

Geoff White Interview (Part 2)

The Struggle for Trotskyism in the SWP

The following is the second part of an interview with Geoff White, an early leader of the Spartacist League (SL) and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In the first part of the interview (1917 No. 7) White described his years as a cadre of the American Communist Party, and how, in the course of the dramatic developments in the Stalinist movement in 1956—Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin and the subsequent crushing of the Hungarian workers—he gravitated toward the then-Trotskyist SWP. In this installment White recounts how the RT came into existence in the Bay Area SWP over opposition to the leadership’s infatuation with Fidel Castro and his July 26 Movement.

Geoff White played an important role in the RT’s fight in the SWP, both as the tendency’s principal organizer on the West Coast and one of its central national leaders. He originally drafted the initial RT declaration, “In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective,” a document which the Bolshevik Tendency stands on today. In opposing the SWP’s prostration before the Castroists, which was to lay the basis for a 1963 “reunification” with the impressionist International Secretariat of the Fourth International (IS), led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, the RT carried forward the best traditions of the SWP. In 1953 the SWP had broken with the revisionist Pablo current over the latter’s abandonment of the necessity of a conscious Marxist leadership and initiated the International Committee of the Fourth International (IC). (For a critical appreciation of the significance of the IS/IC split see our letter to the Gruppe IV. Internationale reprinted elsewhere in this issue.)

In a speech reprinted in a 1979 Spartacist League internal bulletin, James Robertson (who today presides over the degenerated political obedience cult which the once-revolutionary SL has become), described White as perhaps “the highest level Communist Party leader ever to be recruited to the [American] Trotskyist movement after the initial split” of 1928 involving James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. Robertson begins his account by remarking that, after joining the SWP in the Bay Area as a leader of a left-split from the Shachtmanite Independent Socialist League:

“I didn’t know that the SWP was very uncomfortable with their new acquisition, and on being run out of town to New York, the new Trotskyist youth organization which we had built was dismantled...And here’s another lesson from party history...You do not destroy a factional opponent by wiping out his local organization and sending him to the party center. A year later I was back in the Bay Area organizing into a left opposition against the SWP majority many of the people who’d run me out of town—including Geoff White!”

—*International Discussion Bulletin* No. 11, June 1979

Robertson’s version of the origins of the Bay Area RT doesn’t exactly correspond to White’s recollection. This can perhaps be attributed to the former’s fondness for colorful polemical exaggeration and apocryphal stories. In the summary to his speech Robertson commented that, after leaving the CPUSA, White:

“became a rightwing member of the SWP. And I was a leftwing member of the SWP. He was more able and better connected than I and he saw to it that my operation in our common local area was destroyed and I was deported. A year later we were the leaders of our faction. Rather an argument I think against holding old grievances. Already he felt damaged and would not move to the center and become the national chairman with me as the national secretary, which is the way it should have been because he looks like Gregory Peck, very wholesome American, unlike me.”

1917: When did you move out to the Bay Area?

GW: I came out here in February 1958. So that gives me a year in Boston. I came here to register at U.C. Berkeley because I had been here when I was in the Navy and I liked it, and there didn’t seem to be any reason to stay in Boston any longer. The politics didn’t attract me anymore, my marriage was up—I had a job there, but it was a lousy job.

1917: So, you went to graduate school here. Did you join the SWP as soon as you came out?

GW: Not as soon as I came out, it was a couple of months. It was something I knew I was going to do but I wanted to really think it over carefully, take my time with it and maybe I was enjoying not having organizational business for a while. I worked pretty hard, I was really gung ho. I worked very hard and very closely with the SWP, and they weren’t particularly pressuring me to join because perhaps they thought that I was as useful to them as an independent.

I was extremely hostile not only politically, but also personally and emotionally to the CP, and I think I still am. I think even in the late days of the Spartacist League, I was still affected by this history in a subjective way, and I really enjoyed bashing the CP. There were opportunities to do that out here. My main negative feeling about the SWP was that they let the Stalinists get the better of them sometimes.

