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**From Munis to Meese:
Left Communism or State
Department Surrealism?**

1994

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A Sleepwalker's Guide To San Francisco

In 1983 I became involved in sustained political activity outside of conventional leftism. I was a member of an anarchist group, "Workers Emancipation," which was nominally focused on the class struggle and published a magazine called *Ideas and Action*.

Tom Wetzel was the proprietor of the magazine. Of the oscillating membership of 5–15 people in the group, Wetzel had the most coherent idea of what he wanted and where our efforts should go; he became the group's *de facto* leader and his vision or lack thereof defined our efforts. We went to peace marches and demonstrations against US intervention in Central America, functioning as an orderly, cooperative tail to the rest of the left. Our group had no theory. We haggled endlessly over a nebulously worded statement of principles. The statement denounced the evils of capitalism while leaving capitalism itself undefined.

Ideas and Action was filled with fraternal debates with Trotskyists and social democrats. Turgid articles on the crisis of the economy aped left-Trotskyists in their superficial analysis of capitalism. *Ideas and Action* also reprinted statements from anarcho-nationalists in Eastern Europe and expressions of solidarity with libertarian workers' organizations in Latin America. Suspiciously short on analysis, these distant exotic libertarians compensated by chanting hymns to the glory of self-management, democracy, unionism and federalism. This mantra was sufficient to justify our reproducing their manifestos.

The long-term goal of the tendency around *Ideas and Action* was to gain the North American franchise of the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers Association, the international federation of moribund syndicalist union bureaucracies. Wetzel had some allies in West Virginia and in New York City, one of whom was a low level trade union functionary in District 65 of the United Auto Workers Union. This was extolled among the anarcho-syndicalists as being of great relevance to their future role in the American workers movement.

We had the same quarrels found in any other leftist political scene, only our disagreements were processed through a miasma of anarchist jargon. In rebellion against his brother, a Reagan administration appointee, Wetzel was fond of brandishing his working class origins to back up his fundamentally leftist politics. In his more visionary moments, Wetzel's concerns for the social content of a post-revolutionary society focused on how the ideal mass democratic workers' organizations would be able to salvage the market economy, and how post-revolutionary syndicalism would impose labor discipline on the marginal sections of the working class. Toward the end of the life of "Workers Emancipation" an enormous amount of time was taken up with debating the "historically progressive" role of pornography consumption among sexually frustrated anarcho-syndicalists.

Going through the mail our group received from other leftist groups, I came across what at first appeared to be the publication of a rarified and baroque Trotskyist sect, the International Communist Current. I was impressed by an article in their magazine *Internationalism* titled, "A Closer Look at Some Leftist Lies — Cuba Is a Capitalist Hell." This article was a detailed attack on the exploitation and repression of the Cuban working class by Cuban Stalinism and the colonization of social life by the party-state. The ICC even denounced the repression of Cuban anarchists by Castro. Other articles attacked social democrats, Stalinists, Trotskyists and Maoists, not because they weren't nice guys, weren't libertarian enough or were untrustworthy members of the common family of the left, as Wetzel and his crowd did, but as counter-revolutionary and objectively capitalist political forces. The ICC regarded unions as agencies of capitalist discipline against the working class.

The ICC's emphasis on autonomous working class struggles to the exclusion of middle class protest politics and the vehemence of their attacks on the left and Third World nationalists impressed me, as did their denunciation of the capitalist nature of all the so-called Socialist countries. They partially critiqued Leninism. Most importantly, unlike leftists and anarchists, the ICC defined the goal of a social revolution as being neither the nationalization of the economy by a state led by their organization nor workers' self-management. They advocated the abolition of wage labor, money, commodity production and national borders by the international power of workers' councils.

The ICC weren't icepickheads after all. They traced their sources of theoretical inspiration to obscure Marxist revolutionaries I was just beginning to find out about; the Italian, Dutch and German left communists of the 1920s and 30s. The ICC was a semi-Leninist and partyist version of the revolutionary Marxism I was then discovering in the Situationist International Anthology, and pamphlets from Black and Red in Detroit such as Barrot and Martin's *Eclipse and Reemergence of the Communist Movement*, *Unions Against Revolution*, and *Lip and the Self-Managed Counter-Revolution*.

Influenced by coherent revolutionary analysis of the Situationists and left communists, I came to see anarcho-syndicalism as a leftist ideology that embalmed the disastrous legacy of the CNT in the Spanish Civil War. Half a century earlier the world's greatest anarchist union movement had proven itself to be as good as any other union when it came to ending strikes, and spectacularly inadequate when it came to destroying the state. Anarcho-syndicalism had proven to be a dead end for the class struggle. I drifted away from the anarcho-syndicalists.

Looking for ICC journals, I combed the sectarian literature racks at Bound Together Books. At City Lights Bookstore in North Beach I rooted through the rags of Trots, Maoists, Sandinista groupies, peaceniks, ecology geeks, Stalinists,

Black Nationalist Stalinists, Albanian Stalinists, Moscow and Peking franchise Stalinists. I collected back issues of *Internationalism* and *International Review* like baseball cards or old Black Sabbath albums.

The ICC was still too close to Lenin for my liking. I looked for people whose political orientation was somewhere between the anarchist milieu and the ICC. The late 1970s had seen the rise and fall of a number of groups in the United States with authentic communist perspectives distinct from and hostile to the left and unionism. By fall of 1983 the only publication in the United States or Canada close to a left communist perspective outside of the ICC was a bulletin called *The Alarm*. *The Alarm* was produced in San Francisco by the Fomento Obrero Revolucionario Organizing Committee in the United States (FOCUS).

Further investigation showed that Fomento Obrero Revolucionario (FOR) was a left communist tendency whose politics were similar to the ICC. The FOR was active mainly in France and Spain. The FOR had been founded in the late 1950s by people who had broken with the Trotskyist movement over the class nature of the Russian state. Some of the members of the FOR had been involved with the Bolshevik-Leninist Group, the small Trotskyist group that had been on the same side as the more numerous radical anarchist workers in the uprising in Barcelona in May of 1937. Founding members of both the ICC and the FOR had been internationalists during World War II; unlike leftists and many anarchists, they had denounced the USSR, the various resistance movements, and the democratic imperialist powers as enemies in the class war of the poor against capital.

