FROM OUR MAIL-BOX

"TRINIDAD, BRITISH WEST INDIES — "Today while travelling by train I picked up part of a paper entitled THE WESTERN SOCIALIST. It was my first real introduction to socialism. The paper has convinced me that socialism is the only cure for humanity. Enclosed is ten dollars for literature on your list. Which I would like to read. Please rush as I am anxious to send the glad tidings."

WORCESTER, MASS. — "Please send me twelve issues of THE WESTERN SOCIALIST. Never believed in socialism until I read your magazine. Gives a new slant on the matter. May be what we need after all. Want to know more about it."

THE LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA — CANADA — "Please be advised that the Library of the University of Ottawa will appreciate receiving THE WESTERN SOCIALIST. (Readers are urged to get libraries in their vicinity to display complimentary copies of the WS which we are willing to send for the period of one year. We now have hundreds of leading colleges and public libraries throughout the world mailing the WS available to their readers."

FOREIGN SECRETARY — SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN — LONDON — "Our 43rd Annual Conference is over. It was a grand three days. In my opinion, one of the best conferences over. No fireworks or oratorical displays. We had the largest delegation in our history and everyone got down to the business in hand in a good methodical manner. The organization was splendid, from the accommodating of provincial delegates to the sale of literature... It is good to meet comrades from Scotland, from Manchester, from Birmingham and other places. Comrades whom one only sees once per annum... I am, at the moment, actively engaged in forming a new branch in Kingston-on-Thames, with every prospect of success."

LOS ANGELES COMRADE — "I wish you would put a bit in your letter to the Canadian comrades know that Com. George Armstrong's wife, known as Ma Armstrong in Winnipeg, was buried here last Monday. I'm sure that the many comrades who enjoyed her warm and generous hospitality will sadly regret her passing."

SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN — LONDON — "Cable: FRATERNAL GREETINGS FROM ALL COMRADES IN GREAT BRITAIN. BEST WISHES FOR SUCCESS. [Message to Party Conference in Boston."

DETROIT COMRADE — (Telegram) — "CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES FOR A BIGGER AND BETTER CONVENTION. LONG LIVE DETERMINATION TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD. (In a following letter, our comrade writes, "I sent a telegram to your convention and when I had finished reading it to the WO operator she asked me if she could read it over to me, that she was very much interested in learning something about Socialism and wished to mail her some literature. I of course told her I would be glad to, and later sent her Jan. Fourth issue of WS... I will do my part in ultimately meeting her and trying to develop and orientate her to our cause."

NEW WESTMINSTER, CANADA — "I'll make one suggestion for what it may be worth. Having in mind that our chief task is the making of socialists, a process which has enjoined us to create a language of our own — the language of the working class. The terminology that language is to be understood by the ordinary peddlers of the commodity labor-power. Hence, I would suggest that our Declaration of Principles be permanently placed inside the front cover page and on the inside of the back cover page an Index Dictionary be a permanent feature defining such terms as capital, labor-power, value, materialist conception of history, etc."

MIAMI, FLORIDA — "Here's a good clipping from the "Miami Herald" of April 3rd: 'Cost operators have no cause for pride in their resistance to costly safety recommendations, but they are... (Continued on page 12)"

THE WESTERN SOCIALIST

TROTSKYISM TODAY

On paper, the Trotskyist movement ("Fourth International") is quite an impressive organization. It claims parties and sections in about 30 countries. It has 2 weekly in the United States — the "Militant" and "Labor Action." It possesses a number of bi-monthly, weeklies and monthlies in England, France, Germany, and many other countries.

What is the reality behind the facade? What is the real strength of the Trotskyists? What has happened to them since Trotsky was murdered in August, 1940? Where are they going? In order to answer these questions exhaustively, it would of course be necessary to examine Trotsky's theories one by one — to follow him into the maze of "Thermidors," "Permanent Revolution," "Objectives Situations," and what not. This, however, is not intended here. It will only be necessary to examine his views on the nature of Russia and to show how the contradictions inherent in them have led his followers into unparalleled absurdities.

