, in some branches, to a semi-Maoist orientation in others, to a softness towards petty-bourgeois identity politics in yet others – although it should be noted that such softness partly reflected a reaction to the Labourite adaption towards social chauvinism that SAIt had absorbed from its mother party.

Thus this opposition within SAIt was a far cry from a principled, programmatically cohesive Leninist faction modeled on the tradition of James P. Cannon. However, orbiting around opposition to SAIt’s endorsement of a bourgeois politician and capitulation to the Democratic Party, the opposition’s members saw themselves as defending the basic Marxist principle of the political independence of the working class. Yet the opposition failed to accomplish this modest task. Even the basic question of proletarian class independence was blurred by the fact that some opposition supporters considered it acceptable to vote for candidates of the bourgeois “third party” Greens.

Nor did the opposition succeed in preventing the SAIt leadership’s suspension of a founding cadre, Margaret C., on the laughable grounds of “creating a negative atmosphere” by refusing to back down from opposing support to the Democrats. This was followed by her expulsion on the pretext that visiting comrades in opposition branches such as Mobile and

* Reprinted from *The Internationalist* No. 51, March-April 2018.



CSEL contingent at International Women's Day in Boston highlighted the cases of Jeffrey Pendleton, a New Hampshire labor martyr who was arrested on 8 March 2016 and died in jail five days later; and Nina Droz, a Puerto Rican political prisoner, in jail since May Day 2017 for protesting against austerity imposed by Yankee imperialism.

Lowell/New Hampshire supposedly violated the terms of her suspension. (It should be noted that Margaret continued to uphold the general framework of traditional CWI politics, which we have rejected.)

The bureaucratic measures aimed at suppressing opposition to the class-collaborationist “Bernie turn” caused widespread indignation, compounded by the outright sexism used in attempts to discredit and silence this widely respected comrade with 31 years in the organization. As we said in a motion passed unanimously at a SAlt Lowell/NH branch meeting and forwarded to the Executive Committee on 18 March 2017, the leadership’s measures were “a violation of democratic centralist norms” and the organization’s own established procedures. In retrospect, we were much too circumspect in our language regarding this anti-democratic grotesquerie. Meanwhile, without a coherent programmatic agreement hammered out in vigorous debate, the opposition was easy pickings for a not terribly competent internal regime. One by one, clots of oppositionists resigned in a combination of demoralization, disappointment and/or indignation at affronts to their personal dignity.

Through the course of this oppositional struggle, and continuing subsequently, we undertook a reexamination of the meaning of Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism, and we found SAlt and the CWI lacking in all ledgers. From failure to defend the deformed workers states – both in the past (Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union) and in the present (e.g., North Korea and the People’s Republic of China) – to the claim that cops and prison guards are “workers in uniform”; from the

slogan of the “Party of the 99%” to backing “Brexit” and SYRIZA in Greece, we came to reject *in toto* the rotten history of social-democratic opportunism that passes for Marxism in the CWI.

During the course of our reexamination, we held discussions with representatives of Left Voice, the U.S. publication of the Fracción Trotskista tendency. Initially attracted to them due to their criticism of not only the Bernie Sanders campaign but also the bourgeois Greens, as well as the motion they supported in UAW 2865 in 2015 calling on the AFL-CIO to end its association with police unions, we were put off by their approach as a “media project” rather than a Leninist party. Study of their materials led to the conclusion that their approach to the Democratic Socialists of America has been just as tailist as the one employed by Socialist Alternative. We also noted the failure of Left Voice articles about

the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to forthrightly call for the deformed workers state’s defense against threats from U.S. imperialism, which have escalated under the rabid Donald Trump administration.

Through our investigation of these and other key issues we concluded that the cause of international proletarian socialist revolution is best embodied in the historic Trotskyist program that was upheld for three decades by the Spartacist tendency (now International Communist League), which the ICL has increasingly decisively abandoned in the wake of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR. Studying the literature of the ICL alongside that of the League for the Fourth International and its U.S. section, the Internationalist Group, we were won to the positions of the IG on all points of contention. Among those that have stood out particularly over the recent period are the genuine Leninist position on the national question; the fight for the independence of Puerto Rico and all colonies; defense of refugees and immigrants; and the struggle to mobilize the power of labor against fascist provocations (notably over anti-fascist mobilizations in San Francisco and Portland).

Our conclusion is that the League for the Fourth International are the true heirs of the program of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky and we seek fusion with them to further the cause of world communism. This perspective is being concretized in an agreement for joint work between the CSEL and IG/LFI with a perspective for early fusion.

Danny K.

Mike G.

Appendix: Draft CSEL Statement of Principles (first outlined in Fall 2017)

[The points below are included here for reference, based on the effort to draw up a “statement of principles” first outlined in late Fall 2017.]

1. Proletarian Political Independence

We unequivocally oppose voting for or supporting any capitalist parties or politicians. In the United States, that means unremitting opposition to all wings of the Democratic and Republican parties, including the Democrats’ “inside/outside” sheepdogging agents such as Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America. We similarly oppose voting for or supporting small-time bourgeois or petty-bourgeois parties like the Green Party or any such formations that are yet to exist. What’s needed is a revolutionary workers party committed to the overthrow of the world capitalist system, and it is such a Leninist vanguard party that we seek to forge.

2. Reformism versus Revolutionary Politics

The main contradiction in society today, as it was a hundred years ago, is the contradiction between the social nature of production and the private ownership of the means of production. In the age of imperialist decay, this is heightened by the contradiction between increasingly international productive forces and the national boundaries of capitalism. There has been no crisis that capitalism hasn’t been able to worm itself out of; no concessions to the working class and oppressed that it hasn’t been able to claw back. While we support and defend every legitimate reform that benefits the proletariat and other oppressed layers of society, we, at the same time, understand that short of a socialist revolution that

dismantles the capitalist system once and for all, the energies and efforts of the working class will be squandered fighting the same battles over and over again.

3. The Labor Movement

Despite the savage losses the unions have suffered in the last forty years, they are still the basic defense organizations of the working class. They must be defended by class-struggle means. One of the key tasks for communists is to embed ourselves into the unions and struggle against the reactionary, pro-capitalist (usually Democratic Party) trade-union bureaucracy and to replace it with a communist leadership committed to the class struggle.

4. Revolutionary Integrationism and Black Liberation

In the United States, a key task of the communist vanguard is the fight against racist oppression and the struggle for black liberation. World capitalism and American capitalism in particular (both the U.S. and the hemisphere) were founded on genocide against the indigenous population and the enslavement of Africans. Throughout its history, the United States ruling class has excelled at pitting one segment of the working class against other segments of the class. The multiracial working-class unity needed to overthrow capitalism requires the labor movement taking up struggle against racism in all its forms. Only socialist revolution, by dismantling the material basis for racial oppression, can lay the foundation for the eradication of racial, nativist and other forms of bigotry and oppression. We stand on the program of revolutionary integrationism as first developed in the 1950s by Richard S. Fraser inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. In contradistinction to both the liberal integrationism of the mainstream Civil Rights Movement and black nationalism (which so often covers for self-proclaimed Marxists tailing after black Democrats), revolutionary integrationism explains the strategic role of the fight for black freedom as key to proletarian revolution, and that only workers revolution can fulfill the promise of black freedom.

5. Women’s Oppression and the Tribune of the Oppressed

We stand on the historical Marxist understanding of the oppression of women and the program developed by Marxists from Bebel, Zetkin and others in Germany to the Russian Bolsheviks on how to fight it. The source of women’s subjugation is the economic and social unit of the family and women’s subservient role inside it. We stand for the replacement of the family with socialized services – such as free laundries and cafeterias – as well as for free high-quality health care, birth control and access to abortion. From the March on Versailles to the February Revolution, from the immigrant picketers of the 1912 Bread and Roses Strike to Ahd Tamimi today, working women have time and time again demonstrated their ability to rank among the most ferocious defenders of their class. Bringing this to bear on the basis of a revolutionary program is key to socialist revolution and a crucial task of the revolutionary party. Furthermore, we stand on the Leninist conception of the vanguard party as the tribune of the oppressed. We fight to mobilize the power of the multiracial working class in defense

Internationalist photo



Joint IG/CSEL contingent at Philadelphia demonstration in defense of class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, 30 April 2018.

of women, youth, gays and lesbians, gender-nonconforming people, immigrants, indigenous people, religious minorities and all those targeted by chauvinism, bigotry and capitalist persecution.

6. Imperialism and the Deformed Workers States

We stand against imperialism and colonial oppression. We understand that imperialism is not a policy, but the “highest stage of capitalism” and inextricable from the decaying capitalist system. We stand against all imperialist wars, occupations and “humanitarian interventions,” whether under the aegis of the United States or other imperialist powers, NATO, the United Nations, et al. In the belly of the imperialist beast, a precondition of forging a revolutionary workers party is unflinching opposition to all militarist adventures and CIA plots in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Asia. We further call for independence for all colonies. In the United States, this includes championing independence for Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. We further stand on the Trotskyist understanding that the Soviet Union was a bureaucratically degenerated workers state and that other countries where capitalist rule has been overthrown (e.g., North Korea,

China, Cuba, Vietnam) are deformed workers states. We stand for unflinching defense of these deformed workers states from imperialist attack and internal capitalist counterrevolution. We stand for proletarian political revolution in the deformed workers states to oust the anti-revolutionary, nationalist, bureaucratic castes and for the establishment of revolutionary workers democracy. At the time of this writing, a key task for revolutionaries in the United States is forthright defense of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea against imperialism, including its right to arm itself with nuclear weapons.

7. Internationalism

“Nothing human is foreign to me” – Karl Marx. We are internationalists. The cause of socialism and liberation anywhere on the face of the planet is our cause. We understand that the forging of an international revolutionary Trotskyist party is not only the answer to the myriad oppressions and degradations engendered by the world capitalist system, it is also the only path to preserving human life on this planet. We seek to reforge, including through splits and fusions of communist militants, the Fourth International as the party of international proletarian socialist revolution. ■

Agreement for Joint Work Between the Class Struggle Education League and the Internationalist Group*

(26 January 2018)

The Class Struggle Education League, based in the Lowell, Massachusetts/New Hampshire area, and the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International, hereby agree to carry out joint work aiming at an early fusion of our forces, on the basis of:

- Statement of the Class Struggle Education League (January 2018);
- The programmatic positions embodied in the documents of the First National Conference of the Internationalist Group, “The Trotskyist Struggle for International Socialist Revolution” (published in *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015) and the First International Conference of the League for the Fourth International, “The Struggle to Reforge a Genuinely Trotskyist Fourth International” (published in *The Internationalist* No. 50, December 2017).

This agreement formalizes the perspective for carrying out joint work first discussed during the visit by IG representatives to meet with the CSEL in late October 2017. Since that time, the CSEL comrades have carried out further intensive reading and discussion of IG/LFI publications; additional study of key differences between the LFI and other ostensibly Trotskyist tendencies, particularly the latter-day Spartacist League/ICL and the Fracción Trotskista; and distributed IG/LFI literature at events and demonstrations.

A CSEL comrade’s recent trip to work with the IG’s New York local included participating in the IG contingent at a rally in Philadelphia for the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal; join-

ing IG and Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas comrades in distributing Internationalist literature to workers at a large unionized facility facing a possible strike and participating in our Marxist study group.

Perspectives over the following period includes the following:

- Distributing the IG statement “Let Haitians Stay!” as well as *The Internationalist* and other IG/LFI publications at the January 27 Boston rally protesting the deportation of Morocco-born activist Siham Byah and the detention of immigrant activists Ravi Ragbir, Maru Mora-Villalpando and others.
- Pursuing opportunities for labor-based solidarity with and defense of immigrants in the Lowell/N.H. and Boston areas.
- Gathering further information on Teamster organizing among African immigrant car attendants in Boston for use in materials on class-struggle defense of immigrant rights.
- Seeking to further consolidate the Marxist study group in the Lowell/N.H. region established by the CSEL; systematic discussion with youth and trade-union contacts there and in Boston; to further develop perspectives for key work in the Boston area, including a periodic campus sale.
- February 17 joint forum on the Haitian Revolution.
- Joint preparations for May Day with an eye toward our early fusion.
- Working on a more in-depth balance sheet and Marxist analysis of Socialist Alternative and its internal crises that can be used particularly in approaching current and former members of that organization. ■

* Reprinted from *The Internationalist* No. 51, March-April 2018.

An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present

By the Class Struggle Education League

31 May 2018

The following Open Letter by Class Struggle Education League founders Danny K. and Mike G. was distributed at the Left Forum in New York City on 1-3 June 2018. It is reprinted here from The Internationalist No. 52, May-June 2018.

“Yet revolution is a supreme political act and those who want revolution must also want the means of achieving it, that is, political action, which prepares the ground for revolution and provides the workers with the revolutionary training without which they are sure to become the dupes of the Favres and Pyats [French bourgeois politicians] the morning after the battle. However, our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goals and its own policy.”

–Karl Marx, “Apropos of Working-Class Political Action,” 21 September 1871

The Class Struggle Education League was founded in Fall 2017 by members of the Lowell/New Hampshire branch of Socialist Alternative (SAlt), the U.S. group in solidarity with the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI). This Open Letter is by Danny K. and Mike G., former leading members of the branch who went on to found CSEL. After eight and five years in SAlt, respectively, our growing disagreements with the organization came to a head over its blatant tailing of the Bernie Sanders campaign. Participating in the opposition within SAlt to this class-collaborationist policy, while becoming aware of the opposition’s own limits, led us to reexamine what Marxism, Leninism and Trotskyism really stand for.

This forced us “to face reality squarely,” as Trotsky writes in the *Transitional Program*. Within SAlt, members are given the idea that it is a revolutionary socialist party that only *pretends* to be a reformist organization as a matter of tactics, to “reach people where their consciousness is at.” But hard experience revealed to us that SAlt isn’t any kind of revolutionary party at all. Instead, it is an opportunist, social-democratic organization that continually tramples all over Marxism’s bedrock principle of *proletarian political independence*. Marx warned against being a “tagtail” to bourgeois parties – but that is exactly what SAlt does, and what it is.

To put it another way, our experience as members led us to the conclusion that Socialist Alternative is a thoroughly reformist group that, for tactical reasons, internally pretends to be a revolutionary party that is just pretending to be reformist. We decided to make a decisive break from its program and perspectives, and resigned in September 2017. Intensive study and joint work have led to the decision by the Class Struggle Education League to fuse with the Internationalist Group (IG), U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. We

have published our statement, “Where We Come From and Where We Are Going” in *The Internationalist* (No. 51, March-April 2018) and on the IG’s website (internationalist.org). We will also be discussing this at the joint CSEL-IG panel titled “Revolutionary Regroupment vs. ‘Sanders Socialism’” at the Left Forum (Sunday, June 3, 2:00 p.m., Room 1.69).

We want to take this opportunity to go over some of the key issues that led us to part ways with the CWI. We address this open letter to our former comrades in the SAlt opposition – some of whom are still within that organization, others of whom have dispersed to the four winds – as well as to any others seeking to draw lessons from the fight inside SAlt.

The “Bern Turn” – Bringing It All Home

From the very beginning of Bernie Sanders’ presidential bid it was clear that he was running to refurbish the credentials of the racist, capitalist Democratic Party. In September 2014 – the weekend after Seattle City Councilor and SAlt spokesperson Kshama Sawant urged him to run as an independent at the People’s Climate Summit in New York – Sanders spoke at the University of New Hampshire. We attended his appearance, sat through a dreadful social-patriotic video and an only slightly less dreadful speech by Sanders, and spoke during the discussion period. Dutifully carrying out SAlt’s party line, we also urged him to run as an independent. In response, Sanders hemmed and hawed for a full thirty seconds before making it clear that he had always intended to run as a Democrat. And as the campaign continued, Sanders made it clear that he would endorse the Democrats’ candidate (Hillary Clinton) if and when he lost the nomination.

This was well understood and admitted even by SAlt’s leadership. Over and over, they argued that it wasn’t “about” Sanders. They insisted that all their pleas to Sanders to run as an independent, to run all the way to November 2016,¹ etc., aimed to intervene in his campaign with “bold demands,” to “force the contradictions” to the benefit of Occupy-influenced youth and dissatisfied workers who backed Sanders. What was the real contradiction here? The one between claiming, in words, to be a socialist alternative to capitalist politics, while, in deeds, SAlt prettified and spread illusions in the capitalist politician

¹ As we finished writing this Open Letter, we saw that SAlt is up to it again, advising New York gubernatorial candidate Cynthia Nixon that if she is defeated in the Democratic primary, she should run all the way to November on the Working Families Party ballot line (“Cynthia Nixon Challenges Establishment Democrats in New York State,” socialistalternative.org, 30 May). To top it all off, they are giving this advice to a bourgeois candidate who is notoriously anti-union, and was the spokesperson for keeping NYC’s exclusive Center School in a predominantly white school that has been the epicenter of a revolt against school integration on Manhattan’s Upper West Side (see “Free Market Racism: Segregated Schools, Gentrified Neighborhoods,” in *Marxism & Education* No. 5, Summer 2018).



Sanders as he did his job of ushering those youth and workers into the Democratic fold.

SAlt's leadership would have us believe that their capitulation to the Sanders campaign was nothing more than a clever tactical maneuver to break left-leaning voters from the Democrats, an attempt to actualize Lenin's well-known analogy in *"Left-Wing Communism": An Infantile Disorder* that offering critical support to a reformist candidate is like the support a rope offers to a hanged man. No – this was a cynical and deliberate blurring of the class line. Lenin used this analogy when discussing the British Labour Party in 1920, as an example of communists giving critical electoral support to a party of the working class in order to win its base away from its reformist, pro-bourgeois leadership. This is diametrically opposed to tailing a bourgeois politician like Sanders who was running to be the candidate of the Democratic Party, the oldest and most experienced capitalist party on the planet.

To this end, SAlt helped create branches of People for Bernie and launched its own Movement4Bernie. Also Students for Bernie, Labor for Bernie, you name it. They participated in and/or organized rallies for him (March for Bernie) in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Seattle. Working overtime to spread illusions in Sanders launching an "independent" bourgeois candidacy, they called sometimes for a "Party of the 99%," at others for a "People's Party." In some branches they phoned-banked for him, in others they door-knocked. This culminated at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, after Hillary Clinton was duly nominated, with SAlt members, one them elected as a delegate (!), leading over a hundred Sanders delegates to rally for the Green Party's candidate, Jill Stein (see "Inside the DNC Walkouts," counterpunch.org, 5 August 2016).

It was no accident that in line with all this, SAlt embraced the populist vocabulary of the "99%" used by Occupy and Sanders. This populist rhetoric is anti-Marxist, specifically bourgeois. Ever since the French Revolution of 1789, the

bourgeoisie and its followers have cloaked themselves in the language of the "people" and "the people's party." SAlt further developed its perspective of a "new party" in its 2016 U.S. Perspectives document (socialistalternative.org, 11 July 2016). The document states outright that this party would be "likely to initially have a more populist multi-class character rather than having a clearly pronounced working class character." The scrap of hedging about "initially" does not obscure the politics: SAlt proposes to build a "multi-class" party. Trotsky had a whole polemic in *The Third International After Lenin* about the impossibility of a "two-class party." The Marxist name for what SAlt is calling for is a *bourgeois party*. (Naturally, SAlt is part of the workshop sponsored by the "Movement for a People's Party," formerly "Draft Bernie," at this year's Left Forum – where social democrats will hold love-fests for pro-Democratic "Sanders socialism" beginning with the Friday plenary addressed by Jane Sanders, as well as a Democratic NYC council member, etc.)

Opposition within Socialist Alternative grew as the entire logic of the "Bern turn" led the organization to be ever more brazen and blatant in its ever-escalating capitulation to this bourgeois politician. At one point (in January 2016), there was a "Unity Opposition Statement" which we signed along with 101 SAlt members against the National Committee's policy which, the opposition statement said, "is qualitatively an endorsement of a Democratic Party politician, such endorsement being incompatible with building an independent workers' party." True enough, but this opposition, as we wrote in our statement "Where We Come From and Where We Are Going," was far from a solid *revolutionary class opposition*. Since then some have left SAlt in the direction of Maoism (the Austin, Texas branch), others joining the Green Party (Mobile, Alabama branch). One of the main groups of oppositionists (Worcester, Massachusetts branch) stayed in SAlt despite the organization's ever-increasing adaptation to the Democratic Party. We want to speak here to the various arguments that were presented by those who opposed the SAlt "Bern turn" but – in different ways – failed to address the central question: *the class line*.

Without a real fight for the class independence of the workers, talk of "tactics" is just a bunch of cynical excuses. As any Marxist could predict, the "Bern turn" reinforced illusions in reforming capitalism through bourgeois electoral politics, and sowed confusion with SAlt ranks. Many members and even at least one whole branch (Tennessee) took SAlt's position to its logical conclusion and decamped to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). If you're going to carry water for "progressive" Democrats, who needs the baggage of a self-styled Trotskyist organization? Surely, these former comrades must have thought to themselves, if we're going to be the best Bernie-builders, why not go all the way with the DSA?

SAlt's ploys and get-rich-quick schemes flew in the face of Marx's warning. They ignored Trotsky's admonitions to "face reality squarely," "call things by their right name" and "swim against the stream" in order to build a revolutionary leadership of the working class and all the oppressed. Instead, the SAlt leadership pandered to existing consciousness, ly-

ing to workers and youth, and being a tagtail on a bourgeois party. It was class-collaborationism, pure and simple. We got fully and finally fed up with it – aren't you? Breaking from the whole "method" and tradition of opportunism, we want to devote ourselves to building a genuine revolutionary Trotskyist party, one whose deeds go together with its words. That is the revolutionary workers party that we need and are going to fight for as part of the IG/LFI.

Democratic (Party) Socialists of America

Like many other self-styled socialist groups on the U.S. left, Socialist Alternative has faced something of a quandary with the dramatic growth of the DSA since Sanders' campaign and the election of Donald Trump. On the one hand, the DSA is a pressure group on and in the Democratic Party, and has a whole history of embodying social-imperialism (see the IG pamphlet, *DSA: Fronting for the Democrats*). But, on the other hand, marvel the smaller social-democratic groups who lost out in the bid to be the best Bernie-builders, the DSA is so big!

SAlt has, thus far, maintained organizational independence from the DSA, but this hasn't stopped SAlt from tailing after the DSA. SAlt joins the chorus of reformist well-wishers cheering on the DSA and applauding its electoral victories. This includes when DSAers are explicitly elected as Democrats, as just happened in Pittsburgh (see "Socialist Candidates Defeat PA Democratic Establishment in Primaries," socialistalternative.org, 26 May).

Meanwhile, in "Democratic Socialists of America: The Case for Strong Independent Campaigns to Build the Left in 2018" (socialistalternative.org, 30 March), Kshama Sawant enthuses over the DSA Refoundation Caucus and its proposals. Far from calling for a clear break with the Democratic Party of war and racism, the Refoundation Caucus calls for "taking steps to move away" from "being a pressure group on the Democratic Party" and eventually some time "seek to decrease and eventually cease" endorsing Democrats. (Even the hedging is double- and triple-hedged.) Meanwhile, this caucus for mildly pressuring the DSA to kind of think about eventually becoming a bit less of a pressure group on the Democrats advises: "Any socialist running on a Democratic ballot line should do so in a strategic way that leads a base constituency away from the Democratic Party and toward independent political power" (dsarefoundation.org, "Endorsement: Towards an Independent Electoral Strategy for DSA"). Break with the Democrats ... by running as a Democrat?!

To this claptrap, Sawant responds: "Socialists should be sympathetic to those genuinely looking to transform the Democratic Party," while taking care to remind readers that the Democrats are a party of capitalism. It would be best, she writes, if the DSA ran "five to ten serious electoral campaigns drawing from the lessons of the most effective independent left efforts," in order to "help activists gain experience, build the profile of socialist ideas, and counterpose our approach to the corporate hacks in the Democratic Party leadership." But if DSA doesn't follow that counsel, never fear, as in Pittsburgh, SAlt will congratulate them anyway. Once again, SAlt's pandering to current (bourgeois) consciousness "where it's at"

means keeping workers and youth wandering in the labyrinth of electoral reformism. It stands in the way of developing revolutionary, working-class consciousness. Tailing the DSA, SAlt acts as a tagtail on a tagtail.

Green Party: Third Wheel of U.S. Capitalist Parties

So following Clinton's nomination and the DNC walkout, SAlt enthusiastically backed Jill Stein and the Green Party. This is in keeping with pre-"Bern turn" SAlt arguments about breaking the two-party duopoly and supporting "the strongest possible pro-worker, anti-corporate challenge to the two corporate parties" (sic). (See Socialist Alternative pamphlet, *Challenging Capitalism & the Two Parties*, 2012.) Some of our former comrades in the SAlt opposition argued that the organization should have been backing the Greens from the beginning. As we mentioned, one whole branch (Mobile Bay) resigned to join the Greens *en masse*. But the Green Party is also a capitalist party, albeit a minor one. Supporting a capitalist "third party" is no less a violation of the principle of working-class political independence.

Some members of the SAlt opposition, for example in the Worcester, Mass. branch, rightly saw James P. Cannon as a key figure for those who want to be Trotskyists. It's worth recalling what the founder of U.S. Trotskyism had to say on this topic. In 1948, Henry Wallace was running in one of the long line of "people's"/third-party gambits in American capitalist politics. Inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, Sam Marcy, who later formed the Workers World Party, advocated supporting Wallace. Against claims that this would be like tactical maneuvers that Lenin's Bolsheviks had carried out, Cannon emphasized, in his February 1948 speech on election policy: "The maneuvers of the Bolsheviks were always within class lines," not "to maneuver within the parties of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, their whole tactical line...was to make a sharp cleavage between the working class organizations and those of the bourgeoisie."

At a time when SAlt and the International Socialist Organization were debating the best way to tail Sanders, the Internationalist Group quoted Cannon's 1948 speech in an article present and former SAlt oppositionists ought to go back and read today ("Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left," June 2015, internationalist.org, reprinted in the IG's above-mentioned pamphlet on the DSA). Cannon dotted the i's and crossed the t's:

"The Wallace party must be opposed and denounced by every class criterion.... Its differences with the Republican and Democratic parties are purely tactical. There is not a trace of a principled difference anywhere. And by principled difference I mean a class difference.... Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear."

In 2016, Jill Stein campaigned on a platform of liberal nostrums and called for a "Green New Deal," shot through with red-white-and-blue nostalgia for the Democratic Party liberalism of yesteryear. Calling to "Fix Our [sic] Broken [sic]

System,” her website proposed slashing the military budget in half – leaving it with over \$300 billion for imperialist militarism! Support to this mishmash of warmed-over liberalism is just as much being a tagtail to a bourgeois party as support to the Democrats.

And before Stein, there was Ralph Nader. SAlt supported his campaigns for president in 1996 and 2000 when he ran as a Green, as well as his “independent” campaigns in 2004 and 2008. Like Sanders and Stein, Nader repeatedly made it clear that his goal was to push Democratic nominees to mouth more populist rhetoric in order to get *them* elected. He even met with John Kerry during the '04 election to advise him on his vice-presidential pick. Nader ranted against “illegal” immigration and welcomed the endorsement of the right-wing populist Reform Party, whose candidate in 2000 had been fascistic “America First” Patrick Buchanan. (See “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers,” internationalist.org, October 2004.) In 2008, SAlt lamented having to decide between Nader and the Green Party’s candidate, former Democratic Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney. Nader also pushed rabid anti-Chinese protectionism – not that this would much bother the CWI, which repeatedly (as on its stophkrepression.net site) promotes materials from Radio Free Asia, notoriously a creature of the CIA.

Everywhere the Green Party has held government office, it has upheld capitalism. In Germany in 1999, the Green Party held the foreign ministry and loudly clamored for sending imperialist troops into the Balkans (which Germany did, the first time since World War II) during the U.S./NATO bombing and invasion of Serbia. The record of left-populist, “multi-class” parties underlines much the same point – as shown by SYRIZA in Greece, which was all the rage among the gamut of left opportunists not long ago. (The CWI ran candidates on SYRIZA slates, as SAlt boasted on its site; see “Greece’s Syriza Tops Euro Elections – CWI Supporters Elected to Volos Council,” 17 June 2014.)

Here in the U.S., the Greens do not win much of anything, but to cite one example, Jason West, Green Party mayor of New Paltz, NY, ordered a crackdown on Occupy protestors in 2012. The Greens in the U.S. are basically a home for homeless liberal Democrats. As Cynthia McKinney said in 2008, she didn’t leave the Democratic Party, the Greens were “a place to go when the Democratic Party left me.”

In the 30 March article hailing DSA election campaigns that we cited above, Kshama Sawant also mentions SAlt’s endorsement of the Richmond (California) Progressive Alliance slate, centered around longtime Green mayor Gayle McLaughlin’s bid for the position of lieutenant governor. Clicking over to the RPA’s website, we discover that the RPA is composed of “Greens, Democrats, and Independents.” Some SAlt oppositionists wanted to “return” to the organization’s pre-Sanders “tradition.” But as decades of examples show, this is a tradition of supporting capitalist politicians for offices small and large, including commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. This has nothing to do with Marxism, but it is certainly an “alternative” ... to socialism, that is.

Kshama Sawant and the CWI Tradition: Municipal Socialism and Chasing Liberals

One of the most famous and important quotations from Lenin is his statement that the Marxist’s “ideal should not be the trade-union secretary, but the *tribune of the people*,” that is, of all the oppressed and exploited. In contrast, Socialist Alternative’s ideal seems to be the social-democratic city councilor. In fact, many of our former comrades in the SAlt opposition upheld the campaigns for Kshama Sawant’s election and reelection as a supposed alternative to the “Bern turn,” and one they saw as fitting more with the “CWI tradition.”

What the Marxist movement has traditionally known as “municipal socialism” is focused on local legislative reforms and improvements rather than socialist revolution, and thus also known disparagingly as “sewer socialism.” Together with spreading illusions in a “peaceful socialist transition” through a parliamentary “enabling act,” a dismal record on Northern Ireland, and so much more, this is indeed, a tradition of the CWI going back to the Militant tendency in the British Labour Party. The CWI’s international leader Peter Taaffe is, after all, co-author of that bible of municipal socialism, *Liverpool: A City That Dared to Fight* (1988), harking back to the Militant’s administration of the city in the 1980s. This is definitely not an alternative to SAlt’s enthusiasm for Bernie Sanders.

Kshama Sawant’s rise to prominence has illustrated SAlt’s reformist acceptance of what is “possible” under capitalism, and the alliances with liberal capitalist politicians that this entails. SAlt hails the role of Sawant’s campaign for raising the minimum wage. However, the way the issue was chosen and formulated was closely calibrated to how it was being picked up by liberal Democrats. Originating in the wake of Occupy Wall Street, the “Fight for \$15 and a Union” demand was taken up by the Service Employees International Union as part of a national campaign centered on rallies to pressure Democratic politicians to support raising the minimum wage. SAlt did get into the action early, it’s true, but its \$15 Now front group time and again caved to the needs of small business owners and the sensibilities of petty-bourgeois liberals (for example, dropping the “and a Union” part because it would scare away some Seattle voters). It meant offering loopholes like the collective bargaining opt-out which would have exempted certain unionized workers from the wage hike! In the end, with a years-long phase-in, \$15 Now became \$15 Later for most Seattle workers.

While we welcome any reforms or improvements that benefit working people and the oppressed, it is important once again to call things by their right name. What really happened with the \$15 Now campaign was not a “class-struggle” explosion but a liberal campaign to pressure the Democrats. Far from being linked to transitional demands to strengthen the class power of the proletariat, pointing the way toward socialist revolution, it was posed in the fashion of the social-democratic “minimum program” of what’s deemed achievable under capitalism.

During our time in SAlt, we were constantly barraged with make-work electoral activities that were peddled as “class strug-

gle,” from “class-struggle” petition drives to “class-struggle” non-binding ballot referendums. This was quite maddening and was a clue that what SALT is selling is warmed-over activist liberalism masquerading as “Trotskyism.” This can be seen once again in the recent campaign for the Seattle “Head Tax” targeting, in particular, Amazon’s contemptible Jeff Bezos. Let’s preempt SALT loyalists demagogically saying, “Oh, you oppose a tax on the wealthy to fund housing and services for the homeless?” The point is that “Tax the Rich” is lifted from the program of liberal Democrats, there is nothing “transitional” about it. What was eventually passed (despite a reactionary cartoonist depicting Sawant operating a guillotine) was a watered-down bill, acceptable to SALT’s liberal Democratic allies on the Seattle City Council.

The end result of this playbook of passing off activist New Dealism as revolutionary politics is twofold. First, it disorients those who look to SALT for leadership as to what “class struggle” really means. Second, it reinforces SALT’s accommodation to liberal Democrats in order to get enough support for the electoral initiatives that have become their, and Sawant’s, calling card. Even before the “Bern turn” SALT was suggesting that votes for certain liberal Democrats in the Seattle City Council election of 2015 would make things easier for Sawant to get her reformist agenda passed by that body (“Seattle Politics at a Crossroads – the 2015 City Council Elections,” 2 August 2015). Her courting of liberal Democratic King County Council member Larry Gossett (who then turned around and voted for the youth jail targeted by the “Block the Bunker” campaign to which Sawant lent her support) was cut from the same cloth.

How SALT adjusts its program the better to swim with, not against, the liberal stream of confidence in the capitalist state has been shown again in its shameless tailing after the Democrats’ racist gun control schemes (see “Socialists’ Chase After Anti-Gun Movement,” April 2018, on internationalist.org) and trying to get in on the Women’s March/#MeToo action by organizing a “Take Back the Night” march in Boston as an International Woman’s Day event. (Take Back the Night has a long history of appealing to the racist, sexist capitalist state, usually calling for more cops on campus and featuring police commissioners.)

More on the CWI Tradition: Cops, Capitulation to Chauvinism, and Counterrevolution

Of course, SALT and the CWI have a long history of embracing cops, corrections officers, and security guards as part of the labor movement, claiming they are “workers in uniform.” Trampling all over the Marxist understanding of the state as “special bodies of armed men” whose job is defending the power and property of the ruling class, this flows from their aspiration to be social-democratic administrators of the capitalist state. Examples range from the inclusion of the Prison Officers Association in their British electoral vehicle (the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition) to joining with SEIU-organized security guards in \$15 Now campaigns such as the one at Boston’s Northeastern

University in 2015. (For more on this, see “Her Majesty’s Social Democrats in Bed with the Police,” Summer 2009, on internationalist.org.)

We defend SALT and Kshama Sawant – as all leftists should – against the vicious lawsuit by Seattle police officers who killed Che Taylor in 2016 and are suing her for “character defamation.” Yet the topic of the Seattle police is another one where SALT has contributed to the CWI’s tradition of obscuring the role of the cops. While in the end voting against the appointment of Kathleen O’Toole as Seattle chief of police, Sawant praised the decision to hire a woman police chief, giving a speech praising O’Toole’s commitment “to really build a relationship with the community” and her proposal for a “tiered approach for policing protests,” going on to complain about “gang violence,” “ineffective policing” and not enough cops on the beat. In 2017, Sawant followed this up with the suggestion that Seattle cops could be used to resist I.C.E.’s immigrant-snatching squads. This is, once again, SALT’s trampling over the Marxist understanding that the bourgeois state cannot be pressured to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed, and must be smashed through workers revolution.

This anti-Marxist view of the state even includes district attorneys. In Philadelphia in 2017, the SALT branch’s blog hailed the election of “progressive” district attorney Larry Krasner (“Krasner Wins! Keep Building the Resistance!”, phillysocialistalt.com, May 17). Since his election, Krasner has stalled on handing over the DA office’s files regarding the prosecution of former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia’s attorneys have demanded these files to help show the effects of former Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Ronald Castille’s failure to recuse himself at Jamal’s appeal, despite the fact that Castille was an assistant district attorney in Jamal’s original case. And who was Krasner’s first choice to lead his transition team? None other than Ronald Castille! We can’t help but note that SALT’s website has published no articles on Mumia for the past ten years, and that SALT was absent on both January 17 and April 30 when we traveled to Philly to participate in demonstrations outside the courtroom calling for Krasner to turn over the files and for Mumia to be released.

We have been told that the Philadelphia branch has long avoided Mumia’s case because it might taint branch leaders’ reputations in unions they’re active in. We do not know if this is accurate, but we do have our own experiences with SALT’s willful blindness toward special oppression – another hallmark of Labourite social democracy. In 2013, Boston SALT ran a supporter for an at-large seat in the city council. The mayoral race that year was largely about the legacy of the Boston busing plan for school desegregation in the mid-1970s – in which racist thugs threw stones at schoolchildren, attacked black bathers on public beaches and assaulted black men with American flagpoles at City Hall. John Connolly, who ended up losing to Marty Walsh, made the centerpiece of his campaign a return to “neighborhood schools,” which, as any Bostonian to the left of Jeff Sessions will tell you, is a call to roll back the scraps of the busing plan.

