

Marxist Bulletin No. 2

The Nature of the Socialist Workers Party— Revolutionary or Centrist?

DISCUSSION MATERIAL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCY WITHIN THE SWP

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SPARTACIST

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PREFACE

"It is necessary that every member of the Party should study calmly and with the greatest objectivity, first the substance of the differences of opinion, and then the development of the struggles within the Party. Neither the one nor the other can be done unless the documents of both sides are published. He who takes somebody's word for it is a hopeless idiot, who can be disposed of with a simple gesture of the hand."

--Lenin (as printed over the mast-head of the first issue of The Militant, 15 November 1928)

The present collection of discussion material documents the origin and development of differences which led to the still persisting split among those forces which comprised the left wing of the Socialist Workers Party. Much of this material has never previously been circulated beyond the discussion participants themselves. All of it now appears publicly for the first time.

Struggle Against Wohlforth's Impressionism

The division in the tendency began simply enough as an effort by James Robertson to stabilize the tendency in its work by countering the zig-zag course that the principal tendency spokesman, Tim Wohlforth, was pursuing. In the months following the June 1961 SWP Convention, Wohlforth first made a wild attempt to wage a power fight against the Party Majority for control of the Young Socialist Alliance. He then went over to a fanciful discovery that the party was still solidly revolutionary though confused by the present revisionist leadership (which had merely been around for 35 years) and would be set right by exemplary hack work for the Majority's revisionist line by the Minority which would then become the new majority. In intention and effect Wohlforth was to spend the next year offering the Dobbs regime in the SWP a bloc--to police the Revolutionary Tendency on the left and against the Swabeck and Weiss pro-Maoists and liquidators on the right. But with the discrepancy in forces involved on each side, the proffered bloc was rejected by the Majority as the over-ambitious effort of a mouse to make love to an elephant. In response to this tactical line based on wishful thinking others sought to link the tactics of the Revolutionary Tendency to an estimation of the SWP in a more long term historical perspective. Faced with this slowly mounting opposition to his leadership, Wohlforth switched back and forth throughout the summer of 1962 on the emerging issue of the nature of the SWP--now insisting on the continued soundly revolutionary working-class character of the party, then agreeing that it had become politically centrist, then again denying that the issue had any validity except as a factional red herring.

Finally, following the writing of "The Centrism of the SWP and the Tasks of the Minority" by Robertson and Ireland, Wohlforth felt his control of the tendency slipping away and launched a campaign to split rather than face the possibility of ending up in the minority if the discussion were permitted to go to a conclusion by establishing clear-cut majority and minority positions. To justify such a split and to frighten Minority supporters outside New York City, Wohlforth raised a hue and cry over a split, but not his own. He announced

that the R-I document was the preparation for a split from the SWP. The logic behind this accusation seemed to rest on the simple assumption by Wohlforth that since he would certainly leave the SWP if he thought it was degenerated, therefore that's what Robertson was planning. (As evidence of this logic operating in Wohlforth's head, it should be noted that by the fall of 1963 Wohlforth, when he was ready to leave the SWP, when from thinking the party had always remained revolutionary to the position that it had never been really revolutionary!) To give plausibility to the split accusation, Wohlforth in his "Towards the Working Class" was obliged to create such a fictional and deliberately vicious caricature of the R-I position that however good an excuse it proved two years later for the expulsions from the party, it was simply not believed then by sufficient forces within the tendency. Instead it produced such a reaction that when Wohlforth and Philips broke away, despite the fact that they were the only SWP National Committee members in the group, hence the principal spokesmen, they took less than a third of the Minority supporters with them.

The SWP's Rightward-Moving Centrism

Massive vindication for the "centrist" position was not long in coming. Even as Philips and Wohlforth, backed by Healy, were consummating the split (the unprincipled particulars of which is the subject of Marxist Bulletin #3 Part I), the Cuban missile crisis had broken and the SWP leadership embraced J.P. Cannon's revealing justification of Khrushchev's role: "What else could he have done under the given circumstances?" This statement implicitly identifies a revolutionary-proletarian policy with that of a Stalinist bureaucracy trapped within the narrow confines of sabre-rattling alternating with capitulation--the latter invariably intended at the expense of others.

The SWP Majority's profound break with Trotskyism, i.e., revolutionary Marxism, in embracing the Castro leadership as the colonial world's road to Socialism had ripped the guts out of the party's domestic line as well. The SWP's answer for the Southern Negro struggle in the period following the missile crisis was an ever shriller call for Federal deputies or troops to do the job. This finally culminated in the grotesque demand upon the imperialist butchers: "Withdraw the Troops from Viet Nam and Send Them to Mississippi!" In November 1963 the SWP central leadership in panic following the Kennedy assassination grovelled before the American Bourgeoisie directly. Dobbs can never live down his cowardly telegram printed in The Militant of condolences to the widow of the political chief of American imperialism.

Internationally the SWP has performed comparably. Following its unification with the Pabloites to form the "United Secretariat" of the Fourth International, events in Ceylon and in Algeria have been shattering blows. A gang of social-democrats, thinly disguised as Trotskyists in order to retain favor in the eyes of the Ceylonese working class, openly broke from Marxism in 1964 to join the capitalist government. Until the Ceylonese betrayal could no longer be hidden, the United Secretariat had kept this group as its official section, the largest they had, and had sheltered it against all criticism in exchange for Ceylonese support to international revisionism.

Until the fall of Ben Bella the United Secretariat and the SWP acclaimed the Algerian government as leading a revolutionary transition from capitalism. Only after the sharp right turn of the Boumedienne coup did Joseph Hansen and the other Pabloite ideologues coolly admit that the Ben Bella regime had been a bonapartist one, tied to French imperialism and resting upon a fundamentally capitalist society.

Meanwhile the former international secretary of the revisionists, Michel Pablo himself, has become a personification of the consequences of the line associated with his name. He had become a high official in the Ben Bella government; had broken away from even the United Secretariat as too sectarian and narrow for revisionist tasks (besides the association could embarrass "his" Algerian government's close ties with the Russian state). At last report his whereabouts are still unknown following the Boumedienne coup.

Where We Stand

As long ago as October 1961, Robertson wrote in a letter found in the present collection that what was needed is "a revolutionary Marxist International, not an international publicity agency for assorted 'leftward-moving' bureaucracies."

The Spartacist, as the continuation of the Revolutionary Tendency in the Socialist Workers Party, seeks consistently and uncompromisingly to march under the revolutionary banner of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. The Spartacist knows the working class is the only class which can effect a genuinely progressive re-ordering of society, which can only fully come about on an international scale. History has shown that the working class requires the leadership of a Leninist party for the conquest of power in every country. The main task before revolutionists is therefore the construction of the world party built of national sections which can successfully lead the workers in their struggles against the capitalists and their agents, including the Stalinist bureaucracies. The struggle against revisionism, to be viable, is inseparably linked to the struggle to maintain the continuity of the Marxist movement. The movement does not need "new beginnings"; rather it needs to carry forward into new situations the understanding gained by our predecessors--of the Communist International of Lenin's day and the Fourth International and Socialist Workers Party of Trotsky's.

An Uncompleted Discussion

If the split by Philips and Wohlforth had not cut the process short, the likelihood is that among the three main documents introduced by what was evolving as the incipient majority within the old tendency, Geoffrey White's "The Tendency and the Party," written from the vantage point of an already developed discussion, would have become--with some amending--the official tendency majority position. Shane Mage's brilliant "Theses..." suffered from a lack of necessary comprehensiveness because of their extreme brevity.

Never having completed the arrival at a formal position proved in the sequel to have been poor practice. In the first place the several documents sharing a common basic position were not identical among themselves. Thus a certain ambiguity was left, especially in

tactical implementation in party work. This was not immediately apparent as the impact of the split was severe enough for the tendency forces remaining to be preoccupied for some time in a struggle either to heal the breach or in any event to consolidate the tendency as it was.

In addition we were later placed in an awkward position when the Philips-Wohlforth group revealed to the party Majority some of the Robertson-Ireland document's more flamboyant and extreme phrases and formulations which had been written in the successful effort to cut away any middle ground from Wohlforth, to compel him either to accept or oppose the characterization of the SWP as centrist and the resulting orientation. When the Control Commission demanded to know the position of the Revolutionary Tendency toward the Harper and Robertson-Ireland drafts, those undergoing interrogation could not honestly give a clear-cut answer as to where they stood in a formal sense on the documents in question (and the Control Commission brushed aside fuller political explanation as evasive). And it was to us absolutely out of the question to buttress our case by turning over White's and Mage's drafts thus directly involving them in the party witch hunt--a bitter joke since White and Mage were about to be thrown out also for the crime of political association.

Finally, the absence of an adopted position has made possible a certain continuing formal weakness in the definition of the tendency, e.g., as explicitly democratic-centralist, which will be with the group until the adoption of documents at the projected founding conference of the Spartacist League.

"A Simple Gesture of the Hand"

Several well-meaning friends have asked why the Spartacist bothers to publish this material, arguing that it either deals with out-lived disputes or that the questions dealt with are so specialized ("sectarian") as to be of interest only to a narrow circle of sophisticates (in which category such well-wishers invariably place themselves). The reply must be in accord with the spirit of Lenin's quotation printed at the head of this preface.

The issue of the Socialist Workers Party necessarily continues to hold great importance for a group struggling against revisionism within the Trotskyist movement. The Spartacist group remains convinced that many cadres for the revolutionary movement in the United States can yet come from the SWP. But this will only come to pass through the patient effort to understand and intervene at each point against the SWP's degeneration. The internal tendency discussion in 1961-62 is a valuable contribution toward such understanding.

Moreover, this tendency discussion throws a glaring light upon the participants themselves. Moments of crisis--including sharp internal struggle--reveal far more of the real character of individuals and groupings than any other test, above all the mere uttering of words after the fact. Today any serious person drawn to the Spartacist group also wants to know: "What about the split with Wohlforth?" And that question, which has every right to be asked, can only be answered by recourse to the concrete history of the dispute.

In any event, this is the way it was.

New York City
Oct. 18, 1961

Oakland, Calif.

Dear Ed,

I'm taking a couple days off work in order to formulate my notes and incorporate them into this letter to you. The intersection of events in the past couple of weeks both within the American, particularly the youth, movement and of IC-SWP developments have forced a stock taking, reevaluation and affirmation of our working perspectives. And I mean taking a hard look at a more fundamental level than the merely tactical 180 degree turns which have been executed every few weeks in the period since the party convention.

Within the American movement: In the post-party convention period we have in part sinned against our intended underlying perspective. At the very first gatherings of comrades of our tendency in NYC brought together because of the needs of factional struggle for the pre-convention period, I recall explaining that we were embarking on a long, hard road and one which the party would react to with all the considerable means at its disposal and in particular, that our majority in the YSA-NEC was rendered highly transitory thereby. This was then and since even put forth as a sort of a slogan: "To Transform Ourselves from the Youth Leadership Into a Tendency in the Movement as a Whole." I.e., the party majority would itself aid us in bringing about the first half, but it was up to us to bring about the second by rooting ourselves, and seeking to become local majorities, in the party branches and youth units. And to do this not merely as an organizational defense measure, but as a process of the political delineation of our minority as that of the consistent Trotskyists within the party.

You were at the national gathering just after the party convention when we recognized without dissent that the period of working as a faction was over with the close of the convention and that we would seek to consolidate and extend ourselves in the next period in the more general form of a political tendency within the movement. At that point prospects along these lines were pretty good, if modest: we had with the excellent pre-convention and convention arguments won a general recognition for ourselves as 'the American minority'. But since then we have not gone forward.

It has been our activity in the youth field which has compromised our intended line and which in the balance has been an error. For we continued with a series of factional maneuvers in the youth organization. There was to be sure plenty of justification, even compulsion, for our actions which were in addition utterly principled in nature. The particular whys and wherefores have been gone into in earlier letters; e.g., my letter to Roger of 9-14-61. Our post-convention course arose out of the contradiction in the YSA of our grouping (except for my removal)

continuing as the one nominally in the majority on the NEC and responsible to and for the YSA which we had founded and largely built. But at the same time we were entirely a lame duck leadership visibly, but not formally, repudiated by the party leadership which had swung a majority of the party-youth activists behind it. In the attempt to discharge our responsibilities to the YSA our comrades were drawn into a series of organizational wrangles which, with the party in a fundamentally powerful position, was a situation which the party could and did degrade and muddy, using every turn to pose an image of 'Wohlforth a party disloyal-bureaucrat-cliquist' thus making mileage in a campaign to reduce our political tendency to a matter of bringing a disrupter to heel.

Additionally there has been another underlying obstacle to our ability to carry out the requisite turn. Our central grouping in NYC was largely formed as a political and especially organizational youth leadership habituated to disciplined administrative practice and of reducing questions to a matter of taking assignments in a division of labor. These are fine and necessary habits for a majority, but over-reliance on them for a minority is to display its least significant and weakest side.

To put our error in general form: we continued to work as a faction rather than as a tendency. A faction is a grouping organized for struggle, emphasizing internal discipline, mobilizing for and executing uniform tactics, etc. A tendency is a grouping of comrades who hold essentially the same viewpoint on more-or-less fundamental questions and who may be, but are not necessarily organized for power struggles, i.e., a faction. (For a brief refresher I recommend rereading Cannon's 'Faction Struggle and Party Leadership' in the Nov.-Dec. 1953 FI.) Additionally, preoccupation with more organizational questions places us most fully at the mercy of the party leadership's mastery of organizational judo, i.e., puts the plane of struggle within the sphere of the party's greatest competence--handling org. questions.

At the same time that we were drawn into extending ourselves in organizational struggles we entirely failed to move in other directions. I.e., until just two nights ago and then on the basis of this present perspective, the NYC tendency comrades never have had a political discussion as such! Even for example Mage's Cuba resolution was presented to the party for convention vote with neither discussion nor vote on it by its proponents (many of whom accepted it only in a general way). And the needs of a factional center in NYC have determined our geographic allocation of forces up until the present time.

The widening breach in the International Committee: The present situation in the IC, opened by the SLL letter to the SWP of Jan. 2, '61, has gone rapidly through several stages. (1) The SLL began by finally moving to put some life in the IC for the first time and toward the aim of reconstructing a Trotskyist International. It sought to win the concurrence of the SWP and at the same time very gently warned the SWP that political weaknesses had been noticed of late within the American Party (e.g., unity sentiments toward the Pablo grouping). What was essentially new was that the SLL would no longer be held off from these aims by the private demurs of the passive and obscuring SWP. From now on things were to be out in the open within the IC. The SWP refused to visibly react in any direction in the ensuing correspondence series, almost entirely one sided, from SLL to SWP leading bodies. (2) Then the SLL brought out its draft world resolution (about which you will recall my enthusiasm when I talked with you when on tour, because, as I put it, the draft contained points which I had thought were even personal prejudices on my part and shared by no one else). The draft contained a section which said among other things: "The revolutionaries in the SWP need periodically to take a hard look at themselves and check over their political work constantly." The party response was to bring out its own draft international resolution which by its objectivist methodology and gaping evasions served to sharpen the concern of the SLL leadership. (3) In June the party printed in the internal bulletin the Cannon letters of the previous month which said: "The breach between us and Gerry is obviously widening." and "...I get the definite impression that the SLL is off on an Oehlerite binge." In July at the IC session in which the SLL won a clear majority, C. Slaughter, main reporter to the meeting, concluded his summary with the no longer implied or gentle: "The question that follows from the SWP resolution today is: why not liquidate the Trotskyist parties? We must stop this trend before it is too late." The SWP has ignored the invitation to defend its views at the next IC meeting and has never replied directly to these or earlier SLL criticisms. It was the reading of the Slaughter report two weeks ago which pushed me to look at our situation, since open rupture is plainly a near thing.

I believe that the SLL is doubly correct vis-a-vis the SWP. First that the SLL-IC position on the central task of the Trotskyists is incontestible--the need for a revolutionary Marxist International, not an international publicity agency for assorted "leftward-moving" bureaucracies. Further, that the resulting critique of SWP views and motion is true. Second, and given the first part, it is then incumbent upon the SLL to force clarification within the IC by moving through all the stages necessary to achieve a real political discussion and consolidation within a world body which can then become an international instrument instead of the passive, semi-fiction of the past 8 years. The internal deadlock must be broken, even though it places us within the SWP in an extremely precarious, but also important, position.

What the main elements in our perspective must be: With the foregoing as a preliminary let me move into the question of what is indicated for us to do. To recapitulate--the growing dissatisfaction with mere tactical zig-zags in the YSA together with the recognition of the implications for us of the trend of SLL-SWP relations are together what has led to the determination for a real assessment.

If the present course of IC developments are followed out along their current path, there will be a collision and an organizational rupture. The SWP will not long endure the present level of pressure on it to discuss, rather viewing this pressure as sectarian name calling and insults. But it will not acquiesce to an intra-IC discussion either, since that would contradict the course actively being followed: e.g., right now Hansen is in Latin America seeking to get next to the kinds of forces which the IC would like to debate how rotten they are.

The SWP tops have an easy and natural rationale to cover a split from the IC and one which the SWP is already largely prepared for: "We choose to openly discuss with all Trotskyist and leftward-moving forces in the world on an equal basis and seeking common actions and fraternal solidarity. We have tried to deal with the unfortunately disoriented IC comrades in the same spirit, only they won't have it, so we choose to continue on the broader road of general fraternal relations, not into an ingrown isolation." I can hear Dobbs saying it at a plenum in which a split is passed off as really a move toward unity in "the big picture."

We have a primary duty to our political views and goals to the future of Trotskyism in this country, i.e., the American revolution. This duty entails (1) to uphold the views which we share with the IC majority, and (2) therefore to urge and stand for the maintenance of SWP unity with the IC and, if that unity is broken, to advocate its reestablishment. It is also necessary to take this course with great circumspection and with a clear and real affirmation that we are an indigenous wing of the SWP and organizationally loyal and disciplined. Otherwise a break with the IC can well automatically lead to our own exclusion.

