

TROTSKYIST WRECKER?: THE SWP YEARS (1949-1961)

“My role and all my principal policies in shaping the development of the NCLC were essentially predetermined by 1963, before I encountered a single collaborator for this undertaking. Since the first steps toward founding the organization, in the summer of 1966, my policy has always been to bring the organization’s development and outlook to one which was essentially predetermined as my object before 1963.” Lyndon LaRouche, *The Challenge of Left Hegemony* (May 1973)

In either late 1948 or January 1949, Lyndon LaRouche joined the Boston branch of the Socialist Workers Party led by Larry Trainor. He would remain inside the SWP for almost two decades until his formal break in late 1965 after he had just turned 44. One of LaRouche's "old comrades from the SWP days" told the *Boston Phoenix* (1/29/74) that LaRouche

stayed very active in the party until he left Boston. . . . "He attended all the meetings It seemed like his only interest in life was politics. But what the hell, he never worked; he lived with his parents until he left town. His whole life was wrapped up in the movement. I never heard him say a good word about any writer of literature," said this senior comrade. . . . "Lindy had an encyclopedic mind, he could remember anything. And back then, he had a very orthodox theory, but he was willing to argue at the drop of a hat whether it was a period or a comma at the pause. No one would argue with him; you'd just 'yes' him to death because he came on like a screwball."

The *Phoenix* then reports,

Even after LaRouche broke with the SWP, there were old SWP comrades in Boston who would get 15 or 18 page letters every month or six weeks setting forth LaRouche's latest thoughts on the state of the movement and the Marxist dialectic.

An old Boston SWP'er also told the *Phoenix* that LaRouche did work in an SWP factory cell in the Lynn GE plant "but he couldn't get up every morning so he got canned."

LaRouche's reasons for joining the SWP remain murky. In *Conceptual History of the Labor Committee*, he says he

joined the SWP's Boston local in early January 1949, after a few weeks probation, at the point that the national SWP was undergoing a drastic loss of membership. He joined, in fact, for the same reason that many were leaving: political reaction was on and there was no place outside an organized socialist group in which to act and develop as a socialist.¹

In *Conceptual History*, LaRouche states that his first big dispute with the SWP occurred a few months after joining the Boston local. He says he secured employment at the GE River Works in Lynn, Massachusetts, in order to conduct "colonization." He claimed that he was almost immediately in the thick of the fight between the UE local leadership allied with the CPUSA and the CIO organizers tied to Walter Reuther who were trying to oust them.

LaRouche here is referring to a late 1940s bitter fight inside the CIO's United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers Union (U.E.) whose former president James Carey had been deposed by Albert Fitzgerald, who received crucial support from the American Communist Party. LaRouche claimed he proposed and initiated efforts to make a tactical alliance with the Fitzgerald faction against the anti-CP Reutherites, but was soon put under local SWP discipline for this "offense" because Bert Cochran and Farrell Dobbs had then opted to build a "Third Camp" between the Reutherites and Fitzgerald due to pure "Stalinophobia."

How much LaRouche really was in the thick of anything can be questioned if he actually wound up getting fired for not being able to wake up in time for the job. Still, it is also possible LaRouche deliberately got himself dismissed after the SWP refused to endorse his scheme.

Throughout his SWP career, LaRouche's main criticism of the Soviet Union was aimed both at Bukharin and "the Liebermanites," who wanted to decentralize the Soviet command economy during the Khrushchev and early Brezhnev eras. LaRouche's cybernetics-inspired economic vision was always of an economy centralized to the utmost degree. He also seems to have lacked any emotional commitment to the culture of Trotskyism and the bitter feelings many in the movement felt towards Stalin. Only as a state planner and hyper-centralist did LaRouche strongly identify with the Trotskyist "Left Opposition" inside the Soviet Union, which first outlined the "forced industrialization" of the country on the backs of the peasantry; an economic policy Stalin later adopted in his famous Five Year Plans and brutal assault on the "kulaks."

After moving to New York in late 1953 or early 1954, LaRouche began planning his new life with his first wife, a fellow SWP member named Janice Neuberger who worked as a secretary in the SWP's national office then located at 116 University Place in Greenwich Village. Although he was involved in the SWP in the New York area for over a decade he was largely ignored by the organization. A former SWP member named Clara Fraser -- who left the SWP in 1965 around the same time as LaRouche -- describes him this way:

He called himself Lynn Marcus back then. He never seemed to belong to any SWP branch; he was a loner. He was never active, never involved in any mass movement or internal organizational work. What he did was write—and write and write and write, until we all wished he'd be stricken by digital rheumatism.

Marcus wrote thick, dull, endless *Internal Bulletins*, which were dutifully distributed to the membership by the obliging National Office. (It was probably the memory of his super-

prolific effusions that eventually helped destroy the vaunted internal democracy of the early SWP!) For years and years his eternal *Bulletins* appeared, on one of two subjects: the United Front or Economics. I never understood any of them. Neither did anybody else. Nobody ever responded to any of them, either, but he couldn't care less. He would appear at national conventions every two years, but he wouldn't take the floor. I know he was there because I never recognized him and would ask who he was; he had that kind of non-presence, non-personality. They said he was an economist, but nobody seemed to know where he worked or what he did. Sometimes I would feel sorry for him and go up and say hello; he never replied except in a mumble or a curt rejoinder. Once I mustered the audacity to ask him to explain his latest document. My polite interest evoked nothing but a look of utter contempt.

