

Conclusion

A new stage in the degeneration of the International Committee

Whether you date the polemics between Frank Brenner and I with the International Committee to the summer of 2002, when Brenner first had an exchange of letters with Nick Beams, or to the summer of 2003, when David North took offense at some remarks I made in a private exchange with Vladimir Volkov, one must conclude that these polemics have gone on long enough. If you take only the major works Frank Brenner and I have written in this period, their total output would come to well over 1000 pages were they printed in book format.¹ In the course of the past seven years we have responded to a wide range of issues covering theoretical and practical questions of burning importance to the building of a revolutionary movement. We have covered many areas in the fields of philosophy, history, science, culture, psychology and last but not least politics. No one can say that we have failed to provide a comprehensive response on all the key theoretical and practical issues in contention between ourselves and David North. It is safe to say that there has been nothing remotely resembling such an all-sided critique of the theory and practice of the International Committee since the split with Healy in 1985. I can also add that the depth with which we have treated the theoretical issues far surpasses anything produced in the previous history of the International Committee, including the documents coming out of the split with Healy. Regardless of whether you agree with our conclusions or not, that in itself is an achievement. We have been able to accomplish this not because of any particular talent that we may possess, but because, to paraphrase Newton, we stood on the shoulders of those who went before us. We made a conscious effort to assimilate the theoretical work and lessons of the International Committee and the entire history of Marxism and to conceptualize its relevance for the 21st century.

What has been the response of the leadership of the International Committee? We can document three phases of their reaction. The first phase was one of stonewalling and refusal to reply to our criticism. Despite getting a verbal agreement from North to hold discussions on our critique, none was forthcoming either to Frank Brenner's essay, *To know a thing is to know its end* (May 2003),² or to my critique of North's embrace of Plekhanovian Marxism in *The Dialectical Path of Cognition and Revolutionizing Practice* (March 2004).³ This phase lasted about three years. We only got a response out of North after we made public our criticisms when we published *Objectivism or Marxism* (May 2006)⁴ on our web site. That action initiated the second phase of the response to our critique, namely North's polemic, *Marxism, History and Socialist Consciousness* (June 2006).⁵ Although nominally a response to our criticisms, this was a

¹ I am including in this rough estimate Brenner's essay, *To know a thing is to know its end*, my essay, *The dialectical path of cognition and revolutionizing practice*, our joint works, *Objectivism or Marxism* and *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart*, and now my work, *The downward spiral of the International Committee of the Fourth International*. I am also including supplementary essays that we have written over the past seven years that further amplify some of the issues brought out in these major polemical essays.

² http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/to_know.pdf

³ http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/dialectical_path.pdf

⁴ http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/objectivism_marxism.pdf

⁵ <http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mhsc.pdf>

thoroughly dishonest piece. It nowhere even mentions my earlier critique of North's embrace of Plekhanov and the objectivism of the Second International, it maintains the fiction that our critique of the IC never got around to discussing program and perspectives and creates the absurd fabrication that we have been conspiring to "smuggle" into the programmatic foundations of the IC a concern with psychology and sex. We wrote a comprehensive reply to North with *Marxism Without its Head or its Heart* (Sept 2007)⁶ where we not only demonstrated the dishonesty of North's arguments, but also explored issues in history and philosophy that have long been neglected in the International Committee. We also produced a devastating critique of the practical disorientation of the International Committee in the face of mass movements of the working class in the U.S. and Mexico. Finally, we exposed what had been a blatant adaptation to bourgeois nationalism in Iraq. North's reply to MWHH in his *Odyssey* series, *The Frankfurt School vs. Marxism: The Political and Intellectual Odyssey of Alex Steiner* (Oct 2008)⁷ initiated the third phase of the IC's response to our critique. North made it clear that he is done discussing issues of substance with us, even at the debased level characteristic of the arguments in MHSC. (While MHSC did not lack personal attacks and guilt by association type arguments, one can say that at least it made a pretense of replying to some of the substantive issues that we raised.) In lieu of replying to any of the issues we raised in MWHH, North has substituted a smear campaign against me. He has also enlisted the services of several leading members of the IC to add their pens to this inglorious task, most notably Ann and Chris Talbot.