At bottom, the reason I hold a perspective of struggle against split from the SWP is because the party is far from one in which all the revolutionary juices have been drained. Factionalism now is linked with and only has use in a split perspective. In the past few years the party has begun to react to opportunities by turning each one into a cycle of opportunism until the given opening is exhausted. Each time a selection takes place, some--notably the Weiss grouping--get worse and move toward liquidationism, but others react and are impelled in a leftward direction. This process has just begun, if one stops to view the SWP historically. There are two roads open.

Either each wave of oppositionals will let themselves get washed out of the party, making it ever harder for succeeding left-wingers, or each opportunist venture into fresh fields will augment the revolutionary Marxists with additional forces.

There is one and only one reason for which the SWP should be able to find grounds for our expulsion: the advocacy within the movement and within those circumstances as expressly laid down by the SWP leadership of our Trotskyist views.

Not only would failure to follow this course be a sectarian gift per se to the SWP tops, but in the next period it could well mean our extinction. To take a clear look at ourselves: we are a nominal 35 or so comrades. About 15 in NYC where there is a certain spread of opinion and orientation among the leading comrades; in addition, a similar number in the Bay Area, but of generally less commitment so that there is as well a spread between the two areas as well as a lack of common orientation within the Bay Area. Then there are a couple of valuable but isolated comrades who are rather passive toward their views, elsewhere.

This nascent grouping is not one which, even if part of it could maneuver the other part into a split against its will, would hold strong promise for the demanding life of an organizationally independent existence. (Correct programme is not by itself enough; the development of cadres counts, too. Trotskyist groupings of our size keep turning up and disappearing in half the countries on earth.) We hold in our hands a body of comrades with great demonstrated qualities of work and seriousness. The chemistry of transforming this into a cadre is not an easy thing. Abortion is.

It is necessary to orient for the best, the optimistic variant before us (what Trotsky called revolutionary optimism). An example along this line would be for the upsurge in the union movement (so long deferred--but note what is happening now in the auto workers) to produce a cleavage in which our party opportunists seek to become the agents for the inevitable "more progressive wing" of the T.U. bureaucracy, while every other element in the party and possessing an essential militancy orients toward the rank-and-file movement. Then we'll have the reckoning for which the pressures are building and in the most favorable, fullest, clear-cut circumstances.

Immediate tasks: To put ourselves on the correct track we have to open up and act like what we aim to be--a tendency that is a part of the party. One never gets something for nothing. Switching over the mechanism that holds our grouping together from that of an organizational disciplinary sense imposed upon a minimal political agreement to that of a developing political cohesiveness offers threats of losing some comrades along the way. The danger is that we may do it raggedly or fail to fill

the new modes of functioning with a real, live, content. But should we go in the other direction and simply quiet down on practically all issues through the means of seeking a vastly intensified discipline, even if the turn aimed at were the one sketched here it would fail because the majority would clearly see and trumpet it about that we were approaching the party in a military fashion. J.P. Cannon is not at all stupid and we would not deceive him by one more tactical product of what he has so frequently stated his hatred--a permanent faction.

This line of conduct is urgent for another reason; we have failed for so long to engage in political discussion and clarification even within the tendency that some comrades fear that beginning to do so now will cause some of those in the NYC tendency to go over to the majority. This fear that we may be in actuality some kind of clique is not only groundless--our comrades here certainly all agree, for example, with the July '61 IC minimal position adopted on Cuba--but this view only serves to exacerbate real centrifugal forces of other kinds. Rather than conjure up such fears we should seek as much political discussion as we can, and as much of that as we can before and with the movement as a whole rather than within the tendency. Politics and a political identity should be our hallmark rather than clinging to the habits of a vanished role in the YSA leadership.

The principal threat to a perspective of political struggle with the party is in finding ourselves (1) isolated, (2) discredited, or (3) thrown out through "violating" party decisions and "proving" that we are all the usual stuff--anti-party elements, agents of a foreign power (Healy), etc. About (1) isolation, this is in some ways and with some elements inevitable in any case, simply on the basis of the party tops' power and authority and our lack of same. But those whose primary respect is for power are not the best elements for us to approach anyhow. None-the-less the feeling of isolation on our people is a constant strain liable to induce hasty and unstable conduct on our part. It is the isolation of discreditment and the danger of being expelled that we must counter as our principal external task at this time.

The question of how to deal with the Cuba discussion in the YSA is both a matter with which we must deal and is a good example of how to proceed as an SWP disciplined tendency. The new youth leadership--i.e., the party leadership--has made Cuba the only political point on the agenda of the coming YSA national conference. What was intended as a trap for us fell through when a surprise majority on the PC voted unambiguously that party members in the youth were free to state their views on the Cuban question within the YSA

Now the YSA is in general not a matter of struggle for us; the party has made it clear that the YSA is a party property. We therefore must avoid anything that smacks of obstructionism

or of organizing non-party youth against the party. Hence we seek to raise and work out our political views in the party primarily. The only question of real import to the YSA is that of youth-party relations. But youth-party relations can't even be touched on without making at least an implied attack on the social-democratic practices the party is imposing. At a minimum we should leave the question entirely alone in the discussion unless the party expressly permits the expression of views and resolutions on this subject. Best is to present within the party our model of youth-party relations, e.g., the Mage draft resolution, rather than seeking the right to try to implement it within the youth at this juncture. All the youth will know where we stand in any case and the intra-party existence of this position, kept active, will serve as a good measuring rod for the evolution of party conduct toward the youth.

Certainly we must absolutely avoid getting involved in any mutual recriminations about past record, etc., in the YSA. That would open the door wide to exactly what the party majority is looking for--a big, messy, senseless organizational squabble at the coming youth conference. We do not carry a responsible role in the youth leadership any longer and any time we act otherwise we are going to get hurt and do the YSA no good either.

But about the Cuban question we need to and indeed have the opportunity to move differently. We have been virtually ordered to discuss it in the YSA and would politically be discredited and pilloried by our opponents should we fail to offer the differing views from the SWP position which practically all YSA members know exist since they were invited into the party pre-convention discussion as observers. But there is a trap: the party PC rep to the YSA-NEC has "invited" us to request the introduction of our SWP bulletin pre-convention material into the YSA discussion. To do so would center the discussion on a simple continuation of our attacks upon what has in the interim become the SWP position, i.e., make it appear we are warring with the party in the youth. Rather we should request the introduction only of comrade Mage's draft resolution on Cuba which is entirely objective (i.e., doesn't mention the SWP) for the information of the YSA.

The next step in dealing with the Cuba-youth business is crucial to our whole perspective. Rather than seek to a priori bind tendency supporters to the particular interpretations contained in the Mage resolution, i.e., to work as a faction facing the rest of the YSA with an internal discipline, rather than this our comrades should present their various views on Cuba and even alternative discussion drafts of resolutions should they feel it necessary--thus treating the YSA to a real, live discussion. We are not in any power fight in the youth and the certain attempts of the surely surprised party majority comrades to exploit intra-IC type differences can in fact have only beneficial effects. We will present a far more attractive

appearance to non-party youth as serious about working out the Cuban and colonial questions, not in subordinating them to organizational aims within the YSA as the party majority is doing. At the same time we are placed in the strongest defensive position toward the discussion from the party side. It makes it clear that the rumors circulating in NYC that "we intend to split at the youth conference" are nonsense. Further with this conduct we are most closely following the PC motion as stated: i.e., members presenting their views, not a party faction presenting its views to line up non-party youth against the party.

The party majority seems sure to make the Cuban question the voting issue of division at the youth conference. If so, the left wing delegates can at that time decide how to formulate our common position as it has evolved in the light of the discussion. At a minimum something like the July IC statement is quite sufficient should no draft resolution introduced into the discussion prove satisfactory. But to seek a common plank at the beginning--either an elaborate or a minimal one--then go into the discussion bound to such a stand and refusing to be drawn out would open us up to the various difficulties and charges as indicated above.

I think that to work along these lines by our tendency comrades in the youth will not only avoid many pitfalls, but cause us to emerge a politically strengthened and defined tendency and with our nature better understood and strengthened in the eyes of the movement as a whole. This provided that we don't get carried away into investing the discussion with the importance of a party convention and lose sight of more primary aims within the party. Likewise comrades must not begin to attack the party or party leaders no matter what the provocation--and there may be deliberate provocation. Should such a situation start to develop in any form responsible comrades should on the spot call any offender to order in an educational way and as a loyal party member should. So much for the question of Cuba in the YSA.

As has been mentioned before, we must deal with the matter of the disposition of our comrades geographically. Our concentration in NYC has weaknesses which will soon be even more sharply apparent when larger numbers of older party youth are taken out of the YSA after the coming conference. The NYC party branch is, from the standpoint of rooting our tendency in the party, one of the least likely in the country. In addition to the common NYC political disease of ingrownness and isolation, the branch is very heavily and directly administered from the National Office and is policed by numerous comrades eager to prove their zeal to the party tops. ---

We will have to make some decisions after the youth conference and perhaps move rapidly to carry out a redistribution at that time. Hence in the meantime we must weigh various alternatives.

Summary: All our proposals for the next months must revolve around strengthening ourselves within the party so that we make it as difficult as possible to be dumped out as "Healyite agents" as the fight in the IC sharpens. This means bringing to the fore the political character of our tendency (and working to clarify and extend it by so doing) and emphasizing our organizational loyalty and discipline to the SWP. This cannot be accomplished by some tactical maneuver, but by a real, if delayed, going over in our functioning to what it should have become earlier.

Should we be squeezed out of the SWP none the less we will still be in the strongest position--our comrades and not only those in our tendency vividly aware that we did everything in our power short of surrender of our Bolshevist convictions in remain in our party. But if we approach the situation in this spirit we diminish to the minimum the likelihood of this more pessimistic variant. The party tops will then be in the least advantageous position to move against us organizationally; and we seek political confrontation within the party.

I know this is a long letter, but it's been four months since we've been able to discuss personally, and a great deal has piled up and become urgent in the meantime. I know you don't write much but you should make some response upon due consideration. In addition I'm sending copies of this letter to other comrades to the extent I can get out carbons in a single typing. I hope these proposals elicit a strong response from all who read it, both of consideration and reply and of implementation to the extent feasible in particular circumstances.

There is a whole separate area worthy of another long letter just in going into the politics of our tendency at this juncture and the related tasks. Citing and relating the most pressing questions, sketching a line content and suggesting the ways and levels of dealing with them. I'll try to crank something out next weekend.

Certainly much of what I've covered is not as directly applicable to the Bay Area as it is to New York. For example because your branch is at a great distance from the center and our comrades are a force in it, you are necessarily plunged into struggles in the branch from time to time since many practical decisions are made by the branch itself. But the general tenor is, I believe, applicable to the Bay Area and the other parts of the country. And much of it is intended precisely for strengthening the processes for pulling our tendency more closely together on a nationwide basis. For this job programmatic agreement is the strongest bond and the one which we must heighten.

With Leninist greetings,

Jim

Oct. 24, 1961

Oakland

Dear Ed,

I just received a copy of Jim's letter to you with his thoughts on perspectives. As you may gather from this letter, we have had some discussions here on general perspectives. My letter of October 9th to Jim P. was based on the complete agreement of all leading comrades here. There are however some differences on more long range perspectives and therefore Jim R.'s letter should not be interpreted as representing the collective thinking here.

I will briefly give you some of my tentative thoughts on Jim's letter. However, I wish to emphasize at the beginning that I do not feel that a speculative discussion of long range perspectives is very meaningful to our tendency. We have been warned against speculation of the possible future course of the party leadership and urged rather to devote ourselves to constructive party building work.

As far as I can see Jim's perspective is based on two things: (a) a prediction that the party leadership will take one of several courses now open to it (that of imminent split with the IC) and : (b) an estimation as to the significance of certain internal differences within our tendency. As far as (a) is concerned I personally feel that an imminent split with the IC is highly unlikely. This would require too much political clarification on the part of the SWP leadership--something quite disastrous to it. A sharpening of relations is quite certain--but a full fledged split re: the break with Pablo quite unlikely in the near future. Should such a split take place no tactical moves on our part--such as making our internal differences public--would matter much. The only meaningful gesture would be political conciliationism, which of course we all oppose. However, while we all may have our own personal views as to what the party will or won't do, it is politically incorrect for us to base any serious tactic on the shifting sands of such speculation. Further, as I said earlier, it is better for the health of the tendency to stay clear of controversy based on speculation.

(b) is a more serious defect in Jim's letter. It is my conviction that Jim tends to overestimate the seriousness of the extremely minor differences that have so far come up in our tendency. We have had one preliminary discussion on Cuba recently and nothing in that discussion suggested to me any serious political difference. Rather what took place was a good theoretical exchange of views. Jim seems to think our tendency is somehow unprincipled and carries this so far as to suggest that a serious discussion would lead to defections. This is baseless in my opinion--and quite frankly a little hard to take after all these months of constant political discussion, letter writing, documents, etc. No one to my knowledge in New York feels that a discussion

will lead to defections nor has anyone opposed political discussions. Certainly it is wrong to feel that our tendency was ever held together by organizational maneuverings. I do not know of one comrade in New York or elsewhere who became involved in our tendency because of an organizational struggle. I do know of a few who have been critical of precisely the organizational struggle we have conducted.

The political basis of our tendency is clearly the general line of the SLL International Perspective Resolution--the central theme of which also has been the major point of our position on Cuba: That is the maintenance of a revolutionary perspective on a world wide level and the continued use of Marxist methodology. I do not know of a political tendency which has had such a solid basis for its principled existence. Certainly the volume of our discussion material plus the increasing volume of International discussion material has driven this point home and clarified it over and over again.

Certainly if Jim feels that the internal differences are important enough to require an adjustment of our functioning he is proceeding in the wrong way. Rather than presenting the tendency with an organizational solution to these differences in the form of a worked out perspective, he should first seek to clarify the nature of these differences through a political discussion process. Or to put it concretely before he works out a way as to how we are to handle our differences on Cuba in the YSA pre-convention discussion, it is proper to first discover the nature and extent of these differences. Only when we discover this will we be in a position to discuss meaningfully the best way to handle them.

In any event we have a way to clarify politically what the basis of our tendency is. We have been asked to consider the new draft of the SLL Resolution when it comes out and to declare ourselves as to our support to that document making clear of course any reservations we may have (as on Cuba). Therefore we plan to have such a discussion and certainly will not present our views on this to the party and the IC without a discussion in our ranks on the actual statement to be issued. I hope this process will clear up once and for all the nature of the political basis of our tendency. Then whatever minor differences remain (and these will remain for ours is not a personal grouping) can be handled responsibly within the framework of a clear understanding of the nature of the political ties that hold us together.

There is one point that I feel extremely strong on--we must avoid at all costs any tendency of our people becoming turned inward around such a speculative business as a discussion of perspectives. It seems that everything in the world, including unfortunately ourselves, are conspiring to obscure the importance of our proceeding on a straight line to doing positive party

building work on the one hand and seeking clarification on International Perspectives on the other. This must not be allowed to continue. We have important internal educational and political tasks in our tendency. But these tasks, if they are to be fruitful, must be directly related to our external tasks--to especially the preparation of our tendency for participation in a discussion on the World Movement in the party.

I might mention one practical point on Jim's suggestions as to how we handle ourselves in the Cuba discussion. Needless to say in the past party discussion, we did not require or urge the comrades to appear in the party as a monolithic group. I assume that comrade Danny and other comrades who felt Cuba was a deformed workers state made it clear in their locals that they supported the general approach of our Cuba line but felt that Cuba had already become a deformed workers state. Such an approach is not harmful to our tendency and certainly there is no call for any change in this way of functioning now. However I do feel strongly that it is politically irresponsible for separate drafts on Cuba to be presented in the YSA discussion by our people. Certainly such a drastic step, which simply would mean to the party that we were not in fact a principled political tendency, should not be taken unless a fundamental difference on this question comes up in our discussions--it should not be proposed before such differences do come up. As I said earlier there is no basis at all for feeling that anything but the most minor differences exist among us. Perhaps the hardest thing to learn in politics is to acquire a sense of perspective to differentiate between important and unimportant differences and not to let unimportant ones obscure essential agreement.

You may of course show this letter to any comrades in the area who may have seen Jim's letter to you.

Comradely,

Tim

PROPOSED STATEMENT ON ORIENTATION

By Tim Wohlforth

1. The basic political and strategic outlook of our tendency is expressed in our statement, "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective." That statement explains our fundamental political critique of the present drift of the SWP majority in the direction of centrist politics. It also states in unequivocal terms that, despite the revisionist political positions of the leadership, our tendency is an integral, loyal, constructive part of the SWP, and our task is both to help build the party as it is today and to struggle politically to return it to its original solid revolutionary perspectives. All the work of our tendency flows from these two aspects of our assessment of the SWP. We recognize that the political rejuvenation of the party cannot be carried out by our tendency if our tendency is not fully and loyally integrated in the work of the party.

2. The task we set before ourselves is extremely difficult and the forces at our disposal are quite limited. Our perspective is a long range one. We seek to reorient the basic proletarian backbone of the party which has become confused and disoriented by the revisionist political trends in the leadership. Such a task will take time. Further, it will take the combined impact of the international movement, our own political work in the party, and a revival on the part of the masses which the proletarian elements in the party continue to remain responsive to.

3. During the course of this long-term party work, the comrades of our tendency face two dangers. First, some comrades can become so well integrated in the work of the party that they neglect the political necessity of struggle against the revisionism of the leadership. Secondly, and at present this is a much more real danger to the tendency, some comrades may seek to maintain a revolutionary perspective but to isolate themselves from the concrete work of the party. Both tendencies are equally harmful and represent a desertion from the revolutionary tasks that our tendency must tackle. A Bolshevik must learn to work effectively under conditions where there are strong centrist political pressures upon him without either deserting his own political ideas or deserting the working class cadres of the party who can be reoriented. As Bolsheviks we do not take lightly this party, which despite its political sickness, has been produced by 30 years of revolutionary struggle.