It was in this atmosphere that Boston SAlt chose to debut their campaign on St. Patrick's Day in the historically Irish American enclave of South Boston, which was ground zero for the racist attacks on school integration, with a leaflet demanding, together with standard reformist wish-list items, "fully funded *voluntarily integrated* schools" (our emphasis)! At a meeting later that day, when first presented with a copy of the leaflet, one of us (Mike) objected to this pandering to Southie racists. Much of the local SAlt leadership doubled down on their defense of the capitulation, saying that they had thought "long and hard" about how to distinguish their campaign from other leftists' defense of "forced busing" (!!! – another racist codeword). According to them, certain "ultralefts" were running around Southie telling the poor residents of that neighborhood that "if you're against busing, you're racist." The truth, of course, is that if you're against busing, you *are* racist. To his credit, one National Committee member in the room, who hadn't seen the leaflet before the meeting, was also shocked, spoke against the horrific formulation and put a stop to attempts by the chair to quash the conversation.

After multiple discussion rounds, we were told that a new leaflet, *sans* the formulation, would be produced. When we showed up for the next campaign event there was, in fact, a new leaflet ... but there were also hundreds of copies of the old leaflet as well. We probably should have quit then and there, but instead, when no one was looking, we threw the old leaflets in the trash like the garbage they were.

These local examples of SAlt/CWI's social-democratic opportunism are part of the big picture in which one of the biggest historic elements is their swimming *with* the stream of capitalist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and Eastern European deformed workers states. As Cannon said at the height of the factional battle with the followers of Max Shachtman on the eve of World War II: "Who touches the Russian question touches a revolution. Therefore, be serious about it. Don't play with it." Well, the CWI, despite its Trotskyist pretensions, has certainly played along with counterrevolution. In 1991, their Russian members proudly manned the barricades of George H.W. Bush's man in Moscow, Boris Yeltsin. They deny this now, but in the October 1991 issue of *Rabochaya Demokratiya* they boasted of it openly, bragging of how they built barricades around the monument to the martyrs of the 1905 revolution and crowing that unlike 1905, the 1991 "revolution" (read: counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union) was victorious.

In 2013, SAlt played into imperialism's anti-North Korea hysteria in an article titled "Dictator Threatens Nuclear Attack" in which the U.S. imperialists, fresh from their invasion of Libya, appear as the face of peace-loving rationality. Genuine Trotskyists, on the other hand, defend the right of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a bureaucratically deformed workers state whose cities were flattened by the U.S. imperialists in the Korean War, to defend itself, including with nuclear weapons, as an elementary deterrent against imperialist assault. In Hong Kong in 2014, the CWI abandoned any pretense to the Trotskyist

program for deformed workers states (unflinching defense against capitalist counterrevolution from within or without; proletarian political revolution to oust the anti-revolutionary bureaucratic Stalinist excrescence) to cheer on the CIA-funded so-called Umbrella Revolution and its program of capitalist counterrevolution under the guise of (classless) "democracy." Despite their paper-thin pretensions of Trotskyism, SAlt, in keeping with the CWI tradition, are social-democratic opportunists through and through.

Reforge the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution!

We have watched with dismay as some of our former comrades in the anti-"Bern turn" opposition within SAlt have erroneously come to the conclusion that, if SAlt represents Trotskyism, then they want nothing to do with Trotskyism. Some have retreated into the Greens, or the DSA, or the Socialist Party; others have embraced Maoism, black nationalism, anarchism... But in their different ways, they (like SAlt) turn their backs on the principle of working-class political independence that we cited at the beginning of this Open Letter. In the class struggle, when the crunch comes, there are two sides of the barricades, like the picket line. If you support the Democratic Party, directly or indirectly through the DSA, if you support the Green Party, if you embrace the historic tradition of the CWI on the police, you end up on the other side, on the wrong side of the class line. In the end it's really quite simple. It's which side are you on? That's the question we are directing to our former comrades.

We are determined to go forward in the fight for the revolutionary Marxism of our time. We come out of the fight over the "Bern turn" and our years in SAlt more convinced than ever that, as Trotsky put it in 1938, "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership." We remain convinced that the international proletariat remains the only force capable of overthrowing capitalist exploitation and oppression and building a new, socialist world. As we move toward fusion with the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International, we uphold the conviction that the central task of revolutionaries today is the forging of a Bolshevik-Leninist party that, armed with a genuinely Trotskyist program, can lead the workers and all of the oppressed to the seizure of power through world socialist revolution. We urge our former comrades in the SAlt opposition, and all those who want to fight for that revolution, to study the program and practice of the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International. We look forward to talking with you about the issues raised in this Open Letter, and many others, as we prepare for new struggles.

For the Class Struggle Education League,

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31 May 2018

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Class Struggle Education League Fuses with Internationalist Group*

(June 2018)

On June 3, the Class Struggle Education League, based in southern New Hampshire, and the Internationalist Group joined together in a single organization, the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. The fusion took place following a well-attended CSEL-IG panel on “Revolutionary Regroupment vs. ‘Sanders Socialism’” at the annual Left Forum in New York City. The panel was sharply counterposed to the Bernie Sanders brand of Democratic Party liberalism that dominated this year’s edition of the social-democratic confab. The previous day a panel by the Class Struggle Education Workers on “Teacher Revolts Shake Labor” and “On the Front Lines Defending Immigrants” drew a standing-room-only crowd. The CSEW is a union tendency fraternally allied with the IG. Also at the Forum, “An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present” (31 May) by the CSEL was distributed.

The CSEL-IG panel focused on the issues that led the Class Struggle Education League toward fusing with the Internationalist Group, and what revolutionary regroupment means, from Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks to today. Speaking for the CSEL, Danny Keating, a steel worker, recounted that his first reading group studying the *Communist Manifesto* was in the U.S. Army, which he had naively enlisted in as a young man. After the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, he decided he had to resist, leaving the military and looking for a communist group. After encountering the Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party (“off-putting and strange”) he met Socialist Alternative (SAlt), which he believed was teaching working-class independence from the bourgeoisie. Instead, he said, SAlt capitulated to existing consciousness, launching a new campaign every six months, never getting past Socialism 101 in its internal education of members, leading to high turnover, confusion and disillusionment.

Disagreements began when the SAlt leadership truncated its call for “\$15 and a Union” to “\$15 Now,” because some liberals were uncomfortable with the union part. SAlt’s 2015 “turn” to campaigning for Bernie Sanders was particularly cynical. The leadership called for Sanders to “campaign all the way to November” (as if that would make it okay to support a bourgeois politician) knowing full well that Sanders was never going to win, that he would support Hillary Clinton, that he would never break from the Democrats. They told the members to tailor their approach to those who following the election of Trump have illusions in the Democrats, opposing only “corporate” and “establishment Democrats.” When the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) grew exponentially after the elections, Keating said, SAlt leaders “were beaming. To them, this was confirmation that they should have watered down their program even more: ‘Imagine how big the left would be if only we had lied

to people a little more,’” they figured.

The New Hampshire branch of Socialist Alternative said it would engage with Sanders supporters, but wouldn’t lie to them. The speaker contrasted the program and action of the League for the Fourth International with that of SAlt’s parent body, the Committee for a Workers’ International, which grew out of the Militant tendency of the British Labour Party. “The CWI’s Labour reformism and sewer socialism is nothing but sowing illusions and diverting energy from what is really needed,” namely building a tight-knit revolutionary party, not opportunistically adapting to the outlook of what they would call “newly radicalized layers,” meaning young people that they “could lie to from the start,” said Keating. So after breaking with SAlt, “we hit the books again,” seeing that “in this period of splits and fusions,” many opportunist outfits are busting apart while people “are striving to find an organization that actually seeks to overthrow this rotten system.”

Mike Gath, also speaking on behalf of the CSEL, emphasized the importance of the writings of James P. Cannon. “In Socialist Alternative the beginning of the end” came after reading (or in his case, re-reading) Cannon’s *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, about the 1939-40 struggle against the anti-Soviet petty-bourgeois opposition inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party. Clearly there was a discrepancy between the revolutionary party Cannon talked about and Socialist Alternative’s claims. It took a couple more years of fighting for the comrades who would go on to found the CSEL to come to the conclusion that when they talked about the need for a party, they weren’t speaking the same language as the SAlt leadership, or others in the opposition. “What it meant for us was a class-struggle, revolutionary vanguard party – not a ‘mass socialist party,’ not a ‘party of the 99%,’ not a ‘people’s party.’ No, we need a Leninist revolutionary vanguard party, as a sign here says, to reforge the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution, hammered out on programmatic agreement.”

Gath underlined the importance of Lenin’s statement in *What Is To Be Done?* that the role of the revolutionary is not to be a trade-union secretary but to be a tribune, or champion of the oppressed. So they threw themselves into struggles for trans rights and gay rights, as well as highlighting the fight for black liberation, not always a simple task in an area where the black population is statistically quite small. The black question is key to revolution in the United States, and the CSEL endorsed the program of revolutionary integrationism put forward by Richard Fraser in the SWP during the 1950s against the perspective of black nationalism, which in practice often meant tailing after black Democrats. At a conference in Connecticut held by Socialist Action (a split-off from the SWP which has a black nationalist line), a spokesperson for the Malcolm X Grassroots Network responded to criticism that it was getting “too close to the Democratic Party” by saying no, they were

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At 30 April 2018 protest in Philadelphia in defense of class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, supporters of the Class Struggle Education League join with the Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth in calling to “Mobilize Workers Power to Free Mumia” and for “Black Liberation through Socialist Revolution!”

and always had been Democrats. (Socialist Action had nothing to say in response.) In February, the CSEL held a second annual black history forum together with speakers from the IG and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, highlighting Ona Judge, the former slave of George Washington who escaped to New Hampshire.

The CSEL speaker stressed that revolutionary integrationism “means that the oppression of the black population cannot be solved before a socialist revolution. There is no reforming racism away.” He noted the CWI’s adaptation to social-chauvinism coming out of the Labour Party, adding, “you can see the same thing in the Bernie Sanders campaign: the idea that to work on issues like \$15 Now that appeal to everyone regardless of race is how you’re going to forge unity across racial lines. But that kind of reformist approach doesn’t get to the root of eradicating the material basis for black oppression.” Finally, “one of the key things that led us to this room was re-reading Trotsky’s Transitional Program, encapsulated in the sentence that ‘the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.’ So what kind of party? A party that is the memory of the working class, a tribune of the people, tempered in class struggle.”

The CSEL checked out several left groups. They spoke with Left Voice, an Internet outlet linked with the Fracción Trotskista internationally. Gath noted: “When we met with them, it was sort of, ‘Hi, how are you. I don’t want to join a media project, I want to join a Leninist vanguard party.’” The CSEL rejected LV also for its refusal to defend North Korea and its tailing after the DSA. About the Spartacist League/

International Communist League (SL/ICL), of which Gath had been a member as a teenager, he noted the SL’s thesis about a post-Soviet historic retrogression in working-class consciousness, which it uses to claim that the working class today is too backward to be mobilized on the basis of Trotsky’s Transitional Program. So then what is the task today? he asked. “SALT said you have to go further into reformism. The SL in practice retreated into a kind of abstract propagandism. In both cases, these are reasons not to intervene in the class struggle fighting for a revolutionary program, which is what we want to do.” He concluded: “So what brought us to the Internationalist Group? It comes down to a motto of the Brazilian comrades, that there should be a coherence of words and deeds. We thought that was really important. We wanted to bring our actions into line with our instincts.”

Charlie Morán, a member of the Internationalist Group and a founder of *Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas* (Class Struggle International Workers), spoke of the experience of organizing immigrant workers, including at the Hot and Crusty bakery where workers won a union hiring hall after 55 days on the picket line (and where he was subsequently fired for his union activity). He cited the work leading to the unionization of several hundred workers at B&H Photo & Video. Seeking to bust the union, management shut down its New York City warehouses, but the store workers (whose ranks include members of TIC) still have a union. In particular, he emphasized that while many ostensible Trotskyists have abandoned the Transitional Program, for the IG and TIC, “it is our program, our guide for daily work.”

Morán pointed to the action of the Brazilian comrades in winning and defending the six-hour workday at the giant CSN steel plant. In 1999 they sparked a strike by the Rio de Janeiro teachers union demanding freedom for class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. This was followed the next day by the action of longshore workers in the U.S. shutting down ports up and down the West Coast for the same demand. Looking to Mexico he pointed out that in 1999, the *Grupo Internacionalista* started out with only two comrades, but in the strike at the National University against attempts to impose tuition they insistently fought for workers defense guards. Then that July they succeeded in sparking the formation of a defense guard of the electrical workers union, which defended the strike in the face of threats of army repression. The occupation by tens of thousands of students lasted for ten months, ending with the mass arrest of strikers in February 2000. But it succeeded

in keeping the university free, with no tuition, as it continues to be today.

The speaker noted the IG's struggle in the United States for workers strikes against the war from 2002 on. This call was finally realized on May Day 2008 when all 29 West Coast U.S. ports were shut down by the International Longshore and Warehouse Union demanding an end to the war on Afghanistan and Iraq and for defense of immigrant rights. Morán cited the work of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico in militant teachers strikes in 2006, 2013 and 2016, and the action of health workers in the state of Oaxaca fighting to break the stranglehold of state-controlled corporatist pseudo-unions. These workers, led by GI spokesman Dr. Arturo Villalobos, brought emergency medical aid to the victims of the 19 June 2016 police massacre in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca during that year's teachers strike. It was in reprisal for such courageous actions that Villalobos' son was beaten and tortured last month. In response, the IG and CSEL protested outside Mexican consulates while the sections of the LFI won support from unions in the U.S., Germany and Brazil, along with hundreds of supporters of labor and democratic rights, to denounce this state terror.

Abram Negrete, speaking for the Internationalist Group, began by noting that the day before, June 2, there was a demonstration in Mexico City in defense of our comrade Arturo and his family that was attended by 150 people and 16 organizations including several left groups – with the notable absence of the Grupo Espartaquista de México (the Mexican section of the ICL). He stressed that “the struggle to reforge the Fourth International is a struggle for the most vital, the most basic needs and interests of working people all around the world. And in places like Oaxaca, this is a question of life and death, in the literal sense.” In particular, he stressed, the question “Is the Transitional Program applicable?” has “a lot to do with our differences with many of the different tendencies that claim to be revolutionary or Marxist or Trotskyist.” As in, we seek to apply it, they don't.

The fusion with the CSEL reminded him of the fusion, some 40 years ago, of the Spartacist League (of which the founders of the IG were then members) with a group that had been called the Lavender and Red Union and then changed its name to Red Flag Union. To the opportunists who spend their lives chasing after one petty-bourgeois movement after another, embracing lifestyleism and what is today known

as identity politics, it must have seemed inexplicable for a group coming out of the gay movement to be fusing with hard Trotskyists. But it was possible precisely because of the fight for the revolutionary principles of Marxism.

“I think that the fusion with the Class Struggle Education League is a lot like that,” Negrete commented. Here are comrades who come out of Socialist Alternative, which is the very embodiment of social-democratic, “color-blind” economism, which considers cops to be workers and which threw itself headlong into the Sanders campaign as he was running for the Democratic presidential nomination. But “if you look at the trajectory of the comrades, they come out of all kinds of real struggles, they come out the working-class struggle in a place that is pretty far from the center of U.S. politics.” Their experience in struggle underscored the need for Marxist clarity, leading them to make a sharp break with opportunism and insist on genuine Bolshevik politics.

The IG speaker focused on “What is revolutionary regroupment, and what is it not?” He noted that “Revolutionary regroupment doesn't mean that all leftists get together into one big group. It doesn't mean a ‘big tent’ like the Democratic Socialists of America call themselves. Inside this big tent what is purveyed is subordination to the ruling class in the form of the Democratic Party. It doesn't mean all leftists being nice to each other and pretending that they don't have disagreements. It doesn't mean sanding off the sharp edges. It doesn't mean tailing after the DSA, like Left Voice does, for example, and advising the DSA. No, it means a hard struggle *against* class-collaborationist politics.”

He cited examples of revolutionary regroupment, includ-



Joint CSEL-IG panel on “Revolutionary Regroupment vs. ‘Sanders Socialism’” at Left Forum 2018.

ing the fusion of the Mezhraiontsy, the Inter-District Group of Trotsky, Joffe, Lunacharsky and others, with Lenin's Bolsheviks in July-August 1917 leading in short order to the Bolshevik Revolution. Another example of revolutionary regroupment on a large scale was when Grigorii Zinoviev went to the congress of the Independent Social-Democratic Party of Germany, and after a lengthy speech two-thirds of the delegates came over to the Communist Party. But there were also many examples of smaller revolutionary regroupments, including the East Oakland Women, the Buffalo Marxist Collective and other groups coming out of the breakup of the New Left that were won to the Spartacist League at the start of the 1970s. A number of those comrades were in the room at this forum.

Revolutionary regroupment – bringing together cadres coming from ostensibly revolutionary or other organizations of the working class and oppressed and winning them to the program of authentic Marxism, i.e., Trotskyism – is a key tactic in times when potential revolutionaries are dispersed, often as the result of earlier defeats. But such a regrouping cannot be achieved on the basis of a lowest-common-denominator platform papering over differences. The *sine qua non* or essential condition for success is that it be on the basis of the revolutionary program. After World War II, the decimation of the Trotskyist cadres by the Nazis and Stalinist repression (following the 1940 assassination of Trotsky himself) and disorientation over the rise of Stalinist-governed deformed workers states led to the growth of tendencies, headed up by the international secretary of the Fourth International, Michel Pablo, that abandoned the struggle for a Trotskyist vanguard in favor of chasing after or joining with non-proletarian and non-revolutionary forces.

As stated in the 1998 “Declaration of the League for the Fourth International”:

“The reforging of the Fourth International requires defeating Pabloism and all other currents which betray the revolutionary Trotskyist program. An important component of this fight, and of the struggle to overcome the disparity between the tasks we face and our limited forces, will be the tactic of revolutionary regroupment on the program of Leninist internationalism. We foresee a series of splits from revisionist organizations and fusions with those genuinely seeking to be communists, in building the vanguard party.”

Spelling this out at the panel on revolutionary regroupment, the IG speaker Negrete emphasized:

“When we talk about reforging the Fourth International, we’re talking not about piecing together the fragments of various opportunist organizations, but rather overcoming the historical crisis that destroyed the Fourth International organizationally, in 1951 to 1953, through Pabloite revisionism. Many of the fragments that claim to be Trotskyist in the world today are either derived from Mandelism, or from Morenoism – such as in the case of the Fracción Trotskista – or from the Lambertistes or from other tendencies which basically reflected the destruction of the Fourth International by Pabloite revisionism.

“The Spartacist tendency, in our view, fought for and de-

fended, and in some cases even extended, Trotskyism for three decades. That’s not nothing – we’re based on that. It was the only organization that told the truth about Allende’s popular front in Chile; the only organization that said ‘All Indochina Must Go Communist,’ calling for workers strikes against the war; the only organization that didn’t swim with the stream of New Leftism, that didn’t pretend that black liberation could be accomplished without proletarian revolution; the only organization that tried to understand – and put forward a program – for ‘interpenetrated peoples’ in places where different peoples were mingled together.”

But the aftermath of counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc – which the ICL in some of its finest moments and uniquely on the left fought tenaciously against, undertaking bold actions in the bureaucratically deformed/degenerated workers states while the pseudo-Trotskyists almost without exception sided with the capitalist-restorationists – led to a fundamental crisis in the Spartacist tendency.

This crisis was based on an accumulation of a number of factors, including aging and the weight of the labor aristocracy in the organization but centrally on loss of confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat – a hallmark of all revisionism. Following the counterrevolutionary destruction of the USSR, a world-historic defeat for the proletariat, the ICL began to draw defeatist conclusions and write them into its program. It began with the assertion that the Stalinist bureaucracy – a brittle parasitic layer – not only paved the way to disaster but “led the counterrevolution.” This phony claim, which was invented in order to drive out the founders of the IG/LFI, not only whitewashed the imperialists and their stooges who actually led the counterrevolution, it contradicted Trotsky’s analysis of the contradictory character of the bureaucracy and the ICL’s own actions in East Germany and the Soviet Union.

Soon the ICL was concluding that the Transitional Program was outdated, and blaming this on the workers with its thesis of a “historic retrogression” in working-class consciousness.¹ From there, the SL/ICL went from one programmatic departure from Trotskyism to another, usually while railing against the Internationalist Group/LFI. This included: dropping the call for independence for Puerto Rico in 1998 (while accusing the IG/LFI of Latin American nationalism for upholding it); dropping the call to defeat U.S. imperialism in the wake of 9/11 (accusing the IG of pandering to anti-Americanism for upholding it); dropping the call for hot-cargoing military goods in the 2002 lead-up to the invasion of Iraq (accusing the IG of adventurism for upholding it), and most infamously supporting the U.S. invasion of Haiti following the 2010 earthquake (while denouncing the IG’s call to kick the imperialists out as a “deranged and grotesque fantasy”).

So every few years there is another crisis in the SL/ICL, complete with “regime change” – chucking out the previous ostensible leaders and replacing them with another set – and bringing new revisions of Leninism and Trotskyism. IG

¹ The same claim is made by almost every other tendency falsely claiming to be Trotskyist. See “In Defense of the Transitional Program,” in *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.

spokesman Negrete noted at the June 3 panel:

“The latest one is fairly spectacular. It is embodied in a creature, the fearsome hydra. So they put out a document called ‘The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra.’ It turns out the chauvinist hydra was them, according to them. According to them, for 40 years they had a chauvinist line on the national question. Now, it is true, as many of the comrades in this room can attest, that they engaged in chauvinist behavior and actions, notably against our comrades. But that’s not what they’re talking about. They’re saying that what’s necessary is to revise the understanding of the national question.”

In contrast to the SL/ICL’s centrist gyrations, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International have been constant in upholding the program of revolutionary Trotskyism, and on the basis of seeking to put the Transitional Program into practice have been able to intervene in the class struggle, achieving some modest successes, as noted earlier. This caught the attention of the comrades splitting from Socialist Alternative, as CSEL spokesman Keating commented, with some exaggeration: “We were impressed by the IG. People said, ‘why would you want to join that.’ And we would say, ‘here’s a list of 90 things they’ve done, what have you done?’ So we started engaging with the IG, and that’s why we’re here today.”

On the basis of programmatic continuity and fidelity to Trotskyism and Leninism, the IG/LFI has continued to pursue revolutionary regroupment. More than once, the unexpected has occurred. In joining with the Portland Trotskyist Study Group, the Internationalist Group won cadres out of the International Socialist Organization. It began with a late-night phone call in mid-2011 when these comrades called to say that they had “had it with the ISO” and wanted “the real Trotskyism.” But that was only the beginning of a process. After visits, joint study focusing on the “Russian Question,” from Kronstadt to China, and several months of common work around the Occupy movement and in support of longshore workers fighting union-busting in Longview, Washington, the fusion of the IG and PTSG took place in July 2012.²

The LFI reaffirmed the perspective of “revolutionary regroupment(s) of cadres breaking from opportunist organizations to embrace authentic Trotskyism” in its April 2015 document “International Perspectives of the League for the Fourth International,” while adding that “the immediate prospects may be limited” for such regroupments.³ Little did we know that in the following year, two separate groups of cadres from in and around the ICL would come knocking on our door seeking the regroup with the LFI.

This included the former leaders of the Italian section of the ICL, who declared their solidarity with the LFI in a document titled “Back to Trotskyism.”⁴ And the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction of the ICL in Los Angeles made contact with the IG/LFI after they were summarily expelled from the

² See “Portland Trotskyist Study Group Fuses with Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist*, Summer 2012.

³ Reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.

⁴ Reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016.

Spartacist League the day after handing in their declaration of faction calling to “Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!” After several days of intense discussion and several months of joint work – notably at May Day 2016 in New York City, the Lutte Ouvrière Fête in France and the Left Forum in NYC a few days later, and attending the Second Conference of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico in early July – the BLTN faction and IG fused.⁵

With the CSEL as well there has been a process of joint study and common work. This included the Black History Month forum in New Hampshire, where IG members and a member of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth spoke on the Haitian Revolution and its legacy. It included two trips to Philadelphia to show solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal, in January and April when we had a joint IG-CSEL contingent of a dozen people. CSEL statements were published in *The Internationalist* (No. 51, April-May 2018). On May Day, there was a joint IG-CSEL contingent of over 50 people in New York City. There were the protests over the torture attack in Mexico, and finally the open letter and joint panel at the Left Forum in New York. In the end, Mike Gath said, “when I started working with the Internationalist Group more, the big sense that I got was of coming home again, after a long time. This was revolutionary Trotskyism as I remembered it, as I understood it.”

Summing up the discussion, Negrete remarked:

“We’re talking about a regroupment between a small organization and an even smaller one. But this is part of something much bigger. This is a little taste of what we can and must accomplish if we fight for our principles, if we do that intransigently, if we don’t sand the edges off of it, if we look for the real opportunities, if we’re smart about it, if we’re determined about it, but above all, always remembering that every single tactic is subordinated to the principles of communism. Nobody will carry out revolutionary regroupment if when they have the tiniest opportunity they sell out, or they adapt, or they tail after the existing leadership. Only the people who fight for those principles now are able to carry out all sorts of regroupments and splits and fusions in a much bigger way.

“The lesson of this is that these principles are valid, that they guide the work in Oaxaca, they guide the work for workers strikes against the war, the fight for workers defense guards, and a workers militia where it’s possible, to smash the fascists. This is what we’re talking about when we talk about the potentials and lessons of revolutionary regroupment.”

Following the successful conclusion of the forum, the comrades decided there was no point in delaying further, and they should just do it. So by a vote of the CSEL comrades and polling the IG Executive Committee the fusion was formalized then and there. Meeting subsequently, on July 5, the IG executive committee (now expanded to include a comrade of the ex-CSEL) chartered a New England local of the Internationalist Group. ■

⁵ See “Better-Late-Than-Never Faction Fuses with Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist* No. 44, Summer 2016.

Revolutionary Marxism Is Based on the Political Independence of the Working Class

By Alice M. and Andrew C., Spokane

On 14 August 2018, Spokane Socialist Alternative member Alice M. submitted the following document for inclusion in SAlt's September 2018 Members Bulletin as part of pre-convention discussion. (This request was denied, supposedly due to "new rules" – a pretext for cracking down on discussion as the leadership took the organization ever deeper into outright bourgeois politics.) The document was subsequently also signed by Andrew C.. The comrades sent it to SAlt branches and posted it, requesting that it be forwarded and circulated widely. We reproduce it here from Revolution No. 16, May 2019.

A revolutionary party can only be based on the genuine ideas of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky. That's not being "dogmatic," it's what we have learned from history.

However, it is clear that this is not the case with the political line put forward by Socialist Alternative. This has become more and more clear recently, but in our reading we see that it goes way back. Therefore, the intent of this document is to express fundamental disagreement with that line, first and foremost on the question of the political independence of the working class.

Political independence of the working class is a core principle forming the very basis of revolutionary Marxist politics. Without it, all talk of Marxist "tactics" is a deception. This point goes back to the resolution from Marx and Engels that was passed by the First International, stating that against the "collective power of the propertied classes," the working class must constitute a "political party *distinct from, and opposed*" to bourgeois parties – that is, to "*all*" the parties of the propertied class, it stated (our emphasis). Marx made the same point in his speech on this subject, emphasizing that the workers must never be "the tagtail of any bourgeois party." (Resolution on Working Class Political Action and speech by Marx at September 1871 conference of the First International.)

It is on the basis of the struggle for genuinely working-class, revolutionary politics that the Bolshevik-Menshevik split took place. Without that, the Russian Revolution would not have happened. It was on the basis of this same principle that the Trotskyist movement was formed in the fight against Stalinism's subordination of the Chinese workers to the bourgeois nationalist party, and subsequently the fight against popular fronts of class collaboration with "progressive" bourgeois politicians.

Evaluating documents from internal discussions and disputes in SA¹ over the question of Bernie Sanders, it is clear to us that the "Bern Turn" was a betrayal of working-class political independence. It is also clear to us that it was not an isolated incident. Instead, it was a bold, naked manifestation of a fundamentally tailist and anti-Marxist perspective. This

¹ Editor's note: In this and the following document, "SA" refers to Socialist Alternative.

was even theorized in the 2016 perspectives document calling for a so-called new, mass party that it openly states would not in fact be any kind of workers party in any way, shape or form but one which would have a "populist multi-class character." Didn't Trotsky have something to say about that?

The "Bern Turn" has, in our view, set Socialist Alternative on a trajectory of ever more blatant expressions of an orientation and perspective actually counterposed to revolutionary Marxist politics. This is conveyed well by the myriad of recent articles in SA's newspaper on the subject of various "left-Democrats," including some members of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), running in, and sometimes winning, Democratic primary elections.

Where the Logic of the "Bern Turn" Keeps Leading

The "Bern Turn" and its whole logic led deeper and deeper into building illusions in capitalist politicians. The policy of courting of liberal Democrats in Seattle, in California, etc. was being expressed more and more blatantly with SA's politics nation-wide. As time went by, the "Bern Turn" kept pulling SA ever deeper into Democratic Party politics.

But far from pulling back, or drawing Marxist lessons from all this, the logic and momentum of this have drawn SA further and further into the most flagrant political support to and collaboration with Democratic and other capitalist party politicians.

This summer SA campaigned for, sponsored an event with, and effectively endorsed Democratic Party candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. SA proclaims that it is "proud to have worked with the Ocasio-Cortez campaign," while Ocasio-Cortez herself, the capitalist media and the head of the DNC all state that she seeks to rejuvenate and bring new blood to the Democratic Party. Are SA members supposed to believe that "socialism" actually does mean building this party of U.S. imperialism, capitalist war and murderous police repression? We don't.

Now SA is hailing the campaign of yet another Democrat: Cynthia Nixon (while making various suggestions to the DSA to "get a stronger commitment from her"). This is not only a bourgeois candidate but one notorious for anti-union statements. Following the example of Ocasio-Cortez, Nixon started calling herself a "democratic socialist." Instead of unmasking the gross identification of "socialism" with bourgeois politics, NYC SA wrote (July 11), "It's positive that Cynthia Nixon has embraced socialism." This is yet another stark example of how far SA's politics are from revolutionary Marxism. How far are SA members willing to go along with this? Where will it end?

It Didn't Come from Nowhere

All of this did not come out of nowhere, and it is important for others in SA to see this as well. The fight for the political independence of the working class means opposing

all bourgeois politicians and parties, like Marx said. Not just the Democrats, but the Greens and any other minor capitalist parties too. What part of “all” isn’t being understood?

James P. Cannon made the point crystal-clear in his speech against supporting the Progressive Party campaign of Henry Wallace back in 1948: “Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the old two parties, but any other capitalist parties who might appear.”

But SA has most certainly endorsed and worked in favor of minor-party bourgeois candidates like the Greens. The biggest example of all was SA’s support to Ralph Nader in the 2000s, even though Nader was not only a capitalist candidate but an immigrant-basher. (Nader’s “play for the right,” as *American Conservative* magazine called it, even gained him support from ultra-rightist Pat Buchanan and the Reform Party.)

Campaigning for Nader and other candidates of minor bourgeois parties like the Greens was not in fact politically counterposed to SA’s eventual open embrace of Democratic candidates. As Cannon said in the same 1948 speech, there is “no principled difference” between supporting a Democratic or Republican candidate and supporting one from a minor bourgeois party, “And by principled difference I mean a class difference.”

In fact, the one thing paved the way for the other. Supporting Greens, etc., paved the way for supporting Democrats. It is very important for others in SA to see this, especially those opposed to or critical of recent policies like the “Bern Turn,” support to Ocasio-Cortez, etc. Supporting Nader et al. meant betraying political independence of the working class. That paved the way for the “Bern Turn,” which has paved the way to supporting Ocasio-Cortez, and hailing Cynthia Nixon’s run (and even giving the stamp of approval to her supposed socialism). And this will pave the way for more and more class collaboration.

This same type of opportunist politics is behind SA’s latching-on to and tailing the renewed push for “gun control” laws, which are a weapon of the racist ruling class against black people above all. SA has recognized the racist, anti-labor nature of gun control, and yet tails after protests, hailed by the Democrats, carried out by youth after the Parkland mass shooting, through *advocating* gun control, on the basis that “The only areas where there are forcible attempts by the police to disarm people are public housing projects in the inner cities.”

It must be again emphasized that the question of fighting for the political independence of the working class in the U.S. is part of the *international* program of Marxism. But in Mexico, SA’s sister organization Izquierda Revolucionaria has tailed bourgeois populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador in a similar fashion to what SA is doing here.

As relatively new members and supporters of SA, comrades in Spokane did not personally take part in the faction fight in SA over the question of Bernie Sanders. We studied this disagreement around the same time that members of the former Lowell/New Hampshire branch of Socialist Alternative resigned and constituted themselves as the Class Struggle

Education League (CSEL). While a number of SA branches had left the organization prior to CSEL, we saw these groups as generally moving *rightward* from SA in many respects, towards the amorphous, movementist, and near-apolitical approach embodied in the emergent “Marxist Center” tendency. CSEL, on the other hand, moved sharply in a leftward direction, towards revolutionary Marxism in the Trotskyist tradition.

Political clarity is essential. The working class can only win its real independence from capitalist politics if it is guided by a *revolutionary* program. This means counteracting all forms of bourgeois ideology and fighting for the workers to bring their power as a class into the fight against all forms of oppression. The revolutionary program starts from the real needs of the workers and oppressed, not the existing consciousness, since as Marx said, in bourgeois society the ruling ideas are those of the ruling class.

In contrast, SA’s political approach seeks by and large to tail and compromise with existing political consciousness, justifying this by saying Marxists must “meet people where they’re at.” But what is meant by this is not actually using Trotsky’s Transitional Program to show the need for workers’ revolution, but using the claim of “meeting” existing consciousness as a pretext for building reformism and outright bourgeois politics.

The real connections with the present-day burning concerns and struggles of the workers and oppressed must be made on the basis of a forthright, patient, and steadfast explanation of the *genuine* perspective and program of revolutionary Marxism. As Leon Trotsky wrote in *The Transitional Program*:

“All methods are good which *raise* the class consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in the struggle. The impermissible methods are those which implant fear and submissiveness in the oppressed before their oppressors....To face reality *squarely*; not to seek the line of least resistance; to *call things by their right names*; to speak the *truth* to the masses, *no matter how bitter it may be*; *not to fear obstacles*; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives....” (emphasis added)

These are “the rules of the Fourth International,” Trotsky wrote. We want to start by calling things by their right name, and what we see in Socialist Alternative’s political line is class collaboration. In contrast, those rules of Trotsky’s Fourth International, together with its genuine program, are more urgently needed than ever in the fight to build a revolutionary Marxist party for socialist revolution here and around the world.

P.S. (August 14): In the document above, it was asked how far SA members are willing to go with the leadership’s class-collaborationist course, where it will lead, and where it will end. As the document was about to be submitted, the news came that Kshama Sawant has voted in favor of confirming the new chief of the Seattle police, armed fist of the class enemy. It is the responsibility of all SA members to stand against this horrific violation of class principle, which is derived from deep-going violations of Marxist politics discussed above. ■

Socialist Alternative Is No Place for Revolutionaries*

Statement of Resignation by Alice M. (Spokane)

(October 30, 2018)

We reprint below the letter of resignation from Socialist Alternative by Alice M., who after joining SAlt as a high-school activist became a leading member of its branch in Spokane, Washington. SAlt, which politically supports the Committee for a Workers' International led by British pseudo-Trotskyist Peter Taaffe, is best known for its Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant and its promotion of illusions in the so-called "political revolution" of Bernie Sanders. This has led to considerable internal turmoil: see documents by former SAlt members who went on to fuse with the Internationalist Group: "An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present" (page 19 of this pamphlet) and "Class Struggle Education League Fuses with Internationalist Group" (page 25). Alice M. and others formed the Spokane Marxist Group, which declared its sympathy with "the programmatic heritage embodied today in the Internationalist Group (IG), U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International," and went on to fuse with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (page 42).

The 2018 National Convention of Socialist Alternative, held from the 20th to the 22nd of October in Chicago, has given its stamp of approval to the organization's increasingly open support to Democratic and other capitalist politicians. Together with this, it has upheld – explicitly or through silence – other manifestations of SA's increasingly blatant class-collaboration. The convention has definitively shown that Socialist Alternative stands on positions and actions that are completely counterposed to Marxist principles. The organization's claims to uphold those principles are clearly and obviously false. Yet today, fighting for the principles and program of revolutionary Marxism is more urgent than ever.

I joined SA during my sophomore year of high school, and worked intensively to help build the Spokane branch, because I had decided to devote myself to the cause of international socialist revolution. Today, however, it is clear as day that loyalty to that cause means opposing the kind of politics exemplified by:

- Socialist Alternative continuing and deepening its "Bern Turn" (promotion of Bernie Sanders' campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination), by backing and promoting a whole range of so-called "left Democrats." This goes together with tailing the Democratic Socialists of America's drive to rejuvenate U.S. capitalism's Democratic Party of imperialist war and racist police murder. All of this goes directly against the most basic Marxist principle of political independence of the working class, as discussed further below.

