

Introduction

Leon Trotsky, the great Russian revolutionary, noted that centrists tend to disparage revolutionaries' "active concern for purity of principles, clarity of position, political consistency and organizational completeness." We take these things seriously. A recent pamphlet by the International Communist League (ICL—centered on James Robertson's Spartacist League/U.S.), entitled "The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?", seeks to demonstrate that: "The IBT is a political animal of a truly bizarre and dubious sort." Despite the Robertsonites' hysterical sectarianism and lack of political principle, we propose to respond to each and every one of the criticisms leveled by the ICL. Lenin once remarked that in any political dispute it is necessary to:

"study calmly and with the greatest objectivity, first the substance of the differences of opinion, and then the development of the struggles within the Party. Neither the one nor the other can be done unless the documents of both sides are published. He who takes somebody's word for it is a hopeless idiot, who can be disposed of with a simple gesture of the hand."

We have therefore reprinted each paragraph of the ICL pamphlet with a response.

We consider the SL to have been a very important group historically—indeed a vital link in the chain of revolutionary continuity. In the first issue of our journal *1917* we stated:

"We stand on the documents of the first four congresses of the Communist International; on the struggle of the Left Opposition against the Stalinist political counterrevolution; on the founding documents of the Fourth International and the revolutionary traditions of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) led by James P. Cannon from the 1930s to the 1950s. The SWP leadership abandoned the struggle to build a Trotskyist vanguard in the early 1960s in favor of reliance on the objective process of history (personified, in the first instance, by Fidel Castro). The Revolutionary Tendency, the progenitor of the Spartacist League (SL) was born in the struggle against the liquidationist implications of the ersatz Castroism of the SWP majority. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the programmatic heritage of Trotskyism was represented by the Spartacist tendency. This tradition we claim as our own."

The Spartacist League's attitude toward the IBT (and our North American predecessor, the External Tendency of the international Spartacist tendency [ET/iSt]), has fluctuated considerably over the years. Initially the SL leadership was prepared to engage in substantive written political exchanges with us (two of which we published as *Trotskyist Bulletins*). After a time the SL/iSt leadership moved away from political polemics and sought instead to draw a hard line against us with a combination of physical intimidation and slander. The ICL leadership continues to criticize us politically on the one hand, and, on the other, to denounce us as embittered anti-communists, "unnaturally obsessed" with the SL and therefore "dubious" and even "COINTELPRO-like." Internally, considerable attention has been paid to hardening the membership against us.

We do not regret the political attention we have paid to the SL/ICL. The SL remains an important political competitor internationally, not only for historical reasons but also because, at first glance, it appears to have politics substantially similar to our own. In addition to a variety of polemics, we have produced several articles evaluating critically the history of the SL/iSt, in particular the October 1982 "Declaration of an External Tendency of the iSt" and the 1985 article entitled "The Road to Jimstown" (published in the fourth and final issue of the *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* [ETB]). We also published an extensive interview with Geoff White, one of the original leaders of the RT/SL in 1917.

The SL/ICL leadership's attitude toward us is profoundly contradictory. They have written more polemics against us than any other political tendency, yet we are the *only* leftist group that they refuse to debate in public. They obviously feel that a full and free exchange

might not be advantageous to them.

We therefore find ourselves in the unusual position of welcoming the publication of this attack on us. Despite the misrepresentations and manipulations of fact (as well as outright lies), it assembles the main strands of their polemics against us into a single document. This permits us to present a detailed response to each of their charges and should, we hope, permit the interested reader to weigh the merits of the arguments on both sides.

—February 1996

We have numbered each of the paragraphs of the ICL pamphlet in the order they appeared with our comments interspersed. Every word of the SL text is reproduced below exactly as it was originally published.

For the last 13 years a grouping calling themselves successively the “External Tendency” (ET), “Bolshevik Tendency” (BT), and (currently) the “International Bolshevik Tendency” (IBT), has claimed to be the true repository of the principles and program on which the International Communist League (ICL, formerly the international Spartacist tendency) was founded. While the IBT currently includes the New Zealand-based Permanent Revolution Group, most of whose members have never had any contact with our organization, almost all of the founding members of the IBT individually resigned from our international tendency in the early 1980s. When they were members, they never acted as a political grouping and never fought—much less mentioned—what they subsequently claim was the irreversible “degeneration” of our party. Rather, they simply *quit*, one by one, in the period after Ronald Reagan’s election as president of the United States.

In contrast to the days of the Vietnam antiwar movement when most of these people joined in the late 1960s/early ’70s, the political climate had shifted dramatically to the right as U.S. imperialism, after a period of “détente,” again made aggressive anti-Sovietism the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. The American government armed Islamic fundamentalists to kill Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan, raised a hue and cry for the reactionary, priest-infested, pro-capitalist and anti-Semitic Polish Solidarność, spent billions for a high-tech military buildup and waged surrogate wars against the guerrilla forces considered to be proto-Soviet agents in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. All the NATO powers lined up behind the U.S.’ strident Cold War II anti-Sovietism. Internationally, our organization stood out for our Trotskyist position of unconditional military defense of the Soviet degenerated workers state against imperialism and the forces of internal counterrevolution.

In the United States, the domestic corollary of Reagan’s anti-Soviet war drive was brutal union-busting and, incidentally, the attempt to identify Marxist political advocacy with “terrorism.” The Spartacist League/U.S. was compelled to initiate a series of lawsuits against the capitalist authorities who sought to brand us as a criminal, “violent” conspiracy. Beginning in Detroit in 1979, we had also won some prominence in the U.S. for initiating and leading a series of united-front anti-fascist mobilizations which succeeded, for a time, in keeping the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis from rallying in Northern U.S. cities.

Our labor/black mobilizations brought thousands of largely black workers and youth into the streets under communist leadership. We won real, if exemplary, victories, putting the SL squarely in the cross hairs of the racist, capitalist American state, which has always been haunted by the spectre of the confluence of black and red. As the stakes of being a communist got higher, a number of our members opted to quit. Many simply went away to pursue their own personal lives; others remained sympathizers of the organization. But those few who went on to form the ET/BT/IBT had their own peculiar pathology.

Nos. 1-4

The SL suggests that the IBT was launched by iSt members who ran for cover as the “stakes of being a communist got higher” with Reagan’s election to the U.S. presidency. The fact that we have maintained an unbroken record of political activity is enough in itself to disprove such an assertion. It is true that the founding cadres of the IBT did not comprise a tendency within the iSt when we were members. In the quarter century after 1968, the SL/iSt did not have *any* internal tendencies or factions. The 1982 founding Declaration of the External Tendency of the iSt cited this as evidence that the internal regime of the SL was fundamentally different from that of Lenin’s Bolshevik Party, Trotsky’s Fourth International, or James P. Cannon’s Socialist Workers Party:

“Trotsky’s method of dealing with intra-party political struggle was quite different than that of the present leadership of the iSt. Political differences were fought out politically and where possible attempts were made to re-integrate oppositionists. Seymour [the SL’s preeminent intellectual] makes the same observation as regards the Bolsheviks.

“The fact is there is something pretty unhealthy about a Trotskyist organization in which there have been virtually no political tendency or faction fights for a decade and a half.”

This is a point the ICL leadership cannot answer.

Many of our founding cadres were driven out of the iSt in a series of purges during the late 1970s and early 1980s. At the time none of us was fully conscious of all the dimensions of the transformation underway in the degenerating iSt. The May 1984 issue of *Bulletin of the ET* commented:

“Unfortunately most future ET members were not able to generalize and draw the proper political conclusions while they were still in the organization [iSt]. In many

cases, our present comrades remained so loyal to the Robertson regime that they acquiesced in their own 'purges,' (as they were described internally at the time). We should have stayed and fought."

Hindsight of course is 20/20. But serious revolutionaries do not lightly decide to turn their backs on their organization. In explaining why he did not immediately rally to Trotsky and the Left Opposition, James P. Cannon remarked that "Dissatisfaction, doubts, are not a program....A serious and responsible revolutionist cannot disturb a party merely because he has become dissatisfied with this, that or the other thing" (*History of American Trotskyism*).

They coalesced in late 1982 from several interlinked clots of embittered ex-members in the U.S., Germany and Canada. The fact that they had quit, one by one, was then alibied by claims that they had all been unjustly "purged" for their political opposition. The fallacy of these assertions is easily proven by the simple fact that they could produce not one oppositional document written by any of them when they were members, nor any motions expelling them for their ostensible political views. All they had were their own resignation letters (which to this day they seem curiously disinclined to print).

No. 5

We say there were purges; the SL responds that: "The fallacy of these assertions is easily proven by the simple fact" that there were no oppositional documents. But all that the absence of documents proves is that there was no organized internal opposition—not that there were no purges. We propose a different test of truth. In each purge involving our comrades, the proceedings were recorded and the tapes deposited in the ICL's archives. Anyone listening to the tapes of the meetings leading up to the "quits" could quickly form his or her own opinion about whether the individuals concerned were being driven out of the group by the leadership or were merely leaving because of personal demoralization. In the past the SL has not been prepared to play these tapes, ostensibly on the grounds that they are "internal." The tapes in question would certainly reveal quite a bit about the internal norms in the iSt at the time—but after all, that is precisely what is in dispute. Serious people can draw their own conclusions from the SL's reluctance to provide the evidence.

We have never claimed that most of these purges took place because of "political opposition" to the leadership. The iSt at that time was a group with no factions, no tendencies and very little organized internal discussion of any sort. In fact most of the cadres slated to be purged retained considerable political respect for the leadership. This is why the purges were so disorienting for them. The ET Declaration observed:

"The central expression of the degeneration of the SL however has been the series of sub-political (and depoliticizing) 'fights' (aka 'purges') launched by the central leadership to rid itself of imaginary, or at least only potential, internal enemies. At least from the famous 'clone purge' of 1978, the SL leadership has shown an accelerating tendency to rip up whole areas of work and significantly weaken the tendency through driving out talented, political cadres on charges which were of secondary importance or irrelevant when they weren't entirely bogus."

As for printing our "resignation" letters, we note that to date the ICL has only printed one. It is from comrade Tom Riley, and appeared in the September 1980 issue of *Spartacist Canada* (which Riley had edited). The letter, published under the headline "Former Editor of SC Resigns from TL," begins:

"I never thought I'd be writing out a resignation from the iSt, the only revolutionary organization in the world, but here it is. At the request of the organization I am resigning from the TLC [Trotskyist League of Canada]."

In his resignation statement, Riley specified that “of course I agree with the political program” and added that “I am very reluctant to do so [resign].” Normally intelligent people understand what it means when someone resigns “at the request of the organization.”

This is not to say that the BT wasn't, and isn't, animated by political appetites that were, and are, quite divergent from those of our organization. Although they came together as a formation largely motivated by subjective malice, on a political level they were the crystallized reflection of the pressure of anti-communist public opinion. Insofar as the BT claims to present a version of Spartacist politics it is a counterfeit one: along with their anti-Sovietism goes an indifference—at best—to the necessary link between the struggle for black freedom and the struggle for working-class emancipation in the United States.

No. 6

By “anti-Sovietism” the SL means criticism of its programmatic departures in the direction of Stalinophilia (e.g., naming a contingent of its supporters the “Yuri Andropov Brigade”—see paragraph No. 19 below). In fact, at the most critical junctures, when the heat was really on, the IBT and its predecessors remained Soviet defensist while the SL flinched (see paragraph No. 29 below for discussion of the KAL 007 flap and the “tragedy” that befell Reagan’s Star Warriors aboard the Challenger; the question of military support to the Stalinist coupists in August 1991 is discussed in paragraph No. 25 below).

The ET screamed that the SL was abandoning trade-union work in favor of “community organizing” when we initiated labor/black struggle leagues linked to the party, attempting to build on the success of our anti-fascist actions (needless to say, the ET was to be found nowhere near most of these actions). As the SL noted in its 1983 conference document, the ET “sees the ‘working class’ as separate from and counterposed to the black plebeian masses. What the ETs really mean by the ‘working class’ is the labor bureaucracy pure and simple.”

No. 7

We have consistently participated in anti-racist actions—including a variety of anti-fascist actions from which the SL has abstained. In our press we have published articles taking up the question of racism and special oppression. The charges of “indifference—at best” to the struggle for black liberation in the U.S., like the assertion that we regard the black plebeian masses as “counterposed to” the working class, are malicious inventions.

The SL leadership manufactured these slanders in response to the ET’s criticisms of their wholesale liquidation of the once-promising SL-supported trade-union work (see the 1982 Declaration of the ET and the *Bulletin of the External Tendency*). In June 1983 the ET published a document entitled: “Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work,” which sharply criticized the SL leadership’s advice to its supporters to resign their positions as stewards in the phoneworkers’ union. This meant turning their backs on a working-class base which had been built over more than a decade of patient and persistent struggle by the Militant Action Caucus (MAC). MAC had won recognition from militants around the U.S. as the preeminent opposition to the pro-imperialist national union leadership. The SL leadership also ripped up work in auto, longshore and other industries. Today the SL has no trade union work at all.

The SL leadership ordered the retreat from the unions because it feared that class-struggle

militants with a proletarian base could potentially provide a focus for the crystallization of political opposition internally. Robertson et al sought to cover their turn with the announcement of the formation of "Labor Black Struggle Leagues" (LBSLs), organizations which, to this day, remain empty shells. In our June 1983 document we wrote:

"It is no accident that the LBSLs are being announced at the very moment that the caucuses, as we know them, are being liquidated. The LBSLs are designated to replace the union centered caucuses as the SLUS' main transitional organizations. The tactic of the LBSL is fine; it is only wrong if it is counterposed to and built on the corpses of the union centered caucuses.

"Without the anchor of the trade unions and the nucleus of their leadership in the caucuses, the effect of anti-Nazi/KKK mobilizations, however powerful, will tend to be dissipated back into the amorphous community. This is an ABC lesson about work among the unemployed and the unorganized drawn by Cannon from the CLA's [organization of American Trotskyists] experiences in the 1930s.

"At a time when the fascists are on the offensive, trying to polarize the US working class along race lines, it is critically important that revolutionaries remain in the integrated industrial unions and seek, by building alternative leaderships around the transitional program, to turn the unions into 'instruments of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat' as Trotsky advocated in 'Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay.'"

The ET also occasionally postured to the left. When 240 U.S. Marines were blown to pieces by a car bomb—placed by persons and forces unknown—in Lebanon in October 1983, the SL/U.S. raised the slogan "Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive!" This highly conjunctural call was meant to take advantage of a situation where 1) the U.S. had only a token military presence in Lebanon and all of the competing fratricidal factions were jockeying for U.S. support—*none were fighting a just war against the imperialists* and 2) there was widespread revulsion in the American population against the imperialist machinations of the U.S. rulers abroad. The ETs insisted that this slogan marked our descent into "social patriotism," never mentioning the fact that it was raised in an article which also opposed the U.S. invasion of the tiny Caribbean island of Grenada and hailed those fighting against U.S. imperialist troops there. The same WV front page that carried the call "Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive!" also carried the slogan "U.S. Out of Grenada, Dead or Alive!"

No. 8

The SL's scandalous call to save the lives of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon is the subject of our *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2. It contains the ET's original critique, the SL's response, and all subsequent polemics. (The SL published a very limited selection of the polemics in its "*Hate Trotskyism*" Bulletin No. 5.) The SL's flinch over the Marines was the subject of a parallel criticism by Adaire Hannah and Bill Logan (two founders of the IBT's New Zealand section) in a November 1983 statement entitled "Spartacist Principles Betrayed."

The blow suffered by the U.S. military in Beirut has continued to reverberate. Every time the U.S. military prepares to intervene in a neo-colonial country, the media recalls Reagan's humiliation in Lebanon. When a gang of trigger-happy U.S. Rangers bit off more than they could chew in Somalia in October 1993, *Workers Vanguard* (22 October 1993) commented that although: "The U.S. death toll of 18 troops killed and 85 wounded was slight compared to the butchery inflicted on the Somalis....it caused many Americans to have flashbacks to the U.S. defeat in Vietnam." The capitalist press was also full of comparisons between the

Rangers' setback and the blow inflicted on the Marines in Beirut, but the SL ignored this obvious parallel.

A few months earlier *WV* had published a letter from an SL supporter who drew a parallel between Clinton's plans to send "peacekeepers" to Bosnia and Reagan's disastrous adventure in Lebanon. This presented difficulties for the SL leadership, which could only explain the discrepancy between its position on the two situations by falsifying the historical record (see *Workers Vanguard*, 2 July 1993). We commented on this exchange in 1917 No. 13.