4. Through the intensive political discussion prior to the last convention, and through our current Statement and the work around it, our tendency has done an excellent job of presenting its Marxist views within the party. However, our tendency continues to display serious weaknesses in integrating all its members into the work of the party and properly orienting them so as to establish the closest personal working links with the proletarian elements in the party. Despite the very, very real difficulties of work in the party, every member of our tendency can find effective, productive work in the party which will help strengthen the party, and, in the process, our tendency. The major obstacles to the effective integration of the

comrades into party work remains the comrades themselves, not the party. The comrades who continue to fail to integrate themselves into party work, within the framework of their own personal capabilities, are expressing their own inadequacies as Bolsheviks. No real Bolshevik will allow the centrist politics of the party leadership to prevent him from reaching the working class cadres of the party.

5. The deep political sickness of the party cannot fail to have an adverse effect on the functioning of the party in its day-to-day work. It is therefore inevitable that to the extent that our comrades become active in the outside work of the party, to that extent there will be times when their tactics, as well as others they are working with, will come into conflict with the tactics of the party leadership. In addition, the political sickness of the party has already created a certain break down in the disciplined functioning of the movement. Under such conditions discipline tends to be exercised in a capricious way with a good deal of leeway being given petty bourgeois elements in the party while an occasional stringent enforcement is applied against our comrades.

6. Under such conditions it is imperative that our comrades function as disciplined revolutionists even if we are the only comrades so acting. Our task is to urge the tightening up of discipline where it is slack, not the application of the slack standards to ourselves. Decay in discipline is always the sign of a drift away from the concept of the essential role of the combat party, and thus a drift away from the working class itself. Our tendency, which has stressed so heavily the critical importance of the role of the party, must be the foremost defenders of the integrity of the party even under conditions when the party is controlled by political elements drifting towards centrism. The best proletarian elements in the SWP are most critical of the party's organizational slackness and quite correctly evaluate a political tendency, in part, by its attitude toward the party today, as it is, in the concrete. Therefore, our effectiveness in reorienting the party politically will be heavily influenced by our ability to function in a disciplined manner as a minority in the coming period.

7. A Bolshevik minority must at all times prepare for becoming a Bolshevik majority. Our tendency is not in business to remain a perpetual minority. We intend, in fact, we are going to, become the majority of the Socialist Workers Party, and that is all there is to it. We must therefore train our own comrades today to learn to function in a responsible way so that they will be fit to play an important role in the future majority leadership of the revolutionary party in the U.S. Therefore, for the education of our own cadres, we must insist strongly on loyal, disciplined, functioning in the party.

8. We recognize no circumstances whatsoever which would justify a member of our tendency, or any member of the party for that matter, in resigning from the party. We predict that there will be many, many situations in the coming period in which comrades will have to see important mass work temporarily injured in order to remain a part of the party. The party to us is more important than any of these individual mass activities--or all of them together. Our task is to politically utilize these grave errors of the party leadership in or-

der to educate the proletarian cadres of the party politically as to the nature of the political process now going on in the party.

9. Any comrade who, despite the advice of our tendency, resigns from the party, is breaking with our tendency organizationally and politically. As our tendency is a loyal part of the SWP, we have no members or supporters outside the ranks of the SWP. As our tendency is above all else a Bolshevik tendency which values more than any other section of the party, the necessity of the building of the combat party, anyone who takes this task so lightly as to resign from the party is politically breaking from our essential political outlook. Any comrade who so acts will be recognized by our tendency as a deserter of the revolutionary party in the United States and of the World Movement.

10. Until our tendency fully absorbs the basic Leninist concepts reiterated above, we will continue to be plagued by problems which prevent our full political effectiveness in the party. In other words, our ability to solve our own political problems will go a long way towards putting us in a position to help solve the political problems of the party as a whole.

(Submitted to NYC tendency meeting 5-18-62)

ORIENTATION OF THE PARTY MINORITY IN YOUTH WORK
(Draft)

1) More than half of the revolutionary Marxist tendency remains involved in the youth organization where we function on both a national and a local basis. Our work in this area has not been as effective as it could have been due to our failure to define our orientation, objectives, and perspectives in regards to this work. These must be formulated within the framework of our primary perspective as a minority tendency within the SWP. The kind of struggle we can carry on in the youth is circumscribed by this, and is differentiated from party work by several factors: we comprise a significantly larger percentage in the youth organization than in the party; we are in more frequent contact with and have greater opportunity to work with new and politically unaligned people; the party, contrary to Leninist principle, prohibits free discussion from taking place with non-party youth.

2) Our major goal in the youth is to build the revolutionary Marxist tendency by recruiting party-youth members of the youth to that tendency, by young members of the tendency gaining political and organizational experience, and by making those locals in which we may have a majority into exemplary organizations of revolutionary youth functioning. We cannot seek to gain political and organizational control of the youth movement independent of similar developments within the party, for the party as it is now has arrayed the whole weight of its authority against this; nor can we, therefore, prevent the majority youth leadership from carrying out its program, no matter how rotten or detrimental it is to the real interests of a revolutionary youth movement. The party not only limits us in the discussion of our politics within the youth, but prohibits us from revealing this limitation. We are not even able to discuss openly the relation of the party to the youth organization. In our work in the youth we must act as disciplined SWP members at all times, even when SWP discipline is counterposed to Leninist principle. Our work and the nature and extent of our struggle within the youth is thus at all times necessarily conditioned and limited by the primary consideration of our work in the SWP.

3) These considerations, however, do not limit our role in the youth to merely that of a 'loyal opposition', and we help neither the youth nor ourselves by playing this role. The present youth leadership not only apes and even exaggerates the centrist politics of the party, but is consciously cooperating in the destruction of the organizational independence of the youth out of motives of personal opportunism. Our approach to a youth movement can have nothing in common with the approach of such a leadership. Our orientation should not be to give critical support to objectionable majority proposals or to formulate the majority's proposals in a more reasonable way. Rather our orientation should be to expose the rottenness and inability of the present youth leadership to the greatest extent we can without jeopardizing ourselves, and to offer for consideration of youth members, either through local debate or by statements and counter motions in NEC minutes, a revolutionary alternative on issues under discussion.

4) Our work in the youth has thus far been hampered by an incorrect orientation within the youth minority, which it is hoped will be corrected through this discussion. This approach is that in order to influence others we must above all appear to be 'responsible'. This concept of 'responsible' is elucidated by the following statement from Tim's document Proposed Statement on Orientation, in which he says, 'We must...train our own comrades today to learn to function in a responsible way so that they will be fit to play an important role in the future majority leadership of the revolutionary party in the U.S. [referring here to the SWP]. Therefore, for the education of our own cadre, we must insist strongly on loyal, disciplined functioning in the party.' No matter what our analysis of the SWP and of our perspectives therein, this approach transferred to the youth, i.e., being loyal, disciplined members of the youth in order to prepare ourselves for the control of that organization, is incorrect, for we have already seen that this perspective for our youth work is out of the question. We do not seek to be 'responsible' members of the youth in the sense given above, but rather to be responsible, loyal, and disciplined members of the Marxist tendency working in the youth for the purpose of building that tendency. Of course, our ultimate orientation to youth work will be defined during the course of the tendency's forthcoming discussion on our perspectives within the SWP.

5) The effectiveness of our work thus far has also been limited by a certain organizational sloppiness. Minority youth comrades should regularly meet to discuss issues coming before the local, particularly in those locals where we have a significant force. NEC comrades should see to it that the majority carries out its responsibilities towards minority members. NEC comrades should meet prior to NEC meetings to discuss issues coming before that body, not to enforce any sort of discipline over these comrades but to make sure that the implication of various possible approaches to these issues are understood. To the extent that common agreement is arrived at, they should then plan the most effective sort of action to take in that body or formulate proper alternatives to the proposals of the majority. We should seek to get our views into the minutes whenever possible, through statements, counter-motions, etc., in order to bring these views before a wider audience, and should seek to avoid where possible the unconsidered splitting of our vote, which, if too frequent, can make the minority to appear non-serious or to have major internal differences or to have no overall alternative to the majority's approach to youth work. At all times, in both national and local work, we should refuse to do the dirty work of the majority for the majority, we should assume no responsibility for actions which we consider incorrect, and should always put forward correct proposals even when we know they will be overturned by the membership.

6. Because of the nature of a youth organization and because of the relatively favorable size of our youth fraction, many avenues of work are open to us in the youth. Yet, compared to

the majority, our forces are limited. Therefore we should pick and choose, channeling our energies into that work which will be most fruitful for our purposes. Examples of this sort of fruitful activity would be work on campuses and in organizations where we are relatively free from the hindrance of large majority fractions and actions where we can independently bring in contacts, work with them, and offer them our views of whatever struggle we are engaged in. We should seek to further our own political development by giving forums and classes whenever we can. And at all times we should seek to deepen our understanding of revolutionary Marxism through study of the basic works and of the issues over which we are presently engaged in struggle.

Lynne Harper
August 8, 1962

THE CENTRISM OF THE SWP AND THE TASKS OF THE MINORITY

I. The Centrism of the SWP

1. The Decisive Importance of the Nature of the Party.

The American Minority has been nurtured in the SWP and is a tendency within the party. The SWP (& youth) continue to loom large as a shaping influence upon the minority. How the SWP is analyzed and summed up determines a) the tasks of the minority which are carried out within and through the SWP, b) the nature, scope, and very existence of the minority grouping, flowing from our conclusions about the state and direction of development of the party. Thus the question of the nature of the SWP is of decisive and central importance to our perspective and tasks.

It would be an error to view the "nature of the party" as some kind of a priori or external label to be applied to the SWP. To know the nature of the SWP is to know how the party is moving and will move in response to events, opportunities, and challenges in the class struggle and in relation to the aim of the Socialist Revolution.

It is possible to perceive the broad outlines of the party's political shape even under conditions of relative quiescence. It must be our continual responsibility to do this, checking our expectations against results, so as to properly orient our tasks. To do otherwise would render our entire role directionless and random, at the mercy of chance impressions and momentary situations.

2. Some Relevant Party History (A Sketch of Highlights since 1940).

a. The American Trotskyists took a stunning double blow in 1940. Over half of the movement broke away and a few months later Leon Trotsky was murdered. Among those breaking away from the movement (40% of the party and 80% of the youth) were most of the party's writers, theorists, as well as a whole political generation who had made up the youth leadership. The party lost nothing in the way of intransigence and solidity through these blows, as was shown by its resolute role in the Smith Act trial and the upsurge in the working class trade-union struggles during 1943-47 out of which issued Cannon's affirmation, "The Coming American Revolution." However, a theoretical sterility and blunting of political alertness took place and was never made good. All these circumstances underlie the recent statement of the British SLL that the SWP had made no political contribution to the world movement since 1940 [in "Trotskyism Betrayed" by SLL-NC, July 21, 1962].

b. The response of the SWP to the Tito-Stalin split marked the opening of a period in the party's existence which was concluded with the end of the regroupment period. (The response to the Cuban Revolution is on a new and different plane.) It was a period in which, when opportunities opened up somewhere, the party typically would initially respond in a revolutionary manner. Failing to get sufficient results, it would begin to water down its approach, enthuse over dubious elements and press hard against the limits of formal revolutionary doctrine. Then a halt would be called, a cooling off took place and its "historic opportunity" or "hero" of only yesterday,

though perhaps unchanged, became completely passé.

The eulogistic and shameful scrabble after "comrade" Tito in 1949-1950 was a reaction to disappointments in the reversal of the trade-union struggle, a sharp decline in the party's size and influence, all in the context of the growing witch hunt, which stated Cochran-Clarke's restlessness to break out of the revolutionary movement.

Similar reactions set in internationally in the Fourth International; but it was not until the Cochran group in the United States was ready to break overtly with Revolutionary Marxism that the then US majority recoiled and led a world split which arrested the rightward drift in the party for a time. Yet, the split was weak and defensive for the following reasons:

- 1.) It placed organizational over political issues. The split of the FI was simply announced in the pages of the Militant as a reaction to the world center's support of the Cochran-Clarke group. It was not fought out to a culmination and rupture, thus catching the SWP's cothinkers by surprise and unprepared and left the neutrals perplexed and inside the FI.
- 2.) It placed national over international considerations, as was in addition shown by the SWP's endorsement of the expulsion of the French majority by the Pablo center in 1952 [See SWP International Bulletin of November, 1952, "Documents on the Crisis of the PCI (French Section of the FI)."] This took place only a year prior to the SWP's own break with Pablo.

Immediately in 1954, at Weiss' instigation, the party was made to undergo the strange experience of the anti-McCarthy campaign in which McCarthy was dished up as a full-blown fascist who had to be fought in the streets by the trade-unions. This qualitative overstatement of McCarthy's role was accompanied by an agitational campaign in the very depth of a period of terrible isolation, reaction, and passivity, while the Militant, week after week, shredded and reduced to a parody the Trotskyist understanding of fascism.

Then in 1956-58 came the series of regroupment activities growing out of the Stalinist crisis which began with the adoption of the excellent SWP "Statement on Socialist Regroupment" and which correctly facilitated the SWP's involvement in open forum discussions. It also facilitated and encouraged the winning-over of a left-wing from the liquidating Shachtmanite YSL. Soon, however, the impatient attempt at a pay-off at any price led to flattery in the Militant of the Gatesites who were heading for the Democratic Party and to an adaptation to the National Guardian, as in the building of Guardian supporter clubs. Then came the treatment of the ISP with an approach of rubbery principles. Only the intransigence of anti-Trotskyist elements saved the SWP from being a partner to a common electoral New York State slate which would have placed the SWP in the compromising position of being in an electoral bloc for propaganda. The feverish assertion in the PC draft resolution of March 1959 that regroupment was bigger and better than ever, came just when the regroupment period had palpably come to an end. But then J.P. Cannon called a halt and that was that. The party was contained rather formally within nominally principled limits.

3. The Present Political Positions of the SWP (i.e. the "autocatalytic" or "chain-reaction" breakaway of the SWP from the programmatic fundamentals of Revolutionary Marxism.)

Revolutionary parties are not immune to errors (e.g. the Bolsheviks' "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.") However, the further and clearer the departure from the politics of a consistently class-struggle character, the stronger the restorative (correcting) force within the party.

But, after an incubation period of some years (see point 2) the party, unclearly over the youth, openly on the Cuban Revolution (i.e., the permanent revolution), and grossly over Pabloism and the Fourth International (i.e., internationalism) has not merely broken with Leninism, but has overtly replaced it with something else. What had been in recent years a tendency to give an opportunist twist in practice to attempts of the party to seize on opportunities, until a halt was called by restorative forces within the party (characteristically J.P. Cannon), has changed to an overt breakaway from Marxism with the party's response to the Cuban Revolution, so that the accumulated opportunist forces and appetites within the party were not only unleashed but outright encouraged by Cannon's initiative in attacking the SLL. With the response to the Cuban Revolution, the variance between words and deeds has become qualitative. The dominant motives and practice today are a clash of attempts to recruit dubious human material at the expense of revolutionary principles, opposed by the fear that any recruitment efforts might alienate the "friendly" leadership groupings of whatever organization the majority can locate (i.e., July 26, Local 1199, SNCC, etc.).

4. The Degenerative Process -- The SWP as a Centrist Party.

Centrism is a catch-all word to describe any of those organizations which in Lenin's words are "revolutionary in words, opportunist in deeds."

The SWP in particular has fallen victim to degenerative processes similar to those which overtook the pre-World War I German Social Democracy and Lenin's Bolsheviks, so that the party stands today:

- a. in opposition to the most essential aims of the Trotskyist movement for a major part of the globe in the declared dispensability of a revolutionary proletarian party to lead the colonial masses to victory (victory as opposed to the stalemate of the deformed workers' states or the still more illusory "victories" that do not transcend the entanglements of capitalist imperialism);
- b. internationally no longer for a world party, a Fourth International as the self-organized, international vanguard of the working class; instead the SWP seeks a limited unity of mutual amnesty with other centrists in order to form both an "international publicity agency for assorted 'leftward-moving' bureaucracies" and to retain an organizational fig leaf to cover their break with the essential substance of proletarian internationalism -- the struggle to build a world party of the workers.

Given these profound differences with Revolutionary Marxism, it is to belabor the obvious to insist merely upon the centrist character of the SWP. On the contrary, it is critically important, in accepting the characterization of the SWP, not to be swept away and into a split perspective as though centrism equalled some kind of political leprosy. To quote a "Letter to Ed" of 18 October 1961 which deals with this question:

"In the past few years the party has begun to react to opportunities by turning each one into a cycle of opportunism until the given opening is exhausted. Each time a selection takes place, some -- notably the Weiss group -- get worse and move toward liquidationism, but others react and are impelled in a leftward direction. This process has just begun, if one stops to view the SWP historically. There are two roads open. Either each wave of oppositionals will let themselves get washed out of the party, making it even harder for succeeding left-wingers, or each opportunist venture into fresh fields will augment the revolutionary Marxists with additional forces."

5. The SWP as a Rightward-Moving Centrist Party.

Centrism is a phrase which covers a multitude of sins. As Trotsky put it: "Speaking formally and descriptively, centrism is composed of all those trends within the proletariat and on its periphery which are distributed between reformism and Marxism and which most often represent various stages of evolution from reformism to Marxism -- and vice versa."

The SWP falls short of being a left-centrist party, that is, one of those organizations or groupings (often moving left from the social democrats or out of the CP) which genuinely desires and seeks to work for the socialist revolution but suffers some internal limitation in the form of ideological or organizational baggage which it is unable to transcend in practice (e.g. the Workers Party -- USA, 1941-46; the Austrian Revolutionary Socialists, 1934-38; the left-wing of the POUM at various times.)

