14. The Kennedy Assassination

For people who are old enough, it is often said that they remember where they were when President John Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. I certainly do. I was in the YSA headquarters on Fourth Avenue near Twelfth Street, not far from the SWP headquarters. In the hall with me were Peter Camejo and Ralph Levitt, one of the Bloomington defendants. Levitt was working for the defense committee.

We were listening to the news when the announcement came. I said, "I hope it's not that nut who tried to join the party, that guy who is a one-man Fair Play for Cuba Committee chapter in New Orleans." Imagine how I felt when it turned out he was the one charged with the act.

The SWP and YSA had received letters from a Lee Harvey Oswald, asking to join. His letters, as I remember them, were politically confused, and the photo that was sent with them was strange. In it, the person who was supposedly Oswald held copies of *The Militant* and the Communist Party's *Worker*. He also sported two or more rifles and hand guns sticking out of his belt. A similar picture appeared on the cover of *Life* magazine after the assassination. Oswald, it turned out, had posed for similar photographs holding the Communist Party's paper and the Workers World Party's *Workers World*.

One look at the picture and everyone in the leadership of the party and YSA thought we were dealing with a nut or a provocateur. Oswald purchased subscriptions to *The Militant* and *Young Socialist*. But no one in our leadership thought we should accept him as a member. In any case, our policy was not to accept at-large members in places where there was no party branch or YSA chapter, for the reason that there was no real way of evaluating the applicant.

The press featured Oswald's connection with the FPCC and speculated that Castro or some unspecified "reds" were behind the assassination. We were a potential target because we were well known as supporters of the Cuban revolution. A city cop came to the SWP headquarters and stationed himself inside the front door to see who came in and out.

The New York *Daily News*, attempting to fire up the atmosphere against the left, stated in an editorial: "The fact remains that Oswald was a Marxist and proud of it. The fact remains that the Communist Party continually preaches death to imperialism, capitalism, etc. It is only natural for lamebrains such as Oswald to conclude that this means killing your enemies wherever and whenever you can reach them defenseless. Ideas have consequences."[1] This was all a pack of lies.

As T*he Militant* pointed out a few days later, the editorial was also an attempt to cover up the fanatical hatred that the right wing had for Kennedy, particularly because of the concessions the government was being forced to make to the fight for Black rights. In Dallas during the days before the Kennedy visit, for example, the rightists had posted leaflets displaying a photo of Kennedy and the words: "Wanted for Treason."

The New York SWP had scheduled a public forum with Dr. Fritz Pappenheim as the speaker for the night of November 22. We canceled the forum, and assumed Dr. Pappenheim would figure that out, as we had no way to contact him. But some other comrades and I kept watch at the headquarters just in case; and there he came down the street, disciplined soul that he was, ready to speak come hell or high water. He was greatly relieved that we had the brains to cancel the event.

The murder of the US President had generated a climate of intense emotion and anxiety, raising the serious possibility of attacks on the left. So, the Political Committee decided to meet not at the headquarters, but in the home of George Weissman. We knew we could be singled out as scapegoats, given our strong political denunciations of Kennedy on everything from his administration's developing war in Vietnam and his inaction in defending the civil rights fighters, to his attacks on Cuba.

We decided that Farrell, as party National Secretary write a letter to Mrs. Kennedy, expressing our condolences to her and her children. I did the same for the YSA.

Farrell also prepared a statement expressing the party's strong identification with the concerns of millions, including the Black population, who were deeply upset and alarmed by the assassination. The statement, which presented the basic Marxist position on such actions, was distributed to the media and published in the next issue of *The Militant*, dated December 8.

Dobbs stated: "The Socialist Workers Party condemns the brutal assassination of President Kennedy as an anti-human, anti-social, and criminal act. We extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs. Kennedy and the children in their personal grief.

"The act springs from the atmosphere created by the inflammatory agitation and deeds of the racists and ultraconservative forces. Political terrorism, like suppression of political freedom, violates the democratic rights of all Americans and can only

strengthen the forces of reaction. Political differences in our society must be settled in an orderly manner by majority decision after free and open public debate in which all points of view are heard."

The Cuban ambassador to the United Nations issued a statement condemning the assassination.

Ralph Levitt, as a defendant, was understandably very uneasy about what this turn in the political climate implied about the prospects of defeating the Bloomington witch-hunt. I was concerned about Ralph's morale, and asked Farrell for a hand. We held our talk over a relaxed restaurant meal, also joined by Melissa Singler. Farrell's patient and kind approach helped Ralph regain his sense of proportion and a more balanced view of the political situation. Ralph was relieved, and jumped back into the work of organizing the defense committee.

We knew a reporter on *The New York Times*, Peter Kihs, who was fair minded and an opponent of McCarthyism. Farrell got in touch with Kihs, who agreed to write an article on why Marxists oppose acts of individual terrorism as harmful to the workers movement, with specific relevance to the Kennedy assassination. Farrell suggested that Kihs get in touch with all the socialist groups, and get statements from them to this effect. The result was a fairly lengthy piece in the *Times* that was the first attempt in the major media to counter the potentially inflammatory atmosphere.

At the highest level of government Chief Justice Earl Warren insisted that the assassination was the work of a single deranged individual. Warren called on people to "abjure hatred," intolerance, and violence of all kinds. This helped dispel the development of anticommunist hysteria, which would have run counter to the then-current policies of the federal government.

Soon after his arrest Oswald was murdered by a crony of the Dallas police, Jack Ruby, in the basement of the Dallas jail. The murder occurred while Oswald was surrounded by cops, and the event was broadcast live on TV. Ruby hardly seemed the type to sacrifice himself in a burst of patriotic feeling. He was an unsavory character, a hanger-on of the cops and the owner of a cheap striptease establishment. The murder cut short any possibility for Oswald to defend himself. Oswald's only statement, made earlier to reporters while he was being displayed by the cops like a trophy, was, "I'm a patsy."

These peculiar circumstances made it impossible to know what had really happened in the assassination of Kennedy. As a consequence, all kinds of conspiracy theories have grown up in the decades since.

Melissa Singler and I were painting our apartment when we heard, live, the assassination of Oswald over the radio. Horrible as it was, we could not help breathing

a sigh of relief that this turn of events had precluded a witch-hunt trial of Oswald directed at drumming up anticommunism again. The December 8 issue of *The Militant* condemned Oswald's murder as well as the Kennedy assassination. A front-page article detailed how his constitutional rights had been violated from start to finish by the Dallas police and prosecutors.

Melissa Singler had been recruited in Detroit. She was a "red diaper baby," a term that we and others on the left used to describe the child of a radical parent. But Melissa's parental political influence was unusual. Her mother had been a member of the Proletarian Party, a group that dated back to the early 1920s, but which did not join the unification of communist forces that formed the Communist Party at that time. The Proletarian Party later adopted Stalinist politics but remained a small, independent sect based in Michigan. One of the members of the United Socialist Students of Greater Boston had been a supporter of this small group.

Melissa's mother worked in the office of a United Auto Workers local union in Detroit. The office staff was unionized, but not by the UAW. Melissa's mother helped lead a job action against the UAW bureaucrats' mistreatment of the office workers. Under Melissa's influence, and through attending our Friday Night Socialist Forums in Detroit, her mother came to support much of our Trotskyist politics.

Melissa had artistic talent. She helped design the *Young Socialist*, and later covers for books published by Pathfinder Press, which became the successor to Pioneer Publishers. She also for a time managed Pathfinder Press by herself in a hall rented in another building. Pathfinder had grown too big to fit into "116."

She was on the YSA National Executive Committee at the time of the assassination, and later became secretary to Farrell Dobbs. Farrell was always fond of Melissa, whom he called "little bit" in reference to her diminutive size.

In the years after the Kennedy assassination, a mythology has developed among liberals and even some leftists around John Kennedy and his brother Robert, who was Attorney General at the time. The Kennedy administration is hailed as enlightened and progressive, redolent of "Camelot," the mythical realm of King Arthur. Many people today credit Kennedy with fighting Jim Crow, when in fact he and his brother had done everything they could to hold back and blunt the Freedom Now movement. Some claim Kennedy would have pulled US troops out of Vietnam had he not been killed. The truth is that the US intervention in Vietnam was escalated step by step on his watch.

It is even speculated that Kennedy was against the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, but had to go along because it was a scheme that President Eisenhower, his predecessor, had cooked up. But Kennedy called for a Bay of Pigs-style invasion *during the 1960*

election campaign. In office, he pushed all the dirty tricks against Cuba, including arming and training counter-revolutionary guerrillas to wage terrorist campaigns inside Cuba and plotting Castro's assassination. And, of course, Kennedy brought the world to the brink of nuclear war in the 1962 missile crisis in an effort to break the Cuban revolution.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee held its Fourth Annual Conference in early December, a month after the assassination. They projected an intensification of the voting rights fight.

In another development, Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam, announced he was suspending Malcolm X, his chief spokesman, from his posts. He also barred Malcolm X from speaking publicly. The pretext for this punishment was that Malcolm had made intemperate remarks about the Kennedy assassination. Malcolm had described Kennedy's death as a case of "chickens coming home to roost" — suggesting that the wave of murderous violence against Blacks was now being turned against the US rulers who had permitted it. It soon became clear, however, that Elijah Muhammad had other reasons for moving against Malcolm.

15. MALCOLM X

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 19, 1925. In February 1946 he was sentenced in Massachusetts to 8-10 years imprisonment for burglary. While in prison he was won to the Nation of Islam, a Black Nationalist religious sect founded by W. D. Fard and headed at that time and until his death by Elijah Muhammad.

Emerging in the early 1930s, The Nation of Islam was one of the groups that developed as a result of the decline and splintering of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which had galvanized a large section of the Black community after World War I. The Nation of Islam taught a religious doctrine that Black people were blessed by God and that whites were devils specially created to oppress Black people. They called for the creation of an independent Black nation in the United States, but tended to stress that the achievement of this state would be the work of God, not human beings.

In 1952 Malcolm X, as he had renamed himself in the Nation of Islam manner, became assistant minister of the Nation of Islam in Detroit. In 1954, he was appointed minister of the Harlem mosque. A powerful speaker and thinker, Malcolm was a great success as a proselytizer for the Nation of Islam, which began to attract significant support in the late 1950s and early 1960s as nationalist sentiments spread among Blacks in the wake of an increased pace of civil rights activity throughout the country.

As the Black struggle burgeoned in the early 1960s, in the North as well as the segregated South, Malcolm X began to press the Nation of Islam to become more deeply involved in the struggle. His conflict with the leadership deepened when he discovered that the moral precepts of the Nation of Islam (which had helped reshape his life and which included opposition to drugs, alcohol, and violence and sexual abuse against Black women) were not being adhered to by Elijah Muhammad.

Malcolm X was suspended from the Nation of Islam at the end of 1963. In early 1964 he broke from the organization. Instead of attempting to combine religious and political organizations, he established a mosque for those who shared his religious

beliefs and a Black nationalist political organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, to participate in building a Black Nationalist movement in the United States

Today, Malcolm X is a recognized hero of Black America and he is also widely respected among many other sectors of society, so much so that his picture even appears today on a US postage stamp.

But that's not the way it was in the 1960s. Prominent liberals like James Wechsler, Social Democrats like Bayard Rustin and Tom Kahn, the Communist Party USA and other left-wing groups and spokespersons attacked Malcolm X with bitter hatred. Even the Black leaders of the civil rights movement treated Malcolm with guarded circumspection. And while he is a hero today, Malcolm's revolutionary ideas, especially those he developed or began to talk about openly after his break with the Nation of Islam in 1964, have largely been ignored and suppressed in the chorus of post-mortem praise.

This background needs to be remembered in order to understand and appreciate the revolutionary response of the Socialist Workers Party to the rise of Black nationalism and the revolutionary development of Malcolm X.

The split in the Nation of Islam resulted in a remarkable development on the part of Malcolm X. Malcolm had until then been the main public spokesperson for the Nation and was well known for his fiery brand of Black nationalism. Now, in what would turn out to be the last year of his life, Malcolm X broadened his horizons and deepened his understanding of the nature of the system that was responsible for the oppression of African Americans. Without giving up his Black nationalist viewpoint, he became an internationalist and was even moving in an anti-capitalist and socialist direction when he was gunned down in early 1965, most probably by government agents.

Even before his break with the Nation of Islam, Malcolm took notice of the fact that *The Militant* defended the Nation's civil rights against police frame-ups. *The Militant* also reported the content of his speeches honestly, in contrast to the daily press and most publications on the left. When he encountered *Militant* salespeople — Black or white — outside his meetings he would often stop to say, "That's a good paper."

Harry Ring, a *Militant* staff writer, interviewed Malcolm X early in 1964. In a change from his past positions Malcolm said that he would now support the civil rights movement in the South, while continuing to support the right of Blacks to armed self-defense against racist attacks. He began to accept speaking engagements in the South.

In a March 12 statement reprinted in *The Militant*, he outlined his plans for a new Black organization. "Whites can help us," he said, "but they can't join us. There can be no black-white unity until there is first some black unity. There can be no workers solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity. We cannot think of uniting with others, until after we have first united among ourselves."[1] This too, was new. Malcolm was thinking of the need for workers solidarity; but such solidarity had to be constructed on the basis of equality, and it required that Blacks first be organized as Blacks to fight their special oppression.

The struggle itself was bringing the Northern and Southern movements closer. Blacks were intensifying their fight in the North as well as all across the South. In New York City, a massive school boycott was being organized, as well as a rent strike in Harlem to protest the appalling conditions in the slums of the Black ghetto. The rent strike, led by Jesse Grey, was widespread, but had a weakness in not involving many rent strikers in the actual organization of the action. The YSA helped out. We went from door to door in Harlem, handing out leaflets and explaining the issues.

Malcolm X agreed to speak at the Militant Labor Forum on April 8. We knew that the meeting would draw far more people than could fit into our usual meeting hall at 116 University Place. So we rented the Palm Garden Ballroom for the event. Eight hundred people showed up for his talk on "Black Revolution." Among them were my parents. Like many other people, my parents had been influenced by the incessant public smear campaign against Malcolm X. But they came to see for themselves. They did hear a powerful revolutionary speech, quite different from what they had been led to expect from the press. Years later, my father would proudly tell people that he had heard Malcolm X firsthand.

The meeting was deemed important enough that the *New York Post* sent one of its top columnists, the liberal James Wechsler, to cover the event. Wechsler wrote a column warning of the danger of the "young Trotskyist intellectuals" getting together with the angry Black masses that Malcolm spoke for.[2]

Shortly thereafter, the cops and the press raised a hoax about the formation of a Black youth gang in Harlem, called the "Blood Brothers," who were supposedly organizing to murder whites for political reasons. One reporter said they were trained by "Black Muslim dissidents." The scare campaign was obviously directed against Malcolm X. We scheduled a Militant Labor Forum at 116 University Place, with Clifton DeBerry, the SWP's Presidential candidate, Quentin Hand from the Harlem Action Group, William Reed of New York CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), and James Shabazz, a leader of Malcolm's Muslim Mosque, Inc. It was a hot night, and the forum was packed. We were pleasantly startled when Malcolm X walked in

with Shabazz and spoke in his place.

Malcolm had founded the Muslim Mosque, Inc. right after his split with Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam. But Malcolm's subsequent experiences and his travels to Africa and the Arab world had caused his viewpoint to evolve; he became convinced of the need for a broader, non-religious organization. At a rally held at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem he announced the formation of the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

Jack Barnes and I held an interview with Malcolm X in early 1965, a few weeks before his assassination. He outlined the development of his thinking in the year since the split. He told us that the "press has purposely and skillfully projected me in the image of a racist, a race supremacist, and an extremist. First, I'm not a racist. I'm against every form of racism and segregation, every form of discrimination. I believe in human beings, and that all human beings should be respected as such, regardless of color."

Explaining the split in the Nation, he said, "The split came about primarily because they put me out, and they put me out because of my uncompromising approach to problems I thought should be solved and the movement could solve.

"I felt the movement was dragging its feet in many areas. It didn't involve itself in the civil or civic or political struggles our people were confronted by. All it did was stress the importance of moral reformation — don't drink, don't smoke, don't permit fornication and adultery. When I found that the hierarchy itself wasn't practicing what it preached, it was clear that this part of its program was bankrupt.