The above paragraph (No. 8) in the ICL's text reveals the contradictions in the SL's social-patriotic flinch over the Marines in Lebanon. When a group called "Islamic Jihad" claimed responsibility for detonating simultaneous truck bombs at the barracks of U.S. and French imperialist gendarmes, only the SL had trouble figuring out who wanted an imperialist pull-out. There was a vicious communalist civil war under way in which various Muslim militias were pitted against the Maronite Christian "government" (and, sometimes, each other). The U.S. and French troops were supporting the government. A year prior to the barracks bombing, the 15 October 1982 issue of *WV* explained the mission of the U.S. Marines in Beirut: "They are there to shore up the new Gemayel regime which is based on the Phalange killers who carried out the Sabra and Shatila massacre." The article commented that:

"By sending in the Marines on an open-ended mission in the Near East, Reagan has brazenly reasserted U.S. imperialism's role as world gendarme....The U.S. forces in Lebanon are a beachhead for large-scale military intervention in the region...."

A few weeks before the bombing, the 23 September 1983 *WV* reported that U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig saw the opening in Lebanon as:

"... 'a great strategic opportunity' for 'redrawing a new political map for the region'. Lebanon was going to become the beachhead for Pax Americana in the Near East. The U.S. thought it could rush in, find the most unsavory and reactionary gangster among the competing feudalist chieftains, and create a viable puppet government. The Gemayel clan was supposed to be the Pahlavi dynasty [U.S. client regime in Iran] of Lebanon."

WV quoted a *New York Times* report that the Reagan administration "saw the survival of the [Gemayel] Government as essential to American interests, even if this meant moving more American forces into the region." *Workers Vanguard* further observed that:

"The Pentagon has abandoned the pretense that U.S. forces fire only when fired upon. A few days ago U.S. warships shelled positions deep in Syrian-controlled territory in retaliation for anti-Phalange forces bombarding the defense ministry in Beirut. *U.S. forces are now routinely providing artillery cover for the Lebanese army....*

"The U.S. is now much more heavily involved militarily in Lebanon than in Central America both in the number of troops and the direct role they play. And that role is rapidly expanding."

—emphasis added

Thus the assertion that "1) the U.S. had only a token military presence in Lebanon..." is belied by the SL's own account. A photo caption in *WV*'s 23 September 1983 issue (published only weeks before the bombing) described the American intervention in Beirut as the "Biggest display of U.S. combat firepower since Vietnam," while the accompanying article explained:

"...the U.S. is now committed to defending the Phalangist gangsters with an additional 2,000 troops drawn from the American fleet in the Indian Ocean, a total of 14,000 Marines both on shore and off with 12 warships standing off the coast and 100 warplanes."

All other reports confirm that the U.S. military had become heavily involved in defending the Maronites. Pulitzer prize winner Thomas L. Friedman reported that:

"Early on the morning of September 19 [1983], the guided missile cruisers *Virginia*,

John Rodgers, and Bowen and the destroyer Radford fired 360 5-inch shells at the Druse-Syrian-Palestinian forces, to take the pressure off the beleaguered Lebanese troops.”

—From Beirut to Jerusalem

A few short weeks later, when one of the “anti-Phalange forces” leveled the marine barracks, the U.S. military lost more men than on any single day since the Vietcong’s 1968 Tet Offensive. It was a traumatic blow for the Reaganites, and the SL leadership responded in an abjectly cowardly manner by suddenly calling for getting the survivors out “alive.”

While the U.S. and its allies were supporting the Phalange, it is also true that “*none [of the Muslim militias] were fighting a just war against the imperialists*” in the multi-sided communalist conflict underway in Lebanon in 1983. But that is no reason not to defend blows struck by *any* of the contenders against the imperialist gendarmes. The fact that revolutionaries defended the Serbs against NATO attacks in September 1995 did not imply that we favored their victory over the Croatian or Muslim militias.

As for the claim that, “(2) there was widespread revulsion in the American population...”, we would note that it occurred *after* the Marines were bloodied. As a rule, aborted military interventions are less popular than successful ones. In any case, for Marxists, opposition to imperialist intervention in the neo-colonial world is one of *principle*. Leninists want to see the imperialist troops out *immediately* and *unconditionally*. We do not specify that they must be brought out alive. We have no special interest in preserving the U.S. Marine Corps. The SL leadership’s call to save the U.S. Marines in Lebanon was a cowardly, social-patriotic flinch.

We addressed the distinction between the SL’s slogans for Grenada and Beirut in *ETB* No. 2 (January 1984):

“The *real* difference between the SL’s positions on Lebanon and Grenada is that Grenada was a cheap victory for Reagan. It didn’t cost a lot in terms of casualties and nobody is very worried about what a small socialist propaganda outfit has to say about it one way or the other. So it’s easy to be principled on that one. Lebanon is a different story....It might look ‘unpatriotic’ to be seen applauding that action. So the SL leadership, despite all its huffing and puffing about hanging tough in the crunch, flinched and adjusted the program of the organization to make it more palatable to the bourgeoisie. A ‘profile in cowardice.’”

The BT’s bloodthirsty insistence that Marxists should always and everywhere hail the death of soldiers considered expendable by their rulers is more than obscene in a country where astronomical rates of minority unemployment mean that a high percentage of those joining the military are black and Latino. This is an Achilles’ heel of American imperialism. But the BT has always turned a blind eye to racial oppression in America.

No. 9

If you cannot deal with your opponents’ arguments, why not ascribe to them a position you *can* deal with? We have never suggested that “Marxists should always and everywhere hail the death of soldiers considered expendable by their rulers...” We said simply that Marxists do not concern themselves with preserving the military cadres of imperialism, and that when the U.S. Marines invade a neo-colonial country, we support their immediate, unconditional removal by any means necessary. In a 7 February 1984 letter to the SL (reprinted in our *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2), we remarked that, “Communists no more call for the death of every American marine in Lebanon than for every British soldier in Ireland.” Every military reversal handed “our own” imperialist rulers by neo-colonial peoples—whether in Lebanon, Somalia or Bosnia—is a good thing.

The SL attempted to deflect attention from its scandalous call to save the Marines by pointing to the fact that many of them were black or Latino. We addressed this in our 7 February 1984 letter:

"In the first place, the Pentagon did not intend to expend *any* of its marines in the bombing of the Beirut headquarters. Secondly, let us remind you that revolutionaries no more regret the 'loss' of Reagan's black hitmen than his white ones. Those who sign up to fight the dirty colonial wars of U.S. imperialism can expect to occasionally encounter some resistance from their would-be victims, and some will inevitably pay the price."

The lower ranks of the Marines and the U.S. Army are indeed disproportionately black and Latino. This is a fact with potentially important implications in periods of sharp social struggle. But it does not change our attitude toward imperialist gendarmes intervening in Third World countries. As we wrote in *ETB* No. 2 (January 1984):

"It is true that in the event of a massive proletarian upsurge, some elements of the Marine Corps might well be open to revolutionary propaganda—but to orient to them today is worse than a stupidity. In the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, the bulk of the police force went over to the strikers. Should we therefore change our attitude toward the cops? Of course not. The cops are the relatively lightly armed bodies of men who are trained and paid to protect capitalist property at home. The Marines are more heavily armed colonial troops chiefly used to protect American capitalist property overseas....Neither the Marines nor cops are part of the working class...Both are the sworn *enemies* of the workers and the oppressed."

This was not something we contrived as part of a "posture against the Spartacist League" but part of the programmatic heritage of the revolutionary SL. The April 1977 issue of *Young Spartacus* (No. 53) observed:

"In a programmatic sense, the volunteer army should be regarded like the police force. It is against the interests of labor to support the economic demands of volunteers and their self-organization into unions to improve their material conditions. While rejecting a positive orientation for 'democratizing' the volunteer army we oppose particular manifestations of racial and sexual discrimination....

"Only in a pre-revolutionary period would our political orientation toward a volunteer army in the U.S. differ from our attitude toward the cops."

Furthermore, their oh-so-radical "anti-imperialist" bloodthirstiness over Lebanon was simply a convenient posture against the Spartacist League, not a seriously held position. As we noted at the time, the bloodthirstiness was always proportional to their distance from where the blood was being shed. When the question came home during the Persian Gulf War, with red-white-and-blue "antiwar" coalitions calling to "Bring Our Boys Home," the BT wasn't shrieking, "U.S. Marines, Live Like Pigs, Die Like Pigs!" On the contrary, they were shrieking about the "sectarianism" of the Spartacist League for our political opposition to the social-patriotism of the popular-front left. In contrast, the BT was so eager to be at one with these yellow-ribbon "radicals" that in the Bay Area they even voted *against* adding the call to "end the blockade of Iraq" to the coalition's list of demands.

No. 10

The slogan "Colonialists: Live Like Pigs—Die Like Pigs" appeared as a headline on the front page of *Workers Vanguard* No. 207 (26 May 1978) in response to the hysteria over the killing of 70 Europeans in Zaire. The WV article commented that:

"it should by now be clear to those Belgians, who for generations have been the most arrogant and parasitical of all the white settlers in Africa and who go to their

ex-colony to participate in renewed exploitation of the toiling masses, that *they might not come back alive.*”

In other words, “you pays your money, and you takes your chances.” We see no reason why Marxists should assume a different attitude toward members of the U.S. Marine Corps.

The allegation that our comrades “voted *against* adding the call to ‘end the blockade of Iraq’ to [a San Francisco] coalition’s list of demands” is simply untrue. This is the first time the SL has ever raised such an allegation—five years *after* it supposedly took place! At the time, the 5 October 1990 WV quoted a 13 September 1990 leaflet by the Revolutionary Trotskyist Tendency (RTT) mistakenly claiming that at a meeting of the Emergency Committee to Stop the U.S. War in the Middle East (ECSUSWME), “the BT ‘abstained from the vote when the RTT asked the Committee to adopt the slogan of “End the Blockade”’”. The SL was happy to repeat the RTT’s criticism of us, but hastened to add that this did not mean that it endorsed the slogan:

“Let’s be clear here. We do not appeal to Bush and Thatcher to ‘end’ the blockade, but rather call on those who oppose the imperialist invasion to ‘*break* the blockade.’ And this is anathema to the reformists precisely because their desperately sought-for Democratic ‘doves’ are definitely not going to countenance siding with ‘the enemy.’”

—WV, 5 October 1990

In 1990 it was enough for the SL to repeat the RTT’s mistaken claim that we had *abstained* on the vote. Five years later, to sharpen their polemic a bit, the SL suddenly claimed that we had voted *against* adding such a demand. In fact, as we explained in our press, at the meeting in question our comrades had earlier put forward a motion to transform the coalition from a popular-frontist pressure group on the Democrats into a genuine united front:

“After losing this critical vote, which confirmed the popular-frontist character of the ECSUSWME, the BT comrades sat through the rest of the meeting as non-voting observers. A subsequent leaflet by [the RTT] erroneously stated that the BT ‘claims to be the left wing of the Committee,’ and chastised us for not voting for one of the many RTT amendments put forward to give the coalition’s popular-frontist program a more leftist coloration.”

—1917 No. 9

We also reported how IBT comrades intervened in the other major anti-war coalition in the Bay Area, the “Committee Against a Vietnam War in the Middle East” (CAVME). This was controlled by the reformist Socialist Action group, which, in the interests of building a “broad” mobilization (i.e., attracting Democratic Party politicians and other pro-imperialist liberals) prevented the expression of any kind of socialist or anti-imperialist views:

“the 22 September CAVME meeting attracted a hundred people, at least half of whom had no organizational affiliation. Several BTers were there, along with a dozen supporters of the Spartacist League (SL). Socialist Action was clearly worried about losing control of the meeting and seeing their front group turned into a united front that granted Marxists, like everyone else, the right to put forward their views. “Unlike the BT, the Spartacist League did not try to contest the policies of SA; they were happy merely to denounce them. SLers at the meeting criticized CAVME because its program did not include a call for breaking the imperialist blockade of Iraq. Such a call would be perfectly appropriate for a united front against U.S. war provocations. Yet, instead of pushing to amend the basis of unity to include this demand, or supporting the BT’s efforts to ‘break the blockade’ against Marxist politics in CAVME, the SL cited these as reasons not to be involved.”

An all too familiar story for the SL.

From a Whiff of Anti-communism...

There was more than a whiff of “God that failed” anti-communism in the tall tales of “nightmarish internal meetings,” forced confessions, high dues rates and other horrors spun by the early ET. But their polemics had a certain educational value for our membership, and we published three internal bulletins full of them in preparation for our 1983 conference. As the document noted, “We should hope the ETs go on for a while in their present fraudulent posture...they are a crystallization of everything that is backward and wrong in the SL.”

No. 11

Tall tales? The SL dues schedule was steep, and acknowledged to be so at the time. If indeed there were no “nightmarish internal meetings” then the SL leadership could easily discredit our account by agreeing to play the audio tapes of the events in question to interested parties in the workers’ movement. Yet the SL steadfastly refuses to play the tapes.

As for “forced confessions,” we recall that Al Nelson, Robertson’s longest-standing collaborator, wrote out a “confession” for Bob Mandel to sign. Mandel is a former ET/BT supporter who was a prominent figure in the San Francisco Bay Area New Left in the late 1960s. During the 1970s he was one of the SL’s best-known trade-union supporters, and his activities were reported regularly in *Workers Vanguard*. When he fell out of favor in the SL, he was considered to be especially dangerous politically. In *ETB* No. 3 we described how, when the SL leadership began to organize his purge, Mandel was:

“distraught and badly shaken by the prospect of separation from the political tendency to which he had devoted his life. Mandel did everything he could to prove his loyalty to the organization. He was presented with a statement penned by Al Nelson. The statement reads like an FBI-style confession. It begins: ‘I freely admit the following statements to be true and understand they are to be filed as a confidential statement with the Central Committee of the Spartacist League....’ This bogus ‘confession,’ composed of some pretty bizarre allegations, as well as various other statements, a few of which are true, was intended to be used to discredit Mandel publicly in the future. Having signed it, he found himself in a Catch-22 situation which the SL leadership has since sought to exploit. Mandel certainly made a big mistake in blindly signing such a ‘confession,’ but the whole incident casts an unpleasant light on the routine practices of the SL leadership.”

The SL leadership’s antipathy for Mandel did not abate after he was purged, particularly when it became clear that he was not ready to give up left-wing politics. *Workers Vanguard* of 5 March 1982 alleged that a group of ex-members had staged a “walkout” from a February memorial meeting for Toni Randell, a deceased comrade. In fact the walkout never occurred. Nedy Ryan, at that time secretary to George Foster, then the Political Chairman of the Bay Area Spartacist League, wrote a remarkable deposition dated 28 December 1983 (reprinted in *ETB* 3), which casts light on how things worked in the SL:

“The WV report on this memorial said that ‘In the California meeting, the observation that Comrade Toni had nothing but contempt for quitters actually triggered a walkout by some of the ex-members present,’ calling this ‘an unseemly display.’ Specifically, we were all told that the ex-members referred to were led by Bob Mandel. Because of the incident related below, I’ve always assumed it was George Foster himself who gave this information to WV.

“As you can image [*sic*], the idea that ‘Bob Mandel walked out on Toni’s memorial’ caused quite a flap among the leadership in New York and among all the members in the Bay Area. While it could be considered a small incident, the well-deserved affection and respect in which Comrade Toni was held automatically evoked

feelings, in any decent breast, that any 'quitter' who would walk out on her memorial because his own petty feelings were hurt is a thorough heel and someone to be held in revulsion and contempt. So the charge was very effective. It was also a lie.

"The day after I heard the story, I spoke to George Foster about it. At that time I was assigned to work as his 'secretary'....I asked him to describe the walkout to me. I knew that I had been on the other side of the room from both Bob and the door, and thought I had missed all the fun. George told me that the 'quitters' had 'walked out' after the singing of the Internationale. I said in confusion that was the end of the meeting. Yes, he said (and I do remember these exact words, because they are so astonishing), 'maybe I should have said they walked out after the meeting was over.' Then he appeared to come to a decision, shook his head and said something like no, never mind. So before my very eyes he consciously decided not to correct the slander which was proving so useful and had so pleased New York.

"As you know, Bob wrote a letter to WV the next month, urging a retraction. WV replied, not by retracting but by branding Bob as 'snivelling' and 'self-centered' for bringing the matter up....

"I knew the truth too, of course, but I also knew that to accuse George of lying, in defense of the 'traitor' Bob Mandel, would have subjected me to abuse, persecution, and possible exclusion from the party to which I had devoted 13 years and of which I still hoped to remain a member. This was cowardly and wrong, and for the little good it does now I apologize to Bob for it. Of course this incident contributed to my bitter disillusionment with the S.L."

