

# Socialist Workers Party (United States)

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The **Socialist Workers Party (SWP)** is a far-left political organization in the United States. The group places a priority on "solidarity work" to aid strikes and is strongly supportive of Cuba. The SWP publishes *The Militant*, a weekly newspaper that dates back to 1928, and maintains Pathfinder Press.

## Contents

- 1 Organizational history
  - 1.1 The Communist League of America
  - 1.2 "Entryism"
  - 1.3 Split from the Socialist Party
  - 1.4 Formation of the SWP
  - 1.5 The 1940 split
  - 1.6 The World War II years
  - 1.7 Postwar years
  - 1.8 The Cold War period
  - 1.9 1960s
  - 1.10 1970s and new leadership
  - 1.11 1980s and after
    - 1.11.1 Internal affairs
    - 1.11.2 Party activities
  - 1.12 The question of International affiliation
  - 1.13 The party and presidential politics
- 2 Personnel
  - 2.1 SWP National Secretaries
  - 2.2 Prominent current and former members
- 3 Footnotes
- 4 See also
- 5 Further reading
  - 5.1 Books
  - 5.2 Archival material
- 6 External links

## Socialist Workers Party

<b>Chairman</b>	Jack Barnes
<b>Founded</b>	1938
<b>Ideology</b>	Communism
	Marxism
	Castroism
<b>Political position</b>	Far-left
<b>International affiliation</b>	Pathfinder tendency

Politics of the United States

Political parties

Elections

# Organizational history

## The Communist League of America

The Socialist Workers Party traces its origins back to the former Communist League of America (CLA), founded in 1928 by members of the Communist Party USA expelled for supporting Russian Communist leader Leon Trotsky against Joseph Stalin.

Concentrated almost exclusively in New York City and Minneapolis, in 1929 the CLA did not have more than 100 adherents.<sup>[1]</sup>

After five years of propaganda work, the CLA remained a tiny organization, with a membership of about 200 and very little influence.<sup>[2]</sup>

The rise of fascism in Nazi Germany and the failure of the communist and social democratic left to unite against the common danger created a situation where certain radical parties throughout the world reexamined their priorities and sought a mechanism for building united action. As early as December 1933, a Trotskyist splinter group called the Communist League of Struggle (CLS), headed by former Socialist Party youth section leader Albert Weisbord and his wife Vera Buch, approached Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party of America seeking a united front hunger march of the two organizations followed by a general strike.<sup>[3]</sup> This suggestion was dismissed as "poppycock" by SP Executive Secretary Clarence Senior, but the seed of the idea of joint action had been planted.<sup>[4]</sup>

## "Entryism"

Early in 1934, some French Trotskyists of the Communist League conceived of the idea of entering the French Socialist Party (the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* or SFIO) in order to recruit members for the Trotskyists, or so some critics have charged. The group retained its identity as a factional organization inside the SFIO and built a base among the party's youth section, continuing their activity until popular front action between the SFIO and the mainline Communist Party of France made their position untenable. This tactic of "entering" the larger social democratic parties of each country, endorsed by Trotsky himself, became known as the "French Turn" and was replicated by various Trotskyist parties around the world.

In 1934, the Communist League of America merged with the American Workers Party led by A.J. Muste, forming the Workers Party of the United States.

Throughout 1935 the Workers Party of the United States was deeply divided over the "entryism" tactic called for by the "French Turn," and a bitter debate swept the organization. Ultimately, the majority faction of Jim Cannon, Max Shachtman, and James Burnham won the day and the Workers Party determined to enter the Socialist Party of America; a minority faction headed by Hugo Oehler refused to accept this result and split from the organization.

The Socialist Party was itself beset with factional disagreements. The SP's left wing "Militant" faction sought to expand the organization into an "all-inclusive party" — inviting in members of the Lovestone and Trotskyist movements as well as radical individuals as the first step towards making the SP a mass party.<sup>[5]</sup> Although there were no mass entries at this time, several radical oppositionists did make their way into the SP, including former Communist Party leader Benjamin Gitlow, youth leader and ex-Lovestone supporter Herbert Zam, and attorney and American Workers Party activist Albert Goldman.<sup>[4]</sup> Goldman at this time also joined with YPSL leader Ernest Erber to establish a newspaper in Chicago with a Trotskyist orientation, *The Socialist Appeal*, later to

serve as the organ of the Trotskyists inside the Socialist Party.<sup>[6]</sup>

In January 1936, just as the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party was expelling the Old Guard for their factional organization and alleged "violation of party discipline," James Cannon and his faction won their internal battle in the Workers Party to join the SP, when a national branch referendum voted unanimously for entry.<sup>[6]</sup> Negotiations commenced with the Socialist Party leadership, with the admissions ultimately made on the basis of individual applications for membership rather than admission of the Workers Party and its approximately 2,000 members as a group.<sup>[7]</sup> On June 6, 1936, the Workers Party's weekly newspaper, *The New Militant*, published its last issue and announced "Workers Party Calls All Revolutionary Workers to Join Socialist Party."<sup>[8]</sup> A new phase in the party's life had begun.