"So the only way it could function and be meaningful in the community was to take part in the political and economic facets of the Negro struggle. And the organization wouldn't do that because the stand it would have to take would have been too militant, uncompromising and activist, and the hierarchy had gotten conservative. It was motivated mainly by protecting its own self interests. I might point out that although the Black Muslim movement professed to be a religious group, the religion they had adopted — Islam — didn't recognize them. So religiously it was in a vacuum. And it didn't take part in politics, so it was not a political group. When you have an organization that's neither political nor religious and doesn't take part in the civil rights struggle, what can it call itself? It's in a vacuum. So, all of these factors led to my splitting from the organization."

Shortly after the split, Malcolm made his pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca, where he learned that Islam was colorblind, and accepted all races and peoples.

He also told us, "I used to define Black nationalism as the idea that the Black man should control the economy of his community, the politics of his community, and so

forth.

"But, when I was in Africa in May [1964], in Ghana, I was speaking with the Algerian ambassador who is extremely militant and is a revolutionary in the true sense of the word (and his credentials as such for having carried on a successful revolution against oppression in his country). When I told him that my political, social and economic philosophy was Black nationalism, he asked me very frankly, well, where did that leave him? Because he was white. He was African, but he was Algerian, and to all appearances, he was a white man. And he said if I define my objective as the victory of Black nationalism, where does that leave him? Where does that leave revolutionaries in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania? So he showed me where I was alienating people who were true revolutionaries dedicated to overturning the system of exploitation that exists on this earth by any means necessary.

"So, I had to do a lot of thinking and reappraising of my definition of Black nationalism. Can we sum up the solution to the problems confronting our people as Black nationalism? And if you notice, I haven't been using the expression for several months. But I still would be hard pressed to give a specific definition of the overall philosophy which I think is necessary for the liberation of the Black people in the country."

He explained the function of the two organizations he had helped form. First was the "Muslim Mosque, Inc., which is religious." This was the first group he established after the split. "Its aim is to create an atmosphere and facilities in which people who are interested in Islam can get a better understanding of Islam."

As a result of his thinking and experiences abroad, he came to the conclusion that another organization had to be built, a political organization which would be secular. "The aim of the other organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, is to use whatever means necessary to bring about a society in which the 22 million Afro-Americans are recognized and respected as human beings."

In this interview, he went on to talk about the role of students and youth in the struggle in the United States and worldwide, his opposition to US intervention in Congo, Vietnam and elsewhere, his contempt for the Democratic Party, and his belief that capitalism eventually will "collapse completely."[3]

The Militant sent reporters to cover the meetings of the OAAU, which often featured a talk by Malcolm. We also sent people to sell *The Militant* at those meetings. My brother Roland was one of the most consistent salespeople at these events. Sometimes the crowd would be suspicious of these salespersons, especially if they were white. But Malcolm would urge the audience to buy the paper, endorsing it as "one of the best."

In his April 8 talk to the Militant Labor Forum, Malcolm said that "1964 will be America's hottest year yet; a year of much racial violence and bloodshed. But it won't be blood that's going to flow only on one side. The new generation of Black people that have grown up in this country during recent years are already forming the opinion, and it's just an opinion, that if there is going to be bleeding, it should be reciprocal — bleeding on both sides."[4]

Malcolm was right. In July a Black rebellion rocked Harlem. Robert DesVerney, writing in *The Militant* reported, "Armed with nothing more than courage, bottles, bricks, bare fists, and occasional Molotov cocktails, Harlem residents, provoked by years of savage brutality by New York's corrupt and racist cops, managed to fight the tactical riot force of the police to a stalemate in three days of demonstrations and open hostilities.

"The immediate cause of the outbreak was the killing on July 16 of a 15-year-old Negro boy, James Powell, by a white police lieutenant wearing civilian clothes."[5]

The rebellion had a deep impact on me and on my political consciousness. Nothing like this had happened before in the United States during my lifetime. But it was only the beginning. In the following years, similar Black rebellions spread to cities across the country. New militant Black organizations formed, and older ones were transformed. Malcolm X was the prophet and symbol of this new upsurge. The worldwide youth radicalization that marked the political period called "the Sixties" was profoundly influenced by the American Black movement.

When he returned from a tour of Africa and Europe at the end of November, Malcolm blasted a renewed assault by Belgian and US imperialism on Congo. The purpose of the attack was to prop up the Belgium puppet Moises Tshombe, precursor to the infamous Mobutu. Tshombe's forces were under strong attack from the followers of the assassinated Patrice Lumumba. At an OAAU rally of about 1,000 in Harlem, he characterized Tshombe as the "worst Negro in the world," and said of the President-elect, "Johnson is sleeping with [Tshombe]." Addressing the crowd, he said, "Man you voted for him [Johnson]. You were insane, out of your mind. I don't blame you. You were tricked."[6]

Malcolm X agreed to speak at another Militant Labor Forum on January 7, 1965. The title of his talk was "1965 — Prospects for Freedom." About 600 people came to hear him. After the talk, I jumped up on the stage and introduced myself as the editor of the *Young Socialist*. I asked Malcolm if he would do an interview with the YS. He readily agreed, and we set the day and time. The result was the interview referred to above.

I discussed the project with Jack Barnes, newly elected National Chairman of the

YSA. We agreed that Jack should accompany me to do the interview, to help build the YSA's relations with Malcolm X. I drew up a list of questions, and we went with a tape recorder up to Malcolm's office at the Hotel Teresa on 125th Street in Harlem. Malcolm was dressed immaculately, as always, but I noticed that the collar of his white shirt was frayed. Clearly he was having financial troubles since the break with the Nation. We had a good interview with him, and we went away convinced that he would like to talk again with us.

I took the tape, transcribed it, and edited it lightly. I also sharpened some of Malcolm's points. We had agreed that Malcolm would have the final say on the article. I had to work at my new assignment on *The Militant*, as well as edit the *Young Socialist*, so we decided that Jack would take the draft back for Malcolm's approval.

Jack was excited when he came back from his meeting with Malcolm. He told me that Malcolm liked the way I had edited the piece and he had nothing to change. He also discussed the planned march against the Vietnam War that Students for a Democratic Society had initiated and that the YSA had endorsed and was building. Malcolm wanted to know how we planned to resolve the contradiction between our full revolutionary socialist program and our support of a demonstration that had limited objectives. Malcolm had been wrestling with questions like this for some time, even before he was expelled from the Nation of Islam. The Nation had always talked in a militant fashion, but it never participated in struggles along with other groups. Malcolm X wanted to take part in the Black struggle as it was, and at the same time he wanted to further his militant revolutionary objectives.

Malcolm and Jack also talked about the possibility of Malcolm making a nationwide speaking tour of the college campuses, organized by the YSA. Jack told him that he thought student groups of many types, and even student governments and faculty could be drawn into such an effort. What we would do is spearhead the project. Malcolm replied that even if only the YSA sponsored the speaking tour, it would be OK with him.

But this was not to be. Malcolm X was assassinated on February 22, 1965 as he was about to address a meeting of the OAAU at the Audubon Ballroom. My brother Roland was present, and had to duck for cover as the shooting started. He got up to witness Malcolm collapse and die on the stage.

Melissa Singler and I were at the YSA's national headquarters. We rushed over to 116 University Place, as did most members of the party and YSA. An event of some sort was scheduled to take place later in the afternoon. Tom Kerry, shaken like we all were, addressed us. He told us that in face of this terrific blow we should go ahead with our plans, and not allow this criminal act to demoralize us. We had just received

off the press the issue of the *YS* that contained Malcolm's interview. We put a special insert into each copy about the assassination.

Three people were charged and tried for the assassination. One of these, Talmadge Hayer, was caught at the scene because he had been shot by one of Malcolm's followers. The other two were members of the Nation of Islam. Hayer admitted his part in the crime, but has always said the other two defendants were not part of the plot. The government sought to put the blame on the Nation, which had certainly opened itself to the charge, by making openly hostile and threatening remarks about Malcolm. There had been a fire-bombing of Malcolm's home, and an attempt on his life when he was driving through the Sumner Tunnel in Boston, which he thought were the work of the Nation. But shortly before the assassination, Malcolm came to believe that the government was the main force behind actions taken against him, including in other countries. He said that the Nation didn't have the resources to carry out these actions.

Herman Porter was at the Audubon Ballroom when the assassination took place, planning to cover the meeting for *The Militant*. He also covered the trial of those accused of the murder, who were all convicted. His *Militant* articles on the trial were collected into a pamphlet, which made a strong case that it was the government, through one of its covert agencies, that was responsible.

The *New York Times* gloated in its reporting of the assassination, suggesting that Malcolm X, as an apostle of violence, got what he deserved. Today, this same mouthpiece for the ruling class portrays the historical Malcolm as a tame figure.

Some 30,000 people passed by Malcolm's casket in the Harlem funeral home where his body was on view. At the funeral itself, thousands of Blacks and a few dozen whites stood in line on a bitter cold day, but only 1,000 were able to get in. In the audience were John Lewis, chairman of SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee); Black comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory; Stanley Branch of the Chester, Pennsylvania, Freedom Now Committee; James Farmer of CORE; Harlem rent strike leader Jesse Grey; James Foreman, executive director of SNCC; Robert Moses, head of SNCC's Mississippi voter registration project; and even Bayard Rustin, a Black social democrat and a political opponent of Malcolm X.

Ossie Davis, the Black activist and actor, spoke. Ruby Dee, also an actress and Black activist, read the many statements from around the world and the country, many from Africa, saluting the fallen leader. In a very moving passage in his speech Ossie Davis said, "Malcolm was our manhood, our living Black manhood. This was his measure. This was his meaning to his people. In honoring him we honor what is best in ourselves. We know him for what he was — a prince. Our own, Black, shining

prince — who did not hesitate to die because he loved us so. And now we surrender his services to Islam."[7]

We also held our own memorial meeting at 116 University Place. Clifton DeBerry chaired the meeting, which was addressed by James Shabazz, Robert DesVerney, and Farrell Dobbs, National Secretary of the SWP. The final speaker was Jack Barnes, who spoke on the meaning of Malcolm's life for the new generation of revolutionists. We of that new generation felt that Jack was speaking for all of us. The YSA soon put out a pamphlet with our interview and Jack's speech.

There were other memorial meetings we held around the country. George Breitman gave a speech in Detroit, which we published in full over two issues of *The Militant*, entitled "Malcolm X: The Man and His Ideas." We soon published books by and about Malcolm that explained and preserved Malcolm's contribution to the movement for the liberation of all humanity.

Malcolm X was the greatest person I have ever met.

16. A BLACK FOR PRESIDENT

In the 1964 elections, the SWP decided to run Clifton DeBerry for President. He was the first African American to be nominated by a political party to this highest office. His running mate for Vice President was Edward Shaw. Both were relatively young, DeBerry being 39 and Shaw 40. Both were on the party's Political Committee, and Shaw was the recently elected National Organization Secretary of the party.

I was chosen by the PC to be the campaign director. This was part of a transition from being a leader of the YSA to taking on strictly party assignments. I was still YSA National Chairman and editor of the *Young Socialist*, but I was now writing more frequently for *The Militant* on subjects that included the war in Vietnam and the Black struggle. Since I would be 28 in 1965, I would graduate from the YSA in any case.

Finances for the campaign had to be kept separate from the usual party finances, so we raised funds specifically for the campaign. We had to operate on a shoestring budget, but we were able to send DeBerry and Shaw on nationwide speaking tours, and we put out campaign leaflets and a poster. We won support from more advanced activists, especially among students and other young people. Our main target was youth.

To reach youth interested in the campaign, but who were not necessarily ready to join the YSA, we formed Students for DeBerry and Shaw (in some areas called Youth for Deberry and Shaw). We obtained as many speaking engagements on campuses as we could for the candidates.

The candidates personified two of our central issues: the Black struggle and the defense of Cuba. DeBerry had been a member of the Communist Party when he was recruited to the SWP by Farrell Dobbs in the 1950s, when Dobbs was the party organizer in Chicago. DeBerry had been a union organizer, and was active in the Black struggle. Shaw was recruited when he was a sailor. He had been a leader of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

The SWP campaign strongly supported independent Black political action. The

highest expression of this was the Freedom Now Party in Michigan, which won ballot status for a statewide campaign. The central leader of the Michigan FNP was the Rev. Albert Cleage. The SWP campaign supported the FNP.

At the Democratic Party convention, the predominantly Black Mississippi Freedom Democrats sought to unseat the official all-white Mississippi delegation. The Freedom Democrats were an outgrowth of the struggle to register Blacks in that state, particularly the 1964 Freedom Summer campaign, spearheaded by SNCC. In that struggle three young civil rights workers, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, the first one Black, the other two white, were murdered, sparking national outrage and attention. But the convention rejected the Freedom Democrats' appeal, and even succeeded in keeping the issue from coming to an embarrassing floor vote. The result outraged the Freedom Democrats, SNCC and other Freedom Now fighters.

The Republicans nominated Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who was on the far right wing of the party. His Democratic opponent was President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who had been Kennedy's Vice President, and who succeeded to the oval office after the assassination. Johnson, a former Texas senator who had only recently taken some distance from his fellow Southern segregationists in the Senate, was, of course, to the left of Goldwater. Liberals, labor officials, civil rights leaders and even many Republican voters supported Johnson.

Most people on the socialist left also supported Johnson as a lesser evil. An exception was the Communist Party, which supported him as a positive good and put forward the Johnson campaign slogan, "All the way with LBJ." The Students for a Democratic Society put out a campaign button with the words, "Part of the way with LBJ."

Over the Labor Day weekend, the Young People's Socialist League held its convention, and rejected support to either capitalist party, a break with its parent group, the SP-SDF. While the SP-SDF hadn't officially taken a position, its prominent leaders, including Norman Thomas and Michael Harrington, were openly campaigning for Johnson. The SP-SDF suspended the YPSL, charging it had taken a position "outside the basic framework of democratic socialism."

I wrote an open letter to YPSL, urging it to support the SWP campaign, and a number of YPSL members did join Students for DeBerry and Shaw. YPSL itself disintegrated. Some former YPSL members regrouped and formed what would become the International Socialists.

I wrote an article in the *Young Socialist* entitled, "Is Johnson the Answer to Goldwater?" I also wrote a campaign statement that was issued in the name of the candidates: "How to Fight Goldwaterism."

We and the Freedom Now Party certainly were fighting against the dominant current. But we were attracting those who were coming to an understanding of the need for independent working class and Black political action.

We did not equate Johnson and Goldwater but argued that supporting Johnson was not the way to fight the threat that Goldwater represented. The so-called "lesser evil" capitalist politicians like Johnson were part of the system that spawned the extreme right. We attacked Goldwaterism for its openly anti-union, pro-racist and warmongering stands. Goldwaterism was an expression of reaction to the Black Freedom Now movement.

We also exposed Johnson's wretched record on Black rights and warned that he was escalating the Vietnam War. In the middle of the campaign, Johnson bombed North Vietnam, using a phony incident in the Tonkin Gulf to provide cover for a near-unanimous resolution by Congress that gave him the legal fig leaf for years of bloody war against Vietnam.

In contrast to the capitalist candidates, we stressed the need for the Black freedom movement to stay in the streets. We argued against the notion of placing reliance on the Democrats, which meant limiting or stifling the struggle for their benefit.

At the end of the campaign, the Students for DeBerry and Shaw organized two conferences on independent political action, in Detroit and New York. In Detroit, Rev. Cleage spoke to a rally at the conference: "Any Negro with all his marbles will vote for Clifton DeBerry." Besides the two candidates, James Shabazz of the OAAU also spoke. In New York, Shabazz was again a speaker. He was joined by Dr. Otto Nathan, an economist and executor of Albert Einstein's estate. Paul Boutelle, who was the candidate of the Freedom Now Party in Harlem, spoke. He joined the SWP soon thereafter. Sharon Krebs, one of a group of young people who defied the government's ban on travel to Cuba in the summer, supported the socialist ticket. Rev. Cleage and his brother Henry, both candidates of the FNP, sent messages to the New York meeting from Detroit.