The FOR in Europe and FOCUS/*The Alarm* in San Francisco were for working class self-activity outside of and against unions and leftist parties. They unconditionally opposed nationalism in all forms, including national liberation struggles. Like the ICC, the FOR defined the USSR, China, Cuba, and other so-called socialist countries as state capitalist societies. The FOR were enemies of the state in its dictatorial and democratic manifestations.

The people in FOCUS/*The Alarm* had experienced a falling out with the FOR several years previous but still published their bulletin under the same name as the bulletin of the European group. They still described themselves as the organizing committee of the FOR in the United States.

The Alarm was an ironic title for this publication, the epitome of petty sectarianism. *The Alarm* hurled furious denunciations at other obscure ultra-left groups. The prose huffed and puffed with ridiculous phrases like “traitorous misleaders” and “neo-filibusterist.” Early issues paid fawning homage to Trotsky and Lenin, blaming the “betrayal” of the Russian Revolution on Stalin alone. Later issues dismissed the Russian Revolution as having been of no significance and nothing more than a bourgeois coup d’etat.

One issue of *The Alarm* consisted of a long poem “Dedicated To the Martyrs of Bolshevik Fascism.” The poem included a lengthy catalogue of prominent victims, among them the party leaders Kamenev and Bukharin. To describe architects of Bolshevik state capitalism as victims of Bolshevism and mourn their passing was the same as describing the brownshirts as “victims of Hitlerism”; technically correct, but politically delirious. In a similar vein, the laundry list of martyrs included the Red Army Marshal Tukhachevsky. A graphic dedicated to the rebels of Kronstadt was illustrated with a picture of Bolshevik troops attacking Kronstadt, under the command of, among others, Marshal Tukhachevsky.

In later issues, *The Alarm* adopted an identity with Spanish anarchism and at the same time demonstrated a fondness for Leon Trotsky, oblivious to the implicit contradictions. *The Alarm* also printed news of the autonomous workers movement in Spain, of strikes and riots outside the control of parties and unions, information about surrealism and the Spanish Civil War. Much of this was exotic and appealing to me. Its crazy-quilt quality and impassioned pleas for contact and common action with other partisans of social revolution told me that the people behind *The Alarm* were in a strange place between Trotskyism and anti-statist communism. Politically they were much worse than the ICC, but they were the only people near at hand, and I had nothing to lose by pursuing contact with them. I gave them the benefit of the doubt, assumed they were developing their ideas, and that we might be able to work together.

The next to last issue of *The Alarm*, September-October 1983, announced that they were reversing their previous opposition to unions and joining the San Francisco branch of the Industrial Workers of the World. This was expressed in an article titled “New Thesis on the Organization of Workers” signed by a Comrade Sandalio. This article was a hodgepodge of confusion comparing the contemporary IWW in the United States to the early twentieth century IWW, to the anarcho-syndicalist CNT in Spain in the 1930s and to the factory organizations of the left communists in Germany in the early 1920s. I’d been a member of the IWW for a brief period a few years earlier. The IWW was a laughable anachronism, the organizational shell of a long gone social movement, made up of people with no analysis of its past significance or the reasons for its subsequent eclipse. Whatever the IWW had been 60 years earlier had little bearing on what it was in the mid 1980s. It was like a Knights Of Columbus or Elks Lodge for non-party leftists, with as much relevance to the contemporary class struggle as an association of Civil War paraphernalia buffs. I was disappointed that the one group in the Bay Area that had politics akin to my own was evaporating just as I was becoming aware of its existence.

I wrote to *The Alarm* a number of times to see what had happened to them. In the summer of 1984, I made contact with and joined a small network in the Pacific

Northwest who had taken over the mailing list of *The Alarm* after the bulletin's original author quit the project.

That summer I also made contact with Comrade Sandalio, also known as Steve Schwartz, who had been until recently the one and only member of FOCUS/*The Alarm*. Schwartz was working as the official historian of the Sailors Union of the Pacific, AFL-CIO, in the union headquarters on Rincon Hill in San Francisco.

The SUP building was a white rectangle with absurd nautical trimmings, an example of the totalitarian architecture favored by strong states of the 1930s and 1940s. The front of the building faced a stirring view of the Bay Bridge. In the middle of the day on a weekday the front doors were locked. I had to knock. A janitor let me in. The interior of the building looked like a set for "The Lady From Shanghai" or a Humphrey Bogart movie. Aside from the janitor the building looked deserted. I found Schwartz in a tiny rabbit-warren office. He was a short, rotund man with gray and black hair. He appeared to be in his early forties. He wore granny glasses, a green commando sweater, chinos and penny loafers.

Schwartz told me he'd worked on merchant ships crossing the Pacific before containerization wiped out most of the maritime jobs in the late 1960s. In the 1970s he'd participated in anti-union workers' committees while a clerk in the Southern Pacific Railroad yards in Richmond, Calif. Schwartz described himself as an internationally recognized surrealist poet who had been involved in a number of poetic and publishing endeavors with Philip Lamantia and Franklin Rosemont's surrealist group in Chicago. In the late 1970s he'd been the band manager for The Dils, one of San Francisco's best early punk bands. He'd written the song "Class War" for The Dils and written articles in the punk scene paper *Search And Destroy* under the name Nico Ordway. Now Schwartz was employed by the Sailors Union of the Pacific to write the official union history, in time for its hundredth anniversary the following year.

Schwartz explained that he had joined the IWW because "they were people we (left communists, libertarian communists) could talk to." I questioned the value of a dialog that required him to abandon his politics and join an organization before the members of that organization would condescend to talk to him, particularly when the people in question had so little to say. Schwartz hemmed and hawed.

Schwartz repudiated the left communist critique of unionism, saying that revolutionaries hadn't come up with any alternative to unions to offer the unionized section of the working class in the day to day struggle against capital. I was mystified at his presumption that it was the immediate personal responsibility of, or that it was possible for, a few hundred revolutionaries world-wide to solve the immediate organizational problems of millions of wage workers in the absence of mass collective struggles. In response to this, Schwartz claimed he'd found

the philosopher's stone of the class struggle, and that it all hinged on the San Francisco-based Sailors Union of the Pacific.