I gave up on Lynn Marcus. Just one of those fringie eccentrics. I left the SWP in 1965. He left soon afterwards with Jim Robertson and the Spartacist League, but I heard nothing about him. Then in 1968, Students for a Democratic Society spawned a mammoth strike at Columbia University, and who should turn out to be one of its spokesmen but Lynn Marcus—now Lyndon LaRouche—and his group, the SDS Labor Committee. I couldn't believe it—Lynn Marcus, a popular leader?²

Another SWP member named Frank Lovell had a similar impression. At a 1986 Socialist Scholars Conference in New York, Lovell -- worked in the group's national office in the 1950s -- discussed the man he called "Lindy." He explained that most people in the SWP didn't know what to think of LaRouche because they couldn't understand what he was saying. He recalled that LaRouche would frequently stay up night after night composing long papers that he would then dispatch to puzzled

SWP leaders like the party's National Organizational Secretary Tom Kerry.³ Asked if he thought LaRouche could have been some kind of FBI agent or informant, Lovell replied with an emphatic "no." Simply put, LaRouche was a marginal and eccentric figure even inside the ever-shrinking universe that was the 1950s SWP; he simply wasn't taken seriously.

Although both Fraser and Lovell are right in that LaRouche had absolutely no impact on the SWP as a national organization, his relationship to the SWP is more complex than might be imagined. To better understand why, one must enter the highly murky world of Trotskyist politics of the period and the one issue that wracked the world Trotskyist movement from the 1950s till the early 1960s: "Pabloism."

CANNON LAW

When LaRouche arrived in New York, the SWP had just gone through a wrenching split with the Paris-based headquarters of the Fourth International then led by "Michel Pablo," an Egyptian-born Greek Trotskyist whose real name was Michel Raptis. The split involved the Trotskyist movement's views of the Soviet Union.

Pablo had been influenced by Isaac Deutscher, the Polish Trotskyist who wrote a classic three volume biography of Trotsky. Deutscher argued that the postwar Trotskyist movement should take a favorable view of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satrapies as "deformed workers states" worth "critically" defending. He also claimed that after Stalin's death the Soviet bureaucracy would inevitably become more democratic. In January 1951 Pablo wrote a document entitled "Where Are We Going" where he attempted to address not just developments in the East Bloc but also revolutions in both China and Yugoslavia. In it he argued:

The relation of forces on the international chess-board is now evolving to the disadvantage of imperialism. An epoch of transition between capitalism and socialism, an epoch which has already begun and is quite advanced. . . . This transformation will probably take an entire period of several centuries and will in the meantime be filled with forms and regimes transitional between capitalism and socialism and necessarily deviating from “pure” forms and norms.

Since “the objective process is in the final analysis the sole determining factor, overriding all obstacles of a subjective order,” Pablo believed that it was still conceivable that “the Communist Parties retain the possibility in certain circumstances of roughly outlining the revolutionary orientation.”⁴

Pablo’s views flew in the face of “orthodox Trotskyism” represented by SWP leader James Cannon. In a Winter 1954 *Fourth International* article entitled “Trotsky or Deutscher?: On the New Revisionism and Its Theoretical Sources,” Cannon labeled the Stalinist bureaucracy “the chief prop of world capitalism” as well as “the chief obstacle in the workers’ movement to the emancipating revolution of the workers.” This belief was now being challenged by a “new revisionism” advanced by Deutscher, “a Polish former communist . . . who passed through the outskirts of the Trotskyist movement on his way to citizenship in the British Empire.”

Deutscher’s “shady game” began when he “identified nationalization and planned economy, made possible by the October Revolution, with Stalinism, the betrayer of the Revolution and the murderer of the revolutionists.” Deutscher then used this argument to call for the Trotskyists to back away from ferocious direct attacks on the post-Stalinist USSR. The Fourth International should accept the notion that it now was necessary to critically

defend these “deformed workers’ states” from a left neutralist point of view. Deutscher justified his argument or compounded his error (depending on one’s point of view) by claiming that the Soviet bureaucracy starting with the Malenkov government would gradually move away from Stalinism and evolve in a more democratic manner. As Cannon puts it:

Soviet democracy, he [Deutscher] says, will be restored as Trotsky predicted – but not by a revolutionary uprising of the Soviet proletariat -- and no party of the Fourth International is needed. The Stalinist party is good enough, and the heirs of Stalin will lead the way to the abolition of Stalinism.

Deutscher proclaims, as the most likely prospect of Soviet development under Malenkov: “A gradual evolution of the regime towards a socialist democracy.” He continues: “An analysis of these conditions leads to the general conclusion that the balance of domestic factors favors a democratic regeneration of the regime.”

Pablo and his co-thinkers in the world Trotskyist movement adopted some of Deutscher’s basic arguments. They believed that the pressures of the Cold War were now so immense that the “base” of the CPs would force the leadership towards a more revolutionary path. Under such conditions, Trotskyist ideas would enjoy a renaissance. Pablo specifically argued that the Fourth International should make an “entrist” (or “French turn”) into both Communist as well as the Social Democratic parties. There they would function as the “left-wing” of both groups. The Fourth International would still be preserved as a literary “think-tank” of sorts but not as an independent political structure, a strategy quickly dubbed “liquidationist” by Pablo’s foes.

Inside the SWP, a pro-Pablo current arose in the early 1950s and was known as the “Cochran/Clark group.” The Cochran/Clarke

group had strong roots in the “proletarian” wing of the SWP. During the McCarthy period, they wanted the SWP to take a more open approach to American labor unions where there was still some CP presence. In Pablo’s argument, they saw a possible way to justify closer Communist/Trotskyist collaboration inside the trade union movement during the Red Scare. They also tended to view Cannon’s faction as largely made up of “museum pieces” of the Trotskyist Old Guard whose historical role had come to an end. For Cochran/Clarke, Cannon’s influence did not come from the correctness of his arguments but from the fact that the Old Guard allies enjoyed considerable social prestige, senior positions, long-standing personal connections, loyalties and sentimental attachments with the party faithful. In short, Cannon symbolized “the Last Hurrah” of the founding fathers of American Trotskyism who were unable to adapt to a new set of political complexities posed by the Cold War.

