

POLITICAL BUREAU MINUTES.....29 July 1968

Present: Full: Robertson, Turner, Nelson, Henry, Stoute(late)

Alts: Janacek, Ellens(late)

Staff: Rogers, Cunningham, Gordon

Other: Mark T., Syrek (Full CC, Bay Area)

Absent: Alt: Small(exc.) Staff: Martin

Meeting convened 8:35 p.m.

- Agenda:
1. General Information and Correspondence
  2. Personnel and Organization
  3. Internal Discussion
  4. Mage Economics Document
  5. Biafra
  6. Czechoslovakia

1. General Information and Correspondence:

- a. Esquire Magazine: August issue features cover story on radicals in the Army. As expected, concentrated overwhelmingly on Andy Stapp, but is also favorable to us, with several references to Gallatin. The author also included as his opinions our criticisms of YAWF as adventuristic, and other points made by Robertson during interview. Article repeatedly put us on a par in importance with the SWP. The authorities at Ft. Hood originally tried to ban the issue on their base, thereby increasing interest in it enormously among the soldiers.
- b. Wallace: Polls reported in the Village Voice show the right-wing third party candidate has obtained considerable support outside the South, estimate 20% of the U.S. population would like to vote for him. Studies of his social base show he has tapped a vein of plebian discontent, mainly poor whites whose conditions of life are unsatisfying and who feel oppressed by "big government", etc. Survey recently reported in New York Times also shows he has the same percentage base among union members as among non-union members. Information is interesting to us because it sheds some light on our discussion of Mark T.'s NYC Spartacist statement of 25 May to the PFP, and supports the analysis in that statement.
- c. Wohlforth Bulletin: 22 July issue comes out critically but enthusiastically in support of the SWP candidates. This is another of their 180-degree flip-flops, as they wrote last year that the SWP is no longer a tendency in the workers movement and a vote for Halstead-Boutelle is an "anti-class" vote.

2. Personnel and Organization:

- a. Syrek: Has arrived in NYC with a press and a half. As a full member of the CC, he participates in PB meetings by right with voice and consultative vote.
- b. Glenn: Several months ago Comrade Glenn, then a CC alternate, offered his resignation from the SL for largely personal reasons. He was not permitted to resign, as he was in bad financial standing and refused to pay up, and was dropped from membership for non-payment of dues. He has now sent in a letter and a check for \$90, repaying his \$75 arrears, and has pledged \$15 a month for the future. He has been undergoing Scientology "therapy".

Motion: To reconsider dropping Comrade Glenn for non-payment of 4 months' dues.

Passed

Motion: To accept Comrade Glenn's resignation, taking account of his overcoming his bad financial standing. Passed

- c. White: Comrade Geoff White, a full member of the CC, has sent in his resignation from the organization. His letter [attached] recognizes that this has been pending for some time and that his previous leave-of-absence has a transitional character to his final departure from our movement. His letter raises his developing political differences. In view of the leading position of Comrade White in our tendency over many years, a reply to his resignation should be written, taking up his main points.

Motion: To append Comrade White's resignation letter to this set of PB minutes and to table the question of his resignation pending clarification of his financial status. Passed

Disc: Nelson, Turner, Mark T.