I was the final speaker at both conferences. I urged the many youth present to join the YSA. As a result of the campaign and the windup conferences, we made some important recruits, including a number of African Americans and a renewed YSA chapter in Philadelphia.

While in Detroit, I also spoke to the Black youth group at Rev. Cleage's church on the class and race divisions in American society, and advocated revolution. I remember one young man in particular, whose face would light up at various points I made. The more militant I was, the brighter he smiled. He was Derrick Morrison, who would soon join the YSA and play a leading role in our activities.

Our support for Black nationalism and self-determination was beginning to attract young Blacks trying to think through the relation between Black nationalism and socialism. Our championing of the ideas of Malcolm X played an important part in their thinking. They came to agree with our view that the Black struggle was a central part of the socialist revolution to be carried out by the whole working class, and that Blacks would play a key role in that revolution.

George Breitman's writings in particular, attracted a number of young Black revolutionists in Detroit. Since George lived there at the time, they sought him out. They were startled to find he was white, but that fact also helped convince them of the possibility of revolutionary action alongside white workers.

Lyndon Johnson won the presidential election by a landslide. The vote for the Freedom Now Party unfortunately disappointed its leaders, who had unrealistic expectations about an immediate mass response from Blacks. They became demoralized and the Freedom Now Party withered away. The vote for DeBerry and Shaw was small, as we expected, but we weren't campaigning primarily for votes but to spread our ideas and win new supporters to the party and the YSA. This we accomplished on a modest scale. The Communist Party hailed Johnson's victory, convinced that he would now move in the direction of peacefully resolving conflicts.

The Students for a Democratic Society was hopeful that the President would now wind down the Vietnam War. They received a rude shock a few months later when Johnson ordered a massive escalation of the Vietnam War, with a major bombing campaign against North Vietnam and the massive deployment of US troops. I spoke at a rally against the war that SDS sponsored at Harvard soon after, and an SDS leader there told me, "You were right" about Johnson.

* * *

Two weeks after the assassination of Malcolm X a mass march for Black voting rights attempted to leave Selma, Alabama to go to Montgomery, the state capital. Governor Wallace called out state troopers, and the local sheriff armed white "posse men" with whips to stop the march in a bloody attack on the unarmed protesters. Scores were injured, including SNCC Chairman John Lewis, whose skull was fractured.

"But that was only the beginning," Fred Halstead wrote in *The Militant*. "The terror lasted into the night when posse men went through the streets beating on automobile hoods with nightsticks and yelling: 'We want all niggers off the streets.'"[1]

The attack was televised and shown throughout the nation and the world. Americans were stunned by the brutality of the carefully planned attack and Wallace's defiance. Demonstrations in support of the marchers mushroomed in city after city, the largest

being some 25,000 in Harlem in New York City. Even the more conservative civil rights leaders demanded that federal troops be sent to Alabama, or Blacks would have to arm to defend themselves.

Another march was planned two weeks later, with Martin Luther King at the head. Wallace vowed he would smash that one, too. The federal government went to court to try to stop the march, but the outcry was so huge that President Johnson relented and allowed the march to proceed. He also sent federal troops to guard the marchers.

Over 5,000 began the march in Selma, and then, in an agreement worked out with the federal government, most returned to Selma. Three hundred continued the two-day trek to Montgomery. Of these 250 were Black Alabama freedom fighters and 50 were "dignitaries."

The YSA sent Peter Camejo, its National Secretary, and Betsey Stone, YSA National Organization Secretary, to the march. They were accepted as part of the "dignitaries" contingent. Camejo covered the march for *The Militant* and obtained an interview with the recovering John Lewis. Betsey at one point slipped into a ditch at the side of the road. She was helped up by a fellow marcher, who turned out to be Marlon Brando.

The Selma events marked a turning point. The Johnson administration, escalating the war in Vietnam, wanted to quench the anger fueling the rising Black movement at home. Johnson sponsored the first new civil rights law that had any teeth to it, the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Congress approved the law under the pressure of the massive outcry in defense of Black voting rights in the South.

The movement wasn't quelled, however, but was inspired by the victory.

17. I Leave the YSA and Become Militant Editor

Much of the day-to-day work of members of both the party and YSA was prosaic. There were weekly branch business meetings, and for those who were members of both the YSA and SWP, that meant two such meetings. There were street sales of *The Militant* and the *Young Socialist*. Sales began to pick up in the 1960-64 period, as the Black and youth radicalization began to develop. We sold *Militant* subscriptions door to door, particularly in Black neighborhoods. We ran state and local election campaigns, and this also meant petitioning to get SWP candidates on the ballot. New York and Detroit had regular weekly public forums, and other areas began to follow suit.

For big events we had our announcements printed professionally. But for ordinary weekly public meetings, even offset printing was too expensive. In the early days we used a mimeograph, cutting the stencils on manual typewriters, with handmade headlines and home-grown line drawings by our artistically inclined supporters. By the mid-sixties, we obtained machines that could make stencils photographically. We also used the new IBM Selectric typewriters that could print proportional fonts. We made headlines from special commercially produced paper with typefaces that you could rub off onto the mock-up. I suppose that these time-consuming technologies would be unknown, if not unimaginable to activists of today, but they were quite typical for the time.

Our most technologically advanced activity was the publication of our weekly newspaper, *The Militant*, which was to become a big part of my life activity for the next several years.

The Fourth National Convention of the YSA, held over the 1964-1965 New Years weekend, marked my graduation from the youth organization and a shift to direct party-building work (as distinct from building the party through strengthening the YSA). Jack Barnes was elected the new National Chairman of the YSA, and I became a staff writer for *The Militant*. For a time, I remained editor of the *Young Socialist*,

until the new editor, Doug Jenness, was able to move to New York. In this interim Jack Barnes and I held our interview with Malcolm X. I had been working on *The Militant* part time for much of 1964 and early in 1965. The final issue of the bi-monthly *Young Socialist* that I edited was dated April-May, 1965, and was sold at the first large antiwar demonstration, called by Students for a Democratic Society.

I learned a lot working under *Militant* editor George Weissman. He could sharpen an article politically and stylistically often simply by rearranging or deleting sentences or phrases. He tried to keep the author's words and style intact. Tom Kerry, who at that time was editor of our magazine, *International Socialist Review,* was a good editor too; but Tom had a different approach. Although he preferred not to rewrite someone else's work, and would make suggestions for improvement, he sometimes could not resist the urge to insert expressions of his own. Regular readers could probably infer that Tom was the source of these very colorful invectives. Weissman's lighter touch did not sacrifice political clarity, but made the different articles in the paper reflect the styles of the various authors, making for more variegated and interesting reading.

George's main fault as an editor was that he was a night owl and procrastinator. Sometimes he would not come in to the office until 3 p.m. or later. We would have a staff meeting to plan the issue on Thursday afternoon. Most of the staff went to the New York branch meeting Thursday night and the regular Militant Labor Forum Friday night, as well as taking part in various branch activities on the weekend. As a result, most of the work on each issue was done on Monday and Tuesday. Because of George's schedule, we would most often stay up all night Tuesday through Wednesday morning, drinking coffee and eating sausage sandwiches and hot peppers from Smith's bar and grill across the street. Staff writer Fred Halstead said the paper was improvised, like jazz.

Harry Ring did the main work of laying out the paper and writing headlines. Every so often he would snap, become furious with George's lack of discipline and storm out of the building. Once, Farrell ran out after him to talk him into coming back so that the issue could be completed. After cooling off for a bit, Harry would always come back.

The final copy would be delivered to the printer Wednesday morning, and George would go home and crash all day. The rest of us would get the proofs back from the printer during the day. After a few hours sleep, Harry would come in to lead the work of final proofreading and layout. We would finish around 6 p.m. and take our mockup and final proofs over to the printers.

Weissman had agreed to be the editor for a limited time. Actually he was the

acting editor. Joe Hansen was still listed as editor on the masthead, but he and his wife Reba had gone to Paris as SWP representatives to the new center of the reunified Fourth International.

I was asked by the Political Committee to become the new acting editor. In the late spring of 1965, George Breitman came to New York from Detroit for a few weeks to train me for this assignment. The first issue that I was responsible for was dated June 7, 1965.

To the relief of the staff, I immediately set up a much more normal schedule. We still had the long day on Wednesday, but we were able to finish earlier because we had done most of the proofreading and mock-up beforehand. Fred Halstead, however, still liked to work through the night sometimes, especially when writing an important article he wanted to ponder about. Sometimes I would leave him at his desk when I went home at 9 or 10 p.m. on Tuesday, and find him still tapping thoughtfully on an article when I came in the next morning at 8 a.m.

* * *

Younger readers who are used to lithograph printing, personal computers and Internet publishing might find it interesting to learn a little more detail about how *The Militant* was put out in those days.

Before writing an article, the authors would usually be given a line count by George Weissman or Harry Ring. Harry would take a black grease pencil and draw the outline of the space allotted to each article, using the pages of a previous issue as a guide. The staff would then compose the articles on old manual typewriters, with the margins set for 68 characters on a line. With that setting, we knew approximately how many inches of type each article would take.

After editing, the articles would be sent over to the commercial printers. There the articles would be typed on a linotype machine. This machine had a standard keyboard, and as each letter was typed, a mold of that letter would fall down from small boxes onto a holder, and a line of molds would be built up.

The machine also melted lead. When a line was finished, hot liquid lead would flow into the molds, making a single rectangular piece of lead with the molded letters raised in relief on one edge. The line of lead type would then fall into a long container just under the previous line, and in this way a column of type would be built. The used molds were then mechanically sorted by the machine back up to their respective boxes. The raised letters on the column would then be inked and printed on a proof sheet a little wider than the column.

Two of these proof sheets were made. One would be used for proofreading, usually

by two people, one reading the original copy out loud while the other checked for errors on the proof sheet. The other proof sheet would be taped onto Harry's mockup to see if it really fit. If it didn't, marks were made to indicate what should be cut or what space was unused. The corrected proofs were sent back to the printers.

Photographs were sent out to a photoengraver. They were marked to indicate which part of the photo was to be used, and whether the photo was to be blown up or reduced. The photo was screened into a pattern of dots and etched on a metal plate. The plate was then glued to a piece of wood, so that the plate's surface was the same height as the columns of type.

We called those mounted engravings "blocks." Harry would outline on his mockup the space each block would occupy. Headlines were made up in the print shop from molds of different sizes and styles of letters. Then they were cast with hot lead.

Finally, with all the spaces on the mockup pasted in with proofs, or left blank for the blocks, we would take the mockup over to the printers, who used it to make up the pages in a frame, using the lead columns and blocks.

After each page was made up, a new proof was made for the whole page. We would once again proofread each article against the copy. One person would read over each page without the copy for a final proofreading. Sometimes we had to cut an article to make it fit. To make a cut at this stage we had to throw out lines of type from the bottoms of paragraphs, up to the point where a sentence ended. The printers would saw off anything on the line to the right of the period. (Actually, the printer's frame showed the page in reverse, something like a mirror image, so the period was really on the left of the sentence in the frame.) Sometimes we would have to saw off part of a photo block.

To accommodate this method of final cutting, we wrote paragraphs with the most important sentences first.

When a hole appeared, we would throw in an advertisement for a book or pamphlet. We had a stock supply of these small ads already made up and kept at the printers. Sometimes, to fill space, we put thin pieces of lead in between each line of type.

When we were all done, the printers would tighten the frame, locking in the lines of type, blocks and headlines. The frame would then be put on a flat bed press and the pages would be printed.

Subscription copies of *The Militant* were rolled up in a paper wrapper by a mailing company. These wrappers with the subscribers' names and addresses were prepared by the *Militant* business office. They were printed from plates with raised letters. The plates were stacked in a printing machine, which took them one at a time and, with a loud clunk, printed the names and addresses on the wrappers. The plates themselves

were typed from subscription forms, on a machine that whacked the plates with a thump as each character was typed so that the letters and numbers would be raised on the plate.

In the years ahead, we made gradual improvements by adopting more modern technology.

I like all aspects of revolutionary journalism, from writing and editing to layout and printing to selling. I like the smell of print shops. I like the old hot type process and the new cold type print shops too.

18. The New Antiwar Movement

At the 1960 founding convention, the YSA had about 130 members. Following the 1961-62 New Year's convention, that figure went up to about 230. We held at that level for two years or so. Although this is a small number, it was not out of line in comparison with other left-wing and socialist groups at the time.

In the early years, we had more than our fair share of very alienated people with peculiar personalities. Some people of that sort were attracted to groups like ours for the wrong reasons — simply because we stood at such variance with the prevalent attitudes in society at large. By 1964, however, we had won over a layer of young people who were influenced by real struggles, primarily the Cuban revolution, the Black struggle and resistance to the witch-hunt. They were participants in real life actions, along with other young militants. As a result the bulk of our members were pretty much just like others of their generation. It was simply becoming more common for young people to hold views like ours.

We were developing a strong youth cadre through a natural sifting process, with some who had joined earlier dropping away and new, more committed recruits replacing them. Our geographical distribution also spread out into areas where there were no party branches, usually places where there were college campus struggles. This put the YSA in a good position to plunge into the new antiwar movement that arose among students in 1965.

The 1964-65 YSA convention held over the New Year's holiday weekend occurred during the first truly mass and sustained student campus action in our political experience — the Free Speech Movement at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. YSA members participated in the FSM, and the convention heard first-hand reports from the Berkeley delegates.

The precipitating issue was the right of students to carry out support activities on campus on behalf of the civil rights movement. Jack Weinberg, who later became a member of the campus Independent Socialist Club, oriented to the International Socialists, set up a literature table for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The

university authorities had him arrested.

Weinberg was put into a police car. A growing crowd of students, eventually numbering thousands, surrounded the car and prevented the cops from taking Weinberg to jail. For two days the protesting students used the roof of the cop car as a speaking platform.

The Free Speech Movement emerged as a coalition of campus groups. YSA member Syd Stapleton became one of the central leaders. The main leader who emerged during the fight was Mario Savio. The FSM organized thousands of students in sit-ins, and held a successful student strike around the issue of student political rights, in the face of adamant resistance from the university administration and the state-appointed Board of Regents that ran the California university system.

Harsh rules, arising out of the witch-hunt experience, prohibited free political expression and activity, especially of a left-wing variety, on campus. The cops tried to repress the revolt, but this only brought more students into the movement. At the height of protest, some 10,000 students participated and many more supported them.

The issue of student political rights, or "student power" as it came to be called, became intertwined with the political issues that fueled the radicalization.

At the YSA convention, I had suggested that the war in Vietnam could trigger a strong response among youth, especially on campus. We knew, of course, that we were not strong enough to create a mass response ourselves, and we could not know what was about to happen.

Shortly after I got back to New York in January, C. Clark Kissinger, the National Secretary of the Students for a Democratic Society, phoned the YSA national office. He informed us that SDS was calling for a national student demonstration in Washington against the war. Jack Barnes and I met with Kissinger soon after. We offered the cooperation of the YSA in building the action. SDS sent letters to the major peace groups, most of which ignored the invitation. But the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) endorsed the action.

In early February, President Johnson initiated the major escalation of the war, sending the first big wave of troops and beginning the continual bombing of North Vietnam. Support for the march began to take off.

The youthful SDS was linked to the League for Industrial Democracy, a social-democratic group. The LID and many of the former leaders of SDS were completely opposed to the march. Leaders of the traditional peace groups like SANE were also unhappy with the idea. C. Clark Kissinger came under intense pressure to include opposition to North Vietnam and the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (which the government called the "Vietcong") as part of the basic stance of the call

for the march.

The YSA encouraged resisting the pressure, arguing that, in contrast to North Vietnam and the southern fighters, the US had no right to be in Vietnam at all. We called for immediate withdrawal of all US troops.

The SDS leaders basically held firm against the pressure from the LID. They decided that the official theme of the march would be "End the War in Vietnam," a position we accepted because it was fundamentally directed against the US government, rather than just being for peace in the abstract or criticizing both sides equally. This thrust of opposition to Washington remained a hallmark of the movement from then on.

The march was set for April 17. SDS printed up thousands of placards, reflecting different views on how to fight against the war. But they left out the call for immediate withdrawal, a concession to the more conservative peace groups and the LID. We carried the signs reading "Self Determination, Not US Sponsored Dictatorship." For us, the principle of mass action to oppose the US war was the deciding factor, not the particular slogans being raised.