Although party leader Jim Cannon later hinted that the entry of the Trotskyists into the Socialist Party had been a contrived tactic aimed at stealing "confused young Left Socialists" for his own organization,<sup>[9]</sup> it seems that at its inception, the entryist tactic was made in good faith. Historian Constance Myers notes that while "initial prognoses for the union of Trotskyists and Socialists were favorable," it was only later when "constant and protracted contact caused differences to surface."<sup>[10]</sup> The Trotskyists retained a common orientation with the radicalized SP in their opposition to the European war, their preference for industrial unionism and the CIO over the trade unionism of the American Federation of Labor, a commitment to trade union activism, the defense of the Soviet Union as the first workers' state while at the same time maintaining an antipathy toward the Stalin government, and in their general aims in the 1936 election.<sup>[11]</sup>

Cannon went to Tujunga, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, to establish another new newspaper, *Labor Action*, targeted to trade unionists and SP members and aimed at winning them over to Trotskyist views, while Shachtman and Burnham handled the bulk of the faction's activities in New York.

Norman Thomas attracted nearly 188,000 votes in his 1936 Socialist Party run for President but performed poorly in historic strongholds of the party. Moreover, the party's membership had begun to decline.<sup>[12]</sup> The organization was deeply factionalized, with the Militant faction split into right ("Altmanite"), center ("Clarity") and left ("Appeal") factions, in addition to the radical pacifists around Norman Thomas. A special convention was planned for the last week of March 1937 to set the party's future policy, initially intended as an unprecedented "secret" gathering.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Split from the Socialist Party

Prior to the March convention, the Trotskyist "Socialist Appeal" faction held an organizational gathering of their own, meeting in Chicago, with 93 delegates gathering from February 20–22, 1937.<sup>[13]</sup> The meeting organized the faction on a permanent basis, electing a National Action Committee of five to "coordinate branch work" and "formulate Appeal policies."<sup>[14]</sup> Two delegates from the Clarity caucus were in attendance. James Burnham vigorously attacked the Labour and Socialist International, the international organization of left wing parties to which the Socialist Party belonged, and tension rose along these lines among the Trotskyists. United action between the Clarity and Appeal groups was not forthcoming and an emergency meeting of Vincent Dunne and Cannon was held in New York with leaders of the various factions including Thomas, Jack Altman, and Gus Tyler of Clarity. At this meeting Thomas pledged that the upcoming convention would make no effort to terminate the newspapers of the various factions.<sup>[15]</sup>

There was no action to expel the Trotskyist Appeal faction, but pressure continued to build along these lines, egged on by the CPUSA's increasingly hysterical denunciations of Trotsky and his followers as wreckers and agents of international fascism. The convention did pass a ban on future branch resolutions on controversial

matters, an effort to rein in the activities of the factions at the local level. It also did ban factional newspapers, establishing instead a national organ.

Constance Myers indicates that three factors led to the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the Socialist Party in 1937: the divergence between the official Socialists and the Trotskyist faction on the issues, the determination of Altman's wing of the Militants to oust the Trotskyists, and Trotsky's own decision to move towards a break with the party.<sup>[16]</sup> Recognizing that the Clarity faction had chosen to stand with the Altmanites and the group around Thomas, Trotsky recommended that the Appeal group focus on disagreements over Spain to provoke a split. At the same time, Thomas, freshly returned from Spain, had come to the conclusion that the Trotskyists had joined the SP not to make it stronger, but to capture the organization for their own purposes.<sup>[17]</sup>

On June 24–25, 1937, a meeting of the Appeal faction's National Action Committee voted to ratcheted up the rhetoric against American Labor Party and Republican nominee for mayor of New York Fiorello LaGuardia, a favorite son of many in Socialist ranks, and to reestablish their newspaper, *The Socialist Appeal*.<sup>[18]</sup> This was met with expulsions from the party beginning August 9 with a rump meeting of the Central Committee of Local New York, which expelled 52 New York Trotskyists by a vote of 48 to 2, with 18 abstentions, and ordering 70 more to be brought up on charges.<sup>[18]</sup> Wholesale expulsions followed, with a major section of the YPSL leaving the party with the Trotskyists.

The 1,000 or so Trotskyists who entered the SP in 1936 exited in the summer of 1937 with their ranks swelled by another 1,000.<sup>[19]</sup> On December 31, 1937, representatives of this faction gathered in Chicago to establish a new political organization — the Socialist Workers Party.