Figuring that sharp internal debate would do the party good, in December 1983 the Spartacist League/U.S. Central Committee voted to make a public offer to readmit the ET with full membership rights, including of course the right to engage in internal struggle based on democratic-centralist democracy and discipline. No sooner had we made this decision than we discovered that the ET in San Francisco was circulating a petition claiming that one of their number, Bob Mandel, had been assaulted by our comrades during a demonstration in support of striking workers.

This was a blatant lie. Even the one eyewitness affidavit which the ET finally produced (a month later) alleged only that a heated argument had taken place. Mandel later admitted that our comrades had never touched him. But the ETs launched an international campaign labeling us as "violent." We were at the time engaged in a very serious legal fight against the FBI, which had targeted our organization as "violent." And here we have a group of ex-members of our organization screaming that we are "violent." Whose interests did this serve?

We obviously were not going to readmit to membership those who had engaged in a slander campaign which—animated by subjective malice and counterposed political appetites—was purely aimed at trying to destroy our organization. Nonetheless, we did keep the offer open for the Canadian ETs who had not signed this petition claiming that we had assaulted Mandel. Their response was to immediately sign it! In short, the ET/BT deliberately closed the door to its own readmission with full rights of membership—including factional rights—in the second year of its existence.

Nos. 12-14

The chronology as presented by the SL requires some explanation. On 3 December 1983, at a mass picket in support of striking Greyhound bus drivers in San Francisco, SL supporters carried out several provocations against supporters of the External Tendency. We immediately sent a mailgram protesting this behavior to the SL Political Bureau. When that was ignored, we followed up with a letter. In our 14 December letter (reprinted in *ETB* No. 2) we recounted how Eva, an SL supporter, had approached our comrade Ursula:

"and repeatedly accused her of defending a Hitler-lover.... Ursula at first denounced these slanders but finally turned away, thereby preventing an altercation in front of a group of curious leftist onlookers, attracted by the 'Nazi-lover' accusations and the accents.... Later, Eva approached Howard Keylor and loudly accused him of

being a racist. Unbeknownst to her, the individual for whose benefit she was slandering Keylor, is a longshoreman and thirty-year friend of his. The longshoreman just laughed at her.”

The accusations of “Nazi-lover” were occasioned by our defense of Uli Sandler, a member of the central committee of the German section of the Robertsonites’ international, who, after resigning, was retroactively expelled as a “proto-fascist”! This outrageous slander was the subject of protests from various former iSt members and German leftists who knew Sandler (including Oskar Hippe, one of the few survivors of the pre-Hitler German Left Opposition—see articles in *ETB* 1, 3 and 4).

Our 14 December letter also protested a physical provocation carried out later that same day against Bob Mandel by Peter Woolston and Ritchie Bradley, two SL supporters:

“Mandel had just said ‘hello’ to Martha Phillips, his ex-companion and also formerly a Spartacist candidate for election in Oakland. She responded with a series of political attacks. Woolston immediately approached Mandel from the front while Bradley placed himself behind Mandel. When Mandel quietly responded to Phillips’ points by raising the SL/US’ social-patriotic position on the Marines in Lebanon, Woolston began to shout. He yelled that Mandel was a member of a racist organization which defended Nazis...When Mandel quietly responded, ‘What about Lebanon? What about the FMLN flags?’ Woolston shouted, ‘I don’t care’ and began to shove Mandel repeatedly in the chest with his forearm. Each time Woolston yelled about racists, finks or Nazi-lovers, Bradley said, ‘Yeah Mandel, yeah, Mandel’ and shoved his elbow into Mandel’s kidneys.

“Closely observing the scene from Mandel’s left and no more than 7 feet away, were George Foster and Al Nelson. They made no attempt to stop the physical assault and verbal provocations, demonstrating that these were not isolated actions of disoriented supporters, but organizational policy.”

In *ETB* No. 3 we commented that:

“What happened that day is simply that two SL supporters attempted to set Bob up for a beating, and did a little shoving in the process to get him to throw the first blow. Even the dishonest account published in *WV* [No. 349] tacitly admits that they tried to set Mandel up for attack. When ‘Mandel showed his face at a labor demo [he] was loudly and politically confronted by indignant and vocal SL supporters who called him a scab.’ Certainly the experienced ‘military’ leaders of the Bay Area SL, Foster and Nelson, who stood no more than a few feet away throughout the whole incident, knew that to yell ‘scab’ in the middle of a crowd of angry pickets is like yelling ‘fire’ in a crowded auditorium....It is entirely possible that a couple of ‘hotheaded supporters’ [read: angry pickets] *could* have been incited to take ‘a swing at the worm Mandel.’”

The meeting of the SL Central Committee that decided to “offer to readmit the ET” took place two weeks *after* the 3 December incident and thus after the receipt of our original protest. The SL leadership was fully aware of our objections to their supporters’ behavior at the Greyhound picket *prior to* the plenum where they supposedly decided to readmit us. We submitted a formal letter of application on 15 February 1984 and received a preliminary response from the iSt dated 27 February 1984 (reprinted in *ETB* No. 3). The 2 March 1984 issue of *Workers Vanguard* suddenly announced that our protest meant that we could not be admitted. We traced the chronology of these events, and their political significance, in the third issue of the *Bulletin of the ET*:

“On December 6 we sent a mailgram to the Political Bureau of the SL/US protesting the provocation at the Greyhound picket lines. No response. On 14 December we sent a registered letter, again to the SL/US PB, explaining in some detail exactly what had happened....Still no response. After another few weeks, we began to cautiously solicit a few signatures, mainly from former SL supporters widely respected within the organization, for the protest declaration reprinted in *WV* No. 349. Far from trying to scandalize or discredit the organization which we seek to

rejoin, we hoped that this kind of pressure would make the leadership think twice before engaging in similar acts in the future.

“Unfortunately, the response of the leadership has been to compound their provocation with a lying denial that anything untoward occurred. Instead, in the time-honored tradition of those who practice such tactics, they have sought to ‘blame the victim’ and have counter-charged that our protest statement is a ‘Cointelpro-style’ provocation against them!”

“So now the ‘Cointelpro-style’ smear is being used in an attempt to effect what the original provocation failed to achieve: sealing off the ET from the membership of the iSt.

“The SL leadership has a problem with the ET. They decreed that ‘the ETs ought to inspire fanatical hatred in iSt members,’ but that didn’t wash. Our Trotskyist criticisms have stood as an obstacle to a smooth transition to revisionism. There are still enough cadres in the iSt who...don’t mourn Yuri Andropov and who aren’t interested in saving the U.S. Marines in Lebanon. As the leadership’s political disorientation is increasingly manifest to the cadres, our influence has increased. We haven’t automatically inspired hatred and we can no longer be simply ignored. “So what to do? Perhaps half-believing their own lies that we are not interested in winning the SL cadres and are just a motley crew of burnt-out quitters, Robertson & Co. decided to try a maneuver. They would pretend to offer the ET membership in the SL with full democratic rights....

“When we called the readmission bluff, the leadership (which certainly does possess ‘fanatical hatred’ of us) was forced to find some excuse to keep us out, without having to renounce its initial demagogic offer. Accordingly, they seized on our protest statement—which does no more than restate the facts which we elaborated in our letter to the Political Bureau of 14 December.”

As for the allegation that “Mandel later admitted that our comrades had never touched him,” it is simply a lie. This can be confirmed with Mandel himself.

...To the Stench of Provocation

In the following years the number of lies and provocations against our party emanating from the BT was simply astonishing for an organization which claimed on paper to stand for our principles and program. In May 1985, the BT published a highly inventive piece of reptile journalism worthy of the anti-communist ravings of Ayn Rand or *Reader's Digest*, titled “The Road to Jimstown,” smearing our party as an “obedience cult” and spinning lurid, slanderous tales of political intimidation, “sexual groupies” and internal corruption. Thus the BT sought to feed the anti-communist American political climate which targeted us.

No. 15

We published “The Road to Jimstown” in 1985. It briefly outlines the course of the SL’s degeneration from Trotskyism to political banditry. This is the first time, after *ten years*, that the SL has commented on it. Attentive readers will note that the ICL pamphlet denounces it as a pack of ravings and smears without citing any specifics. There is a good reason for this: it is all true, and there are lots of people who know it. We admit that some of it is pretty “lurid,” but lurid is as lurid does.

In the initial “Declaration of an external tendency of the iSt” we wrote that: “The iSt remains a revolutionary organization. Its members constitute the largest repository of

Trotskyists in the world.” We took no joy in having to conclude, barely two years later, that the “gradual molecular transformation” of the SL “into an obedience cult (a process which has been underway for some years) had reached the point of no return.” To substantiate this assessment it was necessary and appropriate to describe “some of the more cultish features of the SL’s internal life.”

It is not entirely clear to us which passages in “The Road to Jimstown” the Robertsonians take umbrage at. We do not imagine, for example, that they would wish to challenge the veracity of the following:

“For several years Robertson has had his own little coven of sexual groupies with its own bizarre initiation rituals. They made a semi-official debut internally when, dressed in black and carrying candles, they appeared as ‘the Susanna Martin Choir’ at a social held during the 1983 SL National Conference. (Susanna Martin was an early American witch.) In the report of the conference which appeared in WV (No. 342, 18 November 1983), it was noted that the choir’s ‘performance was received with wild and overwhelming acclaim.’ What wasn’t reported is that running such an ‘informal interest association,’ as WV coyly referred to it, is Robertson’s exclusive prerogative in the SL. Nor did WV mention that being one of Jim’s groupies confers great ‘informal’ authority within the group.”

The SL leadership complains that telling the unpleasant truth about life in Jimstown “feed[s] the anti-communist American political climate which targeted us.” This recalls Stalinist complaints that Trotsky’s exposure of the corruption and cynicism of the Soviet bureaucracy aided imperialism. Trotsky replied that the job of revolutionaries is to “say what is.”

At the same time, this article alleged no new major programmatic departures on our part. Instead the BT expressed shock at our use of mocking guerrilla theater tactics to fight a ban on our youth organization at San Francisco State University (no one ever accused the BT of having a sense of humor), and outrage at our attempts to get the San Francisco longshoremen’s union to take official responsibility for a solidarity boycott of a South African ship. The material basis for our supposed “degeneration” was alleged to be that we had acquired “valuable real estate,” i.e. a modest office building in New York to house our international headquarters!

No. 16

No programmatic departures? In concluding that the SL was “Over the Brink” we reported how:

“In November 1984, cadres of the Spartacist League/U.S. donned witches’ hats, false noses, pigs’ faces and Nazi regalia and paraded around San Francisco State University (S.F. State) as the ‘Red Avengers of the Underground SYL.’Meanwhile, on the docks on the other side of town, *the Spartacist League was doing its best to wreck an 11-day boycott of South African cargo—the most important political strike by any section of the American proletariat in decades...*”

—“The Road to Jimstown,” (emphasis added)

We regard sectarian wrecking of workers’ struggles as a “programmatic” departure from Trotskyism. And it was not the only departure. As we pointed out in “The Road to Jimstown,” one of the sickest aspects of the “Red Avengers” was the misogynist “jokes” aimed at the SL’s feminist opponents—e.g., the description of them as “rabid doberman pinschers of the female persuasion” (*Workers Vanguard* no. 367, 23 November 1984). This all took place in the SL’s flagship Bay Area branch, under the direction of the group’s top leadership.

The story of the longshore boycott and the SL’s wrecking is documented in *ETB* 4. At the

beginning of the action (in which ET supporter Howard Keylor played the leading role), the SL had its supporters set up a “picket line” and declared that the twenty-five (mainly black) longshore militants who ignored this provocation and went on board the *Nedlloyd Kimberley* to initiate the boycott of South African cargo were “scabbing.” For eleven days the longshoremen refused to handle the cargo until, in the end, the action was broken by a federal court injunction. The biggest scandal was that SL trade union supporters violated union security and provided the written evidence that the company and the cops used as “Exhibit 1” in getting their injunction! The SL’s activities throughout the boycott were driven by blind factional malice. Its attitude closely paralleled that of the Stalinized Communist Party toward the 1934 Trotskyist-led Minneapolis teamster strike.

The suggestion that a five-story Manhattan office building and the other assets enjoyed by the top leadership (like Robertson’s house on a Bay Area marina paid for with an internal fund drive—see 1917 No. 4) does not constitute a sufficient “material basis” for bureaucratism recalls similar arguments used by Gerry Healy and his American lieutenant Tim Wohlforth to explain away their own corrupt internal regimes:

“Wohlforth always dismissed the Spartacist tendency’s allegations about the grossly bureaucratic practices of the Healy/Wohlforth regimes with smug demands that we demonstrate upon what materially privileged stratum the WL [Workers League] is based.”

—WV No. 61, 31 January 1975

We commented in “The Road to Jimstown” that such arguments are:

“Very neat and tidy. No room for the development of mini-personality cults or small group megalomania. But life is more complex—which is why we have the Posadases, the Healys and the Robertsons....”

In September 1986, the BT staged a physical confrontation at one of our Bay Area forums (the BT’s tales of our supposed bureaucratism have always been belied by the fact that they attend and speak at our public events). In November 1986, a second BT provocation in the Bay Area was narrowly avoided when we moved the venue of our meeting at the last minute (the BT declined to attend the event at the new location). In October 1987, the BT tried to rush the mike at a Spartacist-initiated united-front rally for jailed Black Panther Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt). The BT had done nothing to build the rally (indeed to this day they have never published an article on Geronimo), but they were allowed to speak after they endorsed the demonstration—the insulting \$1 donation they offered as token of their “support” was refused.

No. 17

We will address each of the above incidents in turn.

i) There was indeed a “physical confrontation” on 19 September 1986 at an SL forum in the San Francisco Bay Area. But it began when SL “ushers” started to push our comrades out of the room at the end of their meeting. In an April 1987 collection of documents detailing SL violations of workers’ democracy, we included statements on this incident from *Workers Vanguard* (26 September 1986), ourselves and the Left Trotskyist Tendency. The introduction to our “truth kit” noted:

“It is hardly surprising that in its account the SL disclaims all responsibility for the attack and instead seeks to blame the victims. But note the extremely vague character of WV’s account:

“When the meeting adjourned, as is our policy with this group, the BTers were asked to leave the room. At the door they resisted leaving and precipitated a

fight, suddenly punching and kicking the comrades ushering them out.’

“The SL leaders are plenty cynical but they are not stupid. Perjurers are often tripped up by discrepancies in their testimony. We suspect they deliberately left out any details from their account in order to preserve some wriggle-room for later. “According to *WV* we were merely ‘asked to leave the room.’ But at least one SLer who was involved in the fracas has, in private conversation with reputable leftists, admitted that their ‘ushers’ were physically pushing our people as we were leaving. A number of people saw our comrade Kathy Z. roughly pushed to the floor by the ‘ushers’ and heard her cry out. This was the first act of real violence.

“Al Nelson, the Spartacist honcho whose remarks are reprinted in *WV* disingenuously inquires, ‘Besides, who would resist leaving a meeting after its over anyhow?’ In the first place the only sense in which any of our comrades ‘resisted leaving’—note that even according to *WV* they had all got ‘to the door’ under their own steam—was by being on the floor where they were pushed or thrown by the SLers ‘ushering’ them. Secondly, the SL’s policy of excluding us from meeting halls at the end of their formal discussion period is a cowardly attempt to seal off their members and contacts from political debate.”

The LTT account of the September 1986 incident began by noting that “Only one of us had attended an SL forum before; for the rest it was the first time.” Unlike the SL, the LTT’s 30 September 1986 account of what transpired was specific and direct:

“We were appalled to take notice of the SL’s undemocratic proceedings, especially in relationship to the Bolshevik Tendency....

“When the BT was told by the SL they had to leave, they proceeded to do this only verbally protesting the political exclusion. The SL’s goon squad, however, apparently in a hurry to get them out of the room, began to push the supporters of the BT toward the exit. We clearly saw that the goon squad began the manhandling of the BT as they protested. Upon reaching the exit a female BT supporter was pushed to the floor and another supporter, Howard Keylor, [a long-time union militant then in his 60s—ed.] was pushed and thrown from the room onto his back. At this point, the BT began to defend itself.

“....Arriving outside the room we saw that the SL goons were savagely attacking two BT supporters: Bill S.—who was being kicked while he was on the floor; and Howard Keylor, who was getting his head banged against a bench by the goons. One of our female supporters came to the defense of Howard and was herself punched in the back, lifted off the floor, and thrown toward another of our supporters.”