The SWP's practical excursions into activity bear not merely the stamp of being mistaken or inhibited in some way from a revolutionary standpoint, but in addition have become opportunist in intent. The theoretical or political "explanations" are just that, not guides to revolutionary action, rather "covers" -- rationalizations to maintain a revolutionary rhetoric. Comrade Mage's recent "Critical Notes on the Political Committee Draft 'Problems of the Fourth International and the Next Steps'" is nothing but a political exposé of a whole series of such rationalizations.

The disease of the SWP is degenerative in character and some insight and guidance can be gained for us by comparison with the CPUSA which was undergoing a degenerative process in the period 1924-34. However, it is important to keep in mind the quite different circumstances and mechanism in the case of the SWP.

The SWP in its leadership has become a very old party. From 1928 to the present -- 34 years -- it has been led by the same continuous and little changing body of personnel. Thus it is the most long-lived, ostensibly revolutionary, organization in history. Its current National Committee must have one of the highest average ages of any

communist movement ever.

While the leadership is old, many of the leading rank and file party stalwarts at the local branch level are middle-aged and comfortably well off -- skilled workers with many years seniority and homeowners to boot. Most extreme, but by no means unique in this respect, is one of the two largest party branches, Los Angeles.

6. General and Long-Term Conclusions re the SWP.

The divisions within the SWP are irreconcilable since they reflect differences which are and will ultimately be reducible to the difference of reform vs. revolution. It is a strong temptation in politics to succumb to impatience and seek to artificially accelerate what is deemed inevitable in the long run into an immediately posed issue. The break of the SWP with Marxism has taken place over "foreign" issues about which many subjectively revolutionary members are insensitive and unaroused.

The process of clarification within the SWP will not be complete until the party has to face up to major class struggles within the United States. From now until such a time the role of the revolutionary Marxists within the party must be that of an aggressive, political polarizing force.

II. The Tasks of the Minority

7. The fundamental task of the minority must be to win unambiguously the mantle of Trotskyism, of recognition as the revolutionary Marxist party, within this country. The basic character, course and crisis of this undertaking are determined by the irreconcilable differences generated by the rightward-moving and degenerative process of the SWP and the resolute opposition to this process which must be undertaken by the minority. The heritage and unbroken tradition of Marxism in the United States must not be allowed to falter and be dragged through the slime of centrist politics which can have no other effect than of selling short the American revolution.

That the leadership of the SWP is well on this road can be seen not only in the positions taken by the party on such international questions as Cuba, Algeria and the Colonial Revolutions in general, but in a more fundamental sense in the common denominator running throughout these and all other positions and actions taken by the party which run counter to or tend to sabotage the formation of revolutionary Marxist parties. The slighting of revolutionary parties is well illustrated in an absurd and criminal half-quote selected by the National Committee from Trotsky's Stalinism and Bolshevism: "...The party is not the only factor of development and on a larger historical scale is not the decisive one." Thus does the SWP signal its retreat from Marxism and here the battle for Marxism begins in the American Section of the Fourth International.

8. The battle for the preservation of Marxism in this country is not, however, one which has begun only in the past few months. On the contrary, the discussions on the reunification with Pablo and the panegyrics of the party over the course of the Algerian revolution can be traced quite easily to those positions decided on in the course of the Cuban Revolution. The failures to undertake a princi-

pled and critical defense of the Cuban Revolution have, in turn, their roots far back in the history of the SWP.

Principally, however, the organizational and tactical battle has been going on since the organization of the minority evolved over the course of the discussion on Cuba. We have been struggled against not only politically, but organizationally as well since we began to raise a concerted voice concerning the new course followed by the SWP. The shape and nature of this battle have only recently come to be recognized as such a vicious and severe one simply because the minority has only recently realized the seriousness of this struggle and attempted a more vigorous resistance. In other words the party has been attacking us all along and primarily in the area which they have come to understand best -- the organizational area of bureaucratic manipulation.

9. It is time that we appraise not only the sources and nature of this fight within the party but further that we correctly evaluate the likely path of struggle in order to best prepare and implement the most determined, resolute and conscious opposition. Basically the speed with which this conflict is finally resolved will depend upon how swiftly events move on the national and inter-national arenas. It will also depend in large measure on the degree to which we are successful in swelling our membership, that is, comrades who adhere to our fundamental program. From most indications on the American scene, this is likely to take some time; a period of several years.

However, there are at least two areas of important and immediate unrest and conflict. By all criteria, the largest and most important of these is the civil-rights struggle in the United States and particularly in the American South. This clash contains the genuine seeds of prerevolutionary conflict in this country. The other area lies in the direction of the peace movement which in many cases marks the attempts of youth to break away from the cul-de-sac of bohemianism and locate a base from which they can express their militant dissatisfaction with the cold and hot war policies of the Washington government.

There are many other potential areas of conflict as well, not the least of which is the trade union movement. It is, for example, highly interesting to note that many trade unions in this country have contributed funds to the SNCC which is at the moment the left-wing grouping of the civil rights movement in this country.

10. It will, therefore, be a period of years in which we are involved in this struggle for Marxism. We must not slight the serious, bitter and protracted nature of this struggle since each delay, every detour and all indecisive actions on our part can only contribute to the further strangulation of revolutionary opportunities in the United States. It is absolutely necessary that we utilize what Trotsky called "the superiority of foresight over 'astonishment'" and reject all forms of crass empiricism which have become so popular with the Majority.

For instance, some Majority comrades are currently assaying as the real item the "crisis view of history" which amounts to the proposition that the economy is headed for another severe slump which will (automatically) assure a mighty gain in membership and influence for the party. According to this view Fascist and other Bonapartist pos-

sibilities are severely discredited. The revolutionary party is reduced to a colossal container to catch the cast-offs of this process. Minority comrades are well able to discern the falsity of this approach. But we must beware all temptations to sit back and wait for a split in the Majority ranks or a major social upheaval as a substitute for decisive actions now. That we will gain from these clashes is incontestable only if in the interim we have become a viable revolutionary grouping! As Leninists we seek no quack formulas for quick revolutionary victories.

11. Knowledge of the immediate and forthcoming struggle with revisionism can only serve to help prevent shock, disillusionment and "astonishment" over the high-handed techniques with which the Majority bureaucracy are currently attempting to quash the Minority. Throughout, of course, the party leadership will genuflect in the direction of "democratic" centralism. But none will be surprised at times when centralism elbows democracy aside.

Thus the party welcomes all minority comrades who wish to blindly do party work. But as the recent episode of Comrades Shirley and Steve strikingly portrays, we can expect the most vicious resistance when seeking to be placed in positions of genuine importance. The disgusting and unprincipled tactics utilized by the Carl Feingolds and LeRoy McRaes only serve to underscore the profound mistrust of the SWP towards all fresh, youthful, revolutionary currents. The Majority with "good" reason does not trust us and will attempt to veto any attempts of ours to integrate ourselves into the party. Fighting by their rules, we will never raise ourselves above an errand boy (or girl) position. Even those few comrades left of the tendency who hold responsible positions within the party are on their way out with the possible exception of one or two who will be permitted to remain if only to keep the majority au courant with the latest positions of the minority.

12. The Majority rank and file, however, contains many valuable elements who will more and more become disgusted at this unprincipled behavior and find it increasingly difficult to reconcile this activity with their conceptions of democratic centralism. One of our major tasks must be to recruit these comrades to our tendency. This in fact is our first line of recruitment and is of vital importance. These Majority comrades who currently refuse to join us may well comprise groups who will join us at later times as the SWP continues its reckless course. It is important that we remain sensitive to the stirrings of the majority and give them as many openings as possible to reach us and exchange ideas, opinions, etc. On the other side, we must incessantly attempt to contact them and push their doubts about the party into the open. But this process, although one of the most important, is but one of the ways in which we will increase our numbers; it is by no means the only one and we must seriously begin to consider the possibility that we will not gain a majority following within the party.

13. We seek to recruit to the tendency. All organizational tasks must be undertaken with this concept in mind. Leninists seek everywhere to carry out the revolutionary program of the Fourth International and today that revolutionary program is embodied in the principles and program of the American Minority. At present, largely because the SWP is the ostensible revolutionary party in the eyes of

the radical public and the party membership, we work through the SWP. But we can have no intention of building centrism. We work within the party because it provides us with the best possible opportunity for building our tendency and not through any mistaken concepts of loyalty to a diseased shell.

14. Our discipline is with the ranks of the tendency as well. Discipline binds us to a program of action and functions through the form of a party. But in this period, when the program has become separated from the Majority of the party, our discipline must be with the Minority until that time when program and form are again united. It is imperative that this uniting take place as quickly as possible, but for the various reasons given above, it is likely that this will take some time. In the interim, we must not allow ourselves to drift back and forth confusing, now, discipline with the form of the SWP and, then, with the Minority.

15. Ours will be a problem of a "double" recruitment. As we seek to build the tendency, therefore, and as we have the perspective of working within the SWP in the coming period, recruitment of new cadres from outside the party will involve considerable effort. There can be no question of meekly handing this raw material over to the party for conversion into careerists or a probable speedy disillusionment. At the very least, we must exercise as complete communication and access as possible with these elements when they are first introduced to the party. But this source of cadres for our tendency is second only to recruitment within the party and is therefore of the utmost importance.

16. As our tendency builds its ranks, the SWP will become more and more reluctant to accept members in its various branches who are evidently supporters of the Minority. On one pretext or another the SWP leadership will refuse to take these comrades in, or suggest that they do not have "enough experience," etc. Thus Goran Moberg was refused admittance to the party on the grounds that he was living in Puerto Rico which was not a part of the United States. Requests to make him a member-at-large were considered out of the question by Carl Feingold.

We can not drop these comrades! On the contrary, we must keep them in as close a contact as possible with the functioning and activities of the Socialist movement. Under no conditions must this vigorous new material be allowed to wither up and drift away because of insufficient political and organizational contact with revolutionary Marxism.

17. Gathering all of our forces together, and acting in a cohesive fashion, we must press the struggle within the party on an organizational level as well as on a political one. But our primary battle is a political one and we must not allow ourselves to succumb to the Majority disease of organizational manipulation in lieu of political struggle. We have, nevertheless, much to learn on the organizational plane, but we must learn these techniques while battling against them. In many meetings, it is possible to utilize tactics which will at the very least give us an opportunity of being "heard," that is, of carrying our arguments to the other comrades.

18. To repeat, our major battle is a political one and we must seek whenever possible to counterpose revolutionary arguments and programs to those of the SWP. The effect of this tactic will be a two-fold one. That is, it will help to bring over additional Majority comrades to our ranks and at the same time it will help to crystallize the political thinking of the Minority comrades who carry out these appeals. No item in the Militant or the ISR should be too small for us to fasten upon and expose its true nature. We must seek to open political discussions at all times if only during the coffee break at branch meetings. There are no shortages of areas on the American scene in which we can ask for discussion: the civil rights movement, etc.

19. In general we must pick and choose our battles in order to avoid defeats and losses which might weaken the fighting spirit of the Minority. But there is no reason why we can not act as united blocs within the party when approaching some outside activity as a strike, campus activity or the like. This will always be a highly difficult proposition because of our position within the SWP, but we must attempt to utilize every opportunity possible for recruitment. Planned and united actions within the party will exact a much greater reward than haphazard and self-contradictory actions. This places a tremendous burden upon the various Minority comrades who are expected to carry out these actions, but they are therefore not the less needed.

20. The situations in the various branches are differentiated in degree from that in New York. Thus, there is an opportunity present in certain cities such as Berkeley-Oakland or New Haven of our winning organizational control. All comrades in these critical areas should be encouraged and aided as completely as possible. Visitations by groups or individuals, many letters, and material aid should be made available in order to make the most of any opportunities which may present themselves. Organizational control in a branch would render the task of recruitment much easier. Control would also make it much more possible to reach other Majority comrades through the National Convention, etc. Therefore, in addition to the suggestions above, comrades should be encouraged to move to places where they can be most politically effective.

21. The situation facing our forces is qualitatively the same in the YSA as in the party. But in the youth a more open and revealing process takes place, paralleling the course of the SWP. The process is the more open because those currently carrying out the Majority line there are usually not as skilled as the SWP's Carl Feingold in manipulating organizationally. But that they are less skilled does not mean that they are less dangerous. Still, by virtue of their fluster and bluster they can often be temporarily beaten or side-tracked. Comrades operating in the YSA can speedily detect those times when it can be most advantageous to attack with vigor and those when it will be best to maintain a silence. But at no time must we fall into the trap of lending other than critical or conditional support, depending upon the circumstances, to the various proposals and activities. At other times, we must resolutely offer, in the words of Comrade Harper, "a revolutionary alternative on the issues under discussion."

22. The document submitted by Comrade Harper (Orientation of the Party Minority in Youth Work [draft]) on 8 August 1962 to the New York Tendency contains our basic position in regard to youth work. This

document should be supported, developed and implemented at every opportunity.

23. The essential prerequisite for developing and implementing the Minority program and tasks is a high caliber of political and theoretical training. Without this preparation and continued development of cadres, we can have no other option than to function on the basis of personalities and "facts" rather than on the basis of Marxist theory and dialectical processes. It makes absolutely no sense to demand that comrades be more "active," particularly in such a danger-laden situation as the one we are presently in, without at the same time demanding a tendency program designed to continue the development of political awareness which forms the sine qua non of our existence as socialists.

24. One of the charges which has been made amongst the Minority is that our tendency stands in danger of becoming a "study circle." Presumably, the reference attempts to characterize a latent or explicit desire for Minority comrades to shirk from mass contact and (centrist) party building concomitant with a preference to discuss revolutionary work as abstractly as possible. But not a single member of the Minority fills this bill of goods! Each has at the very least taken the significant step of joining what he or she took to be the revolutionary party in this country. In addition, the Minority is primarily composed of comrades who have worked tirelessly in the party on a political and organizational level and who have made many of the most outstanding contacts with mass groupings. One of the most noteworthy complaints of these comrades is not that they do not wish to do party work, but that they do not care to be reduced to cogs in an autocratically managed centrist party, that is, a party which limits the areas of political usefulness. Our comrades want to be active, but they want to be active as revolutionary Socialists.

Therefore, one of our major tasks at this moment is to become a study circle! The ability to reason and develop our program, both individually and collectively, is absolutely necessary if we hope to win new elements while carrying on a sustained struggle. We are the vanguard precisely to the extent that we become capable of carrying out the tasks of a vanguard. The carrying out of these tasks necessarily presupposes study on all problems facing the proletariat as a class engaged in struggle as well as on all problems before its vanguard.

25. It is necessary to develop both formal and informal political discussion among ourselves. To this end we seek to have forums, educationals and the like in the SWP and YSA given by members of the Minority. In addition, we must supplement this pattern of education by a full range of programs within our local tendency units. More, we must see to it that Minority comrades are provided with the fullest and widest possible knowledge of national and international developments. There can be no meaningful development and application of Marxism without the greatest practicable exchange of information concerning the various moods, trends and events in the world Trotskyist movement. It must be an unquestioned obligation for all comrades to see that others are furnished copies of relevant correspondence whenever possible. At the very least full and continued access to these documents must be the right of all Minority comrades. Any inclination to build personal prestige or status by the arrogation and

withholding of reports must be checked.

26. Fundamental to the tasks of our tendency which can only be successfully carried out by means of raising the caliber of the Minority as Marxists is the resolute shattering of the petty-bourgeois and reactionary division between Marxist "thinkers" and Marxist "doers." Any notions along this line in our ranks can only, if encouraged, bring a most pernicious outcome to our struggle. All comrades should be included in the happenings and encouraged in every imaginable way to take part. This is particularly important at a time when we are so few in numbers. And since we are so few there can be no excuse for failing to carry out this proposal. Failure to include comrades in discussions, consult with them, and heed their proposals indicates an attitude of contempt for the very idea of a Leninist party.

27. Yet even our short-term perspective is not that of becoming a "permanent discussion group" or a Marxist coterie. But we must realize that lacking a clearly thought out -- and discussed! -- set of tactics, strategies and programs we will only function to see ourselves drowned by the Charybdis of sectarianism or rent by the Scylla of opportunism and petty-bourgeois accommodationism. "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary action" is an absolutely correct maxim. Nowhere today is the need for the correct application of this maxim more necessary than in the struggle ahead.

28. Let us take the motto of Karl Liebknecht for ours in the coming period: "Studieren, propagandieren, organisieren" -- Study, propagandize, organize. The success of our struggle to seize the mantle of Trotskyism depends upon it.

Jim Robertson

Larry Ireland

6 September 1962

TOWARDS THE WORKING CLASS

By Tim Wohlforth

Our Evolution

Many of the problems our tendency faces today stem from the weaknesses which go back to the peculiar origins of our grouping. We began essentially as a section of the leadership of the youth organization, the YSA. Our strength then flowed from the fact that we represented the first new wave of revolutionary forces which has come to the party in the recent period. But there was a negative side to our origins. Essentially the original core of our minority had little or no roots in the party and little experience at anything other than student work. This was partly due to the fact that our energies were tied up with the construction of a youth organization so that we had little time for party work per se. It was also caused by our newness to the party--some of us coming from the Shachtmanite organization while others were recent recruits directly out of youth work.

When we began our oppositional struggle in the party, in many ways we were not really a part of the party--we were almost functioning as if we were an outside force. This certainly had a weakening effect on our work and helped the Majority isolate us within the party. While we were conscious of this problem from the very beginning, it must be truthfully admitted that it was not easy for us to reorient our work. In fact it was really only after we made a series of tactical errors in the youth struggle immediately after the last convention that it can be said that we really began in earnest to develop our roots in the party.

To our credit it must be said that once we began on this course about a year ago we have pursued it consistently and with some very solid results. It is this tactical course which made it possible for us to consolidate our forces in the East Bay, to fuse with the working class cadres in San Francisco, Detroit and Philadelphia, and to make a serious impact on the New Haven group. These developments have changed the basic nature of our tendency and for the first time open up a serious opportunity for us to build an opposition deeply rooted in the working class cadres of the party itself. Only such a tendency can ensure the continuity of Trotskyism in the United States. An isolated circle of students and intellectuals is incapable of performing this historically essential task.