SDS resisted LID pressure on another issue — whether to exclude so-called "communists" from the march. It was decided that all who were against the war would be welcome. This was a big step forward from the old exclusionary policies of organizations like the Student Peace Union. While the issue would continue to come up in various forms in the years ahead, non-exclusion became a central pillar of the new antiwar movement.

We in the YSA and SWP threw ourselves into building the march. On campuses across the country committees arose to organize for the march, often taking on some variant of the name, Committee to End the War in Vietnam. Some older peace groups, including Women Strike for Peace, and others, endorsed the action. In a breakthrough, leaders of SNCC endorsed the march.

The issue of *The Militant* preceding the march carried the headline, "Join the March on Washington to Protest the Vietnam War!" over a statement by Jack Barnes as the YSA National Chairman. Barnes drafted the initial version of the statement. I revised and edited it, and he checked it over and made final changes. In the coming years, we would often work together in this fashion.

The issue of the *Young Socialist* we sold at the march was the last I would edit. After that, Doug Jenness became editor. The issue of *The Militant* at the march featured a headline in huge type demanding "GET GIs OUT OF VIETNAM." On the front page was an interview I had conducted with C. Clark Kissinger.

The Militant also included a speech by Fidel Castro that called on the USSR and

China to unite in support of the Vietnamese in face of the US attack. The two giant countries were letting their differences create obstacles to providing Vietnam with much needed aid. Emphasizing the need for greater aid from both countries was a Cuban theme throughout the war.

The demonstration was a big success, with 20,000 participants marching on Congress from the Washington Memorial. This was the largest student demonstration in US history up to that point, and signaled a new mood of rebellion on the nation's campuses.

Shocked by the scope of the action, the State Department announced April 24 that it was sending speakers to colleges and universities across the country to "explain" the war.

Early in May, the situation was compounded by a US invasion of the Dominican Republic to crush a popular uprising by revolutionary military officers, who armed civilians against the US-installed dictator of the country. The revolt smashed the dictatorship's army in three days, but the US salvaged its control of the country by sending 24,000 troops. It would take months for the US troops to put the rebellion down, and stabilize a subservient government.

So the State Department had to try to explain away two invasions. As I wrote in *The Militant*: "The State Department's touring 'truth team' defending the US war in Vietnam got badly battered on the first three campuses it went to."[1] The more the government tried to explain the war to students, the more students turned against the war.

The first "teach-in" was held before the march. Some of the faculty at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor were considering calling a strike to protest Johnson's escalation of the war. They were threatened by the university administration and by state legislators. Since many of these faculty members were young and without tenure, they beat a very intelligent and successful retreat, only to continue the struggle with a different tactic. They decided that instead of a strike, they would hold classes as usual on March 24, but with a focus on the political and historical background to the war, and then continue in an all-night discussion on the war from 8 p.m. that evening until 8 a.m. the following day. They used the phrase "teach-in" in reference to the sit-ins of the civil rights movement.

Following the Michigan lead, dozens of other campuses held similar events at the same time. Some 3,000 students showed up for the event in Ann Arbor. The teach-ins enabled faculty members and other speakers who opposed the war to present the facts about the US invasion, and educated tens of thousands of students. They deepened unity against the war of faculty and students, and made it harder for the university

administrations or politicians to crack down on either.

On May 15, a national teach-in was organized in the nation's capital, with a broad array of speakers on the war. McGeorge Bundy, a top State Department spokesman, was invited to speak, but he chickened out at the last minute. About 4,000 people attended the 15-hour proceedings. More than 100 campuses held their own teach-ins that day.

On May 21, the largest of the teach-ins opened at the University of California at Berkeley. About 30,000 participated in that 34-hour marathon. Speakers were invited to present the Johnson administration's side, and they were scheduled to do so, but they backed out. An important speaker was Isaac Deutscher, a biographer of Trotsky and Stalin, an expert on the Soviet Union, and an anti-Stalinist Marxist. He was also invited to speak at the Washington teach-in. His reasoned speeches presented to such large gatherings the proposition that it wasn't the Soviet Union, China, or Vietnam that had initiated the Cold War, but the capitalist West.

Those who had organized the Berkeley teach-in formed an ongoing coalition called the Vietnam Day Committee. SWP and YSA members became part of the VDC, as did people from the other socialist groups, although the VDC was led by independents. Paul Montauk, an SWP member in his forties who already had more than two decades of political experience, played an important role in the nuts-and-bolts organizing of the VDC.

The new anti-Vietnam-War movement had begun in earnest, and it would be here to stay until the war ended.

In August, the Black ghetto in the Watts section of Los Angeles exploded in a sustained Black rebellion. Like previous uprisings elsewhere, it was ignited by the strong-arm methods used by two cops of the notoriously racist L.A. police department in arresting a young Black man for a misdemeanor. It took a week for the cops and 13,000 California National Guardsmen to subdue the rebellion. More than 4,000 Blacks were arrested, 30 were killed, and 900 injured. This powerful expression of rage against racist oppression had a major impact on the country. It deepened the radicalization of young people, including young whites. Many saw the connection between racism at home and the racist war against another people of color, the Vietnamese.

Several prominent leaders of the protest movements, including Robert Parris Moses of SNCC, David Dellinger and Staughton Lynd of the antiwar movement, and Carl Oglesby of SDS, called for a "Congress of Unrepresented People to Declare Peace in Vietnam" in early August around the anniversaries of the atom bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At this conference, 17 student antiwar committees including the Berkeley

VDC formed a National Coordinating Committee to End the War in Vietnam (NCC). The VDC called for nationwide and international antiwar actions for October 15, and this call was endorsed by the NCC and SDS.

Soon after, the DuBois Clubs, the Communist Party youth group, won approval for moving the NCC offices to Madison, Wisconsin, where they had a sizable group. Frank Emspak, a supporter of the DuBois Clubs and the son of a top national leader of the United Electrical Workers Union, became the national leader of the NCC. (The DuBois Clubs were named after W.E.B. DuBois, who was a founder of the NAACP and a historic leader of the Black struggle. DuBois also supported the CP for many years.)

Although we supported and participated in the Congress of Unrepresented People, we initially gave little weight to the potential role of the NCC. We were still looking to SDS to take the initiative. But it soon became clear that the SDS national leadership was turning away from spearheading the new antiwar movement after their triumph of April 17. The SDS leaders failed to see that the war had become the central issue in US and world politics. Instead, they wanted to build a new radical movement around "community organizing," a vague term that never became a coherent political orientation. It took us some time to realize that SDS as a national organization was frittering away the opportunity they had following April 17. The Berkeley VDC filled the leadership vacuum with its call for autumn actions, on the weekend of October 14-15.

Some 70,000 to 100,000 people in about 60 cities participated in the demonstrations that day. The largest of these was held in New York City where some 30,000 marched down Fifth Avenue. The Fifth Avenue Vietnam Peace Parade Committee was formed to organize the New York demonstration. It typified the broad, inclusive antiwar coalitions that arose in cities all across the country, and it remained the most important antiwar group in the New York area throughout the history of the movement. Fred Halstead of the SWP became a key staff member of the New York Peace Parade Committee. Internationally, hundreds of organizations responded to the VDC call and organized demonstrations all over the world.

The figure of 30,000 that *The Militant* used was based on a count that I made. We knew that the police and daily press always underestimated protest demonstrations, while action organizers sometimes inflated the figures. Street marches tend to form rows of people marching side by side across the width of the march. I made a rough count by estimating the average number of people in each row, and counting the rows as they passed a fixed point. We did our best on *The Militant* to give accurate numbers, which was useful in gauging whether or not the movement was growing over the

course of successive demonstrations.

The NCC called a national conference of antiwar committees to be held in November in Washington, D.C. This conference proved to be a major confrontation between two opposed strategies for the developing antiwar movement. The most consistent proponents of these two strategies were the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party, and the youth organizations associated with them.

It may seem odd that these two currents played such a central role in the movement. After all, we were just emerging from the witch-hunt and anticommunism was still strong. The overwhelming majority of those who participated in the actions were not political supporters of either the CP or the SWP.

But the lines of difference between these two organizations — primarily whether to focus on mass action or electoral politics, on independent working class political action vs. support to the Democratic Party — represented fundamental lines of division that had appeared in mass movements in the United States and elsewhere throughout the twentieth century. The division was basically between the strategies of class struggle and class collaboration. The Communist Party current and the SWP/YSA current simply gave more thought-out expression than others to these counterposed perspectives. The battle over these two lines of approach was to arise time and again in the anti-Vietnam-War movement.

In addition, the two groups were cadre organizations of dedicated people who would take the time and expense to come to leadership gatherings of the movement, such as the one called by the NCC. Of course, there were many people playing leading roles in their local committees who also attended. But these independents did not usually have strong opinions on strategy. The CP and SWP would be arguing not primarily in hopes of convincing people from each other's groups, but in order to win over the independents.

Another very important force was the radical pacifists, represented by figures such as Dave Dellinger, A.J. Muste, and Staughton Lynd. They had few forces but had moral weight. They didn't always agree among themselves, and would sometimes bloc with one side and sometimes the other. They represented a tradition that favored civil disobedience and other acts of individual witness as a means of protest rather than mass action. That line of approach was also raised time and again in the new antiwar movement.

If the major peace groups had taken up the fight against the war, they would probably have dominated the movement at first. But the issue was just too radical for most of the old-line peace groups like SANE (Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy). They couldn't break out of the framework of anticommunism and state the truth that

it was Washington's aggression that was responsible for the war. They still felt the need to blame both sides. They couldn't accept non-exclusion because that would have meant the inclusion of groups designated as communists. They opposed the slogan of the immediate withdrawal of US troops because that might allow the other side, the Communists, to win in Vietnam. On all these points they were out of touch with the youth who were being drawn into the movement.

The officials of the US labor movement, the AFL-CIO, could have played a decisive role if they were so inclined, but they were much further to the right on the war question and more anticommunist than the moderate peace groups, whom they denounced. They were deeply committed to US foreign policy, and were tied into some of the CIA's dirtiest tricks around the world. Only a few trade union officials challenged the official AFL-CIO policy at this point.

So the radicals stepped into the breach.

By the time of the conference, we had realized that we were in for a major fight with the CP over what direction the antiwar movement should take. Before the conference, *The Militant* published articles on the issues we knew would be in dispute, most by Fred Halstead. These helped prepare our members and those who were working with us in the local committees. At the same time, Dick Roberts took on the task of keeping *Militant* readers abreast of developments in the war itself.

We came to the NCC gathering with a sizeable contingent of party and YSA members to carry out our organized participation. The CP came similarly prepared.

My main role in our antiwar efforts was as editor of *The Militant* and as a member of the Political Committee developing our party's policies in the fight against the war. We published articles explaining the differences in the movement, often by Fred Halstead and Harry Ring, and occasionally by myself or other leaders of the party. Sometimes, as part of the leadership of our forces, I also played a role at the major gatherings where the movement would debate out its next steps. It was in this capacity that I was at the NCC convention.

A pretty intense struggle took place at the NCC conference from the very outset, with Frank Emspak from the CP youth and Lew Jones from the YSA literally struggling over the microphone, each pulling on it from a different side. The struggle was over whether an announcement should be made for an additional workshop where the local committees to end the war could get together for discussion about how to build support for the immediate withdrawal demand. Emspak represented the NCC national office, and Jones the Washington antiwar committee that was hosting the event.

The CP supporters were determined to block the formation of a group dedicated to the immediate withdrawal demand, even if it was simply one group within the

broader coalition, which was all we were proposing. They saw the militancy of the campus committees and the demand for immediate withdrawal as an obstacle to turning the movement back toward the Democratic Party.

We didn't get much sleep, as the faction fighting became intense. One early morning, about 4 a.m., Staughton Lynd, a supporter of immediate withdrawal, came into Jack Barnes' room at the hotel where the NCC conference was being held, and where we were discussing our strategy. Lynd pleaded with Jack and me to agree not to call a meeting of those who wanted a national organization of campus and local youth antiwar committees that could eventually support the immediate withdrawal demand. We refused.

We went ahead and organized the "thirteenth workshop," so called because there were only 12 approved workshops. We had to organize the workshop separate from the main conference venue, and we even had to physically protect it from potential disruption by the CP supporters.

The "thirteenth workshop" was too narrow to establish a national organization of antiwar committees. Instead, we decided to set up a publication which would continue to push for such a national organization. This publication was called the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*.

A national organization of the independent antiwar committees did not result from the conference, due to CP opposition. Many at the conference just could not understand the fight, because it tended to take an organizational form. But the counterposed lines were subsequently clarified.

The CP wanted the movement to go into electoral politics, specifically, into the Democratic Party. This was their strategic orientation for the movement. They were opposed to the immediate withdrawal slogan, not in and of itself, but because the so-called "doves" in the Democratic Party rejected the idea. The CP tended to be hostile, even implicitly exclusionary towards any grouping, like ours, that didn't share their orientation to the liberal Democrats.

Our views became sharper and more defined in this struggle. We were for building the broadest movement possible of all who opposed the war, excluding no one, no matter what overall political views they had. Within the movement, we would argue for the slogan of immediate withdrawal of the US troops. One reason for this slogan was that it stood on the principle of self-determination for the people of Vietnam. We didn't concede to Washington even the right to negotiate Vietnam's future. Equally important, this clear-cut demand could best appeal to wide layers of the American people, including the soldiers, as they became disenchanted with the war.

After the conference, it soon became apparent that the National Coordinating

Committee was not what its name implied, but was just one tendency in the movement located in Madison, Wisconsin. We, along with other supporters of the idea, began putting out the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter* addressed to the rank and file antiwar activists, particularly the students and other youth. It was true to its name, and helped organize the movement for the next actions. Gus Horowitz became the editor.

The fight we put up at the NCC conference convinced friend and foe alike that we were leaders of a substantial current and a force to be reckoned with in the new antiwar movement.

19. The Overthrow of the Algerian Revolution

On June 19, 1965, a military coup led by Col. Houari Boumedienne overthrew the revolutionary government of Ahmed Ben Bella. Ben Bella was arrested, along with thousands of left-wing militants of the National Liberation Front. Demonstrations in support of Ben Bella were repressed. Right-wing Muslim theologians, who had been on the defensive in the first years of the revolution, immediately supported the new regime, as did Washington and Paris.

On June 26, Fidel Castro blasted the coup in a speech given to young people who had been scheduled to attend the Ninth World Youth Festival in Algiers (which Boumedienne soon cancelled). Castro expressed his pain and anger at this blow to the Algerian revolution.

"We are not going to speak in diplomatic language, we are going to speak in revolutionary language," he said. "We cannot discuss this question without creating enmity. But in these circumstances what is important is the correct point of view, a correct and objective analysis as far as possible."[1]

Boumedienne had headed an army of Algerian rebel exiles in Tunisia during the revolutionary war, and he supported Ben Bella in the 1962 struggle that brought Ben Bella to power. After the coup, Boumedienne attempted to reassure the Algerian people that he was still for the socialist project. Castro took that claim up in detail, asking why then was it necessary for the military to overthrow the revolutionary government? That wasn't a revolutionary or socialist undertaking.

Castro also expressed his personal appreciation of Ben Bella, recalling the Algerian leader's support of Cuba during the missile crisis. When the speech was distributed in Algeria, Boumedienne closed down the Cuban press service there. Major excerpts from Castro's speech appeared in *The Militant*.

The SWP and the Fourth International subsequently analyzed the reasons for this defeat. We noted that the FLN never embarked on the road of transforming itself from

a political-military guerrilla force into a revolutionary socialist party, unlike the Cuban July 26 movement.

In contrast to the Cuban revolution, the initial mobilizations of the Algerian workers were not developed. There had been important nationalizations, but these were not built upon to eventually expropriate the capitalists, as had happened in Cuba. Instead of moving forward, Ben Bella temporized with the various factions in the leadership, hoping for a consensus on advancing the socialist objective.

In Algeria, the differences at the top expressed different class interests. By not turning to the people for support against his foes, Ben Bella allowed the initiative to pass to Boumedienne. When the blow came, the masses were not prepared to counter it.