- The vote by SA's Seattle City Council member Kshama Sawant to confirm the city's new Chief of Police. The police are the armed fist of the ruling class. It is outrageous and intolerable that a "socialist" organization would vote for the head of this repressive apparatus. Upholding this vote, remaining silent on it, or just raising "tactical" objections (as SA's former Minority Group did) can only bring discredit to socialism for workers and youth fed up with capitalism's whole system of racist police terror. This too goes hand in hand with SA's increasing collaboration with the Democrats.

- SA's grotesque call during the recent national prison strike for the prisoners to unite with their jailers – to form a "unified group" with what SA calls "workers within the prisons" (socialistalternative.org, August 29). Prison guards, like the police, immigration cops, etc., are not workers but part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state. When labor bureaucrats bring them into the unions, this is part of the subjugation of the labor movement to the bosses' state. Instead of fighting for their ouster from the unions, SA is calling to "unite" with capitalism's armed guardians.

These positions and actions are the opposite of everything revolutionaries should be fighting for. As shown below, they are far from isolated events. What they represent is not Trotskyism but the politics of social democracy. What the National Convention has underlined is that Socialist Alternative is no place for revolutionaries. For this reason, I hereby state my resignation from Socialist Alternative (SA) and the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which it politically supports.

In the rest of this statement, I would like to develop these points. When I joined SA, I was won over to what I thought was an organization representing the authentic programmatic heritage of Lenin, Trotsky, and James P. Cannon, the founder of U.S. Trotskyism. I believed sincerely that the Committee for a Workers' International was the vehicle for international socialist revolution, the twenty-first century continuation of the Fourth International (which was unfortunately destroyed by Pabloite revisionism in the 1950s).

I helped organize demonstrations, recruited, attended national functions, and did everything I could to help ensure that Socialist Alternative had an active and functional presence in Spokane. A notable example was the July 7, 2018 "No More Racist Deportations!" protest at the Spokane Intermodal Center, a joint Amtrak-Greyhound bus station. The Spokane Intermodal Center has been the site of large numbers of detentions and searches by ICE and the Border Patrol. In the face of escalating attacks on immigrants nationwide, and in accordance with the principle of international working-class solidarity, the Spokane branch resolved to act. Speaking on behalf of our branch at Spokane's 2018 May Day march, I

* Reprinted from *The Internationalist* No. 54, November-December 2018.

raised the idea of occupying the Intermodal Center bus station. This led to the organizing process for the July 7th protest.

What happened next sheds an interesting light on issues and disputes in SA. Numbering 80 people, the demonstration in defense of immigrants culminated in a two-hour occupation of the bus station. The lead-up to this did not fit at all with the picture presented by SA leaders, that the alternative is either “sectarian” self-isolation or opportunistically tailing Democrats, the DSA, etc., as they do. The flier I wrote for the demonstration straightforwardly pointed out that “All parties of the ruling class, including the Democrats, are an obstacle to the class struggle and the defense of immigrants and must be opposed.” I

was also assigned to contact other organizations; the protest was endorsed by Spokane DSA and Bridges Not Walls (a local group opposing Islamophobia), and was also attended by members of the Peace and Justice Action League and Veterans for Peace.

The protest was a small but relevant example of how militant united-front action on a principled basis is a far cry from spreading illusions in bourgeois politicians who seek to “renew” and refurbish the party that carried out a record number of deportations during the Obama/Hillary Clinton administration.

The experience provided further fuel for the reevaluation sparked over the course of 2018 as I noticed increasingly blatant expressions of an orientation and perspective counterposed to revolutionary Marxist politics. This trajectory was dramatically shown in SA’s “Bern Turn,” though as I would eventually learn, its origins go much further back.

In August of this year, I drafted a document together with a close supporter of the Spokane branch, Andrew C. (who was later denied membership on a political basis). Entitled “Revolutionary Marxism Is Based on the Political Independence of the Working Class,” it contrasted some of the most fundamental points of Marxism to SA’s policy of tailing and backing not only Democratic candidates but those of other, smaller bourgeois parties. The document was submitted for inclusion in one of the pre-convention Members’ Bulletins. However, the leadership refused to publish it (with pretexts discussed in the document’s introduction). I continue to believe that the arguments in that document are important for SA members to read for themselves.

Disgusted by SA’s fawning over Bernie Sanders and other Democrats, I looked more deeply into its history and other anti-Marxist positions. Among them:

- SA’s embrace of populist “99%” verbiage, which cuts



“No More Racist Deportations” protest at Spokane Intermodal Center, July 7 2018.

Facebook

against the basics of Marxist class politics.

- SA’s latching on to and tailing of the renewed push for “gun control” laws, which are a weapon of the ruling class against black people above all. SA had recognized the racist, anti-labor nature of gun control. Yet SA tailed after protests, hailed by the Democrats, after the Parkland mass shooting. It advocated “limited gun control measures,” stating that “The only areas where there are forcible attempts by the police to disarm people are public housing projects in the inner cities” (socialistalternative.org, 5 December 2017).
- The CWI’s aiding and abetting of Yeltsinite counter-revolution in the former USSR, and subsequent failure to defend still-existing deformed workers states against imperialism.
- Class-collaborationist positions on burning issues in Latin America, exemplified today by Izquierda Revolucionaria (Mexico) supporting bourgeois populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador (IR even called on AMLO to “implement a socialist program”) and Liberdade, Socialismo e Revolução (Brazil) calling to vote for the PT-led popular front. These too are violations of the key principle of the political independence of the working class and the historic opposition of the Trotskyist movement to popular fronts, which serve to chain the workers to the bourgeoisie, crippling real struggle against reactionary threats.

Earlier this year, I read “Where We Come From and Where We Are Going” (January 2018) and “An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present” (May 2018), by former SA members in New England who at the time composed the Class Struggle Education League (CSEL), which went on to fuse with the Internationalist Group (IG). I also attended the joint CSEL-IG panel at this year’s Left Forum held in New York City,

titled “Revolutionary Regroupment vs. ‘Sanders Socialism’.”

This was a wake-up call. It became clear to me that the political positions I had come to oppose were not isolated deviations, but blatant manifestations of a fundamentally anti-Marxist perspective. SA and the CWI do not represent the revolutionary continuity of the international communist movement, but its trampling in favor of movementist cheerleading for bourgeois politicians, populists, and social democrats.

Subsequent to the Executive Committee’s refusal to circulate the document Andrew and I had drafted, we began to distribute it on an individual-to-individual and branch-to-branch basis to the best of our ability. After having a few conversations with comrades from different branches, I made contact with the loose, Worcester-centered opposition grouping that called itself “Independent Class Power.” This group of comrades sought to oppose the SA majority’s class-collaborationist turn, and submitted a number of resolutions attempting to correct the organization’s orientation and perspective in accordance with their political positions.

I engaged in discussions with these comrades, but found that their perspectives had not gotten to the root of SA’s increasingly rightward trajectory. These comrades, by and large, did not question SA’s support for bourgeois “third-party” candidates, including the immigrant-bashing capitalist politician Ralph Nader. Much of the opposition these comrades expressed to SA’s support for Cynthia Nixon posited supporting Howie Hawkins, the candidate of the “progressive” bourgeois Green Party, as an alternative. Documents drafted by many of these comrades also accepted and supported the notion of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an “independent,” arguing that the leadership of SA had just strayed too far into the orbit of the Democratic Party. Such an “independent” bourgeois candidacy would in reality be aimed at pressuring the Democrats. But in any case, the fundamental question is not how many bourgeois parties and candidates there are, but the need for *class* opposition to *all* bourgeois politicians and parties. Again, as Marx put it (in a famous phrase discussed in our August document), the workers must never be “the tagtail of any bourgeois party.”

James P. Cannon developed this point in the U.S. context. He strongly opposed the kind of approach put forward by comrades in Worcester and their supporters in other branches regarding Sanders, Nader, and other “independent” bourgeois politicians. This is some of what Cannon said, when quite a few self-described Marxists urged support for the 1948 “third-party” campaign of FDR’s former Vice President Henry Wallace: “The Wallace party must be opposed and denounced by every class criterion. In the first place it is programmatically completely bourgeois.... Its differences with the Republican and Democratic parties are purely tactical. *There is not a trace of a principled difference anywhere. And by principled difference I mean a class difference....* Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. *Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear.*” (“On the 1948 Wallace Campaign”; emphasis added. I would urge everyone to read the entire document, as it addresses many arguments we still hear today.)

Another opposition current emerged in SA prior to Indepen-

dent Class Power: the “Minority Group” centered around Philip L. and Stephan K. The politics of this group, which left shortly before the conference, are of the same fundamental character as those held by the SA majority: class-collaborationist and opportunist. Whereas the majority holds that SA should cheerlead the DSA and “left Democrats,” and perhaps send a few members into the DSA to test the waters, the Minority Group held that SA should enter/liquidate into the DSA in order to build a “revolutionary wing” of what the Worcester branch rightly recognized as an organization which has a “dream of becoming the ‘Left wing’ of the Democratic Party,” and provide even more active and blatant support for figures such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Cynthia Nixon.

Again and again we hear the claim that tailing bourgeois candidates (whether Sanders, “AOC,” Julia Salazar, etc. and/or those of bourgeois third parties) is necessary in order to “engage” with youth and workers enthused by them, drawn into the DSA, etc. This argument is a very old one, used to justify pretty much every kind of opportunism. Figures such as Ocasio-Cortez, Sanders and Cynthia Nixon giving the Democratic Party a “socialist” veneer must be *resolutely opposed*. To actually win honest elements away from bourgeois and reformist politics, it is necessary to, as Trotsky said, “call things by their right names,” not falsely paint those politics in “socialist” colors; and to clearly and soberly explain the need to *break* definitively with the Democratic Party, and all capitalist parties and politicians, and to build a revolutionary workers party that fights for a workers government.

On Kshama Sawant’s vote for the Seattle police chief, the Minority Group only raised tactical objections (such as arguing that there was “no movement for the new police chief”), as opposed to class principle. I cannot speak on the organizational and personal aspects of the factional struggle waged by the Minority Group, but as a general note I would say, paraphrasing Cannon’s *Struggle for a Proletarian Party*, that primacy is held by the political questions, on which there is no qualitative difference between the present SA majority and the ex-Minority Group headed by figures who were long part of SA’s central leadership.

SA activists who want to fight for Marxist class politics will find themselves in a dead end if they look for the problem simply in the way each sector seeks to apply SA’s political approach. It is not possible to fight for a revolutionary alternative to class collaboration without coming to terms with the fact that the whole political approach and actual social-democratic program of SA are the root of the problem. The real alternative is fighting to bring the genuine program of Trotskyism into the class struggle.

Thus, as a revolutionary, I can no longer remain a member of Socialist Alternative. Its political line and actions actively *mislead* the working class and radical youth in a time where the crisis of revolutionary leadership grows more desperate by the hour. Marxists face a challenging and critical period. It is imperative that we put up a real fight for the workers and oppressed to break from the Democratic Party and all bourgeois parties and politicians. Marxists cannot be caught up in endless, unprincipled maneuvers. We must move *forward*.

Comrades who would like to pursue issues raised here, or to receive the August 2018 document “Revolutionary Marxism Is Based on the Political Independence of the Working Class,” are invited to write me at andmc822@gmail.com. ■

Correspondence with the Freedom Socialist Party

The following correspondence to and from founding members of the Spokane Marxist Group (SMG) came after a September 2018 visit to the SMG by two representatives of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP), a “socialist-feminist” organization which claims to be Trotskyist. While still members and supporters of Socialist Alternative, Spokane comrades had been involved in the Washington state campaign of FSP member Steve Hoffman for the U.S. Senate. They believed at the time that the FSP’s campaign represented an alternative to SAlt’s electoral practice, and one comrade made a trip to Seattle to engage in campaign work. This illusion was done

away with over the course of cohering the SMG.

In the September 2018 meeting, the SMG founding members debated the FSP representatives on four questions: the politics of the Hoffman senatorial campaign; the FSP’s agitation for “elected civilian review boards”; the counterposition between the Marxist program for women’s liberation and the bourgeois ideology of feminism; and gun control. Discussion also touched on Lenin’s slogan of “revolutionary defeatism,” teachers strikes, and the role of the revolutionary press. (Corrections to the FSP letter have been limited to spelling errors and, for clarity, insertion in brackets of a few omitted words.)

Letter from the FSP

(16 September 2018)

Dear Alice, Andrew and Jackson,

Again, thank you for inviting us to Spokane for a discussion on Freedom Socialist Party’s socialist-feminist program. We enjoyed meeting with you ... and debating the various viewpoints and criticisms the three of you currently hold of FSP’s platform and positions.

We also appreciate you sharing the document written by Alice and Andrew addressing Socialist Alternative’s opportunistic rightward turn toward the Democratic Party. We agree with the document’s analysis and conclusion that SA’s class collaborationism ultimately leads to demoralization of their members and turns off the working class to [the] solution of socialism.

Since you took the time to write up your questions for us, we thought you’d appreciate a written response to the issues you raised.

FSP Is Basically Reformist

This criticism was made in response largely to our advocacy for an Independent Elected Civilian Review Board over the police, which was referred to as “utter reformism of the capitalist state” and there were also charges of reformism directed at the “Steve Hoffman for U.S. Senate.”

The Elected Civilian Review Board is a longtime project of FSP to address police violence under capitalism. The effort is rooted in coalition building with workers, unions, and the community, especially communities of color who are the most directly targeted by the police state. Dating back to the 1970s, the goal of these coalitions has always been to battle alongside those who are under attack by cops whose crimes go unchallenged or unsentenced.

But FSP has never held any illusions that, on its own, a Review Board will fundamentally alter the nature of law enforcement in the U.S. Nothing short of a revolution by the

working class is capable of this. The Review Board provides an agitational platform for socialists to put the bankruptcy of both the police as well as the capitalist state on center stage and steer supporters and participants on the path towards revolution. In fact, FSP activists who are a part of the ongoing NYC campaign caution “that no reform within the existing economic system can guarantee complete community control over the police.” This is important education for those who may otherwise be “led down the primrose path” by ambitious middle-casters who want new activists to stay rooted solely in single issue successes. Just what a transitional demand ought to do!

Much the same as the Civilian Review Board campaign in New York, the “Steve Hoffman for U.S. Senate” campaign gave FSP the opportunity to disseminate our radical working class program nationwide. We ran as open socialists in a nationwide partisan race calling for an independent political party for labor and an end to the “twin party” system of the ruling class. The campaign was endorsed by labor unions and socialist parties as well as community and feminist organizations.

Far from being a “thought experiment,” the campaign platform made concrete, transitional and revolutionary demands that both Steve and FSP were dedicated to seeing through in the outcome that we won the election. The platform itself was written with the working class in mind. We wanted to, in the manner of Eugene Debs, “speak the language of American workers” to both raise their consciousness and show them the change a labor militant like Steve would be capable of providing in Congress.

You criticized the Steve Hoffman platform for calling for “nationalization” instead of “expropriation” of the energy industry. As Marxists, we know the importance of “calling things by their right names.” However, we also caution against the pitfalls [of] rigid analysis. This can be symptom of that “infantile disorder” known as ultra-leftism, which Lenin

defined so well in his defense of electoral politics against the “Left-wing” Communists in Germany. Taking the energy industry into the public sector is expropriation. We feel that using the word “nationalization” was clearer to U.S. workers.

Feminism Is Irrelevant/Incompatible with Socialism

During our meeting, your group made the claim that “Marxism is qualitatively different than feminism.” This statement was supported by referencing Alexandra Kollontai’s position that feminism is irrelevant to working class people, since after the revolution, the foundation of patriarchy (private property) will be eliminated and there will be equality among the sexes once more.

This is hardly a new theory of why the Left doesn’t need feminism. It tells the same worn out story to women that “liberation is on the way, they only have wait out a few more revolutions to get it.” But it ignores basic facts about the makeup of the global proletariat. Women account for nearly 50% of the workforce worldwide. These numbers skyrocket when you include unpaid labor like housework, child care, and domestic chores.

Engels called the sex struggle the earliest class struggle, and rightfully so. At the dawn of patriarchy, men became the first rulers of wealth making women the first oppressed class. Essentially, they were the first proletariat. This is why women, especially women of color, are dealt the hardest blows under capitalism, which also makes them a lightning rod for revolutionary activity.

By extension, the fight for women’s rights is the fight for LGBTQ rights. There’s no need for women to subordinate their quest for equality until after the revolution. Neither should queers have to wait for fair treatment. This is not the way to win allies to the struggle. Instead the demands of the revolution become the demands of women, queers and people of color because they speak directly to our issues as who we are – workers who are oppressed based on our class, our sex, sexuality and race. This ties us to the fight against capitalism’s attempts to divide us and helps makes us the most committed to that fight.

As a vanguard party, FSP thinks it is critical to develop women’s leadership now, as with all oppressed groups, through a socialist feminist program, rather than wait until capitalism’s inevitable end. In fact, it is critical that we do. As Murray Weiss says, “Permanent Revolution will grind to a halt without the momentum of women’s accelerating struggle for equality.” In other words, socialist revolution will never be achieved without feminism. Marxism is not only compatible with feminism, it requires it.

Revolution does not stop when the workers take power. And unfortunately, neither does sexism. Not automatically. In the way that a union contract levels the playing field for workers on the job, revolution will level the field of patriarchy for women. But without vigilance and leadership, those gains will deteriorate and eventually fade away. No doubt, as Constance Scott stated in a 1981 Freedom Socialist article, “world socialism will wipe out the all the roots of women’s

bondage, but the fight for that liberation must develop on this side of the barricades.”

International Solidarity versus “Revolutionary Defeatism”

Freedom Socialist Party bases itself on the Trotskyist position that revolutions must be internationalist in scope. Socialism cannot remain in “one country” as the Stalinist opportunists proved so disastrously. Instead, it must spread outside of national borders so that the workers of the world can defeat the global capitalist class.

From this perspective we have based our analysis of the social and economic conditions of nations outside the United States. We use a materialist and dialectical approach, especially when looking at countries experiencing a revolutionary period.

Our method of analysis first looks at the elements that define the character of the state, namely, who owns the means of production? After this important basis has been established, we then work to determine the character of the state apparatus (police, bureaucracy, etc.) as well as the program and goals that the state’s leadership holds. None of these factors are taken lightly or without objective knowledge of the situation, especially since things change so drastically under revolutionary conditions.

This is the basis we used to develop our current policy regarding China, which is outlined in *Capitalism’s Brutal Comeback In China*. In our over 50 years as a party, FSP has used the same methodology in our analyses of the USSR, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, and Nicaragua. It has not always made us popular on the Left. In fact, we were accused of being “contra-communists” because of our critical analysis of Nicaragua’s retention of a mixed economy after the revolution as well as the Sandinistas’ abuse of indigenous Mosquitos [*sic – should be Miskitos*] living on the Atlantic coast. However, like all radicals we believe it important to speak the truth to our friends “no matter how bitter it may be.”

We do not consider this method nor the manner in which we support international revolutions to be equivocal [*sic*] with “revolutionary defeatism,” a term whose origin is largely unclear and whose meaning seems to be widely debated among Leftists. The best definition we could find was one Trotsky wrote in “War and the Fourth International” where he stated:

“Lenin’s formula, ‘defeat is the lesser evil’, means not defeat of one’s country is the lesser evil compared with the defeat of the enemy country but that a military defeat resulting from the growth of the revolutionary movement is infinitely more beneficial to the proletariat and to the whole people than military victory assured by ‘civil peace’.”

This “formula” was specific to the Russian working class whose aristocracy were engaged in imperial wars leading up to the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. Essentially, Lenin understood, as FSP does, that all things must be viewed through a dialectical lens, which moves according to the material circumstances of class struggle. Allowing rigid and even formalistic methods [to] dominate your analyses, instead of dialectics, will only



At the 19 June 2016 Portland, Oregon Gay Pride march the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades Local 10 marched with banner declaring “Hard Hats for Gay Rights!”

lead to serious political errors, which can prove fatal to real revolutionary leadership.

Why We Hope You Will Reconsider Socialist Feminism

The long history of Freedom Socialist Party as a revolutionary feminist organization is well documented. Many of those documents you have already, including Socialist Feminism and the Revolutionary Party, The Radical Women Manifesto, and Women’s Emancipation and the Future of the Fourth International. In them, you will find the basis of our theories on socialism, feminism, as well as our experience as a vanguard party for the working class.

We applaud the seriousness of your group in studying Marxism and your commitment to the Bolshevik traditions carried out by Lenin, Trotsky, and Cannon. However, we hope you take a critical look at how those traditions are put into practice by the Internationalist Group before joining them.

We think that Internationalist Group shows the same rigid and ultra-left tendencies we cautioned against in this letter. For instance, the non-Marxist classification in their “Marxism and Education” magazine identifying teachers and students as “petit-bourgeois.” They claim that these groups do not have the power to withhold their labor since “the government can wait out a university strike ... while industrial workers can stop the flow of profits by striking.” The solution for teachers is to unite with the “real” workers in order to win their demands.

This is not only miseducation but an alarming display of workerism that places the value of the blue collar (read white male) worker above all others. If teachers aren’t considered workers, then what about nurses, caregivers, or domestics?

Does their labor power count for anything or must they call on the “hard hats” to save them from their toil?

This is not an isolated issue in the IG press. In fact, it seems to us that much of what they write is aimed, not at the working class, but the erudite and academic Marxists who are already convinced of their superior points of view.

Freedom Socialist Party is careful to consider the audience of our paper. Cannon called it the most important organ of the party and so we want to be sure that our ideas are clear, articulate, and understood by the workers who read it. We write the Freedom Socialist first, to educate ourselves as members, and second, to educate our class.

The approach by Internationalist Group appears to be first, write for its members, then for other political tendencies on the Left, then for the “advanced workers,” and finally, at long last, for the working class. By putting the proletariat so low on its list of priorities, how can IG expect to lead them?

Which brings us to the final burning question: What is Internationalist Group waiting for? In its founding statement IG claims they are fighting “to cohere the nucleus of the revolutionary party.” Well why the wait? Workers on this planet are running desperately short of time. As Alice put it so poignantly in our meeting: “workers today must choose between socialism and extinction.”

Freedom Socialist Party was conceived in the Bolshevik tradition and actively views itself as a vanguard party for the working class. We are not a “pre-formation” that believe the masses “need more time” to be ready for revolution. We know that the working class is the most revolutionary force on the planet, and its only hope for survival. And as for our “nucleus,” we use the one we’ve got and rely on the lessons of Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Cannon, and Clara Fraser¹ to see us through.

Going Forward

We hope that the three of you take our positions to heart, especially regarding the importance of feminism in a revolutionary program. At the very least, we hope we can collaborate and correspond with each of you as you continue to study and participate in the struggle for a better and socialist world.

Comradely Yours,
Jared and Doreen
Freedom Socialist Party

¹ [Editorial note: Clara Fraser was the central leader of the Freedom Socialist Party from 1967 until her death in 1998.]

Response to the FSP

(27 September 2018)

Dear Jared and Doreen,

Thank you for visiting Spokane to talk with us earlier this month, and for your letter of September 16. Here we will answer key points from that letter. This involves two overall themes: 1) regarding the FSP's politics, they are very far from revolutionary Marxism; 2) regarding our politics, they are very far from what you ascribe to us on a number of key issues. As we will show, this is very clear when referring to basic points we made when we met with you.

In the "Transitional Program," the founding document of the Fourth International, Trotsky emphasized: "The strategic task of the Fourth International lies not in reforming capitalism but in its overthrow." Of course revolutionaries support genuine reforms (for example, abortion rights, the right of gay marriage, lowering the voting age, raising the minimum wage), while explaining that they are a by-product of class struggle and can always be taken away by the ruling class, as we see today. But the opposition between revolutionary Marxism and reformism is expressed in the most basic way on the question of the capitalist state. It cannot be taken over by the working class or reformed into being "accountable" to the workers and oppressed. It must be smashed and replaced with a workers state.

Trotsky's "Transitional Program" explains the need to provide a "bridge" between current struggles and socialist revolution, through a system of "transitional demands" stemming from acutely felt needs of the workers and oppressed and "unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat." Is this what the Freedom Socialist Party does? Our meeting with you in Spokane, and your follow-up letter, have been useful experiences in confirming very clearly that the answer is: No.

Reformism

At the meeting with you in Spokane, we said that it is "utter and complete reformism" to put forward the idea that the police – the armed fist of the capitalist state – can be "controlled" by the oppressed or made "accountable" to them. We pointed out that the FSP's campaigns for "police accountability" through "elected civilian review boards" are a clear example of such reformism. And we noted that the FSP's stance "promotes illusions in some kind of independent monitoring of the capitalist state." Your position on gun control, which we raised with you, but which you did not address in your letter, is another example of the belief that the capitalist state can be reformed into something a little more humane, i.e., reformism.

What this reformism looks like in practice is shown on the FSP web site. The accuracy of our description is vividly confirmed in articles like "NYC police review campaign on the move" (April 2017), "Organizing against police violence in NYC" (February 2018) and "New bill propels movement for police accountability" (August 2018). Far from explaining that only workers revolution can put an end to racist police

violence, they push the most blatant kind of illusions in reforming the capitalist police.

The August 2018 FSP article is a promotional piece for the Elected Civilian Review Board bill sponsored by New York City Council member Inez Barron, who (like her husband Charles Barron) is a Democratic Party politician with a long record of tying the oppressed to this racist, capitalist party. The article promotes her bill as an example of "real accountability" and "meaningful oversight" of the police. And it proclaims: "Grassroots organizing is linked with ongoing lobbying of City Hall." Together with the other materials on the FSP site, the August 2018 article promotes the worst kind of illusions in reforming the police. The FSP site's announcement for the October 2018 "Police Accountability Campaign Meeting" is similarly just a promo piece for Barron's bill.

Your letter seeks to give all this a slightly more left-ist sound, stating that "on its own" a review board will not "fundamentally alter the nature of law enforcement in the U.S.," while reiterating the call for "community control over the police." The letter simply ignores our point that the very concept that the oppressed can "control" the armed fist of the bourgeois state is a deadly illusion and a clear example of what Marxists mean by reformism.

You write: "The Review Board provides an agitational platform" to help "steer supporters and participants on the path towards revolution," and then go on to talk about transitional demands. All of this is very familiar to us from Socialist Alternative, which uses the same kind of arguments to justify its reformism and constant alliances with and tailing of Democratic Party politicians. As we noted at the meeting, now Kshama Sawant has voted for the new Seattle police chief. (Meanwhile, in its August 29 article on the prison strike, SAlt grotesquely calls for "prisoners and prison guards" to form a "unified group," joining together for "restructuring" the prison system.)

The history of civilian review boards shows that all they do is provide a cover for the police to keep shooting black people. Calling to continue with demands for a civilian review board (or claiming this will change if they are elected) is not a "transitional demand" or expressing Marxism in "the language of American workers." It is telling the workers things that are false. Again, the idea that the oppressed can "control" the capitalist police or make the armed fist of the state "accountable" to them is not just an incorrect or mistaken idea, it is a deadly reformist illusion.

Is the Transitional Program "Ultra-Leftist"?

Then we get to the part in your letter arguing that to insist on the difference between nationalization and expropriation is a symptom of "that 'infantile disorder' known as ultra-leftism." We are struck by this argument, since at the meeting in Spokane we read out to you the section of Trotsky's "Transitional Program" that explicitly counterposes expropriation to "the muddle-headed reformist slogan of 'nationalization.'" In line

with this, it emphasizes that “we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power” by the working class. While you misuse the term “transitional demand” to justify total reformism on the armed fist of the bourgeois state, you reject the actual Transitional Program.

Is the “Transitional Program” really ultra-leftist? No, that’s not the problem. The problem is that the FSP really is reformist. That is why even the basic ideas of the Fourth International’s founding document are dismissed as supposedly ultra-leftist, dogmatic, sectarian, etc.

Your letter refers to the FSP’s “Steve Hoffman for U.S. Senate Campaign,” stating that it raised “revolutionary demands.” In fact there is not a single mention of revolution or anything like it in his platform or campaign brochure. The campaign site (votesocialism.com) promises that the FSP candidate will “be blunt about what it will take to defend workers and win a more just society.” However, the campaign materials evade the need for the working class to actually seize power itself rather than relying on the ballot box. The statement that “workers need an independent Labor Party that will keep its promises and side with them against corporate power,” accompanied by the standard reformist demands to “tax the rich,” for “expansion of public employment,” etc., is a very far cry from the fight for a workers government to expropriate the capitalist class. Does any of this “unalterably lead to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat”? No.

Amazingly, your letter states: “Taking the energy industry into the public sector is expropriation.” Could there be a clearer statement of reformism than that? Energy sectors were part of the “public sector” in much of the U.S. for years, and in many rural areas energy distribution continues to be. As for expropriation meaning to take something into the public sector, that would make all kinds of things in Spokane “expropriated,” including “Utility Billing,” “Water & Wastewater Management,” “Solid Waste Collection,” and so on (<https://my.spokanecity.org/directory/agencies>). Such a conception brings to mind the kind of reformism that used to be called “sewer socialism” because it claimed “public sector” control of city water systems and so forth was the road to socialism, while blotting out the need for workers revolution.

On this question of nationalization, the public sector, etc., as on the question of “community control over the police,” what you have written shows again, in a very clear way, that we were right to describe the FSP’s politics as reformist. This is not some kind of polemical exaggeration, but simply a statement of the truth.

In Defense of Alexandra Kollontai and the Marxist Program for Women’s Liberation

When we get to the part of your letter referring to the discussion on women’s liberation during our meeting with you in Spokane, we had to rub our eyes in disbelief. The views you attribute to us, and to classic proponents of the Marxist program for women’s liberation like Alexandra Kollontai, go directly against what we actually said. And they go directly against

what Kollontai, the foremost Bolshevik writer and agitator on the fight for women’s liberation, actually put forward. This can be seen by anyone who takes even a few moments to look through her writings.

In our meeting with you in Spokane, we emphasized that Marxists have “an unflinching commitment to the liberation of women and all gender-oppressed people.” The fight for women’s liberation is central to the cause of socialist revolution, as we conveyed to you in that discussion. Far from “waiting” to fight for liberation, the struggle against oppression starts in the here and now. Yet the elementary Marxist truth is that liberation cannot be won short of ripping up the cause of oppression by the roots, through socialist revolution.

We pointed out that the Marxist perspective and program for women’s emancipation is not the same thing as feminism – far from it, as revolutionary Marxists like Kollontai, Clara Zetkin, V.I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg always pointed out that the ideology of feminism is incapable of freeing women from oppression. The point that, far from being a synonym for women’s liberation, feminism is a bourgeois ideology that stands in the way of women’s liberation is constantly exemplified in political life today. Among other things, Hillary Clinton and the Democrats use it to promote the idea that Clinton and the women exploited in her Haitian sweatshops are “sisters”; they used it to promote the aspirations of Obama’s war-mongering Secretary of State to become Commander-in-Chief of U.S. imperialism; and they use it over and over today to subordinate mass indignation against the misogynist bigot Trump to the Democratic “resistance.”

At the meeting, we noticed that you did not provide any real answer to the points we made on this topic. Now your letter simply equates feminism with women’s liberation, stating that Kollontai held that it is “irrelevant to working class people” and supposedly told women that “liberation is on the way, they only have to wait out a few more revolutions to get it.” Your letter goes on to pretend that she (and apparently we too, supposedly) tell women the “same worn out story” that they should “subordinate their quest for equality until after the revolution,” “wait until capitalism’s inevitable end,” and so forth, throwing in the equally false implication that we think other sectors facing gender oppression should also “wait for fair treatment.”

This is not just a complete and utter distortion of what we said and believe, but the kind of thing we see mainstream politicians do in TV debates. In order to get around answering the issues, they change the definitions, create a “straw man,” then make a big show of demolishing it. Do you think we wouldn’t spot this debater’s trick?

From your made-up version, you’d think Kollontai would have said “Women Workers, Wait to Struggle for Your Rights” instead of writing her famous pamphlet *Women Workers Struggle for Their Rights*, which anyone can find on the Marxists Internet Archive. Your claims about the position on women’s liberation put forward by Kollontai and other classic Marxist writers on the subject are shown to be false by even a cursory examination of what they actually said.

This can easily be done by checking out the Internation-

alist pamphlets *Bolsheviks and the Liberation of Women* and *Marxism and Women's Liberation*. Opening the first of these collections, we find Kollontai's "The Social Basis of the Woman Question" (1909). How does it begin? By showing that while "women can become truly free and equal" only in a socialist society, it is necessary to fight here and now for "the equalisation of the rights of women with those of men," for even "the partial improvement of woman's life" today, as "each right that woman wins brings her nearer the defined goal of full emancipation" and increases the fighting capacity of the proletariat as a whole. Does this sound like telling women to postpone the struggle against inequality in the here and now? Obviously not.

Kollontai goes on to highlight the counterposition between the Marxist program for women's emancipation and feminism, according to which, as she explains, "women of all classes can unite" (an idea later expressed in the slogan "Sisterhood is powerful"). Such points are further explored by Rosa Luxemburg in "Women's Suffrage and Class Struggle" (1912) and in other materials (by Zetkin, Lenin, Trotsky, the early Communist International, etc.) reprinted in the Internationalist pamphlets we have mentioned.

To claim that any of this is a call to "wait for fair treatment" is so far from the truth that we have to wonder if your letter is really intended to convince us, or just to caricature and misrepresent the views that we really uphold, based on the revolutionary Marxist program we have described.

Defeat U.S. Imperialism

The basic ideas of revolutionary Marxism fare no better in the next part of your letter, under the subhead "International Solidarity versus 'Revolutionary Defeatism'." In the first paragraph you write of "the Trotskyist position that revolutions must be internationalist in scope" since "Socialism cannot remain 'in one country'" and "it must spread outside of national borders..." What Trotsky (following Marx and Lenin) actually held was that socialism cannot *exist* in just one country, as to create it in the first place requires international socialist revolution.

But let's move on to what we said at the meeting with you in Spokane: that as revolutionaries, we stand for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. We brought up the famous quotation from Lenin that "during a reactionary war a revolutionary class cannot but desire the defeat of its government." We discussed the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and explained these as concrete examples in which revolutionaries are for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. When we questioned you about your position on U.S. imperialism in Syria, all you had to say was that you oppose Assad. In response, we stated the elementary Marxist point that while not giving political support to Assad or any bourgeois government, revolutionaries stand for the military defense of Syria against imperialist attacks.

In describing the FSP's position, your letter states that you do not consider "the manner in which we support international revolutions to be equivocal

with [equivalent to?] 'revolutionary defeatism,' a term whose origin is largely unclear..." You state: "This 'formula' was specific to the Russian working class whose aristocracy were engaged in imperial wars leading up to the 1905 and 1917 revolutions."

Again your position clashes directly with Trotsky's "Transitional Program." In the section on "The Struggle Against Imperialism and War," it states that the "defeat of *your own* (imperialist) government is the lesser evil" in an imperialist war. It goes on to explain that it was the "duty of the international proletariat" to defend colonial and semi-colonial countries, as well as the Soviet Union, against imperialism – that is, to stand for "the defeat of *every* imperialist government in the struggle with the workers' state or with a colonial country" (Trotsky's emphasis). Far from some obscure idea, this restates a fundamental part of the revolutionary program that is the background to Marxists' present-day position for the defeat of U.S. imperialist wars and attacks on Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, for the unconditional military defense of bureaucratically deformed workers states like China and North Korea, etc.

What the FSP is saying is that it wants a different foreign policy, not that U.S. imperialism be defeated as it was in Vietnam. That defeat for imperialism was a victory for the oppressed around the world, inspiring struggles from southern Africa to Central America. It is a far cry from the FSP's concept of "developing a foreign policy based on solidarity among workers of all countries" through reformist electoral campaigns.

More Straw Men, in Blue Collars

The last part of your letter features more arguments counterposed to basic Marxism, and more straw men.

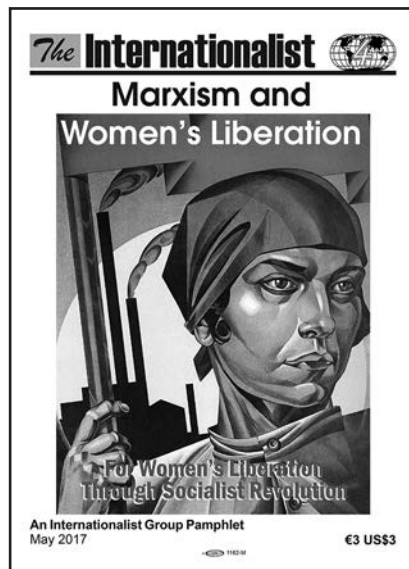
Referring to the *Marxism & Education* magazine published by the Class Struggle Education Workers, which is

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fraternally allied with the Internationalist Group, you denounce the point that “the government can wait out a university strike ... while industrial workers can stop the flow of profits by striking.” You say the CSEW holds that teachers and students “do not have the power to withhold their labor.” This is odd, first because it lumps teachers, who work in the classroom, with students, who study there but are generally not employed by the schools; and secondly, because *Marxism & Education* is filled to the brim with articles reporting on and highlighting the importance of recent teachers strikes (as well as the article “Student Revolt Shakes São Paulo, Brazil”). Then there is the fact that while saying you are Marxists, you denounce the elementary Marxist call to unite with and bring out the power of the industrial proletariat, which you claim means workerist adulation of “the blue collar (read white male) worker.” At the same time, you denounce the IG for supposedly “putting the proletariat so low on its list of priorities.” Where to begin with all this?