There was something called the IPAUC (the Independent Political Action Unity Caucus), which of course ended up in a split which everybody knew it was going to—but first it went on and on for months. There were these independent elements who were sort of opportunists and playing a game in the thing, and there were soft and hard CPers, there were the SWPers, and then there

was me and some other ex-CPers who were like-minded. It got really pretty hairy. The Trotskyists were winning all the debates but the CP was making all the right organizational moves. They knew how to make things happen, but in any semi-intellectual confrontation, the CP got wiped up. It was a lot of fun, it was very intense, and we worked hard.

1917: Did you have any problems of a political nature coming to the SWP? Did you have any misgivings about any particular question?

GW: Well, I don't want to project present attitudes back on that period, but I'm thinking about what I read by the Shachtmanites and I think I always had a little disturbance at the back of my mind about the nature of the Soviet state—a very fundamental question—and one which separated the sheep from the goats. Other than that, I don't think I had any problems and I put that out of my mind pretty much. I fully accepted and was able to argue with the Shachtmanites on this question. I really believed it. If I get into something like that I really have to accept it. I thought I learned a lesson in the CP on that, but you don't change temperaments, you change politics.

Of course, there might have been some details. I remember arguing against how they handled themselves in the National Maritime Union during a certain crisis point. I thought at that point that they were wrong. I thought when I joined the SWP that they had been wrong. I remember meeting some guys who had been in the maritime fraction and arguing with them about it. That was okay in the SWP.

1917: When you joined the SWP, what did you think about the branch out here?

GW: I have to be careful again not to project later consciousness onto this period. I joined the Berkeley/Oakland branch. One of the things that struck me immediately was that it didn't have the tight organization that the CP had. The demands were pretty high, almost as high as the CP, in terms of your time. The atmosphere of discussion, however, was far, far freer and on a much higher level. We really talked politics those days in the SWP. People had opinions and they had different opinions, and they would argue these things out. And I'd think, "Gee, what's going to happen now?" But nothing. Except when things hardened into factions which were making a bid for power there was, to me coming out of the CP, a remarkable amount of democracy. And later, as events came up, I saw what the limits of that were. But even when I was being expelled from the SWP, I still thought that, while perhaps not up to the ideal standards, compared to my experience with the CP and Stalinism, this was a very democratic organization.

Another thing that I was impressed with was that they did not interfere with you in non-political matters. Their definition of what was personal and what was public was much different from the CP. When I was living in Providence I had a print by Raoul Dufy on my wall. It was a nice thing, I really liked it. A guy who was a functionary, an organizer, for the CP came in and looked at it and said, "Well, I guess that's alright—that is—just barely acceptable." But if it was a bit further off

than Dufy, he'd have said take it down. And you could say that kind of thing to people and get away with it in the CP. Nobody would even think about that in the SWP. In fact the organizer did come in and look at some of the stuff we had and said, "I don't like that kind of stuff," and we said well, we do. And he was just making a personal comment. He never had any idea of taking it down. I use that as an example of the kind of differences I noticed.

I also noticed that the SWP was not fast on its feet organizationally. I had expected it to be. We had a case where we had two guys in one union local. It seemed to me that would be a major concentration for the branch, and that these guys would be getting day-to-day guidance because I had been in a situation exactly like that in Rhode Island. There were two of us in a local, a small local and not terribly important, but that was what we were in. And, by god, the CP organizer I was working with at the time, although he had never met them, *knew* the personalities and histories of everybody who was of any importance in that local. We'd talk it over and work really long and hard on that kind of stuff. And we did that in other movements too. The politics was something else—sometimes we'd come a cropper on that account—but organizationally the CP was very good.

I remember looking for this in the SWP but couldn't get any real interest in changing things operationally. But when something political came up, like a position paper on the use of cosmetics or something like that, then boom, everybody was off and running—everybody had an idea. It was very attractive in some ways but it was a little disappointing on the empirical level. I was, or became shortly after I joined, a shop steward in the union I was in.

1917: Were you still going to school?