In the May 1953 SWP Plenum, Cannon claimed that Cochran and his supporters had introduced the slogan “Junk the Old Trotskyism!” In his 30 May 1953 speech to the Plenum, Cannon even threatened to quit the party in protest:

During the course of the past year, I had serious doubts of the ability of the SWP to survive I thought that our 25 year effort...had ended in catastrophic failure, and that, once again, a small handful would have to pick up the pieces and start all over again to build the new cadre of another party on the old foundations.

In his Winter 1954 article, Cannon was still irate at the fact that the Cochran group had even promoted a view similar to Pablo’s in the pages of the SWP’s *Fourth International* which Clarke then edited and which, Cannon claimed, hadn’t been cleared by the SWP’s editorial board. Echoing Pablo, Clarke raised the idea of a self-reform of the Soviet bureaucracy a la Deutscher and asked:

Will this process take the form of a violent upheaval against bureaucratic rule in the USSR? Or will concessions to the masses and the sharing of power – as was the long course in the English bourgeoisie in the political relationship between the rising bourgeoisie and the declining nobility – gradually undermine the base of the bureaucracy? Or will the evolution be a combination of both forms? That we cannot now foresee.

For Cannon such ideas were a betrayal of Trotskyism:

This brazen attempt to pass off this Deutscherite concept in our Trotskyist magazine – carrying the revisionist attack to the public – enormously sharpened the factional struggle, and made it clear, at the same time, that this struggle could no longer be confined to national issues. The party majority, educated in the school of Trotskyist orthodoxy, rose up against this reformist formulation of Soviet perspectives.

Pablo echoed an equally false view when he argued that the transition period from capitalism to socialism would not follow classic Marxist models of revolution. Instead, “deformed revolutions and workers states” would become the “norm” rather than the exception for decades (if not centuries) to come.

James Robertson – who later founded his own Trotskyist sect called The Spartacist League – supported Cannon’s position. In his essay *The SWP -- A Strangled Party*, Robertson describes the Cochran/Clarke tendency inside the SWP this way:

The Cochranites attacked on two fronts: they attacked Trotskyism as a political program and they attacked the existence of an independent SWP. We had about a hundred young comrades under Murry and Myra (Tanner) Weiss,

mainly in Los Angeles, in the party at the time. And they still had some spunk and steam. So the Cannon/Weiss faction was formed of those who wanted to defend the party program.

Go and read what Murry Weiss wrote in the *Militant* in the summer of 1953 on the East German uprising: Hurray, the proletariat raises its fist. The need now is for a Leninist party to consummate the political revolution and lay the foundation for the revolution against capitalism! Very good, very correct. You can also read what the Cochranites had to say: Hurray, the Russian bureaucracy is liberating itself. In the same paper, sometimes on facing pages.

But the Cochranites also proposed to liquidate the independent party organization, which meant to attack the wages and pensions of Farrell Dobbs, Tom Kerry, [Joseph] Hansen, and a bunch of other fellows who were perfectly content to let the European Pabloites do anything they wanted, or to pursue any political line in this country, as long as it was going to be pursued from the organizational framework of the SWP.

“I SORT OF WALKED OUT”

When LaRouche arrived in New York, the SWP was still in turmoil over the just concluded clash with Cochran/Clarke and the developing split inside the Fourth International that would divide it into two virtually separate organizations until the “reunification” talks of the early 1960s. The loss of the Cochran/Clarke faction only reduced the party’s rapidly dwindling ranks.

As an “orthodox Trotskyist,” LaRouche formally sided with Cannon. In his essay *How the Workers League Decayed*, LaRouche writes,

While I was in formal agreement with Cannon et al. against Cochran and Clarke (but not with Dave Steven's idiotic war cry—"The Communist Party Is Counterrevolutionary Through and Through"), and against Pablo's idiocies in the 1953-54 period, I discovered soon enough that Cannon and the rest of the majority leadership were a collection of political frauds. . . . Not to suggest that I played even a minor leading role (from Boston) in the 1953-54 factional struggle centering on New York and points west, except for one long letter denouncing a Harry Braverman article on the 1953 East German political strikes. . . .⁵ After digesting the 1954 experience, I ceased to regard any SWP member as a qualified revolutionary leader.

As the Los Angeles-based Cannon withdrew more and more into semi-retirement, the SWP's national leadership was run out of New York by Farrell Dobbs, Tom Kerry, and Joseph Hansen. All were "Old Guard" Trotskyists but they were far less interested than Cannon in polemics and far more concerned with keeping the SWP from totally hemorrhaging membership. (By 1960 the SWP had less than 500 members nationwide.) Many of the SWP's intellectuals identified with the Cochran/Clarke group and when they left with them so did many of the party's sharper minds.

The Old Guard that ran the SWP clearly viewed LaRouche's as eccentric and irrelevant as well as harmless. Stepped in the classic 1930s proletarian culture tradition, they dismissed LaRouche as a textbook petit-bourgeois radical egghead who had a million ideas about everything but who couldn't last even a few months inside a real factory. That they didn't worry about his promotion of possibly heretical ideas, I suspect, largely stems from the fact – as Frank Lovell explained -- that the SWP

leadership hadn't a clue about what he was saying about in his endless memos and personal letters.

Undoubtedly after arriving in New York, LaRouche at first imagined he could somehow win the leadership of the SWP over to his cybernetics-inspired vision by the sheer brilliance of his ideas. It soon became obvious, however, that LaRouche was quickly labeled a crackpot to be ignored as much as possible. The fact that LaRouche composed his missives instructing the SWP leadership on what he considered the basics of Marxism at night to old radical union leaders while he spent his days working as a "speedup" expert at the May Company must have made him seem comical. It is not terribly surprising, then, that after finally coming to New York and meeting with the national leaders of the SWP and finding himself personally marginalized even within a highly marginal if not dying political sect, LaRouche more or less decided to ignore the SWP just as it had ignored him.