In a series of conversations that summer, Schwartz claimed that 50 years earlier the SUP had been a labor union unlike any other labor union in the world. His history would “blow the lid” off conventional leftist histories of labor unions and class struggle in the 1920s and 1930s. According to Schwartz, when the IWW's west coast maritime unions were destroyed by police repression in the late 1920s, IWW seamen joined the SUP en masse, to the point where “two-card men” made up the majority of the union and steered it on a radical course. The SUP fought against the conservative craft unionism of the AFL and against the left wing corporatism of the CIO. The SUP fought against state intervention in strike actions. During the San Francisco General Strike, the Sailors Union of the Pacific regarded the Moscow-franchise Communist Party as being on the same side as the bosses. Schwartz dazzled me with a blizzard of data, claiming that the Sailors Union had superseded in practice the revolutionary critique of syndicalism.

I was 23 years old, a punk rocker and marginal who worked in minimum wage service sector jobs when I worked at all. At times I'd lived on the street. I lived close to the possibility of returning to camping under eucalyptus trees in the Berkeley Hills. Knowing little about the militant tendencies of the pre-World War II U.S. workers' movement, I was impressed by Schwartz's erudition and overawed that Schwartz was writing a book of historic importance. Schwartz said he'd been working independently on this history of the SUP for years. Presenting himself to the chief union bureaucrats as an apolitical labor historian and fan of trade-unionism, he'd bullshitted his way into the job at the Sailor's Union to gain access to the archives and internal documents of the union. Schwartz assured me he was fooling the old clowns who ran the union and that he was still an “ultra-left communist” and a “libertarian socialist.” He used these terms interchangeably as if they automatically meant the same thing.

The Alarm had been sacrificed so he could get a union job. He couldn't work as the official historian of a union and allow it to be known that he was the author of a publication that in its first issue had described assassinations of union bureaucrats in Italy by urban guerrillas as “viscerally pleasing.” He argued that any confusions caused to readers of *The Alarm* would be well worth the ultimate value of this book to a resurgent wildcat workers' movement in the United States. *The Alarm* would be resurrected after he'd finished his book. I respected his machiavellian attitude. I liked Schwartz. I thought he was for real and I wanted to believe him.

Towards the end of the summer, Schwartz gave me a copy of the manuscript, titled at that point, *A History of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific 1885–1985*.

Schwartz began by establishing the brutal conditions faced by 19th century seamen. Sailors endured grueling labor for low wages on long voyages, bad food

in small quantities and frequent savage beatings from ships' officers. Sailors who jumped ship in California were penalized as criminals, guilty of "desertion" and imprisoned for six months at hard labor.

These conditions, combined with a rapidly expanding West Coast maritime economy, gave rise to the Coast Seamen's Union, which became the Sailor's Union of the Pacific. The Coast Seamen's Union was founded on a lumber pile on the Folsom Street Wharf on March 6, 1885, by radical socialists of the San Francisco-based International Workmen's Association, modeled on Marx's wing of the First International.

Schwartz's manuscript contained copious amounts of information about late 19th and early 20th century labor radicals. Schwartz digressed at length on post World War I mutinies in the German, French and Russian fleets, the abortive proletarian uprising in Finland and the Kronstadt revolt in 1921. But as the account progressed into the 1920s, schizophrenic authorial voices alternated with metronomic regularity, in places sympathetic to proletarian radicals, at other points distancing and dismissive in the smug clichéd style of mainstream American journalism.

Schwartz critiqued the Bolshevik hijacking of radical tendencies in the international workers' movement, and Moscow's sabotage of revolution in Germany. Subsequently the authorial voice took on the frenzied tone of a protagonist in a story by Edgar Allan Poe. He wrote as if he'd been cheated out of a parking space. On page 86 of Chapter IV Schwartz claimed that when it came to police violence against the working class in the United States or Russia "There was most assuredly a difference between the clubs of (Democratic) forces and those of the Communist (sic) police in Moscow."

From a left-libertarian critique of Bolshevik state capitalism, Schwartz swung to a right-wing demonization of Stalinism. Schwartz had crossed over to the side of the bosses, as long as they weren't the bosses of nationalized industry in Russia.

In a later chapter Schwartz claimed the Russian and German revolutions and all the revolts and uprisings since 1917 had been minor footnotes to the union-controlled San Francisco General Strike of 1934. Although many of the seamen and longshoremen in this strike followed the leadership of Stalinists, Schwartz dismissed this as a generation gap between solid trade-unionists of the SUP stripe and combative young proles who didn't understand what the union movement was all about. This last point was offered without irony.

Cracking up entirely under the weight of trade-union consciousness, Schwartz extolled the patriotism of the SUP and its role in the American war effort in World War II and the Korean War. The manuscript ended with brown-nosing praise of Paul Dempster, Schwartz's employer, the contemporary head of the union.

I compared Schwartz's manuscript with *The Sailors Union of the Pacific* by Paul S. Taylor, an economics instructor at the University of California who published his history in 1923 with the cooperation of Sailors' Union leader Andrew Furuseth.

According to Taylor, the SUP was a business union with a conservative strike policy. As early as 1894 the SUP went on record as being against "the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution." During World War I sailors were one of the few categories of workers that refrained from striking throughout the war. Furuseth proclaimed in a patriotic manifesto during the war that "Seamen have no choice but to obey."

Furuseth was an enemy of the IWW from a pro-capitalist position and an eager proponent of government intervention in labor disputes. Furuseth acted consistently to keep sailors divided from longshoremen.

Under Furuseth's leadership, the SUP scabbed on an IWW Pacific Coast General Strike of marine workers, lumberjacks and oil workers called for April 25, 1923. Furuseth was willing to give the names of radical seamen to employers for blacklisting.

Taylor had taken a third as much space as Schwartz had taken to say all the things Schwartz had failed to say.

I was profoundly disappointed with Schwartz's manuscript. I questioned him on the hodgepodge of perspectives in his book. Schwartz said he was as disappointed with what he'd done as I was, but claimed the union had forced him to write it that way and he had no choice in the matter. He professed that he was still a "libertarian socialist," etc. I didn't understand how Schwartz could have been compelled to voice a perspective so alien to all his professed principles. But the text was an early draft, and I reluctantly gave him the benefit of the doubt.