This does not mean that we have actually fully completed this turn or that there has been no resistance to it. On the contrary, from the moment we began on this course of deepening our roots in the working class section of the party, there has been internal dissension and factional conflict within the tendency. This resistance has come from a section of the tendency which finds itself completely isolated from the party ranks, is generally inactive in the party and isolated from mass work in any form. Considering the origins of our tendency as well as the isolation and sickness of the party itself, which cannot fail but have some impact on us as well, this development is certainly quite natural. As long as we were faced with the resistance of a section of the tendency to a positive building attitude towards the party, we felt the best thing to do was to seek to

encourage these comrades to be active through the example of the active comrades of the tendency. Only when this section of the tendency sought to impose its orientation upon the tendency as a whole did we face a serious situation within our tendency. This is the situation we now face with the presentation of the Robertson-Ireland document with the aim of having it adopted as the line of our tendency. It has now become clear that a section of our tendency is seeking to turn the tendency as a whole away from the proletarian elements in the SWP and turn us into essentially a little circle of revolutionary critics.

For our part we favor the continuation and deepening of the political and tactical line that our tendency has been following over the past year. The essentials of both our political and tactical orientation were spelled out in our basic tendency platform "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective." This document was the collective product of the work of the tendency as a whole and received the unanimous endorsement of the tendency. In particular the section entitled "Theses on the American Revolution" and point 10 of the concluding section state clearly and correctly our attitude towards the party and towards the American working class. My statement "On Orientation," issued last spring, was simply a further elaboration of the attitude towards the party expressed in our basic platform. The amendment to the Political Report, submitted by Comrade Philips to the last Plenum, is a further concrete amplification of the line of the platform on the American working class. The approach of this amendment will become of central importance to the orientation of our tendency in the coming period. For this reason I am appending it to this article to ensure that all comrades have a chance to carefully study it.

The basic line of our tendency is in summary: the conducting of a principled political struggle against the centrist politics presently dominating the SWP combined with an all out effort to develop deep roots for our tendency among the working class cadres of the party and with these cadres to develop roots in the class itself. Our work among student youth is a necessary and important supporting adjunct to this main task.

A Class Analysis

The central weakness of the Robertson-Ireland document lies in the attempt of these comrades to analyze the party and develop a tactical line towards work in the party without relating the party to the working class and the work of our tendency to the working class section of the party. It is precisely a class analysis and a class perspective that is missing.

This shows up in many, many ways throughout the document. For instance, on the very first page Robertson-Ireland attribute the theoretical sterility of the present-day SWP to the loss of the Shachtmanites in 1940. But this is simply not true. Certainly the Shachtmanites took with them many gifted writers and talented intellectual technicians. But theoretical vitality is not the simple product of the ability to handle skillfully ideas and concepts or to write them fluently. Its essential roots are in the proper fusion of intellectual elements with working class cadres in a party which is deeply rooted in the class itself. From this standpoint it can be stated

that the split with the petty bourgeois minority in 1940 actually strengthened the party theoretically. The difficulty was that it did not strengthen it to the point where the party was able to withstand the isolation and stagnation of the postwar years in Trotsky's absence. Of the same character is the section later on in the document which compares favorably the petty-bourgeois WP, acceding to the pressures of the bourgeoisie, with the SWP of today.

This may seem like a small historical point but it is symptomatic of the thinking of Robertson-Ireland. Our task is not to flood the party with sharp intellectuals who will take over where Shachtman left off in 1940. It is our task to contribute to the political and theoretical re-arming of the party as part of the very process of struggling to develop the party's roots in the working class. Along these same lines the highly significant role our party played in the American class struggle during the war and in the period just after the war is treated in an off-hand manner with only a sentence. The result is to project the present crisis of the SWP too far back in its history and thus slight those positive features of the party's history which allowed it to play such an important and positive role' for many years. It was never a perfect party but those who fail to see the strengths it once had will never be able to positively contribute to its reorientation and rebuilding today.

This same weakness of a lack of a class analysis can be found in the document's treatment of the party today. The reasons for the opportunism and political centrism of the party in regroupment and more recently in relation to Cuba and the Pabloites is never explained in this document (unless we are to go back to the loss of the Shachtmanites). We are told that this is an "auto-catalytic" process, which we gather means these comrades feel it just sort of spontaneously happened. Likewise with the analysis of the resistance to centrism in the party. This is simply described in non-class terms as "restorative forces" and in one place it is suggested that Jim Cannon, personally, was one such force. In actuality, the isolation of the party from the working class, the erosion of its working class base, has led to the development of a petty bourgeois tendency inside the SWP which today has the reins of the party in its hands. The resistance to this tendency over the years has come from the more healthy working class cadres of the party--for which Jim Cannon was many times a spokesman. An understanding of these class forces in the party is the beginning of any analysis of the party, or any tactical line within it.

A Working Class Perspective

The bulk of the Robertson-Ireland document is devoted to our tactics. Needless to say, since these tactics flow from the analysis made at the beginning of the document, these tactics are as devoid of a class approach as is the analysis. Trade union work, for instance, gets only a part of one sentence. There is no attempt to relate the construction of our tendency to the relationship of the SWP to the American working class. For instance, we are told that "the role of the revolutionary Marxists within the party must be that of an aggressive, political polarizing force." But we are not told what we are to polarize and around what kind of issues.

The preliminary discussion on this document, held recently in New York, has helped to clarify further this aspect of the Robertson-Ireland document. It seems that the working class was omitted from the document because the authors question the existence of the working class as a force in our own party. Both Comrades Robertson and Ireland denied that there was a proletarian core or kernel in the party. Comrade Robertson said that to maintain that such a core existed was in actuality to perpetrate "a myth" for the workers in the party have become bourgeoisified, are in fact a conservative grouping.

This is a very, very serious claim. If the party does not have such a working class core, and if we seek to maintain an orientation towards the working class, then it follows that it is our duty to split from this petty bourgeois centrist party. If we remain within it the limitations placed on our functioning by party discipline necessarily limit our functioning to a petty bourgeois milieu--which is death to real revolutionaries.

But this is simply not the case. These comrades are in reality subjectively justifying their own isolation from the working class section of the party by claiming this section does not exist, much as liberals justify their isolation from the American working class by denying that there is a working class. Not only does the party have a proletarian core but a section of that core has become part of our own tendency. The bulk of the growth of our tendency over the last year has come precisely from this layer of the party. Despite our weaknesses in functioning in the party, itself due to the type of attitude expressed in the Robertson-Ireland document, we continue to have an impact on this section of the party as witness our collaboration with the New Haven comrades.

Of course, some of the workers in the party live quite comfortably these days and many more are tired and worn out from years of difficult struggle in an extremely difficult environment. But is this the case with all the working class members of the party? And further, is the present condition of some workers in the party unchangeable, un-influenced by changes in the class struggle? If the comrades hold the latter to be the case then what hope do we have for the American working class as a whole which is certainly as bourgeoisified, if not more so, than that small vanguard section in the party?

It is not simply a matter of the workers presently in the party. We must consider the workers who will be coming into the party in increasing numbers in the period to come. Unless Robertson-Ireland maintain that a small circle of students and intellectuals will have more success winning over newly radicalized workers than the admittedly sick, but still proletarian SWP, then their perspective makes no sense. We feel, that despite its sickness, there are enough healthy working class elements in the party, that with our support and encouragement, these comrades can begin work that will in time bring important layers of fresh, young workers and Negroes into our movement. We have complete confidence that within the party we will win over the bulk of these class conscious forces. Does Robertson-Ireland have this confidence in our ideas?

These comrades, as they have no class analysis of the party, begin with a feeling of deep alienation from the party as a whole. This is expressed in a thousand little ways throughout the document.

"We have no intention of building centrism," Robertson-Ireland state, and they caution us on having "any mistaken concepts of loyalty to a diseased shell." Along the same lines is their distinction between the discipline of the party and the discipline of the tendency. They claim to reject the former and adhere to the latter. But since our tendency has no national organizational structure and has never invoked discipline against anyone or anything, all this adds up to is a lightheaded attitude towards discipline of the party. This mood in the tendency leads to such actions as that taken by Judy, actions which have done great harm to our tendency.

We cannot win serious influence in the party if we feel so alien from it as to view its growth as the growth of an opponent formation (for certainly all centrist parties are our opponents). We must identify with the party as our party, work to help it grow and expand having full confidence in our own ideas and thus in our ability to win to a correct Marxist program the new forces that come into the party. Discipline is not a tactical matter. If one wishes to seriously build the party (which these comrades do not) then one must loyally and fully accept the discipline of the party. There is nothing that more alienates the best elements in our party than a light attitude towards the discipline of the party. They correctly interpret this to mean a hostility to the party itself, a party they consider to be theirs. It was some of the best people in the New York branch that criticized Judy the most for her undisciplined functioning. I sympathized with these comrades, and not Judy, on this point.

Rejecting party building and rejecting party discipline because the party is dominated by centrist elements leads logically to only one conclusion--splitting from the party. But these comrades do not openly advocate such a course. This, however, puts them in a difficult spot. On the one hand they feel they cannot (and by and large these comrades have not) do much fruitful work through the party. They cannot openly do work independently of the party without risking expulsion from the party. The result: the comrades generally do not do work of any variety which brings them in contact with the masses. And thus of necessity they become a little ingrown critical circle isolated from the masses whose only excuse for existence is "study" and factionalism. It is within this framework that the underlined assertion of Robertson-Ireland that "one of our major tasks at this moment is to become a study circle" takes on its real meaning.

Their activity, to the extent that it occurs at all, takes on a "circle building" character. This is expressed in their concept of "double recruitment." They urge our tendency to take young fresh elements, indoctrinate them with our views (in a careful manner of course so as not to get "caught") and then sneak them into the party and into the tendency. Essentially these comrades are once again expressing their very real lack of confidence in their own ability to win over fresh new elements who come into direct contact with the party Majority. If we are in fact correct in our ideas we need not fear the impact of the Majority comrades on young revolutionaries. Of course if we are completely isolated from party work we will not come into contact with these new forces and they may very well become Majorityites.

Also this method of recruitment has a very direct influence on the type of new recruits our tendency gets. Since the tendency is prohibited from independently carrying on class struggle actions by

its existence as a part of the party, these new recruits are not brought into our tendency through joint participation in struggle. It is the rare individual, who after being so recruited, is not so turned inward and embittered as to be next to useless in influencing other party members or in carrying on serious mass work.

There are other indications in the document of this "circle building" approach. While the comrades recognize that we cannot operate independently of the party they urge us to operate through the form of the party as if we were in fact a separate organization. This is the meaning of their urgings that we "act as united blocs within the party when approaching some outside activity as a strike, campus activity or the like." Comrade Harper similarly urges us in the youth to function where the Majority isn't. We reject this kind of circle building functioning for we wish to function exactly where the Majority is. We have confidence in our ability to win over the best of the active working class Majority comrades. We reject any concept of playing games with party discipline, sneaking people into the party, functioning in an undisciplined way when the Majority isn't looking or not present (why else the concern to be active where they are not?).

All this talk of pressing "the struggle within the party on an organizational plane" is cut out of the same cloth. We do not want an organizational factional war with the Majority. Such an approach will only deepen our isolation within the party--force us deeper and deeper into our little circle. Our task is not to subjectively oppose everything the Majority proposes but rather to seek close organizational collaboration with Majority comrades, despite the efforts of the centrists in the party to prevent organizational collaboration through provocative actions. Having established these working relations we must pursue all the more vigorously the political struggle.

For us to consider opening up our tendency to non-party members is simply to invite disciplinary action from the Majority. This is clearly an action in violation of the statutes in our party. Furthermore it is completely unjustified. Not one single person has been refused membership in the party solely because of suspected sympathy with the Minority. I personally would have opposed on the floor of the New York branch the application for membership of the comrade referred to in the Robertson-Ireland document. I have never met this person. More important he has never attended a single party function and was completely unknown to the party local. He is not an American citizen and he planned forthwith to go to an isolated area where we have no branch. This is an absurd business and gives one a feel of the kind of question which these comrades tend to blow out of all proportion. I have no intention of participating in any meeting at which internal party matters are discussed in front of nonparty members. Even in the non-Leninist YSL we did not invite non-members into our tendency until we had a conscious split perspective.

The results of the type of functioning Robertson-Ireland advocate have been clearly indicated by our work here in New York. While a rather large section of our local tendency here has been busy with this kind of circle building activity (or no activity) the Majority comrades, who were until recently a minority in the local YSA, have been engaged in open YSA activity. The result was that they decisively defeated us with a landslide 2 to 1 vote in the recent YSA

local elections--and they did this because of the support they had won from the bulk of the new recruits in the local. The major responsibility for this important defeat lies with those tendency members in the youth who have utterly divorced themselves from the real life of the YSA local. Admittedly, the Majority comrades had the weight of the party leadership on their side and this was an important factor. But we had maintained control of the local despite this for a couple of years now. In any event the size of the defeat is a clear indication that at least some of the blame lies with our own comrades. That is unless one claims that our ideas cannot stand up in open conflict with the Majority's in a struggle for the allegiance of young people who wish to be revolutionaries.

The Robertson-Ireland orientation, taken as a whole, has an internal logic to it that the authors may only be partially aware of, or not aware at all. To state it openly and plainly theirs is a split perspective. A tendency which rejects party discipline (even if only partially) and party building, which seeks to sneak people into the party, which functions in part as an independent entity, which carries on an organizational faction war within the party, which, in violation of party statutes includes non-party members, which is so deeply alienated and isolated from the party ranks that it has in fact already split in content if not yet in form--such a tendency is going down a road which must inevitably lead to a split from the party. That is the logic of it regardless of the wishes of the individual comrades who adhere to this orientation. The more we act as if we were an outside force, the greater will be our isolation from the party ranks. As soon as we are really, totally isolated we can count on the Hansens, etc., to toss us out of the party--to the cheers of a relieved membership. With the type of tactics these comrades suggest that we follow the leadership will have little difficulty in finding solid grounds for expulsion.

Whatever else may be said for the Robertson-Ireland "study circle" proposal, I am somewhat sceptical as to the theoretical contributions that will come out of such a group. Worthwhile Marxist research cannot develop in the stultified atmosphere of the type of "study circle" these comrades advocate. Only comrades capable of deeply rooting themselves in the class struggle or working closely with and assisting as best they can comrades who are so rooted can make, or ever will make, serious contributions to Marxist theory. What we need is less talk of the importance of theoretical work and more serious work by all the comrades on the real problems we face. Talking circles will not help this.

Our Alternative

What is our alternative to the real perspective of Robertson-Ireland to turn our tendency into an isolated circle of critics? We start from our class analysis of the nature of the party itself. We see the party as containing both a centrist wing, which presently dominates the leadership, and a proletarian wing which resists this domination fully and consciously, as in the case of our own cadres, or partially and confusedly, as in the case of many, many of the party's trade union and Negro cadres. Since we view the party in this fashion we do not feel alienated from it. Rather we feel a complete identity with its proletarian kernel. It is our party and we are going to struggle to return this party to the proletarian ele-

ments who actually built it. It is the Hansens, the Weisses, and the Wardes who are alien elements in our midst. For their politics we have nothing but hatred, nothing but implacable struggle against the corrupters of our party.

Our task is to raise the consciousness of the healthy working class forces within the party. In order to do this we must more and more devote our attention to the developments on the American scene. This is the importance of the treatment of the American scene in our basic platform; this is the importance of the Philips Amendment that we presented at the Plenum. We must relate the drift of the party in the class struggle in this country with their outright betrayals internationally. It has been this approach which has led to our growth among older party cadre in the past period. It has been this approach which has brought the New Haven people close to us. This must continue to be our course.

We cannot reach the working class cadres of the party as long as we remain an outside alien force within the party. We must deepen our roots in the party. We must become the most loyal, the most disciplined, the most dedicated builders of this party as well as the most implacable, most tireless opponents of the petty bourgeois tendency which dominates and strangles the very life of our party. We must work with these comrades in order to help develop the roots of our party among the working class and Negro people. Yes, we must do all kinds of work, even Jimmy Higgins work. We are not privileged characters. The problems of the party are our problems and we must collectively work to correct them.

Of course we expect the centrists to seek to force us out of the party and out of significant positions of influence within the party. They must do this for our success will mean their political death. What does Robertson-Ireland propose in this situation? Clearly to retreat deeper and deeper into our little comfortable circles. We propose to seek to deepen our roots in the party. The more they seek to force us out the deeper, deeper in we sink our roots. Should they expel some of us, the others must remain in the party and dig in deeper and the expelled members must immediately re-apply for membership and orient all their efforts around assisting the developments within the party. Our success in these tasks will have a tremendous effect on the overall success of the work in this country.

Nothing can be allowed to stand in the way of our building of a proletarian tendency within our party. The building of such a tendency requires the defeat of the tactical line put forward by Robertson-Ireland and the further implementation of the line we have been following this past year.

October 2, 1962

Appendix to "TOWARDS THE WORKING CLASS"

Dear Tim:

The history of the revolutionary movement is replete with individuals and little groups of frustrated and rootless petty-bourgeois, who under cover of revolutionary phraseology prepare a desertion of the revolutionary movement.

I hope I am wrong, but the Robertson-Ireland 'document,' taken together with the Harper statement on the YSA to which he refers, appear to be heading in just that direction, and at top speed.

I am in agreement of course with the general line of your statement. You make the central points correctly. Hiding behind the very shallow rhetoric is a complete lack of understanding of precisely the two points on which the Minority stands--the decisive role of the class and of the party.

The revolutionary party is going to be built, according to these sophomoric maneuverers, by forcing the party to accept in membership somebody who lives in Puerto Rico or somewhere. It will be built, according to the Harper thing, by sending our forces where the Majority isn't. Finally, it will be built by "studying." The class struggle, at some undetermined time in the indefinite future will then be the final test. Despite all the phrases, their approach reveals beyond the shadow of a doubt that they have no faith and no understanding in the revolutionary potential of the working class and of the struggle of the Negro people.