GW: No, I stopped going to school. I decided I didn't want to do it. So I went to work back into the shops and I got to be a shop steward and I expected some help and some guidance. And I got neither help nor guidance. They were happy with whatever I did. I learned fairly soon that I couldn't expect it. It was very abstract.

1917: Did they have any industrial fractions left in maritime?

GW: Yes, they had one, maybe two, people in the SUP [Sailors Union of the Pacific] and they had one person who was very prominent, and one other, and I think maybe a third in the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union].

1917: Did they discuss union work in the branch meetings?

GW: No. The ILWU work was in the San Francisco branch, so I wouldn't know for sure. But my impression is that they didn't because one of the guys who was in it was over in our branch and I think I remember talking to him about it and finding out that they were not doing anything. They had to work on their own pretty much, even occasionally at cross-purposes.

1917: How large was the East Bay branch?

GW: When I joined it was a little larger than two dozen, maybe thirty.

1917: You mentioned coming into contact with Shachtmanites and arguing with them.

GW: Yes, they were very active around here. We had a youth movement, and there were people in the YPSL [Young Peoples Socialist League—youth group of the American social democracy], I believe, who were actually Shachtmanites, not social democrats, and the question was whether they were going to break or be thrown out of the YPSL. At any rate, there was a lot of pushing and pulling in the youth movement between the Shachtmanites and us.

1917: When you came out here, had the Robertson/ Mage/Wohlforth grouping already split from the Shachtmanites?

GW: I think when I arrived they were in the process of splitting. I don't know if they had actually carried out the organizational conclusions, but they were close to us. We knew that they were our friends.

1917: Was Robertson the only one to come over to the Bay Area branch?

GW: Robertson was the only prominent one. He was the main figure. There was one guy who was active but not in any sense in the leadership whom I liked very much and with whom I am still friends. Robertson I didn't like personally, but politically he was no problem. I got to like Robertson better personally when I liked him less politically. He had an abrasive personality, very polemical. It seemed to me that he had, in some respects, a Stalinist personality. I could hear echoes of the old CP and that got my back up. He really felt at the time that the future of the working-class movement was dependent on how these things were going to come out in the YPSL or the ISL [Independent Socialist League] or whatever. He was lacking a sense of proportion.

1917: Was there much factionalism in the SWP before the RT?

GW: Compared to the CP there certainly was. There were two Marcyites here. There were a couple of people ideologically connected with the Washington group, the Fraserites. There were little dissident things, but the factionalism didn't strike me as being out of hand or particularly disruptive. When the issues came up we would discuss them and people would say well, so-and-so is a Fraserite, which means on this question he will say this and things like that. But relations were very amicable.

1917: The Marcyites would have split pretty soon after you had joined, but it wasn't a big event?

GW: No, no big splits. None of the differences at that time looked as though they were going to lead to splits, they just seemed to be little encapsulated differences that the SWP could live with, and the minority people could live with. There would be ephemeral minorities. Some issue would come up and some minority would organize itself. But if it was not central, it would disappear after the issue was settled. Things were working pretty much the way they were supposed to on paper to put it in a nutshell.

1917: Did you always feel that you were on the left of the SWP?

GW: No, I actually felt that I was somewhat on the right. I defined that not so much in terms of basic ideology, but in terms of style and on tactical questions. In the SL, I was also on the right in the sense that I was more

interested in united fronts, and in co-operating with other groups. I was less interested in smashing the Shachtmanite betrayers of the working class and all that kind of horseshit. I'm saying that now and that makes me sound good, but it also meant that I tended to be somewhat soft on some ideological questions where perhaps a sharper attitude was called for. I didn't consider myself on the left of the SWP but I was aware from the beginning that I was one of the people who was more anti-Stalinist. I also felt there was plenty of room for that. There were a lot of people like that. It didn't look like any kind of a divisive issue.

1917: Was there any issue before the Cuba question that drew lines prefiguring the RT, or did it only begin over Cuba?

GW: All of it became clear to me over Cuba. There may have been something there which would have indicated what was coming up, but I remember I was always on the side of the central party leadership in the minor issues that did come up before that. I don't remember what they were because they weren't terribly important. But I thought that I was a cadre and a really loyal SWPer. At the same time, from my experience in the CP I knew that things could go rotten. One person once said to me, "Well, in a certain sense you've got your bags packed," and I said I didn't check my brains at the door, but the SWP doesn't ask for that.