North's resorting to smears and his inability to reply to our critique of the theory and practice of the International Committee mark his passing as a revolutionary leader. And it has to be said that the failure of even a single leading member of the International Committee to protest his orchestration of a smear campaign against me is clear evidence that the IC has undergone a precipitous degeneration. An organization that lets itself become so completely dominated by a single individual will never be able to build a mass revolutionary movement. In the best of circumstances such an organization will be completely irrelevant to the struggles of the working class. At worst, it will betray the working class in the coming period. It has to be said that in this respect what we are seeing is the malevolent imprint of Gerry Healy's legacy on the International Committee.

I have previously alluded to the incomplete nature of the split with Healy and his methods. Now that we are at the end of this polemic, I can be more precise. The split with the WRP in 1985-1986 under the guidance of North and other leading comrades of the International Committee forced the movement to face up to the fundamental principles upon which Fourth International was built. The work that was done then did clarify some issues, as expressed in the documents *How the WRP Betrayed Trotskyism, 1973-1985*⁸ and *The ICFI Defends Trotskyism, 1982-1986*.⁹ However the philosophical basis of the split with Healy was only probed on the most superficial level. North's reaction to Healy's mystification of dialectics was to abandon the dialectic and to ignore the central lesson of Trotsky's *In Defense of Marxism*. But this course of action could only mean that the problems that led to Healy's betrayal of Trotskyism wouldn't be overcome but instead would be reproduced in a somewhat different form. Several times over the course of

⁶ http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mwhh_ch01.pdf

⁷ <http://www.wsws.org/media/FrankfurtSchool.pdf>

⁸ http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi_vol13_no1/fi_vol13_no1_vecpdf.pdf

⁹ http://www.wsws.org/IML/fi_vol13_no2/fi_vol13_no2_vecpdf.pdf

this polemical struggle we've had occasion to cite the following remark from *In Defense of Marxism*: "Anyone acquainted with the history of the struggles of tendencies within workers' parties knows that desertions to the camp of opportunism and even to the camp of bourgeois reaction began not infrequently with rejection of the dialectic." It's worth pondering why that is. At the heart of the revolutionary socialist project lies a fundamental contradiction: the working class is an oppressed class within capitalism but it is also the only class capable of ending class oppression. A revolutionary perspective is only viable by holding fast to both opposites of that contradiction – the oppressive reality and the revolutionary potential. You can't do that without a dialectical conception of politics and history. That's because otherwise what inevitably happens is that this essential contradiction becomes obscured and gives way to a spurious 'realism' that adapts itself to the world as it is, what Trotsky aptly characterized as "bowing before the accomplished fact."

Trotsky cited the fate of figures like Bernstein and Kautsky, but the political degeneration of Max Shachtman, James Burnham, Max Eastman – and indeed a whole layer of radical intellectuals of their generation – is also directly relevant here. So, for that matter, is Healy's fate. His degeneration took the somewhat novel form of turning dialectics into an esoteric doctrine whose secrets were available to only one man – namely Healy himself. This was, in its own idiosyncratic way, as far removed from Marx's dialectic as the sterile pronouncements of Soviet Stalinist 'diamat', but it provided Healy with a convenient cover for his pragmatic political maneuverings that eventually led to his complete collapse as a revolutionary.

North's rejection of the dialectic has more in common with Shachtman than with Healy. Just as Shachtman (and Burnham) considered dialectics "a red herring" and claimed that what mattered was agreement over "concrete political issues", so now North parries our criticism that the IC has abandoned any work on dialectics and the struggle against pragmatism by insisting that what matters is the party's political line and its analysis of objective conditions. North has gone Shachtman one better by bestowing on this standpoint the overblown title of "the science of perspectives", but in substance this rarely rises above the impressionism of radical journalism.

When North (or his acolytes like the Talbots) talk about "science", what they really mean is a positivist and empiricist conception devoid of dialectics. When North talks about "perspectives", he means an objectivist analysis that, apart from a few routine phrases repeated like an "amen" at a prayer meeting, entirely excludes the revolutionary potential of the working class or the political practice of the revolutionary vanguard. And when North talks about "history", he treats it more like a museum curator than a revolutionary seeking guidance from the past to help orient himself for the struggles of the future. And such a 'curatorial' approach to history always ends up being selective: despite all the veneration for classical Marxism preached on the WSWS, crucial aspects of that heritage (e.g. Engels's *Dialectics of Nature*, Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, Trotsky's *Notebooks of 1933-35*, *In Defense of Marxism*) that jar with "the science of perspectives" are completely ignored.

