

Declaration of Principles of the Spartacist League

Spartacist League (U.S.)

1966-09-04

1. The Socialist Revolution and the Spartacist League

The Spartacist League of the U.S. is a revolutionary organization which, as part of the international revolutionary movement, is committed to the task of building the party which will lead the working class to the victory of the socialist revolution in the United States.

Only the proletariat, through the seizure of political power and the destruction of capitalism in all countries, can lay the basis for the elimination of exploitation and the resolution of the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces of the world economy and national-state barriers. Capitalism has long since outlived its progressive historical role of creating a modern industrial economy. Now in order to maintain their rule, the national capitalist classes must intensify national and racial divisions, through imperialism oppress the colonial peoples and impoverish the masses of the entire world, engage in continual wars for the maintenance and redivision of the world markets in order to prop up the falling rate of profit, and attempt to smash the revolutionary struggle of the workers wherever it breaks out. In its final frenzied effort to maintain its close rule, the bourgeoisie will not hesitate to plunge humanity into a nuclear holocaust or totalitarian oppression of unprecedented ferocity. The United States of America is today the keystone of the entire international capitalist order.

On the other hand, the victory of the proletariat on a world scale would place unimagined material abundance at the service of human needs, lay the basis for the elimination of social classes, and eliminate forever the drive for war inherent in the world economic system of capitalism. For the first time mankind will grasp the reins of history and control its own creation, society, resulting in an undreamed-of emancipations of human potential, the limitless expansion of freedom in every area, and a monumental forward surge of civilization. Only then will it be possible to realize the free development of each individual as the condition for the free development of all.

2. The Crisis of Proletarian Leadership

History has shown that the self-emancipation of the working class, and therewith the oppressed of all the earth, balances on the question of leadership. The economic preconditions for socialism have long since been reached. But the contradictions of capitalism in its epoch of imperialist decay produce not only wars, but also revolutionary opportunities. The success or failure of the working class to achieve victory in these historic opportunities depends upon the organization and scientific consciousness of the struggling masses, i.e., on *revolutionary leadership*. Only a revolutionary leadership--the indispensable weapon of the working people--has proved to have the strategy and determination to lead the working masses to victory. The responsibility for the defeats suffered by the working class and the abortion of previous revolutionary opportunities lies at the door of treacherous Social-Democratic and Stalinist misleaders. But the revolutionary will of the proletariat *will* triumph! The crisis of leadership *will* be solved! It is to the solution of the crisis of proletarian leadership that the Spartacist League directs its work.

3. The Theoretical and Historical Roots of the Spartacist League

The Spartacist League continues the revolutionary traditions of the international working-class movement exemplified in the work of revolutionists such as Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, and Liebknecht. Above all we look to the experience of the Bolshevik Party which culminated in the Russian Revolution of 1917, the only revolution as yet made by the working class.

We seek in particular to carry forward the international working-class perspectives of Marxism as developed in theory and practice by V. I. Lenin and L. D. Trotsky, as embodied in the decisions of the first four Congresses of the Communist International and by the Transitional Program and other documents adopted by the 1938 Founding Conference of the Fourth International. These materials are the indispensable documentary codification of the communist movement internationally, and are fundamental to the revolutionary tasks of our organization.

We also look for inspiration to the example of such revolutionists in the United States as F. A. Sorge, Vincent St. John, Daniel De Leon, Louis Farina, and James P. Cannon. The Spartacist League is the continuator of the revolutionary heritage of the early Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party. The immediate origins of the Spartacist League are in the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP which based itself primarily upon the statement *In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective* and the document *World Prospect for Socialism*.

4. The Vanguard Role of the Working Class and the Road to Socialism

Central to the Marxist perspective of world socialism is the vanguard role of the working class, and particularly the decisive weight of the proletariat of the industrialized countries. Only the working class has the social power and compulsion of clear objective interest to liberate mankind from oppression. Having no stake in maintaining the bourgeois order, its enormous power rests in its productive role, its numbers and organization.

The continued rule of a small handful of capitalists is maintained only through keeping the working class divided and confused as to its true situation. In the United States, the ruling class has succeeded in creating deep divisions along racial lines. The Black workers as a doubly-oppressed race-color caste require special modes of struggle as long as racist attitudes continue to permeate the outlook of the working class as a whole. Socialism in this country will be achieved only by the common struggle of Black and white workers under the leadership of a unified revolutionary vanguard.

Historic experience has shown that the road to socialism can be opened only by the intervention of the masses in the course of history and the creation of dual power culminating in the destruction of the capitalist state and the victory of the workers state and development of a new social order. The police, military, bureaucratic, juridical, and political apparatus of the old order will be replaced by the dictatorship of the proletariat based on councils of working people and supported by the workers' armed strength. Such a state would defend itself against the counterrevolutionary efforts of the deposed ruling class to return to power and would reorganize the economy along rational lines. As the economic basis of social classes dwindled, the workers state would more and more assume a purely administrative function, eventually withering away with the advent of classless communism.

