

What the Spartacist League Really Stands For

a self-exposure
by James Robertson

(THE SPEECH THE SL WOULDN'T PRINT)

with an Introduction by Communist Cadre

A COMMUNISTCADRE PAMPHLET



INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet reproduces virtually in its entirety a public presentation given by James Robertson, the leading central committee member of the Spartacist League (SL) on January 29, 1977. Also reproduced is the greater part of the comments and questions which followed. Robertson's speech was given at a public forum called by the SL under the heading, "Towards the Rebirth of the Fourth International". The meeting was held on the Columbia University campus in New York City.

Political tendencies and organizations often make pamphlets or centerpiece newspaper articles from verbatim texts of speeches given by leading members. In the case of the January 29 presentation by Robertson the SL did not, although before and after this date the SL reproduced speeches of lesser figures in their tendency in their party press. The SL also had a past practice of making transcripts of SL speakers' presentations available to the public. In this case the SL declined requests for such transcripts.

What is the SL Hiding?

Why the departure from past and present practice in this case? The reader will soon see why. The Robertson speech of January 29 was a truly scandalous performance on the part of someone who has been a self-identified Marxist for some thirty years or more (see Appendix A). But despite the fact that the SL has attempted to "cover up" the speech (see Appendix B)--which is certainly an implicit acknowledgement of the political embarrassment incurred by Robertson's presentation--the SL has nevertheless refused to criticize Robertson publicly or disavow the more noxious aspects of his performance. The SL even took the face-saving measure of publishing in Workers Vanguard (the SL's weekly organ) a journalistic news report of the January 29 meeting, quoting some innocuous passages from Robertson's remarks but devoting most of the article to a cleaned-up paraphrased summary.

Robertson Presents the SL's True Political Face

But there is a very good reason why the SL cannot repudiate Robertson's performance of January 29. It goes deeper than the not insignificant fact that Robertson is the leader and guiding personality of the SL. For despite the great deal that was personally idiosyncratic in Robertson's speech, without question he presented the real politics of the SL in a bold and unashamed style. He made no attempt to hide the political essence and method that usually remains well behind the sometimes pedestrian and sometimes torturous attempts of the SL to give itself a Marxist and Trotskyist veneer. For the SL to disown this speech, it would have to repudiate its own past, present, and future.

Communist Cadre (CTC) challenged the SL to reproduce this speech (see Appendix F). The SL declined and CTC here makes good our promise to publish the speech ourselves.

The contents of Robertson's speech and subsequent comments can be divided into two categories. The first is the usual presentation and defense of the politics of the SL made unusually interesting by the especially unguarded formulations used by Robertson--most notably on the workers' state question (see Appendix C). The second is the unrelieved and uninterrupted string of comments that can only be described as national chauvinist and sexist in the extreme. What can one say of a man who claims to be a revolutionary and who publicly refers to the Albanian peasants as "goatfuckers"? Who complains of the poor showing made by an SL candidate to student office even though "we ran a very pretty girl"? Who claims to be a champion of the

exploited and oppressed and yet characterizes the gastarbeiters ("guest workers") from southern Europe as incapable of anything except "screaming for the popular front"? Who claims that Jewish merchants in the black ghettos charge higher prices because they are "being ripped off by all the black kids"? And what can one say of the SL membership who did not sit through this shameless performance in embarrassed silence, but who roared their approval at every turn, cheering Robertson on to the next indecency, to the next slap at the oppressed?(See Appendix D)

Why We Have Published Robertson's Speech

Some in the left may consider this pamphlet to be much ado about something not very important, as sensationalist, or perhaps even demagogic (the last will be the response of the SL). We do not think so.

Communist Cadre is a Trotskyist organization. We believe that we are the only Trotskyist organization in the US, a fact which does not give us as much cause for pride as cause for concern over the retarded development of the vanguard. We seek to build a real Trotskyist working class party of mass proportions in the US. We seek to build a new communist International on a real Trotskyist basis. Since the Socialist Workers Party long ago passed over to reformism, and the Workers' League dwindled into obscurity and sectarian isolation, the SL is the "hegemonic" contender to the name of Trotskyism in the US today among the various brands of revisionist Trotskyism. The SL is the major organizational and political obstacle within the left to the task of building the Trotskyist vanguard. And we seek to eliminate this obstacle through polemic and political struggle. Hence this pamphlet.

The damage the SL does is two-fold. Those sympathetic to Trotskyism which the SL recruits or influences are badly miseducated and most often ruined for revolutionary purposes. And those hostile to Trotskyism while claiming to be communists--the Stalinists and Maoists--are presented by the SL with such a travesty and caricature, such a revision of Trotskyism, as to provide a very easy target indeed. The SL's blatantly anti-Leninist line on the national question, its deep hostility to the reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR, China, Cuba, etc., provide grist for the Stalinist mill and give credence to the old lies and slanders that the denial of the "two stages" theory in Permanent Revolution means no support for national liberation struggles and that denial of Socialism in One Country means no support for the dictatorship of the proletariat. Leftists breaking in a progressive direction from Stalinism and Maoism can be lost for good to Trotskyism precisely because of the mockery of Trotskyism that the SL has made. The SL must be exposed as neither Leninist nor Trotskyist, it must be exposed as the revisionist falsifier of Trotskyism that it is, if genuine Trotskyism is to advance in the US. Hopefully, the wide distribution of Robertson's January 29 speech will go a long way in aiding the completion of this task.

APPENDIX A:
ROBERTSON'S PERSONAL
POLITICAL HISTORY

Robertson began his political career in the Shachtmanite movement. When the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) threw its whole-hearted support to the bourgeois democratic counter-revolutionary Hungarian uprising of 1956 from the very first day (it is important to remember that the SWP took years to recognize the deformed workers' state in Hungary, a position which was not taken until 1950), Robertson, along with Tim Wohlforth, thought (correctly) that their formal differences with the SWP on the "Russian question" had been thereby eliminated in practice by the SWP's defeatist stance with regard to the Soviet intervention. Both quickly joined the SWP while continuing to maintain that the Soviet Union and its "ancillary regimes" were bureaucratic collectivist. To borrow Robertson's phrase, "it was just because the SWP sold out that he threw in with these renegades."

Robertson and Wohlforth provided the old Cannon leadership with relief against the left opposition of the Marcy-Copeland faction, which had advocated military support to the Soviet intervention in Hungary, arguing from the counter-revolutionary character of the uprising. Robertson later, along with Wohlforth and Shane Mage, formed the Revolutionary Tendency, an opposition bloc against the SWP leadership of the early 1960s. This opposition was of a contradictory character, progressive insofar as it opposed the growing electoral reformism and petty bourgeois orientation of the SWP which by that time had dropped its trade union work, but reactionary insofar as that opposition took exception to the attempt of the SWP to solidarize with the Cuban revolution, although without question that attempted solidarity was badly opportunized by popularity chasing and uncritical political support for Castro and the Cuban government.

Robertson and Wohlforth parted company roughly at this time, both leaving the SWP. Robertson founded the Spartacist League, Wohlforth the Workers League, the latter differentiating itself from the SL by, among other things, its position that Cuba is capitalist. In retrospect, seeing the subsequent development of the SL and SWP, it can be said Robertson did carry out a left split. But so much revisionist method and politics were brought along, both from the Shachtmanite past and from the bankrupt SWP of the 1950s, into the SL that whatever left impetus it had in its beginnings was not enough to assure either Robertson's or the SL's development beyond an essentially sterile and abstentionist alternative to the opportunist United Secretariat re-unification of 1963. Robertson remains to this day basically an unreformed left Shachtmanite.

APPENDIX B:
THE SL COVERS ITS TRACKS
AND SLANDERS THE LRP

A large part of the SL's cover-up has been designed not only to avoid any honest account of the January 29 meeting, not only to evade questions about Robertson's speech, but to slander those who did attempt to provide the left public with an honest account.

In the September 16, 1977 issue of Workers Vanguard the following letter appeared:

Workers Vanguard, New York
To Whom It May Concern:

Number 145 of your paper, dated 18 February 1977, carried a letter signed by me in the name of the Bay Area Group for the Defense of Paranagua and Pilla, dated San Francisco, 5 February 1977, expressing thanks to you, the Partisan Defense Committee, and the Spartacist League for support work on the Paranagua-Pilla case.

Today I chanced to read the account of the January 29th meeting in New York at which Jim Robertson spoke, in number 3 of the *Socialist Voice*.

I can only say that I am deeply shocked at the tone of Robertson's remarks as reported by the *Socialist Voice*, and that I know I speak for the majority of the activists on the Paranagua-Pilla case when I say that, while I do not retract the statements in my letter in *WV* Number 145, I feel very strongly that whether or not the facts as stated in *Socialist Voice* are true, the Spartacist League owes the whole left of the U.S. a full, satisfactory accounting of the comments of Robertson at the January 29th meeting. Furthermore, I must say that if the account published in *Socialist Voice* is true, Robertson should immediately retire himself or be retired from any further leadership activity in the socialist and workers' movements in the U.S., at least until he has attained some kind of responsibility. I feel obliged to let you know I find the remarks reported from Robertson by the *Socialist Voice* a great deal more alarming on their face than anything reported in France from the lips of Varga!

Yours,
Stephen S.
San Francisco, 18 March 1977

How did the editors of Workers Vanguard reply to this obviously serious statement from someone who does not regard himself as an opponent of the SL? They replied with a snide and, in its own way, vicious joke:

WV replies: If you believe what you read about the Spartacist League in *Socialist Voice*, you'll love the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Now the Protocols of the Elders of Zion was a late 19th century ultra-reactionary, anti-Semitic tract probably produced by the Czarist secret police. And the Socialist Voice is the journal of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP). With one sentence the SL compares the publication of a moderate, third campist, but without doubt leftist political group with the worst sort of pre-fascist race-hate literature. With one sentence the SL implies that the account in the Socialist Voice is lying and slanderous, so much so that it does not merit a reply, either generally or point by point.

What exactly did the LRP say in the *Socialist Voice*? In their spring 1977 issue (no. 3) appeared an article, "The Spartacist League's Scandalous Chauvinism", in which Robertson's remarks of January 29 were summarized and quoted in the following passage:

Robertson spoke for ninety minutes, giving what was heralded as an analysis of the world conjunctural situation. It was somewhat incredible that the leader of a group which characterizes Russia, China and similar societies as "workers' states" had nothing at all to say about most of them--with one exception. But that political oversight quickly paled into insignificance. In the course of his meandering travelogue, Robertson delivered a series of chauvinist epithets that insulted the revolutionary capacities of the working classes everywhere and denigrated almost every non-white, non-American and non-English speaking people that got in his way. His theme was to blame the working masses for the weak state of the revolutionary movement.

Robertson warmed up with the sneering comment that the Vietnamese victory over imperialism was a "big deal" and was "not really as important as the defeat of the workers in Indonesia" because "not many people live in Indochina." After this cavalier dismissal of 56 million Indochinese people and a struggle which has had enormous consequences for imperialism, he really got going.

"The Greek population exists by selling its children or selling Swiss watches to one another."

Albania, the only "workers' state" Robertson saw fit to mention, was a nation of "goat-fuckers".

"Northern Europe is dripping with fat," so the workers of this region can be "bought off with slight adjustments." Similarly, the foreign workers in these countries can also be bought off and when deported would "only end up supporting popular fronts."

Canada was not worth considering (although the Spartacist tendency has a group in that country) because it is only the "fringe on the surrey extending fifty miles north of the U.S. border." Non-English speaking North America (Mexico and Quebec, with the most advanced class struggles on the continent) was specifically ignored in this talk, which was supposed to deal with the world revolutionary setting.

As for the U.S., the one country where Robertson believes that Trotskyism has an "unbroken tradition," it too "is a jaded country" which, like Northern Europe, "drips with fat if you exclude the Negro (sic) from the statistics." But Robertson saved his vilest spleen for the American blacks: "The black population burned down the ghettos and it's now waiting for the Jews to come back and open up the drug stores." High prices charged by storekeepers in the ghetto were attributed to the fact that "black kids rip them off." And that was his entire analysis on this subject, from beginning to end.

Members of the LRP were present at the January 29 meeting as were members of Communist Cadre. The quotes in the LRP account were taken from notes or memory. Was the account in Socialist Voice as false as the SL says? The speech and comments reproduced in this pamphlet were taken from a taped recording of Robertson's and all other speakers' remarks. The reader will soon see that the account in Socialist Voice was honest and accurate.

Now the LRP is one of those groupings that, while it calls itself Trotskyist, is in fact a variety of the Shachtmanite tendency and has a state capitalist position on the Soviet Union and all the other workers' states. And once the LRP got past a simple account of Robertson's remarks, the article in the Socialist Voice went completely off the track by attempting to explain Robertson's and the SL's chauvinism as derived from the SL's defensist position on the workers' states. Unfortunately the SL's formally correct position on the Soviet Union, China, etc. (a position which is only a paper one, however, and which we do not believe will withstand the tests of repression or war), did not prevent the SL from slandering the LRP; nor did the LRP's third campist politics prevent them from being far more honest in their polemic.

APPENDIX C:
WORKERS' STATE AND
POLITICAL REVOLUTION

At the Jan. 29 meeting Communist Cadre distributed a leaflet entitled "Build A New Communist International On A Real Trotskyist Basis" in which we wrote:

"The SL has introduced an open revision of Trotskyism by depicting the political revolution as the smashing of the Stalinist state (see Spartacist No. 8, Nov.-Dec. 1966), rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist governmental regime and the democratic reform of the workers' state."

How did Robertson reply to our polemic during his remarks? He said:

"...I think I see what the differences are between us. They speak of how we have a bad position of the political revolution as 'the smashing of the Stalinist state, rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist governmental regime and the democratic reform of the workers' state.' Now Trotsky was right in '33-34 when he came out no longer for reform, comrades. It is necessary to destroy the Stalinist state apparatus: that is why it is called a political revolution, and not a reform. That means, in the Soviet Union and ancillary regimes, that the state apparatus has to be swept away by the insurgent power of the proletariat. And that is our difference, I think."

(Robertson, 1/29/77)

The difference, however, is not only with Communist Cadre but with Leon Trotsky as well. This is what Trotsky wrote against Shachtman during the 1940 factional struggle in the SWP:

"We foresaw not only the degeneration of the Third International but also the possibility of its regeneration. Only the German experience of 1929-33 convinced us that the Comintern was doomed and nothing could regenerate it..."

"But we did not draw the same conclusions concerning the Soviet State. Why? The Third International was a party, a selection of people on the basis of ideas and methods. This selection became so fundamentally opposed to Marxism that we were obliged to abandon all hope of regenerating it. But the Soviet state is not only an ideological selection, it is a complex of social institutions which continues to persist in spite of the fact that the ideas of the bureaucracy are now almost the opposite of the ideas of the October revolution. That is why we did not renounce the possibility of regenerating the Soviet state by political revolution." (our emphasis).