If we are to move our limited forces, the movement must be dictated not by petty organizational considerations, but by the rhythm and demands of the mass movement--if the mass movement is really our primary revolutionary interest. If we are to study, then the living laboratory of the class struggle must be the school room in which we open the books. The concept of a study circle means that in reality its proponents believe that mighty class struggles are not on the agenda, that the need for a combat party is still objectively a need of some indefinite future.

By historical accident, the overwhelming majority of the cadre of the American party, in fundamental contradiction with the current political line which it has impressionistically adopted, must nevertheless fight to preserve and build the Party. Contrary to abstract political logic, the cadre in this country must justify its existence by fulfilling a political function left open by the Social-Democrats on the one hand, the Stalinists on the other. Because of its political line it does this poorly. But it must do this nevertheless. Despite its political line it represents the first line of attraction for revolutionary youth today, and Negroes tomorrow, and the working class a little later. Has its political line yet become an insurmountable and permanent block to this type of growth? Can we do qualitatively better at this juncture in the objective situation in terms of recruitment? Can Robertson demonstrate this? Doesn't Robertson realize that it was the very growth of the Party in the youth field, the attraction of new and leftward moving youth which opened up the present struggle and is attracting more and more of the older working class cadre? What will be the result when such new growth

accelerates, as it will? Who will win the new elements who want to be revolutionists? If we can't win them, there is something wrong with us.

A closer analysis of Robertson's arguments portray their shallow and eclectic character. He arbitrarily selects Cuba as the point of no return, the point at which the SWP becomes organically a centrist party moving to the right, which cannot be reformed, but in actuality must be destroyed. Why Cuba? I could select a half-dozen points in the last 15 years to arbitrarily select a closing date for the Marxist accountant to close his books on. The SWP remains impressionistic. But if we really believe that the workers in Russia, and China, in Cuba and America, will demonstrate their revolutionary will, we must also accept the real possibility that we can and will win a majority, if not of the leadership, then of the ranks of the party. Again, any other course demonstrates a lack of the revolutionary perspective which we hold to be the basis for the impressionistic drift of the Majority leadership.

On page 4 of the document Robertson again gives evidence of a complete lack of seriousness. We are told that the SWP is not even a left-centrist grouping "which genuinely desires... the socialist revolution but suffers some internal limitation in the form of ideological or organizational baggage which it is unable to transcend in practice." It has become "opportunist" in intent. This childish babble is made more concrete by the examples he gives us of a genuinely left-centrist outfit, which apparently was not "opportunist in intent." He gives us of all things the Workers Party-USA, 1941-46.

One of the most serious political errors I have made was in leaving the SWP for the WP in 1940, even though almost immediately afterward I joined in the fight of a minority inside the WP for reunification.

The overwhelming majority of the leadership and cadre of the WP split from the Trotskyist movement under the impact of the Stalin-Hitler pact and the pressure of American imperialism. If there could have been any doubt, the subsequent evolution of the WP removes it. Trotsky, by the way, was ready to make all kinds of organizational compromises even with this group to prevent a light-minded and criminal split. But the minority, which did not start off with a split perspective anywhere near as clearly enunciated as that of Robertson, soon was swept away by the political logic of its impressionism, and by a basic rejection, despite its noisy rhetoric, of a revolutionary perspective either in America or in the Soviet Union.

And yet Robertson has the unmitigated gall to present this essentially petty-bourgeois grouping moving under the blows of bourgeois public opinion as an example of a genuine "left-centrist" organization superior to that of the SWP today. What a fantastic and revealing business.

The building of the revolutionary party still remains a slow, hard, tedious task, although the tempo is now beginning to pick up a little. Workers above all do not join such a party lightly. And they do not leave it lightly. They do not carry their organizational convictions packed in an overnight bag ready for instant departure. This may be a handicap in the mass Social-Democratic and Stal-

inist parties in Europe. It is an advantage in the SWP. Workers judge much by deeds. They are not easily taken in by intellectual adventurers and factionalists.

The sooner we realize this, the smaller will be the cost to the Minority and the more quickly will we grow among the real revolutionary elements--those presently in the SWP, and those who are going to join.

Comradely,

Albert Philips

THE TENDENCY AND THE PARTY

By Geoffrey White

The American Minority, originating and remaining a tendency within the SWP, is faced with the necessity of constantly defining and re-defining its position with regard to that organization. It is only within the matrix of such an evaluation that any general perspective for the Minority becomes realistic and helpful. Not only must this evaluation be made, but it must be adjusted and amended as time goes on to conform to changes in direction, or more likely, acceleration or deceleration of the process now taking place in the SWP.

The degeneration of the SWP, as developed by us in "Towards a Revolutionary Perspective" has been proceeding unchecked. "Trotskyism Betrayed" indicates the depth of the seriousness of this problem as our British co-thinkers see it. The party, losing confidence in the revolutionary role of the working class and hence in itself as the potential leadership of that class, is falling rapidly into a centrist position internationally. It is true that this sickness has manifested itself as yet primarily outside the Party's field of direct work, in the area especially of the colonial revolution. This is only natural because it is on the American question that the weight of our revolutionary Marxist traditions is most felt, and that elements within the Party are most likely to perceive the process for what it is and put up the most energetic resistance. The formation and training of the SWP leadership has been in the American trade union field. But more important, the very bleakness of the American scene retards the degeneration to which it gave rise by not providing those "leftward moving forces" which in other arenas have become the channels for capitulation and liquidation. This temporary lag in the process of degeneration must not, however, delude us into believing that the SWP leadership will not follow the same road on the American scene as that which they are taking internationally. The appearance in the field of Civil Rights of even such relatively feeble "leftward moving forces" as the SNCC leadership has led to the liquidation of southern work, partly, it is true, for factional reasons, but more basically because this follows necessarily from their view of the "new world reality" in which we, Marxist revolutionaries, have but at best a dispensable, advisory role. Thus the cancer has already metastasized into the American scene, a process which, under the present circumstances, must inevitably continue. The accommodationist position taken already in the face of Castro, the FLN leadership, the SNCC leadership, and, by tacit complicity, in the face of the Renard leadership, constitutes a consistent position essential to the whole outlook of the Majority, and it awaits but the emergence of some American Frank Cousins for it to be applied directly to the development of the class struggle in America.

We cannot understand the seriousness and the organic, non-fortuitous character of this process without attempting to see its genesis, and placing it in the context of the American scene.

First, it must be seen as a product of years of increasing isolation from the class. In the thirties and early forties, although the SWP was never an essential part of the basic leadership of the

American working class to the degree that even the Stalinists were, nevertheless, the SWP did maintain bastions within the class where, as in Minneapolis, as in the Bell strike, or briefly in Maritime, it was able to influence and direct local developments, and more important, where it received the fructifying and rejuvenating flow of day to day contact with the real class struggle. Since the late 1940's, however, the Party has gone through a period of deep isolation from the centers of class struggle. We have been wiped out of Maritime, reduced close to vanishing point in Auto, and so forth in each industry and every city where we were once a force. This isolation is a serious political defeat which has sharply reduced the Party in size and in influence in various areas of activity. The deep McCarthy period, not yet lifted, also increased the isolation of the American section from the rest of the world movement, and encouraged the Party to concentrate its gaze more and more exclusively on the American scene.

Cut off from effective participation in the direct class struggle in more than just a peripheral way, the Party correctly sought and found opportunities in other fields of work which were, unfortunately, necessarily of an essentially petty bourgeois character. The most important of these alternate fields of work were the regroupment campaign on the Stalinist front from 1956 to 1958, the fruitful work with the LWC, and more recently the opening presented for student work through the YSA. However correct it undoubtedly was energetically to enter these fields, nevertheless the Party had to pay the price in absorbing from them further petty-bourgeois opportunist pressures, as exemplified in the 1959 NY ISP campaign.

Against this background of defeat and of isolation from the direct class struggle, the political decay of the aging leadership of the Party, from which a whole generation was missing, was inevitable.

Having no taste over a sustained period of even small victories, seeing the class reject them and turn to relative passivity or even reaction, the old leadership of the Party, aided by younger elements trained in a petty-bourgeois political milieu, lost confidence in the class and its own ability to achieve victory. Thus it sought to win ersatz victories by riding the coattails of elements like M-26, FLN and SNCC. This leads directly to accommodationism, liquidationism, and the revisionist anti-Marxism it now practices.

It is a tribute to the calibre of this leadership and the power of its hitherto Marxist ideology that this process did not manifest itself earlier than it did.

The central question which we must answer is: "What constitutes the Bolshevik movement in the USA?" Is it still the SWP? In view of the foregoing, we must answer, no. We have shown here and elsewhere that the SWP's anti-Trotskyist course is not an aberration on the part of the Majority, but is an inevitable conclusion drawn from their revisionist world outlook. In view of this underlying and fatal revisionism in the SWP, we must conclude that the Bolshevik movement in the United States is posited today not in the SWP as such, but in the American Minority as a revolutionary Marxist tendency within the broader centrist grouping.

If the foregoing conclusion is correct we must face certain consequences which inevitably flow from it.

Recognizing our tendency to be Bolshevik in content but a minute subgrouping in form, we must seek at all costs to win to our program the most advanced and class conscious workers and intellectuals, to create the nucleus of a combat party and to fortify ourselves by this recruitment against the extreme hazards of sectarianism and narrowness which are inherent dangers in our present position. We must soberly recognize that while 40 people cannot lead the masses, even less can they afford to become isolated from meaningful contact with them.

Our discipline must on principle lie with the Bolshevik tendency, whose discipline, as long as the Voorhees Act organizationally severs us from the International, is ultimate and final. The discipline we owe to the Party, however, is tactical and conditional, conditional to our overriding desire to stay in its ranks.

The Party we must regard in terms of its motion, not statically, in terms merely of where it is at the moment. Seen thus, it is a rightward moving centrist formation.

However, the Party is and remains the cornerstone of our perspectives. It is within its ranks that we find the most conscious workers, the best Marxists, the most resolute fighters. We will find healthy elements among all sections in the Party in those who are not prepared to throw their ideological arms at the feet of the first left moving bureaucracy they encounter.

In this light we must consider the geographical distribution of our forces. New York, while it is the political center and we must seek always to maintain a force there, offers few practical opportunities for the most direct participation in the struggles of the decisive section of the class. Furthermore, it is traditionally the center of petty-bourgeois influence in the Party. It is therefore desirable that our forces there be reduced to a minimum, and that comrades who are unable to function effectively in New York and who are able to make a shift out of the city be encouraged to do so. In deciding recommended destinations for these comrades, special consideration should be given to such locations as Detroit, New Haven, San Francisco and eventually Chicago which combine the possibility of effective work immediately with long range possibilities of involvement with important sections of the direct class struggle.

Furthermore, especially in a youthful tendency such as ours, great care must be given in the occupational guidance of our young people. Youth who are able to do meaningful work politically in the student movement, or whose academic studies are potentially fruitful in reinforcing our woefully weak cadre of trained intellectuals, that is, students with a genuine academic vocation, should not be pressured out of the student category in the name of a false proletarianization policy. Where neither of these factors exists, our young comrades should be encouraged and be guided toward occupations where they will have the potentiality of participating with and eventually coming into leadership of decisive sections of the proletariat, and

away from the Bohemian fringes. Factors to be considered are: economic survival, physical demands, job mobility, and strategic position within the structure of the class. This means special attention to the acquisition of skills which give a degree of job security, job mobility, economic sufficiency, and whose physical demands are not so great as to render after-work political activity impossible. A policy which sends young people into grueling dead end jobs is not only destructive, but also rather than being truly proletarian in fact reflects petty-bourgeois romanticism.

To the extent compatible with maintaining our position in the Party, we must seek to pick and choose our areas of activity, concentrating on those which give us maximum access to the class and maximum opportunity to influence the ideology of incoming contacts. This would mean primarily civil rights work at this stage, educational work in the Party and YSA, and trade union work above all where opportunities for meaningful work in this field present themselves.

Will our continued membership in the Party inhibit our activities on many occasions? Yes, it undoubtedly will, as the Shirley case illustrates. Because we say that our discipline to the Party is tactical and conditional, that does not in any way make our party discipline less rigid. We will be held to a higher standard than the Majority. We must expect and accept this. This means that we must from time to time accept the sacrifice of promising lines of mass work, but this is a necessary price we should be prepared to pay in order to remain in the Party.

If any individual or group of individuals is victimized and expelled, we should resist this if it is unjust, but not at the price of the expulsion of the whole tendency.

Furthermore, in a rightward drifting party, the formal position always lags behind and is better than the actual position. We must be prepared to take advantage of this contradiction.

It also follows that we must be prepared to engage in what are usually called "party-building" activities, for two reasons. First, because it is tactically necessary in order to maintain our position in the Party, and second because in building the Party we are building a field from which we will create our own foundations. But here a cautionary note is necessary. We cannot be trapped into doing the Majority's dirty work for it. If an incorrect motion needs to be introduced, let them do it. How much of a fight to make is an immediate tactical question, but under no condition should we take responsibility for incorrect policies just to prove we are good guys. We must appear as the rational, principled elements, they as the bitter factionalists.

Under these conditions we absolutely cannot have a split perspective. But to seek at all costs short of political suicide, that is, the loss of the right to present our ideas and being forced to repudiate them, to avoid a split, is not to preclude the possibility. If the Majority is willing to pay the price, we can be expelled. This currently unlikely variant is always with us, and our comrades should be prepared for any eventuality.

We must seek to recruit to the Party, to our program and our tendency. It is to our interest to have as many people as possible in the Party where they will face the full impact of our ideas. Where our supporters are unjustly refused admission to the Party, as seems to have happened in one case in S.F., we must consider that in principle we are responsible to them and they to us, but for tactical reasons they must not be a formal part of the tendency, or attend meetings at which Party questions are discussed.

As far as our internal life is concerned, we must recognize that we are now in the process of passing over from a tendency to a faction. International events will increasingly force this on us. This does not mean that we must confront the Party monolithically on every occasion. Such confrontations should be held to a minimum. However, this transition does require a sharpening of our discipline and internal structure. We must recognize that this carries with it the dangers of increasing our isolation in the Party.

Serious attention must be given to theoretical questions, not the least of which is Cuba. This work must involve the maximum number of comrades.

Internally there must, and because of its size and consciousness there can be, a maximum of internal democracy. Political and crucial organizational decisions must be arrived at by all. International communications will become more of a security problem once the break with the I.C. is formalized, but even here, there must be no monopoly. Internal documents and correspondence must, of course, be made accessible to all.

In sum, we must organize now for a long battle for the survival of the Bolshevik movement in the U.S. While we regard this movement as posited in the Minority, we regard the SWP as both the field of battle and the vehicle for the propagation of our ideas. We seek to remain within this organization at any cost short of political extinction. As a self-conscious revolutionary Marxist tendency, we seek to counterpose on every suitable occasion our own principled politics to their opportunism. This is the path to the reconstitution of the Marxist movement in North America.

October 10, 1962

Theses on the Situation and Tasks of the Revolutionary
Tendency in the American Trotskyist Movement
by Shane Mage

I The crisis of the SWP is nothing but an American expression of the crisis of the international Trotskyist movement.

II The crisis of the international movement is caused by the failure of its leadership to apply and develop creatively the method of Marxism. This failure has led a section of the Trotskyist cadre, under the pressure of isolation from the working class and proletarian failures and defeats, to abandon in practice the proletarian-revolutionary perspective of Marxism.

III By accepting the role of pressure-group subordinate to the pro-capitalist Stalinist, social-democratic, and national-bourgeois leaderships of existing social movements, this cadre has succumbed to capitalist ideology and ceased to be a genuinely revolutionary tendency.

IV The political merger of the Cannon and Pablo groups on the basis of a program in no way superior to that formerly advocated by Pablo and, within the SWP, by Cochran and Clarke, has proven that the SWP Majority is no more than a revisionist tendency identical in nature to the other Pabloite groups.

V The SWP Minority is the American component of the international tendency struggling for the revitalization of the Fourth International. Success in this struggle can be obtained only through the most persistent study and development of Marxist theory in application to the course of the class struggle in every country.

VI In all countries the revisionist tendencies contain a significant proportion of individuals who sincerely consider themselves to be revolutionaries, including both veteran working-class cadres and new young militants. Through political discussion and common action many of these comrades can be won away from the revisionist politics of the groups with which they are presently identified.

VII The division between the revolutionary tendency and Pabloite revisionism in all its forms is politically irreconcilable. In the long run, unless the revisionist tendency should reverse its very nature, this fact must inevitably find full organizational expression. However, at present the two tendencies remain within a single party, and formalization of their division will remain premature until the political disagreements have been thoroughly clarified and the choice clearly posed for all.

VIII Presence in the same movement as the Pabloite revisionists and even, in certain cases, participation in a national party with a solidly entrenched revisionist majority, is a necessary tactic for the revolutionary tendency. Like any tactic it is entirely subordinate to revolutionary strategy.

IX The essential strategy of Marxism today is the formation of the revolutionary vanguard party of the working class through continual promotion of and participation in the class struggle on the basis of

the perpetual development, dissemination, and implementation of the program of Trotskyism.

X Strategic imperatives can give way to tactical considerations only on the basis of concrete and compelling arguments. Where the discipline of a non-revolutionary organization conflicts with the obligation of a revolutionary to his class and to the Marxist program there can be no presumption in favor of acceptance of that discipline.

XI The revolutionary tendency consists of all those individuals participating in the class struggle on the basis of the Trotskyist program, irrespective of whether some party with a revisionist majority is willing to permit them to be 'party members.' The mode of participation of such individuals in the revolutionary tendency is exclusively a tactical question.

XII On the basis of the foregoing strategic line, the fundamental tasks of the revolutionary tendency are at present as follows:

(a) Its own theoretical and political development through serious and systematic study of Marxist method and theory.

(b) Participation in the struggle of the working class and Negro people to the maximum extent possible, and intensive effort to place its members in position to participate in future struggles.