1917: How did the RT initially crystalize?

GW: Well, I don't know about nationally but I know what happened here. I can tell you exactly what happened here. There was a plenum of the National Committee [NC] and nobody was anticipating anything false—nobody here at any rate—and I think I would have known. I wasn't on the National Committee or anything, but I was *au courant*.

We had already gotten involved in Cuban work, the defense of the Cuban Revolution. Everybody thought this was a good thing, there didn't seem to be any difference of opinion about that. The NC members went off to New York for the plenum. The day they came back I was at a meeting addressing a bunch of Shachtmanites. I knew it was going to be a bear-baiting session because that's what it's all about, but I didn't mind that. Under the right circumstances I quite enjoy that kind of stuff. So there I was and they had got hold of an issue of the *Militant*. Well, I was not the most religious reader of the *Militant* because frankly, even when I was a loyal member, I didn't enjoy reading it much. Dull paper, even worse than the *Worker*. They'd just gotten the latest issue and it had a report on the plenum declaring that Cuba was a workers state.

A guy got up—I remember who he was because he was a guy who had been in the SWP and we were sort of personally friendly—and said, "Do you think Cuba is a workers state?" And I said of course not, don't be silly, that's a ridiculous idea. And he said, "Well, it says here that your party says it is." I was really stumbling at that point because I was just not prepared. I knew I had to defend the party's position but since I didn't even know what it was that this guy was reading me out of the paper, I think I ducked it. I said, "I haven't read that report and I gave you my own personal opinion, and if

that's what the party says, then that's what the party says, and I'm really not prepared to discuss it." I really didn't think I could shift right there, especially since he'd already trapped me into saying it wasn't a workers state.

So I was a little upset about the thing and the next evening we had a branch meeting. There was a report on the plenum by Art Sharon from the National Committee. He was the real heavy, the other guy was not quite as heavy. So he came in and talked about this, that and the other thing, and then he incidently threw in the business about Cuba being a workers state as if it weren't terribly important. I also got the impression—and I've nothing to back this up, but I got the impression—that he was a little uneasy about it himself. But nothing in the subsequent course of the debate ever indicated there was any truth in this.

A whole bunch of us in the branch, the majority of the people in the branch, got up on the floor and said, "How can you say this? This isn't Trotskyism. This is Stalinism." We weren't prepared so some of our presentations were a bit incoherent, but a lot of people got up and expressed extreme dissatisfaction. Some people spoke in favour I recall, but they didn't really have a lot to say. The lines weren't drawn, I mean nobody knew. It was the first contact with this thing. I'd had this experience the night before which had perhaps sensitized me a little bit.

But the guy who took the lead was Ed Lee. He was a wonderful person. He had been the branch organizer and he had been in the CP for a long time, and he was expelled at the time of the Oakland General Strike in 1946. During the RT days, when we were still in the SWP, Ed Lee was very highly respected by everybody, including the opposition. He had long, long years of experience and he was a guy with a fine mind and a first-rate person in every respect. People had tremendous respect for him and when he supported us, that carried a lot of weight. He was a guy for whom I had great respect and great personal affection to the day he died.

After the meeting a bunch of us, who all knew each other, and identified who was who, retired, as people frequently do. We went off to eat after the meeting to talk about this thing. All the people there opposed this position. As we talked it over amongst ourselves we began to get more of a line and we saw that just at this big table we had a majority of the branch. Subsequently, two or three people, under pressure from the leadership, defected. But initially there was no question.

1917: There were no branch leaders?

GW: Well, Ed Lee. He had just resigned as organizer and some very unpleasant fellow from the East had taken over as organizer, which didn't help matters any. The thing which hung us up was Wohlforth and Robertson. Wohlforth was the sole dissenter on the National Committee and Robertson was the only other guy who was prominent who had taken a position against this thing at the plenum. The only other name we knew was Mage, who meant nothing to us. Wohlforth and Robertson, who did, meant something rather negative. Most of the people in the room didn't want to be involved with Robertson and Wohlforth so it was a bit of a dilemma.