- d. Ellens: Has made a recent trip through several areas. Detroit: Reached Fox by phone but was not able to meet with him. Spent several hours discussing with our comrade there. He faces a fight with his union tops, and needs to build a base of support. Los Angeles: Discussed with Ron B. He is very much on the fringe of the hippie movement; is going into some sort of small business. He is thinking of starting some sort of political class. Comrade Ellens raised the necessity of his moving to an area where we have some other comrades, but this seems unlikely. He is still in agreement with us. Bay Area: Ellens spent most of a day discussing with the Black Panthers, mainly with three--an anarchist, a Maoist, a Fanonist. They were familiar with our material--not interested in being given any more literature but quite willing to discuss. Ellens argued with them about their relations with the PFP and the latter group's essential shortcomings, but they insisted they felt PFP is as far left as the white community can and will go, urged us to join up to try to push the PFP to the left. Panthers seem seriously organized and serious about organizing the ghetto. Their politics are very mixed--Third Worldism plus a little of everything else. They have a lot of classes, of which their members are required to attend one a week, which do not seem to have a particularly consistent subject matter. Their biggest contradiction is that they are making intense efforts at organizing the community without giving much in the way of experience or even example to the people they organize. This is combined with the philosophy of not really organizing for power, but with the idea that some tiny band of guerillas will start things, hoping that the masses will "follow the dragon-slayer once it had killed the dragon". They seem both pessimistic and determined; they seem convinced that they will fall apart if Huey Newton is convicted, but are determined to get him freed. Ellens discussed with our comrades in the Bay Area about the Labor Party Committee; they are very excited about the newspaper, "Workers Action", and are circulating and selling it widely. Ellens was given time in one of the local meetings to present the factional situation; she presented the document on VO and another document which had been sent them with NYC local minutes, and indicated that the differences are serious.

e. NYC: The 24 July local meeting reorganized the local executive committee on the basis of proportional representation, determined by the vote on statements of the two competing positions. The vote was 14 for the Majority motion (appended) and 4 for the Minority document (Turner's document, Whither the SL?, circulated separately). Two comrades did not cast an affirmative vote for either position.

f. Motion passed at 1 July PB:

Motion by Henry: That we reconsider the procedural motion passed at 1 July PB prescribing that factional points shall not be taken up later than 10:30 p.m., on the basis that: (1) It implies that factional points shall be given priority, possibly at the expense of more important business; (2) It may well be necessary to take up factional points after 10:30 p.m., especially if preceding items on the agenda are important and time-consuming and also, frequently, what is factional is vague or not known beforehand; (3) The motion implies that the Majority had purposely delayed in raising the agenda point which prompted this procedural motion; but this is not the case. The meeting in question started exceptionally late, due in part to the lateness of several Minority comrades. It was the last meeting before Comrade Ellens left for her trip, making it impossible to postpone until the next meeting the confrontation scheduled between her and another comrade. All parties concerned should be interested in insuring that meetings begin as promptly as possible so that they might end at a reasonable hour.

Motion to reconsider passed

[Original motion is then on the floor for discussion.]

Motion by Turner: [1 July motion] That we start factional points by 10:30 p.m. or else table them to the next meeting.

Presentation by Turner: Motion is not intended to apply if we stumble onto a factional point, only that they not be begun after 10:30 if their factional character is foreseeable in advance. A number of the PB comrades have full-time jobs and are not able to meet into the wee hours of the morning. This is not meant to preclude emergencies. Nothing whatever is implied in the motion about deliberately raising factional points late; this is absolutely contrary to fact. It happens that Comrade Robertson did indicate he had delayed a factional point until Nelson arrived. If comrades are not here for a discussion it can be postponed until next meeting. The motion is reasonable, a matter of common courtesy which heretofore has not distinguished the Majority; rather the contrary.

Disc: Nelson, Cunningham, Robertson, Stoute, Gordon, Henry, Janacek, Ellens, Turner

VOTE on Turner Motion: For: Turner, Stoute (Syrek; Ellens)

Opposed: Robertson, Henry, Nelson (Janacek; Rogers, Cunningham, Gordon) Failed 2-3

### 3. Internal Discussion - Report by Robertson

This point is necessitated by the appearance of the document, Whither the SL?, originally submitted in the name of Turner and now signed by the 4 other members of the Minority. Document has been pretty generally circulated through the PB. It is the duty of the PB to decide disposition of the document, and the PB has

the prerogative of discussing the document itself first. In view of the clear division on the PB, a discussion here would be gratuitous, although not of course in the NYC local and the organization nationally. Would like to suggest that the document be discussed in the NYC local at the earliest convenient time, which would probably be a special meeting of the local on 14 August, with the discussion as the only point on the agenda. We propose to handle it in one of two ways: (1) if by that date there is reply material to the document, discussion should be in the form of a debate, with some floor discussion; (2) if no reply material exists, only the Minority would have presentation and summary time, but time for floor discussion should be extended.