In the introduction to our 1987 “SL truth kit” we speculated that the attack had not been planned by the SL:

“We rather doubt that the SL leadership intended their ‘ushers’ to go quite so far as they did. They were probably only supposed to rough us up—a little provocative, low-grade physical violence of the sort they have engaged in before. Had the SL leadership planned such an extremely violent assault in advance it would probably not have taken place with so many witnesses around. But whatever their original intent the SL tops decided to brazen it out with a big lie. In doing this the SL leadership assumes full responsibility for the despicable, anti-Marxist hooliganism of their thugs.

“Hand in hand with the violence goes the slanderous charge that BTers are ‘provocateurs’ who seek ‘to bring the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state into play against’ the SL. This is a serious charge which, in its own way, is as much a breach of proletarian morality as the original attack.”

ii) The second incident referred to was addressed in *1917* No. 3:

“In a follow-up item *WV* devoted a full page article in its 5 December 1986 issue to the fact that we chose not to attend the next SL event in Berkeley. We had, in fact, planned to attend and asked a variety of left organizations to send observers with us in the hope that the presence of independent witnesses would forestall more SL

gangsterism. Representatives from the Revolutionary Workers League, Workers Socialist League and Chile Solidarity Network as well as several unaffiliated leftists agreed to accompany us. So on 21 November, equipped only with newspapers, pencils and notebooks, we went to the SL meeting for a political debate.

“When we finally found the hall (the location had been changed at the last minute for ‘security’ reasons), we didn’t much like the look of it. It was a church basement in a semi-deserted middle class neighborhood with the only access down a narrow flight of concrete stairs. A knot of SL goons stood at the top of the stairs brandishing heavy police flashlights while more lurked at the bottom inside the door. We don’t know what they had in mind, but it looked like it might have been more than political debate. Given the SL’s increasingly erratic and violent behavior and their obsessive and fanatical hatred of the BT, we decided that it wasn’t worth risking serious injury to find out. So we went home.”

We drew the following political conclusion:

“Political differences among leftists must be dealt with *politically*. If a particular organization resorts to slander or falsification, the appropriate response is political exposure, not suppression. Invariably in the history of the workers movement, exclusions, physical suppression of opposing points of view and slander have been the weapons of reformists and bureaucrats against Marxists. This is not accidental, for they are the means of *destroying consciousness* and avoiding political debate.”

As we noted in our 1987 SL “truth kit”:

“The SL’s campaign of slander and provocations against the BT/ET have gone hand in hand with a refusal to engage in open political debate. The whole point of the SL’s tactics has been to harden up their members and supporters to *prevent* a political reckoning with the ET/BT.”

iii) The final incident referred to in fact took place in February (rather than October) 1987, when Howard Keylor approached the podium of an SL-sponsored rally for Geronimo Pratt to ask if it would be possible for us to have a speaker. The SL responded by shoving Howard off the platform and then bragging about it in a article entitled “BT Provocation Lands in the Mud” (WV No. 423, 6 March 1987). After this initial response the SL informed us that if we wished to speak at their rally we had to endorse the event (which we of course did). When our comrade Ursula asked to purchase a Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) pamphlet on the Pratt case a young SLer told her that she would have to make a donation to the defense case. Ursula promptly donated \$20 and asked for a receipt which the SLer went off to get. Before long he came back with SL honcho Joan P. who demonstratively returned the money and loudly announced that the PDC did not want our money. The “insulting \$1 donation” is another invention by the SL—although Joan P. did state at the time that they would not want a single dollar from us. (At this point the SL was making a point of refusing donations from us. In June 1986 they had returned a check we sent for the defense of Guillermo Bermudez, one of their youth who had been charged by police on campus).

We have participated in activities in defense of Geronimo Pratt. We have not (yet) published an article on his case (or on those of scores of other class-war prisoners in the U.S. and around the world.) There are also many other important questions that we have not (yet) been able to publish articles on. So what? As our journalistic capacity and financial resources increase, we will cover a wider variety of topics. We recall that similar considerations prevented *Spartacist* from publishing any major articles about police attacks on the Black Panthers in the late 1960s.

What Makes the BT Tick? Anti-Sovietism...

From their inception, the BT claimed to hold many positions in common with us. For example, they too raised the slogan "Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution in Poland!" But when the question of stopping Solidarność was most urgently posed, they went crazy over our statement that if the Kremlin Stalinists intervened militarily, in their necessarily stupid and brutal way, that we would support this and take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities they might commit. The Trotskyist position of unconditional military defense of the deformed and degenerated workers states meant exactly that, i.e. no conditions. For the BT, this was simply further evidence of our supposed "Stalinophilia."

No. 18

This paragraph is a Stalinophilic perversion of the Trotskyist position of unconditional military defense of the bureaucratized workers' states. As we noted in *ETB* No. 1:

"Trotskyists give unconditional *military* support to Stalinist regimes battling internal counterrevolution (i.e., Solidarność) or external capitalist forces (i.e., Finland 1940). This is quite a different matter than extending *political* support to the Stalinists. We take *no* responsibility for the crimes of the Stalinists against the working people—whether in the course of military defense of proletarian property forms or otherwise. Military support is extended *despite* such crimes."

The SL's willingness to "take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities they [the Stalinists] might commit" is precisely the opposite of the position put forward by Leon Trotsky in the context of the defense of the USSR against Nazi Germany in World War Two:

"While arms in hand they deal blows to Hitler, the Bolshevik-Leninists will at the same time conduct revolutionary propaganda against Stalin preparing his overthrow at the next and perhaps very near stage.

"This kind of 'defense of the USSR' will naturally differ, as heaven does from earth, from the official defense which is now being conducted under the slogan: 'For the Fatherland! For Stalin!' *Our* defense of the USSR is carried out under the slogan 'For Socialism! For the World Revolution!' 'Against Stalin!'"

—*In Defense of Marxism*, (emphasis in original)

The slogan "Against Stalin!" signified that instead of "taking responsibility" for the anti-working class crimes of the bureaucrats, the Fourth International *opposed* the atrocities committed by Stalin and the caste he represented.

In a similar vein, they howled at a statement printed in *Workers Vanguard* following the sudden death of the then-head of the USSR, Yuri Andropov, which read in toto: "He sought to curb the worst excesses of the bureaucracy. He sought to increase the productivity of the Soviet masses. He made no overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism. He was no friend of freedom." The BT condemned this rather balanced assessment as a Stalinophilic "eulogy." That the BT took such offense at this statement was simply another reflection of their own capitulation to Cold War anti-Sovietism. While they put forward positions that were a distorted mirror of our own on the Russian question, not only we but the whole anti-Soviet popular-front left knew that the BT wasn't serious (this was evidenced by the fact that the BT was welcome at rad-lib protests, meetings and rallies from which the Spartacist League was regularly excluded).

No. 19

The origin of our rather extensive exchanges over Yuri Andropov (see *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 1) was the SL leadership's decision to name one of their contingents in a 1982 anti-fascist demonstration in Washington D.C. the "Yuri Andropov Battalion." As we noted in our original letter (13 December 1982) on the subject, "On the most general level Andropov and the bureaucrats he represents are counterposed to everything that Trotsky fought for." We reminded the SL that "One of the fundamentals of Trotskyism is that the effective defense of the Soviet Union is inextricably linked to the necessity of proletarian political revolution against Andropov and his caste...."

When Andropov died, and WV ran a black-bordered obituary with his picture on its front page, we commented:

"We note that Andropov scored a 75% approval rating in his 'in memoriam' box in WV No. 348. Three out of four ain't bad. But we don't rate him so highly. Andropov's failure to make any 'overt betrayals on behalf of imperialism' can properly be attributed to his short tenure in office. He certainly didn't send any more MiGs to Nicaragua or AK-47s to the Salvadoran leftists than his predecessor. He did want to raise productivity—but big deal, so did Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. (In any case, Trotskyists must view any productivity schemes devised by the bureaucracy sceptically since they usually have an anti-working class character. Trotsky was no endorser of Stakhanovism!) Any sensible top-ranking bureaucrat is going to be interested in curbing 'the worst excesses of the bureaucracy' in order to increase the efficiency, security and stability of the regime he runs. Your little homily for Andropov focuses on his subjective intentions rather than the objective inevitability, and even necessity, of corruption and inefficiency in a planned economy run by bureaucratic fiat and secret police. You take a semi-Deutscherite approach and, it would appear, arrive at semi-Deutscherite conclusions.

"The working class lost nothing when Yuri Andropov died. Regrettably his career as a Stalinist bureaucrat was terminated by kidney disease rather than by an insurgent Soviet working class determined to smash the rule of the Brezhnevs, Chernenkos and Andropovs and to return to the path of Lenin and Trotsky."

—letter to the SL, 22 April 1984, reprinted in *ETB* No. 3

During his time as head of the KGB, Andropov vigorously suppressed political life in the USSR. *Workers Vanguard* of 13 February 1976 ran an article entitled "Stop Stalinist 'Psychiatric' Torture in USSR!" The then-revolutionary SL had no difficulty denouncing "the repulsive atrocities of the Russian bureaucracy."

Earlier in his career, in 1956, Andropov played a key role in the repression of the Hungarian workers' movement, a point we made to the SL in our April 1984 letter. We quoted Bill Lomax, an authority on the Hungarian uprising:

“Lomax observes that: ‘In the first months of direct military suppression of the revolution, Andropov was effectively the Soviet overlord of Hungary...It was in this period that the last remnants of armed resistance were wiped out, the workers’ and intellectuals’ organizations crushed, and tens of thousands of Hungarians arrested and interned....’ This is a powerful indictment of the decision by the leadership of the SL/US to besmirch its Trotskyist heritage by association with this unlamented Stalinist bureaucrat.”

Finally, while we have ourselves often been subject to political exclusions by various pseudo-leftists (as has the SL), one reason the SL is particularly unpopular is because, in Alexander Cockburn’s memorable phrase, they frequently act “like assholes.” We uphold the traditions of workers’ democracy and have consistently opposed the exclusion of the SL (or any other left group) from events in the workers’ movement.

In an early polemic against the then-External Tendency, we noted: “If the ET were more honest, they would admit that they hated it when we hailed the Soviet Red Army’s military intervention in Afghanistan” (see “The ‘External Tendency’: From Cream Puffs to Food Poisoning,” WV No. 349, 2 March 1984). Four years later, they finally openly renounced and denounced our call, “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” arguing that it was “not a Trotskyist slogan, because what it tells workers is to trust the Stalinists, put your faith in the Stalinists, hail the Stalinists.”

On the contrary, our hailing of the Soviet Army intervention was based on the recognition that, whatever the intentions of the venal bureaucrats in the Kremlin, this military action offered the possibility of extending the gains of the October Revolution to Afghanistan. Many Soviet soldiers saw themselves as fulfilling their internationalist duty in fighting to defeat the imperialist-financed forces of Islamic reaction. But for such internationalism to have been fulfilled required, as we pointed out, a political revolution to oust the Kremlin Stalinists and a return to the proletarian internationalist program of Lenin and Trotsky’s Bolshevik Party.

Nos. 20-21

One would hardly guess from reading the SL’s polemic that we proposed to substitute the slogan “Military Victory to the Soviet Army!” in Afghanistan for the SL’s call to “Hail Red Army!” Only occasionally, in the fine print, did the SL mention the need for a political revolution to oust the “venal bureaucrats in the Kremlin” (including, presumably, Yuri Andropov!) For the first few years of its existence, the External Tendency of the iSt embraced the slogan “Hail Red Army” as an emphatic declaration of which side we were on in the conflict. With our subsequent correction, we maintained our position of military support to the Soviets and their Afghan allies against the reactionary, CIA-backed *mujahedin*, while sharpening the formulation used to convey it. We explained our reasoning in an article entitled “Bending the Stick Too Far...On the Slogan ‘Hail Red Army!’”:

“The trouble with the slogan ‘Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!’ is that it failed to distinguish between political and military support. The Soviet army (which has not officially been called the ‘Red Army’ since 1946) is the military arm of the Kremlin bureaucracy. The army’s policies are those of the bureaucracy. Its role is therefore a contradictory one, like that of the bureaucracy itself. Insofar as the Russian army defends the Soviet Union against imperialism (and this was indeed its purpose in going into Afghanistan), we are on its side militarily. If it sweeps away oppressive social structures and replaces them with collectivized property in the areas under its control (and this was undoubtedly *one possibility* of the Russian intervention), we will support such measures. But to support the Soviet army uncritically (i.e., to ‘hail’ it) would put us in the position of having to apologize for the Stalinists when they

accommodate themselves to the social *status quo* or undertake a cowardly retreat. And, not surprisingly, this is exactly what they have done in Afghanistan.

“...the SL advanced this deliberately angular formulation in the face of a wave of anti-Sovietism which was sweeping America. Commendable as this impulse may have been, there is no getting around the fact that taken literally and by itself, the slogan amounts to a blanket political endorsement of the Soviet role in Afghanistan.

“...The call for ‘Military Victory to the Soviet Army’ corresponded to the concrete situation in Afghanistan because it placed us squarely on the Soviet side of the battle lines without assuming any responsibility for Stalinist betrayals.”

—1917 No. 5

In a subsequent polemic, the SL sought to defend its position by claiming that the Trotskyists had “hailed” the Soviet military during World War Two. We replied in 1917 No. 7:

“The question of ‘hailing’ the Stalinist military came up in 1939 during the historic faction fight in the Socialist Workers Party against the revisionist opposition, led by Max Shachtman, which no longer wished to defend the USSR. Shachtman had a different agenda than the contemporary SL, but he shared their interest in blurring the line between political and military support to the USSR in conflicts with capitalist states. Thus he facetiously asked: if the USSR remained a workers state, ‘why does not the majority propose to hail the advance of the Red Army into Poland....’ as revolutionaries had in Lenin’s day. In response Trotsky explained quite clearly why the Fourth International did not propose to hail Stalin’s Red Army:

“‘This newness in the situation [as compared to 1920] is the bankruptcy of the Third International, the degeneracy of the Soviet state, the development of the Left Opposition, and the creation of the Fourth International....And these events explain sufficiently why we have radically changed our position toward the politics of the Kremlin, including its military politics.’”

—*In Defense of Marxism*

In its polemics against us on this question, the SL claimed that, by calling for “military victory to” rather than “hailing” the Soviet intervention, we were heading straight to the Third Camp. We responded in a letter dated 8 April 1988 proposing “a public debate on this question—in either New York or Toronto—at the earliest mutually convenient date.” But the SL showed no interest. They were well aware that the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan underlined the problems with “hailing” Brezhnev’s intervention in the first place.

The 1989 Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan—ordered in the name of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism—was the opening step in the capitalist counterrevolution that would engulf the Soviet Union a few years later. Eager to get rid of the nagging “Russian question” and any nominal claim to being Soviet defensists, at the time of Yeltsin’s August 1991 counter coup the BT rushed to proclaim that the Soviet degenerated workers state had been destroyed. They happily wrote off in advance (but only from afar and certainly not in Russian) any possibility that decisive working-class resistance could have swept away Yeltsin and his supporters and opened the road to a political revolution against the entire panoply of bureaucratic Stalinist fakers who were busy selling out the country wholesale to the capitalists.

While recognizing that the state power had been decisively fractured by the August events, the ICL looked to spark working-class action in defense of collectivized property. We distributed tens of thousands of copies of our leaflet “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution” throughout the Soviet Union. It was only when it was clear that the working class was not going to move against Yeltsin, who was rapidly consolidating a capitalist state apparatus, that we recognized that the Soviet workers state had been definitively destroyed.

Nos. 22-23

The SL charges that our recognition *at the time* of the significance of Yeltsin’s victory over Yanayev and his decrepit Stalinist coupists was a result of our “Eager[ness] to get rid of the nagging ‘Russian question’ and any claim to be nominal defensists.” But this hardly explains why the imperialist chieftains, the Soviet military cadres and most of the rest of the world drew the same conclusions we did regarding the significance of the aborted coup.

We were not “happy” to “write off” the Soviet degenerated workers’ state; but, as Trotsky said, Marxists have to “face reality squarely” and to “speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be.” And we did. In our September 1991 statement on Yeltsin’s victory (entitled “Defend Soviet Workers Against Yeltsin’s Attacks—Counterrevolution Triumphs in USSR”), we observed:

“The victory of the openly procapitalist current around Boris Yeltsin after the coup collapsed shattered the state power created by the October 1917 revolution. This represents a catastrophic defeat not only for the Soviet working class, but for workers everywhere.”

“The momentum toward capitalist restoration had been building in the Soviet Union for the past several years. All available evidence leads us to conclude that the defeat of the coup and the ascension to power of the elements committed to reconstructing the economy on a capitalist basis constituted a qualitative turning point.”