In a November 1986 interview with the *San Francisco Focus*, LaRouche discussed this early period in New York:

SF Focus: You quit the SWP in 1954 because, as you've said, you thought the leadership "stunk."

La R: I sort of walked out. The proper word for the leadership, probably, is "philistines."

After he failed to convert the SWP to his ideas in 1954, LaRouche reports in *How the Workers League Decayed*:

I spent the period with my energies divided between daytimes of management consulting and (whenever possible) nighttimes and weekends of theoretical political work. . . My active connection with the SWP was limited to occasional meetings with members of the Weiss circle and

instructions to my (former) wife to attend to dues and pledge payments.

In other words, LaRouche still remained a dues-paying member of the party.

LIFE WITH LYNDON

The LaRouches lived during this time in an apartment on Central Park West. A source once close to LaRouche recalls:

Janice LaRouche, his first wife, was the secretary for the SWP in New York City. She continued to hold that position for a while and Lyn worked. They moved into an apartment on Central Park West, which was an expensive, trendy area at the time. Then they decided to have a child. By that time, Janice had dropped out of an active role in the SWP and Lyn was not being appreciated for his great conjunctural crisis thesis, so they really drifted away from political activism. But as soon as Janice got pregnant, Lyn dropped his management consulting job and proposed to form a partnership with a business associate. There were bitter disputes about money and his marriage began to fall apart.

Lyndon and Janice, however, maintained close social ties with a circle of SWP members around Murry and Myra Tanner Weiss. In *How the Workers League Decayed*, LaRouche comments:

While I was, from my first serious discussions with Weiss, in 1955, always in profound disagreement with him on the issue of the comprehension of and approach to conjunctural perspectives, he and my former wife were part of the same close circle of personal friends. . . .

Former SWP member Tim Wohlforth who first met Weiss during this time describes him as “an exceptional man,” quite heavy with “a big face, wire-framed glasses and receding hair.” Wohlforth said that Weiss

always wore a crumpled suit and an open white shirt. He was a completely self-taught Jewish intellectual from a working class background. He had left school in the eighth grade, and what he knew, he learned in the movement. And he knew a lot. Many years later, Murry left the SWP and was forced to find a way to earn a living. He had a knack for communicating with people, understanding people. So he decided to become a psychologist. He passed his high-school equivalency test and then went on to college to get the degree he needed—when he was almost sixty years old.⁶

Murry and Myra Weiss had a particular ability to recruit youth. They wanted to modernize the SWP to make it more attractive to younger radicals. Through their work, a network of younger SWP leaders like Tim Wohlforth and James Robertson were recruited into the YSA from Max Shachtman’s old Workers Party (later renamed the Independent Socialist League) after Shachtman liquidated the ISL into the Socialist Party.

FBI INFORMANT

From 1954 to early 1957 LaRouche had virtually nothing to do with the SWP. Then around March 1957, the fellow who had “sort of walked out” of the SWP sort of wandered back in. From *How the Workers League Decayed*:

During the period from March 1957 through February 1958, I repeatedly presented in a variety of media and on a variety of occasions the first (economic) part of the strategic perspective with which my name has been uniquely

associated in the socialist movement since that time, March 1957.

LaRouche also told the *San Francisco Focus* that his reentry into the SWP had been inspired by the FBI!

SF Focus: Why didn't you try to take over the leadership? Or did you?

La R: I made a couple of stabs at it later, but that was a different problem. (Laughs) That involved a bit of irony. The FBI approached me.

SF Focus: I was going to ask you about that. You rejoined the SWP in 1957—

La R: (Laughs) I didn't actually rejoin it. I just sort of wandered back in. This FBI man—he's still with the FBI—he was a special agent in New York at the time and he came up to the office building where I worked as an executive and pulled me aside and said that they wanted me to work for them on the SWP. I said I didn't like that kind of thing—same thing as McCarthyism—but then he said, "There's a very serious national security problem." And I said, "I won't work for you, but what I'll do is I'll look into it on my own, and if there's something actually going on that is not normal political nonsense, and it's against the law, I'll talk to you about it."

SF Focus: What was going on?

La R: A little deal with the Soviets and some others, which didn't amount to anything explicitly illegal but it sure stunk. And I just tried to see if there was anybody around who didn't like it there and maybe pull 'em out.

SF Focus: So did you in fact ever report back to the FBI about the something that was going on?

La R: No, because there was really nothing there, nothing worth reporting. I told them there was nothing. [Presumably this means he *did* report.] It was kindergarten politics on an international level, which I began to investigate in some of the other dimensions. What was interesting to me was not the U.S. side but the European side.

What was LaRouche's strange reference to the interesting "European side" all about? And why did the FBI believe that the moribund SWP now posed some kind of new challenge to national security?

IN THE WAKE OF THE 20TH CONGRESS

The answer to both these questions, I believe, starts with 1956 20th Party Congress of the CPSU and its revelations about Stalinism. That same year also witnessed the Hungarian Uprising. The combined impact of both events led to a shattering split inside the American Communist Party headed by John Gates, whose faction soon abandoned communism after leaving the party.

For its part, the SWP tried to make overtures both to the Gates faction as well as the majority group still allied with Moscow but now no longer capable of defending Stalin's slanders against Trotsky. A key leader of the SWP's "regroupment" tactic was none other than Murry Weiss. In 1958 "regroupment" began to pay a few dividends when the SWP helped sponsor the "Independent Citizens Committees" for Corlis Lamont's U.S. Senate campaign. The Lamont campaign was also backed by the CP-influenced *National Guardian* as well as by W.E.B. Du Bois.

This is, I suspect, what LaRouche meant when he refers to “a little deal with the Soviets and others” and “kindergarten politics.”

