THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY 1960-1988

THE PARTY

VOLUME 1: THE SIXTIES
A POLITICAL MEMOIR

BARRY SHEPPARD

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Farrell Dobbs (1907-83), worker organizer and leader, revolutionary politician, central leader of the Socialist Workers Party. Selfless, incorruptible, fair-minded and warm human being and friend.

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PREFACE

In the past few years, a new movement has emerged worldwide to challenge capitalist globalization and war, particularly the war on Iraq and the unending "war on terrorism" that Washington unleashed after September 11, 2001. The young activists in this movement are becoming aware that what they are fighting is the drive by the rich capitalist countries to preserve and extend their world domination economically, politically and militarily. It has also become increasingly clear to them that the US government, with bipartisan support, intends to assert unchallenged supremacy among the advanced capitalist countries, to establish, in effect, a new empire encompassing the entire globe.

Those in the active core of this new movement are seeking to increase their understanding of the enemy they face, and are debating the strategies and tactics to use. Many of them are naturally curious about the movements of the last wave of radicalism in the Sixties, especially the anti-Vietnam-War movement, the Black struggle for civil rights and liberation, and the women's movement. This volume looks back at that time with an eye to the future. Hopefully that past experience, both in the United States and internationally, will be of use to the new generation of fighters.

Among these activists some will come to the conclusion that it is the capitalist system itself that is the fundamental problem hindering progress, and even threatening the survival of humanity. They will want to explore alternatives, to demand that "Another world is possible!" Many will be drawn to socialism and the need for a socialist revolution to overthrow capitalism.

I believed in the Sixties, and I still believe today, that the key to achieving the socialist objective is building a mass-based revolutionary socialist party. Of course conditions are not yet ripe for such a mass revolutionary party to take hold here. However, a basis can be prepared today by socialists joining together in the nucleus of such a party. They can participate as socialist builders of mass movements such as the antiwar movement, or antiracist struggles, or union fights for worker rights. Such movements point the way toward socialism. Socialists can educate themselves about

the history and lessons of the working class movement, and publish and distribute literature about current struggles, connecting them with lessons from past victories and defeats. Their knowledge and experience can be very useful within the mass movements and win others to the ideas of socialism.

This book discusses the struggle to build such a nucleus of a revolutionary socialist party, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s — a period of deep radicalization in the United States and throughout the world.

Most of today's young activists have probably never heard of the SWP or even seen its newspaper, *The Militant*. They do not usually run into the SWP at protest actions because the SWP of today generally abstains or is present only to sell its literature. Of those who have encountered the SWP many probably do not have a positive impression of the party. They may see it as an inconsequential ideological sect, one which cares little about or is even hostile to the struggles that inspire these activists.

Their impression is not wrong; but that is not the whole story. The SWP in the 1960s and 1970s was an important and influential group on the American left, with a great deal to admire and with a proud tradition of working class struggle going back to the 1930s.

I was a national leader of the SWP from the 1960s though the mid-1980s. I intend to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of that history. This volume, covering the 1960s and early 1970s, will relate the mostly positive experiences of that great radicalization. A second volume, covering the years 1973-1988 will take up the decline of the radicalization, which also saw the decline and finally the degeneration of the SWP.

Of course, the situation in the world and in the US today is very different from "The Sixties." The USSR still existed then, which had both positive and negative effects on the struggle for socialism and national liberation. On the positive side, the existence of the Soviet bloc held in check Washington's drive to dominate the world. The USSR also gave material support to national liberation struggles, however miserly and with strings attached. But it also was led by a brutal totalitarian bureaucratic elite that crushed the workers and peasants. It's policies worldwide set back the socialist movement. The struggle against Stalinism in the US and internationally necessarily forms a major part of this book.

Today, Stalinism is discredited, and is no longer the obstacle it was. The existence of a sole superpower intent on dominating the world is the new reality we face. In this new reality, the project of building a nucleus of socialists that have as their objective the eventual formation of a mass revolutionary socialist party cannot be a repeat or

replica of the SWP in "The Sixties," which was formed by that organization's previous history and the circumstances it faced in the radicalization of the time.

Nevertheless, there are important lessons for the present and future in the experience of the SWP that are covered in this volume and will be in the next. I hope to convey those lessons to the new generation of today.

* * *

I call this book a "political memoir" for two reasons. First is to distinguish it from a personal memoir or autobiography. By necessity, I have included experiences from my personal life in order to give sense to the narrative, but I haven't tried to tell my whole life history. My personal life was not unique. I was like hundreds of thousands of young people who radicalized in the Sixties. Relating the details wouldn't add much to understanding this aspect of my generation that hasn't already been written.

The second reason I use the term "political memoir" is that I have not attempted to write a history of the SWP. Many aspects of that history are left out or abbreviated. However, the fact that I was a central leader of the SWP for most of this time means that telling my own political story also covers much of that history.

The book is also not a history of world and national politics and the movements in which we participated. I do provide a rough sketch of this background; otherwise my story would be unintelligible. I have also left out, in the main, the cultural changes that marked those times, except where they impinged on revolutionary politics. For example, I don't really take up the drug culture**,** the attempts to set up communes, what was referred to as the counter-culture**,** and the changes in popular music that affected so many young people at the time. I do discuss the sexual revolution and some other cultural aspects of the Sixties, but not to the degree that these subjects would deserve in a general history of the period.

In the period I cover, the changes in political and social consciousness also brought about changes in language. In the early 1960s, for example, most Black people called themselves Negroes. But with the development of Black consciousness, the terms Black or Afro-American gained preference, and the term Negro came to be discarded as a symbol of the subservience to whites which Black people were rejecting. Writing today, I use the preferred terms Black and African American in this book, except in quotations from earlier times.

Similarly, with the rise of feminism women challenged the sexist language commonly used in the past, as illustrated in terms such as "chairman" or "mankind." So, in this book I try to use words like "chairperson" or "humanity" except when quoting from documents or speeches of that earlier time, or when a term such as

"national chairman" was a person's official title at the time, even if the person was female.

During the anticommunist witch-hunt of the 1950s and early 1960s, it was common for party members to use pseudonyms when they wrote articles or gave speeches. This was a precaution to protect their jobs, or for similar reasons. Later in the 1960s, however, as the witch-hunt was beaten back, most people no longer felt the need to use pseudonyms. In this book I generally use real names. But I do this only for comrades who have died, who were publicly known by their real names, or who have given me permission to do so.

I use two types of notes. Numbered endnotes refer to sources and are found at the back of the volume listed by chapter. Footnotes contain material of an analytical or historical character associated with the text. I hope that the reader will find these useful, but it may be convenient to skip over them at first rather than impede the flow of the narrative.

October 2004

1. How I Came to Join the SWP

My first political thoughts were inspired by my parents. My father, B. Ford Sheppard, was from a large clan of Sheppards from England who had settled in southern New Jersey in 1681. Pop had gone to medical school with his identical twin brother, Muse. They both aimed to become doctors like their father. But while his twin did become a doctor, my father was drawn to art. Knowing the difficulty of making a living as an artist in the Great Depression of the 1930s, he moved to northern New Jersey to attend Newark State Teachers College, and became an art teacher at the high school in Millburn, N.J. He continued to draw, paint and sculpt well into his seventies.

Mom, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Hoedemaker, was from Dutch stock. Her father ran a small business delivering meat to delicatessens in the greater Newark area. She had a very sharp mind for numbers, and could calculate faster in her head than anyone I have ever known. But my grandfather was opposed to women going to college. So, Mom went to business school instead. She became a crack secretary in a chemical plant until she met Ford; she remained a housewife after their marriage in 1936.

My parents were Democrats who supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reforms, favored labor unions, opposed racism and the Jim Crow system in the South, and opposed fascism abroad and at home. My father voted Socialist in 1936.

My family was one of the few in our neighborhood that stayed friendly with a German-American family during the Second World War. We lived in a staunchly Republican town. One of my early political memories is of almost getting beaten up in the school playground during the 1948 presidential elections because I supported the Democratic candidate, President Truman. I had just turned eleven.

In our household, I learned about the horrors of the holocaust and other Nazi atrocities. I became ardently opposed to anti-Semitism, and felt a kinship with the Jews. My mother learned from relatives about the anti-Nazi resistance in Holland. She told me about how the Nazis would line up prominent people in a town after a

resistance fighter assassinated an occupier, and begin to shoot them unless someone turned in the guilty party. People who were caught with radios had their eardrums pierced. Many ordinary citizens, including some of my relatives, hid Jews in their homes, which could result in their own deaths.

When I was ten, my mother gave me a slim book that had a profound impact. It was John Hersey's *Hiroshima*. I didn't know it at the time, but this book was the first widely available report on the horrors unleashed by the atomic bombs that Washington dropped on Japan in August 1945. I became fearful of atomic war, and had vivid recurring nightmares of menacing silver bombs in the sky, of atomic bombs exploding over New York City, with the resulting explosion rolling over the Orange Mountains into our town of Livingston, New Jersey, some 20 miles west of New York. As the Cold War deepened and became a hot war in Korea, the danger of atomic war intensified and I remember often talking about it with a boyhood friend in the early 1950s.

The explosion of the first hydrogen bomb by the Soviet Union in 1953 set back Washington's war plans; but the nuclear arms race intensified, and that increased my concern.

I was not only afraid of atomic war, however. I wanted to do something against it. I began to read Bertrand Russell's essays and books warning of the catastrophe that nuclear war would bring. I resisted the pro-atom-bomb chauvinism and anticommunism that was being whipped up. I saw the futility of the campaigns to build bomb shelters, and the stupidity of the atom bomb drills in school, where we were instructed to hide under our desks to protect us in the event of an atomic war.

I became an atheist when I was twelve. One night in bed I was thinking about belief in God, when I suddenly saw that there was no justification for this belief in my experience, that it was just faith unsupported by evidence. The next day I excitedly shared this discovery with a boy I thought might share my view. We talked about it for days. So I became immune to one aspect of the anticommunist crusade, the Bible-thumping denunciations of "atheistic communism."

The term "atheist" doesn't adequately describe what I believed, however. It is a negative term, literally meaning "not a theist," that is, someone who does not believe in a god or gods. I was certainly that. But the term doesn't convey what I did come to believe in, which was the wonderful, intricate, immense and beautiful — and sometimes horrible and terrifying — real universe revealed by our senses and reasoning. I knew that humanity also had both noble and base sides.

My interest in astronomy was first piqued at age seven when my mother gave me a children's book called *The Wonders of the Heavens*. My father reinforced this interest, pointing out the magnificence of the night sky, with all the stars and constellations.

Since that time, I am awed whenever I look up at the stars, or view them through a telescope, or pore over the wonderful pictures provided by the great telescopes. I also spent many hours playing with a chemistry set.

At home, my father painted, and did woodcarving and sculpture. So, I was always around art, and tried my hand at it too. Every year Pop would make a woodcarving on a block of hardwood. My younger brothers and I would ink it and then print our own Christmas cards. Later, we would carve and print our own cards from linoleum. Even when I was quite young, my father would take me to New York City to see the art museums, especially the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan. We would also go to the Museum of Natural History and the Hayden Planetarium.

In my adolescence, these interests widened to include literature and poetry, classical music, mathematics and other sciences. I built my own "High Fidelity" phonograph, a telescope, and a short-wave radio, and I had an interest in tinkering with gadgets of various types.

I began listening to Radio Moscow, which sent out very strong signals on a number of frequencies. I was struck with the almost diametrically opposed news reporting on the nightly network news shows and Radio Moscow. During the Korean War, the networks would claim that the US was winning victory after victory, while Radio Moscow would announce that the US forces were suffering defeats. One occurrence sticks in my mind. The six o'clock news reported that the US had shot down two Soviet-built MIG fighters over Korea, while Radio Moscow reported two American jets were shot down that day.

The anticommunist witch-hunt of the 1950s and early 60s was part of the political environment as I became a teenager. Truman initiated the witch-hunt in 1947 in a secret directive to carry out an investigation of the loyalty to the United States of all federal government employees. In the same year his administration issued the Attorney General's list of so-called "subversive" organizations. Membership in or even having ever been around any of these groups could lead to being fired from your job, or harassed in other ways. The anticommunist witch-hunting committees in the House and Senate stepped up their activities.

Many people accused of being associated with the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party or any of the nearly 100 other groups on the Attorney General's list were hauled before these committees where they were pressured to "name names" of other sinners. Some, including prominent people, were sent to jail for contempt of Congress when they refused to cooperate. Others refused to testify on the grounds of the Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution. This amendment, which declares that people cannot be forced to testify against themselves, is part of the Bill of Rights that

was won as a consequence of the First American Revolution — the War of Independence from Britain. Those who exercised their Fifth Amendment rights were branded "Fifth Amendment Communists."

As the witch-hunt deepened it came to be known as McCarthyism, after Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, the head of the Senate's Internal Security Subcommittee, who became the witch-hunt's most aggressive advocate and leader. Protected by legislative immunity against charges of slander, he opened fire on the Democratic administration — the very ones who started the anticommunist scare in the first place. He denounced the State Department for having allowed itself to be infiltrated by communists and thus "losing China" to the Chinese revolution which took power in that country in 1949.

The Democratic Party liberals responded in kind, passing draconian anticommunist legislation that severely limited civil liberties. Prominent liberal Democrat Hubert Humphrey co-authored a law that provided for setting up prison camps for subversives in the event of an emergency. The FBI created a list of people they would arrest and intern in those camps without charges or trial. Later I would be honored by being placed on that list.

Several Communist Party leaders were imprisoned under the infamous Smith Act, which made advocacy of so-called subversive ideas a federal crime. The Smith Act had been passed into law in 1940 and was first used against the Socialist Workers Party in 1941 because of the SWP's antiwar positions. The Communist Party, which had supported use of the Smith Act against the SWP, now bore the brunt of the witch-hunt. But all labor and socialist organizations were affected. The cancer permeated every aspect of society, including churches and Hollywood.

Militant unionists were driven out of the labor movement by the increasingly right-wing labor bureaucracy with the help of the government. J. Edgar Hoover's FBI infiltrated and tried to disrupt any group considered communist or simply too liberal. Most Black groups were on Hoover's hit list.

During my junior and senior years of high school we all had to take special Citizenship courses (my friends and I derided them as "Citizenshit"). These courses aimed to indoctrinate us with the belief that capitalism was the best possible system, and socialism and communism were the worst. We were taught that it was natural that rich people should run the country and the world: they had to be the smartest people or they wouldn't be rich. Unions were suspect and strikes even more so. The American two-party system was the pinnacle of political achievement. Anyone who questioned any of this was taken to be a subversive who deserved to be fired, imprisoned or worse.

Once, my high school teacher took the class period to denounce the Soviet Union for daring to fire on a US plane. This was during the Korean War, and the US fighter had strayed close to the Soviet border. I calculated that the US plane was three minutes from crossing the border, and I stood up and said so. I asked the teacher, "What would happen if a Soviet plane was three minutes away from the US border?" Reacting like one of Pavlov's dogs, he immediately replied, "Why, we'd shoot it down!" Catching himself, he then said, "Three minutes is a long time. If you don't think so, get up here and speak for three minutes."

I did, and chose as my topic "What is wrong with capitalism." I didn't yet know much about the subject, but began talking just the same. I was just getting going when the three minutes were up. Kids were jumping up and down denouncing me, and the teacher blurted, "The little bastard!" He finally told me to sit down after about five minutes.

One day, my friend David and I decided not to rise to salute the flag with the Pledge of Allegiance. We also refused to bow our heads and recite the Lords Prayer, which was still compulsory at the time.

My father felt the impact of the witch-hunt directly. In one of his art classes, he spoke against McCarthy. A student squealed to his mother, who was a member of the school board. She tried to get my father fired. He was called in and asked, "Are you a communist?" My father answered, "I don't know. What's a communist? Tell me that and then I'll tell you if I am or not." He wasn't fired.

This happened when right-wing organizations were forcing the removal from libraries of "communist" books, which included not only Marx and Lenin, but books by liberals. In Indiana, a state law banned Robin Hood, since that fabled character took from the rich and gave to the poor!

The witch-hunt was waged in the name of individual freedom. But this was the most conformist of times. Anyone who dared to be different in any way was suspect. Far from promoting individuality or intellectual curiosity, the dominant spirit of the times generated an oppressive, stultifying atmosphere that glorified the status quo. In the background was the threat of right-wing totalitarianism, seen most clearly in the movement inspired by McCarthy.

However, even though the ruling class and the mainline politicians initiated the witch-hunt and utilized it to cleanse the labor movement of militants of all stripes, the powers that be didn't need or want a full fledged fascist movement to take power. They decided to clip McCarthy's wings.

McCarthy finally went too far, aiming his fire at the US Army high command for being "soft on communism." He even suggested that Republican President Eisenhower

was suspect. The result was the "Army-McCarthy" hearings in the Senate. My mother watched these on TV every day, and she would fill me in on the day's proceedings when I came home from school. I would watch some of the proceedings before I went out on my paper delivery route. These hearings ultimately resulted in McCarthy's censure by the Senate, and his standing plummeted until his death in 1957. The anticommunist witch-hunt was a long time dying and aspects of it are still with us today.

The summer of 1955, after I graduated from high school, I subscribed to the *Catholic Worker*, the paper of a group with the same name led by Dorothy Day. Day had been a member of the Communist Party in its early days, but then dropped out and became a radical Catholic pacifist and anarchist. The group ran a soup kitchen near New York's Bowery that helped the down-and-outs. Every month their paper would feature a very beautiful print of an original woodcut.

That summer, I had a job working in my hometown's engineering department as an aide to the civil engineers. I showed the paper to one of the engineers, because he was Catholic. He immediately warned me against reading anything that had the word "worker" in its title, fearing that I would be duped by communists in disguise. McCarthy was a broken man but the witch-hunt was still going strong.

In the fall of 1955 I entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on a partial scholarship. MIT is in Cambridge, Massachusetts, just across the Charles River from Boston. I soon became friends with a student named Marc, who lived in the same dorm as I. One Sunday evening a group of us were eating in Simione's Italian restaurant in Cambridge. Marc commented that in order to understand society, one had to read Marx, and in order to understand the individual, Freud. I later found out that Marc's father had been a socialist.

Marc and I moved out of the dorm and rented an apartment. We had many discussions about politics, music, literature and philosophy. Challenged by Marc, I started reading Marx's *Capital* and other books by socialists that I found in the MIT library. I started to consider myself a socialist, and my antiwar views led me toward pacifism. Marc and I started going to the Society of Friends (Quakers) meetinghouse in Cambridge on Sunday nights.

The Friends invited college students in the greater Boston area to these gatherings, where we could get a cheap meal and meet others who had some social consciousness. We also got a good dose of radical pacifism in the discussions held there. At the end of our freshman year, Marc decided to quit MIT. He later enrolled in Queens College in New York, and we gradually drifted apart.

During a few weekends, I joined other students from the Quaker group to "camp

out" in a church-provided facility in Roxbury, the center of Boston's Black community. We would work long hours Saturday and Sunday cleaning, preparing and painting walls in run-down apartment buildings. Then we learned that the tenants in one building we had worked on were angry with us because the landlord raised their rents, on the grounds that we had improved the building! This taught me a lesson about the workings of capitalism, and helped me see the limits of well-intentioned do-good efforts.

During my freshman year, I was in the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC). All male students at MIT were required to take ROTC. I was in the Air Force section. An incident near the end of the year convinced me I had had enough of ROTC. In addition to polishing our shoes to be like mirrors and learning to march around, we also had ROTC classes. One day, as we entered class in our blue-gray uniforms, the instructor closed the blinds and told us we were to pretend to be a squadron of the Strategic Air Command stationed in North Africa.

He said that Washington had determined that Russia was going to launch an atomic attack on the US, and that we were to attack Russia first in a pre-emptive strike. Three bombers would fly together to each target. Only one would have hydrogen bombs, and we wouldn't know which one. This would make it more difficult for Russian anti-aircraft weapons to hit the loaded plane. Each group would have a primary target and a list of secondary cities to bomb if the primary attack were successful. The instructor then said, "I know we will kill many innocent civilians but better their innocent civilians than ours!" I almost puked.

When I came back to MIT for my sophomore year, I told the administration that I would not take ROTC. They said I would have to leave the school. We argued, and finally they said I could stay but would have to get a medical deferment from ROTC. As I had no physical problem, I would have to declare that I had a psychological problem. I would have to see one of MIT's eleven full-time psychiatrists for therapy, since it was obvious that anyone who refused ROTC must be psychologically disturbed.

(MIT had a large psychiatric staff because many students did indeed need help after experiencing the stiff competition and pressure that were part of the MIT experience. In a half-joking and self-deprecating way MIT students called themselves "tools." In fact, several students committed suicide during the time I attended school there.)

The sessions with the psychiatrist turned out to be fun and useful for me. Not only did I get out of ROTC, my psychiatrist was a very kind and smart Freudian who helped me understand much about myself. We never talked about ROTC.

When my draft board called me to report for my pre-induction physical, I decided to become a conscientious objector. But the board would only accept religious grounds

for conscientious objection. I got help from the Cambridge Friends, the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors and the War Resisters League. I filled out the necessary forms, in which I included a tortured explanation of God as a kind of Hegelian spirit of history that was developing toward a better world. I was granted conscientious objector status.

My subscription to the *Catholic Worker* followed me to MIT. As my thinking became more socialist, I wrote to the *Catholic Worker*, explaining that I was not religious and asked if they could recommend a socialist publication to me. They wrote back and suggested that I look into *Labor Action*, the paper of the Independent Socialist League (ISL).§

I found the *Labor Action* analysis of world and domestic events to be on a far higher level than anything I had ever seen. Moreover, it had a page written by members of a youth group affiliated to the ISL, called the Young Socialist League (YSL). The most prominent leader of the ISL was Max Shachtman, who had been a leader of the Communist Party and later the Socialist Workers Party before becoming the central figure in this current. The chairman of the YSL was Michael Harrington, who later became famous as the author of *The Other America*, a book about poverty in the US, a topic that had been out of public consciousness as a result of the witch-hunt.

In *Labor Action* I saw a coupon that could be sent in for more information on the YSL. I clipped it out and sent it in, and thus I became the only member of the YSL in the Boston area.

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§ The ISL originated out of a split in the Socialist Workers Party in 1940. The major difference between the ISL and the SWP was over the nature of the Soviet Union. Under the impact of the Stalin-Hitler pact on the eve of the Second World War, Shachtman and his supporters decided that the USSR after the rise of Stalinism was a new form of class society that had been unforeseen by Marx and his followers. They called it "bureaucratic collectivism" and held that the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR was a new ruling class.

Politically, the Workers Party (as the ISL was then called) refused to take sides in the war when German imperialism under the Nazis invaded the USSR. Similarly, they refused to take sides in the Cold War or in the Korean War when the US invaded the Korean peninsula, although their arguments began to show more sympathy for the "democratic" imperialists than for the Soviet bloc or China. During the Second World War they also refused to take sides in the struggle of the Chinese people against the Japanese occupation. (In this case, it was because of their opposition to the Chinese government headed by the reactionary butcher of the Chinese working class, Chiang Kai-shek.)

The SWP, on the other hand, agreed with the position of Leon Trotsky that the USSR under Stalin and his heirs remained a "bureaucratically degenerated workers state." Trotsky's analysis was that while Stalinism represented a counter-revolution against the Russian

During the summer break, while I was staying with my parents in New Jersey, I attended a YSL meeting in New York City. I was very impressed. I noted that the chairperson was a woman, something new to me. She ran the meeting with confidence and competence. The meeting seemed to me to be serious and reflective of an active group.

The year 1956 saw several dramatic political events that had an important influence on me.

In this country, a struggle had opened that was to transform a whole generation — the rise of the new mass civil rights movement in the South. This began in Montgomery, Alabama, with a bus boycott by Black people, beginning in late 1955 and continuing for over a year throughout 1956. The boycott challenged the Jim Crow system of racial segregation, in this case the segregation of Blacks on the city's public buses. Blacks were forced to ride in the rear, while the front seats were for whites only. (The term "Jim Crow" first came into use before the Civil War, and is believed to have originated in racist mockery of Black people in a minstrel show. The term has been used as a general reference to the entire system of anti-Black racism.)