We also remarked:

“All is by no means lost for the working class of the Soviet Union. The procapitalist governments that have hoisted themselves into the saddle are still extremely fragile, and have not yet consolidated their own repressive state apparatuses. Most of the economy remains in state hands, and the Yeltsinites face the formidable task of restoring capitalism without the support of an indigenous capitalist class. Workers resistance to the impending attacks on their rights and welfare will therefore involve a defense of large elements of the social/economic status quo. The embryonic bourgeois regimes now forming in the ex-USSR can be swept aside much more easily than mature capitalist states.

“None of this, however, can change the fact that the workers will now be forced to

fight on a terrain fundamentally altered to their disadvantage. They have not yet constituted themselves as an independent political force, and remain extremely disoriented. The Stalinist apparatus—which had an objective interest in maintaining collectivized property—has been shattered. Further resistance by the Stalinists is unlikely, since they have already failed a decisive political test, and those cadre who attempted to resist are now in forced retirement, in jail or dead. In short, the major organized obstacle to the consolidation of a bourgeois state has been effectively removed. Before the coup, massive working-class resistance to privatization would have split the Stalinist bureaucracy and their armed defenders. Now workers struggling to reverse the restorationist drive will face ‘bodies of armed men’ dedicated to the objectives of Western capitalists and their internal allies. This incipient state power must be disarmed and destroyed by the workers.”

By contrast, the SL said the Soviet workers’ state had been “decisively fractured,” but still survived. This resulted in a headline in the Autumn 1992 issue of *Australasian Spartacist* that read: “USSR Hangs in the Balance.”

A young IBT supporter, who was a member of the ICL at the time of the coup, pointed out in an open letter to the SL (reprinted in *1917* No. 16) that, “more than three years since August 1991, the SL still can’t say when the USSR ceased to exist as a workers’ state.” He went on to put his finger on the methodological problem with the SL’s position:

“The SL writes that Yeltsin carried out a ‘piecemeal consolidation of a capitalist state’ (WV No. 564). In practice that could mean that Russia was 80% a workers’ state and 20% a capitalist state, then 40% a workers’ state and 60% a capitalist state, etc. This is ridiculous! Revolution and counterrevolution are not piecemeal processes. To say they are goes against the Marxist teachings on the state. Only one class can hold state power at any one time, the working class or the capitalist class....

“Is the SL now implying that...the USSR under Yeltsin was initially a workers’ state with a bourgeois government, which was gradually transformed into a bourgeois state at some unknown later point?

“If, as the SL says, program generates theory, what program could have generated the theory of ‘piecemeal’ counterrevolution in the USSR? Trotsky would have denounced this as ‘reformism in reverse.’ The answer is in August 1991, when counterrevolution really triumphed, the SL abstained from the showdown between Yeltsin and the Stalinist coup makers, i.e., did not support either side militarily....What makes it so difficult for the SL to admit to being wrong is the fact that one of their main competitors in the workers’ movement, the International Bolshevik Tendency, was right in siding with the Stalinist coup in defense of the gains of October, and recognizing its defeat as the death of the Soviet workers’ state.”

In adopting a fighting posture for the proletarian vanguard in the period following Yeltsin's coup, we were following the methodology of Trotsky's Fourth International in the early months of 1933, after Hitler had been appointed chancellor of Germany. Far from proclaiming, "All is lost," the FI geared up for a campaign of international support to the expected proletarian resistance to Hitler in power. Trotsky later explained the necessity for this fighting perspective:

"The complete absence of resistance on the part of the German workers has provoked certain troubles within our own ranks. We expected that the onward march of the fascist danger would surmount not only the perfidious policy of the reformists but also the ultimatist sabotage of the Stalinists. These hopes were not confirmed. Were our expectations false? This question cannot be put in such a formal manner. We were *obliged* to proceed from a course based upon resistance and to do all in our power for its realization. To acknowledge a priori the impossibility of resistance would have meant not to push the proletariat forward but to introduce a supplementary demoralizing element."

—Trotsky, "Germany and the USSR," 17 March 1933, in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*

No. 24

The SL's insistence that Yeltsin headed a workers' state during his first year in power has nothing in common with Trotsky's anticipation of resistance to Hitler's ascension to power. In fact, the ICL leadership's refusal to acknowledge the truth about Yeltsin's victory (and its condemnation of those who did) closely paralleled the response of the Stalinists to the German disaster:

"There is no need to recall the insults that were thrown at us by the Stalinists in all countries. *L'Humanité*, even after Hitler's definitive victory, kept saying in issue after issue: 'There has been no defeat in Germany'; 'Only renegades will talk about defeat'....There is nothing surprising in the fact that this criminal bombast in the face of the greatest of historical catastrophes has still further demoralized the other sections of the Communist International: an organization that has lost the capacity of learning from its own defeats is irrevocably condemned."

—Leon Trotsky, "Once Again, Whither France?", 28 March 1935

Trotsky did not deny that Hitler had taken power—he recognized that it was a momentous, but not irreversible, victory for the counterrevolution. Accordingly he called for a working-class counteroffensive. This is exactly the stance we took in relation to Yeltsin's victory over the CPSU "hardliners":

"Yeltsin's hold on power is fragile, but this does not change the fact that Yeltsin and his republican counterparts are using their newly acquired power to unleash a social counterrevolution. Imperialism, perestroika millionaires and the black-market mafia now call the shots in the Kremlin. Many former Stalinist bureaucrats are appropriating huge chunks of state property. Yeltsin's men hold the top military positions....A year ago Gosplan was still issuing planning directives and joint military-police patrols were on the streets harassing black-market speculators, and arresting and confiscating the property of perestroika profiteers. Now Gosplan is no more and profiteers and millionaires are in the saddle.

"The social counterrevolution is far from fully consolidated, but it is victorious. A resurgent proletariat struggling for power would face far less resistance today in Russia than it would in a mature capitalist state."

—1917 No. 11

The IBT attempts to dress up its defeatism in August 1991 by declaring military support for the Stalinist coup plotters—a ludicrous position since the coup plotters, who were just as committed to capitalist restoration as Yeltsin, were not about to undertake the kind of political and military mobilization required to mount a serious opposition. In any case, the BT's position that "it's all over," if propagated in the Soviet Union at the time, could only have had the effect of *demoralizing and paralyzing* any nascent proletarian opposition to Yeltsin's takeover.

No. 25

We took sides in August 1991—with the Stalinists, against the Yeltsinites. The SL, which claimed to be the party of the Russian Revolution, didn't support the victory of *either*—which amounts to being neutral. The SL is uncomfortable with this characterization, but the political logic of it is contained in their contention that:

"military support for the Stalinist coup plotters [is] a ludicrous position since *the coup plotters, who were just as committed to capitalist restoration as Yeltsin*, were not about to undertake the kind of political and military mobilization required to mount a serious opposition."

—emphasis added

All the contradictions of the SL position are contained in the above passage. If in fact the Yanayevites were "just as committed to capitalist restoration as Yeltsin," then why should Trotskyists care about whether or not they undertook a political and military mobilization? If the Stalinist bureaucrats (including the heads of the KGB and the military) had been "just as committed" to capitalist restoration as the CIA's friends gathered around Yeltsin in the Russian White House, then there would indeed have been nothing of great importance at stake in August 1991. Yet, if one asserts that Yanayev et al were "just as committed to capitalist restoration" as Yeltsin, then it follows that at some point prior to 19 August 1991 the CPSU bureaucracy had been transformed into a formation that was counterrevolutionary through and through and to the core.

If Yeltsin's triumph was merely a victory of one gang of counterrevolutionaries over another, if by 19 August 1991 the social counterrevolution had *already* taken place, then the coup and counter-coup were merely squabbles over the spoils. Yet such a position would conflict with the SL's equally absurd assertion that Yeltsin, the historic leader of capitalist counterrevolution, presided over a workers' state for over a year, until, at some undisclosed point in the latter half of 1992, Jim Robertson decided that "it was clear that the working class was not going to move against Yeltsin." If Yeltsin's successful countercoup opened the "floodgates of counterrevolution," as WV asserted, then the SL *should* have taken sides. (See the extensive polemics on this question in 1917 Nos 11 and 12.)

In our September 1991 statement, after noting the political bankruptcy of the coup leaders, we commented:

"But the Trotskyist position of unconditional defense of the Soviet Union always meant defense of the system of collectivized property against restorationist threats *regardless of the consciousness or subjective intentions* of the bureaucrats. The status quo the 'hardliners' sought to protect, however incompetently, included the state ownership of the means of production—an objective barrier to the return of capitalist wage slavery."

This is why Trotskyists were *not* neutral in the confrontation between the Stalinist apparatus and the Yeltsinites.

At bottom, the IBT's position reflected complete defeatism over the capacity of the Soviet working class to struggle. They had an identical posture toward the nascent political revolution in the former East German deformed workers state following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, i.e. they declared that there was no possibility of a proletarian political revolution. Correspondingly, they denounced the ICL for mobilizing our resources heavily and internationally to intervene with a revolutionary Trotskyist program into the events in the former East German workers state in 1989-90. Their founding statement even claims that our intervention in the DDR "made it obvious that the ICL could not be considered a revolutionary organization, but rather an obstacle to revolution."

No. 26

For comprehensive comments on the events in the DDR see *1917* Nos. 8 and 10. In a January 1990 special German-language *1917* supplement we asserted:

"At the moment what exists is a political vacuum in the DDR. Unless workers councils are organized and establish their own organs of administration this vacuum will shortly be filled to the disadvantage of the working class through a newly elected or appointed Volkskammer [DDR parliament].

Our March 1990 statement critically supporting the ICL candidates in the DDR elections noted that:

"the SpAD/ICL's assertion that the DDR today is in the midst of a proletarian political revolution is simply false....We urgently hope that the workers of the DDR take the road of proletarian political revolution—but it does no good to mistake our subjective desires for reality."

—translated in *1917* No. 8

Our comment that the ICL's DDR intervention "made it obvious that the ICL...[is] an obstacle to revolution" came as a conclusion to the following passage:

"The ICL's activity in the crisis of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in late 1989 and early 1990 sharply revealed the fundamental nature of the Spartacist operation. With prodigious infusions of members and cash, the Spartacists founded a new German section, the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands, which briefly made significant gains. These were soon squandered as a result of heavy-handed interventions from New York. Moreover, the Spartacist intervention was badly flawed by political adaptation to sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and by the absurd claim that the DDR was in the midst of a 'workers political revolution.'"

—*1917* No. 9

Any small propaganda group in a situation like the one in the DDR in January 1990 would have serious difficulties making headway. But the ICL's fundamental problems flowed from the particular character of its leadership: bureaucratic, hyper-centralized and anxious to find a short cut to the big time through some sort of accommodation with a section of the Stalinist apparatus. While there is no question that the ICL cadres subjectively wanted to see a political revolution, and worked as energetically as they could to bring about the conditions for one, the leadership demonstrated in practice that the ICL is indeed a centrist obstacle to revolution, not a revolutionary formation.

That the restoration of capitalism in the DDR and the Soviet Union—and indeed throughout East Europe—was accomplished without a civil war was above all conditioned by the lack of an active, authoritative proletarian pole fighting to defend collectivized property. But the lack of such a pole was neither necessary nor inevitable. In both Germany and the USSR the ICL had forces active on the ground. We did not prejudge what would be the outcome of our efforts to forge the party and leadership required to defend the workers states and open the road to the political revolution necessary to replace the discredited Stalinist bureaucratic caste with genuine organs of working-class democracy.

But in both cases the BT did prejudge—proletarian political revolution was impossible—and so, in the aftermath, they are forced to deny reality. In the case of the DDR they deny that there was any chance that the profound social crisis which wracked the country from October 1989 through March 1990—accompanied in the beginning by mass demonstrations demanding both the defense of “socialism” and reform of the ruling Stalinist party—could have resulted in anything but capitalist counterrevolution. In the case of the USSR, they claim that the spineless Stalinist coup plotters actually led a credible fight against capitalist counterrevolution. What unites these two positions is a denial that the intervention of Trotskyists could have been a decisive factor in bringing about a different outcome. What a profound negation of the very basis for the Fourth International: “The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.”

Nos. 27-28

Here the ICL utilizes one of its favorite polemical techniques—ascribing a position to an opponent and then attacking the invention. We certainly did not argue that proletarian political revolution was *impossible* in the DDR—simply that, contrary to the ICL’s assertions, it was not *under way*. “In the aftermath” it has been the ICL, not ourselves, that has had to adjust its position. It is easy to understand why the ICL’s “optimistic” position with regard to the DDR proletarian political revolution is one they would prefer to bury quietly.

In the case of the August 1991 confrontation in Moscow, we simply asserted that the Stalinist coupists were a lesser evil—and that they *opposed* the Yeltsinites, however incompetently. The necessary posture for revolutionaries in the last days of the Soviet workers’ state was therefore one of a military bloc with the Stalinist remnants against the open restorationists in the imperialist-backed Yeltsin camp. Again the ICL attempts to rewrite our position: we have never claimed that Yanayev et al “actually led a credible fight against capitalist restoration,” merely that they favored the preservation of the status quo as against the social counterrevolution represented by the Yeltsinites. The Trotskyist position of *unconditional* defense of the USSR does not depend on the “credibility” of the forces ranged in opposition to capitalist restoration.

The intervention of Trotskyists with roots in a section of the proletariat *could* indeed have been decisive in both the DDR and the USSR—but only if they had been able to approximate a correct assessment of the objective situation and advance an appropriate programmatic response. A pseudo-Trotskyist formation which intervened on the basis of wishful thinking (as the ICL did in the DDR), or waited to gauge the military “credibility” of its allies before taking sides (as the ICL did in Moscow in August 1991), could *not* have been a decisive factor, however serious and hard-working its cadres.

An Unnatural Obsession with the Spartacist League

One would have expected that an organization whose political appetites and aims were increasingly clearly divergent from our own would have simply gone off to “do its own thing.” But *to this day* the IBT has remained unnaturally and schizophrenically obsessed with the Spartacist tendency. Sometimes the IBT claims in their publications that the ICL is terminally “Stalinophilic.” At other times the IBT emphasizes the political positions they claim to hold in common with us and assert that the ICL has a formally “correct” paper program. Sometimes the IBT tries to reconcile the two positions, as in the formulation (contained in No. 14 of their journal *1917*, dated 1994) that the ICL is “a formerly revolutionary organization that was transformed by degrees into a highly bureaucratized and hyper-centralist obedience cult, marked by capacity for erratic programmatic deviations.” The only constant is the slander that we are some kind of violent, deranged organization, “Jimstown.”

No. 29

The SL’s complaint that the IBT has not “simply gone off to ‘do its own thing’” seems a bit peculiar coming from an organization well known for its aggressive polemics against opponents on the left. We continue to pay attention to the SL, despite its non-revolutionary character, because it remains capable of attracting revolutionary-minded people. It is perhaps noteworthy that this, the first “ICL Pamphlet” ever produced, is entirely devoted to our organization. And, as the advertisements contained within the pamphlet clearly show, this is only the latest in a long series of polemics. The SL has devoted more attention to us than any other group, yet it persistently refuses to engage us in public debate.

The SL’s polemicists complain that we are not merely obsessed, but “*schizophrenically* obsessed” with them. They also claim that our characterization of them fluctuates wildly. In fact it has only changed in accordance with the magnitude of the SL’s departures from revolutionary Trotskyism. The initial 1982 “Declaration of an external tendency of the iSt” (a document which the IBT stands on) began:

“The SL/US-iSt today is an organization with a profound contradiction. It is a degenerating, but still revolutionary organization which is nonetheless the only contemporary organizational embodiment of the program of Bolshevism....Yet while the SL’s program remains revolutionary, its leadership collective increasingly exhibits hyper-centralist, paranoid and personalist characteristics.”

The document concluded with the observation that the SL:

“is neither a cult nor a sect (although it increasingly manifests some of the attributes of both) because its membership remains centrally defined by adherence to the program of revolutionary Marxism....At the same time the SL/US-iSt is a revolutionary organization which is degenerating and the process of degeneration appears to be gaining momentum.”

We were successful in regrouping some former iSt/ICL cadres, as well as winning the sympathy of wider circles in the SL’s milieu. As the SL engaged in an escalating series of overt departures from its Trotskyist history, we were forced to conclude that the SL was finished as any kind of revolutionary organization. In the fourth (and final) issue of the *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*, we traced the SL leadership’s “gradual molecular transformation of their organization into an obedience cult” which, “while remaining formally ‘orthodox’ on a wide range of historically derived political questions,” had decisively broken from its revolutionary past.