In the first place, what’s this business about “blue collar (read white male)”? The working class in the U.S. includes huge numbers of women, African American, Asian and Latino workers. In the manufacturing sector alone, as of last year close to a third of the workers were women and 40% were African American, Asian or Latino, so what are you talking about? In transportation and utilities, 42% were African American, Asian and Latino, and a quarter were women. (The figures come from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.) Do the math to see how far from true “blue collar (read white male)” is. The proportion of doubly and triply-oppressed sectors of the proletariat in transport and communications is even higher in any number of major cities. So what is your letter trying to do with this “blue collar (read white male)” claim, other than empty baiting?

As for hospital workers, the same issue of *Marxism & Education* reports on CSEW activists’ fight to mobilize them in defense of immigrants and Muslims (winning official union support for this), and against medical deportations.

But maybe you would like to talk about restaurant workers, or warehouse workers. Are you seriously going to claim that the IG ignores these sectors or puts them low on its list of priorities? Anyone who takes a minute to check it out can see the innumerable articles on the role of the IG, CSEW, Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth in the struggles of immigrant workers at Hot and Crusty, Bröd Kitchen, the B&H Photo, greengrocer/deli, Liberato and Harlem laundromat campaigns, etc. Or spend a few minutes watching these videos:

“Stop Union-Busting at Bröd/Hot and Crusty”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNVmkkb5kqg>

“Stop Union-Busting at Bröd/Hot and Crusty, Part 2”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjb9FVNH2ZU>

As noted, far from saying teachers can’t or shouldn’t withhold their labor, *Marxism & Education* features in-depth coverage from the midst of teachers strikes, from West Virginia to Mexico. Far from some kind of insult to teachers, the point that they need to unite with the power of industrial workers is shown vividly in the back page article from Mexico, detailing

the militant teachers strike, and the role of the Grupo Internacionalista in fighting to spark action by sectors of the industrial proletariat to help win it. (The Grupo Internacionalista is the Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International, of which the IG is the U.S. section.)

The point about the government being able to wait out a teachers strike in the absence of such aid from key industrial sectors is no idle speculation. That is exactly what the Mexican government did in 2016. It is crucial to draw that lesson – while denying the need for such militant workers aid means standing in the way of mobilizing it next time. *Marxism & Education* also goes into the militant struggles by teachers and health workers in Oaxaca, the repression they face, and solidarity actions from NYC to Brazil. In Brazil, the LFI’s section (Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil) has been deeply involved in militant teachers struggles going back to the world’s first strike demanding freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, carried out by the state of Rio de Janeiro teachers strike in 1999 at the initiative of the LQB.

Does any of this square with your letter’s picture of “erudite and academic Marxists” standing aside from struggle and telling teachers they can’t withhold their labor? “No” would be quite an understatement. There’s a pattern here.

As for strikes by university teachers and students, the LFI’s Mexican section fought for and won the formation of a workers defense guard by the Mexican electrical workers union (SME) in the historic National University strike of 1999-2000, as a result of which the attempt to impose tuition at Latin America’s largest university was stopped. And at the largest urban public university in the U.S., the City University of New York, CSEW and IG members sparked the fight for “7K” (minimum starting pay of \$7,000 per course for adjuncts), which you can see in the articles and photos about “7K or Strike” in the same issue of *Marxism & Education*.

In each of these struggles, against the actual “academic Marxists” who want to keep them within the limits of the ivory tower, revolutionary Marxists work to spread the fight to working-class sectors that can bring capitalist production, transport and communications to a screeching halt.

Lastly, you denounce the Internationalist Group for forthrightly stating that it seeks to cohere the nucleus of the revolutionary party. In contrast, you proclaim that the FSP is the vanguard party. In reality, no grouping in the U.S. left is leading major sections of the working class or has won them to its program. This statement of fact certainly applies to the FSP as well. A revolutionary party is not built through self-proclamation, but through a real fight to uphold and defend the revolutionary Marxist program, bringing it into the class struggle and politically defeating the existing pro-capitalist leaderships.

In order to be able to do that, an organization has to actually base its work on a revolutionary program. As we have seen for ourselves, that is not at all the case with the FSP.

Fraternally,

Alice M.

Andrew C.

Jackson B.

Spokane Marxist Group and Marxist Student Group Fuse with Revolutionary Internationalist Youth*

On March 8, International Women's Day, the Spokane Marxist Group (SMG), based in Spokane, Washington, and the Marxist Student Group (MSG), leadership of the Marxist Student Union at Central Connecticut State University, fused with the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth, youth section of the Internationalist Group (U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International). The international working-class holiday – sparked by the strikes of immigrant garment workers on New York City's Lower East Side more than a century ago – was chosen as the date for the fusion in honor of the fight for women's liberation through socialist revolution and the Russian Revolution that began with mass strikes on International Women's Day in 1917.

The fusion into a single organization followed a period of common work, a high point of which was RIY's Educational and Organizing Conference, held in January, where members of RIY, SMG and MSG gave presentations on their organizations' political work and perspectives, and an SMG activist was a co-presenter of an educational point on the meaning and history of the "united front tactic" in the international communist movement. Presentations were also given by RIY members on Democratic Party feminism and the "#MeToo movement" (highlighting the counterposition between the class-struggle program for women's liberation through socialist revolution and feminism, which calls for "sisterhood" across class lines),¹ U.S. imperialism and the migrant caravan, as well as the history of the communist youth movement going back to German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht's campaign against militarism before WWI.

Following the three organizations' unanimous vote to carry out the fusion, forums and celebrations commemorating International Women's Day were held in New York City, New Britain, Connecticut and Spokane, Washington. Comrades made presentations on the Marxist program for women's liberation and gave a rousing rendition of Langston Hughes' poem "Good Morning, Revolution." They also read speeches and writings by and about such heroes of the class struggle as Sojourner Truth; anti-lynching crusader and black self-defense advocate, Ida B. Wells; Flora Tristan, a courageous early theorist of socialism, trade unionism and women's liberation; Louise Michel, who was tried and deported for her role in the Paris Commune; Rosa Luxemburg, Alexandra Kollontai and Clara Zetkin; gay and transgender rights pioneer Magnus Hirschfeld, and others. A striking aspect of the New York event was the deeply moving talks by

* Reprinted from *Revolution* No. 16, May 2019.

¹ See "Democratic Party Feminism and the '#MeToo Movement,'" *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019.



Internationalist photo

Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and Internationalist Group at March 16 "U.S. Hands Off Venezuela" demonstration in Washington, D.C.

three women comrades from Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (TIC, Class Struggle International Workers), about the experiences and struggles of triply oppressed immigrant women workers and their vital connection to the fight for socialist revolution.

The Spokane Marxist Group had its roots in the Spokane branch of Socialist Alternative (SAIt), U.S. affiliate of the pseudo-Trotskyist Committee for a Workers' International (CWI). The high national profile of SAIt and its Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant, combined with SAIt's status as the only left organization in Spokane until early 2017, led the founding members of SMG into its fold. While in SAIt, comrades who would later found SMG were active in organizing against racist deportations and against fascist groups like Patriot Prayer and the Proud Boys. Of particular note was their leading role in the 7 July 2018 "No More Racist Deportations" demonstration at the Spokane Intermodal Center. The event brought 80 people out in protest against the frequent practice of Border Patrol agents boarding Greyhound buses, where they racially profile suspected immigrants and demand to see their papers. This culminated in a two-hour occupation of the bus station.

At the same time, founders of the SMG opposed the increasingly blatant class-collaborationism by SAIt, an organization whose claims to be Trotskyist were always false but were more and more openly exposed by its promotion of and support to Bernie Sanders' presidential bid. In sharp contrast to the Marxist principle of working-class political in-

dependence, Socialist Alternative enthusiastically cheered on electoral victories for “progressive” Democrats and joined the rest of the reformist left in tailing after the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America.² The SMG founders’ opposition to this resulted in their further investigating the CWI’s political origins and program, identifying the counterposition between genuine Trotskyism and this social-democratic current. This was summarized in the documents “Revolutionary Marxism Is Based on the Political Independence of the Working Class” (August 2018) and the resignation statement “Socialist Alternative Is No Place for Revolutionaries” (October 2018, reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 54, November-December 2018).

The Marxist Student Group, leadership of the Marxist Student Union at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU), emerged from the membership of the now-defunct CCSU Youth for Socialist Action (YSA), which was originally affiliated with Socialist Action (SA), another organization misusing the name of Trotskyism. (Emerging in the mid-1980s from the Socialist Workers Party, SA eternally sought to replicate the SWP’s “successes” in building antiwar popular fronts during the Vietnam War.) The SA-affiliated YSA, far from a Leninist youth organization, had a politically heterogeneous membership, winding up with no members actually supporting SA’s program. The young comrades who later formed the Marxist Student Group traveled a considerable political distance from their first engagements with political activism, which ranged from “Marxist feminism” to supporting Bernie Sanders’ 2016 campaign to variants of ostensible Trotskyism.

The CCSU YSA began to investigate the origins and history of the communist movement in the U.S., as well as the need to reforge Trotsky’s Fourth International (destroyed by the anti-Trotskyist political course that came to be known as “Pabloism” in the 1950s). This led them to move toward genuine revolutionary Trotskyist politics, which had been embodied for three decades by the Spartacist tendency and are upheld today by the IG/RIY. At the same time, organizational issues arose in relation to SA, which treated the YSA in a grossly bureaucratic manner. YSA was renamed Marxist Student Union to reflect the comrades’ Marxist politics and to

² For an in-depth study on the political origins and development of the DSA, see our 70-page pamphlet “DSA: Fronting for the Democrats” (2018), available to order online at <http://www.internationalist.org/orderhere.html>.



CCSU Marxist Student Union / Facebook

Marxist Student Union at January 26 protest against racist police shooting in New Britain, Connecticut.

distance themselves from Socialist Action’s reformism. The leadership of MSU began discussing with the IG and RIY soon after and engaged in a period of joint work, including participation in demonstrations, literature sales and other activities, and a forum on “Marxism, Gender and Sexuality” held at CCSU in December 2018.

The fusion comes at a time when most self-proclaimed Marxist organizations in the U.S. have been thrown into crisis by the growth and prominence of the Democratic Socialists of America following the 2016 presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders and the election of Donald Trump. This has led these groups to jettison just about every remaining pretense of upholding class politics in order to tail after Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other “progressive” Democrats, as these bourgeois politicians carry out their function of leading workers and youth back into U.S. imperialism’s Democratic Party. In contrast, RIY is a training ground for young revolutionaries committed to helping forge a revolutionary workers party on the basis of intransigent proletarian class opposition to all the parties and politicians of “our own” imperialist rulers – and to put an end to imperialism (the highest stage of capitalism) through international socialist revolution.

The fusion of SMG and MSG with RIY is a step toward cohering a nation-wide Trotskyist youth organization, something that has not existed in the U.S. since 1986 when the Spartacus Youth League (youth group of the then-revolutionary Spartacist League) was disbanded. We encourage young people who want to fight for a socialist future to join us in helping build the next generation of Marxist cadre here and internationally, which is so urgently needed for the task of opening the path for the coming socialist revolution. ■

Section 3: From the International Marxist Tendency to Trotskyism

The documents reproduced or excerpted below are the result of a political struggle within the Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota branches of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT). Like the Committee for a Workers' International supported by Socialist Alternative in the U.S., the IMT traces its origins to the British Militant Tendency, which practiced deep "entryism" (also referred to as entrism) in the Labour Party for decades. A faction around Ted Grant, the founder of the tendency, and current IMT leader Alan Woods was expelled in 1992 for remaining committed to this entrism work. This group would later become the IMT.

James B. was a member of the U.S. section of the IMT for nearly two years when he began this discussion, in which he fought for the Marxist principles of working-class inde-

pendence and for an authentically revolutionary program, notably the basic demand of cops out of the unions. Opposing the organization's capitulation to illusions in bourgeois liberal "progressives" like Bernie Sanders, he also fought against the IMT's historic policy of entrism into and political support to bourgeois parties and formations in several countries.

As reflected in replies by John Peterson and others, the IMT leadership attempted to channel political debate away from fundamental programmatic issues, and formal internal discussion, into organizational disputes. In late April 2019, James resigned from the IMT, announcing his intention to "deepen [his] study of the program and practice of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and League for the Fourth International," and encouraging others to do so as well.

Marxist Politics Are Class Politics

**James B., Minneapolis-St. Paul Branch 2
(1 March 2019)**

The primary task of Marxists is to advocate and organize for a revolutionary party of the working class. This isn't out of any romantic notions that workers' consciousness is automatically revolutionary: it's because under capitalism the working class is the only class whose position in society means it can play a consistently revolutionary role and has the social power to overthrow this system. Any real perspective for socialist revolution rests on the conscious organization of the working class under its own class program and Marxist leadership.

This has been central to genuine socialism and communism going back to the beginning of the international Marxist movement. In his resolution of the First International, "On Working Class Political Action" (September 1871), Marx asserted that "against [the] collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes."

Revolutionary Marxists understand that the principled political independence of the working class is paramount. With this in mind, it is clear that many of the positions taken by the International Marxist Tendency go against this vital principle of the workers movement. In many cases, the IMT has helped spread illusions in, and tailed after, various bourgeois politicians and movements, both in the United States and internationally.

Erasing the Class Line

As everyone from leftists to Republican reactionaries has noted over the past period, growing numbers of young people are expressing interest in socialism. This makes it all the more important for revolutionaries to make clear what so-

cialism really does mean and what it does not mean. Blurring the lines can only help those who want to channel discontent back into support for capitalist politics, and harm any real struggle for socialism. Specifically, calling politicians and groups "socialist" when they are not socialist, and spreading illusions about them, helps confuse people who are becoming aware that capitalism must go, instead of helping them see and understand things clearly.

"Saying what is" sharply and clearly is all the more necessary in a country like the U.S., where the very concepts of a "class line" and "political independence of the working class" are still unfamiliar even to most would-be radicals (largely because most of the left ignores or rejects these basic Marxist concepts). Blurring these central Marxist ideas is the opposite of the insistence by Marx, followed by Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and others, that political clarity is essential for revolutionary action. Going along with things that blur the class line, justifying this with claims about "meeting people where they are," getting more influence, etc. are typical of what Lenin called an opportunist approach.

In the U.S., many of these points come together with regard to a central aspect of how the capitalist class maintains its domination here: the subordination of labor and oppressed groups to the Democratic Party. Breaking that subordination is central to Marxist class politics in this country.

Ever since Bernie Sanders launched his first presidential campaign, the question of how to relate to "socialist" candidates of the bourgeois Democratic Party has been front and center. Since then, the IMT and *Socialist Revolution*¹ have responded to this question by excitedly expressing enthusiasm about the growth of his rallies and his "inspiring the basis for a mass movement," and echoing the totally false claims that

¹ [Editorial note: Publication of the U.S. section of the IMT, also referred to as *SR*.]

he is a “socialist.” Sanders lost the primary to Clinton, and announced he would be supporting her as the Democratic nominee (something that he always clearly said he would do). But the perspective of the IMT has been to suggest that Sanders had made a mistake in running as a Democrat, when as he stated very clearly: “I want to revitalize the Democratic Party.” (See, for example, his speech with that title from January 2017: [youtube.com/watch?v=EDaKYagUj5Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDaKYagUj5Q).)

Instead, the IMT said, there could be “a mass socialist party” – “*if only Bernie would break with the Democrats!*” (“The Growth of the DSA and the Fight for Socialism,” Editorial Board of *Socialist Revolution*, July 16, 2017, emphasis in the original). This slogan portrays Sanders as a figure who can and should be pressured into becoming a representative of the working class. This has the effect of grossly misleading workers and youth looking for a solution to capitalist crisis and devastation: instead of organizing a class independent, revolutionary workers party, we only need a capitalist politician to change his class character!

This message disappears the huge gulf separating the politics of imperialist Bernie Sanders from the forces of revolutionary Marxism. Far from being socialist, the content of Sanders’ campaign was and is based on the “tax the rich” rhetoric and FDR-style appeals that were standard for traditional “progressive” Democrats in the days of the New Deal, Truman, Johnson’s “Great Society,” etc. Sanders’ record is one of an eager imperialist, voting for one U.S. imperialist adventure and aggression after another, and in favor of increasingly invasive government spying, used to aid the crackdown on dissidents and real working class activists. Obviously any Marxist has to take a clear stand against U.S. imperialism, and that means vigorously opposing any of its capitalist defenders, whether they misuse the word “socialist” or not.

While *SR* editorials note what they call the “mildly reformist at best” nature of his politics, Sanders’ popularization (misrepresentation) of the “socialist” label is highly lauded, despite the fact that he uses this to tie people to the Democrats. In reality, the way Sanders identifies “socialism” with supporting and reforming the Democratic Party is extremely dangerous for a revolutionary working class movement. Far from his affiliation on the ballot line being an accident, Sanders is actively attracting disillusioned people back into the Democratic Party, who otherwise could be looking outside and attracted towards independent working class politics.

An organization that stands for the political independence of the working class should find itself fighting against this Democratic Party actor, and for a real understanding of what socialism is, and the fact that it can only be based on the overthrow of capitalism and a complete change in the social relations of production.

More recently, DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was elected to the House of Representatives as a Democrat, and the IMT continued this policy of appealing to capitalist politicians.

The IMT has repeatedly proposed that bourgeois politicians Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others, who together with the DSA that exists to promote them are work-

ing to “revitalize” illusions in the Democratic Party, take the lead in building a “mass socialist party of the working class.” Again, this is the opposite of teaching people the truth, that Sanders, AOC et al. are not socialists but capitalist politicians, and that as such they are not potential representatives of, but actually enemies of the working class, who work to keep it tied to the capitalist state.

Right now this is being shown once again over Venezuela, which needless to say revolutionaries militantly defend against the imperialists and their puppets (in line with Trotsky’s policy, which also called for no political support to bourgeois nationalist governments). Meanwhile Bernie Sanders’ latest imperialist propaganda blast demands that the Venezuelan government of Nicolás Maduro “allow humanitarian aid into the country,” a clear pretext for intervention. For her part, AOC voted in Congress to fund “programs to promote democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela,” that is, coup preparations, and has been tweeting that Venezuela is a “failed state” where the question is “authoritarianism versus democracy,” etc. Together with the rest of the “progressive” Democrats, these are imperialist Democratic Party politicians repeating imperialist talking points for a US-backed coup and/or direct military intervention. Marxists need to explain that all this shows yet again the urgent need for political independence of the working class, and revolutionary opposition to Sanders, AOC, the DSA and company.

But the reality I think we all have to face is that the IMT has followed a misleading and unrealistic policy toward the “socialist” Democrats, and that what this means in practice is the IMT turning its back on the essential working class principles of proletarian political independence, and of “telling the truth to the masses” (as Trotsky called it in the “Transitional Program”). The policy of calling on capitalist politicians to build a socialist party, movement, etc. is not a clever tactic or rhetorical device. And no tactic can work if the basic principles are broken. Instead, this all serves to disorient the readers of *SR* and signals to serious radicalizing youth that the IMT is not committed to independent class politics.

Against All Capitalist Parties, Major or Minor

The same criticism goes for support to candidates of minor capitalist parties, like Jabari Brisport, Green Party candidate for New York City Council. *SR* called on readers to vote for Brisport, since he was running on a joint Green Party/“independent socialist” ticket (“Socialist Challenges NYC Democratic Party Machine,” Editorial Board, October 3, 2017). The idea that someone can simultaneously be an independent socialist and run for a bourgeois party is a total contradiction. For the IMT to support this campaign is again to turn its back on the principle of a party fighting for the working class. This is made even more confusing by the admission in other *SR* articles that the Greens are a bourgeois party. You can’t have your cake and eat it too.

American Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon fought against this very same tendency in 1948, when the Socialist Workers Party was debating whether to support the campaign of Progressive Party candidate Henry Wallace. Cannon and the SWP majority recognized the bourgeois nature of this minor

league capitalist party: “Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear.” (Cannon, “Summary Speech on Election Policy,” February 1948.)

Cops in the Labor Movement?

A criticism that the IMT often tries to ignore, or deny the truth of, is that it supports police and prison guard “unions,” and the idea that police, prison guards, etc. are workers. This issue is connected and similar to the issue of class independence, and just as vital to the working class movement.

The question of the state is the biggest separating line between revolutionary and reformist politics. This is reflected in the question of cops and prison guards (both public and private, as the repression industry keeps growing). And this is crucial for any real program for black liberation. How could Marxists raise a revolutionary position and program in mass protests against racist killings by the police and against mass incarceration if they put forward the terrible line that cops and guards are “workers” and should be in the labor movement?

Here in Minneapolis and St. Paul this is an enormous issue. Amid mass “Black Lives Matter” marches, the whole world learned the name of Philando Castile, murdered by a cop just outside Minneapolis for “driving while black” in 2016. Meanwhile we have seen how Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative voted for the new police chief in Seattle, joining Democratic liberals who pretend that since she is a black woman this would change things (as we know, Minneapolis had a gay Native American woman police chief, followed by an African American man in the post, and the police continue shooting and killing).

The revolutionary Marxist position on the nature of the police as “armed fist of the capitalist state” is crucial for anyone who really wants to organize for a socialist revolution in this country. However, the IMT puts forward a truly terrible position on this essential class issue. Probably the best known example is the lengthy article on Marxist.com (January 29, 2008) that praises the “Bolshevik bobbies” of 1918-19, but it is only one of many. Others from the same year support British police “on strike,” and call to “defend the rights of the POA” (Prison Officers’ Association). These were far from isolated cases or limited to that year. Despite some members’ reluctance to recognize that this really is the line of the IMT, this horrific position not only continues but is repeatedly stated in detail.

To give just a couple more examples: the Canadian IMT went all out praising a “strike” by prison guards and sheriffs (“Alberta prison guards’ wildcat – a lesson for the entire labour movement,” May 9, 2013), calling them “workers in uniform,” hailing their “union” leaders for providing “real leadership” to their “brothers and sisters on strike,” and concluding with: “The prison guards have shown the way...” Anyone with any understanding of prison repression, let alone any Marxist, could only be revolted by this “solidarity” with jailers, the opposite of solidarity with those jailed, beaten and killed by these so-called “brothers and sisters.”

The British IMT section did a long polemical article, against “left-activists [who] feel that police officers can never

be anything but enemies of the working class” (“Changing consciousness within the police: a Marxist view,” Socialist Appeal, August 14, 2013). It argues that “budget cuts to police across the country” and “recruitment freezes and pay cuts” show that “a job in the police is another avenue that is being closed off for most young people in Britain,” and that this situation is causing “rising class consciousness” among the police. The article is filled with sympathetic interviews with constables (cops), and backs police efforts to “unionize,” stating: “Through such organisation, rank and file police can be brought into the labour movement and closer to the working class, thus reducing the ability of the capitalist state to be used by the ruling class against the working class.” This article shows very clearly that the non-Marxist (actually anti-Marxist) position on the police question is directly connected to a view of the bourgeois state far from what Lenin described in *State and Revolution*.

The simple question facing those who want to be revolutionaries is this: should cops be in the labor movement? Marxists have always unequivocally answered *no!* The police force is not just distinct from the working class, but counterposed to it as professional strikebreakers and enforcers of racist repression, and its interests are diametrically opposed to those of the working class. We all should clearly understand Trotsky’s famous take on the matter (from his 1932 pamphlet “What Next?: Vital Questions for the German Proletariat”): “The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among social-democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.”

The interests of the cops can never be reconciled with those of the working class. When the police go on “strike,” they’re interested in making their job easier: more cops on the streets to repress the working class and doubly-oppressed sectors of society, and a freer hand (with increasingly militarized weapons and equipment) in making life miserable for working class and minority communities. If some here or there may not fully get this when they sign up, they quickly learn it all “comes with the job” (because repression is the job), carry it out, or quit. In any case, the point is the social function of the armed fist of the state, not the particular “consciousness” of those carrying it out, an idea typical of liberal and reformist views.

It’s no coincidence that cop “unions” serve as shields for killer cops across the country. That’s what cop and prison guard associations exist to do, and that’s what we would be supporting if we support them in the labor movement. This too is a very clear question of the class line.

Proletarian Independence or Bourgeois Entryism?

The debate over entryism is another fundamental question with big implications. While the Trotskyist movement has utilized methods of entryism in the past, this question needs to be seen in a principled way on the basis of an understanding of the class line. In the mid-1930s, Trotsky and other leaders of the Fourth Internationalist movement developed what came to be known as the “French turn,” in reference to temporary

entry of the French section into the French social democracy. This was a short-term tactic to win over workers and youth who (under the impact of the Depression, Hitler's victory in Germany, the Spanish Civil War, the Moscow Trials etc.) were open to Bolshevism but were in social-democratic or centrist organizations experiencing sharp contradictions between a right-wing bureaucracy and a leftward moving rank-and-file, in which Trotskyist cadres could quickly enter and win over significant numbers of these radicalizing elements. In the U.S., Trotskyist militants entered the Socialist Party and emerged a year later, with double the membership. This is obviously a far cry from the situation with the DSA, a pressure group on the capitalist Democratic Party, whose new members are being drawn further and further into that party, all the more so with all the enthusiasm of DSA members (and almost all the left) over the election of Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, and now with Bernie Sanders launching his new presidential bid for 2020.

It is also very important to see that these earlier methods of entryism have nothing to do with entry into bourgeois parties. Here too it is a basic question of the class line. One of the main points on which Trotsky built the International Left Opposition was the lessons of the terrible defeat in China in 1927, where the CP was inside the bourgeois Kuomintang. This is what he wrote in the Left Opposition's June 1929 official declaration on China: "Never and under no circumstances may the party of the proletariat enter into a party of another class or merge with it organizationally. An absolutely independent party of the proletariat is a first and decisive condition for communist politics."

But unfortunately, reading more extensively about the tendency and its history I have seen that entryism in and support to bourgeois parties is actually characteristic of many IMT sections' work. Since Mexico, and its border with the U.S., are so crucial to politics for North American revolutionaries, I think it is an especially important responsibility for us here to be well informed about the situation, including the positions of the IMT section there, Izquierda Socialista.

Izquierda Socialista used to call itself an "active and integral part of the movement around López Obrador and the left wing of the PRD" (Party of the Democratic Revolution), doing entryist work in that bourgeois party (as did its predecessor, the Mexican El Militante group). More recently, it has oriented towards entryism work in MORENA, another bourgeois nationalist party, set up by Andrés Manuel López Obrador ("AMLO," a former PRD leader) in 2012. For a long time Izquierda Socialista called itself the "Marxist voice of the workers, youth and Morena," and its site described the paper's editor as a "Morena national council member." The section called to vote for AMLO, and he when was elected president last year, Izquierda Socialista (July 15, 2018) called it "an insurrection at the ballot box." Marxist.com hailed his election as a "political and social earthquake," a victory for the working class against the capitalists, and hailed his claims that his new bourgeois government would carry out a "transformation" of Mexico, while calling for this to be "anti-capitalist and revolutionary," since it requires a "struggle for socialism" (articles from June 15, July 2, and December 5, 2018). All this

ignores and covers over the truth: that AMLO is a bourgeois politician, and spreading these incredible illusions in him, while identifying them with "socialism," is terribly dangerous for the workers, peasants and youth.

This can be seen in the fact that since his election, AMLO has pushed to even further militarize Mexico's police forces, even working to amend Mexico's constitution for this purpose. AMLO has also established himself as an enemy of the mass migrant caravan trying to enter the United States through the Mexican border. His administration has clearly put itself on the side of Trump by helping prevent the migrants from getting into the U.S. To call on such a figure to be revolutionary is an exercise in not just complete futility but in politically disarming the masses.

Another example of support to a bourgeois nationalist party and government that I've looked into is the position of the Bolivian IMT group, now called Lucha de Clases. In Bolivia (as in Venezuela), there is a world of difference between standing for the defeat of imperialist attacks and right-wing coup attempts, on the one hand, and giving political support to, and spreading illusions in, bourgeois nationalist governments. In Bolivia, the IMT section actively gave political support to the bourgeois-populist MAS (Movement for Socialism) and its leader, Evo Morales, even calling his election a "vote for socialism" (Jorge Martín, 16 December 2009). There is no mistaking this bourgeois nationalist regime: vice-president Álvaro García Linera calls it "Andean capitalism," and calls the party an alliance of capitalists, workers, and peasants. However, even after four years of Morales' capitalist government back in 2009, IMT articles on his re-election call for MAS to become a "tool of struggle for socialism," and denounced peasant leaders and others as sectarians for looking for an alternative to the left of the MAS (such as revolutionary socialism?).

Morales was a so-called socialist (but actually bourgeois) candidate, who promoted union busting and strengthening of big landlords against the peasantry. You only have to look at the battles between striking miners and government-backed strikebreakers, or the land "reforms" allowing agribusiness to evade any substantial distribution of their lands. These days articles on Bolivia from the IMT section say the MAS has "degenerated," but for years the tendency politically supported this bourgeois party and, as with AMLO, called on it to become revolutionary, in practice helping to politically disorient the workers and peasants in Bolivia. We must reject entryism in bourgeois parties, or any political support to those parties and regimes, firmly and consistently, no matter how "socialist" they portray themselves.

For Principled Class Politics

All of these problems share a common root: erasing the class line, and blurring the class characteristics of politicians, parties, and regimes. The same is true with the terrible position that cops and prison guards are "workers in uniform" and should be part of the labor movement. It is crucial for Marxists to identify and explain the line separating the working class and the workers movement, on one side, from parties, politicians and governments of the bourgeoisie, on the other; and to

educate workers and youth on how crucial it is to break from, and never politically support, those that are on the other side of the class line. If we abandon this principle, we cannot call our organization revolutionary in any sense of the word.

Another key principle of the Trotskyist movement is calling things by their name. Instead of tailing after liberals like Bernie Sanders or Democratic “socialists” like AOC, revolutionaries need to be exposing them for what they are: capitalist politicians representing capitalist interests, interests which are opposed to the working class. Ideas like “meeting the workers where they are” and “mild in manner, bold in content” can sound well and good, but if they result in dilution or abandonment of basic Marxist principles in order to be more popular among supporters of Sanders or AOC, they are nothing but a cover for opportunism.

Over the past period, trying to sort through these and other issues and questions, I have read many sources, from the biography *Ted Grant – The Permanent Revolutionary* by Alan Woods and other materials on the history of the tendency, to materials by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and the positions of left

groups on Sanders’ “political revolution.” One thing that drew my attention, partly because of common roots of the IMT and Socialist Alternative (despite real differences between them), was Socialist Alternative’s positions on Sanders’ “political revolution,” and the critiques made of these positions by members from their branches in New Hampshire and Spokane, Washington. One important aspect of those critiques is how they applied this point from Marx, from his speech to the First International in September 1871 titled “Apropos of Working-Class Political Action”:

“Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its own policy.”

Or as the resolution by Marx quoted at the beginning of this document states, “this constitution of the working class into a political party” – “distinct from, and opposed to” all capitalist parties – “is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes.”

Applying this is our task today.

Reply by J.P. for the Executive Committee

(14 March 2019)

Comrade,

Needless to say, we were surprised to read the document you submitted to the comrades in MSP.¹ ... Unfortunately, your document is a series of unfounded assertions, conflation, and outright distortions. As Trotsky would describe it, it is an undialectical and dishonest amalgam of falsifications and out-of-context, selective quotations. It is worth pointing out that none of the points you raise are the result of a dramatic change in world or national events, or a deviation by the elected leadership from the democratically discussed and voted upon decisions of multiple National Congresses, including several Perspectives documents, the Program, and Constitution of the US section of the IMT.

We also note that “coincidentally” – as you would have us believe – the criticisms you raise are precisely the same criticisms of the IMT made by the “Internationalist Group,” (IG) on the web, at the recent Northeast Regional Marxist School, and every other time we encounter them.

We are not afraid of an honest, open, critical, and constructive debate on these or any other questions. We can all learn from such discussions and strengthen the political unity of the organization. A discussion on the ideas you’ve raised has already begun in Minneapolis, not only in your own branch but at the recent aggregate. All comrades, including yourself, had a chance to put forward their views and to ask questions. From what we understand, the comrades felt they now had a much better understanding of what sectarianism and opportunism are and are not, and what the real record of the IMT is on the questions you raise.

However, a genuinely clarifying discussion that serves to raise everyone’s political level can only be had in good

¹ [Editorial note: Minneapolis-St. Paul.]

faith if, as you state in your document, everyone “says what is.” Both rights and responsibilities come with membership in the IMT. You state that “telling the truth to the masses” is the hallmark of a revolutionary. We think it would be useful if you started by “telling the truth” to the comrades of your own organization. This is the only way we can have a clarifying, level-raising discussion—not by playing political hide-and-seek. We, therefore, ask you to clarify the following:

- Do you continue to agree with the basic conditions of membership in the US section of the IMT, as outlined in its constitution, which you voluntarily accepted when you joined?
- “Any person who accepts the Program, Constitution, Code of Conduct, and membership responsibilities of the organization; who publicly defends the organization’s ideas; pays monthly dues; sells the paper; and who participates in a comradely manner in the organization’s activities, under the direction of its democratically elected structures, is eligible for membership.”
- Do you still maintain that the criticisms you have raised – which precisely mirror those raised by the IG – occurred to you entirely independently and that you have no connection whatsoever with the IG?
- Who are you referring to when you write in your document: “members from their branches in New Hampshire and Spokane, Washington,” if not those individuals who subsequently left the CWI and joined the IG, which is common knowledge on the left? . . .

Comradely,

JP for the EC²

March 14, 2019

² [Editorial note: Executive Committee.]

For a Real Political Discussion on Upholding Marxist Class Politics

James B.
(18 March 2019)

To JP and the EC
Comrades,

On March 1st, 2019, I submitted a document titled “Marxist Politics are Class Politics.” I also spoke to an MSP CC contact¹ and requested it be distributed among the national membership. The leadership’s response, including your email of March 14th, has focused overwhelmingly on organizational and procedural points, so far without any written statement answering the criticisms I bring up in my document. You say that I have presented “a series of unfounded assertions, con-fusions, and outright distortions,” but my document clearly cites and references the IMT articles and positions I am writing against. I’ve heard again and again that my procedure wasn’t “traditional,” and many efforts have been made to divert the discussion away from the serious political questions raised in the document.

To reiterate its main points:

- The long-standing IMT position of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an independent and help form a “mass socialist party” can only politically disarm the working class, obscuring the fact that Sanders is not a socialist but a bourgeois politician whose function is to draw workers and youth back into the capitalists’ Democratic Party. This erases the class line between working-class politics and Bernie Sanders as well as other “progressive” Democrats like AOC. Similarly, calling for a vote for Green Party candidates like Jabari Brisport erases the bourgeois class nature of that party, and miseducates members of the IMT as well as readers of *Socialist Revolution*. Far from coming to terms with this, the most recent articles (February 27 and March 5) continue to echo Sanders’ slogan of a “revolution” against the “billionaire class,” and to state that he “could have used the momentum to break from the [Democratic] party—a party that he is not technically a member of—and set up an independent socialist campaign.” All this is the opposite of a Marxist fight for the revolutionary political independence of the working class.
- Supporting police and prison-guard “unions” and their “strikes,” and claiming that cops are “workers in uniform” (or can be “under some circumstances,” as was argued at the recent MSP aggregate), goes directly against the class line on this topic expressed in Trotsky’s writings and classic works on class struggle like *Teamster Rebellion* on the Trotskyist-led mass strikes here in Minneapolis, which is crucial to the fight for workers’ revolution and

black liberation in this country. Very far from being workers, the police are professional strikebreakers and agents of repression for the ruling class.

This question is far from “semantics,” as one comrade at the aggregate said; it’s a vital and concrete one here and now. You only have to look at the racist murders of Philando Castile and Jamar Clark in the Twin Cities area to see the repressive violence of the police force at work. In addition to the absurd talk of “Bolshevik bobbies” in Britain (police who went on “strike” for higher wages and other demands strengthening their professional position), at the MSP aggregate it was stated that during the 1968 events in France the bourgeoisie’s security apparatus was on the verge of revolt. I will discuss that below in more detail, as the next MSP aggregate is concerned with the question of the police and timely clarification of this is essential to that discussion.

- The history of IMT sections engaging in political support of and entrisism in bourgeois parties in countries like Mexico and Bolivia (among others) – this fails to uphold the basic Marxist principle of the class line. It teaches both members of our organization, as well as readers of our press, that a class analysis of these formations is mere semantics, and that there can in fact be a progressive bourgeoisie under modern capitalism. All of this is alien to Marxism, Trotsky’s permanent revolution and the historic program of the 4th International.

At the most recent MSP aggregate meeting,² I was surprised to hear some comrades claim the events of May 1968 [in France] backed up the IMT’s position on the police. Materials about those 1968 events are full of pictures, posters and descriptions of the extreme police violence against worker and student demonstrators and strikers. In terms of a possible police “strike” in May 1968, yes, this was on the verge of happening.