(In Defense of Marxism, Leon Trotsky
 Pathfinder Press, pgs. 37-38)

In 1933 Trotsky wrote "The Class Nature of the Soviet State" and it was in this brilliant and seminal article that Trotsky first announced the new perspective of political revolution in the Soviet Union. How did Trotsky pose the question? Consider the following quotes, all taken from this article:

"...how approach the reorganization of the Soviet state?"

"No normal 'constitutional' ways remain to remove the ruling clique."

"In any case, what will be involved is not an armed insurrection against the dictatorship of the proletariat but the removal of a malig-

nant growth upon it...a real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat, but only between the proletariat and the active forces of counter-revolution."

"The fundamental condition for the only rock-bottom reform of the Soviet state is the victorious spread of the world revolution."

(Trotsky, Writings, 1933-34.

All emphases in above quotes ours.)

In The Revolution Betrayed Trotsky wrote:

"Let us first assume that the Soviet bureaucracy is overthrown by a revolutionary party...such a party would begin with the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the soviets...together with the masses, and at their head, it would carry out a ruthless purgation of the state apparatus." (our emphasis)

Now, reorganization, rock-bottom reform, purgation mean one thing. "Smashing the Stalinist state apparatus" means something quite different. Some SL members have attempted to wiggle out of this blatant difference with Trotsky by arguing that "state" means one thing and "state apparatus" something else. The state, state apparatus, state machine, state power are all synonymous terms used interchangeably by Leninists and Trotskyists. During the discussion period of the January 29 meeting Communist Cadre called Robertson to order on the SL's use of the term "Stalinist state" pointing out that it came right off the cover of Shachtman's notorious book, The Bureaucratic Revolution: the Rise of the Stalinist State. Robertson replied to us:

"Now. I simply say, I vacate the formulation/"the Stalinist state"-CTC/ Now, every week I read articles in Workers Vanguard /weekly organ of the SL/ and I vacate the formulations; I disagree with them. But so what? The Stalinist state apparatus must be destroyed...that apparatus, those means of rule, all those ministries, all that military apparatus /!!!/, everything is designed to take the social surplus away from the Russian working people and squander it in the hands of the bureaucracy. And that has to be destroyed and done away with..."

(Robertson, 1/29/77. Emphasis ours.)

As one can see, Robertson really vacated very little. So if the term "Stalinist state" or "Stalinist state apparatus" is discarded, the SL's position on political revolution is this and this only: the Soviet degenerated workers' state and all the deformed workers' states must be smashed. Trotsky's position and, with him, Communist Cadre's position, is something quite different. We quote from our publication Hungary 1956: a Trotskyist Defense of the Soviet Intervention (pages 17-18):

"Trotsky came out for political revolution in 1933. He first gave expression to the new orientation in "The Class Nature of the Soviet State." The axis of the question is not, as the SL would have us believe, that prior to 1933 Trotsky believed the Soviet state could be reformed, but that after 1933 he believed it must be smashed--no, not at all. The essential question was: peaceful reform or violent struggle. Until 1933 Trotsky believed that the Soviet party (and the Comintern) could be internally and peacefully reformed through the political struggle of factions,

and that a revolutionary government and Soviet democracy could be returned to the Soviet Union upon the peaceful reform of the party. From 1933 Trotsky believed that the Stalinized Comintern and Stalinized Soviet Communist Party were beyond reform and that a new international, and with it a new party in the Soviet Union, must be built. Not that the Soviet state was unreformable, but that the Soviet Communist Party of Stalin was beyond reform!

"And what was the task of the new party that must be built in the Soviet Union? That party must strive for power, governmental power, must strive to overthrow the Stalinist party and place itself at the head of the workers' state. And how to do this? Not through peaceful means, for the bureaucracy has strangled proletarian democracy, but through an insurrectionary uprising once the majority of workers have been won to the new party. This is how Trotsky developed the question."

The SL position that the 1956 Hungarian uprising was the political revolution demands the complementary position that the political revolution is the "smashing of the Stalinist state," for in Hungary in 1956 the deformed workers' state was surely smashed.

Communist Cadre has repeatedly asserted in our polemics that the SL in fact takes a neo-Shachtmanite position on the workers' states. By that we mean a position which, while attempting to conform to the bare formula of Trotskyism's unconditional defense of the workers' states, has filled that formula with the deepest Shachtmanite hostility to the reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The SL retains the letter only to better violate the spirit. But even here Robertson's repeated assertion that the "Stalinist state apparatus must be smashed" shows how far the SL has revised and departed from the unambiguous statements of Trotsky that the Soviet state was not beyond reform but could be regenerated through political revolution.

Robertson's remarks on the question of political revolution and defense of the workers' state, which is, after all, only and just what he calls the "Stalinist state apparatus," shows just how much he personally deserves to be identified as an unreformed Shachtmanite. For it was Shachtman who coined the term "Stalinist state" and it is from such a conception that Robertson's notion of political revolution derives. For if the state apparatus is the state of the Stalinist bureaucracy and not the state of the proletariat, what else can Robertson do but call for smashing it?

We also wish to call attention to the seemingly meaningless and self-contradictory phrase, "Stalinist state apparatus resting on the body of the Russian workers' state." By this phrase Robertson makes clear that he identifies by "Stalinist state apparatus" what Marxists have always meant when we say, state, state power, state machine, state apparatus--namely, the special bodies of armed men for the suppression of one class by another. And when he says "body of the Russian workers' state" he revises workers' state to mean not the police, army, courts, prisons, not the armed means of defense and repression, but rather the country, the economy, the society as a whole. Elsewhere, we have pointed out the origins of this revision. (see Hungary, 1956: a Trotskyist Defense of the Soviet Intervention, pages 15-16.)

PFLP had state power it would behave in the same chauvinist manner towards non-Arab minorities as have...its foes in Tel Aviv toward the Palestinians."

Not only will the SL not defend the PFLP militants against the Israeli commandos, the SL refuses to condemn the Israelis for invading Uganda, which despite Idi Amin is after all an oppressed nation. The SL says the left must not be drawn into the "hypocritical chorus" that denounced Israel for its aggression against Uganda and for violating Uganda's sovereignty and territory. The SL explains to us, you see, that "Unlike the right of nations to self-determination, 'national sovereignty' is not a bourgeois democratic demand that Marxists support. Moreover, Uganda's 'national sovereignty' was subordinated by Idi Amin's complicity with the hijackers." Outrageous! Since Israel only invaded Uganda for a few hours but did not annex Ugandan territory, the bourgeois democratic rights of the oppressed Ugandans were not violated! The SL will not defend the PFLP or Uganda against Israel but claims not to support the Israeli raid after terming it "brilliant" and "audacious". Can this neutrality which obviously favors the Zionists be Marxism? Or Leninism? Or Trotskyism? We do not think so.

(For above SL quotes referring to Entebbe, see Workers Vanguard, July 16, 1976.)

APPENDIX D:
THE SL'S ANTI-LENINIST LINE ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Communist Cadre has repeatedly asserted that the SL in its attitude towards the struggles of the oppressed and the colonial peoples and nations takes an essentially anti-Leninist line. While Leninists and Trotskyists have always insisted upon the necessity of unconditional military defense of the struggles of the oppressed against their oppressors, the SL has sought to evade this communist necessity in favor of a comfortable neutrality. During the civil war in Lebanon, where the Lebanese left and Palestinian Resistance fought a life and death struggle with the reactionary alliance of Phalangists, National Liberals, and Moslem Brotherhood, the SL took a position of open neutrality. The SL invented the reactionary, anti-Marxist formula of "intercommunal warfare" in order to call for defeatism on both sides in that "sordid civil war", as the SL termed it. And while calling for defeatism on all sides, the SL also came out for the right of all communities to self-defense--including those politically and militarily organized by and under the leadership of the Phalange, which even the SL characterizes as "Nazi-like".

This stance is paralleled for Northern Ireland, where the SL advocates the formation of a trade union militia drawn from Catholics and Protestants in order to defend both communities--Irish and Protestant settler--against "sectarian violence". While this sounds very reasonable and evenhanded, it translates into these terms in political practice: the SL advocates the defense of right-wing Orange settler militants and strongholds against the terror of the Provisional IRA (which the SL characterizes as "right-wing nationalist") and other Irish liberationist organizations. In Israel the SL champions the right of the Hebrew-speaking people, i.e., Zionist settlers, to self-determination; the SL, as the reader will see from the discussion following Robertson's remarks, likewise champions the same right for the Boer settlers in South Africa!

But nowhere--not even in the lengthy statements of WV defending such pro-imperialist politics--has the basic political premise of the SL approach to the national question been so exposed as in Robertson's unguarded remarks of January 29, 1977. Here displayed for all to see is the SL's national chauvinism, its glorification of the superior culture of the imperialist (and especially English-speaking) nations and pro-imperialist settlers (such as the Israelis and Boers), its petty academic sectarian horror before the untutored violence and rage of the oppressed. And especially on this last point--the point where the national question and the question of individual terror intersect--does the SL betray its eagerness to completely divorce itself from any semblance of a Leninist policy. Consider the response of the SL to the events culminating in the Entebbe raid:

The Israeli commando raid itself was described as having a "'Mission Impossible' touch", as being "brilliantly executed" and "audacious". And while the SL, after these admiring compliments for the settler supermen, claimed not to support the Israeli raid on the Ugandan airport, it hastened to add that the Palestinian airliner hijacking was "criminal", an "atrocious", and "an indefensible act of indiscriminate terrorism."

By "indefensible" the SL does not mean that this act of terror was politically incorrect as a tactic and counter-productive, something no Leninist would dispute. By "indefensible" the SL means that the SL would not defend the hijackers against the Israeli assault nor against a later Israeli show trial. By this word "indefensible" the SL gives up the Palestinian hijackers to their Israeli oppressors.

The SL spares no words to blur the distinction between oppressor and oppressed. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP, the organization responsible for the hijacking), which is a self-identified Marxist and Leninist party and which allows Trotskyist factions, is described by the SL as "just as chauvinist, racist, and reactionary as Zionism." And even further the SL claims that "if the

 APPENDIX E:

 BUILD A NEW COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL ON A REAL TROTSKYIST BASIS!

[This leaflet was distributed to the Spartacist League on January 29, 1977.]

The Spartacist League (SL) meets tonight to discuss the question of rebuilding the Fourth International and, no doubt, the role the international Spartacist tendency (ist) is to play in that rebirth. The SL will present itself and the ist as the only legitimate Trotskyists in the world and will condemn their opponents within the Fourth International, and rightly so, for opportunism, reformism, and popular frontism.

Yet how free is the SL itself from the betrayal of revolutionary Trotskyism?

The hallmark of Trotsky's politics with regard to the Soviet Union was always the most intransigent and unconditional defense of the first workers' state. While paying lip service to Trotsky's words, the SL, along with virtually the entire Trotskyist movement since the middle fifties, has kept Trotsky's formulations only as a cover for the deepest hostility towards not only the various national bureaucracies, but the historical reality of the dictatorship of the proletariat itself, from which it recoils in petty bourgeois horror, a hostility which rivals that of the Shachtmanites. The SL has introduced an open revision of Trotskyism by depicting the political revolution as the smashing of the Stalinist state (see Spartacist no.8, Nov.-Dec. 1966), rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist governmental regime and the democratic reform of the workers' state. This common hostility led the rotten misleaders of the SWP in the past (with the Marcy-Copeland faction alone in opposition on this question) and leads the SL in retrospect to support, along with the whole world bourgeoisie, the 1956 Hungarian bourgeois national-democratic uprising against Stalinism. We have not the slightest doubt that had Trotsky lived to 1956 he would have instructed his co-thinkers everywhere to give military support to the Red Army's intervention in Budapest just as surely as he himself organized the crushing of Kronstadt.

This hostility towards the workers' states led the SL just as surely to abstain from militant actions of the anti-Vietnam war movement initiated by YAWF and Co-Aim and to cover itself with verbal posturings which counterposed the need to arouse the largely pro-war U.S. proletariat as against seeking to win the petty bourgeois anti-war youth to Marxism (though today with smug petty bourgeois complacency and careerism reigning supreme on the campuses the SL attaches itself to the universities).

The SL line on the Middle East completely violates Lenin's and Trotsky's position of military support of genuine struggles of oppressed nations and peoples against imperialism. The SL until recently joined in retrospect with Stalin in supporting (only "militarily" of course!) the creation of Israel in 1948, only to correct that position with one of "neutrality." To this day the SL refuses to recognize the imperialist proxy role of Israel in even the June 1967 war which achieved the major U.S. strategic objective of closing the Suez to Soviet shipping bound for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

But for better or worse the SL leadership has begun to betray its own past positions on a number of questions and has initiated, beginning about six to ten months ago, a turn to the right which will liquidate what little is relatively progressive in the SL tendency with regard to the left as a whole.

To illustrate: In the Middle East the SL for years maintained a position of

"neutrality," calling for "defeatism on both sides" but managed to rise to the occasion of giving (purely verbal) military support to the Palestinians against the Hashemite monarchy of Jordan during the civil war in Black September 1970. But during the recent civil war in Lebanon when the Palestinian resistance faced even greater dangers against an even more reactionary enemy, the openly pro-imperialist and pro-Zionist Maronite Phalange (which even the SL admits is Nazi-like) and its allies, the SL took an objectively pro-imperialist stand, refused to give military support to the Palestinian resistance and Lebanese left, and, what is worse, while calling for "everyone's defeat" in that "sordid intercommunal war" came out for the right of Maronite communities to self-defense even if politically and militarily organized by the Phalange!

SL Leans Toward Popular Frontism

The SL has always claimed to be the staunchest enemy of popular frontism. Yet now that the SL has reached a certain size and has begun to take on "responsibilities" it has begun to display a tendency towards popular frontism itself. In the recent campaign waged by the Committee to Save Mario Munoz, that committee made the successful effort, which was perfectly correct and principled, to enlist the support of a number of capitalist liberals such as Bella Abzug. What was unprincipled, however, was that when the SL, in its press Workers Vanguard and elsewhere, reported on these successes, it did so wholly in the spirit of opportunist gloating over its ability to "rope in" liberals and failed to make side by side the necessary scathing and unmasking criticism of such Democratic politicians, who we can only assume must have some influence over the progressive sections of the labor movement the SL seeks to win to its politics.

A minor error? From a Scratch to Gangrene. Those of us once in Workers World watched such "minor errors" and seemingly insignificant twists lead up to the full-blown popular front Emergency Committee Against Racism in Boston of 1974. Is the SL's opposition to the popular front based only on an empirical understanding that Stalinist popular fronts in the past have led to staggering defeats, an opposition the SL will be willing to drop when the SL rather than the Stalinists engages in popular frontism?

As the SL has grown, its leadership has adapted itself to the backwardness of the student constituencies out of which it is now recruiting. This is the material basis for the recent right turn evidenced by the new line on Lebanon and the new dabbling in semi-popular frontism on a minor scale. We call especially on those Spartacists of several years' standing (whom we are ready to admit to being subjectively Trotskyists in good faith) to reverse this trend.