Contrary to their assertions, we have never characterized the SL/ICL as simply, or even essentially, “Stalinophilic.” Over the years we sharply criticized a range of Stalinophilic deviations (e.g., “hailing” Brezhnev’s Afghan policy and parading around as the “Yuri

Andropov Brigade”). But we also criticized their cowardly flinches from Soviet defensism. This was exemplified during the imperialist hysteria over the downing of the South Korean airliner KAL 007. When the Soviet military terminated this apparent spy-flight over its territory in September 1983, *Workers Vanguard* (9 September 1983) proclaimed that if the Soviets had known that there were civilian passengers on board then, “despite the potential military damage of such an apparent spying mission,” shooting it down would have been “worse than a barbaric atrocity” (see *ETB* No. 2).

A few years later, in January 1986, the U.S. government launched the space shuttle *Challenger* to deploy a major new spy satellite aimed primarily at the Soviet Union. When the *Challenger* spontaneously aborted, the SL volunteered that “what we feel toward the astronauts [i.e., the military personnel and technical specialists who were to set up the military hardware] is no more and no less than for any people who die in tragic circumstances, such as the nine poor Salvadorans who were killed by a fire in a Washington D.C. basement apartment two days before.” To our way of thinking, there is something self-evidently wrong with “revolutionary communists” who feel the same about the fate of impoverished refugees from rightist terror and a bunch of Reaganaut Cold Warriors on a Star Wars mission (see *1917*, No. 2).

In “The Road to Jimstown,” we commented that the flinch on the KAL 007 was:

“far closer to State Department socialism than Stalinophilia and illustrated that in breaking with its revolutionary past, the SL had become profoundly unstable politically. Such erratic programmatic gyrations in response to immediately perceived interests are characteristic of political banditry—a peculiar and particularly cynical form of centrism.”

That has remained our characterization of the iSt/ICL, and corresponds precisely to the position quoted from *1917* No. 14. The SL tacks on the gratuitous lie that: “The only constant is the slander that we are some kind of violent, deranged organization, ‘Jimstown.’” We do not consider the SL to be, in general, a violent organization. Nor, for that matter, do we consider other groups in the workers’ movement to be “violent, deranged organizations.” The SL, like various other left groups, has at times engaged in unprincipled attacks on its political opponents—ranging from slander to cop-baiting to, on occasion, strong-arm tactics.

In its political schizophrenia toward us—on the one hand we have major programmatic differences, on the other we have no differences—the IBT reveals everything about itself. For the IBT defies political definition, at least as understood by the traditions of the Marxist movement. If they have a counterposed political program to our own, then they should struggle to win our members to their organization based on that political counterposition. If they fundamentally share the same political program with the ICL then why do they exist? If their only *raison d’être* is their (lying) claim that they were wrongly expelled or otherwise driven out of our organization, then they would presumably seek to convince the ranks of the ICL that such was the case by demonstrating that they fundamentally share our political program through participation in the major campaigns of our organization.

No. 30

While the SL claims that we defy political description, there is in fact a very close analogy between our polemics against the Robertsonians and the attempts by the early SL to unmask the cynical pseudo-Trotskyism of Gerry Healy’s political-bandit operation. In its attempts to avoid seriously confronting our criticisms, the ICL/SL has periodically thrown a barrage of Stalinist-style slander at the IBT and its predecessors. (See for example “ET: New Name, Same Game?” [WV No. 388, 4 October 1985], and “Garbage Doesn’t Walk by Itself—What Makes BT Run?” [WV No. 428, 15 May 1987]).

The SL polemicists feign confusion about whether or not we “fundamentally share” the same program with them when it is abundantly clear from the polemics between us that, on a whole range of important political questions, we have sharply divergent views. For over ten years we have been absolutely unambiguous that the SL is in *no sense* a revolutionary organization, but rather a political-bandit operation qualitatively similar to Gerry Healy’s Socialist Labour League of the late 1960s.

While the SL remains quite capable of enunciating formally correct positions on a wide variety of issues, we do not consider that “the ICL has a formally ‘correct’ paper program.” The only programmatic position that really counts in Jimstown is complete obedience to the whims of the infallible leader. Sometimes this has meant defending the USSR and opposing the U.S. military, and sometimes it has meant the opposite.

But such is not the case. On the contrary, since its inception the IBT has reviled virtually every major campaign of our organization internationally—a fact which hardly endears them to our membership. The whole profile of the BT is that of an organization defined by anti-Spartacism, whose mission in life is to dirty our good name and seek to sterilize our efforts.

No. 31

The SL has made this cynical accusation periodically in the past. In fact we have participated in, endorsed and materially supported a range of SL-initiated activities, just as we have participated, on a similar basis, in campaigns organized by other left groups in defense of abortion clinics, against fascists or in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal and other victims of repression by the capitalist state.

When the SL first advanced this brazen lie (WV No. 349, 2 March 1984), we responded promptly with a letter dated 12 March 1984 (reprinted in *ETB* No. 3):

“In the past period we have stood side by side with you physically and financially against the attacks of your sworn enemies. We joined your San Francisco demonstration against Deukmejian, endorsed and contributed to the anti-Moonie suit and our supporters in the ILWU aggressively defended [SL supporter] Stan against the bureaucrats’ witchhunt last year. We have participated in numerous Bay Area demonstrations and court-room appearances in defense of Lauren and Ray [victimized SL phoneworker supporters]. A trade-union supporter of ours in Ohio obtained the endorsement and a \$100 donation from his local for the two trade unionists. In Canada, our comrades actively built the defense rally for Paul and Mike [anti-fascist iSt supporters], poster and leafletting with the comrades of the TLC [Trotskyist League of Canada]. One of our supporters also managed to get his union local to endorse and send a \$50 donation for the campaign.”

In *ETB* No. 3 (May 1984) we reproduced WV’s charge that:

“whenever our party is out front...and the target of the combined hostility of the capitalist state and the reformist ‘left,’ then does the ET show at best indifference to our survival and often an active appetite to see us go down.”

Beside this we printed photostatic copies of four checks we had sent to various iSt defense campaigns in the six months preceding the publication of this slander. Defending the SL has not always been easy. In June 1986 when we sent a donation to the Guillermo Bermudez Defense Fund, the SL returned the check (reprinted along with their letter of refusal in our 1987 “truth kit”).

We have also participated in SL-initiated campaigns to defend other leftists (e.g., international demonstrations in defense of the Iranian left in January 1989). In a few cases we have not supported the SL’s campaigns because we regarded them as seriously skewed (see,

for example, our critique of the SL's posturing about organizing a military brigade to Afghanistan in 1917 Nos. 6 & 7).

BT Provocations and the Campaign to Save Mumia Abu-Jamal

The BT's slanders have a nasty habit of insinuating themselves into places where they can do the most harm. The Partisan Defense Committee in the U.S., and its fraternal organizations internationally which are the legal and social defense organizations of the ICL, have been spearheading the international campaign to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former Black Panther Party member and eloquent fighter against racist injustice, who has been on death row in the United States for 13 years.

We have been fighting for Jamal's freedom for years, but after the death warrant was signed by Pennsylvania's governor on June 2 (deliberately on the eve of the filing of new legal papers demonstrating Jamal's innocence and demanding a new trial), the stakes were sharply raised. International protest has now forced a stay of execution. But Jamal still faces the death sentence and the campaign to save his life has entered a critical juncture.

The American ruling class and its servants—from the Philadelphia cops and prosecutors to the FBI and the pro-death penalty Clinton White House—are determined to undercut the growing domestic and international support for Jamal. So it is hardly a coincidence that the *Wall Street Journal* (16 June) suddenly saw a need to move against a particular small leftist group, the Spartacist League. In a front-page article, the *WSJ* sneers at "radical-left groups" in the U.S. who "have a new hero, Mumia Abu-Jamal."

Trying to write Jamal off as a criminal and "convicted cop killer" supported by a pathetic and sinister movement of leftist crazies, the article goes out of its way to smear us as a cult—a particularly sinister accusation in today's American political climate, after the Waco massacre and MOVE bombing. And where does the *WSJ* get its "information"? From the BT, which is cited right there in the article (there is no other source for this big lie). So in whose interests are BT articles such as "Jimstown" written?

In a letter to *Workers Vanguard*, which was distributed as a leaflet to a recent Spartacist League forum in New York City, the BT whines that it is not their fault that their lies about us have been picked up by the bourgeois press. In any case, the fact that the *Wall Street Journal* is trying to spike support for Jamal through its nasty anti-communist smears is of no consequence to the BT. Rather, this leaflet and another letter we received from the IBT in Britain are dedicated to demonstrating that it is the "sectarianism" of the PDC that really stands in the way of a genuine fight to mobilize for Jamal's freedom.

The letter/leaflet by the New York BT alleges we think the ICL and PDC "are Mumia's only *real* defenders." Quite the contrary; when we took up this case in 1987 we knew only too well that we would have to get much broader forces involved if there was going to be any chance of saving the life of this courageous and compassionate fighter, much less winning his freedom. Now, finally, this has started to happen partly due to our efforts, but also others who got involved earlier on, and particularly as the result of the publication—again through the efforts of others—of Jamal's book, *Live from Death Row*.

Nos. 32-37

The SL takes exception to our description of them as a "political obedience cult," and complains that the *Wall Street Journal* made reference to "Jimstown." *Workers Vanguard* printed our letter in reply to this in its 25 August 1995 issue. We recalled how, in the past, the SL itself labeled other left groups as "cultist," and mentioned that the designation "Jimstown" paralleled the SL's "characterization of Jack Barnes' Socialist Workers Party as 'Barnestown.'" *WV* passed over this in silence. We also noted that our job is to call things by their right names and that we cannot be too concerned about the editors of the *Wall Street Journal* trying to pick up bits and pieces for their own reactionary purposes. We certainly did not approach the *Wall Street Journal*, nor did we talk to their reporter.

In September 1995, a few weeks after *Workers Vanguard* had originally complained about the term "Jimstown" appearing in the *Wall Street Journal*, three members of the Spartacist League of Australia, including Bonnie Bentley, editor of *Australasian Spartacist*, visited Wellington, New Zealand. While there, they arranged an appointment with a reporter from the liberal bourgeois weekly *City Voice* (CV). Their ostensible purpose was to discuss the Partisan Defense Committee's work in the campaign to free Mumia Abu Jamal. The CV reporter informed them that there were already people actively campaigning for Mumia locally and offered to put them in touch with our New Zealand comrades. In response the PDC/SL representatives whipped out copies of the ICL's internal bulletins slandering Bill

Logan (a leading member of the IBT in New Zealand—see paragraphs Nos. 46-60 below) and suggested that *City Voice* consider running a piece based on them. The paper turned down the Robertsonites, but this attempt to feed a capitalist publication material with which to smear a rival leftist group can only be characterized as a provocation.

The attempt to use the PDC's Mumia work as a cover for planting slanders in the bourgeois press is not the only example of how the SL's sectarianism marred its work in defense of Jamal. A few days before Jamal's August 1995 stay of execution, our British supporters wrote to the Spartacist League/Britain to propose an emergency united-front mobilization:

"Time is short, but it is still not too late to initiate a sizeable national demonstration before 17th August. Other groups are planning various events, but these will be fragmentary and isolated in the absence of a co-ordinated campaign. There has been considerable coverage of Mumia's case in the bourgeois press and most of the left groups would probably come on board for united action. The SL/B, of all the groups on the British far left is probably best positioned to initiate such a united front because of the years of work by your American comrades in Mumia's defence. We pledge our fullest support in building any such action, and are prepared to participate actively in every facet of it."

—letter to the SL/B, 6 August 1995

In an item headlined "Poison Pen Pals," *Workers Vanguard* of 25 August 1995 responded:

"[A] letter from the International Bolshevik Tendency to our comrades of the Spartacist League/Britain argues that we have undermined Mumia's defense by not setting up a 'united-front committee.' We don't know what world the BT lives in, but we have a lot more grasp of social reality and our own social weight than to believe that a 'Free Mumia Committee' of ourselves, the BT and a bunch of other small leftist organizations would be able to rally the social forces necessary to win Mumia's freedom."

In 1917 No. 17 we commented:

"it is precisely the fact that 'a bunch of other small leftist [and other] organizations' all began to mobilize around the same issue, at the same time, that made the demonstrations for Jamal successful. In order to build the mass support necessary for winning his freedom, it makes sense to organize this cooperation."

The Philly cops framed Mumia not least because he was a supporter of the radical back-to-nature MOVE organization. Derived from the former radical black nationalist milieu, symbolized by the Black Panthers whom the ruling class greatly feared and sought to destroy, MOVE had long been in the cross hairs of the Philly cops. In May 1985, the Philadelphia police in collusion with the FBI dropped a bomb on the MOVE commune, murdering eleven black people (five of them children) and incinerating a whole neighborhood. The BT remained silent. The New York Spartacist League sponsored a memorial meeting for the bombing victims, inviting MOVE supporters to attend and speak. The very first issue of the BT's periodical *1917* (Winter 1986) contains an account of our New York meeting. The BT article attacks—not the government which murdered eleven people—but the MOVE speaker and the SL (for not making polemics against MOVE philosophy the focus of the event)!

No. 38

Contrary to the SL's claim, we have not "remained silent" about the murderous state attack on the MOVE commune. Like the SL (and most of the rest of the North American left) we consider it a prime example of racist state terrorism. Since the 1985 police massacre of

MOVE supporters in Philadelphia, we have raised this issue clearly and publicly on numerous occasions as an illustration of the brutality of the American capitalist state, as the SL well knows (see for example the photo of a Bolshevik Tendency contingent in *1917* No. 2). In fact, on page 6 of the 15 May 1987 issue of *WV*, there is a photograph of a Bolshevik Tendency contingent at an SL-sponsored demonstration for Geronimo Pratt, and one of our signs very clearly reads: “Which Terrorists Bombed Babies In Philadelphia!”

The short article entitled “‘Powerful Testimony’...to the Police” in the first issue of *1917* was appended to a lengthy analysis of the parallels between the internal regime of Robertson’s Spartacist League and Gerry Healy’s Workers Revolutionary Party. One obvious similarity was Healy’s propensity for slandering other organizations on the left. We reported how, at an SL public forum, LaVerne Sims (a former MOVE supporter) gratuitously cop-baited a member of the League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP). Not only did the SL refuse to defend the LRP comrade against these slanders but when he protested, they ejected him from the meeting hall. We also reported that Sims told an inquiry into the MOVE massacre that, during a secret meeting with Mayor Wilson Goode in July 1984, she had “begged and pleaded” for a police round-up of MOVE (11 October 1985 *New York Times*). *Workers Vanguard* reported on the hearings, and described Sims’ testimony as “powerful,” discreetly omitting any mention of this damning admission.

Our article exposed the SL leadership’s disregard for elementary standards of decency and workers’ democracy. Every word in our article is true, and we stand by it.

In the eight years that we have been fighting to get Jamal’s case publicized and otherwise taken up by others, it is notable that the BT’s journal *1917* has featured not one substantial article on his case. Now they accuse us of somehow trying to hog the campaign for Jamal’s freedom for our own organizational and sectarian advantage. This, the BT claims, is because the SL leadership is afraid of bringing “SL members into wider contact with other leftists.” We don’t know exactly what kind of contact the BT is speaking of here. At the united-front rallies and demonstrations initiated by the PDC in Jamal’s defense, we have welcomed all those who have come together behind the slogans “Save Mumia Abu-Jamal! Abolish the Racist Death Penalty!” to attend with their own propaganda, placards, chants and speakers—including the BT.

No. 39

We hope that the Spartacist League leadership was pleased to see the substantial article we published on the Jamal campaign in *1917* No. 17. The reference to “united-front rallies and demonstrations initiated [and controlled] by the PDC” reveals how narrow the Robertsonites’ conception of a united front is. It is good that the SL permits other leftists—including ourselves—to speak at its events. But a united front means working together with other groups to carry out a common activity. It does not just mean permitting others to endorse your own initiatives.

The letter from the IBT in Britain claims that we have undermined Mumia's defense by not setting up a "united-front committee." We don't know what world the BT lives in, but we have a lot more grasp of social reality and our own social weight than to believe that a "Free Mumia Committee" consisting of ourselves, the BT and a bunch of other small leftist organizations would be able to rally the social forces necessary to win Mumia's freedom.

In any case, to argue that the absence of such a committee kept other left organizations from really mobilizing for a PDC-initiated demonstration that was held in London on July 22 is laughable. These very same "leftists" were much more animated about mobilizing their forces for a pro-imperialist demonstration demanding, "Stop the Rape of Bosnia." This thousands-strong demo was called for the very same day, at the very same time as the Jamal protest (and the latter had been called some time in advance). Remarkably, but not at all surprisingly, the BT has not a word to say against those "Workers Aid for Bosnia" leftists whose own perceived sectarian advantage and capitulationist political priorities led them to counterpose this march to a demonstration in defense of Jamal.