## Formation of the SWP

The October 2, 1937, issue of the *Socialist Appeal* included a convention call from the so-called "Left Wing" to "All Locals and Branches of the Socialist Party," accusing the NEC of the party of having "betrayed the principles of socialism" by withdrawing the party's candidate for Mayor of New York in favor of LaGuardia and for having ordered "the bureaucratic expulsion of all the revolutionary members of the party who oppose and obstruct this sell-out policy."<sup>[20]</sup> A convention was called by four Socialist Party State Committees, the NEC of the YPSL, and the organized Left Wing organizations of Chicago and New York, slated to be held in Chicago over Thanksgiving weekend, November 25–28, 1937. This meeting was quickly postponed until December 31, however, "in order to provide adequate time for discussion by the membership" of important questions.<sup>[21]</sup>

In December 1937 an agenda was published by the Convention Organizing Committee, naming Cannon as the primary reporter on the Trade Union question, Shachtman on the Russian Resolution, Goldman on the Spanish Resolution, Canadian Maurice Spector on the International Resolution, Burnham on the Declaration of Principles of the new organization, and Abern on Party Organization and Constitution.<sup>[22]</sup> The gathering was to conclude with the election of a new National Committee.

On the appointed day, December 31, 1937, over 100 regular and fraternal delegates gathered in Chicago, where they were greeted by a speech of welcome delivered by Chicago leader Albert Goldman, a labor attorney. As editor of the Trotskyist movement's ongoing theoretical magazine, *The New International*, Max Shachtman delivered the first official report to the gathering, dealing with the political situation in the United States. Shachtman boldly declared that

"It is entirely inconceivable that American imperialism can succeed in resisting the inexorable tendencies that are pulling it into the vortex of the coming world war.

"If the working class is unable to prevent the outbreak of war, and the United States enters directly into it, our party stands pledged to the traditional position of revolutionary Marxism.

"It will utilize the crisis of capitalist rule engendered by the war to prosecute the class struggle with the utmost intransigence, to strengthen the independent labor and revolutionary movements, and to bring the war to a close by the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of proletarian rule in the form of the workers state."<sup>[23]</sup>

The convention devoted a full day to discussion of the problems of the labor movement and the role of the new organization in the unions, with "National Secretary of the Convention Arrangements Committee" Jim Cannon delivering the primary report. While criticizing the "reactionary role which the AF of L leadership has played," Cannon declared that "our party...takes a clear-cut position in favor of the earliest and completest possible unification of the AF of L and the CIO, and also the hitherto unaffiliated Railroad Brotherhoods."<sup>[24]</sup>

## The 1940 split

The 1940 split in the SWP followed an internal factional debate over the party's internal government, the class nature of the Russian state, and Marxist philosophy, among other questions. The SWP was to experience many other factional conflicts and splits in its history, but this was the largest, and it foreshadowed many features of those to come.

The majority faction, led by Cannon, supported Trotsky's position that the USSR remained a "workers' state" and should be supported in any war with capitalist states, despite their opposition to the government headed by Joseph Stalin. The minority faction, led by Shachtman, held that the USSR should not be supported in its war with Finland. One of its leaders, James Burnham held, in addition, that the USSR had degenerated so far that it deserved no defense whatsoever. Like this debate, most later factional disputes within the SWP also centered on different attitudes towards revolutions in other countries.

The opposition faction alleged that Cannon's leadership of the SWP was "bureaucratic conservative" and demanded the right to its own publications to express its views outside the party. The majority faction said this was contrary to Lenin's concept of democratic centralism, and that disagreements and the SWP should be debated only internally. Similar disagreements over the SWP's internal government have surfaced in most later faction fights, with most later opposition factions raising similar demands and accusations. Despite this, most of these later factions claimed political descent from Cannon and the SWP majority, not from earlier opposition factions and splinter parties.

The minority faction led by Shachtman eventually split away almost 40% (<http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://www.geocities.com/mnsocialist/novack-swp-history.html&date=2009-10-26+20:32:24>) of the party's membership as well as its youth organization, the Young People's Socialist League, forming the Workers Party.

## The World War II years

A number of members were imprisoned under the Smith Act of 1941, including J. P. Cannon (see Smith Act Trials). Those imprisoned included the main national leaders of the SWP and those members most prominent in the Midwest Teamsters.

The party put into practice the so-called Proletarian Military Policy of opposing the war politically while attempting to transform what they saw as an imperialist war into a civil war. The party lost a number of its members while sailing in the extremely perilous convoys to Murmansk. Problems caused as a result of the

imprisonment of experienced leaders and the enlistment in the armed forces of many others meant that during the war years the editorship of *The Militant* passed through a number of hands.

The SWP was active in supporting those labor strikes that occurred despite the wartime "no-strike pledge", and in supporting protests against racist discrimination during the war, such as A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement. The U.S. Postal Service refused to mail some issues of *The Militant* and threatened to cancel its third-class mailing permit, citing objections to its articles opposing racist discrimination.