SL's Faulty Methodology and Historical Analysis Repeats SWP's Errors

But at the heart of the SL's errors lies a mistaken methodology and a mistaken interpretation of history. The Trotskyist movement proved unable to survive the death of Leon Trotsky politically intact, but the SL accepted as good coin the errors and betrayals made by the SWP leadership long before the re-unification with Mandel. We suggest the SL examine Cannon's courtroom speeches of 1941 in the Minneapolis trial (see Socialism on Trial); Cannon's defense was anything but communist; rather he appealed, with references to Jefferson and Lincoln, to the democratic and patriotic prejudices of his jury. Examine the SWP's stand on the Korean war where that organization took an initially neutral position saying the proletariat had no stake in the victory or defeat of either "puppet". Only under the pressure of the Marcy-Copeland faction did the SWP take a formally correct position of revolutionary defense. The SWP's support of the Hungarian counter-revolution was only the qualitative break preceded by many smaller departures from any semblance of real Trotskyism, for their "defense" of the Soviet Union had long before become a hollow sham as is plainly visible in Cannon's The Road to Peace According to Lenin and According to Stalin, 1951.

The SL may prove capable of partially correcting some of the most recent errors we have made plain, as it managed finally to give token support to the MPLA after the open intervention of South African troops in the Angolan civil war. But the SL will always be condemned to error, will always prove unable to avoid a rightward drift into opportunism and popular frontism, except by the "correction" of a sterile retreat into sectarian abstentionism, so long as its method and political approach does not fundamentally differ from the SWP and all the revisionist Trotskyists.

The SL must ask--in what way does the SL differ from the SWP's notoriously un-Marxist analysis of the Chinese revolution, in which the Chinese workers' state is dated from approximately 1953 and not from the time of the smashing of the old state apparatus of the Kuomintang and the erection of the new state machine led by the Chinese Stalinists? Does the SL date the workers' state in China from October 1, 1949 or later? Any later date asserts the peaceful transition to workers' rule!

The SL repeats the same error and betrays the same method when it asserts that Cuba became, peacefully and without civil war, a workers' state only in 1961 and not in 1959!

Only in 1955 did the SWP take the position that China was a workers' state. Is it any wonder, then, that the SWP could not recognize the character of the Hungarian uprising in 1956? The SL's leading member James Robertson, an open Shachtmanite at that time, was able to join the SWP only because he, along with Wohlforth, believed the SWP's support of the 1956 uprising liquidated their formal differences over the class character of the Soviet Union--which indeed it did, and which is why we describe you as neo-Shachtmanites: Trotskyist only in barest formulations, Shachtmanites in hostility to the Soviet Union.

4th International Died in Infancy-- Build a New Communist International!

The SL will never be able to avoid error and betrayal except by recognizing that none of the wings and factions of the Fourth International survived Trotsky's death and the war intact, that all have broken in practice with Trotskyism's unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and other workers' states, that all have misapplied the united front and the Transitional Program to justify either sectarian ultimatism or abstention or reformism.

Social Democracy was once a revolutionary watchword; yet Lenin understood that the new International, to completely break with the past, must be called Communist, and in so doing he hardly broke with Marxism. We insist that if a new Communist International is to be built on a revolutionary Marxist basis, that is, a real Trotskyist basis, the name Fourth International, which in its day was a glorious battle cry, must be recognized as hopelessly identified with the misdeeds of all those organizations which pretend to its continuation and that the new, revolutionary international must stand before the masses with a new name, to signify the complete break with the errors and betrayals of the past.

We must further recognize that the new international will not be built in real life by "negotiations" and "regroupment" within the sickroom atmosphere of the revisionist "Fourth Internationalists," but only on the basis of a revolutionary upsurge of world historical proportions and the victory of the proletariat in at least one major industrial country (that can be relatively independent of the need for Soviet or Chinese assistance) or political revolution in the Soviet Union or China (which, prior to revolutions in the West, is a far less likely variant).

Whither the SL?

The Spartacist League imagines it is preparing the way forward; in fact the SL is only building another organizational and political obstacle standing in the way of real Trotskyists seeking to build a revolutionary Marxist vanguard. Communist Cadre has no confidence whatsoever in the ability of the SL as an organizational whole and with its present leadership to right itself and find a way to genuine Trotskyism. But we do not doubt that there are many in the SL who sense the changing, rightward course of their organization, that something is amiss. Given the relative sizes of our respective organizations and the deep political differences which divide without a doubt every SL member from Communist Cadre, it is pointless to simply say: Join CTC. But what we will say, what we will demand, is that every SL member begin to struggle immediately within their common discipline to put an end to the political method and political approach of the SL leadership that reproduces in the pages of Workers Vanguard letters signed by Bella Abzug without scathing comment featured just as largely; that asserts that villages in Lebanon which are fascist Phalange strongholds have a "right" to self-defense against Palestinian revolutionaries; that asserts, as WV did in the "Politics of Crazy" article, that the capitalist state should be ceded the right to deal with genuinely "anti-social" elements; that asserts that there is such a creature as the "Stalinist state" and that it must be smashed.

We have no doubt that if such a struggle is waged the SL cannot but be better for it and that in the course of such a struggle many SL members may find their way to genuine Trotskyism and to the discovery that it is embodied in the politics and tendency of Communist Cadre. For our part, we will continue to seek every avenue for political debate and united front collaboration with the SL.

FORWARD TO THE TASK OF BUILDING A NEW COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL ON A REAL
TROTSKYIST BASIS!

LONG LIVE THE VICTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION!

From the Central Committee of
Communist Cadre

c/o Workers & Oppressed Unite
156 Fifth Avenue-Room 416
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APPENDIX F:
OPEN LETTER TO THE
SPARTACIST LEAGUE --
FROM COMMUNIST CADRE

February 3, 1977

On Saturday evening, January 29, 1977, James Robertson, leading central committee member of the Spartacist League (SL), spoke at Barnard College, ostensibly to the topic "Toward the Rebirth of the Fourth International." Communist Cadre (CTC) challenges the SL, demands of the SL that his entire speech, without any deletions or editing, including his replies to questions and comments, be reproduced verbatim in Workers Vanguard or in a special pamphlet. Communist Cadre will without hesitation distribute at every opportunity such a verbatim reproduction of Robertson's remarks, for CTC cannot imagine a more damning indictment of the SL tendency!

Let us forewarn you: CTC has extensive stenographic notes, as well as access to a taped recording, of Robertson's remarks and insists that no face-saving editing be done. Nor will the dishonest device of a journalistic, news article account of the meeting of January 29, touching on "high points" be accepted. CTC challenges, demands of the SL that every sentence and word be made publicly available to the working class movement.

Robertson's sarcastic dismissing of the Indochinese victory as a "big deal", his state-of-the-world analysis without any reference to the workers' state camp, his insinuation that European gastarbeiter are incapable of anything better than popular frontism, his expression of gratitude to U.S. imperialist democracy for permitting the "unbroken tradition" and superior quality of "U.S. Trotskyism", his assertion that Jewish merchants in the ghettos charge 30% more because the "black kids rip them off", his account of a student body election in California which the SL lost "even though we ran a pretty girl", even Robertson's chauvinist, lewd, Marcus-like joke about Albanian peasants -- the working class and progressive movement has a right to such a verbatim account of these remarks in order to judge an organization that allows such a clown and buffoon to occupy a position of importance and to display his utter inadequacy in public.

Communist Cadre will not demagogically play on charges of racism and sexism; we are willing to believe citizen Robertson is subjectively an advocate of race and sex equality. But what was displayed at the January 29 meeting was a complete and utter lack of political seriousness and that is far more damning than any of Robertson's repellent insensitivity to blacks, women, and oppressed people. The SL must now give an account of this to all.

COMMUNIST CADRE, c/o Workers and Oppressed Unite, 156 5th Ave., Rm 416,
New York, NY 10010 Tel: 255-2949

NOTE

On the following pages, Communist Cadre reproduces Robertson's January 29 talk almost verbatim. The discussion period has been edited to about half its original length. To simplify distinguishing CTC editorial comment from various speakers' remarks, we have printed speakers' remarks in regular type and editorial comments in italics. Editorial emphasis is indicated by capitalizing, and speakers' own emphasis by underlining the emphasized words.

We have indicated deletions in three ways. Where a word or sentence was inaudible we have placed three dots within the speakers' remarks; where the word or sentence which was inaudible seemed particularly important we specifically note this by placing inaudible in brackets: [*inaudible*], sometimes hazarding a guess as to the inaudible word based on notes taken at the talk. Where we have deleted remarks for considerations of length (Robertson's remarks were, as shall be seen, rambling and ill-prepared) we have summarized them and noted the deletion within the editorial comment.

Robertson's meandering, ungrammatical style required the use of the standard [*sic*] device. We attempted to limit this device to the most incomprehensible sentences and dubious formulations.

PART I: ROBERTSON'S SPEECH

Well, comrades, I've spoken to a lot larger meetings in my life, but only as a result of a misunderstanding between me and the audience. I genuinely think this is the largest meeting that I've ever talked to, aside from a few captive annual conferences where there was not such a misunderstanding. And as part of my sectarian past--and, hopefully, future--I want to pay some initial attention to something I had no thought on earth of dealing with.

Robertson begins his presentation by addressing issues raised in a leaflet widely distributed by Communist Cadre (CTC) shortly before the meeting had convened. The text of the leaflet is given in Appendix E.

Here's a nice leaflet. It's directed to us. It's carefully and obviously conscientiously written. It's three pages, legal size, elite-typed, single-spaced, and it's been nicely done. And one had better pay attention to such things. It's by a group that I had not heard of called the "Central Committee of Communist Cadre" /sic/. And so I quickly read it just before the meeting. And in about the third paragraph, I think I see what the differences are between us.

They speak of how we have a bad position on the political revolution as "the smashing of the Stalinist state rather than the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist governmental /regime/ and the democratic reform of the workers' state."

Here Robertson goes on to uphold the neo-Shachtmanite position of the Spartacist League (SL) on political revolution--a position that asserts that political revolution is the overthrow not only of the Stalinist bureaucracy but of the workers' state itself. Instead of "workers' state", the SL borrows from the renegade Max Shachtman the formulation "Stalinist state". Later, in the discussion, a speaker from CTC will refute this revision of Trotskyism (see p.33).

Now Trotsky was right in '33-34 when he came out no longer for reform, comrades. IT IS NECESSARY TO DESTROY THE STALINIST STATE APPARATUS; THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED A POLITICAL REVOLUTION, AND NOT A REFORM. THAT MEANS, IN THE SOVIET UNION AND ANCILARY REGIMES, THAT THAT STATE APPARATUS HAS TO BE SWEEPED AWAY BY THE INSURGENT POWER OF THE PROLETARIAT. AND THAT IS OUR DIFFERENCE, I think. And I suspect that this grouping is probably (from multiple other evidence), has derived from the Marcy tendency.

It is, of course, extremely gratifying: the references that "now that the SL has reached a certain size," and "as the SL has grown, its leadership has adapted itself to the backwardness of the student constituency out of which it is now recruiting." Well, we are not recruiting any students these days--neither is anybody else. And all of our opponents have said that we have always recruited only from petty bourgeois students. And, furthermore, we aren't even growing very much lately. So, gratification to the contrary notwithstanding, that stuff is wrong.

And then we get to, down here, on the question of China--I think we agree with you comrades. It seems to us self-evident that the Maoist regime /inaudible/ 1949, through a kind of moving boundary of the extension of state power had already acquired its class character and it was that of a deformed workers' state. And in that nasty reference, "James Robertson, a Shachtmanite" (Just like Sy Landy up there. Yeah, it's just because the SWP sold out that he threw in with these renegades.) Now...unlike Sy Landy, as I now recall (and at the time that went for Wohlforth although he's presumably still in greener pastures), we thought we'd learned something: that the Hungarian Revolution /sic/ showed us that the theory of bureaucratic collectivism was fundamentally episodic and impressionistic, and

that Trotsky had indeed been right, as under the pressure and the test of internal political revolution and social struggle, that, in fact, the Hungarian revolutionary experience could not be squared with any other historic and theoretical experience than that Russia is a deformed workers' state. That's a fact. IT'S JUST AS MUCH A FACT THAT I WAS A SHACHTMANITE FOR EIGHT YEARS...

Having thus argued around an issue raised by CTC in its leaflet (i.e., the significance of James Robertson abandoning open Shachtmanite politics to join the Socialist Workers Party only after the SWP had supported the counter-revolutionary uprising in Hungary in 1956, which the SWP dubbed a "political revolution") Robertson turns to the question of the Fourth International. Again the speaker sidesteps the real issue raised--the capitulation of all major wings of the Fourth International, following Trotsky's death and World War II, to fundamental revisions of Trotskyism.

Okay, now we get to something that's very bad, and again, it's some of the weakest side of Marcyism. It's not their grooving on Russian tanks bringing down innocent workers in East Europe (which, after all, there's something to be said for, 'cause they ain't so innocent now). It's this, about rebuilding the Fourth International:

"But only on the basis of a revolutionary upsurge of world historical proportions, and the victory of the proletariat in at least one major industrial country" or a successful political revolution can the Fourth International be rebuilt. Well, what are you doing here? Seriously. There is a role in history--a necessary, not a sufficient but a necessary role for the subjective factor. The assertion that it is possible for comrades centered upon the Fourth International to come together on the basis of a program, in advance of giant victories, who are supposed to be created by who, then? And you write off the Fourth International in advance until after it's no longer essentially necessary. And that's subjectivism. And it strikes at the heart of a proletarian vanguard.

And then you go on, and in your last paragraph you said, you know, that, therefore, on the basis of program, you're really no good. Including now--and here's one that's really fine--"an SL leadership that reproduces in the pages of Workers Vanguard [weekly paper of the SL] letters signed by Bella Abzug without scathing comment featured just as largely." Now, it happens that one of the pet, abnormally provocative hates of Workers Vanguard is Bella Abzug. If you are proposing unity on the basis of reviling that obnoxious lady, you'd better be careful because you may get the whole St. Bernard.

Robertson fails to note that, while Workers Vanguard has indeed often reviled Abzug, it failed to do so when gloating over her letter of support to the Committee to Save Mario Munoz. This committee was formed by the Partisan Defense Committee, which supports the politics of the SL.

But, nevertheless--and while I go lightly over this document--some comrades of the communist workers' movement have gone to some considerable effort to take a look at the Spartacist League and what, from their standpoint, they think its errors, weaknesses, failings, and future betrayals are. And one should always pay attention to such things--as opposed to the mere sellers of one's journal. [Unclear brief remarks on SWP literature and the evening's time limits follow. Then Robertson begins his main presentation.]