1917: Did you know Wohlforth?

GW: No, I didn't know him. Some of the people knew him because there was a lot of back and forth. I had met him a few times when he came through.

1917: Was he a big name, having come over from the Shachtmanites?

GW: Yeah, he was a name, but not a terribly big name. We read his stuff and knew something of his style.

1917: You did know Robertson?

GW: I did know Robertson but didn't much like his style either. So there was this potential problem right from the beginning.

We talked about it at great length, we were up till one or two in the morning. The general conclusion we came up with was that this was wrong and that it was a very fundamental question, because we saw right away it was not just petty questions about what was going on in Cuba. It had to do with the whole question of Stalinism and the Soviet Union and that kind of stuff. We decided, no, we were going to fight this thing, and if it meant joining up with Wohlforth and Robertson, we had to do that.

1917: Your position, in this first elaboration, was that Cuba was not a workers state?

GW: That was the only thing: Cuba was not a workers state. We in the RT out here never came to the formal conclusion that it was a deformed workers state, although that was what most of us thought before the end of it. It was a negative position that this was not a workers state, because they were saying it was a workers state with certain bureaucratic distortions.

1917: Like Russia in 1920?

GW: Yes, and we were not going to buy that—we were not going to buy that one little bit. It was pretty clear that Ed Lee and I would be the main people to push this thing. Ed Lee, I think, had even more misgivings than I about some of the sectarian tendencies of Robertson and Wohlforth which had been perceived at the time. He was also older than I, and with one thing and another, it fell mainly to me to organize the tendency. Within a week we knew we were going to have a tendency. I forget who wrote the initial letter to Wohlforth and Robertson.

1917: Robertson was living in New York at this time?

GW: My impression is that he was because I know he wasn't at the meeting. If he had been, I don't know what would have happened.

1917: He had been in the branch here for a couple of years?

GW: Yes, we'd had a lot of experience with Robertson.

1917: You never felt, or none of the other people who were subsequently associated with the RT ever felt, any particular affinity to Robertson on a political level?

GW: There were two people, young people in the tendency, who might have. I can't say nobody, but the core of the tendency, the older people, no. He had no base out here. I don't know who wrote the letter to Wohlforth, whether it was me or Ed, saying that so many people in the branch had declared their opposition to the thing, and let's talk about what we're going to do. However,

very rapidly we became the East Bay branch affiliate of the RT.

We didn't feel that we were joining an established group. We felt we were constituting something new; it happened very rapidly. Then we found we had friends in San Francisco (not as many, it was clearly a minority, but I'd say about 30 percent), so we had a little over 50 percent of the East Bay branch and maybe 25-30 percent of the San Francisco branch. So then we began this long fight.

Very rapidly our initial misgivings about the kind of leadership we had in New York—they probably didn't disappear, but became inoperative. They were not a problem. We were conducting a common struggle and it was comradeship. You define your comrades according to your politics and the New York people were our comrades, although we were always aware of a difference in style between the East and the West coast. We were a little more conciliatory in the way in which we carried things out but I don't think there was any political or ideological conciliation because we saw this as a fight against Stalinism. I certainly did, and I think Ed Lee did, because he'd been through the CP experience too. This was the essence of the thing.

There were a couple of younger people who had been brought up in the Robertson school of politics and one of our problems was to keep these people from antagonizing everybody and getting us totally isolated in the branch because we wanted to get control of the branch. It was all nip and tuck. At the same time, we still considered ourselves to be loyal members of the SWP and we wanted the SWP to be able to function in the area. We didn't want to paralyze it. As time went by, we saw we probably didn't have a hell of a lot of a future in the SWP. Yet, even after the Cuba question was resolved at the convention, and we theoretically put that behind us, we still felt even then that maybe there was a future for us. We were obviously still a minority.

1917: These young people who were, as you say, "brought up in the Robertson school," they didn't have any prospect of taking the leadership of the opposition?