As for LaRouche’s cryptic reference to “the European side” of things, he is almost certainly referring to events in England. In 1957 a leading faction of the British Communist Party also split from the CPGB over both the 20th Party revelations and the brutal Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Uprising. Some 200 former CPGB members joined Gerry Healy’s small Trotskyist tendency, which in March 1959 became the Socialist Labour League (SLL). A former British *Daily Worker* correspondent in Hungary during the 1956 Uprising named Peter Fryer led the CP faction into the SLL some time in late 1956 or early 1957, a few months before LaRouche “wandered back” into the SWP. Although Fryer personally fled the SLL in 1959 convinced that Gerry Healy was little more than a political gangster, the SLL continued to gain momentum as an influential Trotskyist groupuscule thanks to the former CPGB members who remained with Healy.⁷

FBI “REGROUPMENT”

“Regroupment” also caught the attention of the FBI which placed at least 301 informants inside the SWP over a 16-year period. The FBI even had at least one informer present at SWP’s National Committee Plenum in New York on 28 November 1958.⁸ Some estimates state that the government (this may include not just the FBI but other police agencies such as the New York Red Squad) controlled some 1,600 agents in and around the SWP from 1960 to 1976. In 1960, 52 of the SWP’s 466 members were on the FBI payroll. The SWP was further targeted for the FBI’s second COINTELPRO operation with the initial SWP COINTELPRO memo signed by Hoover on 12 October 1961. Given the SWP’s prominent involvement in organizations like Fair Play for Cuba (FPFC), it is not hard to understand why.

Yet the deeper reason behind the FBI's actions clearly was the Bureau's fear of the general "realignment" between the old Trotskyist and Communist Parties. As historian James Davis reports, the FBI feared the political equivalent of a reconciliation of Sunni (the CP) and Shi'a (the Trotskyists):

In selecting the SWP as a COINTELPRO target, Hoover had chosen a tiny political organization indeed: there were no more than 2,500 members nationwide. Nevertheless – despite more than twenty years of surveillance of both the CPUSA and the SWP – Hoover, by 1961, had become alarmed over the prospect of a possible alliance between the two parties.⁹

The historian David Garrow notes that between 1960 and 1976, the FBI

Operated some three hundred member informants inside the SWP, with the numerical peak coming in 1961, when 54 individuals out of an SWP membership totaling 480, or 11 percent, were reporting to the FBI.¹⁰

James Davis also states that the SWP COINTELPRO lasted approximately 10 years and involved some 1,000 undercover informants. Over 50 informants held high ranking positions and they supplied over 7,000 internal SWP documents to the Bureau.¹¹

Yet even the pre-COINTELPRO FBI operations against the SWP were remarkable. From 1943 until 1963, FBI wiretaps on the SWP recorded a total of some 20,000 wiretap days while FBI listening devices (bugs) accumulated some 12,000 days of eavesdropping-obtained information. If all this wasn't enough, between 1958 and 1965, the SWP's National Office at 116 University Place was broken into by the FBI some 81 times! Three YSA offices were

entered some 16 times and 10,000 documents were removed or copied.¹²

Yet even if LaRouche was an informant for the FBI, I know of no evidence to suggest that LaRouche was a trained infiltrator. A trained infiltrator following the advice of his “handler” usually works as hard as he or she can to ingratiate himself or herself with the designated “target.” LaRouche, to the contrary, almost went out of his way to marginalize himself. My own guess which may be wrong is that LaRouche was contacted by the FBI sometime around early 1957 and that he at times supplied the FBI with tidbits of information because doing so fed his ego image as an important person secretly tied to powerful forces. LaRouche’s obsessive fascination with the world of intelligence as well as his deep fear of personal betrayal by “agents” also may be rooted in his own personal relationship towards the FBI after he first was contacted in 1957.¹³

THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE THESIS

When LaRouche reentered the SWP, he did so in the midst of a first major post-war U.S. recession that began in 1957. The recession fed LaRouche’s belief that capitalism a la Keynes still hadn’t escaped the threat of a future “breakdown crisis.” In *Dialectical Economics*, LaRouche writes of the “decay of railway systems over the past half-century, the pattern of obsolescence in textile manufacturing, the aggravated technological rot feeding on highly exploited labor in the garment industry, the decay of the shoe industry” and “any number of comparable cases” as strong evidence that a “very large sector” of the U.S. economy was in longterm decline. Production, however, had boomed most in postwar Germany and Japan precisely – or so LaRouche would argue – because the immense destruction of pre-war factories under massive Allied bombing raids meant that even the “oldest” German or Japanese factory dated back to 1946. Yet as wages

rose and factories aged, the German and Japanese ability to sustain a growing world capitalist system was beginning to run out sometime in the 1960s. LaRouche, in short, rejected the conventional view that modern capitalism was now immune to major economic collapse. This idea had been embraced not just by conventional Keynesian economists but also by leading Marxists such as the Harvard-trained economist Paul Sweezy. The notion that capitalism had overcome the threat of a 1929-like “breakdown crisis” had long been Soviet orthodoxy as well.¹⁴

In March 1957 when he “wandered back” into the SWP, LaRouche came equipped with a new economic thesis about the coming collapse of capitalism. In *How the Workers League Decayed*, LaRouche writes that by 1958 he had even developed a master plan for both the SWP and the Fourth International based on his belief that an impending capitalist economic monetary crisis was just around the corner.¹⁵ In *Dialectical Economics*, LaRouche explains that he first developed his views while working as a business consultant during the period he had more or less dropped out of the SWP. His new “perspective” actually emerged as a result of his study of the relationship between the automobile distribution industry (seemingly a fancy name for car dealers) and customers who were dependent on consumer credit:

This situation, typified during the mid-1950s by the crisis in automotive distribution that resulted from the increase in consumer use of credit, was by no means limited to automotive distribution, but it is undoubtedly the best example. In fact, it was intensive study of this example that led the author to develop the now-confirmed prognosis for the course of the development of the U.S. economy and world monetary system during the latter part of the 1950s.¹⁶

LaRouche later tried to incorporate his idea about the coming collapse of capitalism into a Marxist framework, Writing about his

ideas many years later in *The Case of Ludwig Feuerbach*, he states:

We have employed our unique competence to fill out certain critical sections of *Capital* which Marx's death left in sketch form. This accomplishment of ours is most notable in those chapters from Section IV of *Capital*, Volume III, to which Marx assigned the treatment of fictitious capital, where he did not supply much more than identification of several of the major citations he selected for incorporation in the text. The indicated analysis of the phenomena in question is missing in Marx's text, an omission which has devastating consequences for the effort to reconcile the rest of Marxian economics with the actualities of the monetary side of the capitalist realization process.