I think there's a kind of political disease called conjuncturalism which I first ran into before Lyn Marcus [renegade from the working class movement; presently heads the proto-fascist National Caucus of Labor Committees] went completely mad, and he always used to yell at us: "But what's the conjuncture; you're ignoring the conjuncture!" Now, you have to pay attention to the conjuncture, the level of class struggle, the main motion in the world and its various components, and what appears to be possible or likely. One really has to do this. And we have one

comrade in particular who's got an extremely good background...I have his latest memo on the economic conjuncture right here with me for moral reassurance. But, there's a problem.

The speaker cites Lenin's failure to anticipate the October Revolution as late as January 1917 and Lutte Ouvriere's categorical denial of the possibility of significant class battles on the eve of the May 1968 uprising in France. [Deleted]

Now this is not an appeal to know-nothingism, but to suggest that you must try to understand. It is better to be prepared--a hundred-fold better. But to be prepared to do what? That is qualitative. And it's in that sense that I approach the question of conjuncturalism...The questions of victory and defeat depend upon the conjuncture and how you prepare for it, but they do not change your own identity.

Falsely equating conjunctural analysis with impressionism, Robertson proceeds to contemptuously dismiss Latin American and European militants, not only attacking (correctly) their political mistakes, but also disparaging their eagerness to struggle. Also, characteristically for the SL, Robertson makes no distinction between the political arenas open to the working class in Latin America--now predominantly military dictatorships--and in Europe. This blanket indictment of "guerrilla-ism" will become more blatant as the talk progresses.

And we've had a bit too much of conjuncturalism. I'll speak mainly from the standpoint of the revolutionary socialist movement of this country in the post-'50s period. THERE'S A GREAT DEAL OF THIRD WORLD CONJUNCTURALISM BECAUSE MOST OF THE EVIDENT SOCIAL STRUGGLE AGAINST CAPITALIST IMPERIALISM IN THE PERIOD OF THE LATE '50s THROUGH THE EARLY '70s TOOK PLACE IN THE VARIOUS COLONIAL SECTIONS OF THE WORLD... AND, OUT OF THIS, OF COURSE, THERE ARISES IMPRESSIONISTIC THEORIZING, A GREAT DEAL OF GROOVING ON THE LUMPEN-PROLETARIAT, AND UPON SMALL GROUP VIOLENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONALISM.

[Robertson indulges in deleted sarcastic in-jokes on reunification efforts within the United Secretariat.] IT ["third world conjuncturalism"] WAS SIMPLY A CATERING TO IMPRESSIONISM OF SOUTH AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN YOUTH WHO THOUGHT THAT YOU CAN GO OUT AND PICK UP THE GUN AND A BIT OF PLASTIQUE, AND PREFERABLY SOME CHEERING-TYPE PEASANTS, AND AWAY YOU GO! And Lenin and Trotsky were really old hat, if they weren't crypto-opportunist.

Now, having disparaged as much as I can the question of conjuncturalism, it's really quite important to take a look at the conjuncture as best we can...

Robertson begins his obviously ill-prepared "look at the conjuncture" with a shameless burst of US chauvinism. He presents a picture of Southeast Asia as virtually "sewed up" by US imperialism, not only ignoring the dramatic shift in the balance of class forces brought about by the victories throughout Indochina, but taking pains to dismiss the revolution in Vietnam as "an exercise in imperial egotism" on the part of the US ruling class, as merely a minor diplomatic issue in US/Chinese relations! Moreover, Robertson's mercifully brief remarks on Vietnam constitute his only assessment of any of the workers' states in his entire "analysis" of the historic conjuncture.

In the past, the victories took place in Vietnam and all Indochina. The imperialists--headed by the Americans--learned a thing or two and have done a pretty good job, assisted in other ways, in stabilizing, for example, South America (Latin America) and have found what is reasonably described as neo-colonialism as a way to be assured of necessary limits, at least in black Africa. And the great prototype of this phenomenon was, of course, THE INDONESIAN MILITARY COUP OF 1965...IN WHICH NOT MERELY THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS BEHEADED BUT THE MASSES WERE GIVEN A TREMENDOUS DEFEAT... And if there was any virtue in the domino theory in Southeast Asia, it was what happened in Indonesia. SEE, THAT'S WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE. THERE

AREN'T ANYBODY MUCH WHO LIVES IN INDOCHINA AND THAILAND, but--what?--there are 150 million people in Java? And Java remains safe for democracy. And after that THE BALANCE OF THE VIETNAMESE WAR WAS AN EXERCISE IN IMPERIAL EGOTISM ON THE PART OF COMPETING AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS, government, and jockeying around in an attempt to come to an understanding with the Chinese. AS IS CLEAR WITH WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN VIETNAM: WENT COMMUNIST--BIG DEAL!

Referring to the economic crisis leading up to and following the Nixon administration's devaluation of the dollar, Robertson turns to the consequent "periods of kinds of instability in the capitalist world order." He begins by discussing Japan, citing the SL's lack of roots in, or first-hand knowledge of, Japan as "probably the single greatest weakness of our international tendency" and as "Trotskyism's single greatest failure", its lack of influence there. (These remarks deleted.)

It is noteworthy that Robertson, having just lightly dismissed the Indochinese revolutions, and soon to display his chauvinism towards Mediterranean and Latin American countries, devotes considerable relative time to discussing the situation of one of the major imperialist powers, Japan. We point this out scarcely to disparage the significance of the class struggle in Japan, or in any of the major imperialist countries, but simply to expose an "internationalism" that consistently displays greater interest in and solidarity with the proletariat of those countries which more closely resemble its own. This tendency, however, does not prevent Robertson from making sarcastic comments on the Japanese peasantry.

While the petty bourgeois student youth and the public employees' sectors have been quite militant, and of course professing socialist and communist aims, there have been two other big sectors of Japanese society that have been quiescent or reactionary. The limited democratization under MacArthur in the wake of the Japanese defeat did away by and large with the Japanese landlord class and WE HAVE A CONSERVATIVE AND SUCCESSFUL PEASANTRY IN JAPAN. AND THEY HAVE NOT BEEN PART OF ANY SIGNIFICANT STRUGGLES UNLESS SOMEBODY COMES AND WANTS TO MAKE AN AIRBASE OUT OF HIS LAND.

The other is that the main bulk of manufacturing, of the industrial proletariat in Japan have been in the private sector and they've hardly been unionized at all and they've been fed into a traditional patriarchal industrial apparatus where they're guaranteed lifetime jobs, pensions, and the whole schmear. And they've been enormously conservative. So, unlike the railway workers and the rest of the public employees, the main section of the Japanese proletariat has been outside the struggle for the last ten or fifteen years. But now, with the attempt of the rest of the world bourgeoisie to make the Japanese carry an exorbitant load (the Japanese bourgeoisie, and therefore the Japanese proletariat), this patriarchal relationship has begun to decompose and we have the objective possibility of the main battalions of the Japanese proletariat embracing in a militant way the socialist cause.

Now much more than that I really can't say... We ought to understand that that fundamental change, that liberation of the main section of the Japanese proletariat from its industrial masters, is a process that is taking place now. Courtesy, above all, of the American bourgeoisie...

The speaker now addresses the situation in Spain and Portugal with banal generalities before displaying his contempt for the "unviable" Italian working class and sneering, his protestations notwithstanding, at the Greek proletariat.

And then there's the Mediterranean basin--Greece, Iberia, Italy, and, in some ways, Yugoslavia--where capitalism is quite weak...where the main export during the period of the economic boom has been its own sons into the industrial apparatus of North and West Europe. Historically, largely military dictatorships most of the time and with the whole of the economic processes characterized in the result by inflation, but with a number of particular causes. One can describe the

region as generally tumultuous in the revolutionary sense... I don't say a true revolutionary situation, certainly not in general. So, finally the old Salazarist dictatorship fell. The expense of the colonial war in Africa was too much and that triggered the Portuguese situation against a background of economic difficulties. The fascist regime was decomposing.

The newspapers are full of what is happening in Spain. In everyone's mind, in and out of Spain, is the question of 1936. [*inaudible sentence*]

ITALY'S HARD TO CHARACTERIZE. We probably ought to put a chart on the wall... IT IS NOT NOW A PARTICULARLY VIABLE COUNTRY SOCIALLY, POLITICALLY OR MILITARILY, and all sections of the country as you know it [*sic*] and the great hope is that the Pope and the Communist Party will make a deal. It's called the "Historic Compromise." I'm not kidding.

GREECE IS GOING THROUGH ONE OF ITS UNUSUALLY RARE PERIODS SINCE THE METAXAS DICTATORSHIP OF 1935, IN WHICH IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE MASSES TO COME OUT INTO THE STREETS AND ARGUE, "WHICH OF THE TWO COMMUNIST OR THREE MAOIST PARTIES DO YOU SUPPORT?" AND THEY DO IT IN THE HUNDREDS EVERY NIGHT. YOU KNOW, IT'S AN INTER-REGNUM BETWEEN DICTATORSHIPS IN A COUNTRY THAT AGAIN CHRONICALLY CONSISTS OF EXPORTING ITS CHILDREN AND SELLING EXPENSIVE WRISTWATCHES TO EACH OTHER. (AND I'M NOT SNEERING, BECAUSE AFTER YOU'VE BEEN TO TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM IT IS GODDAMN GOOD TO GET TO ATHENS, I'LL TELL YOU THAT! IT IS A GIANT STEP UP!)

So these regions, or this region, around the Mediterranean is historically impoverished, under-capitalized, partakes of some of the elements of the colonial world and some of the elements of what is generally called Europe. It's unstable from the standpoint of a revolutionary proletariat. So, and therefore, it is the region right now, par excellence, like Chile was and Argentina is, of the popular front. Because an old-fashioned stable coalition of social-democratic Labourites and liberal bourgeois isn't good enough. You gotta have revolutionary slogans in order to deceive the masses, in order to keep the old shit going, because the conditions of life are qualitatively less tolerable. So it's the area where you find popular frontism! What's popular frontism? Into the rest of the sellout broth you drop a hammer and sickle! That's all. And stir it. That's the popular front of the bourgeoisie and Stalinist parties.

Here Robertson's insults flow thick and fast as he fantasizes a European proletariat "dripping with fat" (in the midst of widespread austerity programs!), characterizes blacks as outside the working class, and European gastarbeiters as congenital popfronters.

And then there's north and west Europe proper. Somebody said it a few years ago and it's still true: it's a long time now, in terms of social history, since the end of the second world war. North and west Europe drip with fat! In many of these countries, they live better than the Americans and you better know it! Although I'LL GRANT YOU THE AMERICAN STATISTICS ARE OBJECTIVELY FALSIFIED BY THE INCLUSION OF AMERICAN NEGROES WHO LIVE IN ANOTHER WAY. Whereas the European statistics are objectively falsified in the other direction because they can exclude from their calculations what they call so nicely the gastarbeiters, the guest workers--the southern Italians, the Iberians, the Yugoslavs, the Turks. And it [*inaudible*] the situation, but it strengthened the German market. So that, IN THE PRESENT SITUATION OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY IN WEST EUROPE, THEY HAVE A VERY EASY OUT: THEY SIMPLY DEPORT THEIR GASTARBEITERS, THEIR GUEST WORKERS, BACK TO THEIR NATIVE VILLAGES WHERE THEY GO AND SCREAM FOR THE POPULAR FRONT. So, you see, there's a safety valve mechanism in terms of the immigrant labor, the migrant labor--pawn them!

... These countries have generally pretty politically effective social-democratic and/or Stalinist parties. To the extent that there is restlessness and there are economic reserves, adjustments can be made. And that's why one finds relatively less, overall, in the Benelux countries, France, Germany, Scandinavia, tumultuousness...

Now where it all comes to a screaming halt is in Britain with its archaic industrial apparatus having liquidated the imperial reserves in two world wars and the post-second world war period, with a working class that lives now at a level below that of East Germany--significantly below, I'm told. There's a problem, a big general problem.

In deleted remarks, describing the worsening economic crisis in Britain, Robertson cites the inadequacy of the Conservative and Labour parties to deal with the resulting social unrest. He then discusses the role of the Stalinists and the Social Democracy as mediators between the masses and the bourgeoisie as obstacles to the victory of the proletariat.

But, comrades, there's nothing much they can mediate any more. The real problem in Britain is locating the non-existent source in all of this easy Labourite radicalism drifting off to communistic, Shachtmanite, Trotskyite/*sic* type radicalism, any organization in Britain that wants to go after the main chance, in the rallying of the proletariat for the struggle between labor and capital--which cannot, if you mobilize over the issue around the trade unions and the right to strike, of what the British workers get, there is nothing stopping short of immediately posing around such a struggle the dictatorship of the proletariat. And that's a very big thing for these people to swallow 'cause they've had a lot of mediation for a long time.

With characteristic unseriousness, Robertson surveys the left forces in Britain. Consonant with his later light dismissal of the threat posed by fascist forces in the US and Europe, he jokingly refers to the Socialist Workers Party's militant confrontations in England with groups like the National Front (whose program calls for the deportation of national minorities and the smashing of communism and trade unions in Britain). While the politics of the Socialist Workers Party are a blatant revision of Trotskyism, their militance against fascist forces is to be commended.

So instead, we find that most of the groups like the larger, the Communist Party keeps trying to creep into the left wing of the Labour Party, and MI-5 keeps trying to get them out. And Tony Cliff's--no longer the IS, it's called the Socialist Workers Party in Great Britain now--keeps trying to displace the mass role of the Communist Party of several thousand important trade union militants, and RUNNING FASCIST BASHES and right-to-work marches. The Healyites run right-to-work marches and they're doing their best to convince the British working class that somebody called Joe Hansen in the United States is an agent for the GPU. That's what they do. There are about six or eight little groups all trying to imitate the aforementioned. And then, of course, there's the Labour left. I don't have enough time to excoriate and revile them... So it's ripe, the objective pre-conditions for a revolutionary crisis are ripe in Great Britain.

Robertson notes the awareness of the bourgeois press that a social crisis exists in Britain. He quotes at length, in deleted remarks, from a 12/6/76 New York Times article which expresses fear that the crisis will not be contained and that a revolutionary Trotskyist party will emerge from a Labour Party split.

Now he [*the NYT writer*] proposes that as horror; that's what we've been thinking. But the instruments in Britain are not, as now, presently put together to achieve that. And, of course, in the present round of things, our forces in Britain are by two orders of magnitude qualitatively weak. All we can do is intervene, hope, and seek to regroup from among the kaleidoscopic half a dozen groups that hang about in London and a few of the provinces and see what we could put together on a principled programmatic basis. But I have to report that unless the native anger and militancy of the British workers organized in their trade unions

makes a successful confrontation (and that's not very optimistic) that this - which is both an urgent necessity for the British working class and an opportunity for international revolutionary communism is going to be lost.