With the airbrushed portrait of the Sailor's Union, I began to detect a pattern of screwy activity. Schwartz had a penchant for making grandiloquent statements and later retracting them or refusing to back them up. Schwartz had once described the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci as "the greatest intellectual fraud of the 20th Century." I'd always heard Gramsci deferred to reverentially by social democrats, icepickheads and academics and looked forward to Schwartz's demystification. When I later asked him to explain his comment, Schwartz looked befuddled and asked "Did I say that?"

In Caffè Trieste in North Beach he repeatedly bragged loudly that he was "one of the world's leading historians of the Spanish Revolution."

Schwartz's parents had been members of the pro-Moscow Communist Party U.S.A. In reaction against the Stalinist milieu he'd grown up in, he'd become a Trotskyist in his teens and eventually gravitated towards the left communism of the FOR. Schwartz and I agreed that all forms of Leninism were counter-revolutionary. This didn't stop Schwartz from intensely identifying with Leon Trotsky

and blaming anything that peeved him, from bad weather to poor table service, on the machinations of “Stalinists”.

Schwartz had recently been married to R.L., a young woman from Colorado. Schwartz told me Rebecca had worked in massage parlors and acted in pornographic movies. She had bad feelings about these work experiences, and as a consequence, she had problems being sexual with Schwartz. They lived in separate rooms of single room occupancy hotels in North Beach. I never saw them together, and I only saw her once, when Schwartz stood below her window in an alley shouting at her, imploring her to come down to him.

She leaned out the window. She was a conventionally good-looking blonde woman in her mid-twenties. Schwartz was short and pudgy, with a porcine face. His head appeared to rest between his shoulders without the intervention of a neck. When he walked he waddled as if resisting a high wind or attempting to hold a coin between his buttocks. From their conversation I got the impression they didn't spend much time together. He complained Rebecca was a source of money problems to him. He wrote a long bad poem comparing her to the Colorado Rockies, mountain spring water and alpine flowers.

The Only Survivor of the National People's Gang

Schwartz had developed a keen interest in the political situation in Central America. He voiced what could most charitably be called unique theories on the crisis in Nicaragua. Schwartz claimed to have inside information that the Sandinistas' mismanagement of the Nicaraguan economy had lost them the support of all segments of the populace. Schwartz claimed this would soon force the Sandinistas to invade northern Costa Rica. There they would confront the highly effective and popular guerrilla forces of the former Sandinista Eden Pastora. Implicitly denying that the US-backed Contra war had already devastated the Nicaraguan economy, Schwartz believed the Sandinistas would try to unite the country under a phony state of emergency. Schwartz claimed that the Sandinista junta was torn by personal conflicts and so highly divided that any effective military strike against them would bring about a massive anti-Sandinista uprising, and a self-destructive internal coup like the one that had destroyed the leftist regime in Grenada a year earlier. Speaking in July, August and September of 1984, Schwartz was smug and certain that the Sandinistas would self-destruct within months.

Schwartz spoke of the activities of Eden Pastora as the most encouraging social movement in the world, more relevant to the class war than the recent British miners' strike or that years' upturn in riots and strike actions in South Africa. Schwartz claimed that Pastora had been misrepresented due to the hidden

influence of leftists in the news media, and that in reality Pastora was a closet-case libertarian socialist revolutionary. Schwartz referred to Pastora repeatedly as “the Nestor Makhno of Central America.”

I pressed Schwartz to justify this ridiculous claim. He hemmed and hawed, and based his praise for Pastora and his Contra outfit with a familiar line from Lenin: “With Kerensky against Kornilov.” Schwartz’s defense of the former Sandinista government official and current Contra military chief was always in a negative sense: Pastora had not accepted money and weapons from the CIA, Pastora was not allied with Alfonso Robelo or other merchant class rivals of the Sandinistas, etc. Of course, Pastora hadn’t exactly said he was fighting for an international anti-capitalist revolution, but, then, to his credit, he hadn’t said he was against it, either. As a last resort, Schwartz whined that if Pastora snagged state power, he’d be able to sell copies of *The Alarm* in Managua.

I could already see the headline of *The Alarm*: “People’s Nicaragua — Bastion of Workers’ Self-Management and Labor-Time Vouchers!”

Schwartz vacillated between high-decibel despair over the state of the workers’ movement and enthusiasm about common action with the people who produced the summer ’84 issue of a new series of *The Alarm*. After apparently concluding his relationship with the Sailors’ Union history project, Schwartz exclaimed in a phone call, “Comrade Sandalio is back!”

In this vein Comrade Sandalio committed himself to participate in a debate at the Old Mole Bookstore in Berkeley shortly before the 1984 presidential election. He promised me he would argue against electoral politics and against the left wing of capitalism from what he described as a libertarian socialist viewpoint.

At the bookstore, on the evening of the debate, with the audience and the other debaters assembled, I got a phone call at 7:55, five minutes before the debate was to begin. It was Schwartz. In a haggard sniveling voice he said he’d gotten fucked up on downers and red wine the previous night and he was too wasted to show up. I realized nothing could be asked from “Comrade Sandalio” that involved more than talking loudly about himself in the strategic bastions of the class struggle, the cafes and yuppie bars of North Beach.

Career Opportunities

Around the time of the bookstore debate fiasco, Schwartz was hired as what he described as a clerical worker at an innocuous-sounding outfit called The Institute for Contemporary Studies.

In his by now predictable manner, Schwartz bragged to all who would listen that his latest crusade, utilizing the resources of his new employer, was to “expose

the Stalinists” of the New Jewel Movement of Grenada, the leftist regime that had been destroyed a year earlier at the time of the American invasion. He exclaimed that he had rediscovered the virtues of Proudhon. Karl Marx had been “an enemy of the working class,” and after a successful social revolution, commodity exchange would have to be maintained “for thousands of years.” Schwartz was nonplussed when I pointed out that this last idea was not novel and was a cardinal tenet of almost every Stalinist group in the world.

During what turned out to be my last meeting with Schwartz, he gave me a copy of his new book on Grenada.