We came to the conclusion that the workers' and peasants' government had been overthrown, registering the fact that the possibility of going forward toward a socialist revolution had ended. A new popular revolution would be required to open that road once again.

The SWP used the term "workers' and farmers' government" both as a slogan leading towards a revolutionary socialist government, and as a tool in analyzing situations like the one in Algeria. As a transitional slogan, it meant urging the workers and peasants (or workers and working farmers in a country like the US) to take power into their own hands. As a tool for analyzing, it helped understand situations that were in a transitory stage: a stage in between a capitalist state and a workers' state, where a revolutionary overturn created a government that had the potential to advance toward a workers' state. Joe Hansen did most of the theoretical work on this concept.

The concept had helped us to understand what happened in the Chinese revolution. In 1949, Mao's peasant army took power, smashing the old state led by Chiang Kai-shek's Koumintang. It did so, however, under the Stalinist theory of a "bloc of four classes," that included the "patriotic bourgeoisie." Socialist measures were limited to nationalizations of capitalists who had not supported the Koumintang (a substantial section of the capitalists, of course). Independent mobilizations by China's small working class were suppressed or tightly contained. The land reform, which was the great aspiration of the peasant uprising, was halted in part of the country.

Under the impact of the American invasion of Korea, however, the bourgeois allies proved ever more unreliable. The Chinese capitalists hoped that the US would cross over into China and liberate them from the revolution, a real possibility. China sent troops to Korea to fight the imperialist threat. The Chinese CP leadership turned to the workers and peasants, and mobilized them (under bureaucratic control) to smash the capitalists and to complete and consolidate the overthrow of landlordism. In that

way, a nationalized and planned economy was created by the revolution; and so we said that by 1952 a workers' state was established in China.

It was, however, a workers state that was saddled with a Stalinist-type bureaucratic caste.

In hindsight, we came to the conclusion that the regime that had been set up with the victory of Mao's rebel army in 1949 was a workers' and peasants' government, even though it was not led by an internationalist revolutionary party, but by a Stalinist party. This government came to power in a real mass revolution which smashed the old state. The Chinese leadership had shown itself, in spite of its flawed program, to be capable of leading the exploited classes against landlordism and capitalist property. Under pressure from US imperialism, it carried through the transition to a workers' state.

When the Cuban revolution occurred, we were in a position to better understand it in light of the Chinese experience. The Cuban revolutionary leadership was not hindered by a Stalinist program, and was determined to carry through its program for a national-democratic revolution to the end. At first the Cubans set up a coalition government with anti-Batista capitalist politicians who had some credibility with the masses. But these capitalist figures were soon forced out when they attempted to stop the agrarian reform, the creation of a popular militia, and other measures in the interests of working people.

At a certain point in this revolutionary break with the bourgeois forces in Cuba, a workers' and farmers' government was established. Hansen suggested that the definitive shift in the class character of the government was marked by the resignation in late 1959 of the liberal Felipe Pazos as head of the national bank and his replacement by Che Guevara. This government carried through the expropriation of the capitalist class and the formation of a workers state, basing itself on the mobilization of the workers and peasants, women and the youth.

In Algeria, we saw that this type of intermediate government could retreat and decay as well as go forward. While the Ben Bella government had a revolutionary and socialist program, it wasn't able to put it into practice. There was nothing foreordained about this defeat. It came down to a question of leadership, a test the Cubans passed and the Algerians failed. In the end, even though what you say is important, what you do in practice is decisive.

20. THE 1965 CONVENTION OF THE SWP

Early in September, the SWP held its convention in New York, around the themes of the Vietnam War and the Black struggle. Joe Hansen gave the international report, highlighting the war as the central issue of the class struggle worldwide. Farrell Dobbs gave the political report, which focused on the new antiwar movement. Longtime SWP leader Vincent "Ray" Dunne remarked in the discussion that this was the first time we saw an antiwar movement develop *after* the shooting started. Before both world wars there had been movements against entering, but the great majority of these peacetime pacifists converted into warmongers once the US was in.

Robert DesVerney presented the Black liberation resolution, and YSA National Chairman Jack Barnes gave the report on the fight of young people on both interconnected fronts.

In the next period, Jack became the central leader of the antiwar activity of both the SWP and YSA. He helped think through the oft-times tricky tactical questions involved in trying to hold antiwar coalitions together while maintaining their focus on building mass actions against the war that could allow ordinary Americans, including workers and soldiers, to express their opposition.

One of Jack's strengths at this time was his ability to work smoothly with the various leaders of the older cadre of the SWP, as well as with the younger ones. He could help build a consensus by integrating the ideas of many different leaders, and rank and file members as well.

As the war and the movement against it grew, we honed our position down into some simple and clear but profound ideas. The most important by far was to focus on mass action against the war. Along with this, we promoted the demand for immediate withdrawal of US troops and the principle of non-exclusion.

Another important concept we hammered away at was that the antiwar movement should be focused on the single issue of the war. This was the only glue that held the

movement together. The various forces in the leadership of the movement did not agree on much else, and what most of them did agree on (pro-Democratic Party politics) would have tended to push them more toward accommodation with the liberals rather than consistent struggle against the government's course.

We always kept in mind that the majority of the American people did not follow any of the radical tendencies in their overall politics. As more and more people became opposed to the war they would join in demonstrations and other activities that centered on the war, but not necessarily on other issues. We also stressed that the tactics of the movement had to be peaceful, to attract as wide a layer as possible.

Throughout the years that followed, the question of having a "single-issue" or "multi-issue" focus was one of the points of contention and even of splits in the antiwar movement. Other tendencies held unrealistic expectations of somehow turning the movement against the war into a multi-faceted movement for social change or even a radical party of some type. But they never could agree on precisely what they wanted. The CP and various social-democratic currents sometimes supported the arguments for a multi-issue focus because they favored turning the movement toward Democratic Party politics. Reducing the stress on the centrality of the war would aid that objective.

Often at antiwar conferences, the different perspectives would be reflected in a debate on whether or not to "set the date" for the next major action. We knew that setting a demonstration date would get the ball rolling, focus attention on a specific objective, and enable the movement to reach out to new forces to build the action. Those opposed to our perspective often argued against setting the date in order to gain time to change the orientation and objectives of the movement.

Sometimes people who had been newly radicalized by their participation in the antiwar movement argued that demonstrations, which had a value earlier, were now outmoded and ineffective. They said that it was necessary to go beyond peaceful mass actions and take up more militant tactics. But this meant ignoring the need to reach out to the many millions of people who were still not yet convinced to take any action at all.

In the end, our orientation generally carried the day and helped change US politics profoundly.

Another issue that was not specifically on the convention agenda, but which we discussed at that time and subsequently in both the SWP and YSA, was whether we should join SDS. SDS had clearly made a name for itself for having organized the first big antiwar demonstration in April, 1965. As a result, many newly radicalizing young people were joining SDS and new chapters of SDS were being formed all over the country. It seemed to offer fertile ground to reach people with our socialist ideas.

We decided, however, that it was more important to focus on the developing antiwar movement. The SDS leadership had turned away from antiwar organizing. Joining SDS and trying to maintain our antiwar focus would have necessarily led us into needless internal fights with the SDS national leadership over the central course of action that should be followed. It would have been more difficult to organize antiwar actions and to reach the larger body of young people who were activists in the antiwar movement. In a few places, YSA members did participate in SDS, but the experience did not generally prove to be beneficial.

Even though we were not members of SDS, we were still able to reach SDS activists who did participate in the antiwar movement. Local SDS chapters, in particular, often went their own way, independent of the policy pronouncements of the national SDS office. We were able to work well with many of these SDS chapters, and we won some of these SDS activists to our ideas.

In contrast to our approach, the Progressive Labor Party decided upon an entry tactic into SDS. That experience led to continual faction fighting and ultimate disaster for both PL and SDS.

The resolution and report on the Black struggle deepened the position we had adopted in 1963. We took into account the development of Malcolm X's ideas after his split with the Nation of Islam, the ghetto uprisings, and the intensification of the struggle in the South. We also adopted a position in favor of the formation of an independent Black party, an extension of our support to independent Black political action. Such a party would tend to be largely working class in composition due to the class structure of the Black nationality. A Black party would not only fight for the specific interests of the oppressed Black people, it would also point the way forward for the working class as a whole in breaking with the capitalist parties.[§]

[§] A few months after the convention, in December, the SWP in New York held a special dinner to honor one of the most important leaders of the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956, E.D. Nixon. When Rosa Parks was arrested on a Montgomery bus for refusing to give up her seat to a white man, it was E.D. Nixon whom she called for help.

During the bus boycott, SWP leaders Farrell Dobbs, Fred Halstead and Clifton DeBerry went to Montgomery, where they met many of its organizers, including Nixon, and became friends with him.

In 1948 a French socialist who toured the American South wrote about "E.D. Nixon … a vigorous colored union militant who was the leading spirit in his city of both the local union of Sleeping Car Porters and the local branch of the NAACP. . . . Nixon has both feet on the ground. He is linked to the masses. He speaks their language. He has organized the work of race defense with the precision and method of a trade unionist."[1]

Nixon sensed that the mood of the Black masses in 1955-56 in Montgomery was such that

The 1965 convention adopted a resolution on party organization. A three-person committee, composed of Farrell Dobbs, James P. Cannon and George Novack, had been created to draw up this resolution. Farrell wrote the original draft, and George Novack edited it into final form. The document was based on previous resolutions the SWP had adopted. The new resolution basically sought to reaffirm perspectives and methods of functioning that had been part of our tradition, but which were more honored in the breach than in practice during the period of the witch-hunt. The party, faced with the deep conservatism and relative isolation of that time, had been forced to live with lower expectations and less organizational cohesion.

With the rise of the Black struggle and the youth radicalization, Farrell saw the need to reaffirm the SWP's historic view of the need for a democratic centralist combat party. This view flowed from the analyses of Marx and Lenin, that when the great majority of workers and other people exploited and oppressed by capitalism came to the conclusion that a fundamental social change was necessary, there would be armed resistance organized by the capitalist ruling class, using the police and army against the workers.

Moreover a broad enough popular movement against capitalism would be more than the army and police could handle, especially since the army could be won over to the side of the workers, as was illustrated in the Russian revolution. The army is really composed of workers and farmers in uniform, and is not immune to the general ferment in society. We saw harbingers of this phenomenon in the US during the later stages of the fight against the Vietnam War, when widespread antiwar sentiment took root among the soldiers.

To fight the rebellious working class, the rulers would have to resort to mass counter-revolutionary formations organized around radical, ultra-rightist politics. Such fascist movements had already been seen in the 1920s and 1930s, with the Italian Fascists, the German National Socialists, and the Spanish Falange. For the workers to win when such showdown battles erupted, they would need not only revolutionary

---

a big step forward could be taken, and he led the organization of the bus boycott together with a core group of younger Black ex-GIs.

When he retired in 1964, *The Black Worker*, paper of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, wrote, "It must be said that Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. may never have been given the Nobel Peace Prize Award were it not for the fact that Brother Nixon induced Rev. King to take the chairmanship of the Montgomery Improvement Association which ultimately was successful in abolishing discrimination in bus transportation."

Nixon's role in the fight was largely forgotten and ignored later, which is why we brought him to New York for this special dinner in his honor.

mass organizations such as class struggle unions, soviets, factory committees and armed detachments, but a disciplined party that had been trained in struggle and that had a clear Marxist program and political will to power.

We knew that we were a small revolutionary propaganda group, not yet a real revolutionary party. Black people and youth were radicalizing, but there was as yet no mass radicalization of the working class as a class. Our reaffirmation of the organizational character of the party was a reaffirmation of our goal of socialist revolution. But it was more than that. We were affirming the need to build a disciplined, educated cadre organization in the here and now.

Most of the older leaders joined Farrell in seeing the need to reaffirm our organizational character. Younger party leaders of my generation wanted to build an activist movement. We were sympathetic to the concept in the resolution that the party's internal life had a natural rhythm, balancing discussion and action. There were regular periods for broad discussion among all the party members nationally. Then, after decisions were made by majority vote, we would all join together to put those decisions into practice as a united party.[§]

Since 1961, internal differences in the party over Cuba, the Black struggle, Maoism and the Fourth International had become very sharp. The various minorities kept trying to re-open discussion on these questions in some of the branches even after decisions had been made by convention vote. Continual argument over settled questions tended to hamper our work in the broader mass movement. We were unable to conduct fruitful discussion of what to do on a daily basis. In the important New York branch, where I was a member, one meeting broke down into shouting matches from the floor. It was so unruly that the chairperson could not keep order. Farrell Dobbs, drawing upon his respect among the membership, had to take over the chair to calm things down.

Our younger members, in particular, were fed up. We wanted to turn our attention fully to work in the antiwar and Black movements. We pressed forward for more active branches that could continue to win new members to our cause.

An aspect of the resolution that appealed to the younger members was its emphasis on serious organization in all matters. This was a source of pride in the SWP. We rejected all dilettantism and organizational slovenliness. Clifton DeBerry once told me that when he first came around the SWP in Chicago, he was impressed to see Farrell Dobbs, who was the Chicago organizer at the time, sweeping the SWP premises.

[§] In light of subsequent experience, more will be said about this question in Volume Two of this book

We paid attention to organizational details, knowing that it wasn't enough to have good political ideas. Our ideas had to be put into practice, and that meant organization. We loved the slogan of the 1930s Minneapolis Teamsters under the leadership of the Trotskyists: "Whether a picnic or a strike, do it right!"

Jack Barnes had earlier played a key role as the Chicago branch organizer in turning that branch around, establishing regular public meetings (we called them forums), sales of the press, and strong finances. Another branch which became a model was in Detroit, which had maintained weekly forums through the witch-hunt period, as had the New York branch. Soon, every branch was re-establishing norms of activity that had been lost in the 1950s in many areas.

Most of the party leaders and activists, young and old, supported the organizational resolution. But Murry and Myra Weiss, who did not have big political differences, were opposed.

One point in the resolution that broke new ground referred to the case of James Robertson and his supporters. The Robertson group had come to the conclusion that the SWP had lost its revolutionary orientation, and could not be changed. Accordingly, they rejected the idea of loyalty to the party. In fact, they described the party as a "diseased shell." This was truly a split perspective. They intended to stay in the party only until they felt they had won as many over to their views as they could. The Robertson group developed these ideas in documents that were kept secret from the rest of the party.

Tim Wohlforth, whose group had split with Robertson at about the time these documents were produced, didn't want to be associated with this perspective. Wohlforth's loyalty was not to Robertson's faction but to the Socialist Labour League in Britain, headed by Gerry Healy. The Healy group had opposed reunification of the Fourth International and had its own schedule for a split. Wohlforth turned the Robertson documents over to the party leadership, and as a result the Robertson group was expelled. They formed the Spartacist League, which is still around today.

Murry and Myra were opposed to the expulsion. They had no sympathy for Robertson's politics, but they charged that the expulsion was wrong because it was based only on an *idea*, the idea that the party was a diseased shell, and not on an *act* of indiscipline. Most of us thought that the distinction was nonsense in this case. Even a conventional community service organization like the Kiwanis Clubs would refuse to grant membership to people who held no loyalty to the organization whatsoever.

James P. Cannon supported the resolution. But Cannon later sent a letter to the leadership, warning of the danger of stifling the internal discussion and debate in the party. Cannon wrote in response to an action taken against the Kirk-Kaye group in

Seattle, who had circulated a letter to the party branches attacking the party's antiwar policy. The Kirk-Kaye group eventually walked out of the party on their own steam.

Cannon strongly agreed with the party's policy in the antiwar movement, but he advised against any tendency to take all our organizational concepts and norms of disciplined behavior and turn them into absolute principles, all enforceable by expulsion. "Don't strangle the party," he warned.

He stressed the party's organizational tradition, which went back way before the witch-hunt, of thoroughly debating and clearly resolving political questions before taking action against any who might refuse to live with the decision reached by the majority.

It seemed to me and other young leaders that the party had shown no weakness of the type Cannon warned against — just the opposite. Years of almost continual debate had settled a whole series of big political questions. The party now needed to continue in a basically activist direction and act in the unified manner that had been set by the organizational resolution.