Now when I say "us" sometimes, as in this leaflet--"Oh, you people think you're the only ones!"--well, I wish you could identify some other organization with a program designed to meet these needs and a willingness to undertake it, and we would go and join them. I want to deal a little bit later with the question of whether or not the international Spartacist tendency exists for organizationally egotistical reasons. An important point.

The speaker now comes to "English-speaking North America", a synonym, it seems, in the Spartacist League, primarily for the United States. Lest Canadian visitors in his audience miss this point, the chauvinist Robertson chides them for any nationalist sentiments his exclusion of their country from North American politics might arouse. An inaudible sentence or two precede these remarks.

And then we have North America--English-speaking North America. I'm not speaking of Mexico and/or Quebec, where different processes are working. And therefore, IF WE SPEAK OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING NORTH AMERICA, YOU ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADIANS IN THE AUDIENCE--YOUR MAPLE LEAF PROCLIVITIES TO THE CONTRARY NOTWITHSTANDING--WE WILL SPEAK OF THE UNITED STATES AND THAT LITTLE FRINGE ON THE SURREY THAT RUNS FIFTY MILES NORTH OF THE U.S. BORDER...*[laughter]*

In the US we have this most powerful but no longer hegemonic force of world capital. This is a, we have a government and a ruling class that can look back over the--what?--past fifteen-twenty years. Ran an extremely long and expensive and losing colonial war with all of the appropriate consequences that one would hope to expect in terms of lying, exposure, demoralization, corruption, hypocrisy, brutality, the rest. Some fairly unsuccessful governments: the Nixon/Agnew, Ford administrations just going out of power.

The ghetto rebellions of the sixties--whose significance in politicizing progressives in the US and throughout the world is lost on Robertson--are drawn by him in racist caricature. He counterposes to them, by juxtaposition, "something really quite important"--a nationwide post office strike. Robertson, moreover, implicitly admonishes the black militants for their impatience while portraying them as shiftless anti-Semites.

A restless youth which in the 1960s made a lot of trouble on campus, including this one *[i.e., Columbia]*. A BLACK POPULATION WHICH SAID, "WHY WAIT?" AND PROCEEDED TO BURN DOWN THEIR OWN GHETTOS AND THEY'RE STILL WAITING FOR SOME JEWS TO COME BACK AND OPEN THEIR DRUGSTORES. IT DOESN'T HAPPEN. A working class which at the beginning of the seventies went on a number of wildcats, including something really quite important. Listen to this--a major nationwide post office strike! You know the old slogan of the thirties, "You can't strike against the government"? Well, two million guys struck against the government and won. There were no firings, no jailings, no nothing. This is important.

And a lot of the new left hippie milieu, that had previously stopped grooving on the Black Mississippi Democratic Party in '64 and all that stuff, turned to the third world and Vietnam, thought empirically that workerism was where it was at, and they plunged in. They've also grown a little jaded with the Chinese self-help projects in Newark, so they've become "hard Maoists". And then nothing much happened. And you see, comrades, it should have happened, objectively.

Robertson, in deleted remarks, cites massive inflation resulting from the Vietnam War which has been "grinding to pieces" all classes in the US, including the bourgeoisie, which "lost half their wealth in terms of real stable dollars" since 1965 and people "taking it out on each other" as exemplified in vigilanteism promoted in the popular movie "Death Wish". Unlike Britain and western Europe, there is no Social Democracy or Communist Party to mediate for the US bourgeoisie,

only the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters. Black "impatience" again comes in for a tongue-lashing by Robertson, who ignores the role of the political police in destroying the Black Panthers.

And that's all there is. WHAT ABOUT THE BLACK MOVEMENT THAT WAS GONNA DO IT NOW, THAT WAS IMPATIENT? GOT THE PANTHERS; THE PANTHERS SPLIT, RIGHT? AFTER SOME VARIOUS KINDS OF TROUBLE--THEY'RE GONNA "OFF THE PIGS" AND ALL THAT STUFF--WE GOT HUEY NEWTON AND ELDRIDGE CLEAVER. So we have a black population hideously oppressed and abused in this country, twenty millions, and I cannot think of a single organization outside and to the left of the NAACP.

Political parties of the working class in general? Where? What?

Though economic conditions worsened in 1976, Robertson notes, in deleted remarks, that both presidential candidates that year were essentially conservative. In the following remarks he bolsters an implicit theme in his presentation--i.e., that US workers are actually closer to revolutionary class consciousness than European workers by virtue of not being infected by Stalinists. Robertson here presents an idyllic, and necessarily contradictory, picture of the organized US working class. On the one hand, says Robertson, the AFL-CIO alone is stifling a working class seething with discontent. On the other hand, the AFL-CIO is so "eroded from below" that half of the union locals are controlled by militants who would easily "go in with the guys" in opposition to the union higher-ups. Robertson thus avoids dealing with the more sobering reality that the US working class, organized in its trade unions, is still laboring under heavy illusions in the union bureaucracy and in the US government. Moreover, illusions in Stalinism, in reformism, are part of a stage that the US working class has by and large not passed through yet, not one that they have happily circumvented in a direct line from trade union consciousness to revolutionary consciousness.

How does it happen in this country where every section of the population ought to be groaning with discontent and we have this arch-conservative election? And the finger points to the AFL-CIO, which is an ossified structure. It took its crystalline shape in the middle of the Cold War. Now, we also better know what else is happening. It's been heavily eroded from below. I THINK THAT PROBABLY HALF OF THE UNION LOCALS IN AMERICA ARE NOW IN THE HANDS OF GUYS WHO, IF THEY WERE PUT TO IT, WOULD TEND, OVER A PRIMITIVE CLASS STRUGGLE ISSUE, TO BREAK FROM THEIR LOYALTY TO SOLIDARITY HOUSE OR WHATEVER INTERNATIONAL IT IS, AND GO IN WITH THE GUYS... It's eroded now. It's an international apparatus; it's not a union local apparatus anymore.

But nonetheless, the only existing force that, on paper and historically, is committed to the defense of the rights of the working people is the union movement. And it has now for a generation been shrinking from below, for it's eroding, been in the hands of guys who are far, far closer, in the most literal sense of the word, to the CIA and the FBI than they are to the needs of the working people. But it's a very brittle structure. And this is where the European bourgeoisie have it better.

Robertson, in deleted remarks, notes the role of the French Communist Party in the May 1968 general strike, saying that it was the "Communist Party, and only the Communist Party--not the police, not the French Army--who saved the day for the French bourgeoisie. Because they were the ones who could control it, keep the workers isolated..."

But the roots of the French Communist Party go back to the Paris Commune; it's an extremely politically sophisticated apparatus. Can you imagine the AFL-CIO dealing with general strikes? Meany's greatest statement was, "I've never been in a strike in my life. I was a plumber from the Bronx; we never did that sort of stuff up there." They're rigid; they're not only eroded from below,

they're brittle. And the principal grievance that we have with organizations in this country, such as the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, is that they're all geared up to play the role of rendering less brittle, more elastic, more plausible, the trade union bureaucracy... And that's what the YSA [*Young Socialists Alliance--youth arm of the Socialist Workers Party*] is--an available 1000 youth instantly to be hired as assistant educational directors and assistant editors of union newspapers, in order to explain to the workers that black is white and this is the best of all possible worlds.

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Gap in talk due to tape change

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The approving laughter of the predominantly SL audience at Robertson's next remarks is one of many instances where embarrassed silence, followed by refutation later from other SLers, would have been more in order.

IN ABOUT 1954, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WITCH HUNT AND THE COLD WAR, WE RAN A CANDIDATE FOR SOME STUDENT OFFICE AGAINST A RELATIVELY MORE POPULIST STALINIST CANDIDATE. (RIGHT, HE WAS GONNA GET 100 VOTES OUT OF 20,000; WE WERE GONNA GET 50 VOTES OUT OF 20,000.) SO, THIS LAST YEAR WE RAN A REALLY PRETTY GIRL ON THAT CAMPUS AND GOT 18 VOTES. [*laughter*] WE'D BETTER LEARN. AND I CHECKED--I THOUGHT MAYBE THEY DIDN'T PASS OUT ANY LEAFLETS OR SOMETHING!

At the same time, one has to report, from a sampling of the student population, that there's not the 1950s tendency to want to get crewcuts and make it in management and labor relations and all that stuff. It's a turnoff. Cynicism. So that I want to exhort the comrades in the room and elsewhere not to think that this is a socially passive country. I think it's jaded. I think that we have an unresponsive labor movement with no political sight to it, hostile.

I think that all sections of the population in this country have been, each according to their own particular oppressions (and EVERYBODY, NO MATTER WHAT THE DIFFERENTIAL, THINKS THEIR OWN OPPRESSION IS THE WORST), have been trashed and trashed again. [*I think*] that this government, that the very nakedness of its lying and hypocrisy and the general greed of the bourgeoisie and the inability to do anything about it in any apparent way, has created an enormous amount of explosive social material in America looking for an outlet.

After pointing with understanding to the alleged fact that "everybody thinks their own oppression is the worst"--an assertion that (1) is not true, and (2) to the extent that it does apply to the petty bourgeoisie and labor aristocracy in this country, is often evidence of a dangerous tendency to scapegoat the more oppressed for the decay of capitalism--Robertson fatuously dismisses the threat of fascism in the US. While fascism has been weaker, historically, in the US than in many European countries, the Klan, the Nazi Party, ROAR, etc. pose real and serious threats to the physical safety and political unity of the working class in the US. Robertson's remarks are particularly ill-timed in the midst of increasingly aggressive Klan and Nazi activities. The anti-sexual backlash campaigns of Anita Bryant et al were not yet mobilized at the time of Robertson's talk, but the atmosphere which produced them was already becoming evident.

That also argues for a considerable fascist potential in this country. ALTHOUGH, THERE AGAIN, AMERICA HAS ONE OF THE SMALLEST AND MOST HAPPILY PITIFUL, AND ROTTEN, AND DISGUSTING AND CREEPY FASCIST MOVEMENTS OF ANY OF THE MAJOR IMPERIALIST COUNTRIES. THEY HAVE MUCH BIGGER, THE BIGGEST FASCIST MOVEMENT'S IN ITALY. THE FRENCH HAVE GOT A RESPECTABLE, AND THE BRITISH AREN'T TOO BACKWARD, AND EVEN THE GERMANS--YOU KNOW, ASIDE FROM THE POOR OLD WEHRMACHT GUYS THAT COME OUT OF THE BARS AND BOO AT OUR DEMONSTRATIONS. [*laughter*] THEY GOT SS MEN--THEY'RE NOT ALL IN ARGENTINA.

So that's the state of things in general. Now we start getting to the down and dirty polemic material. But first it has to be set in a proper context. One has to know in some sense or, at least, think one has to know something of the period...

Well, okay, there's something called Trotskyism. Except there isn't something called Trotskyism. There's really not, because some of the things that are included among it! I got a not unattractive periodical on my way in here. And here's a hammer and sickle and a "4" on it and it's called Socialist Voice. And I looked and it's state-capitalist and, oh Jesus, it's Sy Landy!...and it's a measure. In the 1930s at least we had this virtue: if you called yourself a Trotskyite [sic] it meant that, of one hundred revolutionary socialist Marxists in the world, 99% of them said, "Oh, Trotsky is a hopeless sectarian locked up in Russia. Why he won't even let the Chinese, let that nice decent nationalist Chiang Kai-shek have the Manchurian Railway."

And Trotskyism is an "in" word now. The tendency, the attempt is made to say that it's not a doctrine anymore. It's a statement that we're some kind of leftist and that we don't think eternal truth is locked up with Comrade X in Peking, especially since it turns out to be X, Y, or Z, and that ain't good. And the harder Maoist types, looking for a spiritual homeland that has state power, are now looking at Tirana [capital of Albania]. [laughter]

Robertson now scolds Maoists looking to Albania for political leadership by taking racist swipes at the Albanians. The SL audience reacts to this disgusting performance as though they were at a burlesque house.

WE HAVE HAD OUR COMRADES CHECKING, AND IT IS NOT YET ASSURED, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT MARX REFERRED TO THE ALBANIANS AS "GOAT-FUCKERS". IS THAT TRUE? [loud laughter] BUT THEN HE WAS PRONE TO BE ETHNICALLY PEJORATIVE OF RACES. [laughter rises] AND IT MUST BE POINTED OUT THAT, TO THIS DAY, AND UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF THE FOURTH FIVE YEAR PLAN, THE PRODUCTION OF GOATS IS STILL THE PRINCIPAL... [there Robertson is cut short by laughing, whistling and applauding SLers.]

So, Trotskyism. There's a tendency to make it just a word. We want to be more programmatic than that. So that everybody says, "I'm a Trotskyite. I'm a Trotskyite."

Now in 1966, I had the temerity amidst a bunch of warm and gentle Healyites to say that I thought (this is in London, right? Healy wasn't in the room, but he was listening on the intercom) that the United Secretariat had not been defeated and that it was necessary to wage a political struggle against them. That was 1966. The United Secretariat is the principle international (erstwhile international) repository of what claims to be Trotskyism. And therefore, we have the not overly happy task of pointing out that this is not Trotskyism, that this is virtually every kind of goddamned other middle ground between revolutionary Marxism and out and out shameless reformism that each of the generations of the socialist movement have had to contend with for a hundred years. And furthermore, to even (typically, not furthermore, but characteristically) to say the name "United Secretariat" immediately is like "Heinz' 57 Varieties"--which one? I want to talk about pretty many of those. But in talking about them, you must keep in mind the conjuncture that I've talked, that I've just kind of started, made an effort to impressionistically, in fact, it was tailored to make this [point?]

The speaker's criticisms of the United Secretariat in Europe here are scarcely political. They are rather moral preachments on the evils of hippie life.

THE MAJORITY OF THE UNITED SECRETARIAT, ASSOCIATED WITH ERNEST MANDEL (AN EXTREMELY BRIGHT MAN; HE KNOWS LOTS OF LANGUAGES. AND ERUDITE!) AND A WHOLE GANG OF YOUNG, VERY HARD, VERY MACHO GUYS WHO (ALL OF THEM FROM FRANCE), WHO ALL THINK THEY'RE MOVIE ACTORS. "It's Alain Krivine, hurray!" I've seen these rallies in Europe: "It's Alain Krivine, hurray!" [laughter] And the light shows and the rest.

But they're centrists...and how does this centrism express itself? Above all, in not being locked in to a chance in any particular country anywhere. BECAUSE THEY'RE LIKE PIRATES FLOATING: THE NEW MASS VANGUARD, THE HIPPIE YOUTH OF EUROPE WEARING TORN BLUE JEANS AND TURNING ON WITH VARIOUS CHEMICALS, FLOATING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS EUROPE SINGING REVOLUTIONARY SONGS. That's the new mass vanguard. And something happens in Portugal--five thousand of them go down there, to groove. *[laughter]*

Another component, little more sinister, is necessary to understand it all--an interest in conciliating the Stalinists some way or other. So it's very easy to say, "Ho Chi Minh is a great revolutionary leader, period.--P.S.: We do not mention he shot the revolutionists; worse than shot, he did them to death in unpleasant ways in Indochina." And to be very soft as long as the Chinese were talking out of the left side of their mouths. So, it's an appetite, not locatable in any particular country, of a kind of bonapartism *[sic]*.