5. The International Character of the Socialist Revolution

Capitalism is a world economic system which has created an international working class with identical class interests the world over. The international character of the working class gives it a potentially enormous superiority over the bourgeoisie as capitalism operates by anarchistic methods which set one national capitalist class against another and constantly create new unevennesses and crises. In order to realize this superiority, the proletariat needs an international party to unify the class across the national and sectional boundaries which divide it and to coordinate the interdependent struggles of the workers of every country. While the revolution may begin in a single country, any partial victory will be only finally secured with the spread of revolution to other countries and

the eventual world dominance of socialist economic organization. The Fourth International is the world party of the socialist revolution, whose program and purposes remain as valid today as at its founding in 1938, despite its present organizational disarray. We stand with all those groups seeking the rebirth of the Fourth International and, as a first step, the creation of a *bona fide* International Committee of revolutionary Trotskyists based upon a real and living democratic centralism.

6. The Necessity for Revolutionary Consciousness

The ruling class has at its command a monopoly of the means of violence, its dominant political and bureaucratic apparatus, its enormous wealth and connections, and its control of education, the mass media and all other institutions of capitalist society. Against such a force a workers state can be brought into existence only by a proletariat fully conscious of its tasks, organized to carry them out, and determined to defend its conquests against the counterrevolutionary violence of the ruling class. The decisive struggle--the conquest of state power--requires *political* consciousness. Through its acquisition of political consciousness the working class ceases to be merely a class in itself and becomes a class *for* itself. Such consciousness is not spontaneously generated in the course of the day-to-day class struggles of the workers; it must be brought to the workers by the revolutionary party. Thus it is the task of the revolutionary party to forge the proletariat into a sufficient political force by infusing it with a consciousness of its real situation, educating it in the historical lessons of the class struggle, tempering it in ever deepening struggles, destroying its illusions, steeling its revolutionary will and self-confidence, and organizing the overthrow of all forces standing in the way of the conquest of power. A conscious working class is the decisive force in history.

7. The Bourgeois Basis of Revisionism

Insofar as revolutionary consciousness is not prevalent among the workers, their consciousness is determined by the ideology of the ruling class. Objectively capitalism rules through finance capital, its monopoly of the means of violence, and its control of all existing social institutions. But it prefers, when possible, to rule through the dominance of its ideas among the oppressed, fostering illusions and concealing its bloody essence. The ideas of the bourgeoisie penetrate into the very movements and organizations of the workers through the agency of the petty-bourgeois labor lieutenants--particularly the parasitic trade union, Social-Democratic, and Stalinist bureaucracies which are based on the "aristocratic" upper strata of the working class. Enjoying privileges not accorded to the vast majority of workers, these misleaders betray the masses of working people through class collaboration, social-patriotism, and chauvinist-racist policies which

sabotage proletarian understanding and solidarity. If not replaced by revolutionary leaderships, they will allow the organizations of the workers to become impotent in the fight for the economic needs of the workers under conditions of bourgeois democracy or will allow these organizations to be destroyed by victorious fascism.

The degeneration and capitulation of tendencies within the Marxist movement has been of especially critical value to the preservation of imperialist rule. Submission to the pressure of bourgeois society has repeatedly thrust nominally Marxist currents towards *revisionism*, the process of ruling out Marxism's essential conclusions. Bernsteinian revisionism, Menshevism, Stalinism, and its Maoist variant, are all illustrations of this process which constitutes a bridge to overtly reformist practices.

Within the Trotskyist movement the problems posed by the post-1943 Stalinist expansions have given rise to the revisionist current of Pabloism. Pabloism is characterized chiefly by a renunciation of the necessity for revolutionary leadership and an adaptation to existing petty-bourgeois and Stalinist leaderships. This deterioration of theory has led to the degeneration of the Fourth International founded by Leon Trotsky, and to its organizational breakup.

The Spartacist League, by contributing to the theoretical clarification of the Marxist movement and to the reforging of the workers' necessary organizational weapons, upholds the revolutionary proletarian principles of Marxism and will carry them forward to the vanguard of the working class.

8. The Deformed Workers States and the Political Revolution

Historic gains have been made in expelling imperialism from and destroying capitalist property relations in certain backward countries, i.e., the degenerated workers state of Russia, and the deformed workers states in East Europe, and of China, North Korea, North Viet Nam, and Cuba. The nationalization of the means of production, establishment of economic planning, and the state monopoly of foreign trade have brought tangible increases in the living standards of the masses together with advances in industrial growth in spite of the hostility of imperialism. On the other hand, the failure as yet of the proletariat to successfully carry through a social revolution in any of the advanced countries, the relatively low labor productivity and cultural levels of the workers states compared to the leading capitalist countries, and the numerical preponderance of the peasant class have allowed the formation of bureaucratic ruling castes which exclude the working class from political power and which are susceptible to the development of capitalist restorationist tendencies. These privileged bureaucracies, themselves a reflection of the continued domination of capitalism on a world scale, stand as a barrier to the elimination of class differences within their own national boundaries and the achievement of socialism on a world scale;

through their increasingly nationalist deviations, they weaken these conquests of the working class in the face of imperialism and open the way for the repenetration of capitalist economic forms.