Published shortly before the 1984 elections with the James Bondish title *The Grenada Papers*, the book Schwartz gave me was a collection of internal documents of the New Jewel Movement seized by the CIA and Air Force Intelligence after the American invasion of Grenada. If the documents weren’t forgeries, they indicated that the New Jewel Movement was a “Bolshevik-Leninist” regime, as the ex-Trotskyist Sidney Hook exclaimed breathlessly in his introduction. Edited by University of California-Berkeley Professors Paul Seabury and Walter McDougall, the book extolled the invasion of Grenada as the first time a “Communist” regime had been overthrown by democratic forces.

The book existed to justify the invasion of Grenada to an audience primarily composed of stupid American congressmen. Most importantly, *The Grenada Papers* demonized by association the Sandinista regime and leftist guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala. The editors’ key point was that insurgencies in the Caribbean and Central America were functions of Soviet intervention and a dire strategic threat to the United States. Events in Grenada were presented as an argument for increased aggression by the US government in Central America.

Before the publication of *The Grenada Papers*, Schwartz had bragged the book was his and that he was its chief editor. As it turned out, Schwartz’s contribution was in a secondary capacity to the Reaganite Professors Seabury and McDougall. Schwartz wrote introductions to sections of the book in which the “Left-wing” West German Social Democrats were taken to task for not being sufficiently supportive of US defense goals.

After reading *The Grenada Papers*, I brought an abrupt end to my fast fading friendship with Steve Schwartz.

The Institute for Contemporary Studies also produced a quarterly publication, the *Journal of Contemporary Studies*. Schwartz became the editor with the Fall 1984 issue. This journal was a deadly dull public policy magazine. Looking over back issues of the *Journal*, I found articles by US government officials, academics and other professional reproducers of our rulers’ ideas.

Schwartz opened the Fall 1984 issue with an article reminding readers of “. . . the realities of the difficult situation in Central America . . .” This reality

was a reprint of a *San Francisco Chronicle* editorial by the prominent rightist George F. Will. The facts, according to Will, were that the Russians forced Nixon to prepare to use nuclear weapons during the October '73 Middle East War, and the Russians were creating "a Communist Central America, and an Iran just a wade across the Rio Grande."

Will's cant was followed by an article by Schwartz on recent events in Grenada. Titled "Caliban's Children," it was an unintentionally comic and pretentious comparison of the rise and fall of the Maurice Bishop regime to events in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Schwartz ended this pompous windbag exercise stating, "This article is based on notes prepared by the author for his participation with Professors Seabury and McDougall in a briefing before the Outreach group on Central America at the White House, October 31, 1984. . . ."

In a letter to the IWW dated five days before this White House conference, Schwartz eulogized a recently deceased Marxist member of the IWW, Ed Spira, on Sailors' Union stationery, saluting Spira as a "working class warrior." Schwartz signed the letter by name and by his IWW membership number, X333361.

An article by Sara Diamond in the March 5, 1985 issue of *The Daily Californian*, a University of California campus oriented newspaper in Berkeley, reported the Institute for Contemporary Studies hosted a \$165-a-seat public policy conference early in 1985 at the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. About 80 academics, business leaders and intelligence analysts attended this gathering. Reagan's attorney general, champion of the death penalty, and W.C. Fields look-alike Edwin Meese, delivered a speech lauding the virtues of the Reagan economic program. Other topics at this conference included education, Grenada, Nicaragua, and "The Future of the Soviet Empire."

Quoting from *The Daily Californian* article: "I think . . . Nicaragua could easily become Grenada Two,' said Stephen Schwartz. . . . The 'lesson of Grenada,' he said, is that in 'certain of the Soviet satellites. . . there are gigantic possibilities of internal instability and collapse.'

"U.C. Berkeley political science professor Paul Seabury, who edited *The Grenada Papers* along with Schwartz and U.C. Berkeley history professor Walter McDougall, said the documents provide analysts with a rare opportunity to study Soviet 'proxy operations'.

"While he said he's not advocating any particular action, Seabury said that 'as a scholar, I would just love to see the Managua documents'."

Participating in this conference didn't prevent Schwartz from taking out an ad calling attention to his membership in the IWW on page 11 of the May 1985 issue of the IWW newspaper, *Industrial Worker*.

In a letter dated November 12, 1985, John Zerzan wrote to the Detroit anarchist newspaper, the *Fifth Estate*:

“What crazy shit about Schwartz! Knew Schwartz shortly since about '75 and he always struck me as a pretty ridiculous character. He went from Stalinist to Trot to ‘Surrealist Trot’ to what he called ‘very close to classical anarchist,’ and given his flakiness it didn’t seem to matter nor did it seem like it would surprise me whatever turn he would take. Now I know this sounds like a claim to omniscience, but he always struck me as an unstable case who could end up anywhere! I remember, somewhere around '76–77 I think, a flyer he put out upon leaving Francis Ford Coppola’s employ ‘exposing’ this film capitalist — imagine, I didn’t even know Coppola was a radical. Then about a year later he made himself a joke by trying to recruit San Francisco punks — who all laughed at him while spending his money . . . Paula and a punk friend almost punched him out one night for his boorish, missionary farcicalness! . . .”

The Red and The Hack

After the summer 1984 issue of *The Alarm*, the project expired. Faced with this debris, I reexamined my conversations with Schwartz, and the issues of *The Alarm* he’d given me. I concluded that Schwartz had produced *The Alarm* as a nominal left communist in an attempt to weasel his way into the FOR.

By attaching himself to the FOR, Schwartz could gain notice among Trotskyists as the author of the most extreme left English language publication close to the Trotskyist spectrum, and guarantee himself a place in the future as a wax mannequin in the ludicrous icepickhead pantheon that was so dear to his heart.

He also went after the FOR to hustle first hand information from Grandizo Munis about Munis’ role in the armed uprising of the working class in Barcelona in May 1937. Schwartz had a sentimental fixation on the Spanish Civil War, and had bragged on many occasions that he would soon write a history of anti-Stalinist radicals in Spain in the 1930s.

In his mid-twenties during the Spanish Civil War, Munis led the Bolshevik-Leninist Group, the small Spanish section of Trotsky’s Fourth International. During the May Days in Barcelona, the Bolshevik-Leninist Group, and the more numerous Friends of Durruti, had, independently of one another, printed and circulated handbills calling for the destruction of the bourgeois state. Both groups called for the armed proletarians of Barcelona to form a revolutionary junta or council to seize and occupy the centers of state power in Barcelona. Munis and his comrades were on the same side as anarchist revolutionaries in the fight against the Stalinist-led destruction of the radical workers’ movement in the Republican-

held regions of Spain, and against the counter-revolution led by the collaboration of the anarchist organizations and the POUM with the democratic capitalist state.