The urgent necessity of having the discussion nationally means we must catch up on getting documents stenciled and circulated. In general, we loathe the idea of disorganizing the discussion by leap-frogging the documents, preferring to circulate them along with the PB minutes to which they are appended. To produce the documents in the order received and along with the PB minutes is the best way. But if we have the documents before the minutes are ready we will not hold them up for the minutes, but will circulate them as soon as they are ready, paired up with critical material presenting the other viewpoint.

In the past 6 weeks the total contribution of the Minority comrades to getting out the huge volume of discussion material has been to stencil 4 pages of the VO document. Part of the pursuit of the faction fight must be putting in time helping to get the material out nationally. We will give heavy priority to getting the Turner document stenciled.

Disc: Turner, Robertson, Nelson, Janacek, Ellens, Syrek, Stoute, Turner, Janacek, Ellens, Cunningham, Henry, Nelson, Ellens

Summary by Robertson: Feels great concern personally over the minutes backlog, having spent ten years on the West Coast, isolated from the national center. This is the logjam we want to break. We now discover tonight that the Minority has been stenciling the Turner document itself, away from the premises and without the supervision or even the knowledge of the national office. The Minority cannot determine unilaterally what work it wants to do. It has decided that the Turner document is most important and assigned a non-member of the SL to stencil it, though it is not the first document that has been submitted. It is not up to the Minority to decide that its documents are more important than, for example, the minutes. We never even knew that the person doing the stenciling was a good typist; we would like to investigate involving her in the N.O. secretariat. She has now turned up in a Minority secretariat. Priorities are determined by the organization. In addition, it was under the initiative of the Majority that joint editorship of minutes and documents was set up. The Ellens document on VO had a number of security violations and inconsistencies which needed editing. Luckily, we do not remember any such violations offhand in the Turner document; if there were any, the job now being done by the Minority without

the knowledge of the N.O. would have to be done over. In general, such work should be done in the N.O.; it might be farmed out by agreement. The involvement of the non-member to stencil does not take the pressure off the two Minority comrades skilled in stencilling work. The assignments and priorities of all comrades come under the jurisdiction of the collective. The document on which they stencilled 4 pages was finally completed by other comrades. They have claimed to be too busy with other work. We want to know what other work. The Minority has shut down 1199 work and stopped MLCRC meetings unilaterally. We want to know exactly how many union meetings per week are required of Comrade Ellens, who is not even a member of her union. It would be easy to let the Minority slide into second-class citizenship, in which they have no rights and privileges and no demands are made on them by the organization. But this would be corrosive of democratic centralism. We have cut back on lots of functions of the organization--e.g., ceased the production of SPARTACIST supplements--in accordance with the collective need. Minority comrades will not decide unilaterally that their union meetings and MLCRC contacts are more important than the national discussion.

Motion by Robertson: To reaffirm in the light of the revelations tonight that the internal documents of the organization be produced under the control of the organization under the provisions for joint Majority-Minority editorship.

Amendment by Turner: To strike from Robertson's motion the motivation ("in the light of the revelations tonight").

VOTE on Amendment: For: Stoute, Turner (Syrek)

Opposed: Robertson, Nelson, Henry (Janacek; Cunningham, Gordon; Mark T.) Abstaining: (Ellens) Failed 2-3

VOTE on Motion: For: Robertson, Nelson, Henry (Janacek; Cunningham, Gordon; Mark T.) Opposed: Stoute  
Abstaining: Turner (Ellens; Syrek) Passed 3-1-1

4. Mage Doctoral Dissertation - Mark T.

Mage's dissertation on Marxian economics is known only to us. He is indifferent to the disposal of it and would let us do what we like with it. The dissertation (1) attempted to present the core of Marxian economics in a clear way and answer some criticisms, (2) attempted to answer a number of critics from the modern left, including some "Marxists", notably Paul Sweezy. Publication of the dissertation by us would serve three purposes: (1) money in royalties, (2) an excellent means of publicizing the SL if it had a preface by us, (3) the ideas presented would further our political aims. The legal situation is that Mage abdicated all copyright rights and put it in the public domain. Therefore we can't copyright it either. But we can get a copyright on a revision if there are "substantial changes". Therefore, we could (1) go ahead and revise it, then take it to a publisher. The disadvantage is that the publisher might then go back to the original, discover that it is in the public domain, get another editor to revise the original and get the copyright himself. (2) take it to a publisher as it is and hope we get the job of editing it and therefore some royalties. At least in this case we would not have put in the work on editing it in advance if the publisher decides he is interested in the dissertation and not in us. (3) get about

\$10,000 and publish it ourselves.