Because the French cops were coming over to the side of the strikers? No – *the opposite*. What actually happened is described in detail in the Penguin Books collection *Reflections on the Revolution in France: 1968*. The police were “within an inch of open strike” because they were furious at the government for supposedly going soft on the protests, releasing people the cops had arrested and beaten, and making supposedly conciliatory statements that the police saw as disrespecting their work of violently repressing the demonstrations!

As the book states, the police “took as an insult the growing press campaign against police brutality, brutality that reached paroxysm on the ‘Night of the barricades’ (the night of 10-11 May) reminding the whole population of the

¹ [Editorial note: Local member responsible for communication between branch members and the Central Committee.]

² [Editorial note: Joint meeting of both MSP branches.]

excesses committed against the Algerians during the late fifties and early sixties.” This followed the invasion and closing of the Sorbonne on May 3, when the cops arrested and savagely beat hundreds of students. The cops also had some “professional-departmental demands,” particularly “with reference to wages” (they wanted higher pay for beating up protesters). Then the “floodgates opened when Prime Minister Georges Pompidou...declared that the Sorbonne would be reopened and prisoners released,” and made some hypocritical statements about his “understanding” of the students’ situation:

“Policemen understood the Prime Minister’s declaration to be a disavowal of their actions. The crisis that had been smouldering among them now exploded.

“The Interfederal Union of Police Unions ... published a communiqué which noted that ‘it considers the Prime Minister’s declaration to be a recognition of the rights and privileges of students and a total disavowal of actions taken by the police forces by order of the Government’.”

It was this that led to the cops being “within an inch of open strike” in May 1968!

I was similarly surprised to hear a comrade supporting the leadership position assert that the Czarist police force went over to the side of the revolutionaries in February 1917. Trotsky specifically addresses the revolutionaries’ attitude to the police in his *History of the Russian Revolution*: “The police are fierce, implacable, hated and hating foes. To win them over is out of the question.” This work makes a clear distinction between agitation among the soldiers in the Czarist army, and firm opposition to the cops, who in this revolutionary situation performed their job, defending the Czarist order with brutal repression.

Trotsky also writes on the role of the police in his work *What Next?*, including his famous quote: “The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker.” It’s clear that Trotsky was unconditionally opposed to treatment of cops as “workers in uniform,” not only in the context of the rise of fascism, as some comrades at the aggregate suggested, but as a fundamental point about the class line.

Contrary to the EC letter’s claim that my document “distorted” IMT positions, I named and documented the sources, and prior to the aggregate discussion last weekend, compiled a packet of documents and distributed them to the membership, for comrades to be able to reference while I presented my views. There is a lot of additional documentation (for example, highly relevant parts of *Teamster Rebellion*, writings by Trotsky, etc.) that I would be happy to send to comrades as well.

My goal in this was to show how, far from being a question of tactics, the points I’m raising are fundamental principles of the Marxist tradition. This discussion reminds me of what Trotsky wrote in *The Third International After Lenin* in the context of his critique of the Stalinists’ entrism into the bour-

geois Kuomintang, spreading of illusions in “progressive” bourgeois politicians like La Follette, etc.:

“[T]he opportunism of the recent period, zigzagging ever more deeply to the Right, has advanced primarily under the banner of maneuver strategy. The refusal to concur with unprincipled compromises which, because of this very fact, were harmful in practice, was characterized as lack of ‘flexibility.’ The majority declared its basic principle to be the maneuver.

“A whole corps of specialists in maneuvers for bureaucratic requirement arose.... The task of this school of strategy consists in obtaining through maneuvers what can be won only through revolutionary class forces....

“[I]t must be clearly understood that maneuvers can bear only a subordinated, auxiliary, and expedient character in relation to the basic methods of revolutionary struggle. Once and for all it must be grasped that a maneuver can never decide anything in great matters. If combinations appear to solve something in small affairs, it is always at the expense of great matters....

“The contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is a fundamental one. That is why the attempt to bridle the Chinese bourgeoisie by means of organizational and personal maneuvers and to compel it to submit to combinationist plans is not a maneuver but contemptible self-deception, even though it be colossal in scope. Classes cannot be tricked....

“The most important, best established, and most unalterable rule to apply in every maneuver reads: you must never dare to merge, mix, or combine your own party organization with an alien one, even though the latter be most ‘sympathetic’ today. Undertake no such steps as lead directly or indirectly, openly or maskedly, to the subordination of your party to other parties, or to organizations of other classes, or constrict the freedom of your own agitation, or your responsibility, even if only in part, for the political line of other parties. You shall not mix up the banners, let alone kneel before another banner....

“The misfortune lies precisely in the fact that the epigones of Bolshevik strategy extol maneuvers and flexibility to the young communist parties as the quintessence of this strategy, thereby tearing them away from their historical axis and principled foundation and turning them to unprincipled combinations which, only too often, resemble a squirrel whirling in its cage. It was not flexibility that served (nor should it serve today) as the basic trait of Bolshevism but rather granite hardness. It was precisely of this quality, for which its enemies and opponents reproached it, that Bolshevism was always justly proud. Not blissful ‘optimism’ but intransigence, vigilance, revolutionary distrust, and the struggle for every hand’s breadth of independence, these are the essential traits of Bolshevism. This is what the communist parties of both the West and the East must begin with. They must first gain the right to carry out great maneuvers by preparing the political and material possibility for realizing them, that is, the strength, the solidity, the firmness of their own organization.”

Comradely,
James B.

Letter from the Minneapolis-St. Paul Area Committee

(19 March 2019)

Comrade James,

Democratic discussion means a discussion in which every member is able to listen and participate in an informed manner. In your first document, you reference over ten articles on three or more topics that supposedly support your political disagreements. The area membership put forward a plan to discuss your disagreements and the referenced articles in a timely manner. However, it was important to allow time for all comrades to read the sources you referenced in your first document in order for a democratic discussion to be had. Now you have sent your positions in writing once again -with more articles that the area membership may or may not be familiar with on still more varied topics. The area membership already knows of your political disagreements, and you do not present new ones in this second document, just more sources for comrades to read. The presentation of this new document has the appearance of forcing comrades to choose sides before they have had the opportunity to read all the material and come to an informed position on these issues themselves. These are not the actions of someone who is confident their ideas will win out through democratic discussion.

Your maneuver of misrepresenting correspondence between yourself and the EC also does not speak of good intentions. The goal of the EC's letter was not to present a political argument to your positions- though we will repeat the suggestion that you take up the EC's invitation in the letter to discuss these points politically in person, as well as at the aggregates in MSP. The goal of the EC's letter was to clarify the organizational process

for how we typically discuss disagreements, and it asked several questions which you did not answer. Those questions were:

- Do you continue to agree with the basic conditions of membership in the US section of the IMT, as outlined in its constitution, which you voluntarily accepted when you joined? "Any person who accepts the Program, Constitution, Code of Conduct, and membership responsibilities of the organization; who publicly defends the organization's ideas; pays monthly dues; sells the paper; and who participates in a comradely manner in the organization's activities, under the direction of its democratically elected structures, is eligible for membership."
- Do you still maintain that the criticisms you have raised – which precisely mirror those raised by the Internationalist Group – occurred to you entirely independently and that you have no connection whatsoever with the Internationalist Group?
- Who are you referring to when you write in your document: "members from their branches in New Hampshire and Spokane, Washington," if not those individuals who subsequently left the CWI and joined the Internationalist Group, which is common knowledge on the left?

The area committee asks that you provide the answers to these questions to your comrades, because just as we must be honest with the working class, we must be honest with each other. Comradely,
MSP AC¹

¹ [Editorial note: Area Committee, responsible for coordinating the activities of the two MSP branches.]

Letter from J.P. for E.C.

(25 March 2019)

Hi comrade,

We received your email on March 18. You demand a "real political discussion," but have clearly chosen to evade the simple questions we asked of you in order to clarify the basis for discussion. You have also ignored the request of the MSPAC that you reply to these simple "yes" or "no" questions.... Why do you not want to answer these questions? ... [Y]our implication that you have not been given space for a discussion of your views is simply untrue. Instead, you have doubled down on the outright falsifications and distortions of the IMT's positions on various questions. We will address some of these points briefly, for the sake of clarity.

Re: the accusation that the IMT considers the police to be part of the working class. There are several dozen articles on Marxist.com about the police which make our basic position crystal clear: that the police are a key component of the repressive "bodies of armed men" of the capitalist state in defense of private property (see a sampling of articles below). In not a single one will you find it asserted that the cops are part of the working class. Instead, you have dishonestly cherry-picked a

couple of quotes, taken entirely out of context, to build a case for the position you and the "Internationalist Group" ascribe to us.

What we say in the handful of articles that do take this up is that, in the context of mass working-class struggle and protests, any pressure that can be brought to bear on the police to stand aside, or even to actively break with their role as defenders of the capitalist state, can be a good thing. It is an undeniable fact that in many revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations, from the Winnipeg General Strike to the Tunisian Revolution, the police have caved under the revolutionary pressure of the masses and in some cases many individual police have taken off their uniforms and even joined the mass movement.

If the police being organized in a union can help organized labor bring pressure to bear in these situations, potentially cracking their ranks and making it more complicated for the state to unleash violence against striking or revolutionary workers, this would not be a bad thing. While we do not put much emphasis on this, neither do we make "drive the cops out of the labor movement!" one of our central demands, as the Internationalist Group does.

Re: the accusation that it is the "long-standing IMT position

of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an independent and help form a ‘mass socialist party.’” Again, this is a flat-out distortion. Never once have we supported the Democrats or Sanders as a Democrat, in any way shape or form. In hundreds of articles, we have been implacably clear on the reactionary nature of the Democratic Party, from the moment the US section of the IMT was founded.

What we have said is that in 2016, at the height of the Sanders movement, with unprecedented millions moving towards socialism, in the context of mass discontent and anger with the Democratic Party, Sanders was in a position to make such a break and could have channelled that energy into a mass party independent of the two main capitalist parties, potentially unleashing forces that could have gotten out of the control of those parties and the trade union bureaucracy. This would have opened many possibilities for revolutionary socialists to fight for a revolutionary socialist program in such a formation. Would that have been a good thing from the perspective of the fight for socialism or not?

Far from sowing illusions that Sanders would do this, we drew people’s attention to this potential precisely to help break the illusions of those who thought that real change was possible through the Democrats, especially when he eventually capitulated to the DNC. Anyone who has honestly read our articles on US politics over the last few years can see our principled track record on this question. We would like to point out that you joined the IMT knowing our position and our approach to people who have illusions in Sanders and that you expressed no disagreements until you presented “your document.”

As for the difficult work of assembling the ones and twos of a cadre organization in places like Mexico and Bolivia. The belated nature of the world socialist revolution introduces many unforeseen convulsions and contradictions. The masses in the ex-colonial world cannot wait for the revolution in the economically advanced countries – they must find avenues of expression. Only a hidebound sectarian would suggest standing aside from the explosive mass movements of millions of workers and peasants, lecturing them about the inevitable betrayals of the leaders they have illusions in.

Instead of patiently explaining the need for class-independent parties and policies as the masses learn through experience that betrayal is inherent in reformism, shrill and sterile denunciations from the internet sidelines are what passes for “Leninism” and “Trotskyism” in sects like the Internationalist Group and the Spartacist League. We have seen their methods fail in practice over and over again. What have they built in Latin America? Or in the US, for that matter?

Sectarians live in a world of ready-made formulas, fixed categories, and purity tests—with themselves as the administrators of these tests. Instead of approaching the working class as it is, the sects have an idealized, utopian understanding and seek to impose their ideas on the living and contradictory workers’ movement in the abstract – which is why the working

Marx
Print

Britain: Bolshevik Bobbies

Rob Sewell, 29 January 2008

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“The London police on strike. After that, anything can happen”, said Sylvia Pankhurst in 1918. The ground is certainly shifting in Britain. There has been a continual build up of public anger at the government’s attempt to impose a 2% limit on public sector pay. The Police are getting a paltry

And there are the police. I knew there was something up when the ‘Socialist Appeal’ office got a phone call from the ‘Police Review’ asking for permission to republish an article from our website on the police strikes of 1918-19. “There is a growing interest in this subject”, stated the caller.

Today, the government had told the police that



*Police march through London
January 23, 2008*

Today we have entered uncharted waters. Feelings are running high and strike action is being discussed. In 1919, they faced Lloyd George. Today they face Gordon Brown. In 1919 they were dubbed ‘Bolshevik Bobbies’, today they will need to take a leaf out of the experience of their forefathers if they are to get anywhere.

The IMT’s *Socialist Appeal* (28 January 2008) enthused as police threatened to strike, urging them to act as “Bolshevik Bobbies.”

class pays them no attention whatsoever.

Sectarians dishonestly quote their political opponents out of context in a bid to “score points” and sow confusion. For them, the idea of skillfully connecting with people who are moving to the left – and who inevitably have many confusions – is a closed book. Though they swear by Trotsky’s Transitional Program in every breath, the actual use of transitional demands to raise people’s horizons as to the need for socialist revolution is alien to them. For them, planting a “Trotskyist” banner and waiting for the masses to come to them is sufficient. But the real world, for better or worse, is much more complicated than the schematic world of the sectarian. Unfortunately, it appears that you have adopted these methods....

Comradely,
JP for the EC

A sampling of articles on the police:

- <https://www.marxist.com/to-end-racism-and-police-brutality-end-capitalism.htm>
- <https://www.marxist.com/usa-police-brutality-racism-and-the-politics-of-polarization.htm>
- <https://www.marxist.com/united-states-baltimore-boils-overhow-can-we-end-police-brutality.htm>
- http://www.marxist.com/oldsite/usa/police_brutality600.html
- <https://www.marxist.com/kaepernicks-stand-against-police-brutality.htm>
- <https://www.marxist.com/mass-protests-against-police-violence-sweep-the-us.htm>

Letter to the Executive Committee and Area Committee

James B.
(25 March 2019)

Comrades of the EC and AC,

I was about to send a response to the AC when I received JP's email on behalf of the EC this morning. I have included that response at the end of this letter.

The EC's email continues to claim that my arguments are based on "outright falsifications and distortions of the IMT's position" on topics raised in my documents. Is this true? By checking the relevant facts themselves, comrades will see that it is not. Only on the basis of the real record and facts can the crucial political issues be faced.

On Bernie Sanders

In his email to me, comrade JP writes:

"Re: the accusation that it is the 'long-standing IMT position of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an independent and help form a "mass socialist party."' Again, this is a flat-out distortion."

Really? Comrades can easily check the facts for themselves.

My March 1 document ("Marxist Politics are Class Politics") quoted the article by the Editorial Board of *Socialist Revolution*, "The Growth of the DSA and the Fight for Socialism" (July 16, 2017). It begins:

"By all measures, 2016 transformed the political landscape in the US. After years of following the ebbs and flows of the explosive and inspiring, yet politically amorphous, eruptions of Occupy and Black Lives Matter, it appears socialists are now finally swimming *with the stream*.

"At its height, the Sanders campaign mobilized millions and rallied broad layers of society, particularly the youth, around the banner of democratic socialism. For a moment, the potential for the emergence of a new party – a mass socialist party – became a concrete prospect. No longer was this a hard-to-imagine abstraction – *if only Bernie would break with the Democrats!*"

The article goes on to state that Sanders' "capitulation to Hillary" (in reality, he always said he would endorse her if/when she won the nomination) "threw away a historic opportunity" but "did nothing to quell the mood of resistance." The article then goes on to cheer the growth of the DSA, call on it to break from the Democrats, praise it for supporting Jabari Brisport's Green Party campaign, and state:

"And by calling on Bernie Sanders, Our Revolution, and any labor leaders who will listen, such as the National Nurses Union, ILWU, and the Electrical Workers Union, to break with the Democrats and build a mass socialist party, DSA could help left elements within these organizations chart a road forward."

The article ends with a series of italicized slogans, including: "*Bernie Sanders, Our Revolution, and labor leaders: Break from the Democrats and build a mass socialist party!*"

Judge for yourself if any falsification or distortion of the record

is going on, and if so, by whom.

A quick search for "Sanders" on socialistrevolution.org is quite revealing, and I invite comrades to see for themselves. Back in 2015, the organization was already promoting the fantasy scenarios of what would happen if Sanders had "run as an independent, calling on the labor leaders to break with the Democrats and to build a mass political party based on the unions, armed with a clear socialist program" (see the September 2015 leaflet "Bernie Sanders and the 2016 Presidential Election").

As the 2016 campaign for the Democratic nomination heated up, the promotion of illusions in Sanders reached a fever pitch. Here's a sample: "Bernie: Build a Mass Socialist Party of the Working Class!" (June 9, 2016). The title says it all, certainly as far as JP's claim that my document engaged in "flat-out distortion" by referring to the long-standing IMT position of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an independent and help form a mass socialist party (though here the word "help" can be omitted – it calls on "Bernie" to just do it himself). The article states "we have consistently argued that [Sanders] should have run independently of the Democrats" while noting that he was about to meet with Clinton and would no doubt back her.

Then it says:

"However, this does not have to be the end of his campaign! On the contrary, we think this could be the real beginning for genuine revolutionary change."

It goes on:

"Sanders identifies as a socialist and campaigns for a 'political revolution against the billionaire class.' ... Given a lead, the millions in and around the Sanders campaign could form the basis of a mass socialist party in the US – a party of the working class. This party could build branches in every union, workplace, neighborhood, and school. The International Marxist Tendency believes that Bernie must break from the Democrats and call on his supporters and, in particular, organized labor, to form such a party. This will mean a new stage in the fight for socialism and for a government of, by, and for the working class."

There is more. "If Sanders or the movement around him launch a mass left-wing party, all IMT supporters will fight to build this party" and try to convince it to adopt a "revolutionary socialist program."

And then:

"There is still time for Sanders to make a truly lasting impact on US and world history. There is no time like the present!"

Talk about illusions! And where is my document's supposed distortion, falsification, etc.? This claim is simply made up, and is a distraction from the real political issues: the need to uphold the political independence of the working class and oppose the spreading of illusions in bourgeois politicians like Sanders and other Democratic "socialists" etc.

The article I just quoted at length from is by John Peterson and Tom Trottier. The same authors wrote "What Next for the

Sanders Campaign? How to Defeat the Billionaires!” (March 17, 2016), which calls for “a mass socialist party based on the working class” and states:

“Sanders’ campaign, with its money and infrastructure, could begin to establish such a party, starting this year, with Bernie as its first presidential candidate. Instead of the next few months being about beating Hillary Clinton, it could be about taking on capitalism and fighting for socialism.”

And so on. There are plenty of similar quotations in the pages of *Socialist Revolution* and on the website, for all comrades to investigate for themselves.

An April 28, 2016 leaflet on the site titled “Fight for Socialist Revolution!” begins:

“Bernie Sanders’s campaign has electrified millions and shown the potential for socialist ideas to get a mass echo.... The only way forward is to break with both big-business parties and to begin building an independent socialist party, and Bernie should run as its first presidential candidate. Polls show that a majority of young people consider themselves to be working class, oppose capitalism, and are in favor of socialism. With this base of support, such a party would turn US politics upside down!”

An article by John Peterson also directly addresses the question of what the IMT argued. “We argued from the beginning of his campaign that Sanders should have run as an independent socialist and that even at this late date, he could still do so” (“Bernie or Bust? The Way Forward for the Revolution,” July 7, 2016).

Continuing over and over, all the way down to last month’s item “For a Revolution Against the Billionaire Class,” the organization’s line also involves opportunistically echoing and validating Sanders’ deceptive buzzwords that cut the guts out of words like revolution, class and socialism, spreading illusions in bourgeois politicians. A new burst of fantasy/illusion-pushing scenarios about how Democratic “socialists” could run “independent socialist campaigns” to build a “new mass party” came with the election of DSA members Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib (see for example “Ocasio-Cortez Defeats the Democratic Machine – Which Way Forward for Socialists?”, July 1, 2018).

Again, comrades should check these articles for themselves. They will very easily find that, far from distorting the IMT position, my March 18 document simply told the flat-out truth in referring to the “long-standing IMT position of calling on Bernie Sanders to run as an independent and help form a ‘mass socialist party.’” What is the purpose of claiming that this isn’t the case?

On the police and prison guards

In his email, comrade JP states that the IMT does “not make ‘drive the cops out of the labor movement!’ one of our central demands” – is this a demand of the IMT at all? In fact, from what you wrote (and what else I’ve seen) it seems that in reality the IMT line is in opposition to the demand for no cops in the unions. Is that the case?

This is certainly no abstract question. The presence of cops, prison and security guards in the union movement means very real and concrete dangers here and now.

I’m from New York, where the racist NYPD murder of Eric Garner and the subsequent protests posed this issue point blank.

When the Garner family called for a march on Staten Island, the United Federation of Teachers importantly supported the protest. A huge fight then erupted as the UFT was viciously attacked for this by their supposed “fellow unionists” of the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association. Inside the UFT, the Movement of Rank and File Educators caucus (MORE), built by several opportunist left groups, criticized the UFT from the right, called for working with “our brother and sister officers,” and wrote: “Rather than allowing these issues to divide us, we encourage the leaderships of the UFT and PBA to find ways to work together and unite us”. (See “The March for Justice and Unity,” morecaucusnyc.org, 21 August 2014 and “The Killing of Eric Garner and the Failure of Social Justice Unionism,” libcom.org, 8 December 2014).

JP writes that there “are several dozen articles on Marxist.com about the police,” and “In not a single one will you find it asserted that the cops are part of the working class.” It is not an accident that all of the six articles that JP links at the end of his email are from the U.S., with none from Britain (or other places where social-democratic views on issues like the police are stronger). With mass struggles against racist police killings and brutality in this country, the IMT’s position on the police would be highly unpopular – and rightly so. In fact, some IMT members here are not even aware of it. IMT leaders sometimes go so far as to deny it, as JP does in his email.

Let’s look at marxist.com as comrade JP recommends. There we find “The ‘Spirit of Petrograd’? The 1918 and 1919 Police Strikes in Britain” (November 2, 2007). This article, which IMT leaders constantly refer to, states: “Faced with poverty and deteriorating labour conditions, the police were inspired by the militancy of other workers”. It repeatedly compares and relates the cops to “other workers”. In other words, obviously, according to this article, cops are supposedly “workers”. It refers to how low pay and “deteriorating labour conditions” (that is, for the job of repression) had led the police to “decline into the lowest sections of the working class,” producing “militantly class-conscious policemen”. It goes on to favorably quote the National Union of Police and Prison Officers, stating: “As the Union declared to its members: ‘we are recruited from the workers; and we shall remain workers...’.”

Again, as cited in my document, Trotsky wrote precisely the opposite: that the worker who becomes a policeman “is a bourgeois cop, not a worker” (*What Next?*). And as for Petrograd, in his *History* (as also cited previously), Trotsky wrote powerfully about how the Petrograd masses in 1917 knew that “The police are fierce, implacable, hated and hating foes. To win them over is out of the question”. How can one turn their back on these genuinely Bolshevik lessons of revolutionary history and still claim to be a Trotskyist? And again, this was precisely the point that was highlighted in the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamster strikes as discussed at length in *Teamster Rebellion* and other classic works on the lessons of the class struggle here and internationally.

We can also look at the “Bolshevik Bobbies” article from January 29, 2008. It goes on about how at that time, the cops in Britain were “furious and making all kinds of threats” against the government because of their “paltry 1.9% rise, in effect a pay cut,” and how “the ‘Socialist Appeal’ office got a phone call from the ‘Police Review’ asking for permission to

republish an article from our website on the police strikes of 1918-19". (*Police Review* was a weekly magazine for British police officers.) Clearly readers are supposed to share the excitement of the author, Rob Sewell, at this news. The article goes on to excitedly report that "The police even decided to march through central London last week. Some 25,000 police took part.... There was a sea of burly blokes with white base-ball caps," so on and so forth. Such marches by the cops are no cause for celebration but a danger and a threat to the working class.

The "Spirit of Petrograd" article on the cops is brought up again in a 2012 article on police expressing discontent with their pay etc. and how the British government thinks they "can attack police working conditions and wages and still have a 'loyal' force" ("British police seeking the right to strike – a sign of the times," marxist.com, 23 March 2012).

Comrade JP flatly denies that "the IMT considers the police to be part of the working class". That will be news to those in attendance at the most recent MSP aggregate, who heard leading comrades defend the IMT position by saying that the police were simply a "backward section of the working class," and even qualitatively similar to steelworkers. Comrade JP also simply ignores what is written in the article I cited in my document titled "Alberta prison guards' wildcat - a lesson for the entire labour movement" (May 9, 2013). I invite comrades to read the article, and see how it calls prison guards "workers in uniform" and hails their "union" leaders for "providing real leadership" to their "brothers and sisters" on strike. Does this article, now posted on marxist.ca and marxist.com for over five years, not represent the IMT position?

How about the article "Changing consciousness within the police: a Marxist view" (August 14, 2013) from the IMT's British section, which I also cited and quoted in my document? Comrades should read this too, to see if my document fabricated, distorted or took out of context its statements about "rising class consciousness" among the British police sparked by "budget cuts to police across the country," the British section's calls for police to be "brought into the labour movement," and the rest of it. Will comrade JP claim that the British section, with its founding and leading role in the tendency, does not represent the view of the IMT? I hope this question will be answered.

At last November's Northeast Regional School, in the session on the midterm elections, Tom Trottier explicitly said that the IMT is not against police "unions" being part of the AFL-CIO or central labor councils, and called for "unity" between the police and the working class, and as an example of the importance of this stance talked about how the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association had been the only "union" to oppose concessions on healthcare in pattern bargaining in New York. I assume comrade JP will not seek to deny this as well.

Attempts to obscure, deny, and evade the reality of the IMT's position and record on this question reflect just how bad the position is for those who want to do away with capitalism's racist, anti-worker repression. The clear position that police, prison, and security guards are not part of the working class, and should not be in the unions or the working class movement, is essential for building a genuine revolutionary Marxist party.

Entryism into bourgeois parties

Lastly, in today's email, comrade JP writes:

"As for the difficult work of assembling the ones and twos of a cadre organization in places like Mexico and Bolivia. The belated nature of the world socialist revolution introduces many unforeseen convulsions and contradictions. The masses in the ex-colonial world cannot wait for the revolution in the economically advanced countries – they must find avenues of expression. Only a hidebound sectarian would suggest standing aside from the explosive mass movements of millions of workers and peasants, lecturing them about the inevitable betrayals of the leaders they have illusions in."

This is apparently supposed to be a response to the section of my March 1 document discussing IMT sections' entering into, promoting support for, and spreading illusions in bourgeois parties in Mexico, Bolivia, etc. Who said anything about the masses in the ex-colonial world "wait[ing] for the revolution in the economically advanced countries," or anything of that kind? Frankly it

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sounds like the kind of “argument” put up against Trotsky when he denounced the policy of entryism into the Kuomintang and drew the lesson (cited in my document) that “never and under no circumstances” should Marxists enter a bourgeois party.

As for standing aside from “the explosive mass movements of millions of workers and peasants,” I certainly never advocated anything of the sort. We’re talking about entryism into bourgeois parties: something that Trotsky, again, explicitly opposed and denounced. Those bourgeois parties stand *opposed* to explosive class mobilizations of the workers, peasants and oppressed. This question too is not at all abstract, as we see right now with the situation in Mexico heating up with major strikes by maquiladora workers in Matamoros. The truth about the IMT’s history of entryism in and political support to bourgeois parties such as the PRD and Morena, which are deadly enemies of the working class, cannot be waved away by a string of vague references to “sectarians”. Neither can the illusions spread in the new president López Obrador (AMLO). It is crucial for the workers and peasants to break from these and all bourgeois parties. This is literally a question of life and death; once again this point was emphasized by Trotsky on the basis of the 1925-27 Chinese experience that became a foundation stone for the international Trotskyist movement.

Below is the response to the MSP AC that I was about to send when JP’s email to me arrived this morning:

(March 24-25, 2019)

Comrades of the AC,

I have read your letter of 3/19, and I fully agree that all members should have the opportunity to participate in the upcoming discussion in an informed manner. Throughout this discussion I have sought to put the political content front and center, and I hope that will be the goal of the discussion as it continues.

Is anyone “forcing comrades to choose sides before they have had the opportunity to read all the material and come to an informed position on these issues themselves”? If so, it is certainly not me. My previous letter had the opposite intent, to provide comrades with more sources to consider, in order to aid them in coming to a fully informed position. At the last aggregate, comrades argued that the repressive state apparatus in France was on the verge of revolt during the tumultuous events of May 1968, and I wanted to explore the subject more thoroughly. I found that the actual facts of what happened in May 1968 contradict the argument made at the aggregate, and certainly do not support the established IMT position of supporting police “strikes” and “unions.” I fail to see how my highlighting these examples is in any way a “maneuver.”

You’re right that the EC’s letter to me was concerned with organizational and procedural matters, and as I said in my response, I am interested in a political discussion, not a discussion of how I brought up the discussion (which was entirely in accord with the procedures outlined in the Constitution of the IMT). Again, your letter seeks to respond organizationally. You reiterate a series of questions, to “clarify the organizational process for how we typically discuss disagreements,” and I have no problem answering

them if it clears any obstacles to a politically-focused discussion:

Not only have I always abided by the IMT constitution, but as comrades in both Minneapolis and New York know, I have always actively participated in interventions, selling the paper, reading groups, student work, and helped with production of *Socialist Revolution* and other booklets while I was in New York.

The question of how I arrived at my disagreements has also come up repeatedly. The first point of disagreement I arrived at was on the IMT claim that the police and prison guards are “workers in uniform,” and the IMT’s record of supporting “strikes” by “unions” of these professionals of racist capitalist repression. I also came to question other points, including the spreading of illusions and confusion on the class character of Bernie Sanders, AOC, and the Green Party. After reading a range of materials about the history of the Fourth International and Trotsky’s categorical opposition to political support for or entry into bourgeois parties, I became convinced that these IMT positions and policies have little in common with those of Trotsky and the historical legacy of the Russian Revolution.

In my document “Marxist Politics are Class Politics,” I wrote: “Over the past period, trying to sort through these and other issues and questions, I have read many sources, from the biography *Ted Grant — The Permanent Revolutionary* by Alan Woods and other materials on the history of the tendency, to materials by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and the position of left groups on Sanders’ ‘political revolution.’ One thing that drew my attention, partly because of common roots of the IMT and Socialist Alternative (despite real differences between them), was Socialist Alternative’s positions on Sanders’ ‘political revolution,’ and the critiques made of these positions by members from their branches in New Hampshire and Spokane, Washington.”

The document goes on to note how those critiques highlighted Marx’s phrase about how “the workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party.”

Your letter reiterates the question posed by the EC as to which former Socialist Alternative members in New Hampshire and Spokane my document was referring to, “if not those individuals who subsequently left the CWI and joined the Internationalist Group, which is common knowledge on the left.” Obviously I was referring to them, and the question seems silly as an attempt to show devious intentions – if those activists’ identity was intended to be some kind of secret, then why would I have mentioned them in the first place?

As for the question as to whether I “still maintain” that the criticisms I’ve raised “occurred to you entirely independently,” I have repeatedly stated that in investigating these issues I have read many different materials on them, including from a broad range of left groups (something not much encouraged in the IMT, as was mentioned at the aggregate discussion, but essential for every Marxist activist). This of course includes the Internationalist Group, which has written in depth on the contrast between Trotsky’s positions and any political support for, tailing of, or spreading illusions in bourgeois politicians and parties. While formulating, crystalizing, and discussing my disagreements, I have come increasingly into political

agreement with their defense of the revolutionary political independence of the working class and the Trotskyist tradition.

The AC's letter refers to the "plan to discuss your disagreements and the referenced articles in a timely manner." Let's now engage in this discussion together in order to clarify these fundamental political issues of upholding the class line in opposition to supporting "unions" and "strikes" of capitalism's

police and prison guards; in opposition to creating illusions in capitalist politicians, or any political support or entry into bourgeois parties; and to any other policies that stand in the way of principled Marxist class politics, desperately needed for advancing the cause of socialist revolution.

Comradely,
JFB

Letter from J.P. for the E.C.

(26 March 2019)

Comrade,

We have received your reply and can't say we're terribly surprised. Not only do you deepen your commitment to selective and amalgamated "quoting" of "positions" outside of time and space, but you reveal without a doubt that you have adopted the utterly mechanical and lifeless method that permeates the approach of the sectarian. As we are focused on producing a new issue of *Socialist Revolution*, we are sending only a short reply in order to clarify a few points here. But we will address your points re: "sowing illusions," the police, and everything else you have raised in detail in the near future.

We would also be happy to discuss why the IMT believes capitalism has been restored in China – whereas the IG maintains it is still a deformed workers' state, which, presumably, should be given critical support *vis a vis* US imperialism. We would also be happy to discuss Trotsky's approach to the US working class and World War II – important aspects of which the IG also rejects. It would appear, by their standards, that Trotsky "sowed illusions" in Roosevelt and US imperialism. But above all, we will counterpose the dialectical, Marxist method to the sterile method of the sectarians, which treats theory as a kind of scripture or categorical imperative applicable at all times under all conditions. Because that is what is truly under discussion here: a fundamental difference in method, both political and in the approach to party building.

As everyone knows, one can quote the Bible to "prove" pretty much anything. Likewise, the writings and speeches of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky can be mined to "prove" that Marx and Engels were reformists, Lenin was a Stalinist, and Trotsky was a fascist. Without presenting quotations in their full context, taking into consideration the moving, dynamic transformations in the objective and subjective conditions, it is easy to demolish "straw man" arguments, kick up dust, and sow confusion. Furthermore, you exacerbate your one-sided approach to discussing "the facts," by dragging in alleged "he said, she said" quotes from in-person meetings and discussions, misrepresenting them both in content and context. This is a dishonest method through and through.

Far from offering a mere "organizational response" to your ideas, a political discussion has been started in your branch, in the MSP aggregates, and the EC has even addressed some points briefly in writing. You claim that you have sought to put politics "front and center," and consider our request for clarification as a mere organizational and procedural matter. However, our concern has been to establish a basis for how to proceed with the discussion so that everyone is clear, not only

about what is being said, but where everyone is coming from. Although you seem to think that things are "black and white," context matters here as well. You say you are not interested in discussing "*how* [you, James] brought up the discussion." However, it is precisely the *how* that has cast so much doubt as to your intentions in raising these points. Let's briefly recap the genesis of this discussion.

When you first raised your differences, your CC contact suggested that you have a series of political discussions together before going into writing, as going straight into writing can lead to the entrenchment of positions. One aspect of an initial political discussion is to ensure everyone knows what is actually being discussed. Dialectical thinking deals with fluid motion and processes, not rigid, fixed categories. It is in the course of discussion, during which different ideas are put forward and debated, that the level can be raised and any differences that truly exist can be refined or clarified. At that point, entering into writing may well be a useful next step.

Instead, you disregarded your CC contact's suggestion to discuss first, and sent out "your document" – complete with all the usual mischaracterizations that are familiar to us, because they are the rehearsed talking points of the IG – before any of these points could be clarified through discussion. Your rush to go into writing leads us to believe that your positions were, in fact, already entrenched and that you weren't really interested in clarifying the IMT's full position on these questions. Despite this, what was our response? To organize a special aggregate and several other upcoming meetings to address your questions and concerns point-by-point. So the implication that we have focused solely on procedural questions is yet another dishonest distortion of the facts.

Our interest is not whether you formally "abide" by the US IMT's constitution in the abstract – something your IG contacts will advise you to adhere to scrupulously – but whether we are discussing with someone who is genuinely interested in building the IMT on the basis of its program and methods. What we wish to clarify is the political basis on which this discussion can proceed. You say you "have no problem answering them [our questions] if it clears any obstacles to a politically-focused discussion." We welcome this and look forward to your responses to the questions below.

To hear you put it, you stumbled upon the IG's site, among others, and eventually developed doubts about the IMT's approach to the police and Sanders. Fair enough, no problem. We are always happy to discuss any and all political questions with comrades who want a better understanding of the ideas, methods, and traditions of revolutionary Marxism. But this

begs the question: if, as you have indicated, this happened months ago, why did you not raise any of these doubts with your IMT comrades until much later? Why did you wait until you had a fully formulated “document” which “coincidentally” mirrored the standard laundry list of criticisms by an organization hostile to the IMT? Why did you not accept the invitation of your CC contact to discuss these differences in person, point-by-point, over time? ...

You note your past activities in defending the program and ideas of the IMT and helping with organizational tasks; these contributions were certainly most appreciated. But what about the present? The tone you have taken is not that of a member offering constructive criticism to improve the work or to get a full understanding of our positions, but rather, is much more akin to the denunciations made by sectarians from the outside. As you yourself write, you are “convinced that these IMT positions and policies have little in common with those of Trotsky and the historical legacy of the Russian Revolution.”

This is quite a serious political assertion. We are therefore compelled to ask: do you truly accept the US IMT’s program? Do you intend on defending it in public, for example, at a paper sale? Since the program is the axis around which the rest of the paper is based, we would also like to know whether you plan on ordering bundles and organizing paper sales—seeing as you are the press officer for your branch.