Trotzky on Russia

In his book "The Revolution Betrayed" (1937) he denies that Russia is state capitalist. "Nobody knows exactly what (state capitalism) means." A couple of lines later he tells us what he thinks it means: "The substitution of state property for private property." (p. 245). We are then informed that this is "progressive," while stateism, i.e., state intervention on the basis of private property and with the goal of preserving it is "reactionary." Why, then, is Russia not state capitalist? Very simple. "The first concentration of the means of production in the hands of the state to occur in history was achieved by the proletariat with the method of social revolution and not by capitalists with the method of state justification. Our brief analysis is sufficient to show how absurd are the attempts to identify stateism with the soviet system. The former is reactionary, the latter progressive." (p. 248).

It's all very clear and simple now, isn't it? (1) State capitalism is progressive. (2) Stateism is reactionary. (3) Russia is progressive. (4) Therefore — it can't be state capitalism.

Some people, of course, would question whether the Russian Revolution was achieved by the "proletariat" and wouldn't be satisfied with MERE technical advance as an index of "progress" or "reaction." But these people Trotsky dubbed "his ultra-left" and considered hardly worthy of attention.

The Bureaucracy

Who are the rulers of Russia? Are they a class? Trotsky says "No." "The Soviet Union has no
The official Trotskyist wing in the U.S. (S.W.F.) published the decree. What was its comment? Did it admit that the "bureaucracy" had become a class? Did it recant and tell its readers that now there was a "complete liquidation" of the alleged conquests of an alleged proletarian revolution? Nothing of the sort. "A study of this decree discloses a further deep incursion under the Kremlin regime into the economic foundations of the USSR." (Fourth International," April, 1946, p. 99.) That was all.

Degenerated Workers' State

We saw at the beginning that Trotsky denied that Russia had state capitalism. What then was his view? Fundamentally, he maintained that it was a society which was neither capitalist nor socialist, whose social foundations, however, were small matter of state bonds carrying interest. We remember the millionnaire collective farmers. As for inheritance law, a little decree of April 1, 1935 (i.e., before Trotsky's book was published), which sanctioned the transfer of state loan bonds, bank accounts, and capital to paper to individuals other than the workers, whatever that is, is his recognition that "the right of testament is inseparable from the right of property. The victory of the bureaucracy in this decisive sphere is its conversion of a new possesing class" (p. 254), and would lead to a "complete liquidation of the social conquests of the proletarian revolution." (p. 250.)

True, the official monthly of the countries controlled by the USSR." (Resolution of the Intern. Com., Fourth Intl., June 1946, p. 172.)

Few of the Trotskyists seem to realize that this concept marks a complete overthrow of the fundamental principles of Marxism. It presupposes that you can divorce the political superstructure of a country from its economic basis. It presupposes that a country can in some way evolve towards socialism with a "reactionary" and anti-socialist ruling class in the society. It presupposes, further, that Stalin's concept of "Socialism in one country," which the Trotskyists allegedly reject, has some foundation in reality.

The practical consequences of this erroneous concept have landed the Fourth International in a maze of contradictions, however, with which we cannot deal here. It would support the "progressive basis" in Russia, at the same time fighting against the "bureaucracy." How this could be done was never shown. It should be obvious that support, in any shape or form, of the "progressive basis" meant, in practice, support of the "bureaucracy.

Further, this idiotic (there is no other word for it) concept leads them to grasp for this break at every turn of Russian Imperialism, Every week, "The Militant," every month the "Fourth International" speak of "reactionary degeneration," "new "old," "obscure tendencies" without ever reaching a point where this "degeneration" stops.