Marxism without the dialectic, Trotsky once said, is like a clock without a spring. North provides an unintended illustration of this in the following remarks, which reveals, as it were, the inner workings of "the science of perspectives." North is explaining how he manages to resist pragmatism without having done any work on dialectics:

[Marxists] seek to locate consciously the daily development of the class struggle and the activity of the party in the broad continuum of its own history and that of the international class struggle. Rather than simply react to events in pursuit of immediate or short-term practical gains, Marxists must identify the essential questions of political principle raised by these new developments, bring to bear in the analysis of the new political phenomenon the party's entire historically-accumulated theoretical capital, and give expression to the long-term interests of the working class as the international revolutionary force in capitalist society.¹⁰

As we pointed out in MWHH, this 'explanation' explains very little. It says nothing about *how* to distinguish "the essential questions of political principle" from what is inessential and contingent. Furthermore, it ignores the obvious truth that historical precedent ("the party's entire historically-accumulated theoretical capital") isn't always adequate as a guide to revolutionary practice, that there are crucial periods in the class struggle when the only way to sustain a revolutionary perspective is *to break with precedent*. In other words, this explanation leaves out everything vital to Marxism as a guide to revolutionary practice. North's "science of perspectives" is an empty shell. And what fills the void is impressionism. A perfect example of this is the WSWS record on the Iraq war, where it was precisely "the essential questions of political principle" – i.e. the perspective of permanent revolution, the political independence of the Iraqi working class – that were completely lost sight of, as the WSWS became an apologist for a nationalist Shiite cleric.

The rejection of the dialectic is almost invariably linked to a turning away from the working class – not in words, but in deeds. In MWHH we documented how in the last 10-15 years the movement under North's leadership has withdrawn from involvement in the everyday struggles of the working class, and how this has led to an estrangement of the party from the working class that is unprecedented in the history of Trotskyism. With the onset of the global financial crisis of the last two years and the beginnings of a radicalization in the working class, this tendency has become more entrenched and now manifests itself as "an almost visceral repugnance" towards the political stirrings of the masses. Brenner, whom I'm quoting here, came to this conclusion through his analysis of the blundering sectarianism that marks the attitude of the PSG (the German SEP) towards an important political shift by a section of German workers and youth away from the Social Democrats and towards the Left Party. The same hostility is evident in the reaction of the WSWS to the mass demonstrations in Iran against the widely-perceived fraud of the June 12th presidential election: most tellingly, the WSWS drew no significant distinction between the millions of demonstrators resisting a despotic clericalist regime and the bourgeois leadership of this movement.¹¹

¹⁰ David North, *Marxism, History and Socialist Consciousness*: <http://www.permanent-revolution.org/polemics/mhsc.pdf>, p. 15.

¹¹ As we haven't written on this elsewhere, a few salient points about the WSWS line on Iran are in order here. While lambasting Western liberals and radicals for uncritically accepting opposition leader Mir Hussein Mousavi's claims to be a reformer, the WSWS seemed equally gullible in swallowing incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's populist demagoguery about defending the rights of the working class and rural poor, as well as his anti-US imperialist rhetoric. Indeed, the only reasonable conclusion to be drawn from WSWS coverage was that Ahmadinejad was the lesser evil in this election. Typically, in opposing the pretensions of Mousavi, the WSWS simply bent the stick the other way. This isn't Marxism but a caricature of it: a Marxist policy has to oppose all bourgeois factions, while showing the greatest sympathy for the democratic aspirations of the masses against the

It is now well over a year since North launched his smear campaign against me. In light of the outbreak of the world economic crisis and the renewal of the class struggle in Iran and other important events of the past year, the launching of a smear campaign by a tiny political group without any connection to the working class may seem unimportant. But for those who are sensitive to the history of the Trotskyist movement and the decades-long struggle to build the Fourth International, this episode is of great significance. It indicates more clearly than anything else in its recent history, that the lessons of the split with Gerry Healy and the WRP were never adequately absorbed. In North's various writings on the history of the movement, there is a

hated and corrupt regime of the mullahs.

On this last point, the WSWS coverage is noteworthy precisely for its antipathy to the masses. The following statement is typical: "To the extent that students, young people and any workers opposed to the regime have been swept up in the opposition movement, they are being exploited as pawns in what can only be described as an attempted palace coup." (June 17, 2009: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/jun2009/pers-j17.shtml>.) While there was evidence that sections of workers were being drawn into the demonstrations, the WSWS discounted this and portrayed the demonstrations as an upper-middle class movement.