## Postwar years

After the war the SWP and the Fourth International both expected that there would be a wave of revolutionary struggles such as accompanied the end of the previous war. Indeed, revolutions did occur in Yugoslavia, Albania, Korea, and China, to name only those that resulted in the overthrow of capitalism, but contrary to Trotskyist expectations they were headed by Moscow-oriented "Stalinist" parties.

In the United States, the largest strike wave in U.S. history - involving over five million workers - occurred with the end of the war and the wartime pledge made by many union leaders not to strike for the duration. (This did not mean there were not many strikes during wartime - there were many wildcat strikes during this period, as well as strikes officially called by the United Mine Workers of America. There were also protests by GIs demanding rapid demobilization after the end of the war, sometimes called the going-home movement). SWP participation in this upsurge led to a brief period of rapid growth for the SWP immediately after the war.

The end of the war also saw the reorganization of the Fourth International, in which process the SWP played a major role. As part of this process, moves were made to heal the breach with Max Shachtman's supporters in the Workers Party (WP) and for the two groups to fuse. This eventually came to nothing. But some members of the SWP around Felix Morrow and Albert Goldman grew dissatisfied with what they saw as the SWP's ultra-leftist attitude towards revolutionary policies. Eventually they left the SWP in a state of demoralization and some joined the WP.

Meanwhile a faction within the WP called the Johnson-Forest Tendency, named for CLR James (known as Johnson) and Raya Dunayevskaya (Forest), were impatient with the WP's caution and considered that the situation could rapidly become pre-revolutionary. This led them to decamp from the WP and rejoin the SWP in 1947. This tendency had moved further away from the "orthodox Trotskyism" of the SWP, which made for an uncomfortable presence. For example, they continued to hold the position that the USSR was a "state capitalist" society. By 1951, their presence in the SWP was ever more anomalous and most left to form the Correspondence Publishing Committee. Dunayevskaya and her supporters eventually formed the News and Letters Committees in 1955 after splitting with CLR James, who was deported from the USA to Britain from where he continued to advise the Correspondence Publishing Committee, which split again in 1962, with those loyal to CLR James taking the name Facing Reality.

## The Cold War period

The brief postwar wave of labor unrest gave way to the conservatism of the 1950s, the housebreaking of previously radical labor unions, and McCarthyism. The growing civil rights movement, which continued uninterrupted out of WWII, could not fully offset these trends, and the SWP experienced a period of decline and isolation.

The party also had a number of splits over these years. One such split saw the departure of the faction of Bert Cochran and Clarke, who formed the American Socialist Union, which lasted until 1959. That 1953 opposition supported some of the positions of Michel Pablo, the Secretary of the Fourth International, although Pablo

disagreed with their wish to dissolve the Fourth International.

The next, smaller split was that of Sam Marcy's Global Class War faction, which called within the SWP for support of Henry Wallace's Progressive Party Presidential run in 1948 and regarded Mao Zedong as a revolutionary leader. This faction ended up leaving the SWP in 1958 after supporting the suppression of the Hungarian Rising of 1956, a position contrary to that held by the SWP and other Trotskyist tendencies. It went on to form the Workers World Party.

Meanwhile throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s the remaining membership of the SWP clung to its firmly held beliefs and grew older. Consequently the party membership shrank over these years from a post war high in 1948 until the tide began to turn in the early 1960s. The 1959 Revolution in Cuba however signaled a change in political direction for the SWP as it embarked on pro-Castro "solidarity work" through the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The result was a small accretion of youth to the party's ranks and in the same period long time SWP leader Murry Weiss won another group of youth from the Shachtmanites as they joined the Socialist Party of America. Many of the new recruits, however, were drawn from the student movement, unlike those who had led the party since the 1930s, and as a result the internal culture of the party began to change.

## 1960s

Despite such growing signs of an end to the isolation the group endured during the McCarthyite period, it experienced a new split in the early 1960s. A factional situation developed in the SWP that saw a number of small oppositional groups develop. One of the key issues was the Cuban Revolution and the SWP's response to it. Cannon and other SWP leaders such as Joseph Hansen saw Cuba as qualitatively different from the "Stalinist" states of Eastern Europe. Their analysis brought them closer to the International Secretariat of the Fourth International from which the SWP had split in 1953. The SWP successfully negotiated a reunification of the ISFI and the International Committee of the Fourth International leading to the creation in 1963 of the reunified Fourth International. Two sections of the ICFI, including Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League rejected the merger and turned against the SWP leadership, working with opponents within the party.

The most important faction opposing the SWP leadership's new line was the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) led by James Robertson and Tim Wohlforth that rejected the SWP's "capitulation" to Pabloism and opposed joining the USFI. They were critical of the Castro government, arguing that Cuba remained a "deformed workers state". However, a split developed within this faction between groups headed by the two men. Nonetheless both the RT and the Reorganized Minority Tendency split to form the Spartacist (see Spartacist League), and the American Committee for the Fourth International, respectively with the latter becoming aligned with Healy's SLL.