(c) Fullest activity within the Socialist Workers Party, which constitutes our primary arena for political work and primary mode of participation in the class struggle.

(d) Full and active intervention in the international discussion process as an integral part of the revolutionary tendency grouped around the International Committee.

10 October 1962

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Note to Thesis XI

Some comrades have queried the absence of an explicit enumeration of acceptance of the discipline of a democratic-centralist (Leninist) party as a criterion for inclusion in the tendency. To remove any possible doubt, it should be made perfectly clear that functioning 'on the basis of the Trotskyist program' must include the living practice of democratic centralism. The actual meaning of democratic centralism is necessarily dependent on the concrete conditions in which the Marxist functions--thus in the U.S. today the problem is complicated by the fact that the revolutionary tendency is not yet organized along democratic-centralist lines, so that a fully Leninist 'party' cannot be said to exist, but is merely in process of formation. I am for the speediest possible perfection of the functioning of the tendency along democratic-centralist lines.

S.M., 14 October 1962

WHAT THE DISCUSSION IS REALLY ABOUT

By Laurence Ireland

The recent statement of Comrade Wohlforth, "Towards the Working Class," offers a reply and, although unclearly, a counterposing line to that set forth in the document by Comrades Robertson and Ireland entitled, "The Centrism of the SWP and the Tasks of the Minority." However, less clarification than confusion regarding the issues now before our tendency comes as a result of Comrade Wohlforth's effort since he has obviously misinterpreted and misunderstood the substance of the Robertson-Ireland document. In the interest of raising this discussion to as high a level as possible, it has become necessary to clarify the matter for Comrade Wohlforth and correct the unwarranted impressions which he has managed to gather.

The over-riding issue before our tendency is that of the reconstruction of the American section of the Fourth International, together with the International itself.

Some comrades may doubt that the question is this serious, that it is really a matter of reconstructing the Leninist party. Yet the basic document of our tendency, "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective," is unequivocal in this respect. (One of the signers of this document, incidentally, is Comrade Robertson.) Here is what is correctly termed "the heart of the matter": "Consciously or not, the SWP leadership has accepted the central position of Pabloite revisionism" (p. 9). Or again: "The essential differences in our party and our world movement are brought into focus by one question, the question of the International" (p. 13). Further: "Today again we face a situation where a world revolutionary perspective is being challenged--this time by the party Majority itself" (p. 15). And:

In sum, we believe that the failure of the SWP leadership to apply and develop the theory and method of Marxism has resulted in a dangerous drift from a revolutionary world perspective. The adoption in practice of the empiricist and objectivist approach of the Pabloite, the minimization of the critical importance of the creation of a new Marxist proletarian leadership in all countries, the consistent underplaying of the counterrevolutionary role and potential of Stalinism, the powerful tendencies toward accommodation to non-proletarian leaderships particularly in the colonial revolution--these pose, if not countered, a serious threat to the future development of the SWP itself (p. 15).

Still there is always the possibility that comrades in the tendency may have become infected with some manner of ultra-leftism or left-sectarianism. An important and necessary test of the correctness of any approach taken by a national section or grouping is in the presence or absence of confirmation by other sections of the International.

Thus it is heartening to discover abundant confirmation of the correctness of the tendency's evaluation of the problem in the SLL document "Trotskyism Betrayed." For instance: "We must point out, however, that this discussion is not at all a question of listing points of agreement and disagreement: we are convinced that a whole difference of theoretical and political method is involved" (p. 1). And further: "The basic difference in method as we shall show are centered upon the basic questions of Leninism, how to proceed to the construction of an international revolutionary party" (p. 1). More:

In the whole theoretical trend of the SWP exemplified by the famous theory of the 'confirmation' of the concept Permanent Revolution, there is an acceptance of non-Marxist, petty-bourgeois tutelage over the masses, but in the guise of recognition of the 'strength' of the masses in pushing the politicians to the left. Theory has been degraded from a guide to action to a dead commentary on the accomplished fact. Behind this there is a long theoretical stagnation, reflected in the failure of the SWP to go beyond a superficial criticism of the last round of revisionism, Pabloism and in the absence of any theoretical contribution by the SWP since Trotsky's death. It is in the construction of the revolutionary party in the USA itself that the necessity of defeating the SWP leadership's revisionism is most urgent (p. 3, emphasis added).

It would, indeed, have been a fatal defect if the Robertson-Ireland document had attempted a contrary position.

But "The Centrism of the SWP and the Tasks of the Minority" stands firmly with this line as, for example, when it speaks of the SWP as standing today:

a. in opposition to the most essential aims of the Trotskyist Movement for a major part of the globe in the declared dispensability of a revolutionary proletarian party to lead the colonial masses to victory (victory as opposed to the stalemate of the deformed workers' states or the still more illusory 'victories' that do not transcend the entanglements of capitalist imperialism);

b. internationally no longer for a world party, a Fourth International as the self-organized, international vanguard of the working class; instead the SWP seeks limited unity of mutual amnesty with other centrists in order to form both an 'international publicity agency for assorted "leftward-moving" bureaucracies' and to retain an organizational fig leaf to cover their break with the essential substance of proletarian internationalism--the struggle to build a world party of the workers (p. 3, emphasis added).

And furthermore: "Given these profound differences with Revolutionary Marxism, it is to belabor the obvious to insist merely upon the centrist character of the SWP" (p. 3).

There can be, therefore, not the least doubt as to what is the basic foundation for the existence of our tendency. It is precisely

because the SWP is, today, a centrist party that our tendency has come into being. And the goal of our tendency must be that of constructing "the revolutionary party in the USA itself."

The question is how shall the construction of the Leninist party be undertaken and it is here that the comrades in our tendency must decide between the positions put forth by Comrade Wohlforth on the one hand, and Comrades Robertson and Ireland on the other. It is with this question in mind that the statement of Comrade Wohlforth is approached and his misunderstandings and impressions corrected.

The basic theme of his paper is concerned with the social and political composition of the SWP. Thus the reader discovers phrases like "the working class cadres of the party"; "working class section of the party"; "a proletarian core or kernel in the party" and "a proletarian wing." Unfortunately, Comrade Wohlforth fails to explain his usage of the term "working class cadre" as he has evidently taken it to mean different things in various sections of his statement. Before any clear picture can emerge, it will be necessary to consider briefly the term "working class cadre" in the Marxist sense and then in the various ways in which Comrade Wohlforth uses it.

Objectively considered, the working class is that group of men, women and children who, having no means of production of their own, are obliged to sell their labor power in order to subsist. The working class is not a homogeneous grouping, but is, rather, "the least heterogeneous class of capitalist society" as Trotsky pointed out (Revolution Betrayed, p. 267). For example, it is possible to consider an agricultural proletariat, an urban proletariat, workers in the service industries, workers "at the bench," white-collar workers, workers in the concentrated industries and etc.

A "cadre" in the Leninist sense is one who is theoretically trained and equipped to give leadership and direction to the class struggle. This involves raising the subjective awareness of the working class so that it becomes capable of functioning as a class in struggle.

The preceding gives, admittedly, only the sketchiest guidelines for considering the term "working class cadre," but it will suffice for our purposes here.

The difficulty in Comrade Wohlforth's effort at once begins to emerge. It turns out that he is speaking of various strata of the working class and, in particular, that stratum in the concentrated industries or industrial workers. This is the only possible interpretation which can be made of Comrade Wohlforth's phraseology since very few of our comrades in the SWP actually own means of production.

It then becomes necessary to consider the social composition of the party from the standpoint of their actual employment in the concentrated industries (as opposed to the class background of the various comrades). About 25 million or 45% of the U.S. working class are employed in the concentrated industries (i.e., Mining, Contract construction, Manufacturing, Transportation and public utilities). Yet, out of an SWP population of around four to five hundred members, it is doubtful if even as many as 10% can be said to be now employed

in the concentrated industries. In any event, the comrades so employed fail to constitute any trade-union fractions and, for the most part, occupy the more comfortable jobs available in these industries. As a matter of fact, the last sizeable component of comrades working in the concentrated industries split from the SWP in 1953 with Cochran!

Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that Negroes and other "non-whites" constitute only about 4% of the population of the SWP. Yet this same grouping accounts for something like 20% of the total population of the United States. And it is well known that probably about 98% of this group are workers.

At this point, the reader is obliged to consider the cadres in the SWP, that is, the political composition or level of theoretical preparation of our comrades, as opposed to the number of comrades who simply pay dues and "belong" to an organization. The conclusion in this respect must be that the political caliber is quite low, else why would revisionism have been able to make such headway in our party?

It is, therefore, important to understand that the situation is qualitatively different from that faced by Trotsky when, in 1928, he wrote to Borodai:

To conquer this (proletarian) kernel, however, is to conquer the party. This kernel does not consider itself--and quite rightly--either dead or degenerated. It is upon it, upon its tomorrow, that we base our political line. We will patiently explain our tasks to it, basing ourselves upon experience and facts. In every cell and at every worker's meeting, we will denounce as a falsehood the calumny of the apparatus which says that we are plotting to create a second party; we shall state that a second party is being built up by the Ustrialov-people in the apparatus, hiding behind the Centrists; as for us, we want to cleanse Lenin's party of the Ustrialovist and semi-Ustrialovist elements; we want to do this hand in hand with the proletarian kernel which, aided by the active elements of the proletariat as a whole, can still become master of the party and save the Revolution from death, by means of a profound proletarian reform in every field.

To misunderstand this point, is to basically misunderstand the tasks before our tendency today.

Does it "follow" then, as Comrade Wohlforth puts it, "that it is our duty to split from this petty bourgeois centrist party (p. 5)?" "On the contrary," as the Robertson-Ireland document points out, "it is critically important in accepting the characterization of the SWP (as a centrist party), not to be swept away into a split perspective as though centrism equalled some kind of political leprosy (p. 3)." Precisely because the SWP is a centrist party, it is necessary to "prepare and implement the most determined, resolute and conscious opposition" to its revisionist and suicidal course (p. 5).

It is, thus, quite unfortunate that Comrade Wohlforth has seriously misunderstood the Robertson-Ireland document to the extent that he has been able to write of it as having "a split perspective" and one "which rejects party discipline (even if only partially) and party building, which seeks to sneak (?) people into the party, which functions in part as an independent entity, which carries on an organizational faction war within the party, which, in violation of party statutes includes non-party members (!), (and) which is so deeply alienated and isolated from the party ranks that it has in fact already split in content if not yet in form" (p. 10). Comrade Wohlforth must be reminded that not one member of the tendency has violated party discipline or party statutes. Indeed, this sort of misunderstanding is the more serious as it comes from a comrade in our own tendency and mouths the sort of thing one might expect from the party Majority!

How is it possible to "sneak" people into the party? And a tendency, even a faction (not prohibited by party statutes), can never become an "independent entity" except by becoming a separate party, and this is clearly not our present perspective. There are no non-party members in our tendency. And as the Robertson-Ireland document points out, "our primary battle is a political one and we must not allow ourselves to succumb to the Majority disease of organizational manipulation in lieu of political struggle" (p. 8).

In fact, one of the basic themes of the Robertson-Ireland document is the need to prepare ourselves politically--as cadres. Comrade Wohlforth drew heavy criticism when he began to propound an idea of "party building" as the basic task of the tendency, as opposed to the notion of theoretical struggle and tendency building stressed by Comrades Robertson and Ireland. "What we need," writes Comrade Wohlforth, "is less talk of the importance of theoretical work and more serious work by all the comrades on the real problems we face" (p. 11).

Yet our comrades in the SLL write: "Only theoretical clarification of the new stage in the class struggle, a clear perspective of the working class as the only revolutionary class and of the advanced countries as the core of the world revolution, can form the basis for the revolutionary parties necessary in the coming struggle for power" ("Trotskyism Betrayed," p. 2).

Comrade Wohlforth sought to buttress his position by quoting with approval the phrase of an eminent comrade urging our approach to be one of inculcating "party patriotism" into the tendency. But even Trotsky in 1933 could write:

We never promised anybody that we would cure the Comintern. We only refused, until the decisive test, to pronounce the sick as dead, or hopelessly ill. In any case, we did not waste a single day 'curing.' We formed revolutionary cadres, and what is no less important, we prepared the fundamental theoretical and programmatic positions of the new International ("The Class Nature of the Soviet State," p. 5, some emphases added).

Hence the following from the Robertson-Ireland document:

The essential prerequisite for developing and implementing the Minority program and tasks is a high caliber of political and theoretical training. Without this preparation and continued development of cadres, we can have no other option than to function on the basis of personalities and 'facts' rather than on the basis of Marxist theory and dialectical processes (p. 9).

Comrade Wohlforth has obviously misunderstood the Robertson-Ireland argument concerning the need for theoretical training. He attacks these comrades for urging the development of cadres as he misunderstands them to be urging "a little ingrown critical circle isolated from the masses whose only existence is 'study' and factionalism" (p. 8). Yet here is what the document says:

One of our major tasks at this moment is to become a study circle! The ability to reason and develop our program, both individually and collectively, is absolutely necessary if we hope to win new elements while carrying on a sustained struggle. We are the vanguard precisely to the extent that we become capable of carrying out the tasks of a vanguard. The carrying out of these tasks necessarily presupposes study on all problems facing the proletariat as a class engaged in struggle as well as on all problems before its vanguard (p. 9).

Perhaps Comrade Wohlforth missed the sentences following the one about the study circle. In any event, it is interesting to hear Lenin on this point:

As long as the question was (and in so far as it still is) one of winning over the vanguard of the proletariat to Communism, so long, and to that extent, propaganda was in the forefront; even propaganda circles, with all the defects of the circle spirit, are useful under these conditions and produce fruitful results. But when it is a question of practical action by the masses, of the disposition, if one may so express it, of vast armies, of the alignment of all the class forces of the given society for the final and decisive battle, then propaganda habits alone, the mere repetition of the truths of 'pure' Communism, are of no avail. In these circumstances one must not count in thousands, as the propagandist does who belongs to a small group that has not yet given leadership to the masses; in these circumstances one must count in millions and tens of millions ("Left-Wing Communism," pp. 129-130).

It would be a mistake to conclude that Comrades Robertson and Ireland urge the formation of "an isolated circle of students and intellectuals." But it would be a profound mistake to slight the role that students and intellectuals are capable of playing in the class struggle. "Not for nothing," wrote Trotsky, "did Lenin propose to draw largely upon the students in order to combat bureaucratism" ("The New Course," p. 22).

In fact, it was one of the purposes of the Robertson-Ireland document to seek to break down the hurtful barriers between "intel-

lectuals" and workers within our party and our tendency. This division is a clear reflection of the class nature of capitalist society and must be struggled against. Comrade Wohlforth speaks of "the proper fusion of intellectual elements with working class cadres in a party" (p. 3). This is why the Robertson-Ireland document said: "Fundamental to the tasks of our tendency which can only be successfully carried out by means of raising the caliber of the Minority as Marxists is the resolute shattering of the petty-bourgeois and reactionary division between Marxist 'thinkers' and Marxist 'doers.' Any notions along this line in our ranks can only, if encouraged, bring a most pernicious outcome to our struggle" (p. 9).

The question of discipline appears in Comrade Wohlforth's statement in such a manner as to suggest that he has misunderstood the Robertson-Ireland document on this point as well. "Along the same lines," he writes, "is their distinction between the discipline of the party and the discipline of the tendency. They claim to reject the former and adhere to the latter" (p. 7). But here is what the Robertson-Ireland document said: "Discipline binds us to a program of action and functions through the form of a party. But in this period, when the program has become separated from the Majority of the party, our discipline must be with the Minority until that time when program and form are again united" (p. 7). In other words, it is not a question of which party or organizational form we must support, it is above all a question of which program we must adhere to. Were the SLL comrades undisciplined when they failed to "build" the Pablo grouping in England? Absolutely not! As Trotsky stressed in 1935:

The International is not at all a 'form' as flows from the utterly false formulation of the ILP. The International is first of all a programme, and a system of strategic, tactical and organizational methods that flow from it ("In the Middle of the Road," p. 16, emphasis in original).

If this is the case in the International, it is, a fortiori, all the more so in the case of a national section of the International.

But since our perspective is one of remaining in the SWP, we can hardly afford to violate "party discipline or party statutes." It does mean, however, that we keep party discipline because we are disciplined members of the tendency!

In any event, discipline is not something to be donned like a hat. Here is how Lenin viewed the question:

First of all the question arises: how is the discipline of the revolutionary party of the proletariat maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its perseverance, self-sacrifice and heroism. Secondly, by its ability to link itself with, to keep in close touch with, and to a certain extent, if you like, to merge with the broadest masses of the toilers--primarily with the proletariat, but also with the nonproletarian toiling masses. Thirdly, by the cor-

rectness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided that the broadest masses have been convinced by their own experience that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party that is really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission it is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end in phrasemongering and grimacing ("Left-Wing Communism," p. 13).

Let there be no more misunderstandings on this question.

Comrade Wohlforth also raises the question of a class analysis: "It is precisely a class analysis and a class perspective that is missing" (p. 3). Surely he cannot mean this statement! Perhaps he has missed the title of the Robertson-Ireland document. For the term "centrism" means nothing at all if it does not refer to a position taken in regard to the class struggle. And "the centrism of the SWP" is the foundation for the tactical conclusions in the Robertson-Ireland document.

It is unfortunately necessary to jog Comrade Wohlforth's memory somewhat. He writes: "This may seem like a small historical point but it is symptomatic of the thinking of Robertson-Ireland" (p. 4). Of course, small historical points are important, but it seems to be Comrade Wohlforth who has forgotten some things.

Thus he writes:

For instance on the very first page Robertson-Ireland attribute the theoretical sterility of the present-day SWP to the loss of the Shachtmanites in 1940. But this is simply not true. Certainly the Shachtmanites took with them many gifted writers and talented intellectual technicians. But theoretical vitality is not the simple product of the ability to handle skillfully ideas and concepts or to write about them fluently. Its essential roots are in the proper fusion of intellectual elements with working class cadres in a party which is deeply rooted in the class itself. From this standpoint it can be stated that the split with the petty bourgeois minority in 1940 actually strengthened the party theoretically. The difficulty was that it did not strengthen it to the point where the party was able to withstand the isolation and stagnation of the postwar years in Trotsky's absence (sic). (pp. 3-4).

