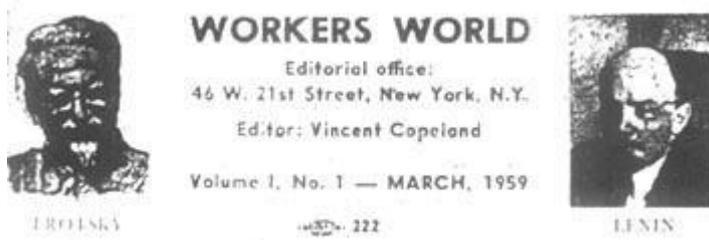


# Roots of the Workers World Party - Ken Lawrence



Historical background on the origins of the still-extant Workers World Party. For a summary of their current status see [Where's the Winter Palace](#).

The so-called "Global Class War" Trotskyist current of Sam Marcy and Vincent Copeland was mainly centered in the SWP of Buffalo, New York, rooted in the blast furnace industrial proletariat there.

Following World War II, the Fourth International faced a political crisis trying to reconcile Trotsky's statement that if the war's aftermath failed to produce a new wave of socialist revolution, all of Marxism would need to be reconsidered. Trotsky's widow Natalia Sedova based her switch to Shachtman's politics on that premise.

In contrast, the Marcyites declared that socialist revolutions in China and Yugoslavia had fulfilled Trotsky's expectations. For them the role of the Marxist party in capitalist countries was to ally itself (i.e., the conscious sector of its working class) with the victorious workers' states in a straightforward strategic display of class solidarity in a class war that had become global.

To many, the Marcyite pro-Stalinist political orientation seemed to be the U.S. variant of Pabloism; actually, it was the opposite. Michel Pablo's perspective was deeply pessimistic, whereas the Marcyites were fully charged with revolutionary optimism, further fortified by the Cuban revolution as time went on.

This stance in turn meant playing down to insignificance polemics against Stalinism, while seeking leadership of the class through exemplary action. The Marcyites remained uneasily as a faction within the SWP until the USSR's military invasion of Hungary in 1956, which they supported and the SWP denounced. Depending on whose version you believe, the Marcy-Copeland faction either left (Marcy) or was expelled (Cannon), and formed Workers World Party in 1957.

The party newspaper banner debuted with a silhouette of Lenin in one corner and Trotsky in the other, bracing the heading, "Colored and White Unite and Fight for a WORKERS WORLD." The founders never looked back, and from then to the present kept their doctrinaire politics strictly internal. However, they were always fun in their taunts to the SWP.

For example, during the Socialist Regroupment period, the United Socialist ticket headed by [Stalinists] Otto Nathan and Annette T. Rubenstein ran for state offices in New York in 1958, with support of the SWP. WW cadres would question the SWP orators, "Comrades, how is it that you could not get along with those of us who regard the Hungarian uprising as a bourgeois nationalist insurgency, but then you can bloc politically with those who call it a fascist counter-revolution?"

At about that time, the proletarian left wing (New York waterfront, Cleveland industrial, and California lumber) branches of the Communist Party were being expelled, after delivering their anti-Foster/Dennis resolution, "Our Reply to the Conciliators of Revisionism," and Harry Haywood's "For a Revolutionary Position on the Negro Question" [Black Belt self-determination]. When that group established the

Provisional Organizing Committee to Reconstitute a Marxist-Leninist Communist Party in the United States, WW ran a friendly headline directed to them, "Welcome, Comrades!"

The POC paper, Marxist-Leninist Vanguard, retorted, "Trotskyism is Counter- Revolution and Nothing Else!" Smarting at that, the Lenin and Trotsky busts disappeared from the WW paper, never to return, and virtually all mention of Trotsky vanished forever from its pages. Prior to the emergence of Progressive Labor, WW and POC were the leading U.S. Maoists, both of which had direct ties to China at a time when the Sino-Soviet split had not yet been publicly acknowledged. (But the POC took up Mao's anti-Tito campaign with characteristic zeal, while WW continued to regard Tito's revolution as a model.)

True to its fundamental principles, WW has always remained primarily action- oriented. Its pamphlets and books are scarcely theoretical, though they are steeped in historical analysis and idiom as a platform for agitation. The party is the most skillful practitioner of united front strategy -- not just tactics -- on the U.S. left, preferring to win influence and leadership through militancy rather than through ideological victories.

Despite that posture, Copeland was an exemplary scholar, with whom I corresponded cordially for several years despite our political differences.

WW has created mass front organizations to meet contingencies -- Youth Against War and Fascism, United Labor Action, the American Servicemen's Union, and others -- but usually participates in the broader mass coalitions as the most militant wing.

The passing of the founders seems to have opened the door to change just a crack. Two weeks ago WW ran an editorial directly criticizing the CP for its opposition to the impeachment of Clinton, urging workers to retain their independence and distance from the bourgeois morass.

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