The struggle began when Rosa Parks, a Black woman, refused to give up her seat to a white man. The boycott was a well-thought-out, well-prepared campaign. The initiators, mostly local Black trade union activists, tried to interest a number of Black preachers to take the leadership of the planned boycott, but these were too frightened to accept the assignment. Finally, they approached a young minister named Martin

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revolution of October 1917, a counter-revolution that had politically expropriated the workers and peasants, it had not succeeded in overthrowing all of the gains of that revolution, such as the nationalized and planned economy. Trotsky called for the revolutionary overthrow of the Stalinist bureaucracy while defending the remaining social and economic gains of the 1917 revolution against incursions by the bureaucracy or attempts by world capitalism to overthrow the USSR. Trotsky held that the ruling bureaucracy was not a new ruling class, but a "petty bourgeois" layer standing between world capitalism and the Soviet workers and peasants. He predicted that either the workers would overthrow the bureaucracy, reestablish workers democracy and resume the march toward socialism, or the bureaucracy "becoming more and more the organ of world capitalism inside the workers state" would overthrow the remaining conquests of October and go back to capitalism.

Based on this analysis, the SWP politically defended the USSR in the Second World War and in the Cold War, and North Korea and China in the Korean War, against the United States and the rest of the capitalist world. The SWP defended the USSR in spite of its opposition to the murderous and counter-revolutionary regime of Stalin and his heirs. Similarly, it defended the Chinese people against the Japanese imperialists in spite of its opposition to the Chiang regime in World War II.

Luther King, Jr. He accepted, and a new movement was born that would sweep the South and have wide repercussions in the North. The boycott, which won solidarity across the country, overturned the rules that barred Blacks from sitting in the seats reserved for whites in Montgomery.

In late 1956 Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt after Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. Nasser had been part of a group of young officers who led a coup in 1952 against the king that Britain had installed when it granted Egypt its independence after the Second World War. Nasser became president of Egypt in 1954, soon winning widespread sympathy in the Arab world as a voice for Arab nationalism and opposition to the state of Israel, which had come into being in 1948, depriving the Palestinians of their self-determination.

Listening to the debates about the invasion in the United Nations over the radio, I found myself agreeing with the arguments being made against it by the Soviet representative. The invasion also opened my eyes to the role of Zionism and Israel as a beachhead for the Western imperialist powers in the Arab world.

Earlier that year, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR and later Soviet premier as well, gave a historic speech at the 20th Communist Party Congress, in which he admitted many of the crimes of the Stalin era. His speech undermined many of the long-held beliefs and Stalinist cultism of Communist parties throughout the world.

In the fall, a popular revolution against Soviet occupation and bureaucratic dictatorship broke out in Hungary. A new regime, headed by a reform-minded Communist, Imre Nagy, came to power. He promised to retain the nationalized and planned economy and to retain the social gains of the workers while democratizing the country. The bureaucratic dictatorship in the Kremlin could not tolerate this upheaval or its spread in Eastern Europe. The Soviet army invaded to crush the revolution.

Socialist consciousness was strong among the Hungarian workers, who had suffered under the Nazi occupation during the Second World War and a brutal, reactionary dictatorship for two decades before. The working class was at the center of the revolt. Elected workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils formed throughout the country. These councils established a centralized structure to continue the fight after the Kremlin's invasion, and elected a young steelworker as their leader. The Soviet army gradually defeated and repressed the councils.

The Khrushchev revelations and the Hungarian revolution had a deep impact on the socialist left throughout the world. In the United States, the Communist Party, which since the 1930s had been by far the largest group on the left, felt the impact

deeply. John Gates, the editor of the *Daily Worker*, the newspaper of the Communist Party, and others in the CP opened a discussion in the CP and in the *Daily Worker* itself on what had gone wrong in the USSR under Stalin. He and others questioned many long-held beliefs and policies of the American CP as well. For most of 1956, the CP paper became a real forum for different views. When the Hungarian revolution exploded, the paper expressed sympathy and confidently predicted that Soviet troops would not intervene.

But a diehard Stalinist faction in the Communist Party leadership, committed to preserving the group's unconditional support to the Soviet bureaucracy, was able to retain power. That faction, headed by William Z. Foster, controlled the party's finances, and used that control to strangle the *Daily Worker* and to dissolve the Labor Youth League (LYL), the party's youth group that had been sympathetic to reform. Gates and others quit the party in droves. At the beginning of 1956, the CP had about 20,000 members. Two years later it had shrunk to 5,000, and by some estimates, to 2,000. *The Worker* resumed publication as a weekly.

The decline of the Communist Party opened the door for new, alternative socialist and left-wing groups that emerged in the radicalization of the 1960s.

Khrushchev's admissions and the Hungarian Revolution vastly reinforced the influence of the anti-Stalinist education that I had received from reading *Labor Action*. I became an opponent of Stalinism for the rest of my life. The contrast between the Soviet denunciation of the imperialist attack on Egypt and the Kremlin's own invasion of Hungary was my first initiation into the contradictory nature of the USSR — a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy ruling on the basis of progressive property forms established by a revolution — although I didn't come to a complete understanding of this until after I joined the SWP.

Within the YSL two opposed lines developed in response to the events. The parent organization, the ISL led by Max Shachtman, sought to dissolve and enter the moribund Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation. The SP-SDF was socialist in name only. It supported the witch-hunt (with reservations), the West in the Cold War, the right-wing labor bureaucracy in the unions, and the Democratic Party. The majority of the YSL under Michael Harrington's leadership backed the ISL position.

A minority led by Tim Wohlforth, Shane Mage and James Robertson opposed this course. I remember receiving thick mimeographed discussion bulletins on the issues in dispute. The fight culminated in a split. I wasn't sure who was right, and the resulting inertia left me a member of the SP-SDF and its Young Peoples Socialist League (YPSL), as the ISL and YSL dissolved and joined those two groups. Before the merger the YPSL had 12 members nationally. The infusion of about 120 people

from the YSL gave the YPSL a new lease on life, and it was to play a part on the American left in the early 1960s. But it proved to be bankrupt in the eyes of the new radicals who came to the fore during the anti-Vietnam-War period.

The YSL minority was drawn toward another development, led by the Reverend A.J. Muste. Muste had been a leader in the 1930s of the American Workers Party, which played a central role in the 1934 Toledo Autolite strike. This strike, along with the Trotskyist-led Minneapolis Teamsters battles and the CP-led San Francisco general strike of the same year, signaled a new mood in the industrial working class that would explode shortly in the rise of the CIO.

The AWP and the Trotskyists were drawn towards each other, and a fusion occurred between the two groups in 1936. For a short time Muste was a central leader of the newly formed Workers Party. But he went back to the church soon after and became one of the most prominent pacifists in the US, and later the most prominent figure in the early years of the anti-Vietnam-war movement. Unlike many other radical pacifists, Muste never lost his feel for the mass movement. In the ferment caused by the 1956 events, he sensed that there was an opportunity to reach out to the thousands of disaffected CP members and supporters. He founded the American Forum for Socialist Education. It drew in ex-CP supporters, the SWP and unaffiliated radicals.

The YSL minority, about 30 people, joined in this process of "regroupment." One result was the launching of united independent socialist election campaigns in California and New York, in which the SWP played a major role. The SWP recruited some former CP members in the process. Most of the others fell away from socialist politics, and remained mired in the Democratic Party.

The most important result of regroupment was the formation of the *Young Socialist* newspaper and the Young Socialist Alliance in New York. The leaders of the YSL minority had been won over to the SWP and they became the leadership core of the YSA. The new youth group was called an "alliance" because its members came from the YSL minority, the younger members of the SWP, ex-LYL members, and previously unaffiliated youth. Its early leadership body also included an anarcho-socialist, and two young supporters of the *American Socialist* magazine, which was published by a group that had split from the SWP in 1953. Youth groups supporting the *Young Socialist* were formed in cities across the country.

At the end of my sophomore year, I began to feel constrained by the emphasis on science and mathematics at MIT. My interests, including my interest in politics, widened. I transferred to Boston University for my junior year, 1957-58, and majored in English literature. There I met a group of students interested in discussing literature, and began to interest them in socialism. Since I transferred to BU just before the

school year started, I wasn't in an undergraduate dormitory, but in a graduate school dorm for students at the law school. There were a few others like me, including my roommate, whom I convinced of my socialist ideas.

I also met a fellow in the room next to mine, Bela, who was a refugee from Hungary. Bela had been in the army during the 1956 revolution, and was elected to the soldiers' council at his barracks. He considered himself a Marxist, and before being drafted into the Hungarian army had studied with the great Hungarian Marxist literary critic and philosopher George Lukacs. With this disparate group, I formed a socialist discussion club at BU.

Michael Harrington addressed one of our public meetings. On the way back from the meeting to our dorm, Bela expressed disgust with Harrington: "I know very well what it means, Social Democracy!" About this time, I also got to know Lenny Goodman, a young worker from Lynn, Massachusetts, who was in the SWP, and a friend of his, James Petras, who would later join the YSA and SWP for a time. In the early 1960s Petras was the YSA organizer in Berkeley, California. Petras today is a well-known Marxist academic and author, specializing in Latin America.

A physics professor at BU introduced me to the writings of Herbert Marcuse, especially *Reason and Revolution*, which was a good introduction to Hegel, and *Eros and Civilization*, which tried to combine Freud and Marx. A year later, Marcuse came to Brandeis University in a suburb of Boston and taught a course on Hegel. I would just walk into his class and pretend I was a student at Brandeis. No one bothered me.

During the spring break in 1958, I joined a high school friend of mine, Jerry Haskins, who was at Brown University in Rhode Island, on a march from "New Haven to the UN" for nuclear disarmament. It was on this march, which lasted several days, that I first saw Dave Dellinger, a radical pacifist who later played an important part in the anti-Vietnam-War movement. At the UN, A.J. Muste addressed a rally.

Shortly after, I read a book by Leon Trotsky, *Between Red and White*, which convinced me that the way to end war and the nuclear threat was not pacifism, but the revolutionary overthrow of the war-generating system of capitalism.

After the spring semester, I married Ethel Krassner, whom I had met two years before on a blind date arranged by a friend of mine from MIT. Ethel was Jewish, but not religious. She lived with her father and brother in the Brighton Beach section of Brooklyn in a small house divided into two apartments. Her father was a machinist. I remember Ethel's father listening to me debating socialism with some of her friends. Afterwards, he told Ethel that I was going to "be somebody." He was part of the older generation of Jewish workers, many of whom were sympathetic to socialism. Ethel worked as a clerk in a Manhattan bank. After we were married we moved to an

apartment in Boston, and she got a job as a typist at MIT.

In the summer of 1958, I had decided to go back to MIT because I could get my degree in mathematics there more quickly than I could get a degree in English literature at BU, and I was itching to leave college behind. I had seen enough of the academic life to know that I wanted no part of it. But I did think that getting a degree might help me get jobs later. So in the fall of 1958, I was once again a student at MIT.

There I met Peter Camejo, a member of the YSA, who was a freshman at MIT. Peter was a high school student from Great Neck just outside New York City when the Hungarian revolution occurred. He told me that he had been sympathetic to the Communist Party, and had confidently predicted to his fellow students that the USSR would never send troops to crush the revolution. After they did so, he became interested in the American Forum for Socialist Education, where he heard the Trotskyist analysis of the Soviet Union for the first time, and became convinced of the contradictory character of the USSR and of the anti-socialist and anti-working-class character of Stalinism and the Stalinist bureaucracy. He joined the YSA in New York before coming to MIT.

Peter and I held many discussions, agreeing and arguing over many topics, usually in his dorm room at MIT. These discussions would intrigue his three roommates, who were soon drawn into arguments about socialism. One of these roommates was Gus Horowitz, who would join the YSA a year later. Peter and I became close friends and political collaborators, a relation that has lasted many decades.

Peter's father was a minor capitalist in Venezuela. His mother and father were divorced, and she lived in Great Neck. Peter spent part of his time growing up going back and forth between Venezuela and New York. As a consequence, he was fluent in both Spanish and English, but his academic skills lay elsewhere. On his college entrance exams (SAT) he was merely OK on the English part, but got the highest possible score of 800 in mathematics (not too unusual a score at MIT, by the way). I was fascinated with his stories about life in the Venezuelan upper crust. It was the contrast he saw between the lives of the rich and those of the common people there that began his radicalization.

Once, at a fancy dinner his father hosted in Venezuela, the guests included top government officials from the dictatorship of Perez Jimenez. Peter said something disparaging about the dictator. The gathering froze. His father made light of the incident, but everyone knew that even a respectable bourgeois could be arrested if suspected of disloyalty. Peter witnessed the 1958 uprising that overthrew the dictator and it had a big impact on him.

I introduced Peter to the game of Go, which was popular in the mathematics

department of MIT. Go is a board game, whose enthusiasts consider it more complex than chess. It originated in China, and was taken up in Japan, where it is a national pastime. Over the next years, Peter and I spent many hours locked in combat over the Go board.

I was a member of YPSL, and Peter was a member of the YSA, but we worked together, seeking out socialists of whatever stripe at MIT, Harvard and other schools in the area. I would sell the YPSL newspaper, *Challenge*, in the halls of MIT. I took a bundle of 50 papers each month, and would just put them on a table with a sign that said "Socialist Newspaper." I always sold out, but later found out that I was practically the only YPSL member in the country who sold the paper on a consistent basis.[§]

By the spring of 1959 Peter and I had gathered enough students who thought of themselves as socialists that we were able to launch a new organization, the United Socialist Students of Greater Boston. This group was a hodge-podge. Besides myself from the YPSL and Peter from the YSA there was a Stalinist student from MIT, who was a member of the Detroit-based Proletarian Party; Michael Walzer, who later became a very well-known academic and social democratic contributor to *Dissent* magazine (he has since developed a more consistently pro-capitalist outlook); Arthur, a supporter of an obscure German group that split from the Trotskyist movement in the 1930s; members of the Harvard socialist club; and others. There were about 50 of us.

We published a discussion bulletin, held meetings to discuss our various views, and participated as a group in a peace demonstration called by the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy. We also attended a large meeting held outdoors in the Harvard Coliseum addressed by a young Fidel Castro, whose July 26 Movement had overthrown the US-backed dictator of Cuba, Fulgencio Batista, early in the year. Castro had come seeking a dialogue with the US government, but Washington gave him the cold shoulder. The local SWP branch was wise enough to allow us to use their hall for

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[§] I was sitting by my table selling *Challenge* early in 1957, when John Nash, a mathematics professor at MIT, stopped and stared at me and my papers. The previous semester I had taken a course he taught on game theory. He looked very disturbed at what I was doing, and his face became red although he said nothing. It was about this time that he was descending into schizophrenia and paranoia. Decades later, as his illness went into remission, he began to teach again and he received the Nobel Prize in economics for his work in game theory that he had done as a young man. His story is told in the book *A Beautiful Mind* by Sylvia Nasar, which was later made into a very popular film of the same name. The film falsely portrays the MIT mathematics department as a pure tool of the Cold War. In fact several prominent persons in the department were sympathetic to left-wing causes.

meetings of the group, and their mimeograph machine for our bulletin.

For a year or so, I had been reading every socialist newspaper I could find. There was one newsstand in Boston that sold them all. I began to be attracted to *The Militant*, the paper of the SWP, because it seemed to have more coverage of working class struggles than the other papers. Peter would provide me with the *Young Socialist*.

I was selected by the YPSL leadership to attend a cadre school in Chicago in late August, which was followed by a YPSL convention in Michigan. The cadre school centered around talks by Max Shachtman on the character of the Soviet Union. I had absorbed his theory, but discussions with Peter and some SWP members had raised doubts in my mind. I remember that after Shachtman had explained in one session that the Soviet bureaucracy was a ruling class of a new type, I raised my hand and asked, "What is a class?" "That's a very good question," Shachtman replied. "We'll take it up tomorrow." But he never did. At the YPSL convention, a sharp difference arose over the Democratic Party. Shachtman had been won over to the SP-SDF position of support to the Democrats, and Harrington argued along the same lines at the YPSL convention.

A minority left wing was formed, led by Sy Landy, Gavin Macfayden, and the folksinger Dave Van Ronk. They supported the traditional ISL position that labor had to break with the Democrats and form its own party independent of the two capitalist parties. I supported this minority. The rightward movement of Shachtman and Harrington disturbed me.

I had to take some makeup courses in the summer of 1959, and didn't get my degree in mathematics until September 1959.[§] After graduation, I started looking for work. The New England Confectionary Company, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was looking for a recent mathematics graduate to become its comptroller. They wanted a young person with a background in mathematics because they were planning to

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[§] During the spring semester of 1959 I took a course in Artificial Intelligence, taught by one of the leaders in the field, Marvin Minsky. It was an interesting course, and paralleled another I took on the logical foundations of mathematics. But there was one aspect of this course that really bothered me — the assumption by Minsky and others, that humans are basically computers. More precisely, they say that we are a computer program run on the "meat computers" of our brains. This view has come to be known as "hard" artificial intelligence (AI).

They were certain, back in 1959, that within a few years they would discover that program or even one superior to it. Once I attended a symposium held by Minsky and other top MIT mathematicians, to which students were invited as observers. They defended this hard AI view, and got around the question of human consciousness by denying its existence! Here were four highly conscious human beings, consciously trying to communicate with hundreds

overhaul how they organized production and distribution by using a mathematical model called linear programming. I applied for the job. They gave me a battery of tests, which I passed with flying colors, including one that was supposed to create a psychological profile. I also signed a loyalty oath declaring that I was not a subversive.

After the results were evaluated, the president of the company told me that I "had no negative qualities," and indicated I would be hired and sent back to MIT at company expense to learn linear programming. He escorted me from office to office to meet and shake hands with what seemed quite a few vice-presidents and other top officers of the company, all of whom were much older than I was. I was waiting to find out my start date when they dropped me like a hot potato. My calls were not returned, and I was given no explanation. I figured that they found out that the person who "had no negative qualities" was a red. In October, I was hired as a computer programmer at Western Electric in Andover, an hour's drive north of Boston. I wrote programs in machine language for a huge computer that used vacuum tubes and big banks of tape recorders.

Meanwhile, Peter Camejo, who had spent the summer in New York, came back to MIT in the fall of 1959, and we got together. We agreed that the United Socialist Students was too diffuse and that we needed to build a revolutionary socialist youth group that had sufficient cohesion to be an active organization. At first, we thought of organizing a group that would support both the YPSL and the *Young Socialist*. Then James Robertson came to Boston, on a tour selling subscriptions to the YS and to the *International Socialist Review*, the theoretical magazine of the SWP. Peter and I helped him sell the magazine, and we had discussions with him. As a result I gave up on the unrealistic idea of being in both the YS supporters group and YPSL. I joined the former.

During this time, Peter and I had been having discussions with SWP members,

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of presumably conscious students, and the content of what they were communicating was that there is no such thing as consciousness! They also implied that the only possible alternative to this view was religion.

At this time I read Lenin's *Materialism and Emperio-Criticism*, a philosophical work. One of Lenin's points was that yes, human consciousness and the human mind are rooted in the material brain, but we don't yet know how. It struck me as better to just say we don't know the connection between the brain and the human mind and consciousness than to deny that the latter exist.

It is possible to assert that consciousness and mind are part of material reality and spring from that reality, without claiming that spirit or mind exist apart from the body as most religions do, and without adopting Minsky's mechanical materialism and reductionism either. Thinking about these philosophical issues drew me closer to the dialectical materialism of Marx.

especially Larry Trainor, an older printer who was a long-time member of the SWP National Committee and the leading SWPer in Boston. Larry invited Peter and me to attend a meeting of the Boston SWP in November 1959. But Larry played a little trick on me when he introduced us to the meeting. He said that we had both applied to join the SWP. Peter had discussed joining with Larry, but I hadn't. Peter and I looked at each other, shrugged, and we were both voted in.

2. First Lessons

There were eight members of the Boston branch of the SWP before Peter Camejo and I joined. All were all industrial workers. In addition to Larry Trainor and Lenny Goodman, there were Larry's wife Augusta (Gusty), Dawn and Sally, sisters who were daughters of Italian anarchists, Sally's husband Jim, Ben and Al. Larry Trainor had the greatest influence on us. He took Peter and me under his wing, and we had many discussions with him in the living room of the very modest house that he and Gusty shared with their two children.

Larry imbued us with three aspects of the SWP tradition, above all. First was fierce loyalty to the working class and confidence in its power. Second was recognition of the great importance that the Russian revolution of 1917 held for the future socialist revolution and support for the Leninist ideas that led to the victory of that revolution. Third was support for the ideas of Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyist viewpoint as an alternative to the perversions of socialism that had been brought about during the Stalin era and after. The SWP that we had joined embodied all three aspects of that tradition both in its ideas and in its members, even though we were a small group and we lived at a time during which the working class and the popularity of socialist ideas had suffered great blows as a result of the Cold War witch-hunt period.

The SWP nationally had fewer than 600 members in 1959, organized into a dozen branches. The largest of these were in New York and Los Angeles, each with more than 100 members. The party nationally was composed largely of blue-collar workers, along with some outstanding university-educated intellectuals, such as George Novack, and young people whom we were beginning to recruit from the college campuses. The number of Black members was small, mainly in New York, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Newark, Philadelphia and Detroit. There were a few Latinos. While the membership was small, it consisted of very dedicated people ("cadres" was the term we used) who gave a great deal of their time and money to the party.

The SWP published *The Militant*, a weekly newspaper, and a quarterly theoretical magazine called the *International Socialist Review*. It also published books and

pamphlets under the imprint of Pioneer Press, and it had a small full-time national staff to administer the party and its press. The national headquarters was in Manhattan, in a four-story building at 116 University Place just off Union Square. The party tried to maintain functioning local headquarters everywhere that it had units. Even in Boston, with our tiny branch, we rented a hall on Huntington Avenue around the corner from the Boston Symphony.

On the first floor of the building at 116 University Place was an antique shop. You entered "116," as we called it, through an adjacent door that opened onto a steep stairway. The second floor was a hall that the New York branch used for its business meetings, weekly public forums called the Militant Labor Forum, and occasional parties where members and friends could socialize.

On the third floor was the office of the National Organization Secretary, a post held by Tom Kerry at the time. Also on this floor was the office of the New York branch organizer, a small office and storage space for Pioneer Publishers, and an office and work area for *The Militant's* business office. The office of the National Secretary, Farrell Dobbs, was on the fourth floor, as was the editorial office of *The Militant*. The founding leader of the SWP was James P. Cannon. When I joined, he was living in Los Angeles. He was the party's National Chairman, although no longer part of the day to day party leadership centered in New York.

Another asset of the SWP was Mountain Spring Camp, situated in rural New Jersey. Mountain Spring was used to hold conventions. It was also the site of a party school where groups of members, a half-dozen or so at a time, would spend six months in concentrated study. The camp had a number of small cabins that were used by the national staff for vacations. For part of the summer the property was rented to a trade union for use as a youth camp for union members' children.

When I joined, in addition to an old farmhouse that had been there originally, party supporters had constructed a dormitory along with a camp-meeting type structure where people could hold large meetings and where meals were served. It had a complete kitchen. There was also a cottage near a pond.

The land for the camp was donated to the SWP by Connie Weissman, who came from a wealthy family. As a youth Connie was adventurous and free spirited. She was the first woman to pilot an airplane solo to Argentina from the US. She had the manners associated with a well-educated woman from the upper class. But she never looked down on anyone and was one of the nicest persons I have ever met. Connie had class in the best sense of the word.

After we joined the YSA in the fall of 1959, Peter and I drove down to the camp from Boston to attend a weekend educational conference of East Coast supporters of

the *Young Socialist.* There I met Mountain Spring's full-time resident, Carl Skoglund. Skoglund had come to the US from Sweden as a young worker in the early part of the century. Here he joined the Socialist Party, and then the Communist Party after the SP split in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Along with James P. Cannon and others who had been expelled from the Communist Party in 1928 for Trotskyism, Skoglund was a founding member of the Communist League of America. The cadres of this group, together with others they won to the cause in the next decade, founded the Socialist Workers Party in 1938.

Skoglund was in Minneapolis when the CLA played the central role in the great Teamster strikes in 1934 that transformed that union and made Minneapolis a union town. Farrell Dobbs and the Dunne brothers — Grant, Vincent (Ray), and Miles — were central leaders of the battle. Carl and other seasoned leaders of the branch also played leading roles. By the time I joined the party, the only living Dunne brother was Ray.