Munis narrowly escaped both the Stalinists and Franco at the end of the war. He went into exile in Mexico. Munis and another former member of the Bolshevik-Leninist Group returned to Spain at the beginning of the 1950s, during a brief upturn in the class struggle. They were subsequently arrested and spent a number of years in Franco's prisons.

Schwartz also went after the FOR for information about the poet Benjamin Peret. Peret is regarded by many, Schwartz among them, as the greatest poet of the Surrealist movement. During the Spanish Civil War, Peret enlisted in the POUM militia, as many foreign revolutionaries did. He later became estranged from leftists in the POUM militia and joined an anarchist militia unit.

After the war, along with Munis, and Trotsky's widow Natalia Sedova, Peret had recognized the state capitalist nature of the Soviet Union. Together the three of them broke with the Trotskyist movement during the 1950s. Munis and Peret founded the FOR. Peret died in 1959. It was this confluence of Trotskyism, Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War in the FOR that drew Schwartz into the left communist branch of the revolutionary milieu.

Munis had a violent hostility to bourgeois historians and hated the appropriation of the experiences of radical proles by academics and careerist hacks. After several meetings with "Comrade Sandalio," the people in the FOR decided that Schwartz was a two-faced low-life, a liar and a fraud. They told him to fuck off, even threatening him with violence at one point, and publicly washed their hands of him and his chimerical "group" in issue 13 of the FOR's publication *Alarma* in May 1982.

When it came to left communism, Schwartz boasted and bluffed his way through a form of politics he did not fully understand. In *The Alarm*, Schwartz used the term "left communist" incoherently, as if this term referred to all those who weren't Stalinist who claimed to be communist, including the POUM and various Trotskyists. No authentic partisan of a left communist perspective would have tried to attach themselves to the confused politics of George Orwell or defended Orwell's propaganda work for British and Allied imperialism during World War II, as Schwartz did in publishing an article with the Trotsky-inspired title "Their Orwell and Ours" in *The Alarm* number 17, April-May 1983.

In spite of his fixation on the Spanish Civil War, Schwartz was unable to decide whether the participation of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT and the FAI in the institutions of the capitalist state was "revolutionary", "counter-revolutionary" or "reformist", the experience of the anarchist organizations joining the Republican government being referred to in a range of wildly divergent ways in *The Alarm*.

Schwartz's incoherence on this issue was one of the points that separated him from the revolutionaries of the FOR.

From *The Alarm* to his badly written history of the Sailors Union, Schwartz sentimentalized the working class as either brutish louts or noble sons of toil. This insipid patronizing style was consistent with Schwartz's Trotskyist perspective, oblivious to the repudiation of work and commodity relations that is the heart of the tendency towards communism in the class struggle.

When he was trying to attach himself to the FOR, Schwartz parroted the FOR's perspectives. After being rejected by the FOR, he was left adrift, and parroted a variety of other opinions. Schwartz continued for several years after this to identify his one-man fanzine to himself as the publication of the FOR Organizing Committee in the United States. He continued writing in the voice of the royal "we" ("We of FOCUS, whose political program is derived from the Spanish Communist Left. . .") and wrote under different names (Sandalo, S. Solsona, etc.), giving the impression there was more to FOCUS/*The Alarm* than there was. The only point at which there was more than one person involved with FOCUS/*The Alarm* was after Schwartz had departed from the project. The only continuity was the bulletin's mailing list and the name. In *The Alarm*, Schwartz reproduced materials others had written on the Spanish Civil War, analysis by distant revolutionary groups, and articles from mainstream newspapers with particular reference to Spain. There was little or no original analysis and virtually no record of any independent involvement by Schwartz in the class struggle. By issue 19 of *The Alarm*, Schwartz concluded that the current version of the IWW was the most relevant expression of class war politics in the United States. A year later he was polishing Ronald Reagan's shoes in time for Halloween.

Schwartz claimed he'd joined the IWW to find people the royal "we" could talk to. For all his love of talking, especially about himself in a loud voice in bars, Schwartz only attended a handful of IWW meetings. Schwartz became a wobbly a short time before he became a paid stooge of Reagan's foreign policy. The period of his IWW membership clearly overlapped with the period of his salaried cheerleading for mass murder in Central America.

I suspect Schwartz joined the IWW to gain access to some of the ancient mariners of the IWW for the Sailors Union history project. A longtime secretary of the Tacoma Washington IWW branch, Otilie Markholt, is referred to extensively in footnotes in Schwartz's SUP history, finally published under the title *Brotherhood of the Sea*. Schwartz wrote an article heaping fulsome praise on Markholt in the July 1984 issue of the IWW newspaper *Industrial Worker*. And, as Schwartz explained it, there was an added benefit to possessing an IWW membership card. IWW members are regarded as members of a fraternal organization by the Spanish CNT, and may expect access to archival materials and internal

documents, and introductions to anarcho-syndicalist veterans of the Spanish Civil War that an outsider might not get.

At a meeting in Berkeley of the San Francisco branch of the IWW in the summer of 1985, I attempted to get the wobblies to publicly dissociate themselves from Schwartz. Richard Ellington led the opposition to my move. According to the IWW's ancient sacred occult rules, Schwartz couldn't be expelled for being a high profile public relations bird-dog for imperialist counterinsurgency campaigns in Central America. Since the national security state didn't exist at the time the IWW's rules were written, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Schwartz's activity wasn't specifically proscribed. He could still be a member in good standing, though I think Ellington complained that Schwartz was in arrears on his membership dues. On these grounds the San Francisco IWW refused to take any action against Schwartz. This confirmed my earlier opinion of the comic opera ridiculousness of the IWW.

Schwartz sent the following letter, dated August 26, 1985, to the *Fifth Estate*:

Dear "Comrades,"

It is really quite amusing to be called a "disappointment" by yourselves, a group who never, in the past decade, did anything to support the projects I was involved in such as *The Alarm*. For you to come whining back now suggesting that somehow I was a valued friend or comrade, is ridiculous. I owe you no explanations whatsoever.