In the winter of 1958 LaRouche wrote a memo outlining the coming economic crisis. He later reported:

Copies of the memorandum I prepared on these theses were incidentally sent to the Central Committee of the British Healyite organization by representatives of the SWP Political Committee where, after opposition to conjunctural perspectives were registered by Tom Kemp¹⁷ and others there, the SLL developed a bowdlerized version of my position for itself.

LaRouche says that he then spend a year in "various forums" giving presentations on the thesis that the capitalist world was on the brink of a huge monetary crisis and that this fact must determine a Marxist political perspective for the future.

But did LaRouche's ideas help influence the SL as he claimed? What seems true is that Healy's SLL did believe some version of a coming capitalist economic crisis thesis. Whether Healy simply

“bowdlerized” LaRouche, or whether LaRouche borrowed from Healy if they even heard of each other remains as unknown as the identities of the “representatives of the SWP’s Political Committee” who supposedly sent LaRouche’s thesis to the SLL. However in November 1958 Healy visited Canada to confer with leaders of the SWP and LaRouche’s document may have been one of a number of SWP internal documents that were shared with Healy.¹⁸

Whatever impact LaRouche’s ideas may have had in England remains unknown. We do know from LaRouche himself what the SWP thought of his theories. From *How the Workers League Decayed*:

In the Political Committee of the SWP itself, there was the following division of opinion on my theses and on the advisability of permitting a national discussion of the theses. Tom Kerry, while not convinced I was correct, took the view that some examination of the obvious new developments was needed and suggested that my theses might be used as a way of provoking thought in those directions. Murry Weiss disagreed entirely with the theses and with the method he regarded them as representing, but was in favor of discussion as means of enriching the internal life of the organization. . . . Joseph Hansen offered bitter opposition to both the theses and the prospect of their discussion—his strong opposition was sufficient to cow a Political Committee which was only marginally sympathetic to the discussion at most.

Based on LaRouche’s testimony, the only two members of the SWP’s Political Committee even vaguely sympathetic to LaRouche were Tom Kerry -- who seems to have good-naturedly tolerated LaRouche -- and Weiss, who was personally close to LaRouche’s wife socially. But even they were clearly less than

enthusiastic about the documents LaRouche submitted.

In a June 19-23 1972 *New Solidarity* article on the SWP, LaRouche recalled about this period:

During the period from 1950-57, the SWP lost all of its base in the organized labor movement and gradually settled into a demoralized state, watching itself contract from thousands of members in 1947 to a couple of hundred during the deepest McCarthyite Dog Days of the 1950s.

LaRouche claimed that the old SWP leadership not only couldn't grasp the idea that following the 1957-1958 recession there would be an upsurge in youth and black radicalism that would presage a later working class revolt, but they were more or less indifferent to the very idea:

Nearly every SWP leader insisted, and in a pretty-enraged tone of voice at that, that the 1957-58 recession had nothing to do with the sudden turn from a period of reaction to growing radicalization. Their argument was essentially that no ferment could imply such a correlation unless it was accompanied by corresponding increase in the SWP's trade-union base of influence! This pessimistic refusal to develop a new conjunctural programmatic perspective was not accidental.

Like all centrists orientated to trade-union opportunism, the Cannon leadership was dominated throughout all its political life -- way back to the days of the CP -- by the most wretched philistinism towards "all intellectuals." Anyone who had not "risen through the ranks" in trade-union work was despised. If any "intellectual" challenged the leadership, or seemed to threaten such a future challenge, he was promptly subjected to all sorts of personal degradations. If

he refused to break under these pressures, he was systematically driven out.

Exemplary is the writer's own experience with those folks. When he presented his now-vindicated detailed theses on the 1960s back in 1958 and 1959 the response of the entire SWP leadership, with the exception of Murray Weiss and Tom Kerry, was typified by Joe Hansen's crude personal observation: "We have people in charge of these things; you have no business taking up these questions." When, in fact, this writer was the only qualified professional Marxian economist in the entire organization!

It was this social prejudice, characteristic of an organization of trade-union-oriented centrists, who closed the door against all serious theoretical work. To attempt to cope with the objective implications of the 1957-58 Recession would have demanded changing the social character of the SWP leadership as a whole.

In fact, by the late 1950s the SWP had heavily invested in both the "regroupment" strategy and in independent attempts to recruit new blood into the party around the fight for civil rights and support for Castro's Cuba; both issues that LaRouche ignored.

DEPRESSION AHEAD?

In the winter 1961 issue of the SWP's theoretical journal, *International Socialist Review* (ISR), however, LaRouche finally got a chance to lay out his "economic perspective" in an article entitled "Depression Ahead?" In *Conceptual History of the Labor Committees*, LaRouche recalls that the SWP's response to his new ideas "was a shrug." In fact it was far more than that. The SWP leadership blocked LaRouche from using any SWP forum to present his ideas. In *How the Workers League Decayed*,

LaRouche writes:

From that time [the presentation of the theses] until my formal separation from the SWP [1965], I was permitted to make only four public statements on behalf of my views. Once in the *Militant* (despite Hansen's vetoes) on the steel strike because labor was at that instant Tom Kerry's bailiwick. Once, the first of three, in *International Socialist Review* ("Depression Ahead"), because of sharp divisions in the SWP leadership over other issues. Twice in seven years. I was offered public forums, once on the economic situation and once on Eric Fromm's views of Marx. Three of my documents were suppressed (contrary to rules and procedures); I was forbidden to give classes to any party youth, etc.