Dobbs was one of the young workers won to the CLA in that fight. His organizational and leadership skills were such that Dan Tobin, the boss of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, put him in charge of organizing the long-haul or "over the road" truck drivers in the Midwest who transported goods between cities, a campaign that transformed the Teamsters into one of the country's most powerful unions.

Many people thought that Farrell Dobbs could have risen to a major national post in the organized trade union movement. But he chose to stay loyal to revolutionary socialism. After the Socialist Workers Party was founded in 1938, Farrell became one of its central leaders. Farrell was to be the most important influence on my political evolution in the years after I joined the party.

The older members of the party, who had gone through the battles of the 1930s and 40s, all had a great impact on the young generation that was recruited in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Like many immigrants to this day, Skoglund didn't have immigration papers. During the witch-hunt, the government tried to deport him. As a result of a defense effort waged by the party, he wasn't deported, but the government did succeed in imposing a kind of house arrest. A court ordered him restricted to Mountain Spring.

Carl had a keen interest in astronomy, and owned a small refracting telescope. Later, when we had to sell Mountain Spring, I rescued Carl's telescope from being carted off by the new owners. Carl Skoglund died in 1960, not too long after I had joined. So, I never got to know him very well.

Shortly after I joined, Larry Trainor talked to me about the step I had taken.

"You've joined the communist movement," he said. I had broken with the social democratic Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation and the Young People's Socialist League to throw my lot in with Marxism.

At the time, I still held the view, which I had learned from Max Shachtman as a YPSL member, that the Stalinist bureaucracy was a ruling class of a new type, and that in the struggle between the USSR and world capitalism, the correct position was a "plague on both your houses" (with a little more plague on the Soviet house).

Larry suggested that I read two books that documented the basic views of the SWP on the differences with Shactman's view. These were *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* by James P. Cannon *and In Defense of Marxism* by Leon Trotsky. While these books won me to the SWP view intellectually, what clinched it for me was the development of the Cuban Revolution in the summer and fall of 1960.

Larry knew that Peter and I had joined the Party primarily because we had been attracted to its ideas. He wanted us to get a better feel for the revolutionary potential of the American working class. In the waning years of the witch-hunt, this potential was not readily apparent. So he urged us to read about the struggles of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the first decades of the twentieth century, including the *Autobiography of Big Bill Haywood*, an IWW leader and the leader of the militant Western Federation of Miners. Another book he had us read was *American City* by Charles Walker, which was at the time the best account of the 1934 Teamsters' union strikes in Minneapolis. Later, Farrell Dobbs himself wrote several books that are now the definitive history of that struggle and its aftermath.

These lessons were driven home by the example of these eight revolutionary workers in the Boston SWP, especially Larry. Larry had no formal higher education, but he knew more about politics and the world than any professor I had ever known. Soon I would meet other working class leaders of the SWP like him.

Larry was a true worker-intellectual, always reading when he was not explaining or organizing. He had a very strong character. He was our image of a real worker-bolshevik, and we used him as a litmus test for the other young people we began to bring around. Those who were attracted to Larry's persona and total dedication to the socialist revolution could be counted on as serious potential recruits. Those who were repelled were usually less serious about revolutionary politics, and not particularly drawn to the working class.

Larry laced his conversation with sharp expressions. I told him about the few times I attended meetings of the Boston SP-SDF, which met only once a month and not at all during the summer, and generally did nothing of importance. At these meetings were a union staffer, his brother, and two Episcopalian seminary students. When Larry

heard this, he told me what he thought about "Epissapailfulls." He didn't single them out for derision; he was equally sarcastic about all organized religions.

One expression he always used when he lifted his glass of beer (against doctor's orders) was, "the first one of the day, God bless us!" Or when explaining that something or other wasn't worth much, he'd say that it "doesn't amount to a piss-hole in the snow." He was something of a character, with his Irish "gift for gab."

Larry also loved literature, particularly Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. He re-read the thick novel nearly every year and felt its emotional impact so much, he told us, that it often moved him to tears.

Another book Larry had us read was *World Revolution* by C.L.R. James, the revolutionary West Indian intellectual, a founding member of the SWP in 1938. He left in the 1940 split and rejoined for a brief time after the Second World War. This book, although somewhat formal in its treatment, documented the betrayal of revolutions of the workers and peasants on a world scale by the Stalinized Communist International in the 1930s. It was from Larry that I first heard Trotsky's characterization of Stalinism as the "syphilis of the labor movement."

One of the most important pamphlets we read was *Socialism on Trial*, the transcript of James P. Cannon's testimony in 1941, when he and 17 other SWP leaders were placed on trial for their beliefs. He, along with many of the revolutionists who had played a leading role in the labor struggles in Minneapolis, were arrested on charges of having violated the Smith Act by conspiring to advocate the overthrow the US government by force and violence. The pamphlet gives a good explanation of the basic ideas of Marxism in straightforward and accessible language.[§]

[§] The Smith Act had been passed as part of US imperialism's preparation for the Second World War. It outlawed conspiring (in the present) to advocate (in the future) the violent overthrow of the US government (in the still farther future). This thought-control law could have been used to snag Thomas Jefferson in its net, for having advocated periodic revolutions to keep the US government democratic.

The SWP did not advocate the violent overthrow of the government. It argued that a peaceful transformation was preferable but predicted, based on a lot of historical experience, that when a large majority of the working people became convinced of the need for socialism, the ruling rich would organize to violently put down the workers by backing a fascist movement. This had happened in Italy, Germany and Spain in the 1920s and 30s. In such a case, the SWP advocated self-defense by the workers to defeat the fascists.

The trial was initiated by the Roosevelt administration, acting in collusion with Teamster President Daniel Tobin. Roosevelt wanted to silence a revolutionary voice speaking out against Washington's imperialist war, especially one that had roots in the union movement, however modest. Tobin wanted to get rid of the potentially threatening left wing that Dobbs, Dunne,

While we were devouring these and other books and pamphlets, our major assignment from the branch was to build a youth organization in Boston that supported the *Young Socialist*. Peter and I started out by contacting those in the United Socialist Students who were not satisfied with a mere discussion group, who wanted a revolutionary and above all an active organization.

One of these was George Shriver, a Harvard student majoring in Russian language and history. At the time George held many views similar to those of the Communist Party. One night I had a long discussion with George and a young Communist Party supporter. It was actually more of a debate, with the CP supporter and me vying for George's political soul. George soon joined our new group, which we named the Boston Young Socialist Alliance.

Another recruit was Bela, my old friend from Boston University. Bela didn't last long in the YSA, as he came to reject Marxism for a kind of anarcho/workers-councilism. He married a woman in the YSA and they left for India. My brother Roger, who moved to Boston in January after leaving Brown University, also joined. We had about a dozen members.

I was still classified as a conscientious objector by the draft board. I asked Larry about the apparent contradiction between this status and membership in the SWP, which was not pacifist. Larry suggested I talk to Tom Kerry in New York. I drove down and spoke with Tom. We agreed that I should write to the draft board, explaining that I was no longer a pacifist. I did so, and was soon called up for the draft. One of the questions the draft board asked was about membership in any organization on the Attorney General's subversive list. I told them that I was a member of the SWP. They classified me 4F, morally unfit for service. So I was not drafted.

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and others led in the Teamsters. Most of the defendants were convicted.

The male defendants spent a year in the federal penitentiary at Sandstone, Minnesota. Grace Carlson, who was the only woman indicted, served her sentence at Alderson, West Virginia.

A sidelight of the case was that the Communist Party, fervently backing the US in the war, supported not only the prosecution of the SWPers (put the SWPers in jail and "throw the key away," they said), but the Smith Act itself. Ironically, the CP was the target of antidemocratic Smith Act prosecutions a few years later during the witch-hunt. In contrast to the CP's earlier stance, the SWP supported the CP defendants, according to the principle that all working class victims of frame-ups by the capitalist government should be defended, regardless of one's political disagreements. This was a reaffirmation of the old slogan, "An injury to one is an injury to all," which the Stalinists had abandoned.

3. THE SOUTHERN SIT-INS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE YSA

Our new YSA chapter was soon immersed in support actions for the Southern civil rights movement, in this case the fight against discriminatory rules that barred Blacks from eating at public restaurants patronized by whites. In February 1960 Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, joined by some whites and crowds of supporters, fought for the right to be served at the lunch counters of Woolworth's and Kress variety stores. They came as a group, sat down on the stools and did not leave, despite being refused service. Hence, the term "sit-in." Adding the suffix "in" to describe certain kinds of protests soon caught on and has been widely used in the movement ever since.

Woolworth's and Kress were national chains. So the sit-ins soon multiplied like wildfire across the South and drew support actions all over the North. This student-led mass youth rebellion marked the beginning of the 1960s, with the fight for Black civil rights at the center. State and local authorities in the South, along with white racist organizations, responded with police and vigilante violence, using clubs, tear gas, bombs, guns, mass arrests and trumped-up charges. But the youth were not intimidated. The size of the protests increased, and the eyes of the nation became focused on the injustice of racial oppression.

A significant outpouring of sympathy developed on Northern campuses. In New York, thousands of students joined sympathy picket lines calling for a boycott of Woolworth's. In the North, the chain did not have the same discriminatory policy it had in the South, and Woolworth's management cried "foul." But it was obvious that picketing in the North could put pressure on Woolworth's to change its policy in the South.

On most private northern campuses there were very few Blacks. This was the case at Boston schools like Harvard, MIT, Brandeis, Wellesley and Tufts. Except for token admissions, Blacks were largely absent from these prestigious schools. There were a

few more Blacks at Boston University and Northeastern. There were more Blacks at the more affordable city campuses in cities with large Black populations, such as the City College of New York and Wayne State University in Detroit. But most Blacks who went to college, including those from the North, went to the all-Black schools in the South. Higher education was highly segregated.[§]

As a result the Northern-based student solidarity was largely led by whites, although not exclusively. Of course, there would have been no Northern movement without the Black-led Southern movement, so in this sense it was a Black-led movement across the country.

The YSA in New York played a significant role in the mobilizations to boycott Woolworth's. Fred Mazelis, a leader of the YSA at City College, became head of the coalition that helped organize students to come out each Saturday to the picket lines. The *Young Socialist* carried the banner headline, "BOYCOTT WOOLWORTH'S!", and urged students across the country to join the movement. For many weeks there were demonstrations every Saturday outside the Woolworth's stores.

We in the Boston YSA also galvanized into action. We were outraged by racism and, as socialists, understood that racism served as a pillar of capitalism by dividing the working class. As young people, we were inspired to act by what the young Blacks in the South were doing, putting their bodies and lives on the line. We wanted to act on our hatred of racism and our solidarity with those on the front lines of the battle. Peter and I and the other YSA members went to all the major campuses in the Boston

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[§] The United States remains a very racially divided society to this day — "Two Nations, Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal" as Andrew Hacker put it in the title of his 1992 book. But young people today know the situation as it existed in 1960 only from history books, if at all. Blacks in the South did not have the right to vote. They could drink only from water fountains labeled "colored." They had to sit in separate sections, usually in the balcony, in movie theaters, when they could get in at all. Schools were totally segregated by law from kindergarten through college, with Black schools under-funded. It was against the law for whites and Blacks to marry. Segregation permeated every aspect of life.

Lynching of Blacks occurred all too often, although the number had declined from the early decades of the century when they were a widespread phenomenon. The perpetrators were not punished. Indeed, a lynching was often treated by whites as a spectator sport, something to bring the kids to, and to take home a memento, usually some body part of the murdered man.

In the North, while there weren't the apartheid laws that existed in the South, there were very extensive de facto manifestations of similar, if unwritten, practices. The idea that a Black person could be mayor of a big city in the North, let alone the South, was unthinkable in 1960, when the sit-ins emerged. Public beaches in much of the North were de facto segregated. It was unheard of to have a Black news announcer on national TV. Black actors would never be able to perform in movies or on TV in roles that were not servile.

area, stuffing mailboxes with leaflets calling for campus organizing meetings. At these meetings, after discussing the basic issues, we urged that leadership bodies be elected by the students to organize their campuses for the Saturday picketing. Hundreds of students participated.

At Brandeis University, 85 students showed up at the meeting. After one of us made introductory remarks, Michael Walzer, our erstwhile "comrade" in the United Socialist Students, rose to warn the students against the YSA. "These are soldiers of the class war," he solemnly intoned. He charged that our views were opposed to those of the Southern students, who practice non-violence. That was a lie. Of course we were not proposing violence of any kind,

Walzer was simply red-baiting the Marxists in order to frighten students from considering our proposals. We had been urging the largest possible demonstrations, with vocal demands to boycott Woolworth's. Walzer proposed limiting the picket lines to no more than 10 at each store, and insisted on silent protest. He wanted us to show that we weren't trying to get people to boycott Woolworth's, but only to examine their consciences. He claimed this was what the Southern Black students were doing.

In fact, however, while the Southern Black students were non-violent, they wanted their protests to be as large as possible. They were putting their bodies on the line in a physical challenge to Jim Crow. They were calling for a boycott. Our position was that our actions had to be likewise massive and vocal, directly appealing to people not to cross the picket lines.

Walzer's remarks showed that the witch-hunt, although waning, was still very much alive. Here we had red-baiting — a scare and smear tactic aimed at weakening and dividing the movement — by a self-proclaimed socialist. Walzer's action showed not only that his "socialism" had nothing to do with "class" or "struggle," but proved to us in real life what we had been reading about in books: the generally treacherous role of social democrats in struggles.

In the discussion we pointed out that small silent vigils would be demoralizing to the student participants. They would not be uplifted by feeling they were part of a mass struggle; instead they would feel isolated and weak. In fact the initial enthusiasm wore off at the stores where the social democratic proposal was implemented, unfortunately.

We helped set up an area-wide coordinating committee, with representatives from the various campuses and other organizations. But the debate went on. Two lines emerged, championed by the two main socialist tendencies — that of Walzer and his fellow social democrats and that of the YSA. The supporters of the Communist Party did not identify themselves as such openly, but they backed Walzer. It wasn't unusual

that people who came from left traditions were the most vocal and took the lead in debate. They knew the most about politics, had more political experience, and had clear ideas about what they wanted. The newly-active independents were aroused by the immediate issues, but they had not had the opportunity yet to think through strategy and tactics.

The issue in this debate, while seemingly of merely local consequence, did actually reflect the type of conflict that occurs in nearly every social struggle in one form or another — that of independent mass action versus class collaboration. In this sense, our experience in the Boston fight over tactics and strategy was just a precursor to the same type of fights that were to emerge later as the youth movement grew.

We eventually lost the debate. Walzer convinced a majority of the student representatives on the coordinating committee that as "reds," we were a public relations embarrassment, and should be excluded. We were voted out of the committee. In response, I explained that since we had been excluded, we were no longer bound by decisions of the committee. We would proceed to organize picketing by those who supported our proposals.

We chose to concentrate our effort at the Woolworth's in Roxbury, the center of Boston's Black community. We built large, spirited picket lines there each Saturday.

The first time we organized the picket in Roxbury, most of the YSAers came over early to Larry and Gusty's house for a giant breakfast to fortify us for the day's activity. Gusty was a very good Italian cook. In fact, she made her living as a cook in the homes of the wealthy in the 1930s, before joining the movement. The first socialist writings she saw were in the library of one of these wealthy families. Her culinary skills were somewhat lost on Larry, whose favorite meal was franks and beans. But the YSA members were happy to be invited over for one of her great dinners.

The *Young Socialist*, with supporters in the major Northern cities, and reporters in the South, had some of the best coverage of the struggle anywhere. The daily press covered the movement, but downplayed it and didn't give the feel of being inside it. In the course of the battle, meetings were often held in Black churches. In one of these churches in Boston the pastor had tacked up the YS on the wall so that the congregation could get the information.

We were very proud of the YS, and tried to circulate it as much as possible among the activists. But then Jim Robertson from the YS national office paid us a visit that set us back. He demanded that one Saturday, YSAers leave our Woolworth picket line in Roxbury, and go to the other stores whose pickets had dwindled, to sell the YS there. We thought this was not very wise, given the red-baiting we had suffered, but we went along with his proposal. I don't think we sold a single paper, and we could

see that we were isolating ourselves from the other activists. Robertson thought the experience was positive anyway, teaching us, I suppose, to enjoy isolation — a skill he mastered in later years, as founder and leader of a sect known as the Sparticist League.

We were furious, but we learned a lesson from that experience: tactics cannot be imposed from afar; most of the time you have to defer to the thinking of the people on the spot.

Our YSA chapter was growing. We held well-attended Saturday night parties for the picketers. We now had 25 members, which compared very favorably with YSA chapters in other parts of the country. One new member was Gus Horowitz, a former roommate of Peter Camejo at MIT, who used to listen in on our discussions. He too would go on later to become one of the SWP's national leaders.

We also launched a class series, reading and discussing Trotsky's monumental *History of the Russian Revolution*. As we read about the conflict of socialist tendencies in the Revolution it seemed that they were reflected, if only on a Lilliputian scale, in our experiences in the Woolworth's picketing.

We made a serious effort to glean as much as we could from Trotsky's masterwork, reading and collectively discussing it chapter by chapter. The class was on the level of many college courses, and the text was much better than most. Serious Marxist education became a hallmark of the YSA, and helped us win and hold new members.

Our inspiring experience in Boston was shared by YS chapters all over the country. We all grew. The time that had previously been set to establish the YSA as a national organization, April 1960, turned out to be propitious. Since its founding in 1957, the YS had been seen as part of the regroupment process. A proposal made in January 1959 by the YS to the YPSL, for a fusion of the two groups marked the end of this regroupment. The proposal was publicly debated by Michael Harrington for the YPSL and Tim Wohlforth for the YS. Not only did Harrington reject any such fusion, but he made it clear that YPSL would bar most YS supporters if they attempted to join the YPSL individually.

Regroupment was over. The majority of YS supporters had been won to the basic positions of the SWP. The rest had quit the organization or just drifted away. The YS began to make plans to bring together delegates from its supporting groups across the country to found a new national youth organization. To that end, the YS leaders in New York drafted resolutions defining the YSA's political profile and a proposed constitution. The conference was called for April 15-17 in Philadelphia.

The Boston YSA sent delegates and observers, including my brothers Roger and Roland who were twins. Roland was not allowed in at first, because he was wearing a

Rutgers University blazer. To the comrades guarding the door, Roland looked more like a fraternity boy than a radical. It turned out that Roland was simply wearing his tennis team blazer — he had come directly down to Philadelphia from a tennis match with Lehigh University. Roger and I vouched for our brother and he was allowed in.

David Weiss, an SWP member in Philadelphia, who observed the gathering, reported in *The Militant* that the "atmosphere of the conference was marked by youthful energy and optimism. The delegates tackled the task of deciding their program and mapping a plan of action in dead earnest, yet the deliberations were repeatedly illuminated by brilliant flashes of humor.

"There was sharp controversy; nothing was taken for granted; nothing was cut and dried; and when the conference arrived at fundamental agreement on point after point it was not until everyone had been heard, every difference aired and the issue to be voted on clearly understood. The excitement animating the conference was enhanced by the fact that delegates came [to Philadelphia] directly from picket lines against Woolworth's and other chain stores in their areas in support of the Southern Negro student sit-ins against segregation."[1]

Peter Camejo and I were elected to the YSA's National Committee. Tim Wohlforth was elected National Chairman, and Jim Lambrecht National Secretary. A key aspect of the newly formed YSA was that it declared itself to be "in basic political solidarity, on the principles of revolutionary socialism, with the Socialist Workers Party." At the same time, it defined itself as an independent organization, with its own democratic structure, decision making process, finances, and newspaper. It was thus conceived as an independent revolutionary youth group.

This made the YSA different from the youth groups of other socialist formations, including the Communist Party's Labor Youth League and other youth groups that the CP organized later on and the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation's Young Peoples Socialist League. These youth groups were financed by their adult mentors, and were under the parent organization's discipline and control. I have already noted how the CP decided to dissolve the LYL after the Hungarian Revolution. A few years after the YSA was founded, the SP-SDF effectively dissolved the YPSL by cutting off its funds, when YPSL refused to support the Democrats in the 1964 elections.

4. Early Battles

The witch-hunt caught up with me shortly before the founding convention of the YSA. I was working as a computer programmer at Western Electric. I was the youngest programmer there, and I was doing well in my job. One day we were all in a class to learn about new computers that used solid state devices. Specifically, we were learning how to program a new IBM computer that was far faster and more versatile than the one we were used to. My boss, who was also in the class, was called out of the room. When he came back he was accompanied by company guards who marched me out of the plant. I had been fired with no explanation.

I tried looking for another programming job. I did well on interviews and tests, but couldn't seem to get hired. Discouraged, I tried to get any kind of a job. My brother Roger and I looked for factory work, but there was a recession. No one was hiring. It was only Ethel's job that kept us going. On some days, after job hunting, I would spend time with Arnie Trachtman. He was a new SWP member and a painter who worked in the style of the German Expressionist Max Beckmann. We would sit in his kitchen, talking and drinking cheap red wine.

Finally, it looked like I had landed a programming job at a small start-up software company. The owner liked my qualifications. But then he called me in to say that he had contacted Western Electric's personnel department during lunch hour. The personnel directors weren't in the office, and his call was taken by a secretary who looked up my file. She said something like, "Oh my God. You're not going to believe this, but Mr. Sheppard was fired at the request of the FBI. He's a member of the Socialist Workers Party, which is on the Attorney General's subversive list." The owner of the company was angry that people could be fired because of their views, and that's why he told me the story. But the major contract he was trying to get was with the government, to write the first programs that would be used to track satellites, and his employees would be required to have security clearances.

I applied for unemployment, but Western Electric fought it. The company claimed I was fired for bad attendance. My only absence had been for a few days when I

developed a high fever at work, and the company sent me home in a taxi, a distance of about 40 miles, which made the taxi bill quite expensive. They had never complained about my attendance before firing me. I was lucky, though, when a reasonable investigator was assigned to my case. I told him about the FBI, and he ruled in my favor. So, I collected a few months' back unemployment payments.

I finally got a job with a software firm where they knew my situation. They paid me cut-rate wages under the table.

In the spring of 1960, some prominent people began to stand up to the witch-hunters. Dr. Willard Uphaus, a pacifist theologian in New England, was hauled before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). The inquisitors demanded that he turn over a list of the names of people who had attended a school at a retreat he organized. This request was phony from the get-go because the FBI closely followed all such gatherings and undoubtedly knew the names of the people who had attended the school.

HUAC wanted to humiliate Uphaus and make the names public, so that those people would face harassment. But Uphaus would not lower himself to cooperate with HUAC. So the self-proclaimed defenders of democracy and the American Way threw Uphaus in jail for contempt.

A defense committee was organized in Boston, led by a young man with a very distinctive name, Norman Thomas Giovanni. (He had been named after Norman Thomas, the most well known US socialist**,** who had run for President several times on the ticket of the Socialist Party.) The YSA supported this committee, made up mostly of young people, and I was assigned to participate in it. We went up to New Hampshire where Uphaus was imprisoned, and raised his spirits a bit by shouting from the lawn below his cell window. They wouldn't let us visit him. The case attracted enough publicity so that his indeterminate sentence was changed to one year. When he was released he was still proudly in contempt of the contemptible Committee. Uphaus called on others to defy the witch-hunters, and was joined in this call by Nobel Laureate Linus Pauling, who also refused to cooperate with HUAC.

In May, HUAC opened up shop in the San Francisco city hall. This time, hundreds of students from all around the Bay Area flocked to the city in militant protest, trying to get into the hearings. Cops beat and arrested protesters, who passively resisted by going limp; the cops then dragged them down the steps of city hall. A photograph of this spectacle was shown on front pages around the country and the world. The YSA joined in the action, which included many groups and individuals. A new mood of opposition to anticommunism was showing its first sprouts. A film supporting the protests made its rounds throughout the country, inspiring additional support and

even attracting some people to move to the San Francisco/Berkeley area to be part of the type of action going on there.

The SWP was running a national campaign in the 1960 Presidential elections. Over the years we had been putting forward candidates in elections whenever possible. We did so for several reasons. Since most people in the US usually consider politics to be centered on election contests, it gave us the opportunity to present our program more readily than at other times. It was easy to organize public meetings where our candidates spoke. We could also reach many people with our ideas through the news and broadcast media, even though the space and time we received was meager in comparison with the capitalist parties. Election campaigns also helped our fight against the witch-hunt by asserting our legal existence and showing that we had no secret agenda. Our ideas were out in the open.