So, they thought it was really groovy that all these lieutenants and captains and an occasional major in the Portuguese army (I forget the name of their eclectic council) were building, you know, maybe gonna build socialism in Portugal (only most of them weren't); maybe Carvalho would; maybe there was gonna be a deal with the Stalinist party. So, essentially, that's the kind of diffuse form of bonapartism, not yet locatable in any particular country. As soon as you get a particular country--like the guys in Ceylon did, you sell out and become ministers; you become "responsible". BUT IN THE MEANTIME, YOU CAN REALLY MAKE IT WITH THE CHICKS IN PARIS IF YOU SAY, "BY THE WAY, I JUST CAME BACK FROM MADRID WHERE I SMUGGLED IN PLASTIQUE TO THE BASQUES TO OFF A BUNCH OF CABINET MINISTERS." You know, "Wow! that's really where it's at!" I'm not kidding you. *[voice becomes heated.]* YOU WANT TO KNOW THE REAL SOCIAL FABRIC OF THE UNITED SECRETARIAT? THAT'S IT!

[calmly] But, they have a lot of people and they really want a revolution of some kind, somewhere, somehow. And maybe Marx is a little old hat and Pierre Frank is telling us that the Transitional Program is not to be taken literally, only in its spirit (which is diffuse) and, so, you have the USec Majority.

Robertson here indulges in non-sequitur, sketching a scenario in which politically bankrupt revisionists, the "floating pirates of Europe" he has castigated, would, without the prior existence of a revolutionary party, form a core of revolutionary opposition to the popular front in Portugal.

Now, there's a quality about them, and it's why I want to speak of them first. If I've suggested that the international Spartacist tendency is not egotistical, it's because, given a proper subjective *[state?]* (You see, truth is not laid out in one's own subjective will. The people of the Communist Cadre are not all wrong. There are also objective circumstances.), if willy-nilly--that is, without Bolsheviks in Portugal--the situation had gone to a clearcut dual power, a large section (magnitude undetermined) of the United Secretariat Majority, concretely, given sufficient pedagogy of reality, hard revolutionary reality, could well have polarized against the popular front, instead of finding little disingenuous ways to support it. "For Dual Power! For a Bolshevik Party!" Under these conditions and under these programmatic norms--real ones, felt ones, fought for--we would have joined together in an instant and have no difficulty with it. And that can happen. But we want to keep the baby and pour out the bathwater of Pierre Frank, Ernest Mandel, Livio (who's pouring himself out now because he doesn't accept self-criticism in order to get a deal with Hansen) and get to those of the youngsters who empirically have the possibility of learning, under the test of events, and, hopefully, with the spur of our arguments, how it is that you make a proletarian revolution, and learning how it is, at the same time wanting to do so.

Then there's the USec Majority. Or there used to be a USec Majority. Not any more; there are now two. There's the Socialist Workers Party--write them off simply, unconditionally, totally as an organization. Write them off. They are reformist; they are locked hopelessly in to bourgeois democracy, constitutional

processes, and a touching faith in all capitalist cops, courts, and judges. Unfortunately, in life, while you must write them off as a tendency, as a current, all over the world in various countries you will have groupings that will find that the USec Majority is not good. It engages in adventures; it engages in its own kind of flamboyant radical opportunism; it wants to send ten kids off into the countryside with guns to rally the peasants and they all get shot. And then Hansen comes plodding along and says, "It is necessary to build a revolutionary party of the proletariat." And so, in Venezuela, or somewhere else, the USec Minority of the SWP has rallied around it people who are recoiling for correct reasons from the USec Majority. Ah! And here's the problem elsewhere and vice-versa.

...Furthermore, they [the SWP] made a deal with a guy called Moreno in Argentina who had a party that nobody could ever figure out how big it was because the definition of membership was too ill-defined and you got the impression that anybody who ever bought a newspaper on a street corner from one of their sellers was a member. But they claimed thousands and they had close to a majority. But Moreno's PSP (Party Socialist Proletario, I suppose). Something has happened in Argentina--I'm speaking now about the Bolshevik Tendency. And it's important although it doesn't turn up here. What happened in Argentina was (So who's Moreno? He's been around for about twenty, thirty years and he's always tried whatever he could do. In the old days, his newspaper used to say, "Published under the revolutionary discipline of General Peron himself," and a big picture of Peron. That's when he was working the Peronista rap. And then, during the second legal Peronista period, he signed the popular front document: "Long live democracy and democratic processes in Argentina--by the way, why don't you stop killing our cadres?") And then Argentina--the ice has closed over there. It's a hard place. So the PSP cannot swallow the pure legalism, constitutionalism, passivity, pacifism, and all the rest of that stuff that the would-be social-democratic SWP would because they haven't cracked the labor movement...

Especially over Portugal, they broke. (Very useful debate. You ought to get a hold of the SWP's bulletin, if it's even published, in which Mandel and Joe Hansen debate. On one side there's a guy who says he's for revolution and Leninism and all the rest of that stuff, and then the SWP's busy saying, "No, no, we gotta have democracy." It sounds just like Karl Kautsky.)

SO THE PSP BROKE, AND BECAUSE THEY'VE GOT SORT OF A LATIN FRANCHISE AND THEY'VE GOT SOME RESOURCES, AND A BUNCH OF ARGENTINES, THEY'RE MOVING IN IN SPAIN, GRABBED MOST EVERYBODY IN LATIN AMERICA. And they're quite annoying because that Moreno's an adventurer. I'm sure he never read our stuff, but he's gotta have a third position, leaning in the direction of the USec Majority. He's against guerrillaism and all that; he excoriates the minority in the SWP over Angola for being neutral in a civil war militarily. He says: How can you possibly, in the middle of a revolutionary/counter-revolutionary period believe in pure legality when the agents of legality are killing you? So the Bolshevik Tendency's out there floating around now. And it's not well known in the northern hemisphere because it doesn't carry much weight in Europe outside of Spain or in the United Secretariat. BUT THEY ALSO RIPPED OFF SOME MEXICANS.

So that's this. With a program that empirically looks rather like our own--which gives us pause since we know this Moreno. But he may get the best of the Spaniards and Spain's moving toward revolution...

So that's it then. And furthermore it's very hard to work in Latin America. You try it and you have dead comrades fast.

There follows here in deleted remarks a lengthy, though scarcely illuminating, discussion of regroupment potentialities in the Fourth International. Every group comes up for a one or two-sentence "analysis". Robertson then states the SL's opposition to the smear campaign currently being conducted by Gerry Healy of the British Workers Revolutionary Party against Joseph Hansen of the Socialist Workers Party in the US, with Healy accusing Hansen of being an accomplice to Trotsky's assassination. Finally, Robertson comes to an attempted analysis of the political

alignments of the Fourth International groupings.

Okay, so the big axis of division among those who call themselves Trotskyists (and I'm excluding the fringe groups that have defeatist positions on the Soviet Union) is: Are you oriented to a bourgeois-democratic, social-democratic trade union base, or do you want to play at some kind of bonapartism ranging from terrorism, to Stalinism through nationalism? And these are appetites. It's not an iron rule, but that's the tendency now for a regroupment shakeout among these forces.

Meanwhile, each wing--and especially the centrist wing--does throw off elements that are susceptible to revolutionary Marxism, especially because, to the extent that the proletariat raises its head as a conscious class engaging in class struggle and exhibiting its appetites for the objective situation of, the precipitation of a revolutionary situation, the program of Trotskyism turns out to be something much more vital than just a bunch of words that some old fud who's been dead for thirty years wrote in a book. And so we want to be around as a propaganda group, where we can, making these points; where we have more strength, directly participating at whatever modest level in the class struggle of the workers. Largely, of course, our problem is that we've been locked up in North America, tending to break out in Europe, and a very little bit in South Asia.

In deleted remarks, Robertson discusses a letter sent to the SL by the Workers League which accused the SL of a "provocative false policy of violence" and urged its leadership to "call your members to order". Given the SL's pacifist proclivities in the face of any threat of physical violence, this is of course a baseless accusation. Robertson points out that the Workers League is itself noted for sectarian physical attacks on leftists attempting to leaflet, attend, or intervene in WL meetings, and he expresses the hope that this WL letter to the SL presages a turn away from such behavior on the WL's part. After this diversion, Robertson returns to the main thread of the talk.

So, how do we handle all of this? Just a small organization of a few hundred on the face of a very large planet. WELL, FOR ONE THING, IT IS VERY GOOD, IF WE HAVE TO BE LOCKED UP LARGELY IN ONE REGION OF THE EARTH, IT IS THAT IT IS NORTH AMERICA BECAUSE OF THE WAGE STANDARDS HERE. Mercifully, we have an industrial base --not so merciful for the comrades that have to work forced overtime in auto and steel, I'll grant you that, but it gives us a big wage basis. Now, we have a policy against race and class guilt-tripping people. I sometimes falsely regret that principle, but it is necessary for our own sanitation. So that we have never gone to anybody in an Ivy League school that we know has one million dollars and said: "This is it, babe--either put up your whole inheritance right now or you're no good." So we don't have much money, the way that PL/Progressive Labor Party used to get it, but we do have industrial workers and occasionally we even get a little windfall money. But a little windfall money in North America is a good deal relative to elsewhere in the world, although our German comrades should begin to produce something soon since they're paying...in the coal mines as much or more than American coal miners get.

Having given what is apparently the material basis for Robertson's belief in the basic superiority of the US as an arena for revolutionary struggle--the affluence of the US economy--Robertson proceeds to outline the conditions for maintaining an international movement. Slipping in an obligatory mention of the primacy of programmatic agreement, Robertson explains how one goes about ensuring the "cohesiveness" of an "International", i.e., as a CTC speaker later points out, of an international debating society.

You see, it needn't come to a question of money, if you want to talk about the international movement. It was an amazing act that a Marx or a Lenin were able to develop international cohesiveness in a time in which there was no long distance

telephone, in which letters and personal communication required, at a minimum, weeks. As a very small international organization, we can remain cohesive. Yes, in the first place (and it's true in Marx and Lenin's time, too), we have to have a common and sufficient and characteristic program which we believe, in our benighted state, answers in broad outline the tasks of the working class to come to power. But that's not enough if you're small. And I suspect maybe, I want to apologize for the comrades of the--what? Communist Collective? Communist Cadre!--that maybe that idea that you have to have a vast objective development (like a German Social Democracy or a Russian Revolution) to come together *[is misplaced?--inaudible]*. You can also do it with a certain measure of money. To keep yourself together, that means that every year or every six months you meet together from all the planets, er, all the continents of the earth. *[laughter]*... But there's a lot of money problems. They allow us to remain cohesive if we have the political basis...

So, I want to throw that out because it constitutes in a sense--IF OUR PARTY WAS BASED ON TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE ELEVENTH ONE WOULD BE MONEY. And not money, money only in relationship to the post-second world war era--the jet aircraft, the overseas telephone, and the xerox. Otherwise all the money on earth would not permit international cohesiveness...

Now, therefore, in our efforts to intersect the class struggle internationally either in a propagandistic way among those who are the self-declared revolutionists (the little groupings around the world) or, where we are stronger, and above all on the American West Coast therefore, and also elsewhere, we have, that's the task that is set for us. And it requires in addition to programmatic and historical development that's buried in too many Marxist bulletins, the weekly press and particular tools. But before I get to that--which is what I want to end up with, I think--I want to talk about another thing here, that in an elliptical way indicates that the United States is the basis for our strength.

So, what about the American section? Any experienced politician in the audience can tell on the basis of the description that I've given of the conjuncture in North America about where we're at. We're fairly static. Unlike the Maoists and most other groups, we have not disintegrated, we've not had qualitative losses, but we're surely not going anywhere. There's a dribble of members who've been in for a while, our youth bring us new members, but not enough because the campuses are quiet. And so, we're simply holding.

Robertson in deleted remarks notes that the SL has had no major internal disension "for a number of years" and that their recent "trade union activists conference" left him "particularly gratified".

WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES IT'S TOO EASY TO BELIEVE THAT YOUR WHOLE MEMBERSHIP IS JUST A BIG BAG OF SHIT THAT THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP IS DRAGGING BEHIND IT, AND THAT *[if]* THE CENTRAL LEADERSHIP MAKES A SERIOUS POLITICAL MISTAKE, THERE ARE WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION NO RESTORATIVE FORCES.

Here Robertson hastens to assure his membership, in deleted remarks, that they are not a big bag of shit--the lesson, it appears, of the trade union conference in which the members somehow made clear to the leadership that they "can act as a corrective" to the leadership.

So it's a pretty strong organization. What this means, therefore, for the American section is that in this period of relative social--it's false to say quiescence because the country groans with misery, exploitation, oppression, the inability for any section of the masses to find a way out--that in the next five or ten years (five or ten years, comrades--and for all I know that will be next week--but five or ten years), we can put our tendency in this country on an intersection with the living processes of the class struggle (and that doesn't mean Arnold Miller and that guy from steel), that we can play the kind of role that

we're supposed to in the class struggle here. In Europe, in one way, because we're much weaker, our opportunities are much richer. See, in the United States we regrouped ourselves through successful regroupment out of chances to have fusion with forces that are close to us. All tendencies that I know of (and I picked up more bulletins and pamphlets; I'll read them tonight) are at a considerable programmatic and political distance from us in the United States. In the United States, with our much smaller forces there have been very few regroupments ... In a Germany, a France, an England, I think we have the possibility to grow by leaps.

BUT, IF TWENTY-FIVE PEOPLE CAME TO OUR TENDENCY IN THE UNITED STATES TOMORROW AND SAID, "WE WANT TO JOIN," WELL, THAT WOULD BE VERY NICE--ABOVE ALL BECAUSE IT WOULD DEPRIVE OUR OPPONENTS OF TWENTY-FIVE PEOPLE--BUT YOU WOULD HARDLY NOTICE IT IN THE SL. (OH, THE PERSONNEL SECRETARIAT WOULD HAVE A FEW MORE ORGANIZERS TO FARM OUT SOMEWHERE, BUT THAT WOULD BE ABOUT IT.)

I see that I have one other great big point and I'll try to encapsulate it in a couple of sentences and I don't know that it will grab you very much in this country, but it's a crucial... /inaudible sentence/

The following panegyric to the "national tradition" of US Trotskyism was a performance that seemed to bring Robertson close to tears. In this astonishing passage, Robertson thanks US imperialism for creating a safe haven for the maintenance of Trotskyist politics. His contention that only in the US "was there a continuous Leninist-Trotskyist tradition embodied in an organization and a cadre" is patently false. As the CTC leaflet pointed out, not only the European Trotskyists, but also Cannon and the SWP degenerated rapidly after Trotsky's death and the end of the second world war. While factions within the SWP raised Trotskyist politics against the Cannon leadership's liquidation of Trotskyism, none of these factions or tendencies established Trotskyist parties.