Disc: Janacek, Cunningham, Gordon, Turner, Nelson, Robertson

Summary: Evidentially our publishing it ourselves is ruled out.

To edit it and get a copyright on the revision would be the best if it works out, but leaves us in danger of putting in a lot of work for nothing.

Motion: That we (1) encourage Comrade Mark T. to take the dissertation to a publisher as it is, in the best case getting the editorship, in any case getting this work published; (2) consider as one of our projected pamphlets a cut and politically edited version of the dissertation, to be entitled, "What is Marxian Economics?". Passed

5. Biafra - Turner

A million people are dying. The situation enables us to raise some class demands. We should try and work something up in the way of a united front or meeting, to expose the imperialist involvement of the U.S. and Britain (and the Soviet Union) who have been supplying arms to Nigeria. Something should be put out as soon as possible in the press.

Motion by Robertson: We note that our informal position since the inception has been for the right of the Ibo people to self-determination and therefore for critical military support to Biafra. We note that the Healyites are supporting Nigeria, arguing "tribalism", although Biafra has about the same size and cultural differences from other "tribes" as one of the European nations, and Nigeria is not a legitimate national unit, having been created as a unit by the British imperialists. The Healyites have never really recognized the right of self-determination for anybody (Ireland, French Canada). We also note that the "Nigerian Socialist" (distributed by the SWP) hails the Nigerian government's "progressive national unification". Passed

Disc: Gordon, Janacek, Nelson, Robertson

Motion: In the light of the preceding motion, we (1) suggest that Comrade Turner work up the draft for an article for SPARTACIST #13; (2) refer tactical implementation in this area to the NYC local. Passed

Disc: Nelson, Mark T., Ellens, Janacek, Cunningham, Gordon

6. Czechoslovakia:

Motion: To table this point to next meeting. Passed

7. Next PB Scheduling: Nelson's vacation is tentatively scheduled for 5-23 August. Turner's vacation is 15 August-2 September. Barring emergencies, the PB will not meet during the month of August through Labor Day.

Meeting adjourned 11:45 p.m.

Motion "A" for Majority: To reorganize the NYC Executive Committee along the lines of Majority/Minority, in accord with proportional representation. This is necessitated by the conduct of the Minority comrades, who have an accidental majority of 4 to 3 on the present Exec, at the last Exec meeting on 10 July: (a) The Minority sought to impose the principle of factional loyalty for assignment to responsible positions--i.e., PB member Turner's opposition to Comrade Salinger's nomination as assistant organizer explicitly for Comrade Salinger's support to the Majority. (b) The Minority made an unprecedented and unconditionally intolerable attempt to gag a comrade under attack--i.e., in mid-discussion in the Exec on Comrade Salinger's fitness to serve, Comrade Turner, in ending an attack so strong as to challenge Comrade Salinger's moral fitness, suddenly moved that the comrade under attack be denied the floor again, since by oversight he hadn't (yet) been formally permitted to attend and speak at the Exec, to which he had been invited because of his projected candidacy as assistant organizer. When a motion to permit Comrade Salinger to speak was then made, Comrade Turner voted against it. These organizational excesses by Minority comrades necessarily conclude their role in leading the local Exec.