With such blindness do they cling to this concept of a "degenerated workers' state" which they are incapable of discerning the real role of the Russian ruling class in Europe today. Control of parties and trade unions by the secret police becomes "progressive."
sown illusions that these slogans and transitional demands will in some way be achievable and will solve the "urgent problems of the masses," the Trotskyists will turn round, tell the masses that the demands and slogans REALLY don’t solve anything, and in the “Trotskyist variety” nature well that even if these demands are carried out, they would not remove the exploitative class character of their program.

Simple, isn’t it? When, however, the slogans fail to attract the “masses,” the next conference recommends our perspective alters and alters or even reverses the previous slogans. This writer confesses to being unable to make head or tail of most of the material published on this question. It seems to him as if it is merely the stringing together of vague, contradictory, and often meaningless jargon. What the relation of it all to the actual situation as recognized by socialism is supposed to be, he cannot say. If there is any relation, he has been unable to discover it.

How they got votes

The Trotskyists follow the usual practice of reformist vote-catching. In France, they went as far as to propose a pact with the Communist Party for the withdrawal of candidates, in return for support for their candidates. The C. P. rejected the offer. In the U. S. they not only put forward their own candidates, but endorse “progressive labor” candidates. That the workers voting for Trotskyist candidates do not vote for them because they understand their program is obvious.

To give but one example: In the last United States elections the Socialist Workers’ Party and the Workers’ Party (Trotskyite organizations) put forward a number of candidates. In New Jersey, the SWF had a Mr. Kohlman as Governor and a Mr. Breitman as senatorial candidate. Kohlman got 9,829 votes, if these had been genuine pro-Trotskyist votes, i.e., votes of workers who had understood the Trotskyist position and supported it by their votes, one would have expected a similar vote for Breitman, but he polled only 4,929 votes. What had happened to account for the difference of 5000 votes? Let "The Militant" official weekly of the SWP tell you:

"The Militant":

The difference in votes between Kohlman and Breitman is accounted for in the fact that Breitman had the most unfavorable position in the senatorial column of the ballot" ("Militant," Nov. 30, 1946, p. 1). This shows clearly that 5000 workers in that have voted without even understanding what they were voting for.

"Leftwing" Stalinists

What then, if our analysis is correct, is the real role of the Trotskyists today?

Any reader, familiar with the history of the Stalinists, will have noticed the similarity of Trotskyism with the Communist Party in its so-called "revolutionary period." Here, indeed, is the clue. Trotskyism, in the main, is nothing but the "left wing" of the Communist Party. In spite of the mutual vituperation between the two Trotskyism is following the same path as Stalinism. The C. P. is rejecting the "transitional demands," the self-styled "vanguards," the splits, the expulsions, the increasing bureaucratization of the party—these are nothing new. They have happened before in the rise and decline of the Stalinist. They are happening now in the rise and decline of the Trotskyist.

That this interpretation is correct is manifest by the embarrassment the Trotskyist movement suffers when the Stalinists take what is called a "left turn." This has happened recently with the clash of American and Russian Imperialisms. Once more the Stalinists use pseudo-revolutionary phraseology. Alas! It then happens that there is little difference between the "genuine slogans" of the Trotskyists and the "false slogans" of the Stalinists. How to explain to the "masses" that the Trotskyists are the "REAL," "GOOD" leaders and the Stalinists the "FALSE," "BAD" leaders? How indeed?

Thus we read the following lament: "Our theoretical criticism of Stalinism had not succeeded in gaining a hearing among . . . workers in the past." But a "continuation of the open class-collaborationist (CP) line of conquests" is now "repeated to the new "left turn," we are told, "will hasten the process for the time being and cement these critical elements to the Communist Party again . . . The swing of large sections of the workers to the Communist Party as a temporary phase is inevitable." (From a resolution adopted by the conference of the "Revolutionary Communist Party" (Trotskyist) in their organ "Socialist Appeal," London, Sept., 1946.) (Their emphasis.)