Murry and Myra Weiss resigned soon after the 1965 convention. A factor in Murry's resignation was personal. He had suffered a very serious stroke and could no longer function at the same level as he had in the past. The other political minorities also left or deliberately provoked their own expulsions, as they felt no longer at home in an SWP that held views so at variance with their own.

The 1965 convention was a turning point. It armed us politically and organizationally to participate effectively in the burgeoning movement in the years ahead. Our well-disciplined and competent organizational functioning would earn us much hostility from those who disagreed with our proposals and perspectives, but it maximized our effectiveness well beyond what might seem possible, given our small numbers. We were a renewed and replenished party, ready for the battles that lay ahead.

In the early and mid-1960s, many new radicals were identified with a general current of thought labeled as the "New Left." This current, mostly identified with the Students for a Democratic Society, rejected democratic centralism, in favor of what they called "participatory democracy." The rationale behind this concept did have the merit of trying to involve as many activists as possible in the decision-making process, not just a handful of leaders. But the notion of participatory democracy stressed the often illusory goal of consensus and downplayed the importance of decision-making votes. As a result, when differences of opinion arose, participatory democracy usually gave way to backroom deals among leaders. Furthermore, adherence to this concept didn't prevent SDS from falling into fierce internal factionalism in a few short years.

SDS and other groups like it eventually split into rival groups with dictatorial internal lives, sometimes around the cult of a single leader.

While our democratic centralism and organizational thoroughness was anathema to the New Left, it was very different from the dictatorial centralism promoted by the pro-Moscow and pro-Peking groups. The Stalinization of the world's Communist Parties in the late 1920s crushed internal democracy in those parties. No deviation was allowed.

Of course, in the United States, the CP could only punish dissenters by expulsion and shunning, while Stalin imprisoned and murdered hundreds of thousands of the real communists who opposed his counter-revolution. But the US party aped the Soviet model as best it could. The Maoist groups did the same in following the Chinese model.

Democracy in the SWP was real, as real as its centralism. Given our historical battle with Stalinism, the right of the membership to have the final say, and the right of all members to criticize the leadership and discuss all questions was jealously guarded.

Holding regularly scheduled conventions was an important part of this internal democracy. We held conventions every two years. A period of pre-convention discussion, at least for three months, was the norm. The National Committee would prepare resolutions on the major issues before the party, so that these could be published in a timely way to kick off the discussion. Sometimes there were counter-positions from a minority on the NC, and these were also published in a timely fashion.

All members could participate in the written pre-convention discussion on any subjects, and they could present their own counter-resolutions if they so chose. They could form tendencies and factions in the pre-convention discussion to advocate their views. There were also discussions and debates in the branches. The internal bulletins of the SWP during the 1960s and 1970s were filled with articles by party members, a testament to the rich internal discussions that were part of our tradition.

If there were differences defined by counterposed resolutions, delegates from the branches to the convention would be elected in proportion to the support each position received. The delegates so elected would then make the final decision at the convention.

Trotskyists tended to be non-conformists, stiff-necked rebels. They also tended to be wordy. I think Trotskyists wrote more per capita on political issues, including polemics, than any other group in the world. And what they produced was often of a very high level politically. Polemics could also be sharp. A revolutionary workers' party can be pretty rough and tumble. Joe Hansen, a well respected older leader and one of the most able polemicists, set a good model of civility in conducting political

debate.

Sometimes, the losers in a debate would feel they hadn't been given a fair shot, and would charge that they had been bureaucratically suppressed. In retrospect, I think that there were isolated instances of high-handed or bureaucratic acts in the SWP in these years. But, on balance, I also think that we were one of the most democratic organizations on the left. I know of no other group that conducted written and oral discussions anywhere near as extensive as ours.

Certainly, we were more democratic than the capitalist Democratic and Republican parties, where money and machine politics rule. We were also more democratic than the bureaucratized and sometimes gangster-ridden trade unions.

21. Fidel Castro Attacks Trotskyism

In January 1966, Havana hosted the Tricontinental Conference of African, Asian, and Latin American Peoples. This was a meeting of movements who advocated fighting against imperialism and for socialism. Moscow and Peking sent delegations. It was apparent that apart from pro-Peking groups from Asia, other movements that were opposed to the Kremlin's policies had been screened out, including the Trotskyists, who supported the Fourth International.

Under pressure of the Cubans, the Tricontinental conference adopted many militant resolutions that were implicitly opposed to the Kremlin's line of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism. For the pro-Moscow Communist Parties of Latin America, these resolutions were just window dressing, and they never intended to carry them out. Castro gave a speech at the end summing up the conference.

The United Secretariat of the Fourth International issued a statement in response to Castro's speech. The statement was directed to Castro. "On the one hand, this speech is imbued with an incomparable revolutionary spirit, as when you proclaim that 'for Cuban revolutionaries the battleground against imperialism is the whole globe,' when you promise that 'revolutionary movements in any corner of the globe can count on Cuban combatants,' when you tell the American imperialists once again that the only way they can gain peace is to get out of Vietnam, when you call upon the Latin American revolutionists to extend armed struggle to an ever-growing number of countries in order to make it impossible for the imperialists to concentrate their forces against the revolutionary forces of a sister people. Reading this part of your speech we feel in solidarity more than ever with this orientation and line of action.

"But on the other hand the speech also levels systematic, slanderous attacks against Trotskyism, the Trotskyist movement and the Trotskyist program as a whole, attacks whose unjustified nature is felt by us with indignation and revulsion."[1]

This statement was occasioned because Castro had repeated the Stalinist charge

that Trotskyism was an agency of imperialism, the charge made in the 1930s in the infamous Moscow Trials of old Bolsheviks, which hardly anybody (Castro included as far as I can tell) gave any credence to after Khrushchev's 1956 denunciation of the crimes of Stalin.

Among other things, Castro had stated: "Even though at one time Trotskyism represented an erroneous position, but a position in the field of political ideas, Trotskyism became during the following years a vulgar instrument of imperialism and reaction." Castro went on at length along these lines.

Castro's attacks were based on the words and actions of followers of Juan Posadas. These groups in Cuba and other Latin American countries proclaimed themselves to be Trotskyist. But Posadas had left the mainstream of the Fourth International as a bitter opponent. He and his followers promoted exotic views that had little in common with Trotskyism. They also tended to act in a very sectarian and provocative manner in the places where they had groups.

Che Guevara had not been seen in public for a time, and his whereabouts was not publicly known. This caused speculation in some quarters, particularly among opponents of the Castro leadership.

Followers of Posadas, including the journalist Adolfo Gilly, claimed that Guevara had been silenced or that he had left Cuba in a political break with Castro. Gilly suggested that Che had supported the supposedly more revolutionary Peking line. There wasn't a shred of real evidence for these claims. A Mexican follower of Posadas even made the outrageous and slanderous charge that Castro had "eliminated" Guevara because of alleged political differences. After the conference, Gilly also said in the US socialist journal *Monthly Review* that Guevara had been killed. (In later years Gilly left the Posadas group and joined the Fourth International.)

In his speech, Castro made it clear that his comrade Che was alive, that he was still carrying out his revolutionary duty, and that the situation would be clarified in due course. Every word of this was true. It later emerged that Guevara and a number of other Cuban revolutionists were preparing to launch a guerrilla front in Bolivia, along with Bolivian revolutionists, after a failed attempt to rekindle the revolution in Congo. The Cuban government's secrecy about Che's departure from Cuba and his current whereabouts were intended to aid that project.

It's not surprising that Castro was outraged by Gilly's smear and the irresponsible role of the *Posadistas* in Guatemala and elsewhere. But Castro's response made an amalgam between the *Posadistas*, who hated the Cuban leadership, and the mainstream of Trotskyism, which had strongly defended the Cuban revolution and leadership. Castro, of course, was right to rebut the Posadas group's false charges. But he also

made an erroneous attack on the entire Fourth International and Trotskyism in general.

We took this attack very seriously, and devoted many pages in a number of issues of *The Militant* to answering Castro's charges, point by point. Joe Hansen wrote the major articles, but we also reprinted the statement of the Fourth International as well as documenting the fact that the mainstream Trotskyists worldwide and in the United States were among the most consistent and effective defenders of the Cuban revolution. Where was the spirit of Castro's 1962 speech "The revolution must be a school of unfettered thought?" we asked.

Leo Huberman and Paul Sweezy, the editors of the independent, pro-Cuba socialist magazine *Monthly Review*, also took up Castro's attack on Trotskyism, saying that the "accusation has no foundation whatever, as anyone who has seriously studied the history of the communist movement since the October Revolution must know. It was precisely this accusation which provided the rationalization for the Soviet purge trials of the 1930s. If anything has been proved — and not least by the Soviet government itself — it is that the trials were a shameless frame-up; and no evidence has ever been produced to restore credibility to the accusation."[2]

The independent newspaper the *Guardian*, also pro-Cuba, likewise printed a refutation of the charges. Their editor-in-exile Cedric Belfrage, who attended the conference, added that "Castro's blast seemed out of context since the Peruvian guerrilla movement, which the conference treated with the same respect as all others, is well known to have been sparked by Trotskyists. [The reference was to Fourth International leader Hugo Blanco, who was the central leader of a mass peasant movement for land. This movement defended the peasant occupations with arms, under the slogan "Land or Death!" At the time, Blanco was in prison in Peru. — BS.]

"Furthermore Trotskyists have since shown from the record that the sources quoted by Castro on Guevara's disappearance were not of Fourth International spokesmen, and that the groups affiliated with the International have in fact always supported Castro and the Cuban revolution."[3]

The American Stalinists, however, couldn't contain their glee. While failing to report a single one of the militant resolutions adopted by the Tricontinental Conference, the CP paper, *The Worker*, zeroed in on Castro's attack on Trotskyism. CP leader Gus Hall also wrote a long article attacking the view put forward by the editors of the *Monthly Review* that "the only kind of revolution that has any chance of succeeding in Latin America today is a socialist revolution." This was also the view of the Cuban leadership, who popularized the concept with the slogan, "Socialist revolution or a caricature of revolution!"

Joe Hansen wrote a reply to Gus Hall that we ran in *The Militant*, explaining that

the real difference between the Stalinist and Trotskyist views was whether or not to subordinate the movement of the workers and peasants to the national capitalist class. He explained that a burning question in Latin America was to carry out radical land reform. But any such project would have to come into conflict not only with landlords and the imperialists, but with the native capitalist class as well. The working class, in alliance with the peasants, would have to take power to carry through the agrarian reform. In explaining Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, Hansen wrote, "Therefore, [Trotsky] argued, the coming revolution [in Russia] would begin with bourgeois goals." [Radical agrarian reform, in Marxist terminology, is part of the goals put forward by the great democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie.] "The proletariat will have an opportunity to take power under revolutionary-socialist leadership. In power the proletariat will transcend the bourgeois character of the revolution by establishing a *proletarian* dictatorship with *socialist* aims."[4] The experience of the Russian and Cuban revolutions confirmed this view, Hansen explained.

So what was the meaning of Castro's attack on Trotskyism? Today, we know that the anti-Trotskyist diatribe was merely an episode, and that Castro would not abandon the revolutionary course that he had set. But at that time we had to consider several possibilities. One possibility was that Castro, incensed by the slanders and actions of the Posadistas, accepted help from Stalinist advisors to present his counter-attack. It was also possible that Castro's anti-Trotskyist attack was meant to appease the Soviet leaders, as a political concession made in return for Soviet aid. But at the time we also had to consider the *possibility* that the Castro leadership of Cuba was moving towards a Stalinist world view. Fortunately, time proved that the last possibility had no real foundation.

In March, Castro gave a speech in which he stated, "I told them also [referring to a delegation of Christian Democrats from Chile who attended the Tricontinental Conference] that I did not think that conditions in Chile permitted a revolution of that type [a bourgeois-democratic revolution led by the bourgeoisie], and that in the conditions of Chile if a revolution was desired, it would necessarily have to be a socialist revolution, and I explained why. Because in an underdeveloped country, burdened with debts as Chile is, a country where large masses of the population live in the worst conditions, would necessarily have to strike a blow against the interests of imperialism, of the [land owning] oligarchy, of big industry, of the import-export trade and of the Bank if something was to be done, to give something to the peasant masses and to the masses of workers in the country.

"And, also that to wage a battle against the oligarchy and against imperialism, the

support of the worker and peasant masses was necessary and that the masses of workers and peasants would not lend support to any bourgeois revolution, because the workers and peasants would not be willing to collaborate to serve the interests of an exploiting class."[5]

We concluded that the Cuban leadership had not changed course. Castro never repeated his attack against Trotskyism. The old Cuban Stalinist Blas Roca published one article defending the attack from the criticism it had received. The incident faded into the background as time passed, and no further information was ever revealed about the reasons for the attack.

22. ANTIWAR SENTIMENT DEEPENS

Over the Christmas-New Years holiday, 1965-66, we said goodbye to the historic offices of the SWP at 116 University Place, and moved to a new hall on the north side of Union Square, at 873 Broadway. The old headquarters had become too cramped and cluttered now that we were growing. In addition, the electrical wiring in the old wooden building was very old, and we were concerned about the danger of fire. The new premises had much more space. There was a wide-open loft that we partitioned into meeting rooms, offices and a *Militant* editorial office.

The renovation was carried out by volunteers, Jack Barnes and I among them. I worked a lot on the construction, which was spearheaded by Nat Weinstein and my brother Roland, who were both employed in the construction trades. Pathfinder Press moved into another building.

Every move offers a chance to throw out things that one no longer needs. This was true of the SWP, too. There was an attic at 116 that I had never seen. I don't think it had been visited by anybody for years. We found all sorts of useless stuff, including boxes of old newspaper clippings that *The Militant* staff had used many years past. We tossed out all the old junk.

Along with the junk, we also found a gem: a painting by Diego Rivera, the great Mexican muralist and painter. Rivera had supported the Trotskyists in the 1930s, offering Trotsky refuge when he came to Mexico, the only country that would defy the imperialists and Stalinists by offering asylum to the old Bolshevik.

The painting was a study that Rivera had created in preparation for his celebrated work at the newly constructed Rockefeller Center. Rivera had been commissioned to produce a mural with the theme: "Man at the Crossroads looking With Hope and High Vision to the Choosing of a New and Better Future." The rebellious and independent artist included a scene showing a worker, a soldier and a black farmer together with Vladimir Lenin. That wonderful mural was notoriously destroyed at Rockefeller's order when Rivera refused to take out the head of Lenin.

Our study for the mural was a fresco. The painting had cracks, and some parts of

the plaster had crumbled. Nat Weinstein, a house painter by trade, was also was an artist. He went to work and restored the fresco, which we sold to the Mexican government.

One disadvantage of the new headquarters was that we were located across the street from a firehouse, and would be subject to the fire alarm and the incredible horn blasts from the fire engines each time they were called out. I soon learned to completely ignore this noise. I blocked it out and kept my attention on whatever I was doing to get *The Militant* out. Whatever success I have had as a thinker I believe was due not to any ability to think fast, which I do not have, but to this ability to concentrate.

No sooner had we moved in to our new headquarters than the New York City transit workers went on strike. It was their first-ever 100 percent solid job action. They shut down both the subways and buses, defying the mayor, the Transit Authority and the courts, which had issued an injunction against the strike. The Transit Workers Union president, Mike Quill, tore up the injunction in front of TV cameras. He and other union leaders were arrested. This was the first mass workers' action I had seen up close.

The strike was so solid there was no attempt to start a back-to-work movement or run the system with scabs. Without its mass transit system, New York is a nightmare. The city was a mess. Many people drove into the city before they wised up and just stayed away or walked. There was total gridlock at times in many areas, with cars blocking each other going crosswise at each intersection. The whole thing was quite exciting.

Tom Leonard, who had a lot of experience in the seamen's and other unions, covered the strike for *The Militant*. He took me to meet the strikers, and encouraged me to get into conversations. I wrote an article reporting what the workers were saying in their own words.

The strike lasted 13 days and was a major demonstration of labor's power. The workers didn't win everything they wanted, but they made gains. President Johnson's State of the Union address a few days later frothed with hatred of the strike. He called for new antilabor laws which "will enable us effectively to deal" with such actions, which he said could do "irreparable damage to the national interest." Whenever capitalist politicians talk about "the national interest" take heed. They invariably mean the interests of the ruling rich, not that of the nation's majority.