Motion "B" for Majority: Therefore, it is proposed that a new Executive Committee be elected with the Majority standing for election on the basis of the following political, organizational and tactical positions rooted in the SL and developed by it since our public inception:

1. Our founding editorial note "In Lieu of a General Policy Statement" (SPARTACIST #1, Feb.-Mar. 1964) setting forth basic perspectives.
2. The "Tasks and Perspectives" document adopted at the Founding Conference of the SL on 3-5 Sept. 1966.
3. The "Memorandum on the Negro Struggle" adopted by the CC Plenum of 31 Dec. 1967, and especially section 12 on Implementation of the Memorandum.
4. The statement on problems and priorities of the SL in the "Letter to Comrade White" of 16 Oct. 1967, adopted by the CC Plenum of 31 Dec. 1967.
5. The motions on PB and N.O. functioning presented to the PB on 4 Mar. 1968, adopted by it on 25 Mar. 1968.
6. The motion adopted 22 May by the NYC local on the allocation of forces and the disposition of the MLCRC.

Attachment, PB Minutes of 29 July 1968

Geoffrey White  
Berkeley, California  
[received 23 July 1968]

The Political Bureau,  
The Spartacist League  
New York, New York

Dear Comrades:

As I am sure you know, for some time now I have been developing in my thinking a series of questions concerning the politics and the role of our group and other groups of a similar character. These questions led indirectly to my leave of absence at the beginning of this year.

I do not think it is useful to raise fully here questions which I know you consider closed, and indeed, must so consider in order to continue your political existence as presently organized. Never-the-less, I would like to try to indicate very briefly the salient points in my feelings on this subject.

In the first place, there is the long term history of what may broadly be called our movement from the emergence of the Russian Left Opposition to the present. This history is characterized, I think, by two outstanding features. On the one hand, we have observed, analysed, criticized, and commented on events, often brilliantly, sometimes not so brilliantly, but with an overall record of which we can be proud. On the other hand, never, in any of the great historical crises, have we been able to influence the actual course of events. This applies to all the great historical events of recent times, the rise of Hitler, the Spanish Civil War, the post-war revolutionary opportunities in Western Europe, the Polish-Hungarian Crisis of 1956, and, of course, on a less grand scale, the rise of the CIO in the United States. Our people were involved in all these crises, with the possible exception of 1956, and yet, can you honestly claim that the outcome would have been in any significant way different if we had not existed?

Of course, we had an explanation for these historical incapacities. The Stalinists had wrongfully appropriated the banner of the October Revolution, and stood between us and the masses who needed our leadership. In 1956-57, this Stalinist monolith was shattered on a world scale, and in Great Britain and the United States, and I believe this is true in most of the rest of the world as well, we could no longer attribute our isolation to the overwhelming power of the Stalinist movement. Certainly the crisis was all the comrades of the pre-1956 era could have dreamed of, and yet, we were unable, on a world scale or in this country, to alter our position qualitatively as a result of it. In fact, according to our own analysis at the time of the fight in the SWP, the general crisis of world Stalinism soon became the general crisis of world Trotskyism.

For us in America, especially, the explanation still remained that there were, after all, no masses in motion. This explained our operational insignificance. Now, however, this is no longer true. This country is in the grip of a profound political crisis, but in the midst of rapid polarization, radicalization, and ideological and political turmoil, we remain exactly as we were, except that the contradictions of the situation lead to greater demoralization in our ranks. The course of the struggle refuses to follow our preconceptions, and we are unable to make our ideas or our history relevant to it.



The point of all this is not a long series of defeats in themselves being the decisive factor; rather, it is the effect this history has had on the mentality and outlook and habits of our organizations and our comrades, and the degree to which the resulting patterns have come to guarantee that the series shall be continued. Certainly one thing Marxists might be expected to examine with great care would be the effect of a history of this kind, however interpreted, on the life and thinking of those almost organic entities, the left sects.

I have come to some tentative conclusions about what has happened to us. I think we have become so habituated to the role we have been forced to play that it has become a value in itself, and the real basis of our political existence. Over the years, certain rules have developed. Originally, most of these were for purposes of survival and quite rational. However, these rules now survive and develop autonomously, regardless of their relevance to the objective world. It is as if we were involved in a great game, the object of which is to make points according to an elaborate and very sophisticated set of evolved rules and stylistic considerations. The analogy to bull-fighting comes inevitably to mind. In short, I question whether our basic orientation is not toward making a good record in some cosmic history book, rather than making history itself. Perhaps, too, this abstractness is necessary for the preservation of our political identity. In the only two cases I know of where groups like ours have actually achieved a small but significant mass base, the POUM and the LSSP, we ended as ministers in bourgeois governments.