Nos. 40-41

The SL/B had originally announced a national mobilization in defense of Jamal. At a PDC-initiated organizing meeting in London on 15 June 1995, it suddenly and inexplicably dropped this proposal and began to insist that all efforts should be devoted instead to the distribution and sale of Mumia's book. Alastair Green, as the leading representative of the British PDC, stated this very clearly at the meeting. Suggestions from the Alliance for Workers Liberty, IBT supporters and others that these two activities were not mutually contradictory were brushed aside. Ignoring proposals for establishing a coordinating committee and scheduling further meetings, the SL/B announced that they would call if anything needed doing!

A few weeks later, in another abrupt shift, the PDC announced a 22 July 1995 Mumia rally. There was little time to build for this event, particularly as there was no coordination between the various groups that had previously shown interest. The SL/B should have called a meeting of interested organizations to prepare a united-front campaign to build a joint demonstration at a mutually acceptable time and place.

It is ridiculous to suggest that the AWL and other leftists, who had earlier been trying to convince the SL/B to hold a demonstration, "counterposed" the pro-Bosnia demonstration to the Mumia protest in the interests of some "perceived sectarian advantage." The Bosnia demonstration was called by a much broader coalition within which groups such as the AWL would have had little influence over setting the date. The fact that the AWL (which sent representatives to both the Mumia and Bosnia demonstrations) takes the wrong position on the Bosnian conflict should not preclude working with it over issues where there is agreement.

The result of the PDC's sectarian antics was unfortunate, but predictable. While thousands marched in favor of a victory for the Bosnian government, the PDC-organized Jamal event drew only two hundred. This was far less than could have been achieved through a united-front effort.

Within our frame of reference when we took up the Jamal case—to make his case known domestically and internationally as a compelling example of what the racist death penalty is all about in the U.S. and to get other social forces to champion his cause—we have been successful. A myriad of other groups and individuals are now working for Mumia's freedom. And certainly nobody ever stood in the way of the BT getting involved in its own right.

No. 42

The PDC did early and important work in Jamal's defense. When the PDC initiated the first wave of international demonstrations in 1990, we supported this initiative and organized a demonstration in New Zealand. Our comrades in Toronto immediately wrote offering to help the PDC "with leafleting, posterizing and any other practical work necessary to make the demonstration a success" (letter to the Trotskyist League, 18 June 1990).

We also participated in the 1995 international protests. In Birmingham, Britain's second-largest city, an IBT supporter played a key role in organizing a united front demonstration for Jamal on 17 July 1995 that won the endorsement of the local Trades Union Council. (Unfortunately the lone ICL supporter in Birmingham, who attended two early meetings of the Birmingham Mumia Committee, dropped out without explanation and failed to attend the protest.) On 9 June 1995 our comrades in New Zealand organized a demonstration to coincide with other international protests. In New York an IBT supporter obtained the endorsement of a United Autoworkers local for Jamal. Elsewhere IBT comrades participated in demonstrations for Jamal from San Francisco to Berlin.

Their sudden recent interest in this case comes at a time when the PDC has been censored from speaking at events in defense of Jamal in Philadelphia and Vancouver. We have also been physically assaulted on more than one occasion by the International Socialist Organization in the U.S. and in Italy by Rifondazione Comunista when we attempted to bring the defense of Jamal before their members.

No. 43

We oppose all political exclusionism, slander and violence within the workers' movement. We oppose attacks on the ICL, or any other left organization.

We are revolutionary communists and absent a broader tide of revolutionary social struggle, larger forces to our right will try to exclude us from any issue they choose to interest themselves in. Conveniently the BT now pops up, providing arguments in advance for the various leftists, anti-communist liberals and black nationalists who, now that the case has become popular internationally, would like to see us pushed aside. The BT says it's all our fault. But what does this say about them?

No. 44

We have no idea what "arguments" we are supposed to have provided for pushing the ICL/PDC aside in the Mumia defense campaign. We have criticized their tendency to avoid participating in united fronts with other organizations, but this is a different matter. We have always welcomed the participation of ICL members in united-front actions. For

example, in Toronto in July 1995, ICL comrades participated in building a successful demonstration in defense of Mumia along with ourselves, the International Socialists, anarchists, social democrats and various other leftists. All the groups met and agreed on a time, place and date for the demonstration, as well as the slogans and text of the leaflet. Our comrades produced the leaflet and the various participating organizations shared printing costs and poster responsibilities. In our opinion this should be a model for defense activities in the future. When the PDC called a demonstration a few weeks later, Toronto IBT comrades participated, helped poster, and contributed toward the printing costs.

The IBT “Principle” of Unity: Bill Logan

Seeking to make a case that the ICL “purges” oppositionists, the BT took up the cudgels for—and even took into membership—elements who had been expelled for genuine and grotesque malfeasance. Gerald Smith, whom we expelled for being a bullying thug and shakedown artist, was not only accepted into BT membership, but his abusive behavior was tolerated for years. There’s also Fred Riker, whom we expelled for cheating on his sustaining pledge and browbeating treasurers (especially female ones) who tried to get him to pay up. The BT made him treasurer of their Bay Area local! In 1992, Riker and Smith exited the IBT as the “Communist Workers Group,” publishing a collection of internal IBT documents which are revealing of the “democratic” norms (more precisely lack thereof) in the “democratic centralist” International Bolshevik Tendency. The Spartacist League has made these available as No. 8 in our *Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League* series.

No. 45

Gerald Smith was expelled from the Spartacist League in the late 1970s. For some years he remained a supporter of the SL in the Bay Area and was highly enough regarded that in December 1983 the SL invited him to head their “Labor/Black Leagues.” Smith declined on the grounds that the LBLs were front groups with no internal life of their own, and that he was not prepared to sign up to be a simple conduit for instructions from the SL leadership.

A year later, Smith was still considered to be close enough to the SL that he was approached to participate in their infamous “picket line” aimed at blocking San Francisco longshoremen from carrying out the boycott of South African cargo (see paragraph No. 16 above). This sectarian wrecking led Smith to break with the SL and gravitate toward the Bolshevik Tendency.

Fred Riker was expelled from the SL. Prior to recruiting him, we carefully studied the documentation the SL produced on his case, as well as supplementary materials provided by Riker. We concluded that there had been no valid grounds for his expulsion. We therefore welcomed him into the ET on the basis of his political agreement with us.

Riker and Smith broke with the IBT in 1992, contending that democratic centralism should not apply to their branch of the organization. They were key figures in hatching a small Bay Area-based grouping (the Communist Workers Group), which published a lengthy and not particularly instructive selection of internal IBT materials related to their departure. The SL eagerly seized on these materials, and republished them as the eighth in their “Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League” series (half of which deal with the IBT). The SL suggests that these documents reveal a lack of democratic practice in the IBT, but they are unable to cite a single concrete instance. If anything, the documents reveal that in dealing with the Smith/Riker mensheviks, we bent over backwards to ensure that their right to dissent was protected. We commented on the whole CWG episode in 1917 No. 13, and need only add that the CWG itself split in 1994 over questions of internal democracy. Several of the CWG’s leading members are now once again supporters of the IBT.

Most recently, the IBT has embraced and exalted one Bill Logan. Logan was expelled at the ICL's first international conference in 1979 for gross crimes against communist morality and its substrate, elemental human decency, after a thorough investigation by an international Control Commission and trial body. The charges against Logan were brought by the Central Committee of the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand (SL/ANZ) and they detailed at least 18 specific cases where Logan, using his position as national chairman of the remote Australian section and taking advantage of comrades' devotion to our program and willingness to make sacrifices for the party, grossly interfered in the most intimate personal life decisions of comrades. Logan was found guilty on every count—and then some. He brutally separated couples by forcing the geographical transfer of comrades “for the good of the party.” He manipulated and forced comrades into entering into—and breaking off—sexual relationships. Most grotesquely, he tried to force one woman comrade to have an abortion, and when that failed, to give the baby up for adoption.

No. 46

Bill Logan, the former leader of both the iSt's Australian and British sections, was expelled at the group's first international conference in 1979. In 1978 he had a falling-out with the New York-based leadership over financing of the British section. As a result, James Robertson decided to remove him as the national chair of the SL/B. The machinations required (one part Zinoviev and two parts Le Carré) are proudly recounted in two SL internal bulletins from January 1979, now publicly available (“On the Logan Regime, Part I: ‘Run, run, run...chop’” and “Part II: ‘What do you mean, overthrow?’”).

Under the regime headed by Logan in Australia, individual members were put under strong pressure to transfer from one place to another “for the good of the party.” Pressure of this sort was widespread in the iSt at the time, although probably greatest in the SL/ANZ, where the organization was hyper-active and badly overstretched. Many of the individuals involved suffered in their personal lives as a result. While no one was actually “forced” to transfer, it is true that the leadership routinely took “advantage of comrades' devotion and willingness to make sacrifices for the party,” and the pressure exerted certainly constituted unwarranted intrusions into members' personal lives. However, the charges that the SL/ANZ under Logan “forced comrades into entering into—and breaking off—sexual relationships” are simply untrue, except indirectly as a result of the pressure to carry out transfers.

The allegation that Bill Logan “tried to force one woman comrade to have an abortion, and when that failed, to give the baby up for adoption” is also a malicious invention. It is true that women in the SL/ANZ *and the rest of the iSt at the time* were pressured not to have children. No one was forced to have an abortion (or to give up his or her children), but the central leadership of the SL/US, including James Robertson, let everyone know that in their view female comrades who bore children were on their way out of politics. In pressuring women in the Australian group not to get pregnant, the SL/ANZ leadership was merely applying a policy that originated in the SL/US.

The case of the comrade who had considered giving up her child was well known throughout the iSt for years before anyone considered that anything was amiss. It was known by an international control commission that met in August and September 1974 to investigate certain incidents involving John Ebel, a member of the SL/ANZ. Prominent members of the commission included “Fred” (Gerhard K., who became chair of the German section of the iSt, but left within a few years), John Sharpe (then International Secretary of the iSt), and Dale Reissner (then chair of the SL/US Control Commission). James Robertson, while not formally a member of the commission, had lengthy private sessions with it.

In the course of his defense comrade Ebel and a supporter of his in the German section made various allegations about bureaucratism and heavy-handedness in the SL/ANZ that were strikingly similar to those raised in 1979. These included an allegation (disputed by the SL/ANZ leadership) that a female comrade had been pressured to give up her child. Neither the control commission, which had before it considerable documentary material on the actual state of affairs in the Australian section, nor the international leadership saw any reason to comment.

Moreover, the father of the child was what was known as a “drinking buddy” of Robertson and lived in the same house in North London with him for a number of months in 1976. This was several years *after* the events in question (and the Ebel commission investigation) but three years *before* the iSt leadership claimed to have first learned of the incident.

So long as Logan was in Australia, distant from international scrutiny and with a mainly inexperienced membership whom he made fearful of talking to comrades overseas and even to each other, his abuse of comrades—especially women comrades—did not come to light. It was only after Logan and his wife Adaire transferred to England in 1977 that it became apparent to the ICL leadership that something was wrong. After a sharp fight in London, Logan was removed as national chairman of the British section. Even then we thought Logan’s opposition to international collaboration and his bureaucratic mindset resulted perhaps from inexperience and insecurity. An attempt was made to integrate him into the international collective leadership in New York.

No. 47

The question of how the Logan regime in Australia could have existed unnoticed for years as a supposed aberration within the iSt is a delicate one for Robertson’s apologists. In addition to the Ebel commission investigation there were also a number of trips by leading comrades of the SL/US to the Australian section during the period in question. George Foster (deputy National Chairman of the SL/US) visited the SL/ANZ for about three weeks in April 1975. James Robertson visited for about ten days in late January 1976, during which there was a summer camp attended by all members. Chris Knox (member of the SL/US Political Bureau and the group’s Trade Union Director) visited in July and August 1976, and then returned in January 1977 in time for the annual summer camp, and to take over as national chairman of the section. Liz Gordon (National Secretary of the SL/US) visited for about ten days in January 1977 (including the summer camp). Difficulties with regard to personnel configurations, personal relationships, and proposed transfers were discussed with all these leading comrades.

All these leaders of the SL/US had personal friends in the section, indeed friends among those who are said to have been abused prior to and during the times of their respective visits. George Foster knew both Joel Salinger and John Sheridan (both former alternate members of the SL/US Central Committee). Salinger had transferred to the New Zealand Spartacist League in mid-1972—prior to any of the alleged crimes. He was a member of the SL/ANZ leadership throughout the period in question. Sheridan, a veteran cadre of the SL, transferred to Australia in 1974 and served on the SL/ANZ leadership from that time onward. James Robertson knew both these comrades well and said he regarded John Sheridan as a particularly good friend. Chris Knox knew both these comrades well. So did Liz Gordon, who also regarded Naoli C. (originally recruited as part of the Bolshevik Leninist Tendency from the Canadian affiliate of Ernest Mandel’s United Secretariat) as a special friend.

In addition there were other comrades from the SL/US in the SL/ANZ during this period, perhaps less well-known to the international leadership, but all with connections in the

SL/US: David R. (a young writer with links to the Boston and Chicago SL locals), Karen W. (an organizational administrator with links to the Boston and Cleveland locals), and Anna K., who had been active in SL-supported trade-union work in the Bay Area. It is simply not credible that so many experienced cadres could have remained insensible to the cover up that the leadership alleged some years later.

The 1982 “Declaration of an external tendency of the iSt” noted that:

“In fact the revelations of life in the SL/ANZ came as no surprise to the bulk of the senior cadres of the tendency, as the Logans [i.e., Logan and Hannah—ed.] had made no particular secret of most of their actions. [SL Deputy National Chairman George—ed.] Foster and other leading comrades had visited the Australian section in the midst of these horrors without noticing anything amiss. In fact Logan, the malevolent genius, was even supposed to have duped poor gullible Foster into helping him get rid of John Ebel, his only internal critic. [The 1982 declaration confused the 1974 case of John Ebel (who had departed by the time Foster visited Australia) with the 1975 case of Keith Olerhead. But although the identities are switched, the account of what took place is accurate—ed.] Not only did Logan and Foster force Ebel [actually Olerhead—ed.] out but they also got him to sign a confession which was to be used against him if he ever opened his mouth about life in the Australian section!

“During the Stalinist purge trials in Smolensk province there was a trial of the first secretary of the party in Belyi named Kovalev. During the trial ‘Questions from the floor pointed out that everyone approved of Kovalev at the time and asked why they [his accusers] had not said anything earlier. But one of Kovalev’s more sophisticated accusers claimed that he had been silent because Kovalev had, for four years, forbidden him to speak!’ (Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror*, Page 334). And so it was in Australia—Logan was somehow supposed to have prevented his victims...from communicating the ‘real story’ to the visiting international leadership. The truth is, of course, that Logan was not operating so very far outside the norms of the tendency at all, so there was nothing to report, particularly little that wasn’t known anyway.”

With Logan out of Australia and exposed in the less-remote British section as at least a highhanded bureaucrat, our Australian comrades came to realize that what they had been subjected to under his leadership was a violation of communist principles and proletarian morality.

No. 48a

The SL/ANZ members “came to realize” that there were problems with Logan’s methods only two years after he left Australia—but very shortly after he had been denounced by the central leadership as a bureaucrat. This realization was encouraged by the international leadership, which had apparently decided to be rid of Logan once and for all. Tactically this made sense. First, he was removed from his position of strength in Britain, where the core cadres in the group (who had high regard for comrade Logan’s capacities) had initially resisted New York’s moves against him. Logan’s loyalty to the organization, and his refusal to launch what he saw as an apolitical power struggle over his own personal status, led him to comply in his own removal. The political authority of the SL central leadership and the conviction among the cadres that any struggle over the question of “regime” must be an exercise in unprincipled, apolitical cliquism, facilitated Logan’s removal from the SL/B, just as it played a key role in the political capitulations of various other cadres in other iSt sections.

The testimony of Australian comrades to the trial body shocked and horrified all those in attendance at the conference, mandating Logan's expulsion. Even the veteran Ceylonese Trotskyist Edmund Samarakkody—who sat on the Logan trial body and then used the trial as a convenient pretext to reject fusion with our tendency—found Logan guilty as charged and called him a “monster.” Samarakkody's hollow insistence that other SL/ANZ leaders were culpable along with Logan—though every single one had been a victim of Logan at one time or another—was roundly rejected by the conference delegates.