By participating in the elections we advanced the idea that working people should build their own party against the Democrats and Republicans. We called on the unions to break with the two capitalist parties and form a labor party. The question of breaking with the Democrats was hotly debated on the left.

In 1960, the SWP nominated Farrell Dobbs as the party's candidate for President and Myra Tanner Weiss for Vice President. Myra toured the South after the YSA convention to express support for the sit-ins. Farrell, together with *Militant* editor Joe Hansen, visited Cuba in the spring of 1960.

We undertook the difficult task of putting the SWP Presidential ticket on the ballot in a few states. Most states have very restrictive qualification rules for parties other than the Republicans and Democrats. While it was possible to get on the ballot in New York State, to do so we had to collect signatures from many thousands of registered voters, including signatures from a certain number of registered voters in each of New York's 65 or so counties. Some of these counties were very rural and conservative and people were still fearful of socialism, under the influence of the witch-hunt.

The Boston branch of the SWP was asked to help collect signatures in three counties just west of Massachusetts. The task was made more difficult by the fact that people who had signed our petitions in previous years had been subsequently visited by the FBI, as we learned from people we approached this time. I was on the team that collected these signatures, and we got the job done. I retain a less than fond memory of our stay in a flea-bag of a hotel, where I made my first acquaintance with bed bugs.

While we were there, the Soviet Union shot down a U2 American spy plane flying high over the USSR. Just before this incident, there had been signs of a lessening of tensions between the US and the USSR. Soviet Premier Khrushchev had scheduled a

trip to meet with US President Eisenhower — a trip that Khrushchev now angrily called off. Another reason for the diplomatic tiff, in my opinion, was Washington's growing displeasure with the USSR for developing closer ties with Cuba.

In the same month, Eisenhower announced he would go to Japan, to renew a military pact that gave the US rights to certain bases on Japanese soil. The pact buttressed Washington's role of world policeman in Asia. The Japanese people had good reason to oppose militarism. They had lived under a military dictatorship until the end of the Second World War, and a US military occupation regime afterwards. They had experienced the fire-bombing of Tokyo, and the atom bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese students, organized by Zengakuren (the All Japan Student Association), demonstrated by the tens of thousands against Eisenhower's visit and the military pact. These were the first of the really massive student actions that were to mark the 1960s throughout the world.

Farrell Dobbs traveled to Japan to witness this struggle first hand and to cover it for *The Militant*. One of the things he reported was a one-day strike by five million workers against the pact. Things became too tumultuous in Japan for Eisenhower's visit — he would have become the focus of the movement. The visit was cancelled. The treaty, however, was rammed through the Diet (Japanese parliament). Farrell joined an anti-nuclear-weapons conference while in Japan, as well as the commemoration to mark the August 6 anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

The YSA in Boston held a picket line in solidarity with the Japanese students and workers. It was a smaller action than usual because many of our members and others were out-of-town students who had gone home for the summer break. There were eight of us carrying signs outside a building which housed a representative of the Japanese government just across the street from the Boston Common. Our demonstration attracted the attention of some patriotic riff-raff who hung about on that side of the Commons. Soon a mostly hostile crowd had gathered, and a leader emerged, a drunk who began shouting obscenities and making threats. Many in the crowd were just curious, but some backed this guy up.

We were outnumbered. As the situation grew more threatening, I decided to try to defuse it. I was the YSA organizer, and as such, the leader at the action. I confronted the loudmouth, walked up to him and calmly explained that we were within our rights. As he became more belligerent, I offered my jaw, and quietly challenged him to hit me. The bully backed down and the crowd broke up. Looking back, I wonder what would have happened if he hadn't backed down — probably a fight, but that's what would have happened if I hadn't confronted him.

In September my brother Roger moved to Providence, Rhode Island, to attend the

Rhode Island School of Design. He initiated a Fair Play for Cuba Committee at nearby Brown University, and formed a YSA chapter that included Chan from Brown and George Beaseley, Dick McBride and Linda Thompson from RISD**.** A meeting for Farrell Dobbs' Presidential campaign drew 400 at Brown that fall, and another large meeting was held for Myra Tanner Weiss. We took these large numbers as signs of political change in the air.

Peter Camejo drove the car that took Farrell to Providence from Boston. I was also a passenger. Farrell was known as a courageous man, but his heart was in his throat because of Peter's high-speed driving; he finally demanded that Peter slow down.

During that winter, we were in another skirmish, this time with American Nazi Party leader George Lincoln Rockwell. He and a handful of his followers were going from city to city to picket theaters showing the film **"**Exodus,**"** about the role of Jewish refugees from the holocaust in the founding of Israel. Rockwell was scheduled to hit Boston on January 15. Larry Trainor asked me to come over to his house to help draw up a leaflet calling for a counter-demonstration. The leaflet, signed by the Boston SWP and YSA, exhorted: "Nip This Danger in the Bud!" An Italian anarchist printer whom we knew ran off a few thousand copies.

We distributed the flyers at trolley and subway stops, and we pasted them on telephone polls. Carol Lipman, 15 years old at the time, was in a group of ours that was picked up by the cops for posting these leaflets. (Carol later became one of the national leaders of the YSA, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, and in various SWP branches.)

The theater where Rockwell was to picket was on a narrow side street not far from the Boston Common. People started arriving early. Soon there were a few thousand, with a group of a few hundred Jewish high school students in the vanguard. The cops were there in force, including a mounted contingent facing the crowd. When Rockwell appeared, the high schoolers attacked, shoving right past the cops. The rest of the crowd surged behind them. Rockwell was pinned against a plate class window and was taking punches. The police swiftly regrouped around Rockwell and spirited him into the theater. Then they transported him and his little band out of town.

Farrell Dobbs and other national leaders of the party weren't too pleased with our action. The issue was not whether organizing a counter-protest to the Nazis was in order — the SWP and YSA had helped do that around the country. But Rockwell could have been badly hurt or killed, and we, with our provocative leaflet, might have been blamed. Moreover our approach made it look as if we were trying to take away Rockwell's right of free speech. This cut across our battle against the government's

witch-hunt. Rockwell's little band didn't represent a real threat of fascism.

Larry didn't agree with the criticisms of Dobbs and the other national leaders of the SWP. He pointed to the 1939 demonstration called by the SWP against a fascist meeting at Madison Square Garden. That time we had helped mobilize 50,000 people and shut down the meeting.

The matter was taken up later that summer at the 1961 SWP convention. In his political report Farrell pointed out that the political situation was different in 1939, when various American fascists like Father Coughlin were gaining some popular support and even organizing to physically attack unions. During a break, I went up to Farrell, and asked him, "So you think we were a little ultraleft?" "Just a tetch," he said with a smile. I was convinced, but I don't think Larry changed his mind

I later read something by Lenin to the effect that youth seemed to be ordained "by God himself" to start out their revolutionary careers by being ultraleft. I believe that this was the only time Lenin invoked the Supreme Being in a political argument.

In the fall of 1960, Belgium was fostering a civil war in the newly independent Congo in Africa, formerly the Belgian Congo. Mineral-rich Katanga, headed by a puppet government, was trying to break away from the new government. Elements in the Belgian-trained military were seeking to oust the country's first elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. The US also got in on the action, under cover of the United Nations.

Lumumba was a popular figure, who wanted real independence for Congo, including control over its vast mineral wealth. Belgium wanted to keep ownership of these resources, and the US wanted to get its fingers in the pie as well. Washington and Brussels were also alarmed by Lumumba's neutrality in the Cold War. They backed the military coup that overthrew Lumumba, murdered him, and installed the first in a series of puppets of the West. They presided over a system of utter corruption, murder, terrorism and plunder of the country that continued until 1998 when the last of these dictators, Mobutu, was toppled**.** This was just one of the many crimes against humanity that Washington has perpetrated. The divisions, weakness, wars and poverty that resulted from imperialist domination still plague the country.

When we heard of Lumumba's arrest, torture and murder, the Boston YSA decided to see if we could gather enough forces to stage a public demonstration against the coup. We were in contact with radical African students at Harvard and other schools in the area, and we put out a joint call with them for a demonstration in Harvard Square in Cambridge. But on the day of the action, March 4, the African students failed to show up. We were never able to find out why, but it is possible they were threatened by the Harvard administration with loss of scholarships or visas.

In any case, the YSA was alone and we decided to go ahead anyway. We carried our signs in a march around Harvard Square. Most students and others in the Square were curious and, not being well informed about events in Congo, took our explanatory leaflets. But then we were attacked by a group throwing eggs. We later learned, through reports in the *Harvard Crimson*, that they included members of the Harvard football team.

One of the eggs hit me in the head. Before I knew what was happening, my wife, Ethel, who had joined the YSA, charged the attackers with her picket sign held up as a club. Seeing this, other picketers spontaneously came running to her defense. It looked like a well-organized flying squadron, with Ethel as the point person. The football heroes turned and scattered into Harvard Yard, with YSA members in pursuit. The next issue of the *Crimson* featured a front page photo of Ethel charging the jocks. We were shown the issue of the paper a few days later by Dr. Fritz Pappenheim, a well-known Marxist scholar visiting Harvard. Some of us, including Ethel, went to see him at his apartment to talk about his book, *The Alienation of Modern Man*. He recognized Ethel from her picture.

5. The Cuban Revolution Changes the World!

The international context in which the Cuban revolution developed was very different than today's. The USSR and the Soviet bloc still existed. As workers' states, these countries were capable of coming to Cuba's aid as the revolution deepened and the conflict with Washington escalated. But the ruling bureaucratic castes in these workers' states also exerted Stalinist pressure on the revolution — in the distorted model of socialism they provided, and in a readiness to sacrifice the interests of Cuba to the Kremlin's search for accommodation with the imperialist West.

The Chinese revolution was only ten years old in 1959, when the overthrow of the Batista dictatorship in Cuba took place. In 1954 Vietnamese independence fighters had defeated the French colonial rulers at Dien Bien Phu and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north of the country. In the 14 years since the end of World War II, the colonial revolution had swept forward. India had won independence from Britain, and Indonesia from the Netherlands. Algeria was in the midst of a great struggle against France. Independence fighters in sub-Saharan Africa were battling Belgium, France, Britain and Portugal. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, led by former colonies which rejected alignment with Washington in the Cold War, had emerged in its first form at the Bandung, Indonesia conference in 1955. The Cuban revolution was part of this vast uprising of the majority of the world's peoples.

Throughout 1959, the Cuban revolution had radicalized, much to Washington's dismay. When they were fighting in the mountains, Castro and the other leaders of the July 26 Movement championed the cause of the peasantry and the agricultural laborers. They had promised to carry out a radical land reform to give all the peasants land and end desperate poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy in the countryside. The July 26 urban underground fought in the name of winning better conditions for the working people and the youth. Unlike many other Latin American leaders who promised such

changes and then failed to deliver once in power, the July 26 Movement meant what it said. Large estates were broken up. Peasants were given land. Agricultural workers took the lead in establishing nationalized or cooperative sugar plantations on many of the big *latifundia*. This led to a split in the new government between the Castro team and pro-capitalist elements who were for land reform on paper but recoiled from its reality.

Some of the expropriated land belonged to the United Fruit Company, a major US company. Alarm bells sounded in Washington. The SWP had the opposite response. We were heartened by the revolution in the countryside and realized something out of the ordinary was afoot in Cuba. But, as readers of 1959 issues of *The Militant* will readily note, we still had a lot to learn about the revolutionary character and leadership capacities of this new leadership that was emerging on the world scene. Farrell Dobbs, together with *Militant* editor Joe Hansen, visited Cuba in the spring of 1960. They came back highly enthusiastic, not only that a deep-going revolution was taking place but that Fidel and others were genuine revolutionaries seeking to lead the masses in a progressive transformation of their country.

Farrell, the party's candidate for President, toured the US, speaking in defense of the revolution. When he came to Boston, we advertised his talk on campuses and among the many young people we met while picketing Woolworth's. During the worst days of the witch-hunt, the Boston SWP branch held fewer public meetings than before, and saw attendance shrink to a handful. But on the night of Farrell's talk we were pleasantly surprised by the turnout of 80 to 100 young people who packed our small meeting room. As they squeezed in, Larry had us dusting off chairs that were in storage and hadn't been used in years. After the meeting, Larry excitedly said to me, "Barry, we're on the move!"

In July, in retaliation for the expropriation of land owned by US companies, President Eisenhower banned the import of sugar from Cuba. Sugar was Cuba's main export crop, and until then the US had agreed to allow a sizable amount of Cuban sugar to be imported into the US at a subsidized price. Cuba responded by offering the sugar to the Soviet Union. A deal was struck, with sugar bartered for oil. US companies owned the oil refineries in Cuba. Washington barred these companies from refining the Soviet oil. The revolutionary government struck back, taking over the management of the refineries, although at first the ownership (and profits) remained with Texaco and the other oil giants operating in Cuba.

Each US blow to the revolution was met with a counter-blow by the Castro government. The Cuban masses were galvanized by the dawning realization that the US domination of their country and economy was being challenged and could be

ended. Cuba was becoming free!

As happens in every deep-going popular revolution, the mobilization of workers soon went beyond what the government had proposed. I remember seeing a television news broadcast of telephone workers marching through the streets of Havana calling on the government to "intervene" — to take over the telephone company, which was owned by International Telephone and Telegraph, a US firm. The workers, who were smiling and shouting and singing, carried a coffin painted with the letters "ITT" and ceremoniously buried it. Such scenes were typical that summer, as the government "intervened" in more and more foreign-owned (mainly US-owned) enterprises — a step which led to nationalization in the context of the growing hostility of Washington toward the revolution. The revolutionary leadership and the mobilized masses were leading and responding to each other in a profound revolutionary process.

US-organized guerrilla fronts made up of counter-revolutionaries and mercenaries sponsored terrorist bombings and killings in an effort to overthrow the revolutionary government. I remember watching a live television report on a demonstration in Havana. Suddenly there was the sound of gunfire. The camera showed a car speeding past while passengers fired on the gathering. Then it became apparent that many in the crowd were also armed, because they began shooting back. The car sped away.

The Cuban government armed the people in a nationwide militia, using the July 26 Movement's armed contingents as its core. In every town and city block-by-block Committees for the Defense of the Revolution were formed. These CDRs became the eyes and ears of the revolution and gave the masses a direct hand in improving conditions in their neighborhoods.

Reflecting our own growing confidence in the revolutionary leadership, *The Militant* began to carry speeches by Castro and other Cuban leaders, which were among the best popular explanations of what the revolution was doing. In one of the first speeches we published, Fidel explained that the US-inspired counter-revolutionary fronts would fail because, unlike the guerrillas of the July 26 Movement, they could never build a base in the peasantry with their program of returning the land to the exploiters. Over the next years others on the US left also came to support the Cuban revolution, but *The Militant* was always the best and most consistent US source providing truthful news about Cuba and publishing the ideas of the Cuban revolutionaries in their own words.

In the summer of 1960, a profound debate developed among the leaders of the revolution. Castro, Che Guevara and the rest of the July 26 Movement that had fought the US-backed dictator had to do so initially in opposition to the policies of the Popular Socialist Party of Cuba, a typical Stalinist-type Communist party. Moscow had opposed

fighting for revolutionary change in countries like Cuba. Moscow, seeking to ease Cold War tensions, had accepted the idea that Cuba remain part of the US back yard and didn't want to be seen as making trouble for Washington in the US sphere of influence. The pro-Moscow Communist parties in Latin America followed suit.

The PSP had initially denounced the Fidel's group as ultra-left at the time of the beginning of Castro's struggle with the attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953. But as it became clear that the struggle had a strong popular base, the PSP changed and supported it. In early 1958, Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, a top PSP leader, joined the guerrilla movement in the countryside. The July 26 Movement was not sectarian towards the PSP or to other forces in the anti-Batista movement. Instead, it brought them into the leadership.

Blas Roca, another old-time PSP leader, clung to the Stalinist dogma that in backward countries such as Cuba, a revolution had to be exclusively bourgeois-democratic and should not develop into a socialist revolution. This was really another manifestation of Moscow's conservative world view, that in order to build an alliance with the "patriotic bourgeoisie," the revolution had to be limited to what these "patriotic" capitalists could accept. This meant, of course, that capitalist business enterprises should not be expropriated. As late as the summer of 1960, Roca was still speaking and writing to this effect.

But it was becoming difficult to find Cuban capitalists who would be loyal to the revolution and willing to defend it against the colossus to the north. Most were looking to the US to force a halt to the revolution. A growing number were fleeing to the United States, and many more would soon follow.

In August, a Latin American Congress of Youth was held in Havana. Many different tendencies that supported the revolution sent delegates, including Stalinists, Trotskyists and others. The YSA sent a delegation which included Peter Camejo, Eva Chertov, Peter Buch and Suzanne Weiss. A heated debate took place over whether the revolution would have to expropriate the Cuban as well as the foreign capitalists. The Stalinists, preferring not to criticize the Castro government directly, singled out the Trotskyists for attack.

Castro spoke to the Congress, and put to a vote the proposition that all imperialist-owned property would be nationalized. The proposition was approved unanimously in a thundering standing ovation. The revolution was moving rapidly to the left. The Congress, under the influence of the Cubans, ended on a positive note, calling for the unity of all tendencies present in defense of Cuba.

In September a Cuban leadership delegation, including Castro, came to New York to attend a session of the United Nations. The US government put pressure on hotels

not to provide lodging for the Cubans. This petty act of harassment backfired. Castro declared that the delegation would camp out in Central Park. Berta Green, a member of the SWP who was also the Executive Secretary of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), got in touch with the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, which agreed the Cubans could stay there.

The *Daily News* reported that Castro was seen at a dinner at the hotel with a "red haired call girl." The so-called call girl was actually FPCC activist and SWP member Sylvia Weinstein, who worked in *The Militant's* circulation department.

Outside the hotel, there were daily demonstrations, of up to 4,000 people, in support of the revolution.

We came to be part of the leadership of the FPCC partly as the result of a crisis in the organization. The original FPCC leadership was somewhat timid, and shied away from forthright defense of the revolution as it radicalized. In response, Cuban members of the July 26 Movement living in the US blocked with the SWP and some other militants, and took over the leadership of the Committee. It was while he was staying at the Theresa that Castro met Malcolm X. A few years later, I would interview Malcolm for the *Young Socialist* in his office at the Theresa. The revolutionary Black nationalist was attracted to the Cuban Revolution from the start and supported it until he was murdered in 1965.

In October, the Cubans smashed a US-sponsored counter-revolutionary guerrilla front. Castro then spoke before a huge crowd of cheering workers and peasants, and said that the revolution would proceed to nationalize the Cuban and foreign capitalists, who had become completely hostile to the revolution. Capitalist properties would be confiscated "down to the nails in their boots!" The debate with Blas Roca on the revolution's course was over.

When this speech was reported on the nightly TV news, I was so excited that I immediately telephoned Peter Camejo, and told him that I thought by this action Cuba had become a workers' state. Peter and I had been discussing the revolution's course since he attended the Youth Congress. I was right. This was a revolutionary workers' state based on the mobilization of the workers and peasants, not a degenerate**d** one like the Soviet Union, which was characterized by bureaucratic dictatorship over the masses and rejection of the revolutionary program of Marxism.

The July 26 Movement was so named to express its continuity with the unsuccessful attempt by Castro and a band of rebels to take over the army base at Moncada on July 26, 1953 in order to launch an insurrection against the Batista dictatorship. Many of the rebels were summarily shot. Castro managed to avoid that fate, but was arrested, tried and sent to prison with a number of his followers. At his trial he gave a speech

that turned the tables by indicting the dictatorship. In it he outlined the revolutionary program of the movement. This speech is known by its last sentence: "History will absolve me!"

In this remarkable speech, Castro defended the right of revolution against tyranny, quoting many writers and historic documents, including the American Declaration of Independence and the Cuban Constitution itself. The goal of the movement was to overthrow Batista by revolutionary means. Castro listed those he looked to for support: the unemployed, the farm laborers who worked only four months a year, the industrial workers, the small farmers who worked like feudal serfs on land that was not theirs, the teachers, professors and other professionals, and the small business owners burdened with debt and hounded by venal officials. "The future of the country," he said, "and the solution of its problems cannot continue to depend on the cold calculations of profits that ten or twelve magnates draw up in their air-conditioned offices."

Castro outlined six immediate problems that a revolutionary government would have to address: a land reform to give land to those who work it, industrialization, employment, housing, education, and health. Along with these were the restoration of public liberties, political democracy and true independence.

What distinguished Fidel Castro and his team was that they meant what they said. They carried out their program in action, even though it meant breaking with the traditional ruling classes and the powerful imperialist bastion in Washington. As a result, the revolution in power evolved into a socialist revolution as it mobilized the working people and youth to confront their enemies.

The Cuban example was burned into my brain, and it had a profound impact on the entire SWP and YSA memberships. The revolutionary example of the revolution and its leaders came to inspire a generation of youth around the world. The leaders of the Cuban revolution were young! Castro was only ten years older than I was, and many of the other leaders were younger than he. They didn't wear suits and ties, but beards and guerrilla fatigues. Among the revolutionary leaders were young women. Some were Black. They pledged to outlaw official racism against Afro-Cubans; and they did so, while our government had to be *forced* into confronting the Jim Crow bigots of the South. The Cuban Revolution brimmed with spontaneity, honesty, enthusiasm, and a willingness to think new thoughts and defy the powers that be. As we entered the turbulent '60s, the Cuban Revolution's leadership became heroes and role models to radicalizing youth in the US and throughout the world.

6. THE FREEDOM RIDES

In May 1961, a new battlefront opened in the fight for Black rights — the Freedom Rides. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) organized 16 people, Black and white, to board two buses on a trip from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. Called Freedom Riders, they challenged segregated seating on interstate buses in the South. The month before, a shorter Freedom Ride had been organized from East St. Louis to Sikeston, Missouri, but it was the trip from D.C. to New Orleans that caught the nation's attention. Other Freedom Rides soon followed.

Federal law prohibited segregation on buses traveling between states, but state laws in the South enforced such segregation. CORE wasn't the only group to recognize this contradiction between federal law and the Jim Crow laws in the Southern states. The civil rights leadership as a whole saw that this contradiction could be used as a wedge in the struggle. After the victory in Montgomery, it was decided to exploit the contradiction between federal and Southern law on interstate bus transportation to pressure the federal government to act.

CORE had a policy of non-violence, but the Southern racists did not. The racist attacks on the Freedom Riders in Alabama were shown on national TV, and galvanized hundreds of young people to join in the battle, especially young Blacks in the South.

George Weissman, writing in *The Militant*, said of the Freedom Riders: "Alabama's howling, bloodthirsty, white-supremacist mobs, wielding lead pipes, baseball bats, slugging, kicking and stomping, could not defeat them. The threats of blustering, cowardly Governor Patterson, his openly giving the go-ahead signal to the hoodlums of the Ku Klux Klan and White Citizens Councils, could not deter them. The unconcealed collaboration of the Birmingham and Montgomery police with the racist gangs waiting at the bus stations and burning with lynch-fever could not turn them back.

"The heroic Negro students of the South and the small band of their white comrades-in-arms in the fight against segregation, now known throughout the world as the Freedom Riders, have won the day. Beaten to the ground, they rose to bind their

wounds and travel on. Those too badly injured have been replaced by hundreds of volunteers streaming now into Montgomery from college campuses all over the South. Their determination … has left a trail of bloodstains on the highways of Alabama. Nonetheless, the Freedom Riders have bought their tickets and got on buses which will go through Mississippi and Louisiana."[1]

In Jackson, Mississippi, 306 were arrested. Robert F. Williams, a Black leader from Monroe, North Carolina, went to Jackson to visit the imprisoned Freedom Riders. He was trying to recruit a contingent to come to Monroe, a hotbed of Klan activity. Williams had organized a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Monroe some years before. Founded in 1909, the NAACP was the oldest and largest civil rights organization in the country. It focused much of its work on legal challenges to racism. Unlike most NAACP chapters, which tended to be composed of professionals, the Monroe chapter was made up of and led mostly by working people.

Dr. A.E. Perry was another leader of the group. Perry was sent to prison on the charge of having performed an abortion on a white woman (abortion was illegal in almost all states). His conviction was based solely on her testimony. Perry was a target of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Monroe NAACP had a policy of responding to armed racist violence with organized, armed self-defense. When the NAACP began fighting segregation in Monroe, Klansmen rode through the Black community, shooting at and beating Blacks. Williams, a veteran of the Korean War, organized a chapter of the National Rifle Association to fight back. After that, the Klan lure of flogging people and shooting up the Black neighborhoods diminished considerably among the white racists.