There was also plenty of evidence that the demonstrators were anything but mindless "pawns" under the control of Mousavi, Rafsanjani and the other bourgeois opposition leaders. On the contrary, it was evident even before the election that many of those who backed Mousavi were only doing so because they felt there was no other viable choice and that their opposition to the Islamic Republic went far beyond what their candidate stood for. Those contradictions came out in the demonstrations themselves, which were often organized to a large extent outside the official control of Mousavi's Green movement and increasingly replaced the approved slogans of reform with the revolutionary challenge of "Death to the Dictator." So far as the WSWS was concerned, none of this mattered: these "pawns in a palace coup" were not much more than a right-wing mob who were being stirred up behind the scenes by US imperialism. Perhaps most shamefully, the WSWS said nothing for months about the brutal repression meted out to the demonstrators by Ahmadinejad's thugs, including mass arrests, beatings, murders while in custody and judicial frame-ups.

(As for the role of US imperialism, there can be no doubt that the Obama administration has sought to exploit the crisis within Iran for its own purposes, and that this includes covert ties to the opposition leadership. But US imperialism would try to exploit any movement against the Islamic Republic. This doesn't automatically make the Iranian demonstrators "pawns" of US imperialism. The WSWS is defaming the demonstrators because it is being willfully blind to the political tensions between the masses and their leaders. What the so-called Marxists of the WSWS routinely ignore is the revolutionary potential of the working class, which can upset the machinations of both bourgeois politicians and foreign imperialists.)

In December, when a new round of mass demonstrations broke out in Iran, the WSWS line seemed to undergo a change. Now the demonstrations were described "as a movement that seems to be taking on a quasi-insurrectional character". The article went on to report that "tens and probably hundreds of thousands joined anti-government protests, including in Esfahan and Najafabad—cities in central Iran that had been considered government strongholds. While many of the protesters wore green, thereby identifying themselves with Mousavi's call for reform of the Islamic Republic, many also took up slogans that directly challenged its existence, including 'Death to the Dictator!' A report in the *New York Times* said the opposition protests have begun to attract participants from working class south Teheran." (Dec. 29, 2009: <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2009/dec2009/pers-d29.shtml>)

By what magic were the "pawns in a palace coup" of June transformed into a "quasi-insurrectional" mass movement in December?? Now these "pawns" were exhibiting a striking degree of independence from their leaders and there were even workers joining the demonstrations! But if the earlier analysis was still operative, then these demonstrations should have been condemned as completely reactionary, part of a US-inspired attempt at a "palace

gaping hole covering the period from 1975 to 1982, the period just prior to North's challenge to Healy and not coincidentally, the period most at issue in North's smear campaign against me. North's inability to honestly face up to that history and acknowledge that the Workers League and its leadership shared some of the responsibility for the political disorientation of the International Committee in this period means that the movement is vulnerable to once again being pulled in the direction of capitulation to various anti-working class forces. And as we documented in MWHH, we have already seen a preview of this tendency in the SEP's capitulation to bourgeois nationalism in Iraq and most recently the all but open embrace of the clerical regime in Iran under the guise of "anti-imperialism".

It is noteworthy that not a single leader or even rank and file member of the SEP or the International Committee has repudiated North's smear campaign. One would think that in an organization claiming to be based on the heritage of Trotskyism, that a smear campaign would meet with some opposition, even if there were little political sympathy with the target of such a campaign. *But the failure of even a single leader of the WSWS to step forward and denounce this smear campaign indicates that we are dealing with a movement that is no longer capable of correcting itself.* This cowardly falling into line behind the leader is another unfortunate legacy from the era of Healy. Granted that North opposed the worst abuses that characterized the IC under Healy's leadership; he nevertheless has imposed upon the International Committee the same fear of internal debate that characterized the worst period of Healy's dominance of the IC. This is evidenced not only by the lack of any response to our critique of the IC, but by the day to day functioning of the organization. The WSWS routinely reports that resolutions are adopted by "acclamation".¹² There has been no internal opposition in many years within the sections of

coup." Typically the WSWS simply ignores these inconsistencies, but to anyone with a memory longer than yesterday's headlines, this new position exposes the earlier line for what it really was – a vile defamation of the Iranian masses. And there isn't any reason to suppose that this change is anything more than a pragmatic adjustment: the underlying causes for this defamation of the Iranian masses remain unexamined and uncorrected. The default position of the WSWS is a deeply-embedded suspicion – and even outright hostility – towards the movement of the masses.