As for your connection with the IG. For weeks you evaded giving a straight answer to your comrades when asked in person whether or not these ideas were your own or the IG’s. Your reply was along the lines of “where I get my ideas is irrelevant.” Then, for over a week, you ignored the simple questions posed in the EC’s original letter and the MSPAC follow up. Now you allow that you “have come increasingly into political agreement with

their [the IG’s] defense of the revolutionary political independence of the working class and the Trotskyist tradition.”

Let us be clear. The IG are an offshoot of the Spartacist Group, itself a split from the failed Socialist Workers Party, via the Schachtmanites [*sic*]. Its *modus operandi* is to write caustic polemics denouncing other left groups, to issue proclamations and political ultimatums, and to present their opponents’ views in a one-sided and dishonest manner. It views itself as *the* revolutionary party of the working class. No need to fight to bring revolutionary ideas into reformist workers’ organizations or to dirty one’s hands discussing with people who have honest illusions in people like Sanders or Corbyn! All that is required is to denounce all and sundry, and the masses will eventually recognize that the IG are the guardians of revolutionary truth and they will flock into its ranks.

Needless to say, in almost every possible way, the IG represents a political history, program, method, banner, and tradition that is entirely alien to that of the IMT. We are happy to discuss any and all honest political questions, past or present, that arise in the course of the class struggle. However, we have no interest in entering into a debate with a dishonest sectarian grouplet that has no connection with the working class and never will.

You have made your and the IG’s positions on these questions abundantly clear. As noted above, we will address your points in detail in a future letter. In the meantime, we ask that you give us a frank and honest answer to the questions we have posed in this letter. Above all, is it your position, as you have written in your latest reply, that the Internationalist Group, and not the IMT, defends the “revolutionary political independence of the working class and the Trotskyist tradition”?

Comradely,
JP for the EC

Letter of Resignation

James B.
(29 April 2019)

Dear comrades,

At the recent branch meeting, I was asked if I still agree with the program of the U.S. section of the IMT. The program calls for “Socialist internationalism and world revolution,” to “Break with the Democrats and Republicans,” for a party of the working class based on a “class independent, socialist program,” “For the unity of the working class” – stated goals such as these were why I joined in the first place. Not only do I agree with the struggle for world socialist revolution, but my commitment to this has continued to deepen, leading me to study how Marxist principles have emerged as lessons of class struggle, and the concrete ways they are applied. This brought me face to face with what I have increasingly come to see as a fundamental problem: that the IMT’s politics in practice do not agree with those stated goals.

As comrades know, over the past period I have questioned and opposed the IMT’s support to police and prison-guard

“unions” and “strikes”; its innumerable calls on Bernie Sanders, a bourgeois politician, to form a “mass socialist party”; entry into and political support for bourgeois parties in Mexico, Bolivia, Pakistan and other countries, etc. – positions that clash with and contradict the stated Marxist goals and principles that led me to join.

The common thread that unites such positions is blurring and in fact erasing the *class line* dividing Marxist, working-class politics and the class interests of the workers and oppressed from bourgeois politics, bourgeois parties and politicians, and the institutions of bourgeois rule. Misusing dialectics in a way that mystifies real struggles instead of clarifying the underlying issues, arguments are continually raised that in practice deny that the class line is fundamental to Marxist politics.

We are repeatedly faced with arguments that it is “sectarian” to see that the police, or capitalist politicians like Sanders, or bourgeois parties like López Obrador’s MORENA, etc., have a given class character. The fact remains that they do. Obscuring this can only mean misleading the working class. The catastrophic results that blurring the class line on such

fundamental questions can have for the working class have been shown over and over – as in Chile in 1973, to mention just one example.

I have addressed these topics in my documents, “Marxist Politics are Class Politics” (3/1) and “For a Real Political Discussion on Upholding Marxist Class Politics” (3/18) as well as in another email (3/26), demonstrating on the basis of concrete and detailed documentation the positions the IMT has taken and how these go against the overall principles referred to. Despite repeated assurances that the Executive Committee would provide a real answer to these documents, this has not occurred.

Program is not only a written document with that name, but what an organization fights for and against in practice. Yet returning to the question of the formal written program itself, here too a series of reformist formulations (such as “Cut the military budget and invest instead in social needs,” “make the rich pay for the crisis,” “public ownership,” “Nationalize the Fortune 500,” etc.) are far from the insistence by Marx, Lenin and Trotsky on the need to smash the bourgeois state in a proletarian revolution that expropriates the entire bourgeoisie, establishing a workers state based on workers councils. Learning more about the history of the tendency, I believe this is closely linked to Militant’s famous call for a Parliamentary “Enabling Bill” making possible a “peaceful socialist transition.”

Lastly, I would like to return to the question of the police and prison guards. Here the question of the armed fist of the bourgeois state is as concrete and clear as can be. This cannot be wished away through the kind of speculative “what if?” mystification that has been used. At the last aggregate, I urged comrades to read the section explaining the Marxist position, on the basis of the mass Trotskyist-led strikes right here in Minneapolis, in Farrell Dobbs’ *Teamster Rebellion*. I would strongly urge comrades to read that entire part of the book, which is in chapter 10 (“Bloody Friday”) and is as unequivocal as can be. To quote just one passage:

“Under capitalism the main police function is to break strikes and to repress other forms of protest against the policies of the ruling class.... Personal inclinations of individual cops do not alter this basic role of the police. All must comply with ruling-class dictates. As a result, police repression becomes one of the most naked forms through which capitalism subordinates human rights to the demands of private property. If the cops sometimes falter in their antisocial tasks, it is simply because they—like the guns they use—are subject to rust when not engaged in the deadly function for which they are primarily trained.”

We also discussed the IMT’s enthusiastic support for the Alberta prison guards’ “strike.” I cited material showing concretely what prison guards “strike” for, which is to be better able to, better paid for and have better conditions for carrying out their job of brutal repression against the prisoners. (With regard to police “unions,” a range of recent exposés have detailed how their contracts work to “shield officers from scrutiny” when they brutalize, intimidate or even kill people; see for example the special Reuters report “Protecting the

Blue,” January 13, 2017).

During the discussion, I stated the obvious: you cannot be in “solidarity” with prison guards and at the same time with prisoners; with the professionals of racist repression and those who it is their job to repress, arrest, handcuff, chain, jail, lock down, strip search, beat and brutalize. You cannot have it both ways. Here too the question is, Which side are you on? You cannot be on the side of Mumia Abu-Jamal and of his jailers.¹

And as we all know, the struggle against racist police repression and mass incarceration is one of the most burning issues of all in this country founded on slavery. This is most definitely the case here in the Twin Cities area. In Minnesota “at least 164 people died” at the hands of the police between 2000 and 2017, as reported by the *Star Tribune* (March 21, 2018). How many cops were even charged in that period? Two. None were convicted. It is not possible to be a Marxist, to actually fight for socialism and world revolution, without burning indignation and revulsion against this and the whole system of racist police repression and racist mass incarceration. That is the opposite of “solidarity” with prison guards, support for cop “unions” and the rest of it. This position also has its roots in the tradition of the Militant Tendency, which called for “democratic control” of the police, a reformist, social-democratic demand raised by the British section of the IMT as well.

I have been asked what I think of the Internationalist Group and its program. What has become more and more clear to me over the past period is that the IG does fight to put the program of revolutionary Marxism into practice in the class struggle. Here are some aspects of this: raising it in the thick of mass protests against police repression; in union organizing drives of immigrant workers; sparking strikes and work stoppages against imperialist war and for the freedom of Mumia Abu-Jamal; raising the defense of Venezuela and of the deformed workers states of China and North Korea against U.S. imperialism; fighting for the political independence of the working class against all illusions in Sanders and other Democratic (Party) “socialists,” the DSA, etc.; fighting to reforge the Fourth International of Trotsky as world party of the socialist revolution.

In the course of the recent discussions and study, these issues have become increasingly clear – and even glaring – to me. Continuing my commitment to put the Trotskyist program into practice, I intend to deepen my study of the program and practice of the Internationalist Group/Revolutionary Internationalist Youth and League for the Fourth International, and encourage others to do as well. I hereby resign from the IMT.

James B.
Minneapolis-St. Paul

¹ [Footnote from original document] Speaking of Mumia, the former Black Panther and radical black journalist whose case has been a world-wide banner of the struggle against the racist death penalty, mass incarceration and bourgeois frame-up “justice” for more than three decades: a search for his name on the IMT socialistrevolution.org site only gives two results, one from 2000 and the other twelve years ago in 2007.

Section 4: Appendix

Trotsky on Bourgeois “Third Parties” and the La Follette Campaign of 1924

The following is an excerpt from Leon Trotsky's introduction (20 May 1924) to The First Five Years of the Communist International, a collection of his writings first published in Moscow in 1924. That same year, reflecting the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist International, the U.S. Communist Party was encouraged to spread illusions in Robert La Follette, a bourgeois politician from Wisconsin who ran for president in 1924 as the nominee of the Progressive Party. Trotsky's denunciation of this opportunist policy was subsequently incorporated in his 1928 document, "The Draft Program of the Communist International – A Criticism of Fundamentals," which became the core of his book The Third International After Lenin.

In America the conciliationist illusions of the petty bourgeoisie, primarily the farmers, and the petty-bourgeois illusions of the proletariat take the form of the Third Party. The latter is being mobilized at the present moment around Senator La Follette, or, more correctly, around his name, for the Senator himself, almost 70 years old, has not yet found time to leave the ranks of the Republican Party. All this, by the way, is quite in the nature of things. But truly amazing is the position of certain leaders of the American Communist Party,¹ who propose to summon the party to vote for La Follette, hoping in this way to secure for Communists influence over the farmers....

It is quite self-evident that the path which certain American comrades are ready to follow has nothing in common with the paths of Bolshevism. For a young and weak Communist Party, lacking in revolutionary temper, to play the role of solicitor and gatherer of “progressive voters” for the Republican Senator La Follette is to head toward the political dissolution of the party in the petty bourgeoisie. After all, opportunism expresses itself not only in moods of gradualism but also in political impatience: it frequently seeks to reap where it has

not sown, to realize successes which do not correspond to its influence. Underestimation of the basic task – the development and strengthening of the proletarian character of the party – here is the basic trait of opportunism! Insufficient faith in the powers of the proletariat is the source of the fantastic leaps in a chase after the farmers which may cost the Communist Party its head. That the Communist Party must attentively follow the needs and moods of the farmers, utilizing the current crisis politically in order to extend its influence to the countryside – this is quite self-evident. But the party cannot accompany the farmers and the petty bourgeoisie generally through all their political stages and zigzags, it cannot voluntarily pass through all the illusions and disillusionings, dragging after La Follette in order to expose him later on. In the last analysis, the mass of the farmers will follow the Communist Party into battle against the bourgeoisie only in the event that they are convinced that this party represents a force capable of tearing the power from the bourgeoisie. And the Communist Party can become such a force in action, and consequently also in the eyes of the farmers, only as the vanguard of the proletariat but never as a tail of the Third Party.

The rapidity with which a false starting position leads to the crudest political mistakes is demonstrated by a document emanating from the so-called Organizing Committee, set up in order to convene a congress of the Third Party in June for the purpose of nominating La Follette as candidate for the post of president. The chairman of this committee is one of the leaders of the Farmer-Labor Party of the state of Minnesota; its secretary is a Communist, assigned to this work by the Communist Party. And now this Communist has lent his signature to a Manifesto which in appealing to “progressive voters” declares that the aim of the movement is to attain

¹ [Editorial note from *The First Five Years of the Communist International*.] The Federated Farmer-Labor Party was formed by the Workers (Communist) Party of the United States in 1924, the year capitalism finally succeeded in temporarily stabilizing itself following the First World War. Despite all of Trotsky's efforts, the ECCI, at that time under the domination of the *troika* (the triumvirate of Zinoviev-Kamenev-Stalin), refused to recognize the fact of capitalist stabilization until 18 months later. As a consequence 1924-25 were the years of pseudo-left policy, “leftist” mistakes and putschist experiments by the Comintern. The “farmer-labor” adventure of the American party was part of this false policy. Summing up this period in 1928, Trotsky wrote: “Finding itself in a cruel and constantly growing contradiction with the real factors, the leadership had to cling ever more to fictitious factors. Losing the ground under its feet, the ECCI was constrained to discover revolutionary forces and signs where there were no traces of any.... In proportion as obvious and growing shifts to the right were going on in the proletariat, there began in the Comintern the phase of idealizing the peasantry,

a wholly uncritical exaggeration of every symptom of its ‘break’ with bourgeois society.... During 1924, *i.e.*, in the course of the basic year of the ‘stabilization,’ the Communist press was filled with absolutely fantastic data on the strength of the recently organized [in 1923] Peasants’ International.... The representative of the Comintern (in the U.S.), Pepper-Pogany, in order to set the ‘auxiliary mass’ – the American farmers – into motion at an accelerated tempo, drew the young and weak American Communist Party into the senseless and infamous adventure of creating a ‘farmer-labor party’ around La Follette in order to overthrow quickly American capitalism.” (*Third International After Lenin*.) What predisposed the American party to this opportunist adventure was its previous ultra-left course.... By decision of the ECCI (under Trotsky's pressure), the American party later reversed its position. Less than one month after the St. Paul Convention of the FFLP where presidential candidates were nominated, the Central Committee of the CPUSA announced (July 8, 1924) that these candidates had been withdrawn, and that the CP would conduct its own campaign with its own candidates.

“national political unity”; and which, in refuting charges that the campaign is under the control of the Communists, declares that the Communists comprise an insignificant minority and that even were they to try to seize the leadership they could never succeed inasmuch as the [Farmer-Labor] “party” aims to obtain constructive legislation and not any utopias. And for these middle-class abominations the Communist Party assumes responsibility before the eyes of the working class! In the name of what? In the name of this, that the inspirers of this monstrous opportunism, who are thoroughly imbued with skepticism concerning the American proletariat, are impatiently seeking to transfer the party’s center of gravity into a farmer milieu – a milieu that is being shaken by the agrarian

crisis. By underwriting, even if with reservations, the worst illusions of the petty bourgeoisie, it is not at all difficult to create for oneself the illusion of wielding influence over the petty bourgeoisie. To think that Bolshevism consists of this is to understand nothing about Bolshevism.¹

¹ [Footnote by Trotsky.] The Executive Committee of the Communist International naturally rejected this policy which is so utterly false and so extremely dangerous. The decision of the ECCI was quite opportune. A few days following its adoption, Senator La Follette came out with a rabid attack against the Communists and piously declared that he would have nothing to do with any undertaking with which these rascals, this Red spawn of Beelzebub and of Moscow, were connected. Let us hope that this lesson will not prove unfruitful so far as certain super-clever strategists are concerned. – *L.T., June 4, 1924*

James P. Cannon on “Third Parties”

In 1948, a discussion took place inside the then-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) over how to respond to capitalist “third parties” when the Communist Party launched the Progressive Party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace, who had been Franklin D. Roosevelt’s vice president. Some in the SWP wanted to support Wallace, a longtime liberal Democratic politician. Before Sam Marcy split from the SWP in the late 1950s to embrace Mao Zedong and prior to his support for the Kremlin crushing of the 1956 Hungarian workers uprising, an incipient political revolution, the 1953 founding document of Marcy’s proto-Stalinist tendency argued for “critical support” to Wallace on the grounds that it was a “progressive-radical movement.” But James P. Cannon, the founder of American Trotskyism, speaking for the SWP majority in the 1948 discussion, warned against the danger of “lesser-evil” politics and laid out the reasons why Wallace and any candidate of a capitalist “third party” had to be emphatically opposed while fighting for a workers party:

“The traditional two-party system in the United States has been very well suited for normal times. The ruling capitalists couldn’t ask for anything better than this system which absorbs shocks and grievances by shifting people from one bourgeois party to another. But that system can blow up in time of crisis. The aggravation of the crisis which we all see ahead can shake up the whole American political situation, so that the old two-party system will no longer suffice to serve the needs of the American bourgeoisie.

“The less it becomes possible to mobilize the workers’ votes for one or the other of these two old bourgeois parties, the more impelling and powerful will become the urge of the workers to found a party of their own or to seek a substitute for it. That mood of the workers will create a condition wherein American capitalism will objectively require a pseudo-radical party to divert the workers from a party of their own....

“Next time, the role played by [Democratic president



James P. Cannon

Franklin D.] Roosevelt—which was a role of salvation for American capitalism—will most likely require a new party. In the essence of the matter that is what Wallace’s party is. Wallace is the, as yet, unacknowledged, candidate for the role of diverting the workers’ movement for independent political action into the channel of bourgeois politics dressed up with radical demagoguery which costs nothing. That is what we have to say, and that’s what we have to fight—vigorously and openly, and with no qualifications at all. We have to be 100% anti-Wallaceites. We have to stir up the workers against this imposter, and explain to them that they will never get a party of their own by accepting substitutes.”
–James P. Cannon, “On the 1948 Wallace Campaign” (February 1948)

Top Local Democrats Back Kshama Sawant “Socialist” Elected in Seattle on Platform of Liberal/Populist Reforms*

In November [2013], voters in Seattle, Washington elected Kshama Sawant, candidate of Socialist Alternative (SAIt), to an at-large seat on the City Council, preferring her to Richard Colin, the incumbent Democrat who had held the post for 16 years. The bulk of the left cheered in unison. Socialist Action (November 20) declared that, despite differences, Sawant’s election was “an important victory for the entire socialist movement.” The International Socialist Organization (December 11) saw it as a harbinger of “The electoral opening for the left.” And, naturally, Socialist Alternative (November 20) was ecstatic, headlining an article on their website, “Victory for Socialist in Seattle! – ‘Earth-shattering consequences’ in the US and internationally.”

Curiously, though, the capitalist rulers didn’t feel the ground crumbling under their feet. For all the considerable national media attention, the big business press was remarkably nonchalant about the victory for a nominally Marxist, socialist working-class party. The monopoly *Seattle Times* (26 November) which endorsed her opponent, carried a sympathetic profile of councilor-elect Sawant, quoting her colleagues-to-be, all Democrats, voicing hopeful anticipation of her role on the City Council. “Councilmember Mike O’Brien said adding Sawant to the council means he and other members can be more aggressive passing liberal legislation.” So Sawant’s presence will help pusillanimous Democratic “progressives” screw up their courage!

How does one explain the bourgeois media and politicians’ equanimous reaction? Sawant did not hide her party affiliation in this nominally “non-partisan” race. But Seattle’s “politically potent alternative weekly,” *The Stranger*, marketed to the younger, hipper audience of middle-class café-dwellers, noted in endorsing her that, “Despite her ‘Socialist Alternative’ label, there isn’t anything particularly radical about the core of Sawant’s progressive agenda.” They got that right. Sawant campaigned on a straight liberal/populist program. Her platform was hardly to the left

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Ted S. Warren/AP

Kshama Sawant, Socialist Alternative candidate elected to Seattle city council.

of candidates of the Green Party, a minor capitalist party, which endorsed her, as did the local “Progressive Party,” whose hero is Teddy Roosevelt, the racist butcher of the Philippines.

Sawant’s campaign protested *The Stranger*’s evaluation, while trumpeting its endorsement: “Sawant’s campaign is radical in that it is a direct challenge to the Democratic Party,” it wrote in an August 2 statement. It would be hard not to be, since there was no Republican candidate. But her most prominent campaign issue, the \$15 per hour minimum wage, was endorsed by both major (Democratic) mayoral candidates, the incumbent Mike McGinn, and his victorious challenger, state senator Ed Murray. In fact, Sawant underbid the Greens who have called for a \$16.50 minimum wage while arguing – like many “mainstream” economists – that “enacting a liveable wage would boost the [capitalist] economy.”

What about the rest of Sawant’s platform? The other two key planks were “a rent control ordinance to make housing affordable, and a tax on millionaires to fund transit, education, and other public services” (“How a Socialist Candidate Won an Election in Seattle,” *Socialist Alternative*, 22 November). Rent control is hardly a socialist demand: it was begun by Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in World War II, and continued since then in New York, which has tens of thousands of homeless. A number of California cities

(San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, Berkeley and others) likewise have rent stabilization regulations. As for a “tax on millionaires,” this is the bread-and-butter of Democratic liberals to give a populist veneer to their capitalist politics.

In fact, the most prominent candidate who campaigned for a “millionaire’s tax” in the November elections was New York City’s mayor-elect, Democrat Bill de Blasio. Sawant’s election has been linked by various liberal commentators to de Blasio’s victory (see “Kshama Sawant’s City Council victory reflects broad trends,” in *The Nation*, 16 December). The would-be socialists also saw the parallels: the ISO (December 16) wrote that “De Blasio ... ran a campaign that successfully painted him as a populist-challenger to the pro-Wall Street agenda of previous administrations.” And SAlt (November 22) headlined, “De Blasio Campaign in New York Creates Huge Expectations – Millions are Looking for a Left Alternative.”

The election of both Sawant and de Blasio has been portrayed as “the Occupy movement goes to the polls.” Of course, the ISO, SAlt et al. argued that de Blasio would turn his back on his campaign themes once in office. But the fact is that the liberal Democrat and the “democratic socialist” campaigned on similar themes. In fact, SAlt’s “how to” article on the election win highlighted the importance of “Democrats for Sawant.” This outfit included the former treasurer of the local Democratic Party who said, “Kshama Sawant’s positions on issues are far closer to King County Democrats than Richard Conlin’s actual record.” Another of the Democratic Party “activists” supporting Sawant was the former chairman of the King County Democrats.

The fact that the “socialist” candidate could garner support of a segment of the Democratic Party officialdom reflects the fact that Socialist Alternative – like Socialist Action, the International Socialist Organization and the other left groups supporting her candidacy – are reformist social democrats who *support* the capitalist system. They just want to throw in a few reforms to make it a little more “people friendly.” When they talk of socialism they mean a social-democratic “welfare state” on the European post-World War II model, with “public ownership” of various industries and utilities. They have no intention of carrying out a socialist revolution to bring down the capitalist state – their ambition is to administer it.

This is brought to the fore over the issue of the police. In the fine print of Sawant’s election fliers there is a call to “build a mass movement against police brutality and racial profiling,” and to “create an elected civil review board with full powers over the police.” No mention of the position of Socialist Alternative and its international organization, the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI), that police, the armed fist of the capitalist state that unions confront on the picket lines, are supposedly fellow workers (see “Her Majesty’s Social Democrats in Bed with the Police,” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009). Tell that to the Occupy Wall Street activists who were pepper-sprayed, beaten and their homes searched by the Seattle Police Department.

As for civilian review boards, these exist in various

places with no effect whatsoever such as New York City, the “stop and frisk” capital of the U.S., or the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, where a BART cop shot Oscar Grant in cold blood. The idea that the capitalist ruling class would allow its racist enforcers to be subject to genuine “democratic control” by their victims is a deadly illusion. Even where police chiefs are supposedly elected, this guarantees nothing. The infamous immigrant-hunting Sheriff Joe Arpaio in Maricopa County, Arizona has been elected five times by popular vote. No civilian review board would stop the SPD from murdering Native American woodcarver John Williams or strangling and beating African American Leo Etherly.

Sawant’s platform also calls for the Seattle City Council to “campaign for immediate, unconditional citizenship rights for all undocumented immigrants.” This could be a step forward, but full citizenship rights won’t be enacted by a city ordinance. It will require a tumultuous class struggle led by a workers party that champions the cause of all the oppressed. In contrast, SAlt has for many years acted as cheerleaders for Ralph Nader, a virulent nationalist immigrant-basher who told the *American Conservative* (21 June 2004) that he opposed legalization. Moreover, SAlt’s co-thinkers in England were in the leadership of a chauvinist strike at an oil refinery where hundreds of workers demanded “British Jobs for British Workers.”

Sawant received a fair amount of labor support, including endorsements from AFT Local 1789 at Seattle Central Community College where she teaches economics; from AFSCME Council 28 of Washington state employees; from IBEW Local 46 electrical workers, and from a number of Seattle-area union officials. Of course, endorsements by labor bureaucrats, who generally support the Democrats, don’t indicate a radical program. But a video of Sawant speaking to a November 18 rally of Machinists at Boeing has been billed as a call for workers to seize the plants. Not so. What she actually called for is for “Boeing to be under democratic public ownership by workers, by the community.” That is something quite different from workers control.

An article on the Sawant campaign’s web site, “Why Socialism,” calls for “taking the top 500 corporations that dominate our economy ... into public ownership and placing them under the democratic control of elected representatives of workers, consumers, and the community at large.” It argues, “We already have some essential industries that are publicly owned under capitalism that provide a glimpse of how socialism could work.” Actually, not. Under capitalism, nationalized industries are still subject to the laws of the market, and the dictates of capitalist governments. The National Health Service in Britain was never really socialized medicine, and under both Labour and Conservative administration its services have been slashed.

Socialist Alternative’s equation of “public ownership” of top corporations with socialism is not some local aberration. SAlt’s mentor, Peter Taaffe, leader of the CWI and of the Socialist Party in Britain, wrote in his treatise on *The State* (1983): “If the next Labour government introduced an Enabling Bill into Parliament to nationalise the 200

monopolies, banks and insurance companies.... A peaceful socialist transformation of society, would be entirely possible." This directly contradicts the basic Marxist analysis of the capitalist state, no matter what its form and who administers it, as an instrument of the suppression of the working class and all the exploited by capital. For workers to rule, this state must be smashed.

SAlt has its origins in the former Militant tendency in Britain, which for decades was buried inside the social-democratic Labour Party. Faced with the rise of blatantly pro-capitalist "New Labour" leaders like Tony Blair, who argue that "there is no alternative" to "neo-liberal" free-market capitalism, Taaffe's Socialist Party harks back to the "Old Labour" traditions, including the famous Clause IV of the Labour Party constitution calling for "common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange." Yet this would leave the *state* intact. And as we noted, like all social democrats, no matter how "militant," Taaffe and his followers seek to administer the capitalist state. What's more, when the chance has arisen, they have done so.

Today Sawant's program calls for "no layoffs or attacks on public sector unions." Really? An article on "Why We Run Socialist Candidates" by Tom Crean in *Socialist Alternative* No. 1 (September-October 2013) declares: "In Liverpool, England in the mid-1980s, our sister organization played the leading role in the establishment of a socialist majority on the city council," and that "The Liverpool socialist council, backed up by mass demonstrations and strikes of the city's workers, refused to impose cuts as dictated by the Thatcher government...." Actually, as part of a struggle with Thatcher & Co., the "Liverpool socialist council" *terminated the contracts of tens of thousands of municipal workers!* As Taaffe himself has written:

"The Labour group [in the Liverpool council] decided on the 'tactic' of issuing 90-day redundancy notices to the 30,000 strong workforce to gain that period as a breathing space in order to build the campaign.... However, the issuing of 'redundancy notices' turned out to be a major tactical error."

—Peter Taaffe and Tony Mulhearn, *Liverpool – A City That Dared to Fight* (1988)

This is the utterly reformist tradition that Socialist Alternative follows, even as it tries to cover itself with the revolutionary mantle of Trotskyism. While not so blatant, the program of piecemeal reforms to capitalism is common to the ISO, Socialist Action, Freedom Socialist Party and all groups of the social-democratic spectrum. Since they have largely interchangeable programs, the question arises, why don't they join together, or at least support each other's candidates? When SAlt proposed to the ISO that it endorse Sawant's 2012 campaign for the state legislature, the ISO dismissed it as a "shoestring effort." Yet as it dawned on them that Sawant might win for city council, the ISO switched gears and effusively endorsed her.

But then, opportunism is the name of the game for the reformist pseudo-socialists. The absence of revolutionary

substance is precisely what appealed to *The Stranger*, which usually backs Democrats, in endorsing Sawant. It noted "one of the biggest contrasts between Conlin and Sawant: The politics of the possible. Sawant doesn't talk revolution like your typical clown-variety socialist..." This bourgeois seal of approval was proudly reproduced on votesawant.org. Certainly Sawant stayed well away from the dreaded "R-word." Yet in this epoch of decaying capitalism, with social programs and union gains under assault across the board, the "politics of the possible" are a lie. The ruling class will not bestow lasting reforms on the working people and the oppressed, and any advances will be the product of hard class struggle pointing to socialist revolution.

While SAlt, SA, ISO, FSP et al. may make a ritual tip of the hat to Lenin and Trotsky, their practical politics are quite different from those of the Bolshevik leaders. To be sure, Marxist revolutionaries do not reject using the platform of bourgeois elections and parliaments – always making it clear that this is the terrain of the class enemy, that workers and the oppressed cannot peacefully take power through the ballot box – in order to expose the crimes of capitalism, dissipate illusions in bourgeois "democracy" and agitate for socialist revolution. Writing on the Bolsheviks' election campaign to the tsar's toothless Duma, Lenin declared: "the substance and mainspring of the Social-Democratic election platform can be expressed in three words: for the revolution!" ("The Election Campaign and the Election Platform," October 1911).

As Trotskyists, the Internationalist Group calls to break with all the capitalist parties, and to oust the pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats who chain workers to the Democratic Party of U.S. imperialism. We call for building a workers party, not a milk-sop parliamentary labor party as in Britain, but a revolutionary workers party to lead the exploited and oppressed in class struggle. This is very different from the [SAlt, ISO, etc.] social democrats who, although they may sometimes run their own candidates, look to the formation of a (bourgeois) "third party," what Sawant called a "mass political alternative to the two-party system." This is why they all look to the likes of Ralph Nader or the Greens while spouting populist rhetoric.

The election of Socialist Alternative candidate Kshama Sawant to one of nine positions on the Seattle City Council with 93,000 votes reflects wide discontent with the Democratic Party of Obama and the Clintons, which mimics the Republicans on virtually every issue. But that discontent is reflected as well in liberal/reformist enthusiasm for Democrat de Blasio in New York. Sawant declared that "I think we have shown the strongest skeptics that the socialist label is not a bad one for a grassroots campaign to succeed." Red-baiting certainly doesn't have as much political mileage as it used to, but as the reformists look to the ballot box with cookie-cutter social-democratic campaigns, revolutionary communists look to the class struggle.

Electing a "socialist" in a one-party Democratic town like Seattle may liven up the city council, but don't count

on much more. Sawant's first action as councilwoman-elect has been to announce that she will join the mayor-elect's "Advisory Committee of business and labor leaders" to discuss the \$15/hour minimum wage. The clear purpose of this class-collaborationist committee is to water down and delay any action, since the June deadline for its report would make a ballot initiative on the issue next to impossible. A class-struggle program to fight poverty wages would be to organize low-wage workers into a fighting union that could undertake real strike action. But that won't be decided in the city council.

The inglorious history of "municipal socialism" is symbolized in the U.S. by the "sewer socialism" of Milwaukee's racist Socialist mayor, Victor Berger. In France on the other hand, the "red belt" of working-class suburbs surrounding Paris were administered by Communist-led city councils for over half a century, and some still are. While housing projects were built, with the mass unemployment produced by capitalism, these turned into high-rise ghettos besieged by the cops. In Britain's cities, Labour-led councils were common, but Thatcher hobbled them by sharply restricting their finances. "Think globally, act locally" may be a watchword of liberals, but tinkering with local issues is not a road to revolution. Over a century ago, Lenin wrote:

"The bourgeois intelligentsia of the West, like the English Fabians, elevate municipal socialism to a special 'trend' precisely because it dreams of social peace, of class conciliation, and seeks to divert public attention away from the fundamental questions of the economic system as a whole, and of the state structure as a whole, to minor questions of local self-government."

As capitalism spirals downward, the U.S. is mired in the fifth year of economic depression, with wages continuing to fall and millions of workers unemployed so long that the government has written them out of the workforce. Obama's "affordable health care" act has ensured mega-profits for

insurers, increased premiums for union workers, and is cutting off funds for hospitals that serve the uninsured, notably undocumented immigrants. "Immigration reform" is a dead letter, while Obama has deported almost two million people. Even as Washington's global clout declines, it keeps raining death from the skies with its drones. Yet far from fighting imperialism, the social democrats all support the Syrian "rebels" who are clamoring for U.S. support.

The struggles for the immediate needs of workers and the oppressed must be linked to the fight to forge a revolutionary workers party. The reformists talk about "change" not revolution, about corporations not capitalism, about the 99% rather than the working class, and SAIt would have us "imagine 200 Occupy candidates running for Congress this year." Social democrats promote illusions in bourgeois democracy and the supposed reformability of capitalism. Genuine communists, in contrast, use the capitalist electoral platform – and every other venue – to prepare our class for decisive battles to sweep away the exploiters and oppressors. As the 1912 election platform of the Russian Bolsheviks proclaimed, they participated in elections "in order to prepare an army of class-conscious fighters for a new Russian revolution."

As it fights against poverty wages, unaffordable housing and health care, a communist campaign would emphasize that the imperialist war abroad and the war on workers here is one and the same. Only international socialist revolution that smashes the capitalist state and raises the working class to power can overcome the deepening impoverishment of the masses, by instituting a global planned economy, freed from the constraints of private property. As a metastasizing police state spreads its cancer everywhere, repressing the oppressed and spying on everyone, only the working class in power can put an end to wage slavery and rescue human culture from mounting barbarism. ■

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Seattle's "\$15 Later" Law – A "Historic Victory"? Hardly

The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 37, May-June 2014.

Last November, the liberal "socialist" Kshama Sawant was elected to the Seattle city council, on a platform for a \$15 an hour minimum wage. The victorious Democratic candidate for mayor, Ed Murray, also called for \$15/hr., as did his Democratic rival.¹ After some weeks' deliberation a select "Inequality Advisory Committee" of corporate lobbyists and labor bureaucrats produced a bill that do that ... by anywhere from 2017 to 2021. The *Seattle Times* (2 May) headlined, "Mayor's plan lifts minimum wage to \$15 – eventually," saying the "lengthy and complicated" route "lacks the punch of '15 now'," but had business and labor support. On June 2, the bill was approved by the city council as activists chanted "we are unstoppable, another world is possible."

The *Seattle Times* (3 June) called it "historic," as did Sawant. Her party, Socialist Alternative (SAlt), had earlier denounced the lengthy phase-in (only after 11 years – in 2025 – will workers who receive tips catch up to the rest) and elements on the "big business wish list." Sawant (who was on the advisory committee) presented a series of amendments to eliminate provisions for a lower "training wage" for teenagers and disabled workers, as well as delays for tips and health care benefits. All were voted down. She then joined her Democratic colleagues to make the final vote unanimous, later calling it "an absolutely historic movement" (Democracy Now, 5 June). An article on the SAlt website hailed the "victory" as "an historic achievement."

Was it? Sawant said the measure "signifies a transfer of income of \$3 billion from the richest in the city to the bottom-most workers," and the SAlt article claimed that "one hundred thousand workers will be lifted out of poverty" Nonsense, workers earning \$15 an hour *won't even be able to pay the rent*, which by 2017-21 is bound to be quite a bit higher. Certainly the vote shows that Democrats are feeling the need to do something to defuse unrest over inequality. Ballot measures calling for minimum wage hikes are being proposed in San Francisco, Oakland, Chicago and other cities. Yet "Council members acknowledged it would take more than a gradual pay increase to make the city more affordable," the *Seattle Times* account noted.

Democracy Now journalist Juan Gonzalez questioned Sawant about her turnaround on the mayor's plan, and the International Socialist Organization (which is every bit as reformist as Socialist Alternative) took her to task for

¹ See our article, "'Socialist' Elected in Seattle on Platform of Liberal/Populist Reforms," *The Internationalist* No. 36, January-February 2014.

proclaiming it a historic victory and for "abruptly dropping the campaign for a ballot measure to win a stronger law" (socialistworker.org, 13 June). SAlt's answer is given in its headline on the city council vote, "Victory for \$15 in Seattle! How Socialists Built a Winning Movement." For the social democrats – whether SAlt, ISO or the other brands – what's key is not mobilizing the working class against capitalism but projecting the image of a "winning movement" (led by them), no matter how paltry the gains.

Revolutionaries can support reforms that significantly improve conditions for the working class and oppressed, while emphatically denouncing their limitations and underscoring the need to bring down the whole system of production for profit. But the ballot initiative being pushed by Socialist Alternative was not, in fact, better than the mayor's bill. In particular, it included a provision, similar to one in Proposition 1 to establish a \$15 minimum wage in the Seattle-Tacoma Washington "airport city" of SeaTac last November, that allowed unions to agree with employers to *contractually exempt their members from the higher minimum wage*. This grotesquely anti-union clause was written into the law by the labor bureaucrats who drafted it!

In SeaTac, a county judge struck down the \$15 ordinance, agreeing with Alaska Airlines that the city had no right to set wages at the airport. In Seattle, SAlt's "15 Now" campaign drafted a ballot initiative as a pressure tactic against waffling by the Democratic mayor and city council. But at the request of Hotel and Restaurant Workers (HERE) union bureaucrats, at an April 26 conference SAlt included a clause similar to SeaTac's allowing *lower* union wages. Trying to hide its capitulation to the sellout bureaucrats, SAlt cynically called this sub-minimum wage clause "language defending the family health care plans won by unionized Seattle hotel workers" ("\$15 in Seattle is not the end – It is the beginning!", socialistalternative.org, 30 April).