Williams had known of the YSA and SWP before the Freedom Rides. In 1959, he was involved in the defense of two local Black boys, one aged 9, and the other 8, who were committed to reform school for indeterminate sentences because a little white girl had kissed one of them on the cheek. Nora Roberts had covered the story for the *Young Socialist*, and the SWP and YSA supported the defense committee that Williams formed. George Weissman went to Monroe to help the effort. The boys were eventually freed. Williams also worked with the SWP in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Williams proposed to the jailed Freedom Riders and their supporters that some of them come to Monroe to join the Monroe Non-Violent Action Committee (MNVAC) to stage non-violent anti-segregation protests at the county courthouse. Seventeen people agreed and, together with the MNVAC they organized a peaceful picket line. Although not a pacifist, Williams backed the action and urged the Black community to abide by the decisions of the protesters.

On August 26, 1961, a racist mob of 5,000 attacked the demonstration. The local police joined in. Cops pinned picketers as young as 14 and 15 while the mob beat them. Blacks from the community attempted to rescue the victims, but were set upon by the cops who had armed the white thugs. One white Freedom Rider who was arrested was nearly beaten to death in jail by an inmate. The attack had been egged on by the cops. Carloads of KKKers invaded the Black community and started attacking Blacks. Black defense guards began firing back.

In the melee a Klan-linked white couple was driving through the Black area. They were stopped by the Blacks, disarmed and placed under citizen's arrest — to prevent them from being harmed by the angry Black residents. Williams was home at the time, and the couple was brought to his house. When the crowd cooled down, the couple was allowed to leave. The racist government, however, used the events to attack Williams. In Williams' own words, "I could hear a lot of gunfire in front of my house. I received a telephone call from a voice I identified as that of the Chief of Police. He said that I had caused a lot of race trouble and that state troopers were coming and that in 30 minutes I would be hanging in the courthouse square."[2] Williams fled.

Williams and a white Freedom Rider and two Black youths who were members of the MNVAC were then charged with kidnapping the white couple. Later, Mae Mallory, an older Black woman from Cleveland who had been in Monroe, was also indicted. The FBI, under the jurisdiction of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, issued an inflammatory statement that appeared in newspapers across the country and on wanted posters in every post office. The FBI release said that Williams was an "outspoken advocate of Fidel Castro, he is known to have worked as a freelance writer, janitor, freight handler and machinist. Reported to be heavily armed, and diagnosed as a schizophrenic, Williams is described as 6 feet tall, 240 pounds and of heavy build. He is extremely dangerous."[3] The Canadian Royal Mounted Police joined the manhunt.

Some of those in the North, including SWP members and our Canadian co-thinkers, who knew him from pro-Cuba and other activities formed a modern underground railroad that brought him to Canada and from there to Cuba, where he was given political asylum. We helped set up the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants, which got out the truth about what happened in Monroe, and we began organizing the legal and public defense of the accused. After several years the frame-up was defeated, and Williams eventually returned home, becoming active in Black rights struggles in Detroit.

Three of the Freedom Riders who had gone to Monroe and aided the defense effort in New York joined the YSA and SWP, among them Ken Shilman, who became

a party leader. Shilman had watched television coverage of the assaults on the first three Freedom Rides, and decided then and there to be on the next ride to the South.

Freedom Rides occurred even as far North as Maryland, a border state, where many segregationist policies existed. Fred Feldman, who joined the SWP later and became a leading member of our writing staffs, was arrested seven times on these Maryland Freedom Rides.

For the most part, however, the YSA was derelict in not throwing ourselves into these actions like Shilman did, mostly I think, because we had no chapters in the South, and we tended to look askance at the nonviolent philosophy of CORE. Over time, however, we learned that it is more important to consider the impact of actions than the stated viewpoint of the leadership. Later on, we were able to build many party units in the South.

7. RIFTS IN THE SWP

During the 1960 election campaign, in the fall, Peter and I became aware that there were two loosely defined competing groups in the SWP. One group was led by Murry Weiss and his wife Myra Tanner Weiss, who were both party leaders. The other group was less cohesive, and existed primarily in opposition to what they called the "Weiss clique." The friction between the two groupings took place, for the most part, beneath the surface of party life, although the whole issue had been aired in the party leadership some time before we joined. In the main, there were no serious political differences between the groups, and officially the problem was resolved; but the two groupings continued to exist.

The Weiss group acted like a set of friends who held themselves somewhat apart from the rest of the party. They supported each other in elections for party posts, and considered themselves a little superior politically and theoretically. The counter-grouping to the Weiss group included members of the National Committee, but was a minority among the non-Weiss party members. The counter grouping tried to act in concert to block members of the Weiss group from achieving some of its objectives. Dobbs and Kerry regarded the Weiss group as a clique, but were opposed to organizing a counter-grouping or acting in a vindictive fashion towards Murry and Myra or their supporters. Larry Trainor was part of the anti-Weiss grouping, however, so Peter and I were initially influenced by his views.

The people in the Weiss group tended to believe that they were being held back from rightful leadership roles in the party by a stodgy and somewhat unsophisticated grouping that had come out of the trade unions. This was their assessment of Farrell Dobbs and Tom Kerry, who were the party's National Secretary and National Organization Secretary respectively. The Weiss grouping sometimes held private meetings of its members to discuss the situation in the party, even though the party's organizational principles sought to discourage such behind-the-scenes functioning of party groupings in favor of open discussion of differences in the official party bodies.

Personal and group conflicts are pretty typical of all organizations. Revolutionary

socialist movements are no exception to this human frailty. But I think that this unfortunate friction in the SWP was exacerbated by the debilitating years of the witch-hunt. The period of deep isolation and reaction turned members inward, looking for faults in others to explain why the party wasn't doing better. I would learn later that there were other weaknesses in the party that originated in that period of sharp anticommunism in American society.[§] Learning a little about this mostly non-political division in 1960 made clear to me why the SWP candidates in this and previous Presidential contests included both Dobbs and Weiss. Myra's presence on the ticket helped strengthen party unity, and she was a good speaker and an effective candidate.

The people in the Weiss group were important party builders and activists. They were instrumental in forming the YSA and pushing the whole regroupment project. Their role in forming the YSA explains why they had a strong representation on its National Executive Committee.

[§] The Weiss group originated in part from disputes that arose during a factional fight in the SWP that led to a split in 1953. In this split, the party lost a big chunk of experienced trade unionists. The main spokesperson for this grouping was Bert Cochran, a longtime leader of party work in the United Auto Workers.

The Cochranites, as they were called in the party by the time I joined, argued that Cannon and the party majority didn't understand the depth of the rightward turn in the working class as a result of the anticommunist witch-hunt and the resultant purging of militants from the unions. They tended to look askance at socialist election campaigns, *Militant* subscription campaigns, and other efforts to reach out broadly to as yet unpoliticized working people. They advocated an orientation toward existing left milieus, including the Stalinists. They held that the party was exaggerating its prospects elsewhere.

The Cochran group traced this failure to the optimistic projections that the party had made during the post-war labor upsurge of the 1940s, when the party had recruited many hundreds of workers across the country.

Cannon was convinced that Cochran and his group had given up on the struggle to build a revolutionary workers' party in the US. The term for describing this pessimistic current in the party was "liquidationism" — that is, a tendency that would lead eventually to the party being disbanded, or liquidated. After leaving the SWP, the Cochran group put out a magazine, the *American Socialist*, for some years. It was an intelligent and well-written magazine. By the time I joined, however, the group that had left in 1953 had dissolved, and was not a factor in my political life. The assessment that the Cochranites were giving up on building a revolutionary party certainly appeared to have been confirmed in life.

Cannon thought that Dobbs and others in the leadership were soft on the Cochran minority, and so he turned to Murry and Myra Weiss to lead the fight for his views. Murry and Myra were living in Los Angeles at the time, and they were respected leaders of the party there. Dobbs did not disagree with Cannon fundamentally about the Cochranites, but favored a slower, less aggressive approach to try to save more of their base of support among the party trade

In January 1961, the SWP National Committee (NC) held a plenary meeting to discuss the Cuban revolution. A "plenum" is a gathering of the whole Committee, which had members from all around the country, in contrast to the Political Committee (PC), a subcommittee of the NC usually resident in New York, which met more frequently. This meeting of the National Committee decided that with the sweeping nationalizations of October 1960, Cuba had become a workers' state. Moreover, many features of the Cuban workers' state were qualitatively superior to those ruled by Stalinist bureaucracies. This new state was based on the mobilization of the workers and peasants under a leadership that was dedicated to advancing the revolution rather than the interests of a bureaucratic stratum. The position adopted noted that the revolution lacked as yet instruments of popular rule such as the Soviets of the early Russian revolution.

The plenum undertook to defend the revolution and the leadership team headed by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro against the attempts by Washington to

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unionists. Cannon was genuinely fearful that, in the increasingly unfavorable political situation, delay in opening a political fight against "Cochranism" could result in losing not just the trade unionists in this group, but the party as a whole.

There was an international dimension to this fight. The central leadership of the Fourth International, especially its secretary Michel Pablo, was secretly backing the Cochranites. Pablo advocated that the world movement make a turn towards the Communist parties, and projected the pessimistic view that we faced possibly "centuries" of bureaucratically deformed workers' states. He felt that the SWP majority was too inflexible toward the American CP and too insistent on the centrality of an independent revolutionary party in the United States. When Cannon learned of Pablo's shenanigans, he became alarmed. Cannon had learned first-hand, through Stalin's interference in the American Communist Party, the destructive effects of trying to run a party in another country from an "international center."

After the split, Cannon sought to maintain a balance between the Weiss group and the Dobbs leadership. Undoubtedly, Cannon was concerned with the unity of the party after the split with Cochran and Pablo. Cannon nominated Dobbs to be National Secretary when he stepped down to go to Los Angeles. But he also saw Weiss as a possible base of support for making sure that his own views got a hearing. For their part, the Weisses always sought Cannon's approval in their conflicts with the Dobbs leadership, and they tended to see themselves as spokespersons for Cannon.

After the split, the Cochranite's predictions about the course the SWP would take were proven wrong. The Dobbs team's political assessments were very sober. I was struck by the resolutions in the early 1960s on the political situation in the US, which stated clearly that the working class remained politically conservative. At the same time, these resolutions pointed to areas of the class struggle, especially the growing fight for Black rights, which were beginning to run counter to this general situation. When there was a real opening in the CP in 1956, the SWP jumped into it, and made a critical turn to the youth.

overthrow them. *Militant* editor Joseph Hansen wrote the resolution that the plenum adopted, and made the report on Cuba to the meeting. The issue of the Cuban revolution was to be put before the party membership for discussion and decision at an SWP convention scheduled to take place that summer.

At the plenum, the Weiss grouping agreed with the basic stance that was adopted, although Bert Deck, one of the Weiss supporters, expressed differences on a secondary aspect of the issue. He thought that the qualitative turning point in the creation of a workers' state came earlier, when militias were established in mid-1959.

The decision was not unanimous, however. Serious opposition to the majority position was expressed by leaders of the YSA: Tim Wohlforth, James Robertson and Shane Mage. They held that Cuba remained a capitalist state, and they viewed the leadership as fundamentally opposed to the rule of the working class.[§]

As a result, discussion over Cuba also began in the day-to-day leadership body of the YSA, the National Executive Committee (NEC). Supporters of Wohlforth, the National Chairman of the YSA, had a majority of one on the NEC. Other members of the NEC, including Jim Lambrecht, the National Secretary, and Nora Roberts, supported the Weiss group. Nora had joined the YSA in her middle teen years when her father Dan Roberts was editor of *The Militant*. (Dan Roberts died at the age of 44,

[§] Wohlforth, Robertson and Mage came out of the "third camp" Young Socialist League. They had been won over to the SWP majority view that the USSR and other states led by Stalinists were bureaucratically deformed but still workers' states. But when it came to Cuba, they argued that different criteria had to apply in deciding that a revolution in its upswing had become a workers' state, in contrast to the criteria that had been applied to the degenerating Russian revolution. They rejected the majority's view that the decisive turning point in Cuba was the expropriation of the capitalist class and establishment of a nationalized and planned economy. They insisted that there was a fundamental conflict between the leadership headed by Fidel Castro and the worker and peasant masses they had led in a revolution.

They held that because the revolution had not been led by a Trotskyist party and there were no soviets, Cuba was not a workers' state. They made the mistake of deducing the nature of the revolution from our theoretical and programmatic expectations, rather than starting with the facts of the revolution itself and then enriching theory on that basis. They rejected what everyone all over the world could see, whether the observers were for the revolution or against it: a socialist revolution had occurred. Certainly the capitalists and their representatives in Washington understood this fact with great clarity and hatred.

When Wohlforth and Robertson headed rival factions later, Robertson adopted the view that Cuba was a deformed workers' state and advocated a political revolution against Fidel, Raul, and Che. Wohlforth continued to argue that Cuba was capitalist until after his expulsion from the Workers League in the mid-1970s, when he adopted the "deformed workers' state" position.

soon after I joined.) Sherry Finer was an NEC member who belonged to neither group. She, like Lambrecht and Roberts, supported the party's stand on Cuba.

The YSA leadership was also divided over the developing peace movement. The SWP Political Committee adopted a resolution introduced by Murry Weiss affirming the party's general position that capitalism is the root of modern war, and that lasting peace could only be achieved through a socialist revolution. A harsh polemical tone strongly suggested rejection of Wohlforth's view that the YSA should jump into the student peace groups, such as Student SANE and the growing Student Peace Union (SPU) led by the Young Peoples Socialist League. In this debate, Peter and I sided with Wohlforth, and we were already carrying out that policy in Boston. A YSA member was a leader in Student SANE at Brandeis, although there was no SPU in the Boston area.

Peter and I received the NEC minutes, and followed the discussions. My brother Roland was living at our family home in New Jersey, and attended YSA meetings in New York as a guest. He later told me, "The fights between the Wohlforth supporters and the Weiss group made choosing a chair difficult, and so I would chair. Both groups invited me to their own parties. I was not a member of the YSA, but I would be told how bad Farrell Dobbs was at the Weiss parties, and the Wohlforth grouping had their own horror stories to tell." Roland came to Boston in July 1961, where he joined the YSA and the SWP.

Meanwhile, I lost my job again. The company which had hired me under the table let me go because they wanted to get some government work. I got another job working on a small magazine called *Computers and Automation*, at much lower pay. There were only five or six employees, some of them students at Antioch College, which allowed students to alternate quarters of working and school. The man who ran the magazine was an ex-Communist who knew of my politics.

In April 1961 the CIA launched its long-prepared invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. We had formed a chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee together with Cubans living in the Boston area who were members of the July 26 Movement. Upon hearing of the invasion on the radio at work, my boss let me go early so I could help the FPCC plan and organize a demonstration against the invasion.

I was approached by a young member of the Communist Party, the same person I had debated earlier for the benefit of George Shriver. He said the CP wanted to join in building a demonstration. Such united work with the CP was very unusual, and helped produce a protest action of 200 near Boston Common.

The invasion was a fiasco. Washington and the counter-revolutionary Cuban force believed their own propaganda that the Cuban people would greet the invaders as

liberators. Instead, the Cuban people mobilized en masse to defend their revolution. Two days before the invasion, several US B-26's with Cuban insignia had staged a bombing raid against the then very small Cuban air force. Thus forewarned, the Cubans were able to prepare for the imminent military assault, and they smashed it.

The next day, Castro proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution at a rally commemorating victims of the raid. What the imperialists couldn't forgive, he said, was that the Cubans had carried out a socialist revolution under their very noses. The battle at the Bay of Pigs was fought openly for socialism.

On May Day, hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants marched in Havana to celebrate their victory. Castro spoke and developed the theme of socialist revolution. *The Militant* extensively described this speech, which in my mind confirmed that the position that we had adopted had been tested and reaffirmed in life. Most YSA members, whether or not they were also in the SWP, were excited and inspired by the Cuban revolution, and they naturally supported the SWP NC majority position that was later adopted at the party's 1961 convention.

Several months prior to the SWP convention, the party opened up a nationwide pre-convention discussion. Party members were able to debate the issues in a written discussion bulletin that was distributed to the entire membership. Each branch of the party also held discussion and debate on the issues.

Following the pre-convention discussion, I was elected a delegate from the Boston branch to the SWP convention. Gusty Trainor had been nominated, but she was not elected. Afterwards, Larry chewed me out. He told me that I hadn't considered the "woman question." If I hadn't run, Gusty would have been elected, and the branch delegation would have had a better gender balance.

At the time, years before the new women's movement erupted, very few groups on the left paid much attention to women's issues. Although the SWP still had a lot to learn, we were better on this question than society at large and other socialist groups. We studied works like Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, and we kept abreast of new writings such as *The Second Sex* by French existentialist Simone de Beauvoir. We knew that the early Bolsheviks strongly advanced women's rights, advances that the Stalinist counter-revolution reversed. In *The Militant* and in party discussion bulletins, Evelyn Reed and Joseph Hansen took positions on the cosmetics industry and capitalist society's standards of beauty that were far in advance of their time, and that would not come to the fore until the new women's movement emerged in the late 1960s.

But it took some years before the party as a whole made real steps forward regarding women in all aspects of party life. For example, during our frequent get-togethers at

the Trainors', Gusty often expressed her point of view on the various issues we talked about; but she wasn't paid much heed. When she participated in the women's movement later, she began to express her anger over the way she had been treated, as did many other women in the radical movement.

Another important issue arose prior to the convention: whether SWP members who were also YSA members had to be bound by the decisions of the SWP convention in the discussion leading to the YSA convention, scheduled to take place in the winter. Murry Weiss urged that SWP members in the YSA be free to argue for their positions in the YSA discussion. Tim Wohlforth informed me years later that in the Political Committee, Farrell Dobbs and Morris Lewit, a party leader since the 1930s, supported this position. Just before the National Committee plenum, Cannon sent a letter from Los Angeles to the gathering expressing his opinion that all members of the SWP should present the views of the SWP majority in the YSA as in other "outside" organizations. (This was the general policy of the SWP, although the party could make exceptions.)

Tim and his grouping were central leaders of the YSA. But they were in a small minority in the YSA on the Cuban question. They were an important part of the YSA, and most party leaders didn't want to see them removed from the YSA leadership, which would most certainly happen if the party's discussion was repeated in the YSA. (It should be noted that elections to leadership bodies in the YSA, as in the party, were based on proportional representation for opposing political views. So Tim's group would only be entitled to representation in the YSA leadership based upon the percentage of YSA delegates voting for his positions.)

After Cannon's intervention, Murry withdrew his proposal. In an informal meeting at the convention between Cannon and Wohlforth, they agreed to try to defuse the situation. Two leaders from each side on the YSA National Executive Committee would leave the YSA, and two other members of the YSA NC who were not associated with the previous factionalism on that body, would move to New York and become members of the NEC. Those asked by the party to leave the YSA would be two party members over 30, Jim Robertson and Jim Lambrecht, who were, in any case, too old to remain leaders of a youth group. In the years leading up to the founding of the YSA, our numbers were so small that we needed the help of some of the older young adults from the party. But as the YSA grew, we were able to establish a more natural age base for the membership.

A member of the SWP Political Committee would now sit in on meetings of the NEC, without vote. It was already the practice that the YSA NEC appoint one of its members to sit on the party PC. Tim Wohlforth was the YSA representative on the

SWP Political Committee. Carl Feingold was designated to be the SWP representative on the YSA NEC. Carl moved to New York from Minneapolis, and he was also elected the full-time organizer of the New York branch of the SWP.

I was asked to move to New York to be part of the NEC. Ethel and I agreed to make the move. This move was to mark a drastic change in my life in the SWP. Before then, my perspective was to be a branch activist and YSA leader in Boston, as well as a national leader of the YSA in the sense of being on the YSA National Committee. From now on, however, I was to be immersed in the center of party life.

I had lined up a job as a programmer with the Equitable Life Assurance Society, which had a big building in midtown Manhattan. Ethel got a job as a typist. We found a basement apartment in Brooklyn. But in the process of moving, our Volkswagen bug broke down just outside New York City. I called Carl Feingold, my contact in the city, and got directions to his apartment. When we arrived there the room was full, and Carl was giving a report on the latest Political Committee meeting. I had stumbled into a meeting of the Weiss group.

When I attended my first NEC meeting, I expected to be co-opted onto that body, but Tim's group, still holding a majority on the NEC, reneged on the agreement. They defeated the proposal to add me to that body, because that would have deprived them of their majority on the Cuba question. They now found it unacceptable to be in a minority, even though it was clear that a substantial majority of the YSA disagreed with them on Cuba, and they knew that they would become a minority when they agreed to the deal.

The Political Committee decided that if Tim's grouping wanted to challenge the SWP through the YSA, in essence counter-posing the YSA to the SWP, then the best course would be to allow the fight to take place in the YSA pre-convention discussion. Accordingly, the PC voted to free SWP members in the YSA from party discipline in the discussion. They knew that the outcome would almost certainly be the defeat of Tim's position in the YSA.

The practice of freeing party members from SWP discipline in discussions in the YSA became the norm following this YSA convention. We learned that it was far better to operate with this norm than to impose SWP discipline on SWP members in the YSA. This made YSA discussions real debates, helped educate the YSA members, and developed their capacity to stand on their own two feet in politics. Since most YSA members would eventually join the SWP, this policy benefited the party in the long run. In following years, unfortunately, some branches put pressure on party members in the YSA to toe the SWP line in the YSA, contrary to the spirit of the party decisions on this matter.

The work of the YSA national office leading up to the YSA convention — mimeographing the discussion bulletins and much else — fell largely on Sherry Finer. Sherry was the youngest of the three daughters of Farrell Dobbs and Marvel Scholl. All three were in the party. Barbara Dority, who had been with the Weiss group, joined Sherry in this task, but other NEC members did little of this practical work. Barbara and Sherry became friends, and worked to limit the effects of the divisions. I would give them a hand in the evenings, after work. They were beautiful women, older than I, and would sometimes tease me. Peter Camejo moved to New York in the late fall. He was to have been the other YSA National Committee member to join the NEC under the arrangement reached by Wohlforth and Cannon.

The discussion in the YSA, as expected, resulted in a big majority for the pro-Cuba and pro-Castro position. At the convention, Peter gave the majority report on Cuba**.** I gave the majority report on the political situation facing the YSA and our tasks in the coming year. We were also able to convince a large majority of the delegates that the YSA should get involved in the student peace movement. On the basis of the delegates' votes, a new majority was formed on the NC. This YSA convention marked a political turning point for the organization and a high point in my experience at the time.

In its physical environment, however, the YSA convention was the nadir. It was held in a hotel in Chicago, several blocks west of Canal Street in what was then a skid-row district. Many of the delegates and observers had been frequenting a nearby restaurant, of less than stellar quality, and the night before my report a number of us got violent diarrhea, including me. The hotel rooms had no toilets. There were only bathrooms down the hall for communal use, and those of us suffering from diarrhea had to wait our turn. So it was really a terrible situation to be so sick when I got up to give my report.

The Weiss group had been seeking the position of National Chairman for one of their supporters, Arthur Felberbaum. He had proposed to me in the fall that he be elected to that position, and he campaigned at the convention for the post. But Felberbaum's involvement in factional hostilities on the NEC had alienated some in the YSA, and it turned out in any case that he was too old. He had reached the age limit for SWP members in the YSA.

As a result, Peter and I, who had led the fight in defense of the party's position on Cuba, became the new YSA leaders. I was elected the new National Chairman of the YSA, Peter the National Secretary, and Leroy McRae the National Organization Secretary. Leroy, who was Black, had been a leader of the Woolworth's picketing in Philadelphia. The NC elected a new NEC, with a new majority. The minority was

represented on both bodies, although Tim was no longer in the YSA, having turned 30. I was 24 years old, and Peter was younger. Our ages were now to be typical of the YSA leadership in the 1960s and 1970s.

Peter and I made a good team. He had a very spirited temperament, made many imaginative suggestions for our work, and was always enthusiastic about the need to speedily implement his new ideas — some of which were very good (and others not so good). I was more even tempered, and at that time had a deeper understanding of Marxism. This made for a good balance. Peter was also a great public speaker, the best we had for the two decades that he remained in the party. In fact, he was one of the best speakers on the entire left during the radicalization of the 1960s and 1970s.