One last point. There is a line of argument on the WSWS that goes as follows: the only progressive opposition to the Islamic Republic is a movement of the working class led by socialists. Every other kind of movement against the mullahs' regime is necessarily reactionary because it is led by bourgeois or petty bourgeois forces. On the face of it, this seems very Marxist, except that it ignores one small problem – *how is a mass socialist opposition to the Islamic Republic ever to emerge?* The task of Marxists is not to dictate to the masses but to help them learn through their experiences. That means that we solidarize ourselves with every effort of the masses to resist the oppressive regime, while forthrightly criticizing and exposing the treachery and weakness of their leaders. Only in that way will it be possible for Trotskyists to gain the confidence of the masses – when they see us as allies whose criticisms are meant to promote their struggles and point the way to victory. But this is the opposite of how the WSWS editorial board operates. It issues dictates to the masses: either you do as we say or you are nothing more than "pawns". The upshot of this purblind sectarianism is that, for all its revolutionary rhetoric, the WSWS is actually functioning as an apologist for Ahmadinejad and the mullahs.

¹² For instance the WSWS reported that six resolutions introduced at a conference of the SEP in April of 2003 were unanimously adopted, <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2003/apr2003/reso-a02.shtml> . Or take the more recent 'Founding' Conference of the SEP in August of 2008. The WSWS reports that the document reported out of that conference, *The Historical and International Foundations of the Socialist Equality Party*, "... was discussed extensively and adopted unanimously at the Founding Congress of the SEP, held August 3-9, 2008." <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2008/sep2008/hist-s29.shtml>.

the IC. This is not because the perspective of the leadership is so clearly correct and beyond criticism. It is because an atmosphere of extreme hostility to any questioning of the leadership has been cultivated for many years.

This manner of functioning does represent a tradition of sorts, but it is not a tradition that has anything in common with Bolshevism or Trotskyism. If you want to find a precedent for a political organization that prides itself on discouraging and driving out dissident voices, one need only look to the traditions of Stalinism. This is not to imply that the International Committee has gone over to Stalinism, but North has cultivated a vision of party loyalty that in many ways converges with the one developed decades earlier by Stalinism. And the fact of the matter is that these practices are so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the IC today that the journalists of the WSWS take it as a matter of pride instead of shame to report unanimous vote after unanimous vote on their various resolutions. And having attended many of these conferences I can vouch for the fact that the “extensive” discussions that are held are of the most perfunctory nature and never feature any hard questions that challenge the position of the leadership.

I was present at a number of meetings of the Central Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party presided over by Gerry Healy in the 1970’s. These meetings featured sessions that may last five or six hours without a break and would often go very late into the night. It was a method Healy used to wear down his political opponents. In almost all cases however, the target of Healy’s ire were not political opponents at all, but trusted comrades with whom he had worked for many years. Healy was a person who was marginally on the verge of paranoia and took these measures as a kind of preventive operation to make sure no one ever dared challenge him. The particular target of the day for Healy’s abuse, be it Cliff Slaughter, Cyril Smith or Bill Hunter, would be mercilessly browbeaten by Healy and ritualistically denounced by every leading comrade, most especially those comrades close to the person being denounced. Physical as well as verbal abuse was a common tactic of Healy’s and of those he trained. In this way, Healy created an organization that was almost completely free of factions for a number of years, until it imploded in 1985 and brought about the liquidation of the WRP. And when a faction did emerge within the WRP, as was seen with the Thornett group, they organized themselves in secret because of course it was not possible to have an open discussion of differences within that organization.

The abusive atmosphere within the internal life of the WRP, including, as we were to learn in 1985, the sexual abuse of female comrades, while owing much to the warped nature of Healy’s personality, was not just a problem of Healy the individual. It affected the way comrades were trained in the movement and colored their view of what it meant to be a revolutionary leader. After the split with the WRP in 1985 and the expulsion of Healy, that kind of abusive treatment of the members ended. However, what persisted, and what persists in the IC under North’s leadership to this day, was Healy’s notion that the way to build a revolutionary movement is to encourage “hardness” and loyalty toward the leadership, and conversely a fear of discussing differences. The irony here is that the notion of “hardness” seems to have originated not with Healy but with Cannon. And at one time in his political development, Healy recognized the problem with that conception. It is apropos to repeat our previous comment on this, from chapter 2:

Gerry Healy, in his better days, would sometimes make the point, in discussing the decline of the American SWP, about how Cannon had come to develop a view of party leadership in terms of ‘hard men’: the best leaders were those who were ‘hard’ in terms of their steadfastness in defending Trotskyist principles, whereas those who weren’t steadfast were somehow softer or weaker people. Healy’s point was that this was a misguided conception that was symptomatic of the extent to which the SWP leadership hadn’t taken the central lesson of *In Defense to Marxism* to heart: being a revolutionary isn’t a character trait but a function of one’s theoretical training and political experience. A superficial toughness counts as nothing compared to a grounding in Marxist philosophy and historical materialism, which Healy, in his better days, recognized as a weakness of James Cannon.¹³

The great irony here is that Healy himself became a much worse practitioner of Cannon’s doctrine of “hardness” than Cannon could ever imagine. The SWP under Cannon did at least make room for oppositional factions and gave them rights. For North, the methods for achieving the goal of the “ideal Bolshevik” may have changed, but the goal is indeed the same. Rather than physical abuse, North employs the methods of ostracism, character assassination, and for some the use of financial pressure. Thereby North has succeeded in forging a party of aging hand-raisers who go along with his every turn even when they know better, surrounded by a newer layer of younger, mostly middle class students, who have been trained to believe that every article they write for the WSWS brings the party closer to the working class when just the opposite is the case. What is clearly missing in the ranks of the WSWS is any semblance of the working class or any spirit of independent thought.

This is no accident. It is the culmination of a process that began many years ago when the struggle for the renewal of the International Committee after the break with Healy was taken to have triumphed when in fact it was only just beginning. The Socialist Equality Party today bears little resemblance to the Bolsheviks at the beginning of the 20th century, nor even to the ‘Proletarian Party’ built by James Cannon in the 1930s and 1940s. What it most resembles today are some of the sterile sects that proliferated in the 1930s. We tried to draw attention to this when we republished a classic analysis of the role of sectarianism and centrism written by Trotsky during his struggle to build the Fourth International in the 1930s, *Sectarianism, Centrism and the Fourth International*. The following words from that piece deserve to be remembered:

Though he may swear by Marxism in every sentence, the sectarian is the direct negation of dialectical materialism, which takes experience as its point of departure and always returns to it. A sectarian does not understand the dialectical interaction between a finished program and a living (that is to say, imperfect and unfinished) mass struggle. The sectarian’s method of thinking is that of a rationalist, a formalist and an enlightener. During a certain stage of development rationalism is progressive, being directed critically against blind beliefs and superstitions (the eighteenth century!) The progressive stage of rationalism is repeated in every great emancipatory movement. But rationalism (abstract propagandism) becomes a reactionary factor the moment it is directed against the dialectic. Sectarianism is hostile to dialectics (not in words but in action) in the sense that it turns its back upon the actual development of the working class.¹⁴

¹³ http://permanent-revolution.org/polemics/downward_spiral_ch02.pdf, p. 34.

¹⁴ <http://www.permanent-revolution.org/forum/2009/05/sectarianism-centrism-and-fourth.html>

In addition to responding to the smear campaign against me I have tried to answer whatever substantive issues were raised, however inadvertently, by North and the Talbots, on subjects ranging from the history of Renaissance science, to the theory of relativity, from Babylonian mathematics to the concept of alienation in Marx and from the role of teleology in Marx's philosophy to the relationship between the development of technology and the development of culture, not in order to score some points in a scholarly debate, but in the hopes that a new generation of workers, intellectuals and youth will find their way to genuine Marxism as capitalism enters once more into a period of increasing crisis and misery. The road to socialism and human liberation requires much finer theoretical tools than the thin gruel served up by North and the Talbots. They have reduced the entire wisdom of the history of philosophy to two questions: 1) "Are you are in favor of or against objective reality", and 2) "Does the world consist of matter"? This crudely anti-theoretical approach leaves nothing to Marxist philosophy except what is indistinguishable from the mainstays of bourgeois ideology, empiricism and positivism. Anyone who imagines they can build a successful movement to overthrow capitalism with these methods is indulging in a fatal illusion.

The revolutionary heritage of Trotskyism awaits a new generation that is willing to learn from the history of the International Committee, both its high points and its low points. Having lived through these polemics over the last seven years, both Frank Brenner and I have endured what Hegel called the "labour of the negative". Yet it is at times like this that one should recall that a theoretical conquest that is attained without enormous struggle is usually not worth much. I am confident that our critique of the theory and practice of the International Committee over the last seven years constitutes a contribution to the education of those who will devote themselves to the struggle for socialism and for world revolution.

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