The Spartacist League stands for the unconditional defense of these countries against all attempts of imperialism to reestablish its control. At the same time we assert the necessity for the working class to take *direct* control and defense of these states into their own hands through *political revolution* and thus sweep away the internal barriers to the advance towards socialism. Only the spread of revolution internally and internationally can successfully maintain these partial conquests of the workers. It is an immediate and pressing necessity to build sections of the Fourth International in the deformed workers states to guide the struggle of the workers for political power and to coordinate their struggles with those of the proletariat in the advanced and colonial countries.

9. The Colonial Revolution and the Permanent Revolution

The partial character of the anti-capitalist revolutions in the colonial world over the past two decades (China, Cuba, North Viet Nam and North Korea) leads us to reaffirm the Marxist-Leninist concept of the proletariat as the key to the socialist revolution. Although existing petty-bourgeois nationalist-led movements against imperialism must be defended, the task of communists is to lead the active intervention of the working class to take hegemony over the national-social struggle. The struggle by the proletarian leadership for *self-determination* of the oppressed nations is a powerful tool to break the grip of petty-bourgeois nationalist leaders on the masses. The Spartacist League fundamentally opposes the Maoist doctrine, rooted in Menshevism and Stalinist reformism, which rejects the vanguard role of the working class and substitutes peasant-based guerrilla warfare as the road to socialism. Movements of this sort can under certain conditions, i.e., the extreme disorganization of the capitalist class in the colonial country and the absence of the working class contending in its own right for social power, smash capitalist property relations; however, they cannot bring the working class to *political* power. Rather, they create bureaucratic anti-working class regimes which suppress any further development of these revolutions towards socialism. Experience since the Second World War has completely validated the Trotskyist theory of the Permanent Revolution which declares that in the modern world the bourgeois-democratic revolution can be completed only by a proletarian dictatorship supported by the peasantry. Only under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat can the colonial and semi-colonial countries obtain the complete and genuine solution to their tasks of achieving democracy and national emancipation.

10. The Revolutionary Party: Its Program, Organization, and Discipline

“Without a party, apart from a party, over the head of a party, or with a substitute for a party, the proletarian revolution cannot conquer.” The revolutionary party is not only the instrument for bringing political consciousness to the proletariat, it is also the main offensive and guiding force through which the working class makes and consolidates the socialist revolution. The revolutionary party is the general staff of the revolution. Its leading cadre have been trained and tested in the class struggle; it has gained the leadership of the class on the basis of its program and revolutionary determination; it has understood the whole of the past in order to assess the present situation with crystal clarity; it recognizes and boldly responds to the revolutionary moment when it comes, that moment when the forces of the proletariat are most confident and prepared and the forces of the old order most demoralized and disorganized. In the revolutionary party is crystallized the aspiration of the masses to obtain their freedom; it symbolizes their revolutionary will and is the instrument of their victory.

The program of the Spartacist League, as part of the Fourth International, is *transitional* in nature. It forms a bridge in the course of daily struggle between the present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. From the consciousness of the working class today it formulates its demands and tasks in a way that lead inalterably to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat. The *united front* of differing and otherwise hostile organizations of the working class is a primary tactic in unsettled periods to both mobilize a broad mass in struggle and to strengthen the authority of the vanguard party within the class. The transitional program directs the struggle ever more openly and decisively against the very bases of the bourgeois regime and mobilizes the masses for the proletarian revolution.

The organizational principle of the Spartacist League is *democratic centralism*, a balance between internal democracy and functional discipline. As a combat organization, the revolutionary vanguard must be capable of unified and decisive action at all times in the class struggle. All members must be mobilized to carry out the decisions of the majority; authority must be centralized in its selected leadership which interprets tactically the organization’s program. Internal democracy permits the collective determination of the party’s line in accord with the needs felt by the party’s ranks who are closest to the class as a whole. The right to factional democracy is absolutely vital to a living movement. The very existence of this right helps to channel differences into less absorbing means of resolution.

The *discipline* of the Spartacist League flows from its program and purpose, the victory of the socialist revolution and the liberation of all mankind.

11. We Will Intervene to Change History!

“Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action.” The Spartacist League, as a national section of the international Trotskyist movement, is in the forefront of the struggle for a socialist future. Our day-to-day preparation of the working class and our intervention and leadership in the decisive moments of the class struggle will propel the struggle forward to the final victory. *“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives--these are the rules of the Fourth International.”* These are the rules of the Spartacist League as we go forward in the historical task of leading the working class to the victory of socialism in the United States!

—General line unanimously adopted by Founding Conference, 3 September 1966.

—Final draft approved by Political Bureau, 8 November 1966.