When we got back to New York from the convention I visited the one-room apartment on the Lower East Side where Farrell Dobbs and his wife Marvel Scholl lived. I gave them a report on the convention, including the skirmishing over the post of National Chairman. When I suggested fighting harder against the Weiss group, Farrell coldly and quietly said, "Then you'll have to fight me first." This sobered me up, and made me think about the need to keep the YSA and party from blowing up when there was broad political agreement.

Nora Roberts was elected the editor of the *Young Socialist* by the National Committee. I tried to work closely with Nora and the other Weiss supporters, and also with Fred Mazelis and other representatives of the minority, who were elected to the YSA leadership. Peter and I were assigned to work full time for the YSA. We received $35 a week, lower than the minimum wage, much lower given the long hours we actually worked.

I made a national tour of YSA chapters during the spring semester in 1962. The chapters organized public meetings on campuses and in the party meeting halls in each city. I had two prepared speeches, one on the fight against war, and one on the Black struggle. The YSA chapters chose which they wanted me to give.

During my tour stop in Los Angeles, YSA organizer Les Evans and I were arrested. The YSA had not been able to get a room for my talk at Los Angeles City College, so we decided to set up a street corner meeting just outside the campus. We practiced that kind of "soap boxing" from time to time, although in this case I stood on a ladder, not on a soap box. We gathered a small crowd of students, but soon the LA cops showed up. They broke up the meeting by arresting us. The charges were soon dropped, but the cops had achieved their purpose. So much for free speech!

While I was in Los Angeles, I visited Cannon at the small house he shared with Rose Karsner, his lifelong companion and collaborator since the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the CP in 1928. I gave Cannon a report on the YSA convention. It

turned out he was thinking along the same lines as we were on the importance of the fight against war and nuclear destruction. He encouraged us to get into the movement. Whenever I visited Los Angeles, I would make it a point to stop by and talk with Cannon.

My speaking tour had reached Seattle when I got a telephone call from Peter. He and Nora Roberts had disagreed about an article she wanted to publish in the *Young Socialist,* and Nora resigned as editor. After consulting the SWP leadership, Peter asked me to return. I went back by way of Chicago, staying one night at the apartment of Jack Barnes and Betsey Stone**.** They told me that at the YSA convention, Carl Feingold, the SWP representative to the meeting, had approached Jack with the proposal that Jack run for National Chairman against me after Arthur Felberbaum's campaign fizzled. Feingold had recruited Jack to the movement in Minneapolis, and Feingold probably made his proposal to Jack under the assumption that he and others in the Weiss group would have a strong influence over Jack, had he accepted. Betsey helped convince Jack to decline, avoiding an unnecessary division and potential hard feelings and tensions

Nora was very talented, and her resignation was a blow to the YSA. Moreover, it began the withdrawal from the movement of most of the Weiss group. I think they were demoralized by not winning the leadership of the YSA. Hostile attitudes towards them also played a role. At the 1961 convention, the anti-Weiss-grouping successfully opposed the re-election of Bert Deck to the party National Committee.

Some Weiss supporters who withdrew from the party claimed that they were being bypassed in favor of younger leaders. Carl Feingold later wrote in an unpublished manuscript, "The real demise of the SWP, in my opinion, began when a small group of young people —led by Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, and Barry Sheppard — came into the organization and were embraced by the old leadership. They skipped over the next generation, which was mine, and anointed these young students as the new leaders of the organization."

Among those in the Weiss group who stayed in the party were Murry's brother Dave, Allen Taplin, Virginia Garza and her husband, Fred Halstead, who later became the party's most prominent person in the anti-Vietnam-War movement.

Jack Barnes had joined the YSA as leader of a group of pro-Cuba activists at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota. Feingold, who was the branch organizer of the SWP in nearby Minneapolis, was the first to make contact with them when he was invited to speak at the campus. The YSA that Jack founded at Carleton College remained strong for several years after he and Betsey left the campus. Among those recruited to the YSA were future YSA and party leaders Mary-Alice Waters, Doug

Jenness, Larry Seigle, Caroline Lund, Dan Styron, Barbara Matson, John Benson, Cindy Jaquith, Dave Wulp and Beverly Scott.

Jack Barnes and Betsey Stone graduated from Carleton in the spring of 1961, and moved to the Chicago area to attend graduate school at Northwestern University in Evanston, just north of the city. She was a teaching assistant in history. He had a Woodrow Wilson fellowship to study economics. There they again built a strong YSA, winning, among others, Joel and Jon Britton, Herman Porter, and Lew Jones to the YSA.

My YSA tour also had an organizational aspect, in which I discussed ideas for YSA activities with each of the chapters. I stressed implementing the convention decision to join the student peace movement and work with the Student Peace Union. The SPU's primary activity was campaigning against atomic testing. SPU was to the left of the adult Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), and a large section of the SPU called for the unilateral disarmament of both the US and Soviet Union.

The SPU was launched by pacifists in 1959. Many in the SPU were attracted to the "third camp" position of the Young People's Socialist League. Mike Parker, who became SPU National Secretary in 1960, told me later that he and others became members of YPSL, but were more loyal to the SPU than to YPSL. The YPSL held the "third camp" view that blamed the US and USSR equally for the atomic arms race. The YSA, in contrast, held that Washington and its allies had started the Cold War. More fundamentally, we defended the Soviet Union as a workers' state against imperialism. YPSL favored the slogan "No Tests, East or West" while we aimed our fire at US militarism.

We paid a price for not getting into SPU on a national scale from the start. It was now an organization of thousands, and the YPSL leadership of the SPU won the support of many SPU members. The YPSL leadership also sought to keep out any "Stalinists" and "Stalinoids" (as they labeled us) and in 1962 the SPU adopted the YPSL's line on the Cold War explicitly, effectively ending any national role in the organization for those who disagreed. Because of the prevailing anticommunism, our views would probably have been in the minority even if we had joined SPU earlier, but we would have attracted some students whom we missed because of our delay.

In February, 1962, the SPU and other groups organized a demonstration in Washington against nuclear testing. It was a big success. About 5,000 students and other young people participated, much more than the SPU leaders had expected. The YSA supported the action and we had a contingent there.

In 1970, Peter Camejo wrote about the YPSL's role in this march. By then, the YPSL had been expelled by its adult sponsor, the SP-SDF, and a section of YPSL had

gone on to establish the International Socialists. By 1970, the IS criticized the YSA and SWP's role in the movement against the Vietnam War as too conservative. "You should have seen what their march was like when they controlled it," Peter wrote. "No tendency was allowed to sell papers! We couldn't sell the *Young Socialist*. On top of that, everyone had to march without making a sound — silent. You would just march to some war monument and stand there looking at it, then everyone would turn and walk away. Meanwhile, Kennedy was offering coffee for everyone in the White House."[1] YSAers sold our literature anyway.

Many years later Mike Parker informed me that some of the more conservative forces that joined in building the march had influenced decisions about the character of the demonstration. Mike Parker didn't even go to the march.

The international Helsinki Youth Festival was held in the summer of 1962, organized primarily by the Communist parties and their youth groups. But as a result of the weakening of Stalinism and the victory of the Cuban revolution, the YSA was permitted to send representatives. George Shriver and Dan Rosenshine from the Detroit YSA, were our representatives. They traveled for a couple of weeks in the USSR, and met the Soviet poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who wrote in favor of the Cuban revolution and whose work was sharply critical of Stalinism and bureaucratism. When they returned, George and his wife Ellen moved to New York, where George joined the *YS* editorial board. We published an English translation by George of a poem by Yevtushenko that praised the Cuban leaders and was a thinly-disguised attack on the Soviet bureaucrats.

At about this time, we suffered a self-inflicted blow, one that, to my shame, I played a role in delivering. Ted Mellor, who had been recruited in Boston, came to New York to be part of the *Young Socialist* editorial board. When Nora Roberts resigned as editor, Ted took her place. In November, Chan, who was recruited while at Brown University by my brother Roger, was also added to the editorial board.

Ted and Chan were gay and they became a couple. At that time, under the impact of the witch-hunt, the SWP had come to frown on having members who were openly homosexual. The official reason was that known homosexuals could be blackmailed by the political police and pressured to become informers. But the real reason, in my opinion, was simply prejudice against gay people, symptomatic of the general prejudice in society as a whole, which had intensified during the witch-hunt. (Why open homosexuals would be more subject to police blackmail than "closeted" ones had not been thought through by any of us.) I had the impression that there were gay men and lesbians in the party. Lesbians were more tolerated. As was true in society at large, homosexuality in men was more feared.

In my college years, I had become friends with some gay men, several of them on the political left. But I was 100 percent ready to do what the party thought best. I talked the situation over with Farrell Dobbs, and we came to the conclusion that Ted and Chan could remain members, but only if they were discreet.

I explained the policy to Ted and Chan. They said they could be discreet about their relationship. But in the spring of 1963, Ted and Chan were "necking" at a YSA party. I met with them and told them they would have to leave the YSA and SWP, and they did so without protest. We lost two good comrades, who were also my friends.

But these two were not the only casualties. As a result of this incident, the YSA and SWP moved towards officially adopting the position that homosexuals could not be members. This did not stop us from continuing to recruit gays and lesbians who agreed with our politics. But they stayed in the closet, in the movement as well as in society. This fostered deception and resentment as well as legitimizing prejudice, damaging these comrades and the integrity of the movement. This state of affairs continued until the gay liberation movement exploded on the scene in the late 1960s with the battle gay men and lesbians put up against a police raid of the Stonewall bar in Manhattan. This inspired a number of gay men and lesbians in the party, some of whom were playing leadership roles, to "come out," and sparked a discussion in the party, with the result that we jettisoned the ban on membership by open homosexuals and embraced the fight for gay rights in society.

8. THE SINO-SOVIET SPLIT

Tensions between China and the USSR reached a breaking point in 1960. The SWP placed major blame for the division on the Soviet Union. The Kremlin stopped sharing information about nuclear weapons with China, indicated that China would no longer be covered by the Soviet atomic shield, withdrew technicians helping China's economy, and took other steps that made China more vulnerable to US imperialist attacks or pressure. This breakdown in relations was fundamentally caused by the Soviet bureaucracy's course of using struggles and revolutions in other countries as bargaining chips in attempting to improve economic and diplomatic relations with the US and other imperialist powers.

Bitter polemics broke out between the leaderships of the two Communist parties in 1961. The Maoist leaders made telling points against the Soviet party, charging that, under Khrushchev, the Kremlin had adopted a line of seeking to appease world imperialism by imposing a non-revolutionary course on the world's Communist parties. This charge was similar to Trotsky's view of the course of the Soviet bureaucracy from the time of Stalin's rise to power. The Chinese also criticized the Soviet insistence that revolutions in backward countries had to be limited to democratic reforms in the framework of capitalism, saying that such revolutions could go further and become socialist in an "uninterrupted" process. This also bore a clear resemblance to the theses of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution concerning the colonial revolution.

At the same time, the Maoists upheld Stalin, and claimed that Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of Stalin was the turning point in the Soviet party's degeneration.

The Maoist stand caused ferment in Communist parties throughout the world, including in the US. Splits occurred, and pro-Chinese groups formed. The heretofore monolithic stance of the "world Communist movement" was broken, enabling some people in the CP or its orbit to assert their independence and think things through for themselves.

When I was in Boston, we took advantage of this stirring to organize a discussion group with some young people around the CP whose minds were now open to

considering our ideas. These discussions were organized around reading some of Lenin's writings that implicitly attacked the Stalinist approach to politics (although they were of course written before the rise of Stalinism).

One of these youth who joined the YSA was Steve Chase. Steve's father and uncle had been leaders of the CP in New England, until they were expelled for backing the Maoists. While these two brothers remained supporters of Stalin, Steve came over to our positions all the way. Steve's father and uncle were part of what became the Maoist Progressive Labor Party. Before PL's founding convention in 1965, we sought to reach out to them.

In 1964, youth around this current formed the "May 2nd Committee," so named because of a demonstration they held on that day against the steadily growing Vietnam War. Peter Camejo became our representative on this committee (soon, however, the committee became a narrow PL front). When one of their Black members, Bill Epton, ran for office in New York against the Democrats and Republicans, we urged a vote for him because he was a socialist running independent of the capitalist parties. We also defended PL against police attempts to victimize the group.

By its 1965 founding convention, however, it was becoming clear that PL would cling to its Stalinist origins and was, in fact, hardening its Stalinist positions. The PL convention attacked the "revisionists" (the Communist Party) and the Trotskyists as "objectively counter-revolutionary." They adopted Stalinist organizational methods, banning internal tendencies, factions and groupings as "Trotskyite notions." In addition, every member was required to participate in organized sessions of "criticism and self-criticism on a regular basis."

Tom Kerry, writing in *The Militant* noted, "What this latter exercise in individual and group therapy means, was spelled out by [PLP leader] Mike Rosen in an article in the Jan.-Feb. 1965 issue of *Progressive Labor*. 'Some of our cadre receive criticism, accept it in words, and don't change one iota,' Rosen complains. 'They continue their harmful ways. They in fact act in such a way as to undermine the movement, unintentionally. No matter how persuasive, patient or correct the criticism is, the comrade shows no change; perhaps he gets sicker. This requires a different approach. One must actually become a little rougher. Actually, the patient is not sick enough to recognize his illness. Make him "sicker." Yell at him; "knock" him in the head. When he is sick enough maybe he will respond to loving care. If not he needs a leave of absence to reflect more on his attitudes, his political development …'

"That's how leaders are to treat 'sick' members, who are presumed 'well' when they self-criticize themselves to conform to the leader's criticism. The leaders may throw in a 'self-criticism' of their own every so often to demonstrate their humility."[1]

This pernicious practice, which erodes membership self-confidence and promotes docility, later became a hallmark of much of the New Left in the course of the youth radicalization. In subsequent years, PL also engaged in physical attacks on other radicals and the antiwar movement.

PL followed the Chinese lead in declaring that the Soviet Union had become "state capitalist." We challenged their view and I wrote articles about this subject in *The Militant.* I also spoke before a fairly large public forum, where a young person from the Soviet Embassy attended and spoke up during the discussion. I talked with him afterwards. He tried to be friendly by pointing out that "Trotsky was a Russian, too."

Another group that came out of the CP in this period was the Labor-Negro Vanguard Conference, a largely working class group based mainly in New Jersey. For a time we had a working relation with them. The LNVC was headed by Clarence Coggins, a Black man from Newark.

One day in 1962, Farrell Dobbs asked me and Leroy McRae to participate in a meeting at the SWP headquarters with Coggins and two young people in his group. I was surprised when Farrell produced a bottle of Scotch to lubricate the discussion. It didn't take much to lubricate Leroy and me, since we weren't used to hard liquor.

We agreed to collaborate on defense of Robert Williams and the other victims of the Monroe frame-up. The Black people of Monroe were suffering an economic attack by the white establishment, including denial of jobs. The Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants collected clothes and other goods to bring to Monroe. Nat Weinstein, a leader of the SWP in New York; Lynn Henderson, a recent SWP recruit; and I, together with the two young people from the LNVC, drove the van with these goods down from New York to Monroe.

It was an all-white delegation rather than an integrated one, chosen as such for security reasons — the sight of whites and Blacks riding together could infuriate the Klan types in Monroe. When we got to the county line, we picked up a tail, the sheriff's car. We were careful to obey all speed limits and other traffic laws. The cop car followed us until we entered the Black community. Evidently, the sheriff's men considered it a "no go" area for themselves.

We were dog tired from the long drive, and we appreciated how well we were received. We were fed and put up for the night. In the house where I stayed there were guns in each room, including a rifle in the bathroom, just in case. The next day we headed back, and a police tail picked us up again. We were relieved when he left off as we crossed the county line. These were still very violent times in and around Monroe.

In another common action with the LNVC we organized a demonstration against

a meeting of the ultra-right Young Americans for Freedom at Madison Square Garden in March, 1961. The YSA and LNVC young people set up a Youth Organizing Committee, and we passed out flyers inviting all who were against the YAF to participate. Another leaflet appeared, signed by Americans for Democratic Action and the College Young Democrats "supported by Students for a Democratic Society," which claimed the ADA-CYD were the **"**sole sponsors" of the demonstration. Their leaflet said that no slogans, posters or literature other than of those two groups would be permitted. "Anyone who feels he cannot comply with the above is asked NOT to participate."

When picketing began, the Youth Organizing Committee people and others brought their own signs. The ADA-Young Democrat officials called on the cops to remove us. I was one of our picket captains and, backed up by a representative of the American Civil Liberties Union whom we had asked to attend, convinced the cops that any orderly person had the right to picket.

The ADA-Young Democrats then set up a separate tiny silent demonstration of their own, while 2,000 others, mostly youth, continued the demonstration carrying a wide variety of signs and shouting slogans.

The LNVC people were good people, and we liked them as individuals. But we weren't able to come together because of one basic idea they brought with them from the CP — the orientation to supporting and working within the Democratic Party. They wanted to do their political work through the Democratic Party, whereas we thought that work in the Democratic Party was a dead end for socialists.

9. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

In 1962 massive protests for Black rights spread in cities and towns across the South. The Southern Black students who led the sit-ins and Freedom Rides organized the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). At first SNCC was viewed as just the youth wing of Dr. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, but it soon became an independent and very militant organization to the left of the SCLC.

SNCC's actions and militant stance inspired young people, both Black and white, throughout the country. The majority of the YSA, myself included, wanted to get more involved with SNCC even though we didn't have many Black members and we had no chapters or members in the South.

A minority of the YSA, especially the followers of James Robertson, placed their emphasis on criticism of SNCC. They criticized SNCC's non-violent tactics and counterposed our socialist program to SNCC's program of fighting for democratic rights for Blacks in the South.

In August, we sent a team composed of Melissa Singler and Ken Shilman to Augusta, Georgia, which was the focal point of the struggle at the time, to help us decide whether we should try to build a YSA unit in the South and join the student struggle there through SNCC. Ken had put out some issues of a mimeographed magazine written by Freedom Riders, and he and Melissa took copies with them to distribute.

While there Ken and Melissa participated in local civil rights activities organised by SNCC, including voter registration.

When they came back, they told us that they thought that it would be a mistake to send YSAers into SNCC. It might hurt our relations with SNCC and other fighters. We decided that the best thing we could do was to continue to organize support work for the Southern struggle in the North, where we had forces.

Later on in the 1960s and 1970s we would build SWP branches and YSA units in the South. But it was still very hard in the early 1960s to maintain a socialist organization in the deep South. That part of the country had for a long time been a bastion of racism and reaction, which had been strengthened by the witch-hunt. The Communist Party did have some units in the South, which for the most part had to operate in a quasi-underground fashion. The CP units were holdovers from their union and antiracist work of the 1930s and 1940s, especially in the Steelworkers. But the SWP did not have any branches there.

Shortly after Melissa and Ken came back, we held a plenum of the YSA National Committee. We concluded we were still too weak organizationally to try to build a YSA unit in the South. The minority opposed this decision, because they thought we should be on the spot to counterpose ourselves to what they called the "reformist" SNCC leadership. The minority accused the majority of abstaining from the struggle, although the year before, when they had been the main leaders of the YSA, they failed to orient the organization to the Freedom Rides.

In retrospect, I think our decision not to try to establish a YSA unit in the South was correct at that time. But I think we were remiss in not having YSAers take a more active role in the campaigns organized by SNCC in the next years, such as the voter registration drives in Mississippi and other places. These campaigns were very positive and attracted many students and young people from the North to participate as well, and some of our members could have done so too.

The debate with the minority over this issue was really about the sectarian notion that the duty of revolutionists is always to oppose, from the left, whoever is leading a mass struggle at the moment. Trotskyist groups have been particularly susceptible to this sectarian disease. This probably stems from the fight we had to put up in the wake of Stalin's crushing victory in the Soviet Union. For decades we were a tiny minority, arguing for authentic Marxism against the devastating onslaught of lies and slanders of the large Stalinist organizations. An ideological rigidity and narrowness can develop in a small group living under such circumstances.

The notion can develop that every difference within an organization and with other groups is a make-or-break issue**.** If there are differences, one side must be 100 percent right and the other 100 percent wrong. As a result differences within the organization tend to lead to splits, with each side believing it has saved the one true program.

In relation to groups like SNCC that arise out of the mass movement, the same sectarian mentality tends to focus on the differences one may have with these groups rather than on the good work that they do. The only alternatives that sectarians see are

sideline criticisms or adaptation. Underlying this sectarian view is really a lack of confidence in the mass struggles and in Marxism, and the foolish notion there is nothing to be learned from others in the struggle.

We rejected this sectarian course and came out with a banner headline in the *Young Socialist* saying "Support SNCC!" Leroy McRae and I soon attended a SNCC conference at Fiske University in Nashville, Tennessee. What a spirited gathering!

Real social movements spawn artistic and musical expressions, and the Southern Black student movement was no exception. There was a lot of singing, not only of traditional Black protest songs, but of new songs that were created in the heat of the struggle. Ken Shilman told me how this was done, from his experience with the jailed Freedom Riders in Jackson, Mississippi. One person would start things off with the beginnings of a melody. Someone else would add a few words. Another would take it a step further. Corrections would be made. And so it went, until a song was created by the whole group.

During the SNCC conference, the attendees took time off to stage sit-ins at eateries that refused to serve Blacks. Leroy and I consulted with SNCC leader James Foreman, as to whether we should participate in these actions. He thought that as public spokespersons for the YSA, we shouldn't, to reduce the chances of further red-baiting of SNCC.

At one place, the counter attendant, a young white man, took relish in swishing a wet mop on the heads of the demonstrators, who were pledged to non-violence. A protester was beaten at another place. The violence and disrespect directed towards the demonstrators angered some of the young Blacks, and when we got back to our meeting place, a discussion broke out about the tactic of non-violence. Fred Zellner, a white SNCC leader who was a very courageous believer and practitioner of non-violence, gave an impassioned speech defending the tactic as a principle. The angry young Blacks backed down, but the confrontation would later resurface as SNCC became more militant and Black nationalist.

My brother Roger and Linda Thompson, who had recently married, moved from Providence to Baltimore, Maryland in March 1962, where they helped shore up a weak YSA chapter. Maryland, a border state, had many features in common with the southern Jim Crow states, so the civil rights movement was very active in Maryland. Roger and Linda became involved in the Civic Interest Group, a SNCC affiliate at largely Black Morgan State College. This group organized sit-ins and other protests in Baltimore, along Route 40, and in various towns along the strongly Jim Crow Eastern Shore. The Baltimore YSA also became involved in protests defying racist violence in the Eastern Shore town of Cambridge, where sharp conflict went on over

a two-year period.

In the summer of 1962, a new union, Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Employees, was fighting to establish itself in the New York City area hospitals. The union had called a strike at two hospitals, and the police were herding scabs across the picket lines to try and break the strike.

Because the union workforce was largely Black and Puerto Rican the strike was seen as part of the civil rights struggle. Malcolm X spoke at a strike meeting. Broader public opinion was being won over to the union's fight. Local 1199 leaders wanted to escalate the battle to gain wider publicity and force a showdown. They wanted to break through the police lines to disrupt the scab-herding, but thought that doing so would pose too great a risk to the jobs of the workers involved. So they turned to socialist youth groups. They asked the YSA, the YPSL and the Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF) to provide troops. I was among them.

When the scabs showed up, we charged at them at a signal from the union leadership. I didn't get very far when a cop threw me onto the ground, put his knees on my chest, and raising his billy club said, "make one move and I'll brain ya." I was arrested along with many others. The cops protected the scabs and won the skirmish, but the incident publicized the union's fight and drew more sympathy to it.

I shared a cell with Fred Goldstein, a leading member of YAWF who was also a member of its parent organization, Workers World. We were wary of each other, of course, since we were members of competing groups. But we had to spend many hours in a cell together, so we began discussing politics to relieve the boredom. Workers World had split from the SWP in 1959, about half a year before I joined. I asked Fred whether they still considered themselves Trotskyists, and he told me that publicly they didn't identify themselves as such, but that they still held classes on Trotsky's writings internally.

Soon a young white man was put in the cell with us. He had nothing to do with the strike, and we never learned why he was arrested. His clothing was torn, and he had bruises and a fat lip. He was shaking like a leaf, and didn't speak. Obviously, the cops had worked him over, which they did not do to us since they knew we had substantial outside support.