This is indeed an admission of political bankruptcy. As for the question of "good" and "bad" leaders, what an anonymous reviewer of some Trotskyist booklets on Spain said years ago holds good in general: "The question that comes to one's mind is this: Why did not the 'revolutionary masses' follow the 'good leaders'?" "Well," say the "Marxist," "the "revolutionary Marxist vanguard was not strong enough to build a strong Bolshevist Party in Spain, which would have applied correct and uncompromising revolutionary leadership and saved the victory gained in Russia in 1917." But why was not the revolutionary vanguard strong enough to do all those things? The revolutionary vanguard was not strong enough because the masses followed the "militards." "But why did the revolutionary masses, who in their revolutionary upsurge, follow the "militards"?" "Alas! We lack where we started from. This idealistic nonsense, presenting social change as a game of leaders and slogans, is sold to all comers as revolution and Marxism," ("International Review," No. 1, 1939, page 16.)

What is Trotskyism's Attraction?

It is essential for socialists to know the real strength and the why and wherefore of political movements to which they are opposed. In view of all that has been said above, it would be a mistake to dismiss the Fourth International with a shrug of the shoulders. It has attracted to its ranks a number of people. It has some, if little, influence in the trade unions and manages to infuse its adherents with great enthusiasm. Well-organized and successful drives are conducted by it, and it has been able to raise relatively large sums of money for propaganda purposes. It is only if we attempt to answer the why and wherefore of all this that we can understand the reasons for its relative strength, and unless we understand these reasons, our arguments and opposition is weakened.

The main reasons, to this writer, appear to be the following: (1) The fundamental approach of Trotskyism to history, which gives the illusion to those participating that they are "doing" something. (2) Linked with this, its fundamentally romantic character, the playing at revolution with a capital "R." (3) The doubtless sincerity of the large sections of Trotskyists. (4) The reluctance to give up the illusion of the "Tract Myth," at the same time unable to entirely withstand the weight of evidence on the real conditions in Russia. (5) The wave of sympathy and also the popularity which was the result of the Moscow "witchcraft trials."
We must leave out points 3, 4 and 5 for reasons of space.

On the first two points we cannot do better then quote a writer who has expressed the real issue extremely well.

"I have long suspected that the vogue which Trotsky has enjoyed among American radical intellectuals must be attributed much less to his towering achievements as a practical socialist theoretician than to a central trait in the heart of his theory which makes of him in many respects a very poor representative of Marxian thought. I refer to his voluntarism and subjectivism."

"Though he succeeded in wrapping his essentially voluntaristic theory in Marxian cloth, Trotsky NEVER WAS REALLY ABLE TO GRASP THE ESSENCE OF MARXIAN THOUGHT, NAMELY THAT THE TIME FOR A SOCIALIST TRANSFORMATION COMES ONLY WHEN A DEFECTIVE SYSTEM HAS SEEPED DEEPLY INTO THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE MASSES, and that there is no way of attaining a socialist goal if there is no self-activity of the masses. His theory is based on the belief that a group of enlightened minds, possessed of a strong will, is capable of marching the masses toward freedom. The cause of freedom coincides with the cause of the vanguard."

"In America, the masses, for a variety of historically ascertainable reasons, never have felt the need for socialist activity. The radical intellectual therefore cannot be tempted to lead the masses to socialism BEHIND THEIR BACK, to act on behalf of the masses instead of with them. There is that frustrating guilt between what the radical intellectual feels to be necessary and the desperately slow process of mass awakening. The urge to overcome this lag through radical action of a minority is almost impossible to withstand..."

"In any case, I appeal to the imagination of the American intellectual, - this hero who so boldly seemed to defy history, who challenged it with his assertion that there should be a new international in America."

"For, let there be no mistake, socialist understanding, as the essential prerequisite for socialism, cannot be brought about by a whirl of a magic wand with the head of Trotsky carved upon it. The process of spreading socialism is not a romantic process. Those who seek to bridge the gap between capitalism and socialism will find that short-cuts inevitably lead in a morass of reformism, disillusionment, and apathy.

HENRY HOLMES"