The winter 1961 *ISR* "Depression Ahead" article identifies LaRouche not as an economist but as "a consulting engineer who writes and lectures on Marxist economic problems." LaRouche's article, which outlines the ideas that he would repeat for the next four and a half decades, begins:

The 1957 recession was the turning point in America's post-war prosperity. The vast governmental power constructed during the Roosevelt era to save capitalism from the "Great Depression," the war budgets, the tremendous inflationary deficits – all of these devices now appeared inadequate to prevent another great depression that seemed to loom up for the middle or late sixties. For the 1957 recession was not just another recession; it was not simply the third of three post-war recessions. There was something more: the mechanism of inflationary credit which was the mainstream of the "New Deal" threatened to become the instrument of inflationary bankruptcy.

The only “out” for capitalism was to demand “extreme sacrifice” by workers:

Kennedy’s “New Frontier” and Galbraith’s *Affluent Society* are demands for extreme sacrifice by the U.S. workers at home – a ten to twenty billion dollar increase in government spending, matching higher taxation, price controls, wage controls, credit controls and new labor control bills. U.S. capitalism is in a desperate situation and is plunging toward the political and economic action the situation demands.

The only path the Kennedy government could now follow was the path of Hitler!

While the U.S. economy is much stronger, has far greater resources and alternatives than Hitler’s Germany, Kennedy’s economic program is as full of economic contradictions as Schacht’s. Schacht’s program put the Nazi economy through a series of financial crises that finally forced Germany to plunge into war as the only possible means for solving its internal economic problems. Schacht’s “guns for butter” and Kennedy-Galbraith’s “public works instead of wages” program are essentially the same in principle with essentially the same inevitable consequences. On the American scene, *Kennedy’s “New Frontier” will lead inevitably to either war or a social crisis*; it is extremely probable that the decision will be faced within the next ten years. During the next two years Kennedy will put the U.S. economy more and more on a war-economy footing, with corresponding political and economic forms of regimentation. Faced with repeated recession crises, the administration will resort to successively more desperate and extreme measures. To the degree that the “New Frontier” postpones the depression it will, to the degree that it builds up the colonial economies, increase the peril to the dollar on the international market.

Yet the coming economic crisis could only be postponed but not avoided:

But, even at the best, the inevitable squeeze and betrayal of the trade unions by Kennedy will not be enough to save the system. The object of Kennedy's anti-labor program can only accomplish a certain stabilization of the domestic economy and a limited break on the continuing depreciation of the U.S. dollar. Only vast foreign investments can save the U.S. capitalist system: not ten or five years from now, but next year; only the opening of a large market for foreign investments will permit the capitalist system to recover from the present recession. It is not remarkable that Washington was driven to such stupid fury by the expropriation of a billion dollars of U.S. investments in Cuba.

Perhaps the most surprising fact about "Depression Ahead?" is that the SWP allowed it to be published at all.¹⁹

LaRouche's "conjectural perspectives" aside, by the early 1960s the SWP's leadership itself had begun gradually to abandon the 1930s-inspired "labor metaphysic." The SWP now aligned itself with the prospectus advanced in the one-famous *Triple Revolution Statement* of 1964, which argued that the introduction of new cybernetic-inspired advances in technology insured that future challenges of the capitalist system would involve large sections of the old blue collar work force being rendered obsolete both by computers and automation.²⁰

CONCLUSION: THE PERSONAL AND THE POLITICAL

Lyndon LaRouche's two attempts to influence the SWP – the first in 1954 and the second in 1957-58 – were abject failures. From his reentry into the SWP in March 1957 until his final

resignation/expulsion from the group in late 1965, LaRouche operated at best on the very margins of an already very marginal party.

During this same period LaRouche's personal life also was in turmoil. One person who knew LaRouche recalled:

He was definitely not into computers until the end of his employment as a consultant to the May Company At that time he predicted that computers could be used to get rid of white collar workers. His consulting did consist of time-study methods to speed workers up. . . . Lyn's predictions about computers were not accepted by his company which supposedly was why he quit. Some time later he had a consulting job with IBM and there proposed (so he says) some advances in computer macro programming, which was also not accepted. He did not know anything about computer programming, he was a systems analyst. He was most successful in getting jobs (i.e., selling himself and his partner) but then they couldn't perform the job they had bargained to do. Lyn would not show up at work.

The source also recalls:

Lyn was not divorced in the [early] 1960s. . . . They separated around then and Lyn had a great deal of trouble supporting himself. Her family had helped him out financially while he and Janice lived together.²¹

As for LaRouche's son, the source recalled: "He was brutal to his son, and really quite uninterested in him."

Around this same time, LaRouche became interested in the writings of Erich Fromm. He particularly liked the way Fromm

promoted “the father principle” against “orthodox Freudianism.” In *Dialectical Economics*, he writes:

Fromm, the onetime maverick genius of the Frankfurt School, is one of the several outstanding psychoanalysts to free himself from both Freud’s metaphysical “libido” reification and the “orthodox Freudian” exaggeration of the influence of the “repressive father” on the development of the child’s personality.²²

Given what we know of LaRouche’s own father, you don’t have to be Sigmund Freud to find LaRouche’s comments revealing. You just have to be Murry Weiss. The source recalled that when they were discussing LaRouche, Weiss remarked that in his opinion “Lyn was a paranoid with delusions of glory.”

¹ In 1946 the SWP reached its highpoint with some 1,470 members. It then dropped to 1,277 in 1948, 825 in 1950, 758 in 1952, and 480 after a split in 1954. By 1957 the SWP had only 434 members and in 1959 only 399. Only in the early 1960s did SWP membership slowly begin to rise again. Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 300.