The Spartacist League specifically has an admirable record. On middle level political questions especially, such as guerillism, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Israel question, and draft resistance, the League has far outshone its competitors. Only the last of these, however, is potentially fruitful in terms of immediate political involvement. I suggest that certain difficulties we have encountered in implementing our line on this point are not so much the result of individual weakness, although they are certainly that too, as symptomatic of our ingrained inability to relate abstract correctness to meaningful implementation.

If I were confident in the League's essential validity, such organizational atrocities as a semi-annual publication schedule, despite personnel changes, and eighteen month delays in the publication of PB minutes would stimulate resolve rather than despair. As it is, they seem to me rather manifestations of an underlying sickness.

We have differences over the PFP. I feel we did right to enter, and were wrong to withdraw. This in itself is simply an episode. What really bothers me about the PFP affair is the way in which our comrades discussed it, reacted to the arena, and carried out their withdrawal. The whole discussion revolved around what are to me the relatively sterile question of the exact political and ideological nature of the PFP, not the fruitful one of whether we could contribute to making things we theoretically desired actually happen. My impression of the arid and scholastic nature of the discussion may be a subjective error. However, the attitude that the group as a whole brought to the intervention is quite clear. Our comrades felt extremely uncomfortable at being involved in a real arena, seemed to fear some sort of contamination. They greeted our ludicrous and futile exit with intense relief. The danger of a blot on our cosmic record had been avoided and we would not have to meet the challenge of actually trying to influence events in even the smallest arena.

29 July 1968

I don't think the PFP question is of great importance in itself, but it is typical of an attitude and an approach to politics which I think is fundamentally invalid and destructive to our professed goals. The long chain of failures will not be crowned with the final justifying success because we really don't want it to be, because that is no longer the standard by which we judge ourselves and our organizations. Judged by its ability to influence the resolution of the political and social crises of our day, or of future days, our existence is, in my opinion, one of total futility. Our existence is justified only in terms of our own abstract criteria, not subject to the criticism of reality.

This is the conclusion I have been moving toward with increasing consciousness at least ever since the Chicago conference, and in some ways, considerably before that. I have been reluctant to follow these thoughts to their logical conclusion for two main reasons. One is the subjective reason of considerable personal investment in the sectarian movement. The other is that despite my confidence in the validity of these criticisms, I have been unable to discover, much less develop, adequate alternatives. Just as I, and I suspect many other comrades, have subscribed to the degenerated workers' state position on the Russian question largely because the visible alternatives present even more horrendous intellectual difficulties and destructive political consequences, so for some time I have subscribed to the validity of Spartacism because I have been able to see no valid alternative.

However, that position is too full of contradictions to maintain long. Comrade Robertson correctly stated at the time of my leave that my course led straight as an arrow out of this organization. I was fully aware of it at that time. I believe it was the common feeling of the C.C. comrades and my own at the time of that discussion that my leave of absence status was transitional. In the last six months it has become increasingly anomalous, and I feel that the time has come to make the formal relationship conform to what exists in reality.

I am therefore officially submitting my resignation from membership in the Spartacist League.

Fraternally,

Geoffrey White

CC: BASL, file

A COMMENT ON GEOFFREY WHITE'S RESIGNATION STATEMENT

Ex-comrade White's resignation contains four main sections. The first argues that the history of the Trotskyist movement has been one of failure, at bottom indefensibly so. Second, White argues that as a result of these failures a set of formal little "rules" to maintain the movement's purity evolved which moreover served to reinforce the failure of our movement. His third point, which is given a length and emphasis comparable to the other sections, argues that leaving the Peace and Freedom Party typifies our futility. White devotes to the PFP about a quarter of his attention in his resignation justifying his break from revolutionary Marxism. Fourth, he concludes that he has been moving in his present direction for a long time and the substance of his break can no longer be denied. He further notes, however, that he had resisted until now the logical conclusion of his drift, both because of his "considerable personal investment in the sectarian movement" and because whatever his distaste for our position on the Russian question he could see no valid alternative.