In the aftermath the Seattle branch also left to found the Freedom Socialist Party, after protesting the alleged suppression of internal democracy, as did Murray and Myra Tanner Weiss.

The SWP supported both the civil rights movement and the Black nationalist movement which grew during the 1960s. It particularly praised the militancy of Black nationalist leader Malcolm X, who in turn spoke at the SWP's public forums and gave an interview to Young Socialist magazine. After his assassination, the SWP had limited success in forming alliances with his followers and other Black nationalists. However, these movements were part of the radicalization of these years aiding the SWP's growth.

Like all left wing groups, the SWP grew during the 1960s and experienced a particularly brisk growth in the first years of the 1970s. Much of this was due to its involvement in many of the campaigns and demonstrations against the war in Vietnam. The SWP advocated that the antiwar movement should call for the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. troops, and should primarily focus on organizing large, legal demonstrations for this demand. It was recognized by friend and foe alike as a major factor influencing the direction of the antiwar movement along these lines. One of the leaders of the anti-war movement at this time, along with Dave Dellinger

and many others was Fred Halstead, a World War II veteran and former leader of the garment workers union in New York City. Halstead was the 1968 Presidential candidate of the SWP who visited Vietnam in that capacity.

The SWP was also increasingly outspoken in its defense of the Cuban government of Fidel Castro and its identification with that government. A new leadership led by Jack Barnes (who became national secretary in 1972) made identification with Cuba an ever greater part of the politics of the SWP throughout the 1970s.

The party also published many of Leon Trotsky's works in these years through their publishing house, Pathfinder Press. Not only were the better-known writings reprinted, many for the first time since the 1930s, but other more obscure articles and letters were collected and printed for a wider audience than they had when first distributed. The expansion of the press also allowed the SWP to host *Intercontinental Press*, the FI magazine which moved from Paris to New York in 1969, which later merged with *Inprecor*.

## 1970s and new leadership

The growth of labor militancy in the early 1970s had an impact on the SWP and currents developed within it urging a reorientation of the party towards this militancy. One such current was the Proletarian Orientation Tendency, which included Larry Trainor, which eventually dissolved itself.

Another tendency developed called the Internationalist Tendency (IT). The IT posed a greater challenge for the group's leadership, as the tendency agreed with the Fourth International's advocacy of guerrilla warfare as a "tactic on a continental scale" in Latin America. However, despite tensions between the SWP and the rest of the international, when the former expelled the IT the International refused to side with the tendency. The IT would disintegrate over the next few months, some of its supporters finding their way back into the SWP.

The international tensions developed further when the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency was established in 1973 by the SWP and its co-thinkers in order to contribute to the debate for the Tenth World Congress. It argued for a reversal of the Latin American guerrilla war orientation adopted at the Ninth World Congress.

This period was the peak of the SWP's growth and influence. The party continued its involvement in the movement against the war in Vietnam, which peaked in 1970-71. The SWP also supported Chicano nationalism, including the Raza Unida Party. It helped organize protests demanding legal abortion through the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition. With the mid-to-late 1970s decline of these movements and the end of the 1960s-1970s youth radicalization, SWP membership and influence went into decline.

In 1978, the SWP leadership decided that the key task was for party members to make a turn to industry. This turn entailed party members getting jobs in blue collar industries in preparation for, the SWP leadership projected, increasing mass struggles. The 1977-78 coal miners' strike and developments like Steelworkers Fight Back were among the events pointed to in arguing for this change in policy. Party members sought to get jobs in the same workplaces in order to work as organized "fractions", doing "communist political work" as well as union activity.

As a result, many members were asked to move and change jobs, often out of established careers and into low-paying jobs in small towns. Many of the older members with experience in trade unions resisted this 'colonization program', which upset their established routine in the unions, as did some of the younger members.

## 1980s and after

### Internal affairs

Opposition to the "turn to industry" developed within the SWP. This opposition was not homogeneous and was



itself beset by differences between different factions.

A further factor in the growing divisions within the SWP was the move by Jack Barnes, Mary-Alice Waters and others in the leadership away from the Trotskyist label. In 1982, Barnes gave a speech which was later published as *Their Trotsky and Ours: Communist continuity today* in which Barnes rejected Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution arguing that it failed to sufficiently distinguish between the democratic and socialist tasks of a workers' revolution. Barnes argued that anticapitalist revolutions typically began with a "workers' and farmers' government" which initially concentrated on bourgeois-democratic measures, and only later moved on to the abolition of capitalism.

Barnes also argued that the "Trotskyist" label unnecessarily distinguished leftists in that tradition from leftists of other origins, such as the Cuban Communist Party, or the Sandinista National Liberation Front. He argued that the SWP had more in common with these organizations than with many groups calling themselves Trotskyist. The SWP has continued to publish numerous books by Trotsky and advocate a number of ideas commonly associated with Trotskyism, including Trotsky's analysis of "Stalinism".