Robertson points to the mere physical survival of self-identified Trotskyists in the US as evidence of political superiority! It is just this trust in bourgeois democracy's providing of an arena for political organizing that informs the SL's treacherous position on Hungary: Better the chance of counter-revolution where bourgeois democracy enables us to organize, than a deformed workers' state where Stalinism denies us such an arena!

In our polemics, in our quarreling, in our informal discussions, in our agreements with an awful lot of the European comrades of the United Secretariat, or out of the United Secretariat, or independent Trotskyists, they say: "Oh, you Americans are raw, provincial, and basically know nothing." Well, very well... there's a tendency to be deferential. But what they mean by that is not, in general, American provincials. What they mean is: "In terms of the lessons of revolutionary Marxism, you're ignoramuses and we're where it's at, and, furthermore, your James P. Cannon (let's quote Wohlforth), is a /window smasher?/." Now that is not true and that is where we've got to insurrect.

Only in Germany can I work my way through a menu, and certainly not in script. But, in the post-Leninist Comintern, if you take a look at the revolutionary sections internationally /Here Robertson's tone becomes demagogic, as though he had been personally insulted. His following remarks refer to the Trotskyist movement in the '30s and '40s./: There were the Chinese--their Central Committee spent five years, from 1932 to 1937 in jail, and they constitute nothing therefore as a revolutionary tradition. The Russians were mainly in jail and were all butchered in '41. Deutscher and the Polish gang sold out early. The French were always split. The Greeks were locked into archeo-Marxist anti-national self-determinationism. The British never existed.

ONLY IN THE UNITED STATES, HOWEVER BAD THE EXPERIENCE WAS IN THE THIRTIES HERE, WAS THERE A CONTINUOUS LENINIST-TROTSKYIST TRADITION EMBODIED IN ORGANIZATION AND A CADRE. AND, HOWEVER CRITICALLY WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN SECTION, /his voice becomes half-choked/ IT'S THE ONLY ONE THAT RECEIVED ALL

THE BLOWS, HAD TO MAKE ALL THE POLITICAL RESPONSES, HAD TO DEAL WITH ALL THE QUESTIONS THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE PERIOD. AND WE'RE NOT EVEN SPEAKING OF THE COMRADES IN GERMANY AND ITALY WHERE THEIR DICTATORS WIPED THEM OUT. So, I don't suppose that that's an issue that's going to grab an American audience very much. BUT, IN FACT, IN A CRITICAL WAY, BECAUSE OF THE PROTECTION OF A VERY POWERFUL, IMPERIALISTICALLY-BASED BOURGEOIS DEMOCRACY, IN THE LAST THIRTY YEARS WE HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE, IF WE USE IT WELL--AND OTHERWISE WE HAVE IT NOT AT ALL--OF THE ONLY CONTINUOUS REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST EXPERIENCE ON THE FACE OF THE PLANET! AND THAT'S WHAT CANNONISM HAD BETTER MEAN.

Last point. *[Robertson mentions in deleted remarks that for some time the SL has been working on a brief declaration of principles around which the SL could rally forces sympathetic to their tendency. He describes and reads from a draft of this declaration.]* What we had in mind was the kind of thing that Trotsky did under analogous circumstances in the early thirties when he wanted to take a series of key positions regarding...the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee and corresponding big issues which contained within them major political experiences, lessons... So this is the declaration that we want to throw out to the world... As I recall, the title of this talk was "Towards the Rebirth of the Fourth International"...the regrouping of the alleged vanguard and the participation of the mass struggles.

And for us--and we're quite unashamed about it--we're not workerist. For us, the regrouping of the vanguard when we're very small is the thing that is available to us. We're not going to bring the masses to us, the way Communist Cadre thinks we are. And so, here's what the comrade *[who wrote this draft]* had to say:

"The declaration should speak to whatever leftward forces, motion there is in the United Secretariat and identify where they are. It should be simple so it can be easily translated into many languages and should bring responses.

"The undersigned call for the reforging of the Fourth International...based particularly on the first four congresses of the Communist International, the Transitional Program and other documents adopted by the 1938 founding congress of the Fourth International, the break of the International from Pabloite revisionism ...and the program and practice of the international Spartacist tendency."

The document, as quoted by Robertson in deleted remarks, goes on to specify various points of principle: no political or electoral support to the popular front; no political support to Stalinist "factions or cliques"; for political revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracies in all the workers' states; rejection of "socialism in one country"; reaffirmation of the necessity to build communist trade union fractions based on the Transitional Program; for the tactic of the united front from above; "recognition of the validity of the tactic of regroupment to unite subjective revolutionary militants on a firm programmatic basis through a process of splits and fusions into a vanguard party; for the exposure of centrism; rejection of the claims "of all the ostensibly Trotskyist organizations to represent the programmatic continuity of the Fourth International which was destroyed by Pabloite revision in 1953"; against such groups' "unbridled maneuverings"; for the "reforging of a democratic centralist Fourth International which will stop at nothing short of the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat."

Now that's a good first draft as a statement of all those who have been expelled from or driven out of the United Secretariat who are rallied in or around the international Spartacist tendency. *[Robertson, in deleted remarks, says additional points can be added, e.g., the electoral tactic of conditional opposition.]* Something else that has to go in there, especially now. We're not only interested in facilitating the polarization of the United Secretariat Majority. There are an awful lot of subjectively decent Maoists and hard Stalinists in the world (not many of them in the United States) and whenever you run into a one-stage Maoist (who doesn't have the theory of stages....you sometimes run into some Maoist collectives and organizations that believe that you can simply fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat), whenever you run into such groups, they are in complete, top-to-bottom, implicit contradiction to every variant of Stalinism. And we would surely like to unite with such people if we could break through and explain...*[inaudible]*

So that's pretty much what we're about, in terms of the time allotment which says, "that's one and a half hours." Thank you, comrades. *[end of Robertson's presentation]*

PART II: DISCUSSION

The chair called first upon Walter Dahl of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP), one of a few organizations that the SL calls upon frequently at their meetings since the LRP's state-capitalist politics provide the SL with a convenient target behind which they hide from their more serious political opponents. Dahl's comments are important here, however, since they aroused repeated indignant replies from SL speakers--replies in which some SLers "out-Robertsoned" Robertson in chauvinism and contempt for the oppressed.

DAHL (LRP): That was the most disgusting speech I ever had the misfortune of hearing. Comrade Robertson has opened up by putting down every non-white, non-American, non-English speaking people [*applause from the SL audience*] and working class that you've graced with your disgusting presence. There's no people worth talking about in Indochina? The Greeks make their living by selling expensive watches? The Canadians are a "fringe"? I didn't even hear what you said about the Albanians, thank the Lord. The ghetto blacks are waiting for what, Comrade Robertson? There are reasons for that kind of cynicism and snideness that we have heard here tonight... [*Dahl proceeds to link Robertson's chauvinism with the SL position on the class character of the USSR. While the SL's neo-Shachtmanite hostility to the Soviet Union (accompanied by a formally correct position of defense) is linked to their US chauvinism, it is not in the manner that Dahl suggests. Out of the political blindness to reality that informs the LRP position that the Soviet Union is "state capitalist", Dahl projects a "Pabloite" conciliationism to the Stalinist bureaucracy onto the SL.*]

It is no wonder that, Comrade Robertson, you have no tendencies in any of the oppressed countries of the world after that disgusting performance...

Comrade Ross of Communist Cadre refutes the revisionist position of the SL that the political revolution is the "smashing of the Stalinist state", and explains the roots and treacherous consequences of this position.

ROSS (CTC): I've only heard Lyn Marcus speak once and I've got to say that this man has outdone him in vulgarity. [*Loud laughter*]

There is no such creature as "the Stalinist state"; Trotsky never, ever used the term "Stalinist state" and he never called for the "smashing of the Stalinist state." You know where you'll find that term? You'll find it on the cover of Max Shachtman's book, The Bureaucratic Revolution: The Rise of the Stalinist State. And that's what it betrays--Shachtmanism. Now, states are loyal to classes only, and it's this fact that makes the political revolution possible.

Prior to 1933, Trotsky felt that revolutionary leadership and internal democracy could be restored to the CPSU, and consequently a revolutionary government restored to the Soviet Union, through a peaceful factional struggle within the CP. After 1933, Trotsky became convinced that the CPSU could not be reformed, that a new party must be built in the Soviet Union and that only through violent insurrectionary struggle could the political rule of the bureaucracy be overthrown and a new party be brought to governmental power and Bolshevik rule be restored in the Soviet Union. That's the political revolution.

Trotsky never, ever asserted that the state apparatus in the Soviet Union must be destroyed. It's true, sections of the state apparatus will remain loyal exclusively to the political rule of the bureaucracy; others will opt for capitalist restoration, and both wings must be destroyed. As an historical example, the 1848 Revolution in France resulted in a political revolution within the capitalist state which by and large remained intact in its majority. It passed from a bour-

geois monarchy to a bourgeois republic. It was on the basis of such historical examples that Trotsky developed the concept of proletarian political revolution.

Trotsky believed that the majority of the bureaucracy--yes, the bureaucracy--would be opposed to political revolution, of course, and that in many instances it would not be unlikely that the majority of the bureaucracy would opt for capitalist restoration. But he never asserted that the workers' state apparatus itself--which is not the same as the bureaucracy--would have to be destroyed.

Asserting that the Stalinist state must be smashed is an open revision of Trotskyism. It asserts that the bureaucracy rules not only politically, but socially. States are ultimately the instruments of class rule. This formula of smashing the Stalinist state is nothing less than a formula for counter-revolution--which is exactly what you used it for in that article in the 1966 Spartacist on the Hungarian uprising. [see Spartacist, Nov.-Dec. 1966] It's a formula for betrayal and it must be renounced if you ever hope to pretend to become real Trotskyists.

Robertson replies by lightly "vacating the formulation" of "smashing the Stalinist state"--a formulation his followers have heatedly defended in political arguments since 1966. He simply "modifies" the SL's neo-Shachtmanite formulation by changing "smashed" to "destroyed" and "Stalinist state" to "Stalinist state apparatus".

ROBERTSON: OKAY, I RENOUNCE IT! It's simple. Look. So you wrote a pretty serious thing, and if the phrase "Stalinist state" by itself appears, it's susceptible to a number of interpretations, including a new class theory. NOW, I SIMPLY SAY, I VACATE THE FORMULATION. NOW, EVERY WEEK I READ ARTICLES IN WORKERS VANGUARD AND I VACATE THE FORMULATIONS, I DISAGREE WITH THEM. BUT SO WHAT?

THE STALINIST STATE APPARATUS MUST BE DESTROYED. Are you trying to say that, deep in our hearts, we really have a new class theory? Check with those guys from the LRP [LRP] if you think so. You'll find out that we're real hardened Pabloites inured to sell out to Stalinism. No, the Russian state is not a new class, and it's a kind of hobby horse [sic]. Send us a letter and we will repudiate the formulation if in fact you've found one. You see, I once acknowledged this like this to somebody who'd misinterpreted with malice. I don't think you have. I think you probably found a defective formulation in our press in 1966. And I don't make any demagoguery that it was eleven years ago, because eleven weeks ago I could find bad formulations, too!

But if you are trying to tell this audience that we are smuggling in new class theories when, I quote, and you call for a "reform"! AND [it's] NECESSARY TO OBLITERATE THE STALINIST APPARATUS THAT HAS BEEN RAISED UPON THE RUSSIAN WORKERS' STATE. THAT APPARATUS, THOSE MEANS OF RULE, ALL THOSE MINISTRIES, ALL THAT MILITARY APPARATUS, EVERYTHING IS DESIGNED TO TAKE THE SOCIAL SURPLUS FROM THE RUSSIAN WORKING PEOPLE AND SQUANDER IT IN THE HANDS OF THE BUREAUCRACY. AND THAT HAS TO BE DESTROYED AND DONE AWAY WITH--AND THAT'S TROTSKYISM!

So please, if you've got a different position from us and you find a bad quote from us, do not load in--saying, you know, "Oh well, we hold Trotsky's position (except that we really don't) and you've got this other position over here and a bad quote." That's a bad thing to do. It does not aid anyone.

Having taken Communist Cadre to task for doing a "bad thing"--i.e., exposing the fact that the SL does not have Trotsky's position on the question of political revolution--Robertson turns to a less formidable opponent to chastise--Walter Dahl of the LRP.

The same thing as being race-baited by this chap--Dahl? "Petty bourgeois cynicism and snideness"? "That the petty bourgeoisie creates socialism"? I was trying to figure out what he was about. He said, "It's no wonder that there's no supporters of your tendencies in oppressed countries." Well, I thought, how nice

it is for the Chileans and the Indians that they're not oppressed, or the Ceylonese!

[laughter] So that's not a responsive thing.

[Here, Robertson draws himself up indignantly, and stares directly at Dahl, in an apparent attempt to be intimidating.] See, I don't know, look, I'm looking at you now! I don't know what you're about. I WAS TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU'RE PEDDLING HERE. YOU'RE NOT EVEN BLACK! (I COULD UNDERSTAND IT THEN.) So you get up and say all this stuff. You talk about the Canadians. (We're putting down all the non-whites like the Canadians.) So, I got a drift from that. I was putting down nationalism, Canadian nationalism, Anglo-nationalism. *[Robertson fails to note that he did not have a harsh word in his talk for US national chauvinism--only a paean of praise to US "Trotskyism's" national tradition.]*

He's misguided, of course... I couldn't figure out what the devil you really were about except that I'm led to believe that you equate the claims of nationalists with their oppression. And if that is the case, I urge you sometime to study the mutual genocide between the Turks and the Armenians and try to figure out, if you really absorb that history, which national people is right.

The Turkish/Armenian conflict is the favorite historical example raised by SLers to support their anti-Leninist theory that "all nationalism is equally reactionary", their support of Israeli and Afrikaner "right" to self-determination, and their refusal to militarily support the Palestinian resistance and Lebanese left in Lebanon.

And our position is that we don't think any of them should be killed. We believe that Turkish and Armenian workers, or on Cyprus correspondingly, constitute the dictatorship of the proletariat. AND I THINK THAT WHILE YOU RAISE THE BANNER OF THE BROWN-SKINNED PEOPLE, I SUSPECT THAT WHAT'S BEHIND THIS WAS SOME KIND OF MORALISTIC CAPITULATION TO NATIONALISM WHICH GENERALLY IS A COVER FOR GENOCIDE. AS THE OPPRESSED GERMANS *[sic]*, LOSERS IN A GREAT WORLD WAR, OPPRESSED.

Robertson thus identifies Germany as an oppressed nation following World War I. Several speakers later, the chair calls on a man who did not identify himself by name or organizational affiliation.