Regarding the first of White's points, that of the alleged failure of Trotskyism, the position he advances is either too much or too little. In a direct sense, Trotskyism would be a failure, and moreover decisively disproved, if somewhere the working class were to come to power without the Trotskyist revolutionary program and party, or the reverse, if the Trotskyists came to power but not the working class. The reasons for this should be obvious. The "rules" of Trotskyism were not worked up by the Trotskyists to explain away defeats and failures and to keep "pure". They are, or at least aim to be, nothing other than a codification of that experience the significance of which White completely overlooks, the Russian October Revolution, the great working-class revolution which succeeded and which, despite all vicissitudes, still endures and still represents, even in its present great deformity, an enormous threat to the bourgeois order. It is logically incumbent upon White, if he is not simply to abandon politics--which as a highly politicized intellectual he is, in any case, unlikely to do--to show either that Trotskyism differs from the lessons of the October Revolution or that the revolution itself is without relevance. This leads to the other, broader, level of consideration, namely that if White is so sure that Trotskyism has failed, where are the successful political practices to which he orients? What is his perspective toward social change? And what social change does he now want, anyhow? This latter point is raised by the ends and means linkage--the forces which effect social change determine its shape.

In short, if you don't know who has won or can win, how can you speak of other than a transient failure of Trotskyism, a failure which is but the ideological and organizational expression of the failure of the working class itself to threaten in a serious and prolonged way the bourgeois order in the past several decades? Or, to put it in reverse form, every time the proletariat has surged forward in an elementary way as a class at least to the point of embryonic soviets or the urgent felt need for soviets (Spain 1936, Italy 1943, Bolivia 1952, Hungary 1956, Belgium 1960, France 1968), then the atmosphere positively reeked of the main elements of the Trotskyist program, and only (only!) the lack of preparation of the vanguard and the brevity or abortiveness of the incidents prevented the emergence of a powerful revolutionary party--and that could only be a party of Trotskyism, the Marxism of today.

Everything else about Comrade White's resignation is anti-climactic to the above considerations. His argument that our initial historical failures led us to

29 July 1968

evolve elaborate, abstract "rules" of purity with which we render ourselves permanently impotent is defeated when White rather pathetically observes that perhaps these "rules" are necessary, considering the fate of the two "groups like ours", the POUM of Spain and the LSSP of Ceylon, which departed from the "rules" and ended up helping capitalists run their governments! To call the questions White raises "rules" is disingenuous--what he's talking about are not rules but politics, specifically, what kinds of struggles the working class can undertake which if victorious will lead it to power, and what kinds will betray the working people and perpetuate capitalist imperialism. Comrade White has nothing historically to add or subtract. He merely regrets that "rules" exist and ignores their real origins in the Russian Revolution and the building of Lenin's Bolshevik party.

But for the present day, White has found a place where he hopes the "rules" don't apply--the Peace and Freedom Party. Faint hope that! What has the Peace and Freedom Party discovered that differs from or goes beyond the Leon Blum Front Populaire or the Henry Wallace Progressive Party? The answer is: less than nothing. The PFP is a self-conscious mobilization of young intellectuals which refuses to even aspire to becoming a mobilizer of working-class masses, even in order to subordinate the workers to middle class ideology and aims. And this appears to be the ad hoc alternative to which White now goes as he leaves our modest, but only genuine embodiment in the U.S. today of revolutionary Marxism, the Spartacist League.