The opposition factions continued to support the theory of permanent revolution, and the Trotskyist label: they anticipated that the SWP leadership was reassessing its place in the Fourth International. While declaring their support to the Cuban and the leftist Nicaraguan governments, they were more critical of the Castroist and Sandinista leadership. Additionally, they continued to oppose the "turn to industry".

One opposition group gathered around the Weinsteins on the West Coast, (with supporters elsewhere too), while a second group gathered around George Breitman and Frank Lovell. Together they formed an opposition bloc on the SWP's National Committee but in 1983 both groups were expelled. The opposition factions, having split from the SWP, formed new organizations. The grouping around the Weinsteins forming the San Francisco-based Socialist Action. The Breitman-Lovell group, after a time, formed the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. Both groups described themselves as "public factions" of the SWP and set the task of recapturing the SWP to their understanding of Trotskyism. Another group, mainly in Los Angeles, had been close to Breitman but did not agree to orient toward the SWP belonged briefly to Socialist Action but left to join the "regroupment" organization Solidarity.

This was the most recent split or major faction fight in the SWP; the organization has experienced an unusually long period of internal peace since, although it has declined steadily in both its membership numbers and its political influence within the U.S. left. Numerous recent expulsions—sometimes of long-standing SWP veterans—have contributed to the membership decline. In 2003, the party sold its major headquarters building in New York City for \$20 million and moved to another location in Manhattan. Party leaders Jack Barnes and Mary-Alice Waters subsequently sold their West Village condominium for \$1.87 million.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Party activities

The SWP's most high profile and controversial campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s was its Mark Curtis Defense Committee, established after Curtis, an SWP activist and trade union organizer, was charged and convicted on burglary and rape charges in 1988. The party claimed that Curtis had been framed by police for his role in defending immigrant workers. Curtis was eventually paroled.

The SWP now focuses most of its energy on internal activities, such as fund-raising, the weekly Militant Labor Forum, and the distribution of Pathfinder books and *The Militant*. Its members are present in a handful of trade unions and it focuses most of its political energy towards defending immigrant rights and promoting Cuban solidarity.

## The question of International affiliation

Due to legal constraints, the SWP ended its formal affiliation with the Fourth International in the 1940s. It remained in close political solidarity with the Fourth International, however. The Socialist Workers Party broke formally with the Fourth International in 1990 though it had been increasingly inactive in the Trotskyist movement since National Secretary Jack Barnes' 1982 speech, "Their Trotsky and Ours", which some view as signaling a break with Trotskyism. The SWP action followed the 1985 World Congress, and the SWP closed Intercontinental Press in 1986. The SWP's international formation is sometimes referred to as the *Pathfinder tendency* because they each operate a Pathfinder Bookstore which sells the publications of the SWP's publishing arm, *Pathfinder Press*. In 1986, the party won a lawsuit against the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a result of years of spying and disruption.<sup>[26]</sup>

## The party and presidential politics

The Socialist Workers Party has run candidates for President since 1948; it received its greatest number of votes in 1976, when its candidate, Peter Camejo, received 90,310 votes.

In the U.S. presidential election of 2004 the Socialist Workers Party ran Róger Calero for President and Arrin Hawkins for Vice-President. It should be noted that both candidates were constitutionally unqualified for the positions (under Article II, section 1) because Calero is not an American citizen and Hawkins was 29 years old, with the minimum age being 35. James Harris and Margaret Trowe, the SWP's ticket from 2000, stood in on the ballot in some states where Calero and Hawkins could not be listed. The two tickets combined received over 10,000 votes. They were on the ballot in 11 states and the District of Columbia, more than any other socialist candidates. The vote total does not reflect the actual vote because of the unqualified status of the candidates. County clerks (in some states) and statewide Secretaries of State have discretion in reporting votes for ineligible candidates. The same situation obtained in 2008.

- 1948—Farrell Dobbs / Grace Carlson: received 13,614 votes.
- 1952—Farrell Dobbs / Myra Tanner Weiss: received 10,312 votes.
- 1956—Farrell Dobbs / Myra Tanner Weiss: received 7,797 votes.
- 1960—Farrell Dobbs / Myra Tanner Weiss: received 60,166 votes.
- 1964—Clifton DeBerry / Edward Shaw: received 32,327 votes.
- 1968—Fred Halstead / Paul Boutelle: received 41,390 votes.
- 1972
  - Linda Jenness / Andrew Pulley: received 83,380 votes. In 1972 in Arizona, Pima and Yavapai counties had a ballot malfunction that counted many votes for both a major party candidate and Linda Jenness. A court ordered that the ballots be counted for both. As a consequence, Jenness received 16% and 8% of the vote in Pima and Yavapai, respectively. 30,579 of her 30,945 Arizona votes are from those two counties. Some sources don't count these votes for Jenness.
  - Evelyn Reed / Clifton DeBerry: received 13,878 votes. Ballot access: Indiana, New York, and Wisconsin
- 1976—Peter Camejo / Willie Mae Reid: received 90,986 votes.<sup>[27]</sup>
- 1980
  - Clifton DeBerry / Matilde Zimmermann: received 38,738 votes.