However, you should be aware of the following. First, in attacking me without any attempt to learn from me what has happened, and in therefore allowing yourselves to be "stampeded" by an illiterate group of Bay Area street punks whose claim to anarchism is as phony as their vinyl jackets, you are availing yourselves of the classic Stalinist method. You could at least write and ask for my side of the argument. But, oh no, that isn't your style. Better to slander and defame people without making an effort to investigate the situation. Especially people like myself whom you always, from the heights of your activist misery, had a basic contempt for. . . I have taken no positions that are out of consonance with the positions you yourselves still claim to defend. I wrote an article about my evolution from "red diaper baby" stupidity in which I advocated a very mild defense of some aspects of the free market system, and a repudiation of the Soviet influence over the "left", as well as the cult of terrorism. NOTHING IN THIS ARTICLE WOULD HAVE CONFLICTED WITH THE VIEWS OF, FOR EXAMPLE, PROUDHON. But of course, why read Proudhon when World War III is about to break out, and when you can have much more fun reading E.P. Thompson? Finally,

what are you going to do when our JOURNAL publishes articles by Frank Fernandez of *Guangára Libertaria*? [*Guangara Libertaria* was an anarchist magazine produced in Florida by Cuban exiles. Their claim to fame is that they supported the Argentine military dictatorship in the Falkland/Malvinas Islands war in 1982.] Or materials on the Spanish Revolution? Will it still be a target for your schoolboy contempt? If so, too bad. . . I should add that it doesn't bother me that your fine revolutionary group never supported the political line of *The Alarm* or the particular activities we (sic) carried out in the U.S., but you never did one-tenth of what *The Alarm* did on the Spanish autonomist prisoners; and, regardless of political line, *The Alarm* published a great deal of important historical material on the Spanish revolution – none of it worthy of your notice.

My current position, as I note above, differs very little from that embraced by Proudhon. I could also cite Castoriadis. And others. I am willing to debate with you about this and everything else I have done and continue to do. Insults don't bother me.

With my very best wishes,

Stephen Schwartz

P.S. You should know that Rutgers University Press is preparing to publish a book-length study by me and Victor Alba of the POUM, Friends of Durruti, etc. in the spring of 1987. You will have a fine time figuring out how to trash that.

His Master's Voice

On the editorial page of the San Francisco Examiner, April 11, 1986, an opinion piece by Schwartz was published under the title "Support Contras."

"We helped bring down Somoza, and we donated more aid to the Sandinista regime, at first, than we gave Somoza in 20 years. But the new regime from the beginning treated us as 'the Yankees, enemies of humanity' . . ."

Schwartz put the pedal to the metal with his Goebbels-style Big Lie in this rant, using the royal we almost once for every sentence in the article, and claiming that if "we" of the US government didn't aid the Nicaraguan Contras, the Sandinistas would overrun Guatemala and Mexico and threaten the United States the way the Germans did to France in 1940.

An article on the Institute for Contemporary Studies, titled “Buttoned-Down Bohemians — Welcome to San Francisco’s New Age Right,” appeared in the San Francisco Examiner’s Image magazine, on Sunday August 3, 1986:

“. . . ICS was launched in 1974, during the waning days of Governor Ronald Reagan’s Administration, by Edwin Meese III and other close Reagan associates. . . Defending America, a 1977 ICS title with an introduction by former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, built an early case that the Soviets had opened a ‘window of vulnerability’ in U.S. nuclear defenses. . . ICS, which receives the bulk of its funding from corporations such as Bechtel, Chevron, IBM and Chase Manhattan Bank (also Alcoa, Union Carbide, Coors, Exxon, and the Hearst Corporation, which owns the *San Francisco Examiner*) and from key right-wing fundraisers like Richard Mellon Scaife, has been called ‘Reagan’s favorite think tank’.”

The article proceeds to describe the leading lights in this constellation of dim bulbs, notably ICS founder A. Lawrence “Lawry” Chickering, and some of his enthusiastic underlings:

“Chickering has in recent years assembled a team of unorthodox conservatives to compliment his own evolving views. The process was bumped along the day in 1983 when Chickering met another (Caffe) Trieste regular, Stephen Schwartz. A bookseller’s son who grew up in the beat literary scene, Schwartz used to call himself a Trotskyite, once organized railroad workers in the Richmond yards, claims to have fraternized with some of Europe’s fiercest terrorists. . . anyone who spends time around (Schwartz) and Chickering, who is 45, can’t help but note their big brother-little brother relationship.

“‘It’s like they are two halves of a complete personality,’ says Betsy Francia, who was an office worker at ICS for several years.

“Though he (Schwartz) speaks nostalgically about sharing humble meals with Indian railroad workers, he says the friendships he’s proudest of making nowadays are those with Norman Podhoretz and other reigning right-wing intellectuals. . . Though he still spends most evenings prowling North Beach, he’s more interested in making inroads with the East Coast conservative set, the minds behind *The New Criterion* and Podhoretz’s *Commentary*. For this, says Schwartz, his friendship with Chickering has been invaluable. ‘He’s given me access. . .’

“Betsy Francia remembers Schwartz describing his role at ICS this way: ‘Lawry and I are like an ideological Batman and Robin’.”

From another point in the *Sunday Examiner* article:

“When the Solidarity movement took hold in Poland, says Schwartz, ‘I finally saw the totally fantastic socialistic conception I had waited for all my life. It

was like a religious experience. Here was a country where 10 million workers suddenly joined a union, the union takes over political leadership of the country, they begin to go in this tremendously open direction. It was totally from the ground up.

“But his excitement turned to bitterness, according to Schwartz, because ‘when Poland became identified with Reaganism, the Left [in this country] abandoned Poland’ . . .”

His sentimentalization of trade unionism and disappointment with the left in the United States, quoted above, was a bald-faced lie, contradicted by a number of anti-leftist and violently anti-Solidarity articles published by Schwartz in *The Alarm* in the early '80s, most notably in an article on the cover of *The Alarm* #12, April-May 1982, written by the Tampa Workers Affinity Group from an anti-statist, class war communist perspective.