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Receipt of White's resignation statement creates mixed feelings. Comrade White, for all his inner corrosion, was a mainstay of our tendency in the Bay Area and nationally. Comrade White was instrumental in holding together the Bay Area tendency at the time of the Healy-Wohlforth split from us in 1962, so that not a single member of the Bay Area tendency went over. In those years he played a valuable role in the development of our perspectives and our theoretical outlook. Later, he made some of the finest journalistic contributions in SPARTACIST. However, from the beginning of his relationship with the tendency, a skeptical quality and a careful, sanitary aloofness were not absent from his make-up. These debilitating features evolved and grew greater and more pervasive. By our 1966 Founding Conference, Comrade White argued, albeit without stubbornness and unsuccessfully, that we should oppose the possession and development of nuclear weapons by the Sino-Soviet bloc, a position which cannot in any practical way be squared with the defense of the deformed workers' states against imperialism. Probably the last real opportunity to deflect Comrade White from the course which led him out of the Trotskyist movement came with the anticipated reunification with Healy. White played a strong role at the Montreal Conference in 1965. But that possibility ended with the revelation of the illusory character of the Healy connection.

Locally, in the Bay Area, comrade White's organizational contributions were on balance ultimately decisively negative. His skepticism was not without deep impact, especially his view that perhaps the historic opportunities for proletarian revolution had been missed and humanity faced now only the prospect of nuclear holocaust. In our principal local spokesman and political leader, this quality naturally alienated would-be revolutionaries and militants who came in contact with the Bay Area local, effectively leading to the recruitment of only one or two people in the area in a half decade! Moreover, the great Berkeley student strike of 1964, with many of whose militants White had close contact, was for us a lost opportunity. Comrade White felt strongly at the time that the Marxist movement--

29 July 1968

i.e. he--had nothing to tell the student radicals! Later, his loss of necessary organizational focus and hardness led the local to distribute a leaflet, at a demonstration where many radical-talking tendencies were present, containing the outrageous slogan: "Join the revolutionary organization of your choice"! Finally, as implied in his resignation, it was White who led our local into the Peace and Freedom Party, a step from which we extricated ourselves satisfactorily and without undue internal turmoil. Later, in Spartacist-West, our comrades acknowledged the error, but opponents, particularly the SWP, continue to exploit our misstep, the only departure from principle in our history, in a way which shows full well the SWP's sensitivity to their own departures and their eagerness to turn on us with "you're another". White may despair of our impact, but our opponents are not unaware of it by any means. (Parenthetically, we wonder what White thinks of the SWP's own "valiant" efforts to transcend the "rules" of Marxist principle. But that gets us into the whole question of the incompatibility of different species of opportunism, i.e., essentially the adaptation to different and often sharply, even bloodily, counterposed forces.)

So we miss White for what he was and what he might have been in helping to forge a revolutionary workers movement in this country. And we note that in his leave taking he was organizationally responsible. He agreed to a gradual withdrawal so as to minimize damage to the Bay Area local in which he played a dominant role until the end of his active period. But given what he had become, his formal departure becomes mainly a new opportunity for younger comrades to build on foundations he helped lay but then himself lacked the strength to help develop.

James Robertson

/based on notes of 29 July 1968/

postscript

On helping proof-read White's resignation statement I was struck by his reference to the lack of "relevance to the objective world" of Trotskyist political rules. In particular his use of the word "relevance" excited my memory. So I checked back to confirm that nineteen years ago there was played out with a closely parallel content the exchange of opinion displayed today in White's "Resignation" and my "Comment." Only at that time both contributions were literarily much superior, but each politically rather poorer (though more comprehensive).

I refer to "The Relevance of Trotskyism" by Henry Judd in the August 1949 New Internationalist and its reply "The Relevance of Marxism" by Albert Gates in the January-February 1950 NI. Judd's denial of Trotskyism's relevance and his random search under the pressures of anti-Stalinism and imperialism led him shortly to become (as Stanley Plastrik) a founder of Dissent magazine (ech!). Even with the large handicap of the bureaucratic-collectivist line on Russia, Gates made mince-meat of Judd and properly so. However this didn't prevent Gates (Glotzer), Shachtman's long-time #2 man, from following his leader into the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation ten years later after a combination of the arid, unrewarding 1950's and a profoundly wrong Russian position had combined to wreak their havoc on the Workers Party-Independent Socialist League.

Nineteen years ago Geoff White was a CP youth leader who had just graduated from Harvard to go on to struggle for nearly two decades as a communist. By his present lights, it's a shame White couldn't have read and accepted Judd back then and saved himself a lot of trouble.

J.R.