No. 48b

The testimony of the SL/ANZ comrades was indeed highly emotional. Many of them no doubt believed that the SL/ANZ regime was a horrendous departure from the norms of the iSt. But if this was the case, how is it possible that the various experienced comrades from the SL/US who had transferred to the SL/ANZ had not noted anything particularly unusual about life in their new section? In fact, they did not find the regime in Australia qualitatively different from the one they had left. This point was noted by the External Tendency in its initial declaration:

“the nature of the abuse in his [Logan's] Australian operation was only a linear extrapolation of the internal regime of Robertson's American section. How else can one explain the fact that none of the SL/US cadres who lived under the Logan regime blew the whistle?”

Edmund Samarakkody was the only member of the trial body who was not a member of the iSt. His participation was a gamble for Robertson. Samarakkody had an international reputation on the left as a man of principle, and had he endorsed the indictment of Logan, it would have lent much credibility to the entire procedure. Yet, because of his long experience and relative immunity to the iSt's intense internal organizational pressures, he could not be relied on to “go along.” His conclusions are summarized by SL National Secretary Liz Gordon in a 10 September 1979 letter sent to a pro-iSt member of the Samarakkody group:

“The conception pushed by the RWP delegation reports is that the iSt is some form of Stalinism or at best old-style Healyism. By extension, then, they lay claim to the iSt's analysis of the Healy tendency in the 1960's, when the atrocious ‘regime’ of the British SLL was out of step with its formally anti-revisionist line.”

In April 1980 the SL received a document by Samarakkody, in which he noted:

“One of the questions that came up for consideration was whether to give Logan the right to cross-examine the witnesses. On this issue excepting for myself, all the members felt that as Logan was clever and had some knowledge of the law, he would misuse this right and seek to upset witnesses by his questions and also try to lengthen proceedings. [The iSt members on the body reversed themselves after checking with Robertson—ed.]

“My interventions by way of cross-examination of both witnesses and Logan was to elicit the truth in regard to the allegations and charges. And as I expected, some questions put by me to some of the witnesses brought out and underlined the co-responsibility of other members of SL/ANZ leadership in regard to the actions of Logan that were the subject matter of the charges.

“I summarised my above views to the Logan Trial Body. I stated that in all circumstances of this case, while Logan was guilty of most or all the charges, as his motives were not personal gain and as together with Logan the Logan regime had to share responsibility in regard to the charges complained of, the punishment to

be meted out to Logan be less than expulsion.

"The reaction of the rest of the Trial Body was one of concerted opposition and rejection of my views. They sought to pose the question as one believing Logan or so many leading comrades some of whom were in the iSt leadership.

"I pointed out that the posing of such a question was completely wrong. On the one hand Logan had admitted his guilt in regard to many of the actions complained of and that meant that those complaints against Logan were true, except that it was not Logan alone who was responsible for the acts and incidents complained against, that it was a question of the Logan-led regime being responsible in that regard.

"The rest of the comrades of the Trial Body were almost in a rage and pointed out to me that I was saying what Logan said. My answer was that Logan's explanation that his actions were based on decisions of the CC of SL/ANZ and was admitted as true by the comrades of SL/ANZ who gave evidence in the case.

"It appears to me in retrospect that the iSt delegation had taken this decision to attack me in the manner they did that night, not only because I was of the view that the punishment of Logan should be less than expulsion. Although my dissent did not prevent them from expelling Logan from the iSt it created other problems for them.

"It appears clear from volume of documentation that the iSt had prior to the setting up of the Trial Body, had bureaucratically hatched a plot and carried out a coup d'état against Logan and forced him to resign from the Chairman of the SL/B (6 October 1978).

"What Logan had done for the iSt to call for his resignation is not altogether clear. In any event the iSt thereafter had decided to sack Logan from the International Spartacist Tendency.

"It would appear that thereafter the iSt membership had been mobilised for the sacking of Logan. And this the iSt had decided to do in the grand style of a trial by an authoritative or a virtual international Trial Body. It would appear they expected to publicise this trial as a step forward in the Bolshevisation of the iSt. However, my dissent went counter to their aims and expectations in this regard.

"Furthermore, the iSt leadership found my dissent threw responsibility for relevant acts complained of not on Logan alone but on the Logan-led regime and also in some respects was critical on the failure of the iSt leadership to take steps to correct the bureaucratic tendencies that were apparent in the SL/ANZ.

"It would appear that for the SL/ANZ leadership and that of the iSt, it was a question of not permitting their authority to be weakened, which would be the case if they had allowed my dissent to be passed off lightly.

"It was in this context that the iSt leadership threw caution to the winds to denounce me, attack the RWP, and abandon unity with the RWP.

—"The Logan Case" by Edmund Samarakkody (1980)

As a result of Samarakkody's intervention, Logan was granted the right to confront his accusers directly. Yet there remained several important irregularities in the trial procedure. In the first place, a climate of prejudice was created in the organization for months preceding the trial. SL chairman Robertson openly remarked of the charges against Logan that "we believe them." Logan was suspended from membership as soon as the charges were mooted. Adaire Hannah, his companion and de facto codefendant, remained on the IEC, but was denied access to that body's correspondence and files.

On 2 April 1979 Logan wrote to the SL/ANZ requesting a copy of the specific charges. He did not in fact receive a copy (dated 16 August 1979) until very shortly before the first session of the trial body on 27 August 1979. He was thereby severely handicapped in preparing his defense. While the trial body had a legal staff at its disposal, Logan had no representation prior to or during the trial. He was not even advised of the order in which witnesses were to be called. It would be difficult for anyone confronted by such a complex

set of questions to defend himself without assistance. This difficulty was compounded by not being advised in advance of the charges, and therefore being denied reasonable access to documents, as well as a reasonable opportunity to solicit relevant testimony.

Although the iSt helped pay the travel expenses of hostile witnesses, they denied such assistance to Logan's companion and chief collaborator in Australia and Britain, Adaire Hannah. Hannah, the only witness prepared to testify on Logan's behalf, was, by virtue of the arrangements of the iSt, resident in New York without a work permit, and without independent means. The leadership's refusal to even *loan* her the money necessary to purchase a plane ticket to Britain (where the trial was held) meant that she was unable to attend.

The trial body had the power to make recommendations, but not decisions. Decision-making power was formally vested in the international conference, to which the trial body reported. Yet the international conference did not have sufficient information on which to make a decision. Most of the attendees at the conference were excluded from the trial proceedings. None of the seven hundred-odd pages of documents produced for the trial body were available to delegates. Nor was any of the material written by Adaire Hannah or Bill Logan. The trial body in its presentation to the conference made no attempt to report on the facts of the case, nor even to summarize Logan's defense. Members of the trial body acted in the conference as prosecutors rather than independent jurors. Logan was only admitted to address the conference *after* the vote to expel him had already taken place. Even then he was given only *five minutes* to speak.

While the SL leadership sanctimoniously intoned that Hannah was Logan's chief victim, she was in fact on trial herself, and was expelled from the iSt on 31 August 1979, immediately after Logan's expulsion, "by unanimous vote of the delegates at the international conference." She was only notified of this in a letter dated 17 September 1979. In her reply to the iSt, dated 14 October 1979, Hannah wrote:

"I did not believe that you could have gone so far as to expel me without any trial, without any chance to defend myself, and without ever being given the slightest indication that there was a possibility of expulsion. My expulsion was carried out in a manner completely contrary to democratic organisational practices.

"Despite the fact that you neglected to tell me the grounds under which it was proposed to expel me beforehand I nevertheless hope that you will see the importance of at least telling me now, after the fact. Of course it will be clear to everyone, whatever your official grounds are, that I was in fact expelled for my association with Bill Logan and our refusal to lie about our political history."

The iSt never replied.

The motion unanimously passed by the conference read:

Motion: "We find the charges of the Australian complainants to be true and correct. Bill Logan is a proven, massive liar and a sexual sociopath who manipulated the private lives of comrades for reasons of power politics and his own aberrant appetites and compulsions in the guise of Marxism. His crimes are against communist morality and its substrate elementary human decency.

"We make the following further charges:

1) Logan was responsible for systematic suppression of iSt and SL/ANZ documents.

2) The examination by the trial body of witnesses with first-hand evidence of Logan's sexual manipulations in London fully confirmed the picture of Logan as a willful liar which emerged from the Australian testimony.

"We further find that the charge regarding ex-comrade Vicky A. was understated by the Australian comrades, and that in this matter Logan is guilty of inhuman torture of a mother, rendered suicidal in his attempt to destroy and take away her baby.

"We find him guilty of the above as stated and therefore he cannot be and should never have been a member of a working-class organization and hereby recommend his expulsion from our tendency to the delegates of the international conference."

After the conference we took the unusual step of releasing our internal discussion bulletins documenting the Logan case to major libraries in Australia and New Zealand, so that information about the man and his crimes would be generally available to the workers movement.

No. 48c

Most of the alleged "crimes" involved activities which were well known within the organization, and were standard operating procedure throughout the Spartacist tendency at the time. The frenzied work schedules and constant organizational crises, combined with frequent personnel transfers, naturally exacerbated the difficult personal situations of members of the SL/ANZ. Transfers, with the exception of compassionate transfers (which permitted members to accompany their companions), were generally justified on the grounds of maintaining or extending organizational perspectives. Whether or not there were really appropriate grounds for these transfers, they were not capricious. No one in the SL/US leadership (which was kept fully informed of all the moves through written reports, as well as informally through personal contacts) ever considered that there was anything irregular about the frequent personnel shifts in the SL/ANZ. During this period there were frequent mass transfers in the SL/US as well.

The most spectacular charge involved the case of the female comrade and her baby who, unbeknownst to the compassionate and caring iSt leadership in far-off New York, was supposed to have been the victim of "inhuman torture" at the hands of Bill Logan. These bogus allegations played a key role in whipping up hysteria at the 1979 trial—particularly among the less experienced iSt comrades. But all the activities of the SL/ANZ regime, including the incident supposedly involving "inhuman torture," were well known to and approved by the Robertson leadership (see paragraph No. 46).

It is worth considering why the motion condemning comrade Logan was "unanimously passed by the conference." No one abstained. No one chose not to vote. Everyone voted and they *all* voted the same way. According to the official ICL version, this was because there was total and unanimous agreement. Such votes were very rare in Trotsky's organization, or in Lenin's, but rather more common under Kim Il Sung and Joseph Stalin.

The unanimity of the vote masked a spectrum of opinion among the iSt delegates. Current IBT members who were present at the trial had very different perceptions at the time. Some were taken in by the whole business, and genuinely believed that Bill Logan was a monstrous sociopath. When the sun rose after an all-night session of the conference spent demonizing Logan, these comrades had no trouble voting to expel him. Others knew better. Some avoided attending the event. We know of a few cases of conference delegates whispering among themselves in private. Most of the middle and upper cadres of the iSt were aware that the essentials had been well known for years. They also knew that the "shocking" abuses in the SL/ANZ were closely paralleled in the SL/US itself.

At the same time, there was tremendous pressure from the leadership. It was clear that anyone prepared to defend a "sociopath" would also be purged. Those cadres who knew that the charges were being exaggerated and that, at the very least, the international

leadership shared some measure of responsibility for what had gone on in its Australian section, rationalized voting for Logan's expulsion on the grounds that it was at bottom a case of one bureaucrat being purged by his peers, which in fact it was. After all, they reasoned, nothing is perfect, and revolutionaries should not lightly abandon the world's only revolutionary organization.

From its inception, the North American BT took up the defense of Bill Logan. The very first statement of the then-ET ("Declaration of an External Tendency of the iSt," October 1982) claimed that, though "Logan was undoubtedly guilty of running a grossly abusive regime," it was the international leadership in New York (half a world away) that should take responsibility because they didn't stop him sooner! According to this scurrilous account, Logan was really "drummed out" of our party because he had "a substantial and independent base in the membership."

No. 49

The 1982 Declaration of the ET did not so much defend Bill Logan as tell the truth about the circumstances that led to his expulsion. It also pointed out that: "The reason that the Logan question is such a highly charged issue for the [iSt] leadership is that it is in a certain sense a set of 'emperor's clothes.'"

This latter assertion is incredible. The *only* member of the entire tendency who defended Logan in 1979 was his wife, Adaire Hannah—his chief accomplice and also, pathetically, his most twisted victim. But back then the ET was clearly not disputing that Logan had done horrible harm to those he claimed to lead in the name of socialism. They admitted that "Logan was undoubtedly guilty of running a grossly abusive regime." It's just that they didn't care. After all it was "only" people who were members of the Spartacist tendency who were his victims.

No. 50

It is true that Hannah was Logan's only defender—which makes the leadership's refusal to enable her to attend his trial (see paragraph 48b above) all the more scandalous. The decision to expel Hannah without notification, charges, trial or even subsequent explanation says a great deal about the iSt leadership's commitment to due process in that period.

The ET position was perfectly congruent with the truth. The SL/ANZ leadership, headed by Logan, engaged in serious abuses of the membership. But the essential facts about the actions of the regime were known to *and approved by* the international leadership. The ET was also correct that the regime in the SL/ANZ was "only a linear extrapolation of" that of the contemporary SL/US upon which it was modelled.

The story changed substantially in 1990, when the BT and the German Gruppe IV Internationale (GIVI)—which despite political differences had been collaborating with each other for years—fused with each other. This fusion occurred a few months after the North American BT came together with the “Permanent Revolution Group” of New Zealand, whose leader and guru was none other than...Bill Logan. So the BT, an organization whose sole reason for existence is the lying claim that the ICL is a “cult,” fused with an organization led by a sociopath whom the ICL expelled precisely for his cult-like manipulation of comrades’ personal lives. This isn’t irony, it’s farce!

No. 51

Contrary to the SL’s claim, our “story” has not changed. The ET never accepted the SL leadership’s account of “cult-like manipulation of comrades’ personal lives” by a “sociopath” in the SL/ANZ in the 1970s. In fact, it is the SL’s story that has changed. In the first (internal) polemic against the ET, Al Nelson, Robertson’s long-serving lieutenant, denounced the ET’s account of the Logan expulsion:

“But to even put the sexual sociopath Logan—who is unfit to be in the workers movement—in the relatively normal Marxist category of a ‘bureaucratic regime’ is itself a savage indictment of the ETs. But they go further and characterize his expulsion as a ‘Stalinist purge trial,’ thereby *exonerating* him of all his genuine crimes against our comrades. For people who profess such deep concern about the norms of party democracy nothing is too filthy to pick up as a factional club.”

—“Notes on the ‘External Tendency’”, 1 August 1983

Anyone comparing the treatment of the Logan purge in the account of the IBT fusions in 1917 No. 9 to the account in the ET’s 1982 declaration can see that they tell the same story.

Indeed the whole underpinning for the foundation of the “International” Bolshevik Tendency centered on alibiing Bill Logan. According to the IBT founding statement, “We Go Forward!” published in 1917 No. 9 (First Quarter 1991), the main subject of dispute/disagreement between ostensible Trotskyists from three different continents was not a programmatic question. The issue of how to fight the counter-revolution which was then galloping across East Europe and threatening the Soviet degenerated workers state was not addressed nor were the local perspectives and orientation of each group. Virtually the entire article on this fusion is devoted to the momentous historical question of...Bill Logan!

No. 52

We advise all interested parties to read the article in question and draw their own conclusions. In discussing the political basis upon which the IBT was founded, the article recounts briefly the history of Trotskyism after Trotsky, and the historic significance of the Spartacist tendency and its predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency.

Despite the SL’s concern that our fusion was without a sufficient programmatic foundation, the political basis of the fusions that united the three founding components of the IBT are clearly spelled out:

“Each group was committed to the revolutionary communist program promulgated by Marx and Engels, elaborated and put into practice by Lenin and Trotsky, codified by the first four Congresses of the Communist International, further

developed by Trotsky's Fourth International and defended by the Spartacist tendency prior to its descent into political banditry."

—1917 No. 9

The Russian question was dealt with concretely: the article reiterated the Trotskyist program of military support to the Stalinists against counterrevolution, while taking no responsibility for any anti-proletarian acts of the bureaucrats. We also referred to our common agreement on such issues as Poland's Solidarnosc, military support to the Soviets in Afghanistan, as well as our common analysis of the course of the Nicaraguan revolution and the collapse of the East German deformed workers' state. Above all, the three founding components of the IBT were united by their common links to the revolutionary tradition of the RT/iSt and a shared commitment to ensure that this programmatic heritage survived the SL leadership's political degeneration.

Given the historic importance of the iSt to the IBT, it is perhaps not so strange that we paid considerable attention to reaching an understanding of our common history, particularly of the course of the degeneration of the iSt. The 1917 article noted that various IBT