² Clara Fraser, *Revolution, She Wrote* (Seattle, WA: Red Letter Press, 1987). Fraser's memory is a little hazy. James Robertson's group left well before LaRouche. LaRouche initially was associated with Tim Wohlforth's American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI). Fraser was right, however, about LaRouche's pen name. During his SWP days he spelled his name "Lynn Marcus." (Since he came from Lynn, Massachusetts, this was part of the pun.) Only after he left the SWP, he dropped the second "n" and began spelling first name just as "Lyn" as an abbreviation for Lyndon.

³ Lovell further recalled that while Kerry was impressed with LaRouche's commitment to idea, he awaited with dread the moment he had to discuss those ideas with LaRouche in person.

⁴ One example presumably would be the role the North Vietnamese Communist Party would play in the Vietnam War. Deutscher's ideas had an enormous impact on the emerging New Left and in particular on the founders of *The New Left Review*.

⁵ Harry Braverman was the third leader of the Cochran/Clarke tendency in the SWP.

⁶ Tim Wohlforth, *The Prophet's Children: Travels on the American Left* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 40.

⁷ Healy first tried to say that Fryer left because of ill health. Fryer then wrote an open letter in which he stated that the SLL was run as a Healy clique. Fryer also noted: "There is scarcely a single leading member of the League whom the general secretary [Healy] has not attacked in private conversations with me at some time or another, in such terms as these: 'I have got enough on P. To get him sent down for seven years.' 'I don't know what game P. is playing. He could be a police agent.' 'B. Is a primitive Irish peasant.' ... 'G is a lunatic.' 'A . . . beats his wife.'" Cited in Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth, *On the Edge: Political Cults Right and Left* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), 157.

⁸ Wohlforth, *The Prophet's Children*, 68.

⁹ James Kirkpatrick Davis, *Spying on America: The FBI's Domestic Counterintelligence Program* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 56-57.

¹⁰ David Garrow, "FBI Political Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Information and Measuring the Effects," *The Public Historian*, 10 (4) (autumn 1988), 8.

¹¹ Davis, 57.

¹² 59.

¹³ In order to better answer these questions, it would be necessary to examine LaRouche's own FBI file as well as the FBI's broader SWP files. However, even if LaRouche wanted to cooperate with the FBI, I have little doubt that just like the SWP National Office leadership; the FBI National Office leadership would have viewed LaRouche as a marginal figure unworthy of serious consideration.

¹⁴ This argument first had been advanced by the famed Soviet/Hungarian economist Eugene Varga against the leading Soviet "crisis" economist Evgenii Preobrazhensky, a leading member of Trotsky's "Left Opposition."

¹⁵ LaRouche's analysis of an impending monetary crisis – while unusual – was by no means unique. LaRouche drew on the work of the Belgian-born Yale economist Robert Triffin who in 1960 predicted a coming crisis in his book *Gold and the Dollar Crisis: The Future of Convertibility*. LaRouche also cites Triffin's work in *The Coming American Socialist Revolution* first published in the *SWP Discussion Bulletin* (Vol. 25, No. 6) as a pre-convention document for the SWP's 1965 gathering.

¹⁶ *Dialectical Economics*, 232.

¹⁷ Tom Kemp, an academic economist and former CPGB member, joined the SLL with the Fryer group.

¹⁸ As I will show in the next chapter, LaRouche also says that he only realized Healy's group had a "breakdown crisis" perspective sometime after 1964.

¹⁹ It should also be noted that LaRouche wrote "Depression Ahead?" when he was 39 years old and one of the last SWP recruits who had entered the party with the vivid lived experience of the Great Depression. By the late 1950s, however, the frequently apocalyptic "class war" ideology and rhetoric that had inspired so many Depression-era radicals and made them endure the McCarthy era was now called into question.

The CPSU turn to "peaceful coexistence" following the 20th Congress met real opposition. In the late 1950s, a faction of the CPUSA quit the party in the wake of China's attacks on the Russian "capitalist roaders." They then formed the Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute a Marxist-Leninist Party in the United States (the "Vanguard Group"). In the early 1960s, an even larger pro-Chinese group left the CPUSA. In 1962 they became known as Progressive Labor (PL). Both groups proudly upheld the old "labor metaphysic" famously critiqued by C. Wright Mills. In the late 1950s a similar tendency split off from the SWP. The "Global Class War" group organized around Sam Marcy and Vince Copeland later became the Workers World Party (WWP).

²⁰ The early 1960s saw the brief flourishing of the left-liberal Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution. Tremendously influenced by the rise of automation and cybernetics, the Committee on the Triple Revolution in late March 1964 issued its own manifesto on the future. It outlined what it saw as vast structural changes in the future American economy that would be rooted in a radically changing composition of the American labor force. The document predicted a brewing major social crisis in America as technological modernization in particular fueled deep structural unemployment. *The Triple Revolution: Cybernation, Weaponry, Human Rights* was clearly meant to influence the Kennedy Administration along the lines of Michael Harrington's famous book *The Other America* but it only came out shortly after JFK's assassination. It was signed not just by leading liberals like Gunnar Myrdal, W. H. (Ping) Ferry, Linus Pauling, and H. Stuart Hughes but also the Socialist Party's Michael Harrington as well as two SDS leaders, Tom Hayden and Todd Gitlin.

To hear James Cannon's favorable but cautious discussion of the Triple Revolution, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYWJZWXOyUY> . Also see LaRouche's discussion of the Triple Revolution in *Dialectical Economics*, 212-13.

²¹ Janice Neuberger LaRouche went on to become a business consultant of sorts. She advised women entering the job market. See her entry in the 1973 edition of *Who's Who Among American Women*.

²² LaRouche was allowed to give exactly one SWP lecture on "Fromm's Views of Marx." At the time, Fromm was involved in the promotion of the "young Marx's" writings such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology* as well as an attempt to integrate Freud's ideas into a Marxist worldview.