

Sound the Alarm

To All Sections, Sympathizing Groups, and Members of the Fourth International:

Since the August 1981 convention of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, the current party leadership has been carrying out a revisionist course which threatens to destroy that organization as a revolutionary party. The open repudiation of the historic program of Trotskyism, in particular the attack on the theory of permanent revolution, has been imposed on the membership in a step-by-step process--through the pages of the party's press and other public activities, as well as through an internal "education" campaign of anti-Trotskyist classes, educational conferences, and speeches.

The content of Jack Barnes's public 1982 YSA convention speech, published in the inaugural issue of New Internationalist six months after it was delivered; and the editorial attack on Ernest Mandel's defense of our program in the August 6, 1983 issue of Intercontinental Press (Mandel's article was also published months after it was submitted) are the clearest and most recent expressions of the programmatic break with the Fourth International and with our Trotskyist heritage. These are policies promoted by the entire leadership, its editorial boards, and all party institutions. They are not simply the opinions of a few individual SWP leaders.

The promotion of this new theoretical line of the Barnes leadership (actually a rehash of old slanders against Trotsky and Trotskyism, long ago thoroughly refuted) has been accomplished without any discussion or vote inside the party. This is true despite repeated requests by many comrades for such a discussion. Even when opening a discussion was constitutionally mandated for the regular pre-convention period, the leadership postponed it--first for three months, replacing it with an educational conference, and then for an entire year. Only spurious reasons were presented for this. The muzzling of the opposition through this process clearly reveals the complete unwillingness of the current majority leadership to allow any serious consideration of these questions by the party ranks, and exposes their lack of confidence in their ability to defend these policies before the membership.

In order to assure that no discussion of these anti-Trotskyist, liquidationist policies will take place a massive slander campaign against the opposition, and an unprecedented wave of expulsions of party members with opposition viewpoints has been implemented. The right to constitute internal party groupings (tendencies and factions) was suppressed. (Party members have even been denied the right to participate in an organized way in the pre-World Congress discussion of the Fourth International, in direct violation of the statutes of that organization.)

The erosion of internal democracy reached a new level at the August 1983 National Committee meeting with the unprecedented suspension on the eve of the meeting of the four minority NC members

so that they could not attend, and then their suspension--in fact their de facto expulsion--from the party itself, in an attempt to isolate them from party members. The opposition leaders were falsely accused of being responsible for the crisis in the party, which has in fact been created by the policies of the majority itself. Since the suspension of the NC members, the thinly disguised purge of other party members in disagreement with the central leadership has been accelerated.

The expulsions, the ban on tendencies and factions, and the twice-postponed convention are merely the organizational manifestation of the anti-Trotskyist political course which the current SWP leadership has embarked upon.

These organizational measures carried out by the SWP leadership are not only undemocratic; they amount to a de facto and unprincipled split which the majority leadership is solely responsible for engineering. We, the undersigned four suspended National Committee members, state categorically that we are opposed to any such split. We will fight for our reinstatement into the party and the National Committee and for the opening of a free and democratic discussion of the differences. We will advocate a reversal of the current destructive course and a return to the historic program of the SWP.

The split in the SWP being carried out by the Barnes leadership is only the national expression of a political line which they are beginning to implement on a world scale--through the formation of an undeclared international faction in the Fourth International. It is clear that much more than just the existence of the SWP as a revolutionary Trotskyist organization is at stake. At the recent Oberlin conference, open to non-members of the SWP, leaders and members from other countries joined in the attacks on Trotskyism and the Fourth International. They even attacked their own sections where they were in a minority--without any authorization to do so by the sections' leadership. This clearly reveals the threat to the existence of our world party which the onslaught of the current SWP leadership represents.

We, the opposition NC members in the SWP, have been at the forefront of the political struggle against these policies and have witnessed the blows on our party and on the International most closely. Merely advocating the official positions of the Fourth International has become grounds for expulsion from the SWP.

It is time to sound the alert for our entire world movement. We call on all comrades to vigorously take up this struggle, to reject abandoning the Fourth International for a nonexistent "new mass Leninist international" as the SWP leadership proposes, and to act decisively to combat the danger that threatens us. There must be an opening of the discussion in all sections and convening of the World Congress on the earliest possible date. The political struggle against the revisionism of the SWP leadership must be a major focus of that World Congress. It is vital that we confront this challenge to the program, and to the very existence of the Fourth International, and that we mobilize every comrade in this effort.

We must reaffirm the continued validity of the Trotskyist program--the only real continuation of Leninism today--on a world scale. The task of building the International and its component sections cannot be accomplished except within this framework. We must rally to the defense of the International and its program against the revisionist line of the SWP's undeclared international faction.

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