The HERE labor fakers no doubt figured they could offer sweetheart deals of lower wages and lousy medical insurance to the bosses in exchange for union recognition. But while filling union coffers with dues money, this would fatally undermine the unions as a defense of workers against unlimited capitalist exploitation. For ostensible socialists to support such a dirty deal is shameful. So when SAlt tries to cover its left flank with cheap criticisms of the "corporate loopholes" in the Seattle minimum wage law it voted for, just keep in mind that it wrote the mother of all corporate loopholes into its "alternative" proposal.

P.S. Now that Socialist Alternative has dropped its ballot initiative and hailed the mayor's law as "historic," perhaps it should rebrand its campaign from "15 Now" to "15 Later." ■

Marxism vs. “Sanders Socialism”

If Donkeys Could Fly...

Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left

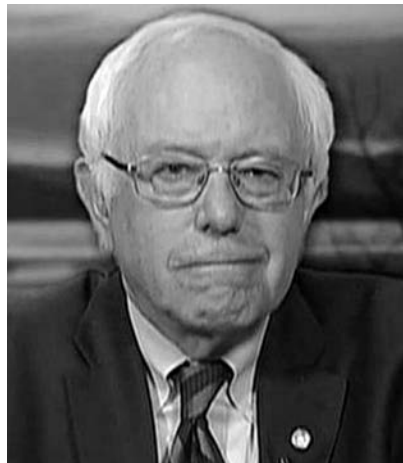
The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 40, Summer 2015.

As Barack Obama’s second presidential term limps toward the finish line, the promises of “hope” and “change” which his Wall Street sponsors and political marketeers dangled before voters lie in tatters. Bewailing widespread disillusionment in the American political system is a standard theme from talk-show pundits to academia. The press reports a weighty, “data-driven” Princeton University study finding that the “US is an oligarchy, not a democracy” – oh, what a surprise! – as it is “dominated by a rich and powerful elite.” Underlying much of the malaise is the fact that Obama has presided over a continuing economic depression along with the worsening of already spectacular levels of inequality. With Republican flat-earthers sparring over who is the most reactionary of all and war-hawk Hillary Clinton dominating the Democratic field, the electoral circus is back again.

The fact is that bourgeois “democracy” is and has always been the class dictatorship of the owners of wealth and property. It’s not just about the Koch brothers and Supreme Court decisions declaring corporations to be people. Long ago, Karl Marx “grasped [the] essence of capitalist democracy splendidly when ... he said that the oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class shall represent and repress them,” as Russian Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin wrote in *State and Revolution* (1917). Sound familiar?

Entering stage “left” to throw his hat in the ring in this tawdry drama is the senator from Vermont who poses as a loveable progressive, “Bernie” Sanders. Billed as an Independent, Sanders has long been a cog in the Democrats’ Congressional machine, including participating in their caucus and committee work. In the 2008 and 2012 elections, he supported Obama, who in turn went to Vermont to campaign for Sanders in 2012. Announcing a bid for the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination, Sanders brought in as campaign manager long-time Democratic operative Ted Devine, who got his start in 1988 managing the vice-presidential campaign of Texas Democrat Lloyd Bentsen, notorious for threatening to use nuclear weapons during the Korean War (see the chilling film *Atomic Café*).

Announcing his bid for the Democratic presidential



Campaign of Democratic Party “socialist” Bernie Sanders (supporter of war on Afghanistan and legalizing NSA domestic spying) aimed to bring disaffected “progressives” back to the Democratic fold to vote for war hawk Hillary Clinton.

nomination in early May, Sanders grabbed some headlines with the statement: “We need a political revolution in this country involving millions of people who are prepared to stand up and say, enough is enough, and I want to help lead that effort.” And what kind of “revolution” does he have in mind? Why, voting for the current government party, the Democrats. For her part, Hillary Clinton tweeted: “I agree with Bernie. Focus must be on helping America’s middle class. GOP would hold them back. I welcome him to the race.”

Sanders stated categorically that he will, as always, endorse whomever the Democrats eventually choose as their candidate for commander-in-chief of U.S. imperialism. Asked by ABC’s George Stephanopoulos, “But if you lose in this nomination fight, will you support the Democratic nominee?” Sanders replied, “Yes. I have in the past as well.” Stephanopoulos: “Not going to run as an independent?” Sanders: “Absolutely not. I’ve been very clear about that.” Like innumerable “progressive” campaign bids of the past – such as Jesse Jackson’s 1980s Rainbow Coalition, Howard Dean (2004) and Dennis Kucinich (2008), to name a few – the central political function of the Sanders campaign is to round up votes from disaffected voters, keep them in the Democratic fold, and deliver them to the eventual nominee.

It’s all a con game, and the first to fall for it is the opportunist left. Their appetites are whetted by the fact that “Bernie” Sanders, along with his man of the people image, sometimes styles himself a “democratic socialist.” In a country where the s-word is a no-no for politicians, this is a bit

of a novelty. But it boils down to shopworn calls to “tax the rich,” a dash of trust-busting rhetoric like that arch-imperialist “progressive” Theodore Roosevelt, an occasional shout-out to the thoroughly capitalist “Scandinavian model,” and a heavy dose of “anti-totalitarian” China-bashing.

Meanwhile, Sanders, the Democratic Party “socialist” and reputed antiwar candidate, has repeatedly voted for U.S. imperialist wars. He poses as a defender of civil liberties but has voted for laws extending and legalizing U.S. domestic spying on the citizenry. And this “independent” toes the Democratic Party line whenever it counts. But that hasn’t stopped various self-styled socialists, would-be radicals, former Occupy Wall Street activists and assorted other reformist left groups from jostling each other as they try to climb on the Bernie bandwagon. Challenged on Sanders’ “socialist” moniker a while back, former Vermont governor and then chairman of the national Democratic Party Howard Dean said on “Meet the Press” (22 May 2005):

“Bernie can call himself anything he wants. He is basically a liberal Democrat, and he is a Democrat that – he runs as an Independent because he doesn’t like the structure and the money that gets involved.... The bottom line is that Bernie Sanders votes with the Democrats 98 percent of the time.”

A “Critical” Voice for U.S. Imperialism

The pretensions of Bernie Sanders to be a leftist, let alone a socialist, are a joke. His cheerleaders of the pseudo-left may present him as a friend of “working folks,” but the real record of the Vermont senator is no laughing matter. As a “critical” voice of support to U.S. imperialism, Sanders is an enemy of workers and the oppressed world-wide.

Let’s start with his reputation as an “antiwar” politician. This takes a lot of chutzpah. Yes, he declined to vote for the first Gulf War in 1991 under Republican George Bush the First, as did most Democrats in Congress. But he then supported the murderous “U.N.” sanctions against Iraq which according to the authoritative British medical journal *Lancet* led to up to a million deaths, including over 500,000 children. Once Democrat Bill Clinton was president, Sanders voted for U.S. intervention in Somalia (1993) and Clinton’s war on Yugoslavia (1999). In the wake of 9/11, Sanders voted for the open-ended Authorization for the Use of Military Force, and has repeatedly voted for military appropriations for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Co-sponsoring a 2007 resolution requiring congressional approval before military action against Iran, Sanders stated: “America’s reputation internationally has been severely damaged and critical military, diplomatic, and intelligence resources have been diverted from the war in Afghanistan – a war I supported, and a country this administration has increasingly neglected.”¹ Currently Sanders is calling on key U.S. ally Saudi Arabia (which has beheaded 85 people so far this year) to run the war against Islamic State. Last July, Sanders joined the other 99 senators in passing a resolution backing Israel’s murderous invasion of Gaza.²

¹ http://www.ontheissues.org/International/Bernie_Sanders_War_+_Peace.htm

² See the video showing the senator yelling “shut up” at critics who protested this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vf2cCdggwgoM>

Like his fellow senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sanders was involved in negotiations leading to the release of U.S. Agency for International Development “contractor” Alan Gross from imprisonment in Cuba last December, and met with him on the island. Gross was on a spy mission for Washington handing out communications devices to pro-U.S. “dissidents.” The release of Gross was part of an agreement to restore the diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, freeing the last of the Cuban Five who courageously infiltrated gusano terrorist groups in Miami. But while stating that he favors allowing travel to Cuba, Sanders voted in 2001 to maintain the travel ban until Cuba “has released all political prisoners, and extradited all individuals sought by the U.S. on charges of air piracy, drug trafficking and murder.” This is a direct threat to Assata Shakur and others who fled the U.S.’ war on black radicals in the 1970s.

Sanders has also repeatedly supported protectionist and other reactionary measures against China, in line with the Democrats’ saber-rattling campaign against the Chinese deformed workers state.

On the domestic front, an article in *Counterpunch* (27-29 June 2014) noted that while Sanders voted against the original U.S.A. PATRIOT Act legislation, in 2006 he voted for “legislation that made the remaining fourteen provisions of the Patriot Act permanent and extended the authority of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to conduct ‘roving wiretaps’ and access certain business records....” Similarly, “Sanders voted against the original legislation that created the Department of Homeland Security, but by 2006 he had joined the majority of Congress in passing continued funding of that agency.” In July 2014, Sanders was a co-sponsor of the USA FREEDOM Act, which “is being hyped as a prohibition of the N.S.A.’s controversial mass surveillance practices, but it actually extends the PATRIOT Act for years and opens up new avenues for more invasive forms of government spying” (*The Hill*, 21 May).

With Obama racking up new records for the number of people deported (2.5 million so far during his presidency), Sanders has repeatedly used populist demagoguery railing against immigrant workers. In an official statement congratulating the Senate Judiciary Committee on its anti-immigrant immigration “reform” bill of 2013, Sanders “supported provisions in the measure that would strengthen border enforcement, prevent unscrupulous employers from hiring illegal workers and give legal status to foreign workers needed to keep Vermont’s dairy farms and apple orchards in business. Sanders, however, expressed strong concern that large American corporations in the midst of very high unemployment were using immigration reform to lower wages and benefits for American workers.”

Pseudo-Socialist Left Debates the Best Way to Chase After “Bernie”

Before Sanders officially threw his hat in the ring, Progressive Democrats of America set up a Facebook page called “Run Bernie Run! As a Democrat.” Soon “The People for Bernie Sanders” was set up by Occupy activists together with members of the “Left Labor Project,” CODEPINK and

others, who resurrected the tired lingo of class collaboration to appeal to “progressive forces to unite behind Sanders” in the 2016 campaign. *Jacobin* magazine (1 May) chimed in with a piece by its founding editor, Bhaskar Sunkara, urging: “We should welcome Bernie Sanders’ presidential run, while being aware of its limits.”

As for avowed socialists, with their ever-so-slightly-different formulas chasing after a hoped-for new “movement,” the social-democrats tailing after the Democratic Party “socialist” provide a snapshot of what is wrong with what passes for a left in this country. Two groups that are relatively prominent on the left – Socialist Alternative (SAlt) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) – stand out, although many other organizations share much the same outlook.

Feeling it had broken into big-time politics since the election of Kshama Sawant as a Seattle city council member, SAlt jumped to get a head start in the Bernie biz over a year ago. In an article hopefully titled “Bernie Sanders for President in 2016?” *Socialist Alternative* newspaper (16 April 2014) wrote that Sanders says that “he wants a dialogue with progressive activists before deciding on whether to run for president and whether he should stand as an independent or within the framework of the Democratic Party.” It helpfully urged Bernie to call a “national conference of progressive, community, and labor organizations” which, “we hope,” would generate enough “momentum” to “persuade Bernie Sanders to take the historic step of running as an independent left candidate for the presidency in 2016.”

Socialist Alternative was practically begging this bourgeois politician and de facto Democrat to run for president, as it earlier did with Ralph Nader. SAlt supporters pushed a Facebook page called “Bernie Sanders, Go Green” (as in Green Party), claiming that this could “radically alter American politics.” To be clear, the Green Party is a minor capitalist party that serves as a home for homeless liberal Democrats who feel that their party has abandoned them. If SAlt was disappointed in its hopes for a Green capitalist Sanders campaign, it nevertheless erupted in rhapsody when he announced his bid: “Bernie Sanders Calls for Political Revolution Against Billionaires,” it wrote (9 May), reveling in the “tremendous wave of enthusiasm” the announcement of his presidential campaign allegedly unleashed.

To cover its rear quarters, the *Socialist Alternative* article added: “Campaign Needs to Build Independent Political Power.” SAlt states that it considers it a “mistake” for Sanders to run in the Democratic primaries, adding that when he fails to win the Democratic nomination, “Sanders should continue running in the general election as an independent.” It waxes poetic about how this fantasy could generate “a huge impetus towards the building of a new political force to represent the 99%” – the populist catch-phrase of the short-lived Occupy “movement.” But it all depends on “how much pressure Sanders comes under from his own supporters.” It’s all about pressure, you see. Yet, Democrat or not, SAlt vows, “We will be campaigning with Sanders supporters against the corporate politicians....”

If donkeys could fly, pressure would transform the likes of Bernie Sanders into the opposite of what is: a capitalist Democratic politician. So these fake-leftists whip up enthusiasm for “Bernie” supposedly to pressure him to the left, as he helps corral votes for Hillary while ostensibly pressuring her to the left. This is the logic of a pressure group on the Democrats, always on the lookout for new opportunities to work with representatives of this party of capitalist oppression. And as a sop for the ranks, it peddles evergreen hopes of ever-bigger “success” through class collaboration. That is precisely how SAlt’s Sawant has functioned in Seattle. Generating illusions in the Democratic campaign of Bernie Sanders is just the most recent embodiment of the policy followed by generations of leftists in the United States who have helped channel discontent and disillusionment back into capitalist politics.

Among the fond hopes voiced by Socialist Alternative is that, if only he would follow their advice, “Sanders’ campaign could play a critical role in helping to lay the basis for a new political party, a third party.” SAlt’s fawning on “Bernie” has provided an opening for the International Socialist Organization, which was caught flat-footed by Sawant’s win in Seattle, an opportunity to pose as a “socialist” alternative to Socialist Alternative. The ISO argues that Sanders “could have set a very different example, with a far greater chance of success, if he ran for governor in Vermont against the Democratic Party’s incumbent.... In so doing, Sanders could have built momentum for a national third-party alternative to represent workers and the oppressed” (*Socialist Worker*, 5 May).

So for the ISO it’s momentum and more momentum, adding helpfully: “If Sanders had his heart set on national politics, he could have run for president like Ralph Nader as an independent, opposing both capitalist parties, the Democrats and Republicans.” Meanwhile, Ashley Smith, a leading ISOer, gushes about Sanders that “he’s really electrified a layer of newly-radicalizing activists and people on the left,” that “he’s really hitting on all the key notes, and I really identify with all the people who’ve been galvanized by his campaign,” but that “he’s making a mistake in running inside the Democratic party” (Real News Network, 26 May).

So the distinction between SAlt’s approach and that of the ISO amounts to very small potatoes indeed. After all, both fervently threw themselves into supporting the “independent” capitalist campaign of the anti-immigrant millionaire Ralph Nader (see “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers,” *Revolution* No. 2, October 2004). Both yearn for a “third party,” while presenting this as somehow innately radical. ISO leaders have repeatedly run on the Green ticket, from New York to California. While claiming to oppose the Democrats, the ISO celebrated Obama’s election in 2008 as a “watershed event,” emblazoning its journal with his campaign slogan “Yes We Can!” (*International Socialist Review*, January 2009).

Both SAlt and the ISO are in the business of tailing after whatever excites liberal Democrats, throwing in a little talk of “independence” to cover their fundamental allegiance to capitalist politics.

What's Trotsky Got to Do With It?

Groups like Socialist Alternative and the ISO present themselves as standing in the tradition of Marx and even, when it suits them, of Lenin and Trotsky. Yet both groups teach their supporters to dismiss as “ultra-leftism” the most basic ideas of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, starting with the most fundamental of all: that Marxism stands for *class* politics. For those whose guiding light is “relating to people where they’re at” rather than telling the unvarnished truth to the masses, the very idea of a *class line* in politics is sneeringly derided as sectarian. Yet so long as working people are tied to the parties of the bourgeoisie, whether red, blue or green, they will be chained to the capitalist system of war, poverty and racism.

The question of third parties is a very old one in American politics. Long before “Bernie” came “Teddy” Roosevelt’s 1912 Progressive Party campaign, with a raft of other “third party” capitalist candidates before and since. For Marxists, the fundamental question is not how many parties there are, but what class they represent. While liberals and reformists measure a candidate on a sliding scale of “progressiveness,” *Marxists oppose support to any capitalist candidate or party.* The bottom line for revolutionary communists, as opposed to these social-democratic reformists, is the political independence of the working class.

Marx was emphatic: “Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its own policy,” he proclaimed in a September 1871 speech to the First International. The following year, he and Friedrich Engels wrote: “Against the collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes” (“Resolution on the Establishment of Working-Class Parties,” September 1872).

And Trotsky? The ISO has been playing around with talk of Trotsky and Trotskyism in recent years, though its political record and tradition stand entirely counterposed to what the founder of the Fourth International stood for. Meanwhile, those who diligently search SAIt literature can find the occasional reference to Trotsky there.³ Leftists who actually want to be Trotskyists should check out what he had to say on “third parties” in the U.S. Early on in its degeneration, the U.S. Communist Party got sucked

³ The actual politics of both groups are thoroughly social-democratic. The politics of the International Socialist Organization are derived from the current led by the British ex-Trotskyist Tony Cliff, whose “state capitalist” theories served as a “left” cover for support to the anti-Soviet Cold War. Others among the ISO leadership came out of the current founded by Max Shachtman, who denounced Trotsky for defending the USSR in WWII and became a leading right-wing social democrat. Socialist Alternative was established by U.S. supporters of another British social-democratic current, the heirs of Ted Grant, which carried out decades-long “entrism” in Her Majesty’s British Labour Party, claims that police and prison guards are part of the workers movement, and proposed establishing socialism through an act of parliament.

into a “Third Party Alliance” which paved the way for the “independent” Progressive Party presidential campaign of Wisconsin governor Robert La Follette in 1924. (For details on this episode, see Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* [2007].)

In his fundamental work against Stalinist opportunism, *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Trotsky denounced how “the young and weak American Communist Party [was drawn into] the senseless and infamous adventure of creating a ‘Farmer-Labor party’ around La Follette.” There can be no two-class party, Trotsky insisted. “The misfortune lies precisely in the fact that the epigones of Bolshevik strategy extol maneuvers and flexibility... as the quintessence of this strategy, thereby tearing them away from their historical axis and principled foundation and turning them to unprincipled combinations which, only too often, resemble a squirrel whirling in its cage.” Indeed, “it was not flexibility that served (nor should it serve today) as the basic trait of Bolshevism,” Trotsky insisted, “but rather *granite hardness*” in the defense of basic class principles, beginning with the revolutionary political independence of the working class.

Trotsky’s 1928 document – smuggled out of Russia by veteran Communist James P. Cannon, which laid the basis for the establishment of the Trotskyist movement in this country – could have been describing SAIt, the ISO and others who justify each new unprincipled maneuver with the claim that it is justified by the need for tactical flexibility.

In 1948, the long-since Stalinized and thoroughly reformist CP backed the “independent” Progressive Party campaign of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s former Secretary of Agriculture, Henry Wallace. U.S. Trotskyist leader James P. Cannon was categorical:

“The Wallace party must be opposed and denounced by every class criterion.... Its differences with the Republican and Democratic parties are purely tactical. There is not a trace of a principled difference anywhere. And by principled difference I mean a class difference.... Bourgeois parties are not the arena for our operation. Our specific task is the class mobilization of the workers against not only the two old parties, but any other capitalist parties which might appear.”

This is the program of authentic Trotskyism which the Internationalist Group stands on in fighting for a *revolutionary workers party*. If the revolutionary party must be “the memory of the working class,” opportunist pseudo-socialists bank on people having a short memory. The allegedly historic Bernie Sanders campaign will go down in history as yet another episode in ruling-class efforts to deceive and subjugate the workers and oppressed in the service of the Democratic Party. The response of the opportunist left is another chapter in its sorry record of doing the donkey work for such campaigns. The work of building a party dedicated to leading socialist revolution depends on sharp *class* demarcation from every form of bourgeois politics, even when dressed up in “socialist” colors. ■

The League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons

Yesterday's "Obama Socialists," Today's Bernie Boosters

**Build a Revolutionary
Workers Party!**

Reprinted from The Internationalist No. 42, January-February 2016.

Bernie Sanders' presidential campaign has nothing to do with winning people to socialism. It's all about getting disaffected "progressives" and youth to vote Democratic in 2016, and at most to nudge this pillar of American capitalism in a slightly more liberal direction. Sanders is well aware of his role. In 2008, Barack Obama won by feigning an antiwar stance in a country sick of the Iraq War, and by exciting large numbers of youth and African Americans with the prospect of the first black president of this country founded on slavery. Today after eight years of Obama's administration, governing on behalf of Wall Street while continuing and escalating the U.S.' endless war in the Middle East, that brand is well past its sell-by date. Sanders has noted that Republicans win when there is low voter turnout, and in 2014 midterm elections 80% of youth didn't vote. So he seeks to "reinvigorate democracy" by pushing a liberal populist program spiced up with some "socialist" rhetoric and talk of a "political revolution" to attract them.

Some of Sanders' earliest backers are leftovers from the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement, with its populist jibes at "the 1%." (He goes them one better, attacking "the 1/10th of 1%.") This includes the hip Marxoid *Jacobin* Magazine, whose initiators came out of Cold War social democracy. On the other hand, the Vermont senator's "color-blind" economic populism has *not* attracted the tens and hundreds of thousands of young people and others who marched against racist police terror in 2014.¹ What Sanders *has* done is place much of the socialist left in a quandary, as reformists and opportunists dream of having an audience in big-time bourgeois politics. Some still want to maintain a pretense of independence from the Democratic Party of war, poverty and racism. Others want to go all the way with "Bernie," hop-

¹ See "Capitalism's Racist Electoral Circus Is Back," *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.



Jim Cole/AP

Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton yuk it up at December 2015 Democratic candidates' debate. Opportunist leftists snuggle up to self-described democratic socialist Sanders. Buyer beware: vote "progressive" Bernie and you'll get warmonger Hillary. But then, Sanders also supports imperialist "war on terror."

ing to pick up disappointed Sanderistas when he endorses "Hillary" after the charade of primary elections. Genuine revolutionary Marxists and communists, in contrast, warn against the Sanders swindle.

The pseudo-socialists have had some practice at this con game already. Almost all of today's Bernie Boosters were, in one way or another, "Obama Socialists" in 2008. In the "all-in for Bernie" corner we have the Communist (in name only) Party (CPUSA) and the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America (DSA). These star-spangled social patriots almost always back the Democratic presidential nominee no matter who it is. The CPUSA, which in 2008 proclaimed "A New Era Begins" over Obama's election, now headlines: "Feeling the Bern: Bernie Sanders is hot in Los Angeles" (*People's World*, 11 August). In turn, a DSA vice chairman was quoted in a front-page article in the *Wall Street Journal* (11 December) hailing Sanders, who has spoken at DSA conventions, as "a gift from the gods." The organ of finance capital quoted Sanders saying in an interview that he supports "the strong entrepreneurial spirit that we have in this country," that he is *not* for government ownership of the means of production, and only wants "to make certain that the wealth is much more equitably distributed than is currently the case."

Of the social democrats who simulate a degree of separation from the Democratic Party (the DSA doesn't even pretend), the most prominent are the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Socialist Alternative (SAlt). The DSA is a continuator of the "State Department socialists" whose chief ideologist was Max Shachtman, who split from Trotskyism refusing to defend the Soviet Union in World War II claiming it was "bureaucratic collectivist" (and who later became a propagandist for U.S. imperialism). The ISO is an heir of Tony Cliff, who broke with Trotskyism refusing to defend the USSR in the post-WWII Cold War, labeling it "state capitalist." SAlt is an offshoot of the Militant tendency of Ted Grant, who along with Cliffites and Shachtmanites (and most of the left) condemned Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s. In contrast, authentic Trotskyists *hailed* the Soviet army in Afghanistan and, while calling for political revolution to oust the sellout Kremlin bureaucracy, intransigently defended the USSR and Soviet bloc deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution.

We have already commented on the pseudo-debate between SAlt and the ISO over how to sidle up to the populist Democratic candidate ("Bernie Sanders and the Pressure Politics of the Opportunist Left," *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015). While SAlt has plunged ever deeper into the Sanders campaign, the ISO continues to piously wish that Sanders, the long-serving imperialist bourgeois politician, were "independent." This hasn't stopped these Cliffite social democrats from gushing with enthusiasm over his campaign, with article after article praising Sanders as a "breath of fresh air," "a welcome departure from the mainstream," saying everyone "should welcome Sanders' praise for 'democratic socialism' and his frequent appeals to the virtues of Scandinavian social democracy," that "Bernie Sanders' call for political revolution is welcome," etc. We've seen this "breath of fresh air" stuff before from the ISO ... over Barack Obama.

When Obama, then a senator from Illinois, started making waves with his high-flown liberal rhetoric and denunciation of Bush's "dumb war" in Iraq, the ISO quickly sensed an opportunity. It showed up at a February 2007 Obama rally in Chicago with a banner reading "Obama: Stand Up! Cut the funding!" As past masters in opportunism, they were soon repeating the Democratic candidate's campaign slogans, plastering "Yes We Can" and "The Politics of Change or Politics as Usual" (along with a flattering photo of Obama) on the covers of its magazine, the *International Socialist Review* (see "The 'Obama Socialists,'" *The Internationalist* No. 28, March-April 2009). Then, after Obama took office and presented his first federal budget the ISO proclaimed: "After 30 years of Republican ascendance in Washington and the retreat of liberalism at every turn, Obama's willingness to draw the line and promise a fight for his priorities is a welcome blast of fresh air." Obama's priorities included the biggest U.S. military budget since World War II.

Socialist Alternative likewise hailed Obama's war budget as "a sharp break from political policies during the last

30 years" (*Justice*, March-April 2009). Nowadays, SAlt is all Bernie, all the time. Its other, implicitly pro-Democratic Party campaigns like \$15 Now which proposed to win a \$15/hr. minimum wage by legislative and ballot initiatives, have fallen by the wayside as it pushes the populist Democrat. After an initial pro-forma call to "persuade" Sanders to run for president as an independent, which he had already rejected, and saying it was a "mistake" for him to run in the Democratic primaries, SAlt dropped any pretended scruples and has been busily participating in "People for Bernie," "Labor for Bernie" and similar efforts, while mounting the Million Student March as a pro-Sanders event. Now, in time-honored opportunist fashion, it has formed a new front group for the campaign. If the DSA has #WeNeedBernie, SAlt has set up #Movement4Bernie as its own wholly owned subsidiary to recruit out of.

A statement on the website of #M4B calls to "Join the political revolution against the billionaire class," in order to "help Bernie win in 2016, stop the right-wing Republicans and counter the Wall Street dominated Democratic Party establishment." Similarly, it calls to "Challenge Clinton" but "Stop the Republican Right." It even has a shout-out to "Many people [who] are excited about the prospect of having our first woman President." So just as Sanders carefully avoids labeling Clinton the candidate of Wall Street, although she practically invited it in the first Democratic debate, Socialist "Alternative" goes out of its way to *not* attack the Democratic Party as such, and certainly not to denounce it or call to break from this capitalist party. With its deliberate silences and weaselly formulations about "countering" and "challenging" the Democratic "establishment," SAlt is participating in Sanders' campaign in the Democratic primaries while cynically slithering around to avoid saying so openly.

If anyone had any doubt on that score, the first initiative of this new "movement" was to publicize a letter from SAlt's "socialist" Seattle city council member Kshama Sawant defending Sanders in a flap inside the Democratic Party over his campaign sneaking a look at a Hillary Clinton campaign voter database. The #Movement4Bernie is a get-rich-quick scheme, and SAlt has to move in a hurry, to make headway among Sanders' supporters before the Bernie bandwagon runs out of gas a few months from now, at the latest by the Democratic convention when Sanders throws his support behind Clinton. It's hardly a new tactic, but it marks the formal entry of SAlt into the Democratic Party. From having its supporters participate in Sanders' campaign, it has graduated to building that campaign as an organization. Whether #M4B says it in so many words or not, that fact is that the necessary first step to "help Bernie win in 2016" is getting people to vote for him in the upcoming Democratic primaries.

Socialist Alternative has class collaboration written in its DNA, it's at the heart of reformist social democracy. An outfit that considers cops to be workers, SAlt is willfully blind to the class line separating the working class and the capitalist class, pitting the proletariat against the bourgeois-

sie. Its entry into Democratic Party politics is a fundamental betrayal of any fight for working-class independence, the cornerstone of Marxist politics. As Karl Marx underscored in his 21 September 1871 address to the International Working Men's Association, "Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers' party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy." In the Sanders campaign, SAlt is going beyond its usual tailing after the capitalist Democrats to direct participation. In doing so, it is feeding and even creating illusions that the cause of "socialism," or at least its caricature of it, can be advanced through struggle within this bourgeois-imperialist party.

Various other denizens of the social-democratic swamp want a little more distance between Democrat Sanders and themselves, but despite some soft criticisms, none take him on frontally. And no wonder, since the program he is running on differs little from the reformist pabulum they routinely dish out. An article by David Freedlander on the Bloomberg Politics web site (13 October) quotes Steve Durham of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) saying of Sanders, "He isn't an anti-capitalist! He is for reforming capitalism" ("Bernie Sanders Isn't Socialist Enough for Many Socialists," 13 October). The FSP criticizes Socialist Alternative for its Berniemanism, but writes that "If he chose to, Sanders has the momentum and the numbers of supporters to break free from the Democrats and contribute toward launching a formidable anti-capitalist party" (*Freedom Socialist*, October 2015). Yet if Sanders were running as an "independent," he would still be a bourgeois politician, defending capitalism and imperialism.

The FSP proposes that various "socialist groups ... increase their impact in the electoral arena by joining together with a common platform." But the reformist common ground these social democrats share with each other (and with Sanders) is precisely the illusion of reforming capitalism, as the bourgeois populist SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) party proposed to do in Greece. It was an utter fiasco, for which Greek working people paid a heavy price. Socialist Action (SA), for its part, counsels leftists to sidestep the Sanders campaign and keep on with antiwar, anti-racist (Black Lives Matter), environmental and women's rights protests, with the aim of building a "labor party" ("Bernie Sanders & the Labor Movement," *Socialist Action*, 5 September 2015). Yet to avoid the common fate of such movements of being co-opted, sucked into the Democratic Party and defeated, it is crucial to directly oppose the Democrats and to oust the pro-capitalist bureaucrats in a struggle to build a *revolutionary* workers party.

The DSA, ISO, SAlt, [etc.] are virtually indistinguishable varieties of what they call "democratic socialism" (the adjective being a promise to the bourgeoisie, liberals in particular, that they are *definitely not communists*). Another neck of the reformist marshland is populated by a Stalinoid strain, heirs of the late Sam Marcy, who broke with Trotskyism to embrace Chinese Maoism. Following a 2004 split over non-programmatic issues, the Marcyites are divided into the Workers World Party (WWP) and its offshoot, the Party for

Socialism and Liberation (PSL). PSL vice presidential candidate Gloria La Riva told Bloomberg Politics, "I don't think he [Sanders] is a socialist. He ignores socialist countries," by which she means the Stalinist-ruled bureaucratically deformed workers states. But it seems that they're "feeling the Bern" anyway. An extensive article by PSL leader Brian Becker responds to "confusion" on the left about how to deal with "the sudden popularity of the self-proclaimed democratic-socialist Bernie Sanders."

In contrast to "some radical socialists" who have emphasized "how 'bad' Sanders is on some issues, or that he is not a 'real socialist'," Becker argues to focus on "the vast opportunity created by the explosive growth and surprising popularity of the Sanders campaign." He writes that, "even the most moderate socialists have been forced to swim in a very small pond" for the past seven decades since anti-communism became the U.S.' "unofficial religion." "Now the pond has suddenly got bigger." Becker goes on:

"Does it make any tactical sense, if you want to truly popularize socialism with the millions of new Sanders supporters who are supporting him precisely because they want change and see a 'socialist' candidate as the vehicle for change, that they are just really wasting their time or worse?

"No, it does not make sense. Perhaps it is a psychological fear by small fish who have been comfortably swimming in small ponds for so long that they fear the scary waves and powerful currents of larger bodies of water or simply being swallowed up by the bigger fish. Or, in the case of some very militant and radical young people who are unfamiliar with the crushing suppression of the socialist and communist left in the U.S., they are understandably turned off by and not seeing past Sanders' liberalism....

"We should argue that Bernie Sanders' program for guaranteed health care, college education and other major reforms is what's important and if Sanders is truly serious about winning these reforms, he should run as an independent.... If Sanders ran as an independent candidate for president, as a 'democratic socialist,' he would receive the votes of millions of people. That would be something really significant in creating a new political dynamic in the United States."
—"Socialist tactics and the Bernie Sanders campaign" (*Liberation*, 19 October 2015)

The article praises Sanders' reform proposals, not surprising since it overlaps with the electoral reformist program the PSL runs on. And, given the "surprising popularity" of his campaign, Becker lectures those "very militant and radical young people" (including PSL youth, perhaps?) to make nice with Sanders supporters and pressure them to pressure him to run as an independent – the same line as the social democrats.

But the power of positive thinking won't turn Sanders into his opposite: in addition to being a capitalist politician and supporting imperialist war, what he stands for is counterposed to socialism. Instead of pandering to his popularity, these are some of the hard truths that must be told to those with illusions in the Democratic Party "socialist."

In 2008, *Workers World* trumpeted "Millions in streets seal Obama victory" while the PSL's *Liberation* declared Obama's election "an occasion of historic significance," helpfully offering

the new CEO of American capitalism “a clear program focused on what the new administration should do to meet the needs of the working people; to fulfill the expectations its campaign has created.” Not wanting to spoil the party and turn people off, all criticisms were relegated to the inside pages (see “The ‘Obama Socialists’”). Today the WWP is taking a somewhat harder stance toward Sanders, no doubt partly for factional advantage against its PSL rival. A lead article titled “Sanders campaign has people asking: What is socialism?” commented that many workers “are confused because his ideas do not seem fundamentally different from those of others in the Democratic Party” (*Workers World*, 5 November). A couple of weeks later, an article on “Bernie Sanders and Cuban socialism” (titled more sharply on the WWP website “Why Bernie Sanders isn’t socialist: In defense of revolutionary socialism”) says:

“Sanders isn’t a socialist. Socialism must be defended from the misleading confines of the capitalist elections....

“Sanders has been useful to the ruling capitalist class, even though they don’t reward him for this. His campaign hooked the growing number of disaffected workers back into the Democratic Party with his commentary on issues such as the lack of affordable health care and the predominance of low-wage work....

“The task at hand is to distinguish revolutionary socialism from Sanders’ politics so the two are never confused.”

Indeed. So what is socialism?

Making “Socialism” Respectable Is Not Preparing Socialist Revolution

The WWP and PSL Marcyites identify socialism with Stalinist regimes like Fidel Castro’s Cuba. Genuine revolutionary Marxists (Trotskyists) defend those bureaucratically deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution. At the same time we insist that they cannot lead to genuine socialism without a proletarian political revolution to oust the narrow nationalist bureaucracy, establish soviet democracy and extend the revolution internationally to the imperialist centers. The ISO, SAlt and sundry other social democrats, on the other hand, see socialism as a “welfare state” writ large, with more extensive nationalizations than in Sanders’ favored Scandinavian model, but without socialist revolution to smash the capitalist ruling class and its state. Neither Stalinism nor social democracy (and much less Sanders’ New Deal liberalism) represent socialism as envisioned by Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, who fought for international socialist revolution to prepare the way to a communist society.

The basic argument of the pseudo-socialist “Bernie boosters” of every denomination is that Sanders’ candidacy, even though running in the Democratic Party – that elephant’s graveyard “where social movements go to die,” as one DSAer, of all people, accurately described it – opens a “discussion on what socialism is” and “popularizes socialism.” Besides, the platform he’s actually running on coincides pretty much with their own reformist minimum programs. Yet *what Sanders is advocating is precisely what socialism isn’t*. And what he’s doing in the concrete is trying to rope people, particularly young people, into voting for the Democratic Party of racist

police terror and imperialist war, which is presiding over the obscene enrichment of the capitalist class at the expense of poor and working people, which is deporting millions of immigrants, the party whose hold over labor and minorities must be shattered on the road to socialist revolution.

Is Sanders “popularizing socialism”? Not really. There *has* been a notable change in popular attitudes toward socialism in recent years, before most people had ever heard of Bernie Sanders. This is borne out even in rigged opinion surveys. When his candidacy was picking up steam, the Gallup polling organization added a question about whether respondents would vote for a socialist if their party ran one. The media duly reported that socialist was the most unpopular of all categories, that less people would vote for a socialist than for a Catholic, a woman, a black, a Hispanic, a Jew, a gay or lesbian, a Muslim or even an atheist. But when you look at the stats, what it showed was that 47% would vote for a socialist, and among young people ages 18 to 29, nearly seven in ten would vote for a socialist. A 2010 poll Gallup poll reported that 36% of Americans viewed socialism favorably, and a 2011 Pew poll found young people favored socialism over capitalism by 49% to 43%.