SPEAKER FROM FLOOR *(unidentified)*: It seems to me that one of the hallmarks of your tendency is its antagonism to nationalism as an ideology and indeed to many nationalist movements. And yet, what stands out in sharp contrast with that general position is your support for Israeli self-determination or, as you call it, "the Hebrew-speaking nation". I'd like to ask you to try to reconcile those two positions. And to add on to that the question: DO YOU SUPPORT THE RIGHT OF SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE BOERS IN SOUTH AFRICA? *[laughter and clapping from audience]*

Robertson, in responding to this speaker, establishes the SL pattern for the right of demagogically linking defense of oppressed nationalities with the advocacy of genocide against the oppressor nationality. This unprincipled mode of argument is based, in turn, on confusing the right of self-determination--the right to a nation state--with the right to a national existence.

ROBERTSON: YES, OF COURSE, WE DO! *[more laughter]* THERE'S ABOUT THREE MILLION OF THEM. AND I'LL TELL YOU A THING, BY THE WAY: IF YOU SAY THE BOERS HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXIST--THEY HAVE A MODERN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY AND A WEAPONS ESTABLISHMENT--IF THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXIST, THEN THEY HAVE NO MORAL LIMITS TO FOLLOW, DO THEY? TO KILL EVERY BLACK AFRICAN (WHICH THEY CAN DO IN ABOUT THREE DAYS IF THEY WANT TO), TO DEFEND THEIR OWN EXISTENCE, JUST LIKE ALL PEOPLE?

PREVIOUS SPEAKER: *[calling out from the floor]* Do you defend their morality?

ROBERTSON: Defend the morality? The morality is the morality of nationalism! Yes, the Boers are [like?] the Biharis. They have no right to exist either, right? They were Moslems in the Hindu province of Bihar. They fled to Bangladesh where they fell into the hands of the West Pakistanis as their tools. There's a million or two of them. There's a theory--it's a Stalinist theory--that all the peoples on the earth are to be divided (with jumps from time to time--you see, the Jews used to be progressive, now they're reactionary), that all the peoples are either progressive or reactionary. If you are progressive, not only do you have the right to exist, you have the right to do anything to your oppressors, but if you are a reactionary people, you have no right to exist and I have the right to kill you. Now, oddly enough, the peoples on the earth--the Irish, the Biharis, the Turks, the Armenians, the Jews in Israel, the Palestinians--they all want to exist. [laughter] And I think maybe you ought to start with that, as a statement that maybe capitalism is rotten ripe for a social transformation, not for a genocide which redoes the map of Europe and the world, so that you only have some peoples.

Now Engels wrote in the Peasant Wars that human progress has been achieved literally only at the expense, by marching over a mountain of human skulls. And that's the way it's been done. [Robertson, in deleted remarks, cites the Carib Indians' conquering of the Caribbean islands.] Are we to say that they [the Carib Indians] are more progressive because they were able to do it? Are the Biharis--who've been squeezed out (cannot go to India, cannot go to West Pakistan and cannot stay in Bangladesh) simply to be destroyed? Because Third World progressivites [sic] say, "Oh, of course, because the Biharis made common cause with the oppressors of West Pakistan."

It's all wrong! The methodology of the horse race of the peoples. The Germans are good or bad; the Armenians; and Cyprus--who's good or bad? Used to be the Turks were good because they were being oppressed by the Greeks. Then the Turkish army arrived--now the Greeks are good. It's, you know, a scoreboard of who you get to kill because of their culture, their ethnic origin. We reject that; you're absolutely right.

AND THERE'S SEVERAL MILLION BOERS IN SOUTH AFRICA. THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO EXPLOIT AND OPPRESS THE BLACKS. THEY HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE. YOU THINK THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO LIVE? WELL, THEN, GO TRY AND KILL THEM! [laughter and loud applause.]

Not content with Robertson's distortions and baiting, an SL supporter proceeds to go him one better.

SL SUPPORTER: I'm not a member of the Spartacist League, but I identify with [its politics]. I want to reply to the downright demagoguery of the LRP people, their members and supporters. IF YOU THINK THAT COMRADE ROBERTSON USED ALL KINDS OF RACIST INNUENDOS, I HAVE A BOOK I THINK YOU OUGHT TO READ. IT'S WRITTEN BY KARL MARX, CALLED THE JEWISH QUESTION. DO YOU KNOW WHAT MARX CALLED THE JEWISH QUESTION? HE SAYS, "YOU KNOW WHAT THE JEWS WORSHIP? THE GOLDEN CALF." HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT FOR RACISM? HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT FOR ANTI-SEMITISM? IF YOU THINK ROBERTSON'S A RACIST, WHAT DO YOU THINK MARX WAS?

Here the SL supporter produces an astonishing maxim--one which neither Robertson nor any other SL speaker chose to disavow.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO MAKE CRITICISMS OF NATIONALITIES AND NOT TO BE RACIST! GET THAT THROUGH YOUR HEADS AND WRAP YOUR MINDS AROUND THAT AND STOP USING THIS AS DEMAGOGY. And as to the question of the comrade from, I believe from the LRP, who asked about: "Well, how can the Israelis have self-determination? They're the oppressor." Well, okay, I'll buy that position--but on one condition, that you explain to me how Lenin must have been a great national chauvinist, a Great Russian national chauvinist. You know why? Because if you read the first Soviet constitution (the Lenin-Trotsky constitution right?--the good healthy, socialist, communist constitution), you'll find that all the major nationalities that have states

in the Soviet Union were entitled to self-determination, all--no exception was made for the Great Russian nationality. Now, how did Lenin (this lunatic, right?) support self-determination for the Great Russian nationality, right? That's what the question comes down to. And if you think the Israelis were oppressors, what do you think of the Great Russian nationality? Were they the oppressors? Wasn't czarist Russia the jailhouse of nations? So if you want to pick petty picayune points, you have to go all the way back to the source and find the roots for any complete understanding of what the national question is all about. That's the problem with this kind of logic.

See, you have what I described a couple of weeks ago as the punishment/reward theory of Permanent Revolution. If you're good, you get self-determination; if you're bad, you get punishment. Okay do you support self-determination for the Ukraine? I assume you do, right?; they're oppressed. But the Ukraine has always been the hotbed of pogroms against the Jews. So what do you do with the Ukrainians? Cut them in half? *[Laughter]* ...It's true. How do you think the Arabs got to the Middle East? They conquered it with the Islamic empire, right? From the seventh century on, they conquered the people there. SO EVERYBODY'S BEEN AN OPPRESSOR AND EVERYBODY'S BEEN OPPRESSED. AND THEREFORE WHAT EXACTLY? THEREFORE, NOTHING! There's no conclusions you possibly draw from something like this. It's not a Trotskyist approach.

AND, BY THE WAY, IF YOUR POSITION ISN'T THAT THE ISRAELIS--THAT IS THE WORKING CLASS OF ISRAEL, WHICH IS WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS--IF THE HEBREW-SPEAKING POPULATION OF ISRAEL IS NOT ENTITLED TO SELF-DETERMINATION, THEN WHAT ARE YOU FOR--DRIVING THEM INTO THE SEA? MAKING THEM AN OPPRESSED NATIONALITY AND AT THAT POINT CALLING FOR SELF-DETERMINATION? DO YOU STILL HAVE TO WAIT? DO YOU TELL THE ISRAELI WORKING CLASS: "MAKE A SOCIALIST REVOLUTION, PEOPLE, SO YOU CAN GIVE UP SELF-DETERMINATION AND BE A MINORITY IN A GREAT SOCIALIST STATE." IS THIS THE LOGIC? Is that what it comes down to?

And that shows that, basically, you're doing nothing but tailing after the aspirations of petty bourgeois nationalist movements. And that's what all this sharp-shooting and potshot business is with calling us racist because we support self-determination. Fine! If you don't support self-determination for the Israelis, then explain to me how Lenin was wrong, explain to me what you're going to do with... the various segments of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Re-Balkanize the Balkans? Is that what's going to happen? So, you have no answer in the final analysis.

Robertson, following several other speakers, whose remarks are deleted here, returns to the subject of nationalism. He does not (nor did any other SL speaker) distinguish the SL position from the one given by his organization's supporter (above). He does not counter the speaker's sarcastic remarks on posing the alternative of socialism to Zionism in Israel with the assertion that socialist revolution is the only way forward in the Middle East. He does not make the necessary distinction between demands for self-determination under a bourgeois and under a workers' state. Rather, he becomes hysterical in the face of mounting criticism from his audience, while playing on the more backward sentiments of his own membership.

ROBERTSON: You know comrades, there's something very bad about liberal America. IT DOES NOT WANT TO CALL, IF YOU'LL PARDON THE, UH, (NO OFFENSE INTENDED) A SPADE A SPADE. *[Screaming]* DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM AMONG BLACKS? DO YOU KNOW (HERE'S A THING THAT MAY SURPRISE YOU GUYS; I'M NOT SO SURE ABOUT IT, THOUGH) DO YOU KNOW THAT WE HAVE A CONSIDERABLE BLACK MEMBERSHIP AND *[Screaming louder]* SOME OF THEM THINK THAT IT'S ALL RIGHT TO KILL JEWISH SHOPKEEPERS! YES! THEY'RE BLACK, RIGHT? AND IT CORRESPONDS TO THEIR EXPERIENCE. *[Inaudible remark from audience.]* YES, OF COURSE, THEY'RE MARXISTS, AND THEY BELIEVE IT'S ALL RIGHT TO KILL JEWISH SHOPKEEPERS! *[Further inaudible remarks.]* NOW SHUT UP A MINUTE!

[To distinguish himself apparently from "liberals" Robertson makes a pitiable attempt at talking "tough."]

No, that's a problem, baby, that you don't experience, you vicarious closet black nationalists. *[Laughter.]* Now let's talk about truth in America. *[Voice rising]* THIS IS A RACIST COUNTRY. THE PEOPLES HATE EACH OTHER AND BELIEVE THEY SHOULD KILL EACH OTHER. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND THAT? *[Inaudible remark from audience]* Shut up! Don't you understand? You don't like it. I know you people; I've met you in the *[Inaudible. Communist Party?]*

You know what racial oppression is? Sidney Poitier, a neuro-brain surgeon, wants to move in next door and buy an \$80,000 house and they won't let him. That's the liberal Stalinist idea of oppression in this country.

WE HAVE A RACIST COUNTRY, BABY! DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE BLACK GHETTO *[Unclear word]* DID IN THE BURNINGS IN THE LATE 60'S? YEAH. Remember the stores that just said, "Soul brother, don't burn it down"? WHO IS GOING INTO THE BLACK GHETTOS, BUT A POOR JEW MARKING UP 20% MORE BECAUSE HE'S BEING RIPPED OFF BY ALL THE BLACK KIDS? AND HE GETS BURNED DOWN, AND IN WASHINGTON, NEWARK, AND A WHOLE BUNCH OF OTHER PLACES, HE'S BEEN BURNED DOWN AND NEVER CAME BACK, AND YOU DON'T LIKE IT: YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND THAT. YOU'RE JUST LIKE THE GOD-DAMNED BOURGEOIS NEWSPAPERS WHO WON'T GIVE THE RACE IN CRIMINAL REPORTS!

[Robertson's agitation diminishes] This is a racist country. You've got to speak the truth about what it's like in this country. The blacks and whites don't trust each other, don't like each other. The vanguard that refuses to face this can never have *[Inaudible]* inter-racial Leninist vanguard. *[almost whispering.]* And now I see what you've been up to. You call us "petty bourgeois" in your delicate little closets.

SL'ers express their appreciation of this demagogic tour-de-force with a burst of loud and sustained applause.

Comrade Jefka of CTC attacks Robertson's dismissal of Vietnam and of the workers' states in general in an analysis of the "world" situation, the SL concept of an international, the racist caricatures of U.S. blacks and European gastarbeiters, the SL's confusion of the questions of self-determination under a bourgeois and under a workers' state. Some of the points that Comrade Jefka would have raised had time permitted (Note the disparity between the time allowed our speaker here and the time allowed the SL supporter quoted earlier) on the SL's over-estimation of Cannon as a revolutionary leader--and their corresponding failure to move beyond his errors--are raised in the leaflet reproduced in Appendix E.

MYRON JEFKA (Communist Cadre): First of all, in the beginning you wrote off the whole conjunctural approach--the whole approach of understanding what's going on in the world and on that basis organizing for the future development of the economic crisis. You wrote off objective conditions. You said, "We're objectivists; you're subjectivists"--and your whole approach is totally subjectivist.

Now, on your attitude towards an international. If we thought that what you're talking about is just building an international tendency (you know there are three to four hundred international tendencies)--big deal! We're talking about, this paper *[our leaflet]* is written about a real international, not an apparatnik, substitutionalist international, a phony one that you can buy with money as long as you have money and a few collaborators in a few countries. That's not the international that Erosky was trying to build, That's a disgrace to call something like that a Fourth International; that's an international debating society!

Now, on this question of self-determination. In that program (where Lenin was for the self-determination of the Great Russians): It was *[written]* after the October Revolution! It was that the Great Russian people under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat *[should have self-determination]*. And, of course, under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in South Africa, we would be for the self-determination of the Boers; and, under the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Israel we

would be for the self-determination of the Hebrews. But under capitalism, we're not for the self-determination of the Maronite Christians who are slaughtering the Palestinians! That's the difference! If there was a socialist revolution in Lebanon, then they could have their self-determination. And that's the big difference.

Now you talk about racism. (First of all, when you talked about the conjuncture, you didn't even talk about the workers' states. So you don't have the Shactmanite line in words, but in deeds you have it. You didn't even mention the workers' states.) You slipped aside Indochina, saying there were no people in Thailand. You said there were 150 million people in Java. Well, there's 120 million people in all of Indonesia, maybe 40 million in Java, 40 million in Thailand and there are just that many in the workers' states in Indochina. And you didn't even mention them! You didn't even talk about how the Indochinese Revolution has changed the conjuncture, what effect it has had on the world...

You talk about the gastarbeiters, you lump them together. It's like Sam Marcy, Sam Marcy says that black people aren't capable of anything better than Third Worldism, so we have to propitiate that; you say, "Gastarbeiters--well, they can't be anything better than pop-frontists." And then, you don't even dignify the black people in this country--whom you compare to gastarbeiters; at least you recognize the gastarbeiters as workers. The black people? Oh, no! They're blacks--all they can do is burn down ghettos. Why don't you talk about the fact that there's a working class--it's a multi-national working class. Don't stigmatize the blacks and set them off from the rest of the working class. All you do is stereotype and lump together.

Now your glorification of the SWP tradition really shows where you're at. You're "the real Cannonites!"; the SWP has "betrayed Cannonism." [Loud applause] Well, Trotsky was stuck with Cannon; he couldn't do anything about him; he had to go along with him. Cannon didn't go along with Trotsky in supporting Browder in the 1940 presidential campaign. [cut off by chair]

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