GW: No. None whatsoever. They represented the minority in the YSA [Young Socialist Alliance—SWP youth group] out here. There were some people in the YSA who had more of our style of things but what we are really talking about is not politics but style. They had this Robertsonian style.

1917: Initially you had a majority in the East Bay, then there were a few defections. So did you end up being a large minority of the branch?

GW: It varied from week to week. Sometimes we were the majority, sometimes we were the minority. At a couple of points we could have taken over the branch forever but we didn't want to do that. We thought that would be very provocative and we avoided it. If we had brought everybody out we could have deposed the existing leadership and elected a new committee. There were a couple of times when New York wanted us to do that but we said this would be the wrong thing to do because we had some irons in the fire in Seattle and Los Angeles and stuff like that. If we looked like disloyal

types, who were preparing for a split and trying to provoke a split, it wasn't going to do our politics any good and we were concerned with our politics—not running the branch.

1917: There are certain factional advantages to having control of the branch: you get to set the agenda and you get to accept new members into the branch and set the tone, and probably most of the new recruits to the branch are going to be minorityites.

GW: We had trouble getting our people into the branch. Two or three were rejected for membership because they were our people. They said we pre-recruited them to our faction. The charge was true but we felt that given the circumstances of the branch, they could be loyal SWP members, as we felt we were. We had to pay that penalty for not taking over the branch. But I felt that if we had provoked a split by trying to take it over, the penalty would have been very high. I think we were correct in that. One thing we did learn was that the correct line doesn't solve all your problems. It just solves some of them.

Things had become quite bitter, but there was a *modus vivendi* worked out. For instance, there were local elections in the spring that year, and the majority ran all the candidates in Oakland and we ran all the candidates in Berkeley. There was never any formal agreement, but everybody understood. There was a certain amount of refraining from stepping too hard on peoples' toes, although the polemic was quite sharp and there was a certain amount of bitterness and a certain amount of organizational nonsense involved too—people using parliamentary maneuvers and whatnot.

1917: Did the majority people work for the minority candidates?

GW: Yes, but not very hard. Essentially the kind of campaign we were running was not one that involved a lot of people. It was a matter of candidates getting up there and making speeches to various groups of the *hoi polloi*—talking to everybody from the League of Women Voters to the Associated Firemen.

1917: Were you one of the candidates?

GW: Yes, I was. Other RT candidates were Marion and Rose.

1917: Rose was in the Berkeley branch at that point?

GW: Yes, by the time the election came around. I think when the tendency was initiated she was still in New York. She was not one of those people around the table. As a matter of fact we sort of wondered if maybe she was coming out to keep an eye on us. I still wonder. If she did, she did it in a way that we couldn't take much exception to. It didn't really matter. We weren't trying to play a game with the East, we just didn't trust their judgement on some things.

1917: So for a while you had a reasonable relationship with the majority given the situation. You said things got pretty bitter pretty quickly. Was that a local development or do you think it was directed from New York, from the national leadership of the SWP? Was it pretty clear that they thought you were a faction that was not going to fade away and perhaps had to be

removed?

GW: No, I didn't see any evidence that they really expected a split. I think they thought it was a possibility, and we thought it was a possibility too. We still at that point hoped to avoid it, and still had reasonable expectations that maybe we could. As for them, I don't know. There were "hards" and "softs." Art Sharon was a hard but he was very principled. I've great respect for Art. He was wrong, dead wrong on this thing, and I think he's even wronger now that he's with Barnes, but he was principled. The guy who was the branch organizer was a real soft-shoe artist and I never had any respect for him from the first day that I met him. He was a schmuck. He helped to make it hard, but he would also ask, "Can we make a deal?" He dirtied the waters considerably and one individual can do a surprising amount to make things tougher. We had our "hards" too, mostly under the age of 25.

1917: Did you recruit much to the tendency after you got established? Did you lose many people to the majority after the lines were drawn?