It was typical of Schwartz's whining craven grandstanding that he portrayed himself as a sincere leftist dolt, exploited and disappointed by cunning diabolical peaceniks and Moscow agents, rather than acknowledge that he had claimed to have jettisoned the left by publishing anti-statist communist perspectives in *The Alarm* for five years since the end of the 1970s.

Schwartz made an artificial and abortive pit-stop in our tiny left communist ghetto, and left communism held no intrinsic appeal for him. Left communism is virtually unknown in the United States, even to intelligent functionaries of the national security state. Happily, in the United States, left communism has no resale value. But counter-revolutionary and ersatz forms of Marxism such as Stalinism and Trotskyism have a limited resale value for purchasers of used proponents of shopworn ideologies. This was convenient for Schwartz; Stalinism and Trotskyism were the yin and yang of his world-view. In both his right wing and left wing incarnations, Schwartz formed his reactive morality around the devil of Stalinism. Without Stalinism, Schwartz would have never had anything to not believe in. Ignored at best, and often laughed at when not ignored, Comrade Sandalio ultimately cashed in on the then expanding employment opportunities for professional repentant former leftists willing to perform public acts of contrition in front of select Reaganite audiences. Nothing had changed about Schwartz's fundamental motivations or the way he viewed the world; his Road To Damascus was strictly a question of market value.

Within the space of a year, Schwartz went from parroting the revolutionary opposition to imperialist war of Marie Louise Berneri in *The Alarm*, #19, Sept.-Oct. 1983, to a career as a bargain basement David Horowitz whose poor analytical skills and flatulent bovine prose could be had by anyone who would buy his lunch for him.

In his journey from North Beach bar-scene embarrassment to salaried cheerleader for the mass butchery of the poor in Central America, Stephen Schwartz resembles the flamboyant mediocrities found in the novels of Stendhal and Dostoyevsky; a social climbing brown-noser, porcine braggart, liar and coward whose opportunist groveling carried him out of the realm of the merely insipid and into a vicarious involvement with atrocities.

It seemed that Schwartz had gone as far as it was possible to go in humiliating himself for his corporate masters. Subsequently, Schwartz surpassed himself by appearing on a television news program insinuating that he was a federal snitch, a political informant and government spy. On Thursday November 10, 1987, the NBC affiliate in San Francisco, KRON-TV Channel 4, broadcast a report titled "Private Spies," on the "Evening Edition" at 6:00 p.m. The following is from a transcript:

Sylvia Chase (anchor on set): People and groups who speak out against Reagan administration policies put themselves in jeopardy of surveillance by private intelligence gathering organizations.

Target 4 has learned it's a kind of private spying network: conservative groups, with close ties to the White House. Members say they pass on the information that they collect to federal agencies, like the Justice Department. And on occasion to the White House itself. . .

. . . When Congress blocked aid to the Contras, the White House got around the law by turning to a private network to raise the money. That triggered the Iran-Contra scandal. . .

. . . Now, there's evidence of another private network. This one spies on the President's political opponents. . .

. . . Here's how it works. Around the country, people gather information on left-wing activities and funnel it to private conservative groups. . . like the Council for Inter-American security, the Capital Research Center, the Young America's Foundation, and the Institute for Contemporary Studies.

All have close ties to the Reagan Administration.

Stephen Schwartz (Institute for Contemporary Studies): We'll be seeing all of the NSC (National Security Council) people, I'm sure. I'll be seeing all of the NSC people.

Sylvia Chase: Stephen Schwartz is a member of what he calls the commie-watching network.

He works at the Institute for Contemporary Studies, a San Francisco think-tank founded by top Reagan aids like Ed Meese.

Schwartz says he addressed a White House meeting attended by Oliver North and even met former CIA director, William Casey. Schwartz says there are lots of ways to get information.

Schwartz: When a left-wing group publishes, say a list of its state committee and throws it in the garbage and somebody finds it in the garbage and brings it to me, then I know the names of all those people and sometimes there will be more information, too.

Chase: What techniques are being used today . . . going through the garbage. That's one way.

Schwartz: Going through garbage.

Chase: Lifting things off the desk when no one's looking.

Schwartz: Now, that's something which is something that I don't believe in. But that's not fair.

Chase: But you know that it happens?

Schwartz: Yeah. I do know that it happens.

Chase: What other techniques would people use?

Schwartz: Well, if any leftist group has an open office where there are a lot of people around, you know you can walk in and if there's something lying on a desk, you don't have to filch it. You might just write down what's on it. . . see a list of names or something like that.

Chase: Are there other people like you around the country keeping track?

Schwartz: There are people that are collecting information. Yes.

Chase: And are they able to get it to people in government?

Schwartz: Yes. But the people in the government are not, frankly, able to do anything more with it than simply collect the information and keep track of the information. . .

I'll end this sordid story with an excerpt from an article that appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* on May 6, 1987:

A Battle Over Right To Write

He wanted to rebut graffiti with graffiti

by Dennis J. Opatrny, of the Examiner staff

When “New Age Rightist” Stephen Schwartz discovered graffiti calling him “the philosophical whore of North Beach,” the former Trotskyite turned red with rage.

He uncapped his felt-tipped pen and was printing a reply to the scurrilous scribblings when he was busted by Mayor Feinstein’s anti-graffiti police squad on a charge of malicious mischief, defacing the wall of a Vallejo Street construction site.

Schwartz . . . has demanded a trial to exonerate his exercise of free speech.

“I was just going to answer that I was not the philosophical whore of North Beach,” said Schwartz, 37.

If he wants a trial, he can have it, said Assistant District Attorney Joseph Hoffman, who believes citizens have the right to speak out under the First Amendment — but with limits.

“The remedy is that he can stand on a street corner and yell all he wants that he’s not the philosophical whore of North Beach,” Hoffman said. “But he can’t go around defacing other people’s property.”

Municipal Judge George Chopelas Wednesday set July 21 for trial. If convicted, Schwartz faces six months in the county jail and a \$1,000 fine . . . Quoting Schwartz’s attorney, Carlos Bea, “We don’t think this is what the mayor meant in her anti-graffiti campaign. In fact, it’s a sad day when a person can’t rebut in public the allegation that he’s a philosophical whore of North Beach.”

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Keith Sorel
From Munis to Meese: Left Communism or State Department Surrealism?
1994

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