We got out later that evening after the union posted bail. Within a few weeks, a deal was brokered by Governor Nelsen Rockefeller that recognized the union (his banks had holdings in the two struck hospitals). From that time on, Local 1199 remained a significant force among hospital workers. As part of the deal, all charges against us were dropped.

10. The Cuban Missile Crisis

I made a trip back to Boston in the late Spring of 1962. While I was there, the YSA held a meeting on Cuba at a Unitarian church in Cambridge. The meeting featured a film on Cuba and a talk by Tony Camejo, Peter's younger brother. Violent Cuban counter-revolutionaries had been trying to break up pro-revolution events like this in other cities, so we formed a defense guard. The meeting was in the church basement, with the entrance down a flight of stairs.

Sure enough, the *gusanos* ("worms," as the Cubans call the counter-revolutionaries) tried to force their way into the meeting. They had gravity on their side, since the struggle was on the stairs. We put our strongest people as the front line against the *gusanos*, with the rest of us arrayed behind the front line to push the attackers back. My brother Roland was in the front line. After the meeting, he pointed out that with the force of most of the YSA at their backs, the front line had little choice but to fight if attacked.

Someone, probably a church official, called the cops. They came and situated themselves between the two forces. We explained that these people were trying to break up our meeting. The *gusanos* denounced us as communists. The argument went on back and forth for a few minutes, with the cops trying to make up their minds. But then one of the counter-revolutionaries hit a cop in the face. In two seconds the cops had cleared them out, and we went on with our meeting.

In the spring of 1962 there was a confrontation in Cuba between the forces around Castro and some of the leaders of the old Stalinist party, the People's Socialist Party (PSP). The three main political groups that supported the revolution — the July 26 Movement, the PSP and the student-based Revolutionary Directorate — had agreed to fuse the previous summer. The Integrated Revolutionary Organization had been formed to carry out this process.

Aníbal Escalante, a leader of the PSP, was the organizational secretary of the IRO in charge of bringing the three groups together. Escalante abused his position to almost exclusively promote former PSP people to leadership positions in the new organization.

Throughout the country, revolutionists from the July 26 Movement and Revolutionary Directorate were pushed aside. It was a crude attempt at a Stalinist takeover of the revolution. Most of the old PSP leaders did not participate in this plot and some strongly opposed Escalante's actions. Most members had gone over to the revolution and recognized the fighters around Castro as the leadership.

The conflict became public on March 13, at a commemoration of the fifth anniversary of a failed attack on Batista's palace by the Revolutionary Directorate. Student leader José Echevarría had been killed in that attack, but he had left a testament in the event that he did not survive. At the commemoration the chairperson read the testament. Fidel noticed that three lines of the testament which referred to God were left out by the chair. Before Castro spoke, he turned to the chairperson to ask why he had omitted the passages. The chair said lamely that he was "told" to leave the lines out. Castro then devoted the major portion of his speech to explaining why such rewriting of history was completely unacceptable and against the interests of the revolution. Impassioned, he asked, "Could such cowardice be called a dialectical concept of history? Could such a manner of thinking be called Marxism? Could such a fraud be called socialism? Could such a deception be called communism? No!"[1]

He went on to explain that Marxists stood on the shoulders of previous revolutionists who were not Marxists, such as the great Cuban independence fighters like José Martí. He pointed to revolutionists who represented the rising capitalist class in the great French and American democratic revolutions. It was ahistorical and anti-Marxist to rewrite history to fit some preconceived goal or pattern. The "revolution must be a school of unfettered thought" he said. We ran the whole speech in *The Militant* and put it out as a pamphlet under that title.

Just as that issue of *The Militant* was coming off the press, Castro made a public denunciation on March 26 of the attempted takeover of the new revolutionary organization by Escalante and his cohorts. The Stalinist plot was smashed with the same forthrightness and honesty that marked the revolution's confrontation with imperialism, with the lessons publicly drawn for all the Cuban people.

Castro noted that in every province, in every town, the general secretary of the local PSP group was made the general secretary of the IRO. The July 26 Movement people were shunted aside — the people who were the central leaders of the revolution! The basic program of the July 26 Movement, the speech "History Will Absolve Me" was being surreptitiously criticized. Escalante, Castro declared, "was creating conditions and giving instructions which tended to convert the [IRO] apparatus not into the apparatus of the workers' vanguard, but rather into a nest of privilege." The result would not be "furthering a free association of revolutionists" but "an army of

timid and submissive revolutionists," which would be "not a party but rather a tyranny, a straitjacket."[2]

We printed this speech, too. A powerful revolutionary movement was putting forward views similar to ours!

Cuba won a new ally in 1962 — the victorious Algerian revolution. After carrying out a bloody and dirty war for seven years, France finally agreed to grant Algeria its independence. A Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic was set up, but it was short-lived. It was toppled by the left wing of the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN, the National Liberation Front) which had organized the struggle against the French. In the summer a popular mobilization put Ahmed Ben Bella at the head of the government.

Before its victory, the FLN had adopted a revolutionary and socialist document, the Tripoli Program. The regime headed by Ben Bella sought to build socialism through a process of workers' self-management of the economy. Steps were taken in this direction after the liberation, following a mass exodus of the former French colonists. Industries that had been owned by the French colonists were nationalized, and workers' self-management committees were elected to run these enterprises. The most important included vineyards and wineries**.**

The Cubans established close ties with Algeria. They were seeking to extend the revolution not only to Latin America, where the Cuban revolution had a big impact, but also to Africa, where many struggles for freedom were taking place in Europe's colonies.

After a time, we concluded that the Ben Bella regime had become a workers' and farmers' government. By this designation, we meant it had the potential to become a full-fledged socialist revolution but was not there yet. I made a national tour for the YSA, speaking in defense of the Algerian revolution.

Alas, the revolution's potential was not realized. It was overthrown in a military coup in 1965. I will say more on that subject in a later chapter.

Tensions between Washington and Havana heated up in 1962, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis in October. In the months preceding the crisis, war drums were beating louder and louder in Congress and the daily press. We organized demonstrations against this escalation through the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. When President Kennedy announced his decision October 22 to blockade the island, preventing ships from entering Cuban waters on the grounds that the USSR was installing nuclear missiles in Cuba, Farrell called an immediate meeting of the SWP Political Committee.

I was a member of the PC, elected to that position by the National Executive Committee of the YSA. I was at home in the evening when I got Farrell's call, and I

quickly made my way over to 116 University Place. The atmosphere in New York City was tense. I passed a group of Puerto Rican teenagers who were clearly very frightened, talking in hushed tones about what would happen to the city if there were an atomic war.

The capitalist news media went into an anti-Cuba and anticommunist frenzy. We stood up to it. The PC discussed and approved the thrust of a statement to appear in the next issue of *The Militant*. It ran under the headline, "Stop the Crime Against Cuba!" We alerted SWP branches and YSA chapters that night to mobilize to support the broadest possible actions against the threat.

In New York, there were two major demonstrations. One was called by Women Strike for Peace and other peace groups. We joined some 20,000 protesters at the United Nations on this demonstration. Then the Fair Play for Cuba Committee held its own action, more specifically pro-Cuba in tone, of over 1,000 people, also near the UN. Leroy McRae joined a contingent from Harlem that marched down to join the FPCC demonstration. Leroy was the SWP's candidate for Attorney General in the November elections.

Leroy and the other SWP candidates used every opportunity to denounce the threats against Cuba and the USSR. Carl Feingold, who was the SWP's candidate for US senator, had been scheduled a half-hour slot on TV during the crisis. He made good use of his time. While most Americans were lining up behind Kennedy, a good number were against Washington's dangerous confrontation. Many in the New York region wrote or called the SWP, praising Feingold's denunciation of Kennedy's nuclear brinksmanship.

Rank and file members of the Communist Party were among them. The CP usually tried to ignore us, but not this time. To counter the favorable reaction among their members, the CP's *Worker* ran an article attacking the SWP election campaign. The gist of their argument was that the SWP would take votes away from the Democrats. This would hurt the cause of peace and the defense of Cuba, they suggested, because the Democrats were more peaceful than the Republicans — in spite of the fact that the crisis was created by Kennedy's Democratic administration with support from both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

The Young Peoples Socialist League participated in the demonstrations, under the auspices of the Student Peace Union. Their line, as usual, was to blame both the United States and the Soviet Union for the crisis. But they also opposed Cuba.

I thought it was grotesque to equate Havana with Washington in this crisis. On one side was the most powerful country in the world and on the other a small island nation, long suffering from imperialist exploitation, which has never been a military

threat to the US. It was Washington, not Havana, which had created the hostile relations between the two countries. Cuba had already been victim of a recent military expedition the year before, and it now faced real and growing military threats from the colossus to the north. Cuba's acceptance of the placing of Soviet nuclear missiles on Cuban soil was defensive.

The "third camp" position of SPU in relation to the US-Cuba conflict was so patently contrary to the facts and so paralyzing to real opposition to the blockade that the SPU was not able to play a leading role in the ongoing need to mobilize opposition to the crime against Cuba. This crisis registered SPU's incapacity to contribute to uniting all who were against Washington's warmongering, regardless of their views on the Cuban revolution. I wrote an article for the *Young Socialist*, "SPU Faces Crisis," in which I developed this point.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev ended the crisis by agreeing to pull the missiles out of Cuba, in return for a promise by the US not to invade the island. Khrushchev did so without consulting the Cuban leadership. Castro was properly outraged at this high-handed and arrogant action by an ally. *The Militant* published Castro's scathing speech on the question.

More information about the crisis came to light in later years. The Cuban leadership at the time thought that the installation of the Soviet missiles should be done openly and publicly, with an explanation to the world. The Kremlin overrode the Cubans, installed the missiles, and denied their existence at first. This confused many throughout the world, undermining the Cubans' credibility and creating the false impression of a secret aggression.

At a New York YSA meeting, I addressed the membership on how we did as a group during the crisis. YSA members and many supporters packed the meeting, and we all felt quite proud of what we had done to oppose the imperialist war threat. Even the minority, which disagreed with us on the nature of the Cuban revolution but opposed Washington's attempts to crush Cuba, joined the celebration that day.

James Cannon, in Los Angeles, feared we might get carried away and denounce the Soviet decision to pull back its missiles. He wrote a letter to the Political Committee, pointing out that the masses of people in the US and the world looked favorably on the USSR's decision, which helped block the threat of World War Three. Kennedy had been ready to push the button. (Years later, Robert McNamara, Kennedy's Defense Minister, conceded that Kennedy was "this close" — holding up his thumb and forefinger about a half inch apart — to launching the hydrogen bombs.) There was general agreement with Cannon's position.

We continued to point out that the US was the aggressor against the USSR. It was

the US which had the Soviet Union, East Europe, China, Vietnam and North Korea ringed with nuclear missiles, not the other way around. Washington had missiles in Turkey, just as close to the USSR as the Soviet missiles in Cuba would have been to the US.

Having gone through the missile crisis, we felt as comrades-in-arms with the revolutionary people of Cuba, who mobilized by the millions to resist any invasion. They and their revolutionary leadership did not flinch, even knowing they would be destroyed in an atomic war. They did not panic. They were serene and principled in defense of their freedom and independence. They stood up to the monster to the north, whom the great Cuban patriot José Martí had called “the beast.”

11. "SUBVERSION" IN INDIANA

In the fall of 1960, George Shriver and his wife Ellen moved from Boston to Bloomington, Indiana, where George enrolled as a graduate student in the Russian and East European Institute of Indiana University. George and Ellen initiated a Fair Play for Cuba Committee on the campus. The university newspaper went wild, denouncing "Mr. and Mrs. Fair Play" on the front page and charging they had been "trained in Moscow."

When the Fair Play for Cuba Committee publicly protested the Bay of Pigs invasion, ultra-rightist Tom Huston, the leader of the campus conservatives who controlled the student senate, warned that if the FPCC was allowed to defend Cuba on campus, there would soon be an organization opposing the US intervention in Vietnam. Since President Kennedy had only sent a small military force to Vietnam — the so-called "advisors" — Huston was prescient. He later became an aide to President Nixon and was associated with preparing Nixon's infamous "enemies list."

After establishing the FPCC, George and Ellen began winning people to the YSA. In the fall of 1961, they established a YSA chapter on campus, with the help of Dave Wulp and Beverly Scott, who had come to Indiana U from Carleton College. Among those who joined the YSA were Ralph Levitt, Jim Bingham, Tom Morgan and Gerry Foley. Gerry, who was fluent in many languages and could read many more, has played a leading role in the movement as a journalist and translator. George, Ellen, Dave and Bev left Indiana U in the summer of 1962, but they left behind a strong YSA and FPCC.

In the spring of 1962, the YSA brought Joe Hansen, *The Militant* editor, to Indiana U to speak about the Cuban revolution. Several hundred people attended, quite a big turnout in the Jim Crow boondocks of southern Indiana, where groups like the ultra-right John Birch Society found support.

In October, during the Cuban missile crisis, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee organized an antiwar demonstration. A mob of right-wing students, joined by John Birch Society supporters from town, attacked the 22 demonstrators. Some were kicked,

slugged, struck by rocks and knocked to the ground. Their placards were destroyed.

Two members of the mob were arrested, one for striking a cop and another for hitting a demonstrator. Their cases were scheduled for a City Court hearing in Bloomington in February 1963. But in January, newly-elected Prosecutor Thomas Hoadley dropped the charges against the two in order, he explained, to "clear the way for a full investigation." Hoadley went on to say: "I am not convinced that the total blame of this near-riot should be placed on the shoulders of these anti-demonstrators, as certain professors, committees and other people would suggest." This last remark was a slap at the American Association of University Professors for holding a hearing on the mob's attack on a faculty member.

Instead, Hoadley said, he was opening a grand jury investigation of the FPCC and YSA to determine if these organizations "were deliberately inciting riot and if it was done as a provocation." A few weeks later, Hoadley downplayed the "inciting to riot" charge and opened a direct political attack. He said he would now seek indictments under the Indiana Communism Act, a McCarthyite law passed in 1951. "The central issue," he said, "remains that this organization [the YSA], like its parent organization, the Socialist Workers Party, states that it is a revolutionary socialist organization."[1]

I went to Bloomington to discuss the situation with the YSA chapter. We had to take this attack very seriously. It was a grave attack on the very right of a socialist organization to exist. The witch-hunt was still strong in Indiana, but, on the other hand, there were signs of radicalization among students. The formation of the YSA and its recognition as a student organization reflected a changing atmosphere. We could find support and fight back.

We formed the Bloomington Defense Committee to reach out to everyone who wanted to oppose Hoadley's witch-hunt. They needed only to agree on basic democratic rights: that the YSA had a right to exist, and had a right to free speech and assembly. We were convinced that many people would agree with these democratic principles, regardless of their opinions about the YSA's socialist views.

On February 18, Hoadley demanded that before the grand jury investigation began, the university should withdraw recognition of the YSA as a campus group. The Bloomington Defense Committee organized support locally, and the YSA began a national campaign. Hoadley complained to the press that he was being abused in letters, press releases of the Defense Committee, and even by members of the state legislature. A state Senator characterized Hoadley's campaign as "ridiculous." "I don't know what Hoadley is trying to do," he said, "but it appears he is trying to run for president through all this publicity."[2]

The YSA sent Leroy McRae, the YSA National Organization Secretary, on a

nationwide speaking tour. On March 25, he spoke at Indiana University, under the auspices of the YSA, on the subject, "The Black Revolt in America." McRae defended the right of Black people to armed self-defense against the racist violence that was sweeping the South in response to the battle for civil rights.

Based on what McRae had said, the grand jury issued indictments of James Bingham, Ralph Levitt and Tom Morgan, three leaders of the Bloomington YSA, under the state Communism Act. The YSAers faced three years in prison if convicted.

Hoadley announced the indictment on May 1, May Day. The indictment charged that the three students had assembled on March 25 "for the purpose of advocating or teaching that the government of the United States, or of the State of Indiana, should be overthrown by force, violence or any unlawful means, voluntarily participating therein by their presence, aid or instigation, and as officers of a Trotskyite communist organization called the Young Socialist Alliance, the youth group of the Socialist Workers Party." Hoadley said to the press, "We are not out to bring disfavor to Indiana U., or to gain a lasting name for ourself. We only want to stamp out Communism and what it stands for before it gets a foothold here."[3]

As YSA National Chairman, I issued a news release that refuted the charges. We also obtained agreement from the Chicago YSA and SWP to free up Jack Barnes from some of his responsibilities there so that he could help organize the defense effort in Indiana. The Bloomington Defense Committee retained local attorney James Cotner to defend the trio, and raised $1,000 bail for each of the accused. The Defense Committee became a national organization and adopted the name Committee to Aid the Bloomington Students. Paulann Groninger of the Bloomington YSA became National Secretary of CABS.

A delegation from the Indiana Civil Liberties Union met with the defendants on May 4 and filed a "friend of the court" brief on their behalf. The American Civil Liberties Union and the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee also announced their support. I visited the national office of the ECLC in New York and asked Edith Tiger, a leader of the group, to help us find a Constitutional lawyer. She referred me to Leonard Boudin, the general counsel for the ECLC. Boudin was probably the best civil liberties lawyer in the country, and an authority on Constitutional law. He agreed to take the case, and the ECLC agreed to pay the costs. But we were also required to have a lawyer who was a member of the Indiana bar. So, we had to make sure that Boudin and local attorney James Cotner would be compatible.

Cotner came to New York to meet Boudin. I was present when they met in Boudin's office in a skyscraper on 42nd Street. Cotner, who had never been to New York, seemed dazzled by the Big Apple, by a Broadway show that he had seen the night

before, and by the illustrious attorney Boudin. But Boudin treated the small-town attorney suavely and respectfully. While we were talking Boudin received a telephone call from the famous folk-singer Joan Baez for whom he was handling a legal matter. "Joan Baez!" Cotner exclaimed (he pronounced her name BAYS), "Joan Baez! Wait 'til I tell my daughter that I was sitting here when Joan Baez called!"

We agreed to challenge the constitutionality of the Communism Act. Similar laws in other states had been thrown out on these grounds. Boudin would make the main arguments in briefs and oral arguments, in the state courts, federal courts and if necessary the US Supreme Court. Cotner would file the necessary briefs locally, and would serve as defense lawyer if a local trial was held.

Defending the Bloomington students became a top priority for the YSA. We prepared an eight-page special issue of the *Young Socialist* devoted to the case, to enable the YSA to get out the facts to each city and campus where we had members. George Shriver edited it, and I also did a lot of work. I worked straight through and finished the mock-up of the paper at 4:30 a.m. I had been bent over the layout table for hours, and when I finished, I couldn't straighten up. I walked home with my elbows on my knees, for over a mile.

The Indiana press was largely pro-Hoadley, but some newspapers did speak out and oppose his witch-hunt. Hoadley fed the press lurid charges about the YSA: that there was a "communist apparatus" operating on campus, complete with "cell meetings" and "speakers imported from Moscow"; that YSA members were "switching cars to hinder surveillance"; "jockeying a mimeograph to grind out propaganda from auto to auto" and "using narcotics to recruit members."[4]

The most widely read paper in the state, the *Indianapolis Star*, published a smear story with names, addresses and other details about YSA members, even including their parents' names. The *Star* singled out Paulann Groninger and her husband William, and ran a photo of the apartment building where they lived. The landlord evicted them, and the *Star* triumphantly headlined on the front page, "Landlord Tells Two YSA Members to Leave."

The three defendants toured campuses in the East and Midwest, speaking out and gathering support. An Indiana U professor blasted Hoadley in an article in *The Nation*. *The New York Times* reported that IU President Stahr publicly opposed the witch-hunt.

The *Bloomington Star-Courier* reported, "The president of Indiana University has felt compelled to speak out before a national forum on the issues at stake. Some 150 IU professors have purchased newspaper space to take a stand. A newspaper in Hong Kong banner-lined the YSA story on Page One. On and on, around the world,

the focus is on Bloomington's 'bout' with the YSA." A bit of an exaggeration, but word was definitely getting out.

On June 28 a judge threw out the indictment on a technicality, but Hoadley immediately asked the grand jury for a new one. The new indictment was handed down July 18, and added another meeting to the March 25 one that McRae had addressed. This was a private discussion in the apartment of a YSA supporter on May 2, the day after the first indictment was issued. The landlord had secretly taped-recorded a discussion among YSA activists of how to fight the attack on their rights.

Technically, the new indictment meant that this was now a new case. Cotner, who wanted to get off the hot seat, declined to be the local defense lawyer for the new case.

We had to find another member of the Indiana bar. Jack Barnes, Ralph Levitt, and I began to scour the state to find one. Jim Bingham's father was a lawyer, but he said that he would take the case only if he could argue that the defendants weren't really serious about socialism. He rejected our insistence that the defendants run the defense, that Boudin be the Constitutional lawyer, that we fight to have the Communism Act declared unconstitutional, and that there be a public defense campaign. So he was out.

Another lawyer, who had an office in the back room of a nightclub, agreed to our conditions. He said he didn't care if we were communists and thought he could do well by us. He boasted of getting a client off on an insanity plea. (The client was known in the press as the "womb eater" for his grisly murders.) But he wanted $4,000 which, fortunately, we could not afford.

Aside from this joker, we could not find an Indiana lawyer who was willing to take the case in partnership with Boudin. Jack and the CABS activists finally found Daniel T. Taylor III, who was located just over the Indiana border in Kentucky. Taylor was also a member of the Indiana bar and agreed to take the case on our terms.

Hoadley changed his tune somewhat. He now told the press that he would not concentrate on the charge that the three students advocated the overthrow of the US government, in order to focus on their alleged advocacy of the overthrow of the state government of Indiana. Trying to prove that the US government was the students' target would have looked strange since the federal government brought no charges. But the charge that the three defendants sought to overthrow the state of Indiana was even more ridiculous. Socialism in one state? Whenever I spoke on the case to students, the absurdity of this allegation never failed to produce laughter.

The defendants were being charged because of their beliefs. So, in order to explain the case, we had to explain the ideas of the defendants. We published Leroy McRae's

speech on the Black struggle as a pamphlet. The defendants and other CABS spokespeople naturally got into discussions about socialism with those who came to hear them. We were gaining new YSA members through this fight.

We were unfailingly scrupulous in managing the money collected for the defense, and we never attempted to identify supporters of the defense effort or the committee with the political views of the defendants. The SWP had a long tradition of building defense committees for victims of capitalist police, courts and prosecutors. We always sought broad support for the democratic rights of those under attack. This policy was well-known and respected on the left and among civil libertarians. Because academic freedom was involved, many professors and faculty at Indiana University and around the country became sponsors.

Finally, in March 1964, a state judge agreed with Boudin that the Indiana Communism Act was unconstitutional. This ruling not only invalidated that thought-control statute and quashed the indictments. It set the precedent that such laws in other states were also unconstitutional. Similar laws were being used to prosecute civil rights fighters in the South.

The Indianapolis Times urged Hoadley to appeal the decision to the Indiana Supreme Court. He did so, with the support of the Indiana Attorney General. In January, 1965, the state Supreme Court upheld the witch-hunting law and reinstated the indictments. However, we had in fact already defeated the prosecution. It would take a few years for the case to wind its way through the federal courts, but the law was finally struck down as unconstitutional.

Our work in fighting this case was greatly helped by the tradition and example of the leaders of the SWP. James P. Cannon, the SWP's main founder, had long experience in this kind of activity, dating back to his time in the early Communist Party in the 1920s, where he built the International Labor Defense. The ILD defended victims of political frame-ups, regardless of their views. The most famous case taken up by the ILD was defense of the principled anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti. After a long campaign, the two unbowed workers were executed on trumped up murder charges; but the huge defense effort made the ruling class pay dearly for the blood that they took.

The SWP had frequent need for defense efforts of various kinds. Among the major cases were the defense of Leon Trotsky against Stalin's infamous Moscow Trials in the 1930s; defense of the SWP and Minneapolis Teamsters leaders in the 1941 Smith Act trial; and the "Case of the Legless Veteran," an attempt by the government in the 1950s to deprive SWP member James Kutcher of his livelihood in a federal job, to which he was entitled as a veteran maimed in the Second World War. It was well known that the SWP conducted such efforts openly and honestly. This reputation for

integrity served us well in the Bloomington fight.

We also learned from this and previous experiences that effective defense campaigns do more than help push back witch-hunt attacks. The defendants are able to turn the tables on the prosecutors and the cops by exposing their contempt for democratic rights and the Constitution.