GW: The lines were clearly drawn but it was always stable. In the beginning people were slow to make up their minds so there were shifts. We lost one person because she suddenly developed a personal relationship with some guy who was in the opposite faction. Her convictions were less strong than his and so we lost her. That's to be expected. Things like that happen once in a while. I think there were some people who were frightened at the prospect of launching a major attack on something important that the national party leadership pushed. When they were writing idiotic pamphlets like *Too Many Babies?* or the big controversy on cosmetics, you could afford to be in opposition but this was more serious. So I think we lost a couple of people that way quite early. Then we picked up these people from San Francisco and after that I don't think there were any major shifts.

1917: Was there any sociological or age differentiation between the minority and the majority, more students or workers?

GW: No. We didn't have many students. I don't think there was any sociological difference. We were stronger in the East Bay than in San Francisco but that was just happenstance.

1917: Was the political fight inside the branch fairly organized or did the differences come up on all kinds of things?

GW: It was pretty organized and I think both sides were trying to minimize the spillover. Though of course there would be some. There was a formal discussion period and this kept coming up. Both groups were still in *de facto* existence at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and we all worked together pretty well on that. Although, I know some of the minority got very disgusted by some of the rhetoric that was being used, particularly by one National Committee member in San Francisco. He went around wearing a *Patria o Muerte* button, and some of us called him "Patria o Muerte." He was a real Cuban patriot—that was pretty disgusting.

1917: You mentioned earlier that you had some other irons in the fire in L.A. and Seattle. Seattle would be the Fraserites.

Did you mean to link up with them or were there some people with them you thought you might get?

GW: We didn't think we could link up with the Fraserites because we saw them as a right tendency within the party and even as a pro-Stalinist tendency because of their analysis of the Chinese question. We thought of ourselves as a left tendency which I think we were. I surprised myself a little bit to find myself in a group that was labelled sectarian, but that's the way the cookie crumbled. But where there was dissidence of any kind there was openness. Later on, during the Pablo controversy, I remember going up to Seattle to make a presentation of our views and being pretty well received. We had people in Los Angeles who had perhaps more of an organizational sympathy than political sympathy. We had hopes in both Seattle and Los Angeles of recruiting people to the tendency. It never came off.

1917: What do you mean "organizational sympathy?"

GW: People who said: "Don't let the people from New York, the central party leadership, push you around," people who were interested in preserving our party rights because they had some ideas of their own. The Weissites would fall in that category, the Fraserites also, and there were some individuals in L.A. too. Eventually Swabeck ended up defending us on an organizational rights basis.

1917: So after the 1961 convention you supposedly dissolved, although given that no one had changed their minds, it wasn't a very dissolved tendency.

GW: I don't remember whether we formally dissolved it or not. I know we stopped meeting. We tried to let things ride, but we all knew, or at least most of us knew, that this wasn't just some isolated thing around Cuba. There was a real ideological problem. Some people would say, quoting the Stalinists, well having said "B" you must say "C." I knew, and some other people knew, that was not necessarily so. That may be true in logic but not in life. It can take you a lifetime before you get to "C." You may never get there. We were prepared for more trouble but we were hoping there wouldn't be. We had a suspicion that maybe Robertson, Mage and Wohlforth were looking for their own independent group.

1917: What kind of contact was there between the Bay Area and New York?

GW: There was a tremendous amount of correspondence with Wohlforth and some with Robertson. Later on, it became more with Robertson. All the position papers were drafted here or there and I think it was a pretty even distribution. They would be sent back and forth through the mail. It seems to me that there were a couple of visits by Robertson and Wohlforth. I can't recall the circumstances but they did come out.

1917: So after the SWP majority opted for Castro, there was the move to reunify with Pablo's International Secretariat.

GW: There was the International Committee which was pretty much Gerry Healy's operation, Pablo's International Secretariat, and Posadas had a split-off in South America. That was a wild card in the deck. When the move came on, it didn't come like a bolt from the blue

like this business about Castro did. We were halfway expecting it. Once the Pablo question was posed, we knew this was it. Tactically we wanted to stay in the SWP as long as possible but we knew we were either going to

get expelled or would have to withdraw. We knew that the thing had gone too far for us to coexist. ■

[TO BE CONTINUED]