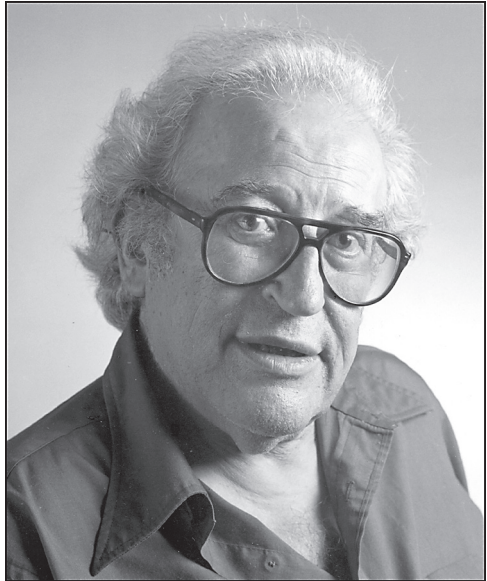


Introduction



Anne Scarsion

Murry Weiss 1915-1981

The articles in this collection, originally published between 1978-1982, were written by a towering figure in the U.S. socialist movement and represent a thrilling contribution to the Trotskyist understanding of the “Woman Question.” In them, Marxist scholar and leader Murry Weiss urges the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USec), the coordinating body of world Trotskyism, to recognize and participate in the feminist upsurge that was revitalizing the radical milieu in the U.S. and Europe. Linked with this, Weiss calls on the International to take a stand against the sexism, international betrayals, and anti-revolutionary orientation of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party (SWP). He describes as “Stalinophobia” the SWP’s blindness to positive political changes occurring in the ranks of European Communist parties. In the final essay, “Permanent Revolution and Women’s Emancipation,” Weiss expands the body of Trotskyist theory with a breakthrough analytical and historical assessment of the vanguard leadership of working women.

The United Secretariat did not heed the warnings raised by Weiss and his comrades in the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) and the regroupment effort known as Committee for a Revolutionary Socialist Party (CRSP). The USec banned women’s caucuses in 1979 and maintained a gentlemen’s agreement with the SWP whereby

the SWP didn't stop paying dues or pull out (yet) and the International didn't challenge it for abandoning political fundamentals such as the theory of Permanent Revolution, the bedrock of Trotskyism.

The SWP had been in a downward political spiral for decades. As early as 1966, a number of leading members deemed the SWP to be beyond repair, and founded the Freedom Socialist Party. The SWP's lack of internal democracy prevented the correction of problems such as its uncritical support of the separatist Nation of Islam, orientation toward the labor aristocracy, unprincipled pursuit of popularity in the anti-Vietnam War movement, and dismissive attitude toward feminism. By 1984, the SWP and international parties that supported it had explicitly rejected Trotskyism and opted for a more comfortable position on the coattails of the Cuban Communist Party, which was no longer advocating revolution in Latin America. The United Secretariat of the Fourth International never confronted the SWP or came to terms with the reasons for its political collapse.

From the late 1970s on, the FSP knocked repeatedly on the doors of the Fourth International in hopes of joining it and winning it back to a revolutionary course. But the party was met with a cold shoulder. The USec showed a marked lack of interest in an orthodox Trotskyist party led by women, lesbians and gays, and people of color.

It was not until 2003, when the 15th World Congress convened, that the FSP was finally allowed to send an observer to a USec gathering. FSP International Secretary Guerry Hoddersen attended the sessions in Belgium and met an impressive array of radicals from many countries. By this time, however, she said, "The USec majority had abandoned the idea of being a democratic-centralist organization and was instead on a track of becoming a multi-tendency International composed not only of parties that

support a Trotskyist program, but of radicals from a hodge-podge of traditions including everything from Maoism to state capitalism."

The USec Fourth International still serves as a left network. But an international coordinating body of revolutionaries is urgently required to face down global imperialism and rampaging U.S. militarism. For this task, the principles of Trotskyism—internationalism, Permanent Revolution, workers' democracy, united fronts against reaction, the vanguard party, and *the emancipation of women*—are as vitally needed as ever before.