A few days after the strike ended, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee issued a public statement attacking the Vietnam War. SNCC leaders had endorsed antiwar actions as individuals, but this was the first time SNCC, as an organization, blasted the war. Referring to the recent racist murder of a Black civil rights fighter in

Alabama, the statement, which was read by SNCC chairman John Lewis, said, "We know that Samuel Younge was murdered because US law is not being enforced. Vietnamese are being murdered because the United States is pursuing an aggressive policy in violation of international law. The US is no respecter of persons or law when such persons or laws run counter to its needs and desires."

SNCC called for resistance to the war, and for young people to join causes such as the civil rights movement rather than submit to the draft, "knowing full well that it may cost them their lives, as painfully as in Vietnam."[1]

SNCC communications director, Julian Bond, had just been elected to the Georgia legislature, a result of registration of Black voters. After the release of the statement against the war, the Georgia crackers went bananas. The legislature voted not to seat Bond. Over 1,000 people, including Dr. King, marched on the state capitol in protest.

The Justice Department ordered an investigation, not of the refusal to seat Bond, but to see if SNCC and Bond had violated the law against counseling draft evasion! The government backed off in the face of major protests nationally.

Despite divisions on other matters, the November conference of the National Coordinating Committee conference did unanimously adopt a call for demonstrations against the Vietnam War to be held on March 25-26. These demonstrations were about twice as large as the first International Days of Protest half a year earlier. In New York some 50,000 people marched down Fifth Avenue, organized by the Parade Committee. Sylvia Weinstein and I carried the SWP's banner, marching along with a small group of SWP supporters. Most SWP and YSA members marched in the contingents of their respective antiwar organizations.

Antiwar sentiment was deepened by events in Vietnam in April. Buddhist monks initiated protests against the US-installed military dictatorship. Broad sections of the population joined the protests. In the northern part of South Vietnam, Danang and Hue experienced virtual insurrections. Sections of the South Vietnamese army joined the revolt. There were massive student demonstrations in Saigon that fought pitched battles with the police. On May Day, 100,000 workers, women and youth marched in Saigon, with banners denouncing the US bombing of the countryside and use of poison chemicals, and demanding an end to the war and the withdrawal of US troops. While this upsurge was eventually repressed, it exposed the lie that Washington was in Vietnam at the will of the South Vietnamese people.

In May, there was a march by women against the war in New York. This was inspired by a similar women's march in Berkeley, California. Caroline Lund was one of the spokespeople for the march, and was a leader of the antiwar committee at Columbia University and secretary of the Organizing Committee to Bring the Troops

Home Now, which initiated the march. She was a member of the SWP and YSA. The action was supported by a wide range of prominent women active in the movement.

As the 1966 elections approached, many activists were drawn into electoral politics, especially in the Democratic Party. As a result, actions against the war became smaller, even though antiwar sentiment in the general population was growing. This became a feature of the antiwar movement in the years to come; election periods tended to see downturns in street protests.

In a sense, the line of the Communist Party that the movement should orient to the Democratic Party was carried out in practice by most activists during elections, while our orientation of building mass actions came to dominate the rest of the time.

We ran our own election campaign in New York in 1966. Heading our ticket as candidate for governor was Judy White, a young antiwar activist. Judy was actually too young to serve in the office. But we ignored that formality and ran a vigorous campaign anyway, arguing that young activists like Judy represented a real alternative to the war makers. In later years we often ran young candidates in defiance of the rules.

This SWP campaign garnered significant support as a means of protesting the war. A.J. Muste; Paul Sweezy, co-editor of the independent socialist magazine *Monthly Review*; Edward Keating, editor of *Ramparts* magazine; Dr. Annette Rubinstein, a Marxist literary critic; James Haughton, director of the Harlem Unemployment Center; and Linda Dannenberg from the Parade Committee endorsed White for governor. The *Guardian* called for a vote for the SWP.

Judy White won a lot of support from rank and file activists as well. Ninety-five students and two professors at Columbia University backed the socialist ticket. A long list of endorsers signed a full-page ad in the *Guardian* calling for a vote for Judy White. Michael Meyerson, a former national leader of the DuBois Clubs, and the Queens College DuBois Club urged a vote for the socialist ticket.

These latter endorsements were a real surprise, because the DuBois Clubs were considered to be the loyal youth organization of the Communist Party, and the CP had always opposed voting for the SWP.

The CP generally backed Democratic Party candidates in the elections, but in some cases they ran their own candidates in districts that were considered safe for the Democrats. In this year they ran the famous historian and CP leader Herbert Aptheker for Congress in one of these districts. The SWP called for a vote for Aptheker, in spite of our criticisms of the CP, as a vote against the two capitalist parties and as a way of furthering the debate among radicals over the need to break with the Democrats. Aptheker and the CP, however, refused to urge a vote for the SWP.

In early September, the New York headquarters of the Communist Party was bombed. At the end of the month, the SWP headquarters was fire-bombed. Both attacks occurred at night, and no one was hurt. Neither the federal or city authorities, who had both venues under continual scrutiny, found the perpetrators.

23. A Political Assassination

In the afternoon of May 16, 1966, an anticommunist fanatic came into Debs Hall, as the SWP Detroit headquarters was known, and pulled out a rifle and an automatic pistol. He ordered the three people present to line up against a wall. Shouting "you're all a bunch of commies!" he opened fire.

The fusillade killed Leo Bernard, shot through the heart, and gravely wounded Jan Garrett and Walter Graham, who were shot several times each. Bernard, 27, was a member of the SWP. Garrett, 22, was a member of the SWP and YSA. Graham, 19, was a member of the YSA. All were very active in the antiwar movement.

Three hours later, the police arrested Edward Waniolek, an unemployed cab driver, at a public library. They had been tipped off by his wife, who said he had told her as he left their house that he was "going to kill some communists."

It turned out that the police already knew about Waniolek. He had visited the South African consulate in New York a few months earlier, saying he wanted to go to the racist country to fight the communists. He said that the US was "overrun with communists," and that he had guns and was going back to Detroit and would "start shooting communists."

The South African consulate notified the Secret Service, who in turn notified the Detroit police. But the cops did nothing until Waniolek carried out his threats. How differently the police would have acted if someone said they were going back to Detroit to "kill the mayor" or "kill some cops!"

The attack took place on a Monday. I was working on the issue of *The Militant* that would be wrapped up on Wednesday. Joe Hansen, who was working on *World Outlook*, came to *The Militant* office to help.

A hastily arranged meeting of the Political Committee drafted a statement. All the units of the party and YSA were notified. Memorial protest meetings began to be organized across the country.

The Political Committee statement said, in part, "This shocking, tragic and ominous deed is not an isolated act. It follows the bombing of the W.E.B. DuBois club offices

in San Francisco and the bombing of the headquarters of the Berkeley Vietnam Day Committee.

"The pattern is one of terroristic intimidation against the American antiwar, anti-racist, radical youth and socialist forces.... This murderous assault was politically motivated. It was a product of the witch-hunt atmosphere that has been stirred up and intensified by the 'dirty' war in Vietnam. From the White House on down to the John Birchers and the Ku Klux Klan, the country is being incessantly incited against the 'communist menace.' Today's glorified hero is the green beret [elite special forces] in Southeast Asia."[1]

The response from antiwar and antiracist fighters, and other socialist groups, was heartening. In Detroit, as the news was flashed on TV and radio, over 40 students from Wayne State University and the University of Michigan spontaneously went down to the hospital to offer blood for Jan Garret and Walter Graham, their fellow students, who were undergoing emergency surgery.

Memorial and solidarity meetings were held across the country. The memorial meeting in Detroit, held at Debs Hall, was packed, with a wide variety of speakers from different organizations. Dr. David Herreshoff, the faculty sponsor for the YSA at Wayne State, and a former SWP member, wrote a moving poem about the shooting, which he read at the memorial meeting. The poem connected Beethoven, a piano that was in the hall and the "jangling cacophony" in Waniolek's brain (Waniolek had been listening to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony when he was arrested.)

The YSA and SWP members in Detroit were especially affected, of course, and responded with resolve and determination. Nineteen-year-old Joe Sanders was typical. Writing years later he said: "I was not yet a member of the YSA when the shooting occurred. I joined the next month, partly in response to the shooting. Walt and I were pretty good friends, students together at Wayne State University. In fact Walt skipped our Spanish class in order to go to Debs Hall and run off leaflets. Had I been a member, there's a good chance that I would have been with Jan, Walt and Leo that day." Like Joe, several other young people joined the Detroit YSA and SWP in the months following the shooting.

In addition to editing *The Militant*, I worked with Jack Barnes, then the organizer of the New York branch of the SWP, and other members of the branch to organize a meeting in New York.[§] I began to call people in the antiwar movement, Black

[§] At the Fifth national convention of the YSA held in March, Jack was "graduated" and replaced as National Chairman by Lew Jones. Betsey Stone became the National Secretary. Some time earlier, Peter Camejo had gone out to Berkeley to strengthen our movement and antiwar activity there.

organizations, and other socialist organizations. I urged that they send speakers or issue statements. We created a broad united front of protest against the terrorist act, and showed that the radical movement in general would not be intimidated, but would gain strength through a united response.

The campaign was an unqualified success. At the New York meeting, Timothy Wheeler, a young leader of the Communist Party, spoke in the name of the CP, and called Leo Bernard "my comrade." To have speakers from the CP and SWP on the same platform was unprecedented. Other speakers included John Fuerst of Students for a Democratic Society; James Aronson, editor of the independent socialist newspaper the *National Guardian*; A.J. Muste; Dave Dellinger, editor of the radical pacifist magazine *Liberation*; Pedro Juan Rua of the Puerto Rican Pro-Independence Movement; and other figures in the civil liberties and civil rights movement.

Farrell Dobbs spoke for the SWP. "On behalf of the Socialist Workers Party," he said, "I wish to address myself first to the guest speakers and to those of you in the audience who are not members of our organization.

"We deeply appreciate your presence here tonight. In simple human terms, your act of solidarity gives us comfort and lends us encouragement at a time of grief and a time of trial."

He also pointed to the "return to that which is rich and deep in the roots of the American radical movement. And when you see that development today, at this critical hour, and think of the great battles that were won in the past with firm principled adherence to the concept of the united front within the movement despite differences, we can be more confident than ever of ultimate victory."[2]

We received messages of support from Stokeley Carmichael, the new chairman of SNCC, and Elizabeth Southerland of New York SNCC; William Worthy, foreign correspondent for the *Afro-American*; Betty Shabazz, widow of Malcolm X; Bertrand Russell, the British mathematician, philosopher and peace activist; Carey McWilliams, editor of *The Nation*; Staughton Lynd; Frank Wilkinson, of the Committee to Abolish HUAC; Noam Chomsky, professor of language at MIT and antiwar figure; Ann and Carl Braden, directors of the Southern Conference Educational Fund; Willard Uphaus; Irving Howe, editor of *Dissent* magazine; Howard Zinn, professor of government at Boston University; and many others.

There were messages from other socialist organizations, including Progressive Labor, Spartacist, Tim Wohlforth for the American Committee for the Fourth International, and a host of local antiwar committees. There were also messages of solidarity from different groups around the world, including from the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

There was general agreement by all these forces that it was the culture of anticommunism, fostered by the government and press, including the daily "body counts" of so-called "communists" killed in the Vietnam war, which led Waniolek to decide to "shoot some communists." The blow was aimed at the whole movement, and it was important for the SWP to respond in such a way that solidarity from a broad range of groups and individuals could be expressed.

But we were the immediate target, and the mobilization of the party and YSA to build solidarity was important to maintaining our morale. We were able to answer the murderous attack with a political counter-attack that marked an advance, in the face of a terrible blow, in the battle against the red-baiters and witch-hunters.

24. The First Black Panther Party

In February 1965, Stokely Carmichael and three other SNCC organizers went to Lowndes County, Alabama. At the time, Blacks comprised 80 percent of the population of the county, but not a single Black was registered to vote. The rate of white voter registration, however, was *very* impressive — 2,400 whites were registered out of an eligible 1,900 — a rate of 118 percent!

The four SNCC field workers started "working with local people who had begun registering Negroes," wrote John Benson in *The Militant.* "In the course of struggling to register, and protesting inadequate schools, unpaved roads, and police brutality, the people of Lowndes County decided they needed their own party."[1]

The movement to build their own party independent of the Republicans and Democrats resulted in the formation of the Lowndes Country Freedom Party, which chose as its symbol a Black Panther. When we heard of this development, we sent Benson down to Lowndes to report firsthand.

"MAY 1 [1966] — When I arrived in Lowndes County I didn't know what I would find," John wrote. "My first experience in Lowndes was at the regular Sunday evening mass meeting, attended by about 250 Negroes. I had expected that SNCC would play a dominant role, but the whole meeting was run by local people. Almost every speaker was an activist who had lived in Lowndes most of his or her life."[2]

Benson interviewed Stokeley Carmichael on the new party. In this *Militant* interview Carmichael blasted the Democrats nationally as well as in the South.

We had also sent Dan Styron and Betsey Stone to join and report on a civil rights march in Mississippi. This march began where James Meredith, who had been the first Black to successfully attend the University of Mississippi, had been gunned down by racists during a one-person walk for justice. Styron reported that the theme of the march became "We want Black power!"

The march was endorsed by a wide range of groups including Dr. King's Southern

Christian Leadership Conference. But this march was defended by the Deacons for Defense and Justice. The Deacons had been formed in Bogalusa, Louisiana, to defend civil rights workers who were threatened by racist murderers. The Deacons spread to other areas.

On the march, they did not carry guns. They provided armed guards for the campsites at night and armed escorts for marchers who had to get to the Memphis airport.

Styron reported that "Implicit in the concept of black power is self-defense. This tactic for opposing the violence of white racists was a major topic of discussion as the march moved slowly toward Jackson. Most of those opposed to blacks defending themselves were some whites, a few black ministers and some from the North. The overwhelming sentiment was for self-defense, and to most local people the argument seemed academic."[3]

Betsey Stone went from the Mississippi march to Lowndes, and picked up on reporting where Benson had left off. Both reporters were struck by how deep were the roots of what became known as the Black Panther Party. "I found that many of the leaders and activists in the Lowndes County Freedom Organization [later Party]," Stone wrote, "have gained experiences in other working-class struggles. Many are veterans of the trade union movement. Others played key roles in the Montgomery bus boycott of 1956. Most of the men who are activists in the Freedom Organization, like most of the black men in Lowndes County, are workers in heavy labor occupations in the building trades. The majority of them go to nearby Montgomery for work."[4]

She also reported that Black voter registration had been much facilitated as a result of Blacks building their own party. She said this was much more effective than the voter registration done on the Mississippi march, which did not spend much time in each town it passed through. Betsey quoted John Hulett, chairman of the Black Panther Party, as saying at a meeting, "We are registering the people ourselves. Then, we won't need any marchers through here." We developed close relations in this period with John Hulett and the leaders in Lowndes.

The concept of Black power was being promoted by leaders of CORE as well as SNCC. *The Militant* became a champion of this new stage in the movement. I interviewed Lincoln Lynch, the associate national director of CORE, for the paper. CORE had originally developed as part of the Quaker-oriented Fellowship of Reconciliation, another project developed primarily by A.J. Muste. As such, it had been committed to non-violence. In this new stage, CORE advocated self-defense. I also covered a debate between Carmichael and Rustin, for and against the concept of Black power.

George Breitman noted in a *Militant* article that SNCC and CORE were coming

closer to the ideas of Malcolm X. "As a result of these changes," he wrote, "SNCC and CORE can now be considered the *radical* wing of the movement, with the NAACP representing the conservative wing, and Martin Luther King's SCLC somewhere in the middle, somewhere to the right of center."[5] Both organizations came under attack by the capitalist press, white liberals, the NAACP and even SCLC for advocating Black power, for opposing the Vietnam War, and for advocating Black self-defense. To his credit, King spoke out against the war the following year.

In Alabama, SCLC was urging newly-registered Blacks to register as Democrats, and actively opposed the formation of the Black Panther Party. SNCC's role, especially the part played by Carmichael, in helping to build the Lowndes Country Freedom Party led to a sharp difference with the SCLC.