So things have changed somewhat from the past when calling someone a socialist was a drop dead swear word. This is primarily the result of the economic crisis of 2007-08 and the ongoing depression, with its mass unemployment – disguised by official statistics but acutely felt by youth who can’t find a job, no matter what. Less and less people believe in the bogus “American Dream” of getting ahead by working hard, since workers today make less than what they earned four and a half decades ago. It may also have to do with a reaction against a right wing which incessantly labels Obama a socialist (as well as a Kenyan, Muslim, etc.). What Sanders’ candidacy is doing is not making “socialism” more popular, but making it more respectable in polite bourgeois circles. But those who really fight for socialist revolution and for communism are never going to be respectable in bourgeois society. The ruling class and their media will treat genuine communists and revolutionary socialists as their implacable enemies, which we are.

Karl Marx in his writings on the 1871 Paris Commune and his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Friedrich Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) and V.I. Lenin in *The State and Revolution*, written on the eve of, and as preparation for, the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, insisted that socialism is a society without classes, the lower stage of communism, in which the state had “withered away.” This requires an abundance of material goods available to all, which presupposes the development of socialized production at the highest technical levels. To achieve that, a series of revolutions are necessary, in at least several advanced capitalist countries such as the United States. This would establish workers rule, the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” to replace what we have now behind the façade of democracy, the dictatorship of capital.² As Marx

² This was dramatically demonstrated by recent events in Greece. Despite the January 2015 election victory of a bourgeois populist party, SYRIZA (the Coalition of the Radical Left), on a program of opposition

wrote in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*:

“Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.”

Social democrats would have you believe that by enacting a number of social reforms (free education, free health care, throw in free public transportation and rent control), nationalizing banks, utilities, major industry and commerce (call it “public ownership” to make it more palatable), add a dash of “participatory democracy” and – presto! – you have “socialism.” Simple, and wrong. Won’t happen, the capitalists will see to it. Look at Greece. The Stalinists identify socialism with existing bureaucratic regimes, claiming it is possible to have socialism in a single country. Wrong again. Not only does that contradict the Bolshevik program, its falsity was tragically proven by the counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet degenerated workers state, and is underscored by the mounting counterrevolutionary threat in Cuba and China. As Trotsky warned in *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) as he dissected the anti-Marxist dogma of building “socialism in one country”:

“If a bourgeoisie cannot peacefully grow into a socialist democracy, it is likewise true that a socialist state cannot peacefully merge with a world capitalist system. On the historic order of the day stands not the peaceful socialist development of ‘one country,’ but a long series of world disturbances: wars and revolutions.”

So how do we get from here to there, from today when political power is monopolized by the two partner parties of American capitalism to the direct fight for revolution? The key is to develop the class consciousness and political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie. The response of reformist pretend socialists is instead to promote “third parties,” minor bourgeois parties like the Greens today, the Progressive parties in the 1910s and ’20s, and Farmer-Labor parties in the ’20s and ’30s. Such parties act as pressure groups on the major capitalist parties, mainly the Democrats, and most disappear after having served their purpose as an escape valve to blow off the steam of popular discontent. This is what the left-wing Bernie boosters are aiming at when they beg him to go “independent.” That will do nothing to develop class consciousness and would in fact be a roadblock to revolution, just as campaigning inside the Democratic Party for dissident “progressives” is.

As mentioned earlier, “socialist” groups building political support and even organizational vehicles to campaign for dissident liberal and populist bourgeois politicians is nothing new. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Stalinist CP-led People’s Coalition for Peace and Justice antiwar group supported a number of Democratic Party “dove” candidates. In 1984, the Marcyite WWP-led All-Peoples

to austerity, and a July 5 referendum in which over 60% voted against the vicious austerity demands of the European central bankers and the International Monetary Fund, it was the bankers who prevailed. See “Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital,” *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

Congress backed the presidential bid of black Democrat Jesse Jackson, and continued to organize rallies for him long afterwards. In 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 Ralph Nader ran as an “independent” under different party labels and was supported by several of the groups chasing after Bernie Sanders today. As we wrote in an article on “Capitalist Nader’s ‘Socialist’ Foot Soldiers” (*Revolution* No. 2, October 2004):

“The ISO and other reformists are fond of talking about an ‘alternative,’ appealing to those who would like a more ‘progressive’ leadership of the Democratic Party. Their role is to sucker young people back into the shell game of capitalist electoral politics. For Marxists, it is not a matter of picking between ruling-class ‘lesser evils,’ but building a revolutionary party that tells the truth. The truth is that all bourgeois politicians are our enemies....”

“Because of the class they represent, ruling-class politicians of every stripe are the enemies of full citizenship rights for immigrants, of a genuine fight for black liberation and women’s emancipation, of the struggle to defeat U.S. imperialism. For this reason they are the enemies of young people who want to change the world instead of trying to find a place in the capitalist electoral circus as illusion-peddlers for the bourgeoisie.”

Chasing after “progressive” capitalist politicians: it’s what opportunist pseudo-socialists do. And they do it time after time, because it leads nowhere, and certainly not to revolution. If they do ever manage to get together on a common reformist program, it could be called (paraphrasing Trotsky’s label for another unprincipled lash-up) the League of Pre-Squeezed Lemons. It shouldn’t be all that hard to oppose a somewhat-popular bourgeois presidential candidate. Relative to other tests that face those who would be proletarian revolutionaries, class opposition to the Democrat Bernie ought to be a no-brainer. Class-conscious workers and defenders of the oppressed won’t forget which “socialists” buckled under the featherweight pressure of the Sanders fad: such people are not serious. They rounded up votes for the party of war in Iraq and Syria, for the party whose mayors are the bosses of the racist killer cops from coast to coast. They can’t be trusted, who knows where they will turn in their next maneuver.

The Internationalist Group, section of the League for the Fourth International, has an opposite program. Our goal is workers revolution to clear the way for socialism. This puts us in irreconcilable opposition to Sanders the Democrat, and to Sanders the “independent” “socialist” who exists in the wishful thinking of the leftist Bernie boosters. As internationalist communists we call for a workers party that fights on the program of class struggle against all forms of class collaboration. And what we have to say to working people, African American, Latino, Asian, immigrant and other oppressed minorities, to women and radicalizing youth is the same as the Trotskyist James P. Cannon said in 1948 [see box on page 61]: *accept no substitutes*. We need to oust the bureaucrats, break with the Democrats and build a party on the program of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolsheviks. Anything less is a diversion that will only prolong the bloody rule of capital. ■

Why Big-Business Press Joins Reformist Left in Hailing Primary “Earthquake”

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to the Rescue of the Democratic Party*

31 JULY 2018 – The Democratic primary victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez over ten-term incumbent Joseph Crowley in New York’s 14th Congressional District has become one of the hottest political topics of the year. It’s “the age of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,” announced CNN on June 26 when the 28-year-old member of Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) routed Crowley, chairman of the House Democratic Caucus. In the solidly Democratic district made up of parts of the Bronx and Queens, her election to Congress is virtually assured.

The primary victory by “AOC,” as many took to calling Ocasio-Cortez, was hyped as a “political earthquake” by media from left to right. The gutter-press *New York Post* tried to whip up a scare (and raise sales) by headlining “Red Alert.” Yet bastions of the big-business press were very far from treating her win as a threat. In a glowing statement by its editorial board, the *New York Times* (“What Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Victory Means,” 28 June) called it “a vivid sign of the changing of the guard” in the Democratic Party, as “the liberal base is fired up” and “many newly motivated women and other activists around the country” prepare to take on Republicans at the polls this November. “Many voters are ready for something different. Politicians across the country should take note,” the editorial proclaimed.

The *Times* editors were far from alone in hailing the news.

- “Ocasio-Cortez Just Did Democrats a Big Favor,” noted the *Washington Post* (27 June).
- The “thrilling upset victory” of Ocasio-Cortez is a “Big Deal,” declared *New York* magazine (27 June).
- “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Insurgent Triumph,” headlined *The Nation* (30 July).

Something is going on here, and would-be leftists would do well to think through what it means. Even the most starry-eyed can’t possibly believe that the likes of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* – pillars of imperialist liberalism for generations – have suddenly gone “socialist.” Instead, the wave of glowing coverage reflects a view articulated by *The Guardian* (27 June): “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez represents the future of the Democratic party.” If sectors of the bourgeoisie hail this as very good news indeed, it is because they have become increasingly worried that the future of this racist, imperialist party, widely discredited among youth and even sectors of its traditional base, is in question.

So what is this “political earthquake” about? Far from seeking to bury the world’s oldest capitalist party, the “democratic socialists” hailed by the *Times* seek to rescue, rebuild and refurbish it. That has always been the reason for existence of the Democratic (Party) Socialists of America, which Ocasio-Cortez joined after

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Mark Lennihan/AP

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez greets supporters the day after her primary victory, together with political marketer Saikat Chakrabarti, former director of organizing technology for the Bernie Sanders campaign, co-founder of Brand New Congress and founder and executive director of Justice Democrats.

the DSA endorsed her campaign. This is the *opposite* of genuine socialism as put forward by Karl Marx, who stressed that the word can only be a deception unless it is based on the fight to win the political independence of the working class. For the workers and oppressed in the U.S., the most urgent and central task is a systematic and thorough break from the bosses’ Democratic Party, which chains them to the politics and institutions of the capitalist order.

That a panoply of reformist “socialists” were in tune with the *Times* underscores why revolutionary Marxists call them *pseudo-socialists*. The DSA hailed “AOC”’s primary win in a June 27 statement titled “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, The Political Revolution Continues!” harking back to the Bernie Sanders campaign that spurred the group’s rapid growth. For their part, the hipster social-democrats of *Jacobin* magazine (3 July) claimed: “On June 26, 2018, everything changed for the socialist movement in the United States” when the “insurgent race” of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez “catapulted the politics of democratic socialism onto the national stage.”

- Groups purportedly to the DSA’s left joined in the jubilation. *Socialist Alternative* (2 July), which has dived headlong into Bernie Sanders’ Democratic “political revolution,” hailed the “political earthquake” and bragged about having “worked with the Ocasio-Cortez campaign to deal a heavy

defeat to Crowley and his corrupt backers.”

- “Any socialist with a political pulse should be ecstatic about the victory of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,” wrote leaders of the International Socialist Organization (ISO), even as they reminded readers that “The Democrats are a capitalist party” (*Socialist Worker*, 11 July). The article, titled “How far can the left go in the Democratic Party?” is part of a roiling public debate in the ISO.
- *Workers World* (1 July) greeted the “amazing upset,” saying “Ocasio-Cortez will have the opportunity to really shake things up.” “We cannot predict how all this will play out,” but “She could be part of the process of people understanding why they need to mobilize independently of the system’s political machinery.”

So these reformists join in building illusions in the capitalist-imperialist Democratic Party which under liberal president Barack Obama was running the imperialist U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, deporting millions of immigrants (more than any U.S. government in history), the party that is now rattling sabers over “Russiagate” and calls Trump soft on North Korea. Meanwhile, on the home front Democratic mayors preside over the racist police murder of hundreds of black people yearly. The reformists just debate over “how far can they go” in this blatant class collaboration.

As the DSA held its national convention a year ago, *The Internationalist* explained the real political function of “Democratic (Party) Socialism” in an article distributed outside (in response to which DSA honchos called the cops on our comrades): “The DSA helps the Democrats use youth revolted by the status quo to yet again shore up that status quo by putting their liberal illusions in ‘democracy’ in the service of the political system of imperialist rule. The DSA ‘left’ does its bit with double-talk, fostering confusion and drowning any question of class principle in a soup of ‘flexible tactics,’ with *Jacobin* adding a dollop of sophistication to the social-democratic broth. And behind them jogs a crowd of pseudo-socialists hoping to catch up with the DSA after losing out in the contest to see who could best tail after ‘Bernie’ and his ‘political revolution’ for Democratic renewal. By pushing the Sanders ‘revolution,’ they all helped the U.S. political system fulfill one of its central functions in a period of turmoil.”

—“The ABCs of the DSA” (4 August 2017), reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 50, Winter 2017. This is also the lead article in a 70-page *Internationalist* pamphlet available from Mundial Publications (go to www.internationalist.org/orderhere.html to order online).

Members of the DSA “left,” together with their myriad camp followers in other groups, claimed that our critique was just a symptom of our supposed sectarian aversion to recognizing “new realities.” The influx of new members, they insisted, was radicalizing the DSA in a process that would push it away from and eventually out of the Democratic Party. The scientific Marxist term for this is: bullshit. As shown by the Ocasio-Cortez campaign, and the response to her primary victory, the DSA and its new members are moving further *into* the Democratic Party. And this, in turn, helps push the fake-left groups cheering them on further to the right, as they seek ever deeper unity with the mainstream social democrats.

“Girl from the Bronx” Becomes a “Political Rock Star”

In the days and weeks following her victory, everyone wanted to know Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s story. Where did she come from? How did she topple a powerful Democratic Party boss? What did “democratic socialism” mean to her? With her primary win, “The future of the Democratic Party is suddenly more clear,” wrote *Rolling Stone* (27 June). So how did it come about that “An Instant Political Superstar Is Born in a New York Primary,” as the *New York Times* (28 June) headlined its front-page story?

Her campaign video, made by Means of Production, a Detroit-based media company with ties to the DSA, portrays her as a veritable David going up against the Democratic Party “establishment” Goliath. “Women like me aren’t supposed to run for office,” says Ocasio-Cortez over a montage of her campaigning in immigrant and working-class neighborhoods. The marketing is flawless – a “champion” for the struggling, working-class New Yorker, ascended from among their own ranks, here to turn the Democratic Party around.

Donald Trump won’t know “how to deal with a girl from the Bronx,” she told talk show host Stephen Colbert. Maureen Dowd of the *Times* picked up the theme in a column titled “Local Girl Makes Good” (30 June), calling her win “a line straight out of a J. Lo Cinderella movie.” Scores of articles recount how until a few months ago she was tending bar at a Mexican restaurant near Union Square. Presented as the millennial everywoman, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is relatable to a generation of youth with college degrees stuck in low-wage, part-time jobs.

While crafting an image of someone who reluctantly chose to run for office – an outsider answering the call of duty – in fact Ocasio-Cortez is firmly rooted in Democratic politics. She phone-banked for Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign, and helped found the Bronx headquarters for Bernie Sanders’ 2016 presidential run. After some Sanders staffers set up a political action committee called Brand New Congress, Ocasio-Cortez was among those they solicited to run for office. She was also one of 38 candidates endorsed by another liberal pressure group, Justice Democrats. And this goes back a number of years.

As a feature article in the *New Yorker* (23 July) by David Remnick explains, she worked in Edward Kennedy’s Boston office while attending university, “dealing with constituent concerns, including immigrant issues.” Today, her “ideological lodestar” is Bernie Sanders, the *New Yorker* editor notes. “When I asked her about her political heroes ... there was no mention of anyone in the Marxist pantheon. She named Robert F. Kennedy. In college, reading his speeches – ‘that was my jam,’ she said.” (RFK is the guy who bugged Martin Luther King’s phones, waged a union-busting campaign against the Teamsters, and tried to wipe out the Cuban Revolution with big brother JFK, from the Bay of Pigs to threatening to blow up the world in the Cuban Missile Crisis, to launching endless attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro.)

So what about “socialism”? The *New Yorker* feature is titled “Left Wing of the Possible,” after the mantra of DSA founder Michael Harrington, who “sought to push the Democratic Party left,” as Remnick writes, adding approvingly: “‘The left wing of the possible’ reflects how Ocasio-Cortez practices politics.”



Star-spangled Democratic Party “socialists” and former Republican in patriotic appeal.

Remnick quotes Saikat Chakrabarti of the Justice Democrats, one of AOC’s closest advisers, quipping that “the right did us a service by calling Obama a socialist.... What people call socialism these days is Eisenhower Republicanism!”

On Twitter the day after the primary, AOC (@Ocasio2018) accused today’s GOP of being “weak on crime ... weak on national security ... weak on family values.” Unlike some fans on the left, Ocasio-Cortez makes no pretense of heading toward a break from the Democratic Party – she is up-front about the goal of reforming and renewing it as a centerpiece of her campaign. In a series of tweets on June 19, she emphasized: “We need to talk about the future of the Democratic Party.... WE have to ELECT a new Democratic Party.... We need to change the Democratic Party because that is what we CAN change.”

A key plank in her primary platform was the call for a “Green New Deal,” together with standard Democratic calls for gun control, “curbing” Wall Street by restoring the Glass-Steagall Act, to “reform our [sic] criminal justice system to be safer for everyone,” etc. This was augmented by Sanders-style calls (with echoes of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson-style Democratic Party liberalism) for Medicare for all, higher education or trade school for all, and a “federal jobs guarantee.”

None of this represents the slightest challenge to the capitalist state or property relations, yet they have been cited as evidence of alleged radicalism, together with Ocasio-Cortez’s call to “abolish” the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency. Just how “radical” that call really is can be seen by her official platform’s explanation (ocasio2018.com) that “Unlike prior immigration enforcement under the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service], ICE operates outside the scope of the Department of Justice and is unaccountable to our nation’s standards of due process.” Interviewed on NPR the day after her primary win, she said “we need to have a secure border,” stating: “We need to make sure that

people are, in fact, documented.” (See “Smash the I.C.E. Gestapo with Workers Revolution,” *The Internationalist*, 14 July.)

And it’s not only establishment Democrats, even some moderate Republicans are clear-eyed about Ocasio-Cortez: “Worried About Socialism Coming to America? Calm Down,” headlined a Bloomberg (2 July) opinion piece on AOC:

“[T]he new socialist movement doesn’t look that different from a standard progressive Democratic agenda. The big new ideas are single-payer health care and a federal job guarantee. These are expensive programs that will be difficult to implement correctly, but both could lead to higher economic output as well as greater quality of life for the poor and working class. In other words, the new socialist movement may turn out to be more about evolution than revolution.”

Investors need not worry, *Bloomberg* reassures them, the “evolution” will be good for business! For sectors of the bourgeoisie worried about the Democratic Party being widely discredited, particularly among youth, this is a “breath of fresh air” indeed.

“Establishment” Reboot?

Behind the pervasive enthusiasm among establishment liberals for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s Democratic primary victory there are cold political calculations. It’s all about the midterm elections. This is also true of so-called “women’s marches,” pro-gun control youth “anti-violence” marches and the Democrat-dominated national protests over the Trump administration’s family separation policy of snatching immigrant children from their parents at the border. All of these have been orchestrated by NGOs (non-governmental organizations) that are front groups of the Democratic Party, including moveon.org, riseandresist.org, womensmarch.com, marchforourlives.com, etc.

The Democrats are well aware that to win back the House of Representatives, and possibly even the Senate, they will have to bring out millions of young voters in November. Yet the “millennial” youth in their late ’20s who overwhelmingly despise Trump are also deeply disaffected with the electoral process and the Democratic Party in particular. Some 50% of eligible millennials voted in 2008, due to enthusiasm for Democrat Barack Obama, the first black president in U.S. history. But as disenchantment with Obama set in, the youth vote dropped to less than 20% in the 2014 midterms. And millennials are now the largest age cohort.

To overcome this, the Democratic Party number crunchers know that they have to counter youth disaffection with establishment politics. They are also aware of the several polls that show that a majority of young people say they prefer socialism to capitalism. While this sends shivers down the spines of Fox News, Glenn Beck and sundry right-wingers, as well as “centrist” Democrats of the Clinton ilk, more far-seeing liberals look beyond the label to see that the actual content of what Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA are calling for doesn’t go beyond old-line “progressive” Democratic politics. Spicing it up a little with the word “socialism” may up its millennial market appeal.

“No, Ocasio-Cortez Is Not Launching a Socialist Revolution,” headlined *Politico* (27 June) – and by “socialist revolution” it means “purging the corporatist Democrats out of the

party establishment.” Instead, “the Democratic Party’s ‘big tent’ just got a little bigger.” House minority leader Nancy Pelosi’s initial reaction to Ocasio-Cortez’s victory was dismissive, saying it was just about “one district.” The next day, on CNN, Ocasio-Cortez said “we’re in the middle of a movement in this country ... it’s not just one district.” But this “movement” is to the polls, to vote for the Democrats.

In another widely quoted interview, in which she said “democratic socialism” is something she “doesn’t lead with,” Ocasio-Cortez explained the strategy: “We need to be identifying our safest seat, and using those seats to advance the most ambitious vision possible that the Democratic Party wants to espouse.” So challenge old-guard Dems only where the Democratic nominee is assured of winning. The interview was published in the social-democratic magazine *In These Times* (25 June), which in a prior piece (“Signs of a Democratic Spring,” 14 May), profiled a dozen candidacies resulting from “a long-germinating rebellion within the Democratic Party that ... might just save the withered institution from itself.”

The point that “new blood is urgently needed” in the Democratic Party was central to the *Washington Post* (27 June) column “Ocasio-Cortez Just Did Democrats a Big Favor,” which argued that her primary victory “gives the Democrats a vital chance to own the emerging electorate of young, female, nonwhite and progressive voters. This coalition can beat Trump in 2020...” It’s noteworthy that, following the fashion among many liberals right now, this essentially writes off white male workers, *many of whom voted for Barack Obama* but went for Trump in large part because they were fed up with the economic policies of the “free-trade” establishment Democrats and Republicans that threatened their livelihoods.

Pillars of the Democratic establishment signaled that they were getting the “new blood needed” message loud and clear, even if some recalcitrant Clintonites played deaf. None other than Democratic National Committee chair Tom Perez – a particular nemesis of “Berniecrats” – proclaimed that Ocasio-Cortez “represents the future of our party.” The phrase has become a mantra. New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, who sits on the Senate Armed Services Committee, congratulated Ocasio-Cortez for her primary win (as Pelosi eventually did as well), and endorsed key aspects of Ocasio-Cortez’s platform, including abolishing I.C.E.

As the *Huffington Post* (4 July) reported. “establishment Democrats are now knocking on her door. A little over a week since her upset of Joe Crowley... Ocasio-Cortez finds herself as an unlikely kingmaker. She’s used her newfound power to boost the political fortune of a slew of candidates...” AOC hit the campaign trail in the Midwest, rallying Democrats from Kansas and Missouri to Michigan, and the fundraising circuit on the West Coast. And back in New York, Cynthia Nixon, the actor and de Blasio ally challenging Democratic governor Andrew Cuomo, has begun calling herself a democratic socialist.

As the *Guardian* noted, “progressives argue that they must ‘expand the electorate’ by bringing new voters into the political system – as did Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders.” The “democratic socialism” ploy is all part of a get-out-the-vote operation.



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez speaking at the Netroots Nation conference in New Orleans, August 6, where she called on the Democratic Party to “come home” and be “the party of [Martin Luther] King, of [Franklin D.] Roosevelt.”

Tripping Over DSA Coattails – ISO Headed for Split?

Ocasio-Cortez’s big primary win and massive media prominence have deepened the dilemmas that Bernie Sanders’ “political revolution” posed for the opportunist left. Pushed and pulled to be more and more “Democratic” and less and less “socialist,” they’re scrambling to figure out how best to enthuse over “AOC” but still justify their own existence, as the DSA registered yet another growth spurt after her victory. For these currents, after all, nothing succeeds like success – even if it’s “success” in building the illusions and mechanisms for rebranding and rejuvenating the imperialist Democratic Party.

While cynically pretending, mainly for internal purposes, to have something in common with Leninism and Trotskyism, groups like Socialist Alternative (SAIt) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO) gush over the DSA’s growth and “successes,” rightly seeing themselves as part of a social-democratic confraternity. But grabbing a piece of the action won’t be so easy.

So they seek to maneuver. While proudly proclaiming that it joined with the DSA to campaign for Ocasio-Cortez, SAIt faces more internal turmoil as it inevitably confronts the question: “All the way with the DSA?” Its July 2 article states: “After the exhilarating victory of Ocasio-Cortez, it is possible to go further and call on Ocasio-Cortez, Cynthia Nixon, the Working Families Party, the National Nurses United, DSA, and others to begin discussing the launching of a new mass membership organization” on a “radical program,” which “rejects corporate cash” and “runs candidates against the Democratic Party establishment and independent of them.” To be sure, “independent” of the “establishment,” but not of the Democratic Party itself.

An alternate reformist fantasy scenario is promoted by the International Marxist Tendency, which writes (*Socialist Revolution*, 1 July): “If Ocasio-Cortez operated in Congress as an independent socialist, she could call for nationalization of the Fortune 500 companies to be placed under workers’ control in order to provide the resources for full employment and a genuine living wage, healthcare, education, and housing for all,” and so forth and so on. You bet – and if donkeys could fly, their wings might generate enough wind power to provide the energy for printing a million more ridiculous appeals for capitalist politicians to please introduce “socialism” through the bourgeois state.

The International Socialist Organization – which joined SALT in hailing Sanders’ “socialism,” while seeking a formal degree of separation by not openly endorsing his campaign – has now broken out in full-on crisis over the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez “phenom.” One *Socialist Worker* article after another trumpets deepening collaboration with “our comrades in the DSA.” Even those arguing against jumping with both feet into Democratic primary campaigns hail the DSA’s “explosive growth” as “a terrific development for the U.S. left,” as ISO spokesman Danny Katch put it (“What’s the Path to Working-Class Power?” 27 July). But beneath the cheering lurks the question of whether the social-democratic ISO can stay afloat while seeking to ride the DSA tide.

In the wake of Ocasio-Cortez’s primary victory, a wave of anguished ISOers have taken to socialistworker.org, calling on the organization to cast aside formal reservations and obstacles to carrying out the logic of their commonly proclaimed enthusiasm for Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA putting “socialism in the air.” One declared: “Bernie Sanders decisively helped to re-popularize socialism by running for president as a Democrat, several others have since done the same at other levels of government, and a political entity, the DSA has given that ferment an organizational expression...” (Dorian B., “Confronting the Question of Socialist Electoral Strategy Today,” *Socialist Worker*, 3 July).

Pointing to the contradictions in the ISO’s policy of showering Democratic Party “socialists” with praise, while maintaining that the ISO itself should not call to vote for them (even as it supports minor bourgeois parties like the Greens), the writer states: “As thousands mobilize to elect socialists ... will we argue not to vote for or support them when they run as Democrats, even while they are contributing positively to the growth of *our* [sic] common struggle and to the building of socialist organizations which have struggled to get off the ground for nearly three generations?” Voting for and supporting such candidates of the imperialist Democratic Party is “not a question of principle or of our basic political program,” says the author.

Another piece begins: “On the day after Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s stunning victory, the internet lit up with leftist joy. Twelve hundred people joined DSA.” The authors proceed to describe the call by some DSAers to “use the Democratic Party as a launching pad to cohere a mass base for socialism” (sic), which “could eventually break away into independent political activity.” They state: “At least for now, those comrades appear to be correct” – after all, “DSA now has over 40,000 members” (Jason Farber and Zach Zill, “What We Don’t Talk About When We Talk About the Democratic Party,” *Socialist Worker*, 3 July). Well, that clinches it for sure! QED.

In the lingo of some DSAers around *Jacobin*, this supposed strategy is known as a “dirty break,” as distinguished from a clean break with the Democrats. In a piece titled “Breaking Clean or Dirty?” (*Socialist Worker*, 17 July), ISOer Owen Hill claims that “the debate between dirty and clean break is not a debate on the grounds of principle.” In reality, the whole “dirty break” business is a political rationalization, an oh-so-cute and clever way of saying: run in the Democratic Party now, talk about someday ceasing to do so in the sweet by and by.

Yet another long-time ISOer, Hadas Thier (“New Conditions Give Rise to New Opportunities,” *Socialist Worker*, 23 July), writes that “we need to reassess our past arguments” and “assess each electoral opportunity on the basis of the opportunities it affords us.” She sums up: “Endorsing a candidate who we know cannot, through their election, change the Democratic Party, let alone the system, may be a contradictory position. But so, too, is to argue that we think the election of a candidate represents a step forward for our side, but not one which we will support.” Instead of “seeking to shield our members or collaborators from contradictions, we should work alongside them” – all of which amounts to a call for the ISO to go with the flow and embrace a less “contradictory” form of tailing the Democrats.

Weighing in on essentially the same lines is Paul Le Blanc, who writes (*Socialist Worker*, 4 July): “I am deeply impressed with the remarkable growth, leftward movement and electoral successes of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA).” A former member of the Socialist Workers Party who has become a “theoretical” heavy in the ISO, Le Blanc advises those seeking “a strategy for building socialism through the Democratic Party” to adopt an “overarching political program” along the lines of “the detailed *Freedom Budget for All Americans*, put forward in 1966 by A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, Michael Harrington, Martin Luther King Jr. and others.” And what became of that doomed effort (the brainchild of Max Shachtman’s Realignment faction in Norman Thomas’ “State Department Socialist” Party) to push the Democrats to the left?

Meanwhile, some in the ISO leadership try to hold on to the line that, while enthusing over Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez is great, openly calling to vote for Democratic candidates is going too far. They hew to the group’s traditional stance of support for minor bourgeois parties and politicians, like immigrant-bashing millionaire Ralph Nader. Prominent ISOers have run as Green Party candidates. One such leader is Todd Chretien, who in 2006 ran for senator on the Green Party ballot line. In a response to Thier, Chretien asks (*Socialist Worker*, 26 July):

“If Nader, an idiosyncratic figure who was vilified by the Democrats, could win nearly 3 million votes, couldn’t Bernie do as well or better, even while running as an independent? Couldn’t DSA candidates like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Jovanka Beckles and Julia Salazar make sustained inroads at the local level running as independents? Of course they could. But here’s the kicker: They probably couldn’t *win* in the short term.” [emphasis in original]

A curious aspect of Chretien’s piece is his statement: “I want to flag an assumption that we all share that may not be apparent to SW readers who are not members of the ISO”: “We are committed

to a democratic centralist method of organization.” Well, yes, that certainly wouldn’t be apparent to readers watching an existential dispute in the ISO raging on its public website. Though couched in sugary assurances that all are basically on the same page – namely, they are all opportunists, just looking for the right angle – the controversy could presage a hemorrhage of members, perhaps a split. Whatever, things certainly aren’t looking good for the ISO.

To understand this whole debate and the general commotion in the opportunist milieu, it’s necessary to understand their mindset. First of all, various of these social-democratic groups (DSA, ISO, SAlt, IMT) in fact have programs that differ very little with each other, with laundry lists of reforms to the unreformable capitalist state. More fundamentally, they see these developments on the left-right axis of *bourgeois* politics. Trump is right-wing, the Clintons are center, Obama is a tad to the left, Sanders a bit more, Ocasio-Cortez and the DSA a bit more. It’s all a continuum according to that outlook, and for them, any movement to the left, however illusory, is positive. So they try to pressure the DSA to the left, while the DSA pressures the mainline Democrats ... and in the process they all move to the right.

Revolutionary Marxists have a fundamentally different – and counterposed – view, from a *class* perspective. Liberals, even left liberals, are no less enemies of the working class than right-wing conservatives. Who carried out the post-World War II purge of the “reds” that built the labor movement? It wasn’t McCarthyite witch-hunters but liberal Democrats who led the charge. Who are the mayors who are the bosses of the racist killer cops in the big cities of the U.S.? Almost all Democrats. Who brought you the

war on Vietnam? Democrats JFK and LBJ. And now we have the latest crop of “democratic socialists” recruiting young people to vote for the party of Obama (the “deporter-in-chief”) and Clinton (who is banging the war drums over North Korea and Syria).

Marxists understand that society is based on a division among *classes* with irreconcilable differences. Far from a move in the right direction, trying to give a bourgeois party a more “left” face is the *opposite* of a proletarian strategy, as it seeks to bolster the image and credibility of this party of the class enemy. It strengthens the barriers to the working class breaking from capitalist politics and building its own revolutionary workers party, independent of and fighting *against* all bourgeois parties. Bolshevik leaders Lenin and Trotsky told the truth sharply and clearly: the proponents of social democracy (a/k/a “democratic socialism”) are professional betrayers of the fight for socialist revolution.

The social-democratic groups are in the business of selling the idea that capitalism can be reformed, propping up this decrepit system which is already in terminal decay and is destroying past gains left and right. That business (a dirty one, to be sure) requires reliance on government parties – in the U.S., the Democrats first and foremost – that have their hands on the levers of the state power upholding the existing social order. Whether they wholeheartedly endorse Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and others engaged in refurbishing and rejuvenating the Democratic Party, or fawn over their gains while offering soft criticisms, the opportunist left is helping build the imperialist Democratic Party of war, racist repression and mass deportations. ■

This is What Social Imperialism Looks Like

Republican senator John McCain was an imperialist war criminal notorious for bombing civilians in Vietnam; war-mongering from Indochina to Afghanistan, Gaza, Iraq and Syria; and being an all-purpose racist reactionary.

“I admire President Nixon’s courage” for ordering “the mining, the blockade, the bombing” of North Vietnam as part of his escalation of genocidal terror (which included the bombing of Hanoi’s Bach Mai civilian hospital) in 1972.

–John McCain (2008)

When McCain died on 26 August 2018, his imperialist colleagues and would-be colleagues fell all over themselves glorifying this enemy of the world’s oppressed. The paeans of praise included:

“John McCain was an American hero, a man of decency and honor and a friend of mine.”

–Senator and Democratic “socialist” presidential contender Bernie Sanders

“John McCain’s legacy represents an unparalleled example



of human decency and American service.... He meant so much, to so many.”

–Democratic congressional candidate and DSA member Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (25 August 2018, on her Twitter account).

Remember this when you hear Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez & Co. praised by pseudo-socialist groups purveying what Lenin called social-imperialism: socialism in words, imperialism in reality. ■

SAlt's Sawant Backs Seattle's Top Cop*



Nuccio DiNuzzo/Chicago Tribune

When Seattle police veteran Carmen Best (left) was appointed chief of police, city council member Kshama Sawant (right) of Socialist Alternative voted to confirm the top cop. Police are the armed fist of the capitalist ruling class.

The following article is reprinted from The Internationalist No. 53, September-October 2018.

A “socialist” voting to support the chief of police? Yes, it just happened in Seattle, Washington, when city council member Kshama Sawant of Socialist Alternative (SAlt) “stunned” observers by voting on August 13 to confirm the city’s new chief of police. As capitalism’s guardians in blue murder black and Latino people every day, this shows how low fake-socialist groups are willing to go as they immerse themselves in bourgeois politics.

One of the opportunist organizations most avidly purveying “Sanders socialism,” SAlt has faced big problems with the growth of the Democratic Socialists of America. Hying the Vermont senator’s “political revolution” for Democratic renewal was supposed to help it hit the big time, but it was the DSA that reaped the benefits, while SAlt has been left in the dust. This has meant increasing upheaval, with chunks of the organization decamping to the DSA.

In contrast, some members repelled by SAlt’s “Bernie turn” have sought to understand the roots of its opportunism. This led former leaders of its New Hampshire branch to investigate the politics of the Internationalist Group, and fuse with the IG in June. (See “Class Struggle Education League Fuses with Internationalist Group” and “An Open Letter to Socialist Alternative Oppositionists, Past and Present,” *The Internationalist* No. 52, May-June 2018.)

Kshama Sawant is SAlt’s political superstar who gave a “socialist welcome to Bernie Sanders” when he campaigned in Seattle (promoting a revival of FDR’s New Deal on the anniversary of Social Security). Her alliances with local Democrats have caused unease among some SAlt members, but the group is determined to move further and further into Democratic Party terrain. As a badge of social democrats’ aspiration to administer the capitalist state, SAlt pretends that cops are “workers in uniform.”

Sawant already praised the process of hiring the previous police chief, Kathleen O’Toole, back in 2014, saying it was “positive ... that a woman will be at the head of what has been and still is a male-dominated bastion,” and describing the new chief’s call for a “tiered approach for policing protests” as a “welcome change” (sawant.seattle.gov, 23 June 2014).

Now Sawant has taken the next step. When O’Toole stepped down last year, she was replaced on an interim basis by Carmen Best, a 26-year veteran of the Seattle PD, who was then confirmed for the top cop job at the August 13 city council meeting. “Stunning the crowd, Councilmember Kshama Sawant voted ‘yes’ in support of Best,” reported KOMOnews.com. Sawant justified her backing of Best to become the chief of capitalist cop repression with the claim that since Best is African American, Sawant’s support was “a vote of solidarity with my black and brown fellow community members” (Seattle City Council Insight, 13 August).

No, Sawant’s vote was a pledge of allegiance to the racist capitalist state. Since ghettos and barrios across the country erupted against racist police terror in the 1960s, the ruling class has allowed some black faces in high places, insultingly hoping this could piece off the black population that continues to face cop terror. This racist repression goes on today, regardless of whether the person heading up the institution enforcing it is black, a woman, or both. Just look at Baltimore, where there was a black woman mayor and black police chief, and almost half the cops on the force were black, when the police murder of Freddie Gray shook the city and the country. As members of the CUNY Internationalist Clubs and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth chanted in protests against the racist police murders of Freddie Gray, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile and so many others: **Only revolution can bring justice!** Part of building the party to lead that revolution is relentless exposure of the opportunists that sully the word “socialism” with their obeisance to the bourgeoisie. ■