Around this time I had another personal experience that showed how closely the police monitored us. In the spring of 1963, Ethel and I broke up. The very next day following our decision, an FBI agent was waiting for Ethel outside our apartment building. He wanted to know if Ethel would now be willing to talk to the political police agency. She told him to go to hell, and went to work.

12. THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

In 1963 the Black struggle deepened in the South and expanded into the North. Leroy McRae and I attended the Third Annual Conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Atlanta over the April 13 weekend. "The heroes of the conference were the embattled delegates from Greenwood, Miss.," I wrote in *The Militant*, "where SNCC's voter registration project has been met by shootings, arrests and other forms of intimidation. Robert Moses, field secretary leading the voter-registration drive in Greenwood, said that SNCC intends to go ahead with plans to register the Negroes in Leflore County where Greenwood is situated."

Historian Howard Zinn addressed the conference. "Dr. Zinn said that it is a myth that Southern racism is a mere distortion on a basically sound, democratic America. Racism is a national problem integral to the whole social structure and characteristic of the entire history of the United States, he said. While the Negro is most blatantly suppressed in the South, Dr. Zinn pointed out; anti-Negro discrimination exists everywhere in the country where there are Negroes. 'You only need to look at Harlem to know this is true' he said."

I summed up: "The general impression an observer received of the outlook of most SNCC workers is that their movement seeks a fundamental change in the social structure of the United States. The conference theme was 'Emancipation Then: Freedom Now!'"[1]

Demonstrations were spreading across the South, organized by Dr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, SNCC, local chapters of the NAACP, and others.

The Battle of Birmingham began in April. The nation and the world saw and read about vicious police attacks against peaceful demonstrators. The cops used clubs, rifle butts, dogs and water cannon. Extra-legal racist groups also attacked the movement. Among the casualties were six murdered Black children, four of whom (young girls) were killed by a bomb planted at a Black church. There was a growing response in the North, demanding that the federal government do something. The Kennedy administration, however, dragged its heels. Not only that, it sought to cajole

Black leaders into giving up demonstrations, calling for the movement to shift from the streets to the courts.

The SWP demanded that Washington send federal troops to the South to protect the embattled African American demonstrators and communities. We demanded that Washington deputize and arm Blacks to defend themselves against racist mobs and the racist local and state police and national guardsmen. When Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary in Jackson, Mississippi, was assassinated on June 12, *The Militant's* front page headline was, "Armed Defense Groups Needed in South to Put an End to Attacks by Racist Killers." *The Militant* pointed out that no new civil rights legislation was needed to do this; all that was needed was the enforcement of Constitutional provisions and legislation that had been on the books since the aftermath of the Civil War.

Over the years the SWP has been criticized by some people on the left for demanding that federal troops be sent to protect the civil rights demonstrators and enforce civil rights legislation and court rulings. The issue first came up when President Eisenhower sent troops in 1957 to prevent violent mobs and local authorities from stopping integration of the Arkansas high schools. Many of these critics, including some of the oppositionists in the Socialist Workers Party, opposed this move. Their stance would have weakened the Black struggle and allowed the racists to win, all in the name of working class independence of the capitalist government.

Our leftist critics tended to hold that the overturn of Jim Crow could or should be accomplished only by a proletarian revolution. In effect, they presented the perspective of a socialist revolution in the future as an excuse for not pursuing the fight for Black rights by any means necessary now.

In contrast, we held that Black freedom fighters had every right to take advantage of divisions between the federal government, representing the capitalist class as a whole, and the Southern state governments, representing local or regional interests. The federal government was no longer committed, as it had been in the past, to the defense of segregation, which violated the US Constitution, embarrassed the United States before the world, and was no longer as vital to the capitalist social order as it had been in the early years of the century. Washington now recognized the need to modify or even abolish segregation, although the government wanted to do so with the fewest concessions to the Black masses.

We argued that it was correct for the SWP to join Blacks demanding federal action to enforce the constitutional provisions, court decisions and laws that upheld Black rights. This approach inspired further fights and demands, and increased the self-confidence and organization of Blacks, and Black workers in particular, including

in the field of self-defense.

In Detroit a local coalition led by Rev. Albert Cleage called for a June 23 demonstration. Dr. Martin Luther King called for a national march on Washington. Dr. King sharply criticized Kennedy for failing to take a "moral stand" on desegregation. King declared that both the Democratic and Republican parties "have betrayed the cause of justice" by collaborating with Dixiecrats. (This was a play on words commonly used at that time. "Dixie" was a nickname for the South, so "Dixiecrats" became a label for the Southern Jim Crow Democrats.)

The Rev. James Bevel, also of the SCLC, was sharper: "Some punk who calls himself the President has the audacity to tell people to go slow. I'm not prepared to be humiliated by white trash the rest of my life, including Mr. Kennedy."[2] Kennedy urged calling off the March on Washington, but King and the other leaders said "No."

The June 23 march in Detroit was the biggest civil rights action in the nation's history up until that time. *The Detroit News* described it: "As if a huge dam had burst, thousands of Negroes swept down Woodward [Ave.] in waves yesterday in their 'walk to freedom.'"[3] A few thousand whites joined 200,000 Blacks in the action.

A formal call for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom was issued by the SCLC, the national NAACP, SNCC and four other civil rights groups. The date set was for August 28. A. Philip Randolph, who had helped organize and lead the all-Black Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Black pacifist and social democrat Bayard Rustin played important roles in organizing the march. Their presence helped convince the United Auto Workers and some other labor unions to back the march.

The SWP and YSA did everything we could to build the March on Washington. We publicized the march in our press and we spoke about it everywhere we were able to. We urged trade unions, civil rights organizations and other groups to make the trip to Washington. On the great day itself, we marched with our fellow demonstrators, and we also sold thousands of copies of *The Militant* with the headline "FREEDOM NOW PARTY". I was quite proud of myself for selling more than 100 copies.

The idea of creating a new political party based on the Black fight for equal rights was gaining ground in the face of the two capitalist parties' opposition to the freedom fight. Advocates included Black newsman William Worthy; Daniel Watts, chairman of the Liberation Committee for Africa; civil rights attorney Conrad Lynn and Rev. Cleage. Worthy, who had initiated the call for a Freedom Now Party, undertook a nationwide speaking tour to promote the idea. Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad, declared, "There will be no real freedom for the so-called Negro in America until he elects his own political leaders and his own candidates."[4] A news conference in the capital on the day of the march called for the formation of the

Freedom Now Party.

The march was enormous, about a quarter of a million people in size. The turnout emboldened Black people and white fighters for equal rights, too. It was the largest action I had ever participated in, and I could feel the power of ordinary people when we unite and organize for our rights and needs. It was exhilarating. However, the event was tightly controlled from the top to minimize conflict with the Kennedy administration. John Lewis, the national chairman of SNCC, was barred from giving the speech he prepared and had to give a watered-down version. Everyone remembers Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, a powerful and eloquent expression of democratic aspirations, but the speech with the best politics was the one not given.

Catholic Archbishop O'Boyle of Washington, who was to give the convocation, read an advance copy of Lewis' speech and threatened to walk off the platform if it was delivered. Walter Reuther, head of the United Auto Workers union, demanded that certain parts be censored and others rewritten. The leaders of the march gave in. What the liberals didn't like was the fact that Lewis denounced both the Democratic and Republican parties, and the timid civil rights bill that Kennedy was backing.

My brother Roger Sheppard took a room at the Statler Hotel, where many members of SNCC were also staying. Malcolm X visited the hotel and held an impromptu discussion in the lobby with the people staying there. They discussed the significance of the march and considered what a Black revolution would entail. After the march, Roger went to John Lewis' room and asked for a copy of his speech for *The Militant*. Lewis gave it to him.

Here are excerpts from John Lewis' speech as it appeared in the next issue of *The Militant*:

"In good conscience, we cannot support the administration's civil rights bill, for it is too little and too late. There's not one thing in the bill that will protect our people from police brutality.... The voting section of this bill will not help thousands of Black citizens who want to vote.... This nation is still a place of cheap political leaders who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with open forms of political, economic and social exploitation. What political leader here can stand up and say 'My party is the party of principles'? The party of Kennedy is also the party of [racist Democrat Mississippi Senator] Eastland. The party of [liberal Republican] Javits is also the party of [right-winger] Goldwater. Where is our party? ... The revolution is a serious one. Mr. Kennedy is trying to take the revolution out of the streets and put it in the courts. Listen, Mr. Kennedy. Listen, Mr. Congressman. Listen, fellow citizens, the Black masses are on the march for jobs and freedom, and we must say to the politicians that there won't be a 'cooling off' period.... The time will come

when we will not confine our marching to Washington. We will march through the South, through the Heart of Dixie, the way [Union Civil War General] Sherman did. We shall pursue our own 'scorched earth' policy and burn Jim Crow to the ground — nonviolently."[5]

The White House and liberals routed the march not to the Capitol building, where it would be seen as a protest against the government, but to the Lincoln Memorial. As Malcolm X put it a few months later to the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, the white power structure "told you when to arrive, what route to march, what signs to carry, even told the leaders what speeches they could make. And then they told you: 'All you niggers out of town by sundown.'"[6]

The restrictions on the march imposed by the government also showed the ruling class fear of Black and working-class mass action in the streets. At this time, Malcolm himself, in the face of the Nation of Islam's abstention, was searching for a road into this growing mass struggle.

By its size and visibility, the march on Washington strengthened the resolve of Black people to continue the fight. Struggles intensified throughout the country, and were met with official and unofficial violence.

Rev. Cleage and other militant leaders called a Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, held in Detroit in November. The windup rally heard William Worthy, Cleage and Malcolm X. The conference also voted to put a Freedom Now Party on the ballot in Michigan for the 1964 elections. It was here also that Malcolm delivered his famous "Message to the Grass Roots," cited above.

In that speech, Malcolm explained that the "Black revolution is worldwide in scope and in nature. The Black revolution is sweeping Asia, is sweeping Africa, is rearing its head in Latin America. The Cuban revolution — that's a revolution. They overturned the system. Revolution is in Asia, revolution is in Africa, and the white man is screaming because he sees revolution in Africa….

"A revolutionary is a Black nationalist. He wants a nation. I was reading some beautiful words by Reverend Cleage, pointing out why he couldn't get together with someone else in the city because all of them were afraid of being identified with Black nationalism. If you're afraid of Black nationalism, you're afraid of revolution. And if you love revolution, you love Black nationalism."[7]

13. THE 1963 CONVENTION OF THE SWP

The discussion leading up to the Twentieth National Convention of the SWP, held in July, 1963 centered on the new stage of the Black struggle and the sharp rise in Black nationalist ideas and attitudes, especially in the North. The growth of the Nation of Islam; the receptiveness among Blacks to the ideas of the Nation's most prominent spokesman, Malcolm X; and the evolution of Malcolm's thinking in a revolutionary direction (which was noticeable before his break with the Nation of Islam and its leader, Elijah Muhammad) were part of the debate.

Malcolm not only blasted white racism and oppression, he roused the masses with his open advocacy of armed self-defense against racist attacks. His wit and sarcasm in exposing the white power structure, his ability to out-debate white liberals no matter how educated, his arguments designed to instill courage, optimism and self-confidence in the Black masses, his denunciations of the government, the liberals, and the capitalist parties, and his espousal of revolution were finding resonance. So was the message that Blacks should unite under their own leadership freed from any subordination to whites, a key aspect of Black nationalism.

George Breitman, a party activist since the late 1930s, and a leader since the Second World War, drafted the resolutions for the SWP National Committee meetings and conventions on the Black struggle. Breitman was the main author of "Freedom Now," the resolution on the Black struggle adopted by the convention. At the time George was living in Detroit, a center of rising Black consciousness and Black nationalist activities. Although he was white, he gained a deep appreciation of the Black movement, and he went on to write widely respected and popular books and pamphlets about Malcolm X and Black nationalism. Over the years, many Black militants, who appreciated George's writings, were surprised to learn that George was white.

Like the earlier discussion on Cuba, this discussion on socialism and Black

nationalism was exhilarating and educational, and I learned a lot.

To aid our understanding of these issues, we republished the discussions SWP leaders had with Leon Trotsky on the question in 1932 and 1939, as well as the resolutions that were adopted by the SWP subsequently. Trotsky, starting from what he had experienced and learned from Lenin and the experience of the Russian revolution about the importance of the struggles of oppressed nations for self-determination, helped educate the early leaders of the SWP on the revolutionary potential of the fight of American Blacks for their rights as an oppressed nationality within US society. One of those leaders was C.L.R. James, the prominent West Indian Black revolutionary intellectual. C.L.R. James helped draft the SWP's first resolutions on the Black struggle.

A rank and file member, Robert DesVerney, played a leading role in the 1963 discussion and was elected to a place in the national leadership, in part because of his contributions. He submitted an article to the party's pre-convention discussion bulletin entitled, "Why White Radicals Can't Understand Black Nationalism." In his witty and clear style, he skewered sectarian and narrowly trade unionist ideas, semi-patriotic and assimilationist preconceptions, and other baggage which — in addition to lack of experience with the Black struggle — tended to cause white radicals to reject or feel threatened by Black nationalism.

DesVerney was a Black intellectual who was making his living as a translator of Russian and other languages. I visited him once in his apartment in 1963, and found him reading the score of a Schoenberg string quartet, humming to himself. Another time, at a restaurant, he explained several advanced mathematical concepts that I, a mathematics graduate from MIT, had not known about. But while DesVerney could sail happily in these esoteric atmospheres, he had a good practical feel for the Black struggle. He understood why Blacks were becoming more nationalistic and he could explain this clearly and convincingly. His articles about meetings in Harlem captured the language and expressed the new mood among Blacks who were becoming more angry and combative.

During the discussion, we came to understand that the suspicions and hostility felt by Blacks toward whites could not be equated to the racism that most whites felt towards Blacks. The Nation of Islam, whom the media dubbed the Black Muslims, held whites to be devils. Was this the same as white racist theories about the nature of Blacks? No, we said. Prejudice is wrong, whoever espouses it. But the prejudice of some Blacks toward whites is a distorted expression of opposition to the oppression of Blacks by white society. The prejudices of Blacks do not lead to or reinforce oppression of whites. White racism towards Blacks, however, is both a false justification for and a form of the oppression of Blacks.

The nationalism of the oppressed is different from and counterposed to the nationalism of the oppressor. "White nationalism" is the expression of white supremacy. Black nationalism is the expression of opposition to that oppression. American nationalism against Third World countries is a reactionary expression of the drive by US imperialism to dominate and plunder those countries. The nationalist fight of those oppressed countries against imperialism, often including expressions of anti-Americanism, is progressive and can lead to socialist and internationalist conclusions, as the Cuban revolution demonstrated.

We understood that Black nationalism was a progressive force in the Freedom Now movement. As Malcolm X put it, "If you love revolution, you love Black nationalism." The convention reaffirmed and strengthened our support to the right of Black people to self-determination, including the right to an independent Black state. Black liberation, in whatever form, would be a central part of a revolution by the entire working class to overthrow capitalism.

We were in a minority on the socialist left on this question. The Communist Party sided with the more conservative Black leaders who presented Black nationalism as divisive or worse. James Jackson, the editor of *The Worker*, wrote in the July 7, 1963 issue: "The Muslim organization in general and Malcolm X in particular, are ultra-reactionary forces operating in the orbit of the Negro people's movement with the strategic assignment to sow ideological confusion …" Jackson accused Malcolm X of being "an agent of their [the Blacks'] enemies and consequently an opponent of their progress."[1]

A minority view at the SWP convention, presented by Richard Fraser (Kirk) of the Seattle branch, held that the Black struggle was decisively integrationist and that Black nationalism diverted the struggle from the revolutionary road. He called his position "revolutionary integration." Fraser had been debating George Breitman about these issues in party discussion bulletins since the mid-1950s. He also opposed the call for US troops to enforce school desegregation and other constitutional rights of Blacks in the South.

* * *

The convention voted to support the recent reunification of the Fourth International, healing a ten-year split that occurred in 1953 over political, tactical and organizational issues. The split led to the formation of two public factions of the Fourth International, led by the International Secretariat (IS) and the International Committee (IC).

The SWP had always been a strong and active supporter of the Fourth

International, even though repressive legislation had barred us from belonging to the FI since 1940. In the split, the SWP supported the International Committee, along with groups in Britain, France, Peru, Argentina and several other countries. The International Secretariat had a stronger presence in most of the other countries.

The main political issue behind the split concerned the stance and tactics to adopt toward the Communist parties and the regime in the Soviet Union.

The IC thought that the IS was adapting to Stalinism, toning down criticism and demanding a general tactic of joining the Communist parties. The IS expected that the Soviet Union and the Communist parties would evolve to the left under the impact of a coming war with the imperialists. The IS supporters argued that the SWP and the IC were sectarian toward the opportunities they saw in the CPs and the divisions in the Soviet bureaucracy after Stalin's death.

The SWP, and the IC generally, also felt that the IS side held an over-centralized concept of the role of the international center. Above all, the IC objected to the high-handed organizational methods exercised by the IS under its main leader, Michel Pablo, who promoted splits in a number of sections of the FI, including in the SWP.

These differences began to narrow soon after the split. Both groups voiced strong support to the Hungarian Revolution in 1956. Similarly, the main groups on both sides had positive reactions to the Cuban revolution and to the Algerian revolution. Tentative discussions indicated that the organizational questions could be overcome. It was agreed that Pablo could not be the central leader of the reunified International. Both sides began to work toward reunification, and this was accomplished shortly before the SWP convention. In fact, the central document adopted at the reunification congress, "For Early Reunification of the World Trotskyist Movement," had been drafted by the SWP leadership.

One of the common activities that brought the movement together was defense of the Peruvian peasant leader Hugo Blanco. Blanco had been recruited to Trotskyism while a student in Argentina. When he returned to Peru, he became active in the organization of mass peasant unions near Cuzco. Most of these peasants were Indians or *mestizo* (mixed race), and many spoke Quechua, an Indian language that Blanco knew.

These peasant unions waged militant struggles against the landowners. The landless peasants faced conditions resembling serfdom supported by private landlord armies and the Peruvian military. The peasant unions formed armed self-defense units. The peasants' rallying cry became "*Tierra o Muerte!*" (Land or Death!) Blanco became an organizer and public spokesperson for the peasant unions, and his fame spread in the region and throughout Peru.

Despite the upheaval in the countryside, no comparable battles by the working class and poor took place in the cities. A government offensive against the peasant unions led the fighters to adopt guerrilla tactics. The government proclaimed martial law in the Cuzco area. For months, the guerrilla fighters eluded capture under the protection of the peasantry in a large swath of the countryside. Blanco's name became known internationally. Finally, he was captured by the army and narrowly escaped being executed on the spot.

Commenting on this in an interview in Algiers, Che Guevara said, "Hugo Blanco has set an example, a good example, and he struggled as much as he could. But he suffered a defeat; the popular forces suffered a defeat. It's only a passing stage. Afterward will come another stage."[2]

After his arrest, Blanco's life was in grave danger. An international defense effort was launched. In this country, we sparked the creation of the US Committee for Justice for Latin American Political Prisoners (USLA) that took up Blanco's case and soon cases of other victims of repression on the continent. This international effort finally led to Blanco's release, although he was forced to go into exile. Later, Blanco was permitted to return to Peru, where he was elected to parliament while still espousing the revolutionary socialist cause.

On both sides of the former split in the International, there were recalcitrants who opposed reunification. On the IC side, the British Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy, was violently opposed. The French section, led by Pierre Lambert, supported Healy. Central to Healy's platform was the notion that Cuba remained capitalist after the revolution, and that Castro was a bourgeois leader. On the IS side, Michel Pablo, who had been the main spokesman for the Fourth International prior to the split, and who had become a prominent supporter of the Algerian revolution, opposed reunification. Also on the IS side, a grouping of Latin American organizations, led by Juan Posadas, went its own way. The supporters of Posadas had a sectarian, competitive attitude toward the Castro leadership; they also adopted some very strange crackpot positions, including advocacy of a nuclear Third World War. Soon after the reunification of the International, Michel Pablo split and established a small international grouping.

Most Trotskyists in the world, however, supported reunification. The reunited Fourth International was sometimes known by the name of its leading body, the United Secretariat.

The Wohlforth-Robertson faction in the SWP split into two groups, but both rejected the reunification at the 1963 SWP convention. They charged that the SWP was rapidly abandoning Marxism. Both groups supported Healy, but Healy supported

Wohlforth against Robertson, demanding that Robertson accept his line on all questions. After the convention, Wohlforth turned over to the majority documents that proved that Robertson was disloyal to the party and violated party rules. The Robertson group was expelled. A year later, the Wohlforth group was also expelled. By the time of their expulsions, neither of these two groupings had any real intention of supporting or helping to build the SWP.

At the convention, a meeting of pro-Cuba activists discussed the situation in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Cubans living in the United States who supported the July 26 Movement had helped us build the FPCC. Now most of them had returned to Cuba. In most areas, the FPCC had dwindled down to supporters of the SWP and YSA. Since we did not want the FPCC to become a sectarian front group, the meeting decided to stop trying to build it. The FPCC then existed for a while as a paper organization, until the assassination of President John Kennedy dealt it a mortal blow.

* * *

The SWP's position of giving critical support to the positions of the Chinese government in its dispute with Moscow was a subject of controversy. We defended those positions that echoed our criticism of the Soviet bureaucracy's break with Leninism and the class struggle outlook on a world scale. (At one point the Kremlin accused Peking of capitulating to "Trotskyism" and Peking made the same accusation against Moscow.) We also defended the Chinese revolution against the Soviet government's denial of economic and defense assistance to China. These measures were aimed at courting imperialism at China's expense.

But the Chinese party still supported Stalin, and ruled the country with Stalinist methods. The Chinese Communist Party had been Stalinized following the failure of the 1925-27 revolution, which Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalists had drowned in the blood of a million workers. The Chinese CP had established a bureaucratized structure during the years of struggle against the Japanese occupation and Chiang Kai-shek, and it brought that model of organization into the victorious 1949 revolution. It was a variation on the Soviet system, topped by a privileged bureaucratic caste headed by Mao Zedong. We reaffirmed our position in favor of a political revolution in China to establish workers' democracy.

A minority led by Arne Swabeck, who had been a party leader since the early days, back with James P. Cannon, held that Mao and his party had broken with Stalinism long before the taking of power. We should cease advocating political revolution, he said, and give Mao our support, albeit with criticisms. This position was supported by a small grouping in Los Angeles, where Swabeck lived, and in Seattle and Milwaukee.

At the convention I also began to better understand a negative result of the party's isolation in the 1950s. In discussions with Farrell, I learned that the central party leadership made a decision to loosen party standards of activism in that period. The idea was to hold as much of the cadre together until more propitious times came along. Then, as collective action would be required in the mass movement, it would make the need for disciplined functioning by the party membership more understandable.

Certain branches, under the looser party rules, tended to go their own ways. One or two leaders in such branches became almost like cult leaders of their tiny groups. This was reflected at the 1963 convention in the monolithic positions of the Seattle and Milwaukee branches. The Seattle branch soon split from the SWP, and founded the Freedom Socialist Party, under the leadership of Clara Kaye and Richard Fraser, who were husband and wife. Sometime later, they divorced, leading to another split in their group. Earlier, in 1959, before I had joined, another monolithic grouping in the Buffalo and Youngstown branches, led by Sam Marcy, had split from the SWP and formed the Workers World Party. The Milwaukee branch also split away as the party began to grow and require cohesive action.

These were extreme examples. In Boston, where Larry Trainor was the central leader, he tended to bring along the whole branch with his opinions or his interpretation of the party line, and to assume that it was only right that there should be no serious challenge to his views. Some of his views were wrong, in my opinion, and his attitude led to some negative developments later. Trainor never fostered a cult around himself, however, nor did he counterpose his own leadership to that of the national party. As a result, many of those he helped recruit and educate became valuable leaders of the movement, although they sometimes had to overcome aspects of his influence in doing so.

Peter Camejo and I were elected to the party's National Committee by the convention delegates. I was elected as a full member with a deciding vote, and Peter was elected as an alternate. Alternates participated in meetings of the NC with voice and consultative vote. Alternates were also ranked in sequential order, and the highest ranking alternate would become a full member with a deciding vote if an opening appeared in the full committee. The NC elected me to the Political Committee, the daily leadership committee resident in New York.