In October, an advertisement published in the *New York Times* by old guard leaders of the movement implicitly attacked Black power. The signers included Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Bayard Rustin, Whitney Young of the Urban League, and A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Dr. King did not sign the ad, and his comments on the subject were contradictory. It seemed that he didn't want to endorse the new militancy but didn't want to cut himself off from the young people who were behind it.

The Black Panther Party in Lowndes was a vanguard development, and was not replicated elsewhere. It had an uphill fight just to get organized. In May 1966, a mass meeting nominated candidates for the fall election. Holding such a meeting was one way candidates could get on the ballot in Alabama. But the law stated that such a meeting had to be held at or near a polling place, most of which were in white-owned stores or homes.

The one place where the meeting could be held to meet the legal requirement was the courthouse lawn. But officials refused to permit a meeting. The Freedom Organization called the Justice Department, which sent someone to tell the Black leaders that he just couldn't get the city to budge, so the nominating meeting would have to be called off. Hulett and other leaders said they would go ahead with the meeting anyway. They were told that the sheriff couldn't guarantee their safety, and they replied they would defend the meeting themselves.

Once he saw they meant business, the Justice Department's man got the city to agree that the meeting could be held in a local church, and would be considered official.

For most who attended, the nominating meeting was the first time they had voted. In the November election, the Black Panther Party didn't win, but it gained legal ballot status by garnering 41 percent of the vote. It was now the Lowndes County Freedom Party.

25. A New Stage of the Antiwar Movement

The Spring Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, a new coalition formed on a national scale, formed shortly after the November elections and issued a call for massive demonstrations in New York and San Francisco on April 15, 1967.

The Communist Party supported the call, leading to an important period of unity in the movement. There were differences of opinion within the CP and its youth group, the DuBois Clubs. Prominent leaders advocated supporting demonstrations as well as "peace" Democrats as a means of opposing the war. They also saw opportunities to win youth in the light of SDS's move away from supporting antiwar actions.

This shift made possible the formation of a new national antiwar student organization, the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam (the SMC). This marked the achievement of what we had advocated as a minority in the divided Washington conference of 1965.

The staff of the SMC was composed of representatives of the DuBois Clubs, the YSA, and the radical pacifists. Linda Dannenberg, representing the pacifists, became executive secretary. Paul Friedman represented the DuBois Clubs. Gus Horowitz was the staff member from the YSA. Thus the division that had occurred at the NCC conference was overcome, at least for a time. The *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter* dissolved, and turned its mailing lists over to the SMC.

On December 8, the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, one of the more conservative peace groups, held an antiwar rally in New York. I reported on the rally for *The Militant.* "The growing opposition to the Vietnam war was reflected when 20,000 people jammed Madison Square Garden to capacity for a Rally to End the War Now," I wrote. "Many of the people present were older members of SANE. But there was also a sizeable contingent of young antiwar fighters, who gave a spirited militant tone to the rally.

"Also present, sitting in a large block, were rank-and-file unionists organized by

SANE's Trade Union Division. Joel R. Jacobson, speaking for the trade union division, received a big applause when he announced that there were 5,000 unionists present from such unions as District 65 Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union and Local 1199 of the Drug and Hospital Workers."[1] These were maverick unions, but their presence and the size of the rally showed that the movement was reaching into the mainstream.

Up to this point, the capitalist press had for the most part repeated the lies coming from the Pentagon and White House about the war. The first major cracks appeared at the end of 1966. Articles from Hanoi by Harrison Salisbury in the *New York Times* reported that American bombing had caused extensive damage to civilian areas in the North Vietnamese capital, and that civilians had been targets since 1965 (which the government had denied). Other major newspapers reprinted these accounts.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* said in an editorial, "The credibility gap yawns wider as one reads Salisbury's account … The government is waging a war of steel and fire in Vietnam. It should not treat the American people as a second adversary, to be kept at bay with a smoke screen of distortion and soothing syrup."[2] From this point on, more of the truth about the war began to appear in the mainstream press.

This reflected a growing debate within US ruling circles about the war, reflected in Congressional hearings, the media, and disputes among prominent politicians.

The marches on April 15, 1967, in San Francisco and New York registered the deepening antiwar sentiment. In New York, the crowd was estimated by a professional crowd appraiser to be 400,000, but it was hard to tell because the massive march from Central Park to the United Nations swarmed over many streets, and many never even got out of the park before the rally at the UN was over.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the march. It was the first time that he had joined an antiwar demonstration — a step that both reflected the groundswell of antiwar sentiment and helped deepen it. Dr. King was joined at the podium by SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael and Floyd McKissick of CORE.

We were stunned by the massive turnout. Jack Barnes and I watched from a vantage point in Central Park as wave after wave of marchers filed past, each contingent announced by banners and posters. This was heady stuff. Our small group couldn't pull off anything like this by ourselves, but we had played a key part in advocating a course in word and deed that allowed the growing antiwar mood to express itself in such a visible and powerful way.

The man who played a pivotal role in this tremendous success, A. J. Muste, died of a heart attack two months before. A huge portrait of Muste was near the front of this historic march. It was a fitting memorial.

About 75,000 turned out at the march in San Francisco. This was the largest antiwar action yet on the West Coast. Some of the more left-leaning trade unions had endorsed the New York march. Seven thousand unionists marched in San Francisco, the largest contingent being from the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

Nearly a half million marched nationally against the war on April 15, a qualitatively larger number than in previous actions. This was the largest demonstration in US history at the time and marked a new stage in the antiwar fight.

The executive director of the coalition that built the San Francisco action was Kipp Dawson, a member of the SWP and YSA. Less than a year and a half earlier, she had been elected to the steering committee of the *Bring the Troops Home Now Newsletter*, at the "thirteenth workshop" we had set up at the NCC conference in November 1965. It had appeared to some that we had isolated ourselves at the NCC conference; in reality we had laid the foundation for a truly broad antiwar movement.

After the demonstration, Dawson moved to New York to be part of the staff of the Student Mobilization Committee. Syd Stapleton, a YSAer from Berkeley and a leader of the antiwar and free speech movements there, also joined the SMC staff in New York.

26. Big Events in World Politics

As *Militant* editor, I worked with the writing staff as well as with the Political Committee in deciding what topics to include in each issue. In addition to articles on local activities sent in by branch members and our coverage of the war, the antiwar movement, the Black struggle, labor battles and US politics, we gave extensive coverage to big international events.

Three of the important international events we had to report and assess, other than the Vietnam War, were the bloody defeat of the workers and peasants of Indonesia dealt by the October 1965 military coup, the "Cultural Revolution" which rocked China during those years, and the 1967 Israeli-Arab war.

Indonesia gained its independence from the Netherlands in a three-year war against the colonial power following World War II. Under President Sukarno, Indonesia adopted a neutral course in the Cold War, and took an anti-imperialist stance. The Sukarno government helped organize an international conference in 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. This conference was the origin of the Movement of Nonaligned Countries.

Indonesia had maintained close ties with China, in defiance of the United States. In that period the US had been boycotting the People's Republic of China in favor of Chiang Kai-shek's exile government on Formosa (now Taiwan). Washington tried to claim that Formosa was the legitimate government of China.

The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was pro-Beijing, and had become the largest Communist Party in the capitalist world, with over a million members and millions more in unions and peasant organizations that looked to the PKI.

The PKI subordinated itself to the Sukarno wing of the bourgeois government, and relied on Sukarno to lead the country forward, to protect the party's rights, and to remain an ally of China. They were following Mao's class-collaborationist line for countries of the Third World rather than learning the real lessons of the Chinese revolution.

The leaders of the Indonesian CP were convinced that rightist elements and the military would be held back by their alliance with Sukarno. That was true for a while,

as had been true in China under Sun Yat-sen (the founder of the modern Chinese nationalist movement), but it did not remain the case as class conflict deepened in the 1960s (just as it did not remain true in China during the 1925-1927 popular upsurge under Sun's successor, Chiang Kai-shek).

Important sections of the developing capitalist class began to chafe under Sukarno's rule. They were determined to smash the power of the PKI. A confrontation was inevitable. But the PKI did not prepare its mass base of workers and peasants for the confrontation, either politically or militarily. The top generals planned a coup. Too late, some sectors of the PKI tried to stop the generals by backing a pre-emptive coup by some left-wing officers (again, not relying on the mobilization of the masses). This attempt became the pretext for the real coup, led by General Suharto in October 1965.

At first, Suharto kept Sukarno on as a figurehead, in recognition of Sukarno's popularity. But that didn't last long. Sukarno was pushed out and effectively placed under house arrest, until he eventually died.

The coup initiated a massive bloodbath directed against the PKI members and supporters, and more broadly against the whole workers' and peasants' movement in the country. The murders were carried out by the army and reactionary mobs organized by the army and also by rightist Islamic groups (these were a small fraction of the predominantly Muslim country). As more news leaked out, the numbers of victims went up to hundreds of thousands. Today estimates are that between one and two million people were killed. The PKI was destroyed and the workers and peasants were crushed and set back for a long time to come. A brutal, corrupt, and pro-imperialist military government had outlawed Marxism and crushed all dissent.

The US made no bones about its support of the coup, and didn't utter a peep of protest about the slaughter. In fact, Washington had been waiting for an opportunity to reverse the Indonesian anti-imperialist revolution, and undoubtedly collaborated with the coup plotters behind the scenes. The coup was a major victory for US imperialism. Indonesia had gone from being a country allied with China to an enemy of China. Indonesia now entered into a close military, political and economic alliance with the US. This tremendous defeat set back the world struggle for socialism and strengthened Washington's military position in Southeast Asia, emboldening the Pentagon to continue its war against Vietnam, and raised the possibility of a wider war with China. But the Maoist leadership in China offered no analysis of this catastrophe or discussion of what could have been done to prevent it. Nor was any serious analysis forthcoming from Moscow.

The SWP and the Fourth International did make that critical analysis. We were

aided in this by testimony from a former PKI member who survived and got out of the country. Joseph Hansen wrote the major articles for *The Militant*.

While there were no public statements from the Chinese government about the cause of the defeat or the increased danger to China itself, the disaster seems to have added to unrest in the bureaucracy and elsewhere in Chinese society. Was Mao's course correct? The defeat of Mao's line in Indonesia came on top of China's increased isolation in the world due to Mao's ultraleft extremism. Mao openly rejected a united front among the workers' states and Communist parties against the US aggression in Vietnam. Beijing would have nothing to do with any governments or parties that did not meet with Mao's approval.

Opposition to Mao's overall course did develop in China, stemming primarily from the years of economic disasters and famine that followed the imposition of "communes" on the peasant masses, and the attempt to launch a Great Leap Forward in industry through makeshift methods such as making steel in backyard blast furnaces.

Mao's response to criticism of his course was to launch the misnamed "Cultural Revolution" against his opponents in the government, the party, in the universities and among intellectuals generally.

The Mao faction, on the defensive, organized discontented young people to fight on his side. These youth, many of whom thought they were being organized to fight bureaucracy, were unleashed to drive the oppositionists out of the many prominent positions they held. To make this possible, schools were closed throughout the country and transportation provided to bring students to Beijing where they were organized into the Red Guard movement.

Mao and his supporters presented this campaign as a movement against bureaucracy and "capitalist roaders" in the party and government. Two of those publicly disgraced were China's head of state, Liu Shao-chi, the premier under Mao, and Deng Zhouping, the General Secretary of the Communist Party.

Mao claimed the campaign was aimed at establishing a regime like that of the Paris Commune of 1871, with complete democracy, every tendency allowed to be heard, and rights scrupulously guarded for any minority. The reality was the opposite. Mao's opponents were violently suppressed. The campaign succeeded for the time being in crushing the opposition, and also succeeded in setting back Chinese culture and science as the Red Guards suppressed virtually all intellectual activity. The economy was set back by the violent turmoil and large numbers of people died from the repression and its social consequences.

When the purge was complete, Mao tried to stabilize bureaucratic rule. He saw the danger that some of the Red Guards, believing the anti-bureaucratic line they had

been fed, would challenge Mao as well. Many of these idealistic young people were aware of bureaucratic abuses and had hoped Mao's campaign meant what it said about the Paris Commune and democracy. Mao turned to the army to disperse the Red Guards and other potentially dissident educated youth. Millions of the students were permanently consigned to distant rural areas, unable to continue their education and barred from returning home.

In the organization and dispersal of the Red Guards, Mao relied on the support of the army. The head of the army, Lin Piao, was Mao's right hand man during the Cultural Revolution, and was even enshrined in the country's constitution as Mao's heir. But Lin Piao and Mao had a falling out (the issues are not clear), and Lin Piao tried to escape to the Soviet Union. But his getaway jet was shot down.

Many radicals in the United States and other countries were taken in by Mao's pretense that the Cultural Revolution was a genuine struggle against bureaucracy and for socialist democracy. The editors of *Monthly Review* took this stand. George Novack and Joe Hansen answered them in a sharp but friendly and educational manner.

On a world scale, new Maoist groups were formed among young people who had become radicalized by the Vietnam War. In the US, two of the fragments of SDS became Maoist groups, with several hundred members each, competing with each other. There were a number of Black radicals taken in by Maoism, also. A section of the new radicalization was derailed in this manner. Following the lead of Mao, these groups tended to become very sectarian and ultraleft, refusing to work with other groups and abandoning the antiwar movement.

For a time, there was talk among these various Maoist groups of forming what they called a "new communist movement." But they were so sectarian they could never agree among themselves over how this was to be done. A factor in their failure to unite was that some of these groups became cults around a single figure, none of which could ever recognize another's claim to the throne.

Some of these Maoist groups would attempt to forcibly take over the speakers' platform at big antiwar demonstrations. Believing the revolutionary cause could be advanced through decisive actions by small groups, they thought that the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators would be won over if only they heard a call to arms. In the later part of the antiwar movement, there were more attacks on demonstrations from ultralefts than from the far right groups (other than the cops), which were intimidated by the size of the antiwar actions.

* * *

In June 1967, Israel, armed to the teeth by the US and Britain, invaded and defeated

Egypt, Jordan, and Syria and expanded its control over the remainder of Palestinian territory that they had not taken in 1948 (the West Bank held by Jordan and the Gaza Strip held by Egypt) plus Egypt's Sinai peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights.

During this savage attack, the Israeli forces used napalm against Palestinian civilians. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled the Israeli blitzkrieg, and many more came under an Israeli occupation that has lasted for nearly four decades. This new forced exodus of Palestinians added to those who were driven from their homeland in the 1948 war that set up the state of Israel. The Palestinian diaspora now numbered in the millions.

The words weren't used at the time, but Israel, in the 1948 and 1967 wars, had carried out the greatest "ethnic cleansing" since World War II.

Washington and the capitalist press went on a pro-Israel and anti-Arab propaganda campaign. Politicians in both parties, including those who had become critical of the Vietnam War, jumped on the jingoist bandwagon, as did some of the leaders of the more conservative peace groups.

Joe Hansen, who was the editor of *Intercontinental Press* (previously called *World Outlook*), was still the formal editor of *The Militant*, and he talked to me about how to handle the question in the paper. His advice was to highlight the danger that this conflict could lead to World War III, in the context of the already high tensions between the US and USSR. The Soviet Union backed the Arab side. I went along with this proposal, and that's how we first reported it. I was uneasy that we didn't come out more decisively on the Arab side.

Jack Barnes felt as I did, and after discussion in the Political Committee, the next issue came down clearly on the Arab side in a front page article that I wrote. I noted the *Wall Street Journal's* statement that the US had been ready to send troops to support Israel if the Arab states had gotten the upper hand. Our stand resonated with the many antiwar youth who were reaching general anti-imperialist positions.

The New York branch held a forum on the war. The speaker was Peter Buch, who had been a socialist-Zionist as a teenager but rejected Zionism before joining the SWP. He spoke under a large banner reading "Hands Off the Arab Revolution!" The meeting hall was packed, in spite of the sweltering heat and humidity. The forum was important in organizing and educating fighters, ourselves included, to counter the pro-Zionist avalanche in the mainstream press.

We reported on the catastrophe the war had inflicted on the Arab countries and especially on the Palestinian people. We published statements and articles by Jewish and Palestinian socialists in Israel who were connected to the Fourth International.