Obviously, it would have been sheer folly to "attribute the theoretical sterility of the present-day SWP to the loss of the Shachtmanites in 1940." Here is what the Robertson-Ireland document actually said:

The American Trotskyists took a stunning double blow in 1940. Over half of the movement broke away and a few months later Leon Trotsky was murdered. Among those break-

ing away from the movement (40% of the party and 80% of the youth) were most of the party's writers, theorists, as well as a whole political generation who had made up the youth leadership. The party lost nothing in the way of intransigence and solidity through these blows as was shown by its resolute role in the Smith Act trial and the upsurge in the working class trade-union struggles during 1943-47 out of which issued Cannon's affirmation, "The Coming American Revolution." However, a theoretical sterility and blunting of political alertness took place and was never made good. All these circumstances underlie the recent statement of the British SLL that the SWP had made no political contribution to the world movement since 1940 (in "Trotskyism Betrayed" by SLL-NC, July 21, 1962) (p. 1).

This point is simply a misunderstanding on the part of Comrade Wohlforth as to what the Robertson-Ireland document actually said. Of course, the split can hardly be said to have "strengthened the party theoretically" as the SLL document notes.

But Comrade Wohlforth continues:

Of the same character is the section later on in the document which compares favorably the petty-bourgeois WP, acceding to the pressures of the bourgeoisie, with the SWP of today" (p. 4, emphasis added).

Here is what the Robertson-Ireland document said:

The SWP falls short of being a left-centrist party, that is, one of those organizations or groupings (often moving left from the social democrats or out of the CP) which genuinely desires and seeks to work for the socialist revolution but suffers some internal limitation in the form of ideological or organizational baggage which it is unable to transcend in practice. (E.g., the Workers Party--USA, 1941-46; the Austrian Revolutionary Socialists, 1934-38; the left-wing of the POUM at various times.) (p. 4).

And here is how Comrade Wohlforth characterized the WP in 1957:

We can now get an accurate picture of the political development of the Shachtman tendency. It was born in 1940 as a petty bourgeois opposition within the Trotskyist movement. It went through a "second split" with the mass exodus of those who rode the opposition bloc out of the movement altogether. It then launched a party and attempted to compete with the SWP to be the Trotskyist party in this country. It contained at this time divergent tendencies which pushed it in different directions. It had within it tendencies which wished a reconciliation with the SWP by building a united Trotskyist party. It had other tendencies which forced it to the right--to a definitive break with Trotskyism in 1946. We can characterize the WP of this period as a left centrist grouping of unstable composition which could not quite decide exactly where it was going. Then followed the 1946 WP-SWP unity affair and with the opening of the cold-war witch hunt, it began to move to

the right at an accelerated pace, transforming itself from a competing tendency within the Trotskyist movement into a centrist "third camp" tendency which felt itself antagonistic to Trotskyism as well as to reformism. It stayed only for a relatively short time in this centrist limbo as it soon struck out in an open reformist direction, seeking today to become the loyal left wing of the social-democracy" ("What Makes Shachtman Run?," p. 22, some emphases added).

Of course, Comrade Wohlforth may have changed his mind in the meanwhile.

Again, on the question of history, Comrade Wohlforth writes:

The results of the type of functioning Robertson-Ireland advocate have been clearly indicated by our work here in New York. While a rather large section of our local tendency here has been busy with this kind of circle building activity (or no activity) the Majority comrades, who were until recently a minority in the local YSA, have been engaged in open YSA activity. The result was that they decisively defeated us with a landslide 2 to 1 vote in the recent YSA local elections--and they did this because of the support they had won from the bulk of the new recruits in the local. The major responsibility for this important defeat lies with those tendency members in the youth who have utterly divorced themselves from the real life of the YSA local (pp. 9-10).

Actually, however, the local YSA was taken over by the Majority through colonization of YSA'ers from Boston, Philadelphia and other areas. That we should not remain passive to this sort of organizational manipulation was one of the reasons for Comrade Harper's document as well as that of Comrades Robertson and Ireland. There can be no good result from mistakingly seeking to place "the major responsibility" other than where it belongs: on the SWP and on the defeatist "responsible" line which has been urged in our tendency.

Other questions of history present themselves as well. Thus Comrade Wohlforth writes: "From the moment we began on this course of deepening our roots in the working class section of the party, there has been internal dissention and factional conflict within the tendency" (p. 2). Of course, the real opposition to Comrade Wohlforth's leadership has resulted from his May document, "Proposed Statement on Orientation." Because he urged a "party building" attitude instead of a tendency building one and because he was prone towards acting without consulting the members of the tendency, a number of discussions arose.

Again, Comrade Wohlforth writes of the person living in Puerto Rico and says "he is not an American citizen" (p. 9). Of course the man is a citizen, although a naturalized one. He was not "completely unknown" to the party as many comrades in our tendency had met him and our comrades are most certainly in the party. In any event, the "isolated area where we have no branch" is Puerto Rico and specific provisions are made in the SWP Constitution for dealing with areas

where no branch exists. The real point, however, is that Carl Feingold, the SWP organizer in New York, expressed not the slightest desire to even meet the man until he was confronted with the possibility of having the question raised on the branch floor. If it had not been for the vigorous action on the part of some comrades in the tendency, this first-rate material would have been allowed to drift away from the party and any prospect of becoming a part of the Trotskyist movement.

Since these misunderstandings, some of which have been cleared up, completely vitiate Comrade Wohlforth's criticisms perhaps it would be best if he simply went back and re-read the Robertson-Ireland document. In any case, the tendency must not be denied the tactics and strategy necessary to defeat revisionism and re-establish the Bolshevik party in the United States as well as internationally. "The words of Liebknecht, veteran of German Social-Democracy, serve as the watchword of our activities: 'Studieren, propagandieren, organisieren'--(Study), propagandise, organize...." (Lenin, "Our Immediate Task," in Collected Works, Vol. 4, p. 220).

13 October 1962

FOR A FIGHTING PERSPECTIVE!

By Shirley Stoute

Tim correctly states in "Towards the Working Class" that our Statement of basic position "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective" was the collective work of the tendency as a whole and unanimously adopted by the tendency. We felt and still do feel that it is necessary to deal with the revisionism of the party as expressed over Cuba--the issue over which we were originally brought together--on the American scene. The statement of basic position is held to be our platform by all members of the tendency and there has been no question of its basic political line or any differences on it expressed by any member of the tendency.

Unfortunately the bulk of Tim's "Towards..." makes it clear that it was not written for the comrades in the N.Y. tendency because it contains many obvious distortions of facts concerning our work. In this document Tim states "From the moment we began on this course of deepening our roots in the working class cadres of the party, there has been internal dissension and factional conflict within the tendency." It would be helpful if this could be documented but, I'm sure it's impossible to do so. I know of no factional conflict and dissension in the ranks to developing roots in the working class. About a year ago, comrade Robertson, one of the "petty bourgeois" authors of the Robertson-Ireland document proposed that comrades in the YSA with no perspective of further academic studies--campus work --should try to get jobs in important sections of industry affording us the possibility of being able to intervene in the union movement. We can develop roots in the working class by participating in the struggles of the working class through the trade union and civil rights movement. The working class cadres of the party must be won again to the Trotskyist program. We can do this only by fighting for our program as opposed to the centrist policies of the Majority within the mass movement.

Tim continues "This resistance has come from a section of the tendency which finds itself completely isolated from the party ranks, is generally inactive in the party and isolated from mass work in any form." I ask of comrade Wohlforth: has any member of our tendency, or of the party as a whole been consistently engaged in meaningful work in the mass movement in N.Y.? NO. Furthermore, has comrade Wohlforth ever touched the mass movement? NO. Tim has been more isolated from the party ranks, and generally inactive in the party than most members of the tendency. Because of this he has never been in a position to recruit anyone to the party or the tendency unlike other Minority comrades.

Now let's be more reasonable. We who have always been the most active members of our tendency and in general of the YSA-SWP as a whole are and always have been generally isolated from mass work in any form. The only thing approaching mass work that any of our comrades have done in N.Y. was in the CAMD. Because of the front group approach the party took towards this committee, we were restricted in attempts to involve people other than SWP sympathizers and a few Village radical types. Therefore our work was very frustrating and con-

sisted mainly of working down at party headquarters which was the headquarters of the committee. This is one of the campaigns that the party latched onto but it has never consistently worked in the civil rights mass movement. Our comrades threw themselves into the Beth-El Strike, especially the "sick circle" wing of the tendency, not comrade Wohlforth.

In general the only type of work that we activists have participated in has been internal organizational assignments--organizing public YSA forums, participating in demonstrations here and there and sales at public meetings. Two or three comrades have been involved in campus work. The isolation of our comrades from mass work stems from the fact that the party as a whole is generally isolated from the mass movement and this is a defect that we must correct.

It is not simply a high number of man hours of work that is required of our comrades. Effective mass work puts us in a position to recruit to the party and build the tendency. The comrades in the Minority (including myself) who have maintained a consistently high level of activity remain isolated from the mass movement because of the type of work we have been doing.

Tim continues. "As long as we were faced with the resistance of a section of the tendency to a positive building attitude towards the party, we felt the best thing to do was to seek to encourage these comrades to be active through the example of the active comrades in the tendency. Only when this section of the tendency sought to impose its orientation upon the tendency as a whole did we face a serious situation within our tendency. This is the situation we now face with the presentation of the Robertson-Ireland document with the aim of having it adopted as the line of the tendency. It has now become clear that a section of our tendency is seeking to turn the tendency as a whole away from the proletarian elements in the SWP and turn us into essentially a little circle of revolutionary critics." To my knowledge, no section of our tendency has ever expressed an attitude that we should not build the party. Of the least active comrades (including Tim), none of these comrades saw this as a party of their orientation and wished to impose it upon the tendency as a whole. The R-I document deals with how we should work in the SWP. It does not propose a course of inactivity, but one of fruitful revolutionary activity as opposed to shallow "party building." If a positive building attitude towards the party consists of "going down to 116 and asking Carl Feingold for an assignment" as Tim suggested upon introducing his document "Proposed Statement on Orientation" last May, then I want no part of it. It is true that the party presents no obstacles to our comrades "rooting themselves in the party" to do meaningless work, but there are obstacles to our comrades functioning in positions of importance in relation to the mass movement.

Among the comrades on both sides in this discussion any honest comrade must admit that there can be found people who are active consistently, spurt activists and those generally inactive. Comrade Wohlforth fits into the last category but it never occurred to me to attribute his inactivity to a rotten orientation or political line.

Tim states: "For our part we favor the continuation and deepening of the political and tactical line that our tendency has been following for the past year." Our political line has been the same since we began as a tendency. It has only been deepened and elaborated upon as our understanding of the fundamental crisis of the party deepened. What political differences do we have? Does Tim disagree with the characterization of the SWP as a centrist party? He does not treat this question in either of his two documents. What tactical line have we been following for the past year that is counterposed to the R-I document? The only thing consistent about our tactics for the past year is that after the party convention we transferred to and sought to continue functioning as a tendency rather than a faction in the party and Tim opposed this change from the beginning.

Tim continues: "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective"--our basic position, including the section "Theses on the American Revolution" and point 10 of the concluding section, states clearly our attitude toward the American working class. The entire document including the above-mentioned sections outlines the political line that we wish the party to adopt but because the party is drifting rightward away from Trotskyism--this movement is outlined in earlier sections of the statement--we are not a homogenous part of the party but the Trotskyist tendency within the party. The document is a public statement of our political position to the party ranks and does not outline the tactics of the revolutionary Marxist tendency in relation to the centrist SWP. Since every member of our tendency agrees with our statement of basic position it is dishonest to claim that the section of the tendency behind the R-I document wishes to dump a proletarian orientation. This is absolutely false and to impose this on the current discussion is merely to render a severe blow to the small forces of our tendency by whipping up unnecessary hysteria to discredit opponents on a false basis. If we had such grave political differences as Tim manufactures in his document "Towards..." it would be unprincipled for any true revolutionist not to split the tendency. I think however, that our forces and our cadre are precious and must not be carelessly destroyed by an unprincipled split since we have such strong, political-programmatic bonds.

Tim's "Proposed Statement on Orientation" issued last spring was not a further elaboration of our basic platform and was rejected by a majority of the N.Y. tendency. The line in practice is one which I, one of the most active members had been trying to avoid following for the past several months i.e., shallow Stakhanovite "party building activity" devoid of contact with outside forces.

To build the tendency we must build the party and recruit to the tendency in the party. The best way we can do this, especially since we feel that the party lacks a proletarian orientation is through our involvement in the mass movement--trade union and civil rights movement. If the party had a proletarian core our task would be much easier. We would need only participate in the would be existing trade union fractions and be active in the mass work in the civil rights movement which the party would be conducting. Witness the stand the party took on the trade union situation of Judy, note the absence of interest in trade union work in the party branches including N.Y. and the stand the party is now supporting in the south-

ern civil rights movement: partly a result of isolation and fear of the mass movement.

I feel that the incorrectness of Tim's line was expressed clearly in the differences we had over the handling of the civil rights business. Tim opposed "waging a campaign and launching a many-pronged attack upon the leadership." He put this on the level of "organizational faction fighting against the Majority" and said he was opposed to this. Tim also said he was "opposed to using this or any other issue to hit the Majority over the head with when they've obviously made a mistake." I feel that Tim's main line is the opposition to a fighting perspective within the party. No fighting perspective and "fusing" with the Majority and trying to take the assignments and work that will win the good graces of Camejo and Feingold leads to only disintegration and liquidation. The recent southern civil rights case puts the lie to Tim's claim that any comrade can easily do fruitful work in the party. Is it because Steve and Shirley are "petty-bourgeois" scum and are "isolated from the party and its ranks" that they find it difficult to do effective mass work in the Southern civil rights movement?

No one has been "sneaking people into the party" and holding meetings at which internal party matters are discussed in front of non-party members. False writings along this line is irresponsible and harmful to the whole tendency.

Tim states: "Not one single person has been refused membership in the party solely because of suspected sympathy with the Minority." This is absolutely true, but even YSA comrades with suspected Minority sympathies (on questions discussed formally in the YSA) must be perfect (no beards, no previous conservative political views or actions, etc). Comrade Wohlforth himself recently advised a YSAer who is a supporter of the Minority to conceal his convictions to get into the party in another area.

On the YSA in N.Y., Tim states:

The results of the type of functioning Robertson-Ireland advocate have been clearly indicated by our work here in New York. While a rather large section of our local tendency here has been busy with this kind of circle building activity (or no activity) the Majority comrades, who were until recently a minority in the local YSA, have been engaged in open YSA activity. The result was that they decisively defeated us with a landslide 2 to 1 vote in the recent YSA elections--and they did this because of the support they had won from the bulk of the new recruits in the local. The major responsibility for this important defeat lies with those tendency members in the youth who have utterly divorced themselves from the real life of the YSA local. Admittedly the Majority comrades had the weight of the party leadership on their side and this was an important factor. But we had maintained control of the local despite this for a couple of years now. In any event the size of the defeat is a clear indication that at least some of the blame lies with our own comrades. That is unless

one claims that our ideas cannot stand up in open conflict with the Majority's in a struggle for the allegiance of young people who wish to be revolutionaries."

This entire paragraph consists of distortions of the truth. Minority comrades have been a minority in the N.Y. local since the loss of some of our older comrades at and shortly after the last YSA convention. The two to one majority now held by the Majority in the local is made up of the national leadership, hard Majorityites from other locals, a few basically rotten lumpen elements and a few people we would like to recruit to the Minority. There is a section of Feingold lackeys--a few opportunists whom we have no hope of recruiting. If all of our comrades had been twice as active in the period since the last convention, the votes at this election would have been the same, that is unless we had all been engaged in a different type of activity, putting us in a position to recruit to the YSA.

We won a majority of the exec in the February elections by a slim margin in spite of the tremendous campaign the Majority waged against us and all the stops they pulled to insure themselves a victory in the elections. This included packing the local with new people who were not ready to join the YSA or were really not YSA material and intense colonization. A few weeks after the elections we no longer had a majority following the local not because we lost our supporters to the Majority but by then the process of colonization etc. had reached the point of transforming the local.

In the next few months the national office successfully strangled the local to the extent that those who had previously been the most active members of the local did not know what was going on. We who wanted to act, in the Majority, Minority and new unaligned comrades were not permitted to take part in planning work of the local. The local chairman, Fred, became a figurehead and the exec a farce. Maybe if we were a little more experienced and competent we could have fought this successfully. We were not only fighting the youth leadership but they were puppets of Carl Feingold. A few of us, especially the "sick circle" wing of the tendency concentrated almost entirely on some outside activity, i.e., CAMD, Columbia Fair Play, and one comrade boycotted YSA business meetings to spend weekends on eastern shore freedom rides.

After a few months however, Camejo and Co. were tired out and were forced to spend more time in the N.O. thus making it possible for us to engage the YSA in activities to build the local. Unfortunately, however, our chairman was a plodding, lame duck do-nothing leadership. Most of the YSA membership was demoralized due to lack of activity. Only the chairman was satisfied. Camejo & Co. were able to channel all the gripes every comrade had, all the defects, including the stifling of the local by the N.O., against our leadership (or misleadership). We didn't have a study circle either.

Just because we have the correct program does not mean that we will always have a majority following among a grouping of youth in any YSA local or the members of any party branch at any given time. We must fight for the correct program!

In conclusion I repeat. We must be for the R-I document because it correctly shows how we should work in the SWP. It stands neither for inactivity as comrade Wohlforth claims nor for shallow "party building" as comrade Wohlforth urges. Rather it opens the way to fruitful revolutionary activity.

October 24, 1962