- Andrew Pulley / Matilde Zimmermann: received 6,264 votes.
- Richard Congress / Matilde Zimmermann : received 4,029 votes<sup>[28]</sup> Ballot access in Ohio.
- 1984—Melvin T. Mason / Matilde Zimmermann: received 24,672 votes.
- 1988—James "Mac" Warren / Kathleen Mickells: received 15,604 votes.
- 1992—James "Mac" Warren / Willie Mae Reid: received 23,096 votes.
- 1996—James Harris / Laura Garza: received 8,463 votes.
- 2000—James Harris / Margaret Trowe: received 7,378 votes.
- 2004<sup>[29]</sup>
  - Róger Calero / Arrin Hawkins: received 3,677 votes
  - James Harris / Margaret Trowe: received 7,411 votes
- 2008<sup>[30][31]</sup>
  - Róger Calero / Alyson Kennedy: received 5,151 votes
  - James Harris / Alyson Kennedy: received 2,424 votes
- 2012<sup>[32]</sup>
  - James Harris / Maura DeLuca received 4,115 votes

## Personnel

### SWP National Secretaries

- James P. Cannon (1938–1953)
- Farrell Dobbs (1953–1972)
- Jack Barnes (since 1972)

### Prominent current and former members

- |                    |                   |                   |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| ▪ Martin Abern     | ▪ Fred Feldman    | ▪ Evelyn Reed     |
| ▪ Harry Braverman  | ▪ Eric Flint      | ▪ Harry Ring      |
| ▪ George Breitman  | ▪ Clara Fraser    | ▪ James Robertson |
| ▪ Joel Britton     | ▪ Richard Fraser  | ▪ Olga Rodriguez  |
| ▪ James Burnham    | ▪ Albert Goldman  | ▪ Norton Sandler  |
| ▪ Peter Camejo     | ▪ Joseph Hansen   | ▪ Ted Selander    |
| ▪ Joseph Carter    | ▪ Asher Harer     | ▪ Max Shachtman   |
| ▪ Steve Clarke     | ▪ Sidney Hook     | ▪ Ed Shaw         |
| ▪ Bert Cochran     | ▪ C. L. R. James  | ▪ Barry Sheppard  |
| ▪ Jake Cooper      | ▪ Martin Koppel   | ▪ Carl Skoglund   |
| ▪ Stephanie Coontz | ▪ Lyndon LaRouche | ▪ Morris Starsky  |
| ▪ Clifton DeBerry  | ▪ Frank Lovell    | ▪ Arne Swabeck    |

- Seth Dellinger
- Farrell Dobbs
- Hal Draper
- Raya Dunayevskaya
- James T. Farrell
- Sarah Lovell
- Sam Marcy
- Kathleen Mickells
- Paul Montauk
- Felix Morrow
- George Novack
- Larry Trainor
- Mary-Alice Waters
- Myra Tanner Weiss
- Murry Weiss
- David Loeb Weiss
- Rebecca Leigh Williamson

## Footnotes

1. ^ George Breitman, "Answers to Questions," in *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions, 1938-39*. New York: Monad Press, 1982; pg. 19.
2. ^ George Breitman, "Answers to Questions," pg. 21.
3. ^ Constance Ashton Myers, *The Prophet's Army: Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977; pg. 112.
4. ^ <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 112.
5. ^ Constance Myers attributes this idea to Militant leader Paul Porter and dates it to 1934.
6. ^ <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 113.
7. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pp. 113-114.
8. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 115.
9. ^ "If we had stood aside, the Stalinists would have gobbled up the Socialist Left Wing and it would have been used as another club against us, as in Spain," he later recalled. James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism*. New York: Pioneer Press, 1944; pp. 195-196.
10. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 123.
11. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 124.
12. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pp. 126-127.
13. ^ <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 127.
14. ^ The committee included Vincent Dunne, Albert Goldman, Max Shachtman, and Richard Babb Whitten. Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pp. 128-129.
15. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 131.
16. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 133.
17. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 138.
18. ^ <sup>a</sup> <sup>b</sup> Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 139.
19. ^ Myers, *The Prophet's Army*, pg. 140.
20. ^ "Left Wing Issues Convention Call: NY and Chicago Join Four State Committees in National Appeal, *Socialist Appeal*, v. 1, no. 8 (Oct. 2, 1937), pg. 1.
21. ^ "Convention Postponed for Wider Discussions," *Socialist Appeal*, v. 1, no. 12 (Oct. 30, 1937), pg. 1.
22. ^ "Convention Date Near, Locals Elect Delegates," *Socialist Appeal*, v. 1, no. 19 (Dec. 18, 1937), pg. 3.
23. ^ "Left Wing Delegates Found Socialist Workers Party at Convention in Chicago," *Socialist Appeal*, v. II, no. 2 (Jan. 8, 1938), pg. 1.
24. ^ "Left Wing Delegates Found Socialist Workers Party at Convention in Chicago," pg. 2.

25. ^ Abelson, Max (2007-07-10). "Communists Capitalize on Village Sale—Get \$1.87 M. for Loft" (<http://www.observer.com/2007/communists-capitalize-village-sale-get-1-87-m-loft>). *New York Observer*.
26. ^ Dan Jakopovich, *The FBI Against the US SWP* (<http://www.isg-fi.org.uk/spip.php?article626>), Socialist Outlook, Spring 2008
27. ^ <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1976&minper=0&f=1&off=0&elect=0>
28. ^ <http://serform2.sos.state.oh.us/sos//results/80/1980/gen.htm>
29. ^ *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2006 (New York, 2005: ISBN 0-88687-964-7), page 607, citing the Federal Election Commission and The Associated Press
30. ^ *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2010 (New York, 2009: ISBN 978-1-60057-123-7), page 535, citing the Federal Election Commission
31. ^ "2008 OFFICIAL PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS" (<http://www.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2008/2008presgeresults.pdf>). FEC. 2008-11-04. Retrieved 2009-02-03.
32. ^ <http://www.ballot-access.org/2012/07/08/socialist-workers-party-regains-qualified-status-in-florida-announces-presidential-ticket/>

## See also

- Pathfinder Mural
- COINTELPRO
- Other parties called the Socialist Workers Party
- List of political parties in the United States
- List of Communist parties

## Further reading

### Books

- Breitman, George (ed.) *Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions, 1938-39*. New York: Monad Press, 1982.
- Cannon, James P., *The History of American Trotskyism: Report of a Participant*. New York: Pioneer Press, 1944.
- Fields, A. Belden, *Trotskyism and Maoism: Theory and Practice in France and the United States*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1988. ISBN 0-936756-29-2
- Halstead, Fred, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War*. New York: Monad Press, 1978.
- Jayko, Margaret (ed.), *FBI on Trial: The Victory in the Socialist Workers Party Suit Against Government Spying*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1988.
- McDonald, Larry, *Trotskyism and Terror: The Strategy of Revolution*. Washington, D.C.: ACU Education and Research Institute, 1977.
- Myers, Constance Ashton, *The Prophet's Army: Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941*. Westport, CT:

Greenwood Press, 1977.

- Sheppard, Barry, *The Party: The Socialist Workers Party, 1960-1988. A Political Memoir. Volume 1: The Sixties*. Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books, 2005.
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- Wohlforth, Tim, *The Prophet's Children: Travels on the American Left*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Press, 1994.

## Archival material

- George Breitman Papers. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives at New York University, New York. Finding Aid. (<http://dlib.nyu.edu:8083/tamwagead/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=breitman.xml&style=saxon01t2002.xsl>)
- James P. Cannon Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison. —Also available on microfilm.
- Frank Lovell Papers. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University. Finding Aid. (<http://dlib.nyu.edu:8083/tamwagead/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=lovell.xml&style=saxon01t2002.xsl>)
- Max Shachtman Papers. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University. Finding Aid. (<http://dlib.nyu.edu:8083/tamwagead/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=shachtman.xml&style=saxon01t2002.xsl>)
- David Loeb Weiss Papers. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University.
- Myra Tanner Weiss Papers. Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University.
- Socialist Workers Party records 1928-1990. Hoover Institution for War and Peace, Stanford, California. Finding aid (<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf1k40019v/>)
- Melba Windoffer Papers. Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington. Finding Aid. (<http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findaids/view?docId=WindofferMelba1798.xml>)
- George E. Rennar Papers. Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington. Finding Aid. ([http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findaids/view?docId=RennarGeorge0636\\_1656.xml](http://digital.lib.washington.edu/findaids/view?docId=RennarGeorge0636_1656.xml))

## External links

- The Militant homepage. (<http://www.themilitant.com>) SWP official organ.
- Pathfinder Press homepage. (<http://www.pathfinderpress.com>) SWP publishing house.
- James P. Cannon Internet Archive (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/index.htm>), Marxists Internet Archive.
- "SWP\_USA" Yahoo! Group ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/swp\\_usa/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/swp_usa/)) — An unofficial discussion board independent of any organization.

- University of Washington Libraries Digital Collections - Vietnam War Era Ephemera  
(<http://content.lib.washington.edu/protestsweb/index.html>) —Includes ephemera produced by the SWP.

Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Socialist\_Workers\_Party\_(United\_States)&oldid=620201145"

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| 1938 establishments in the United States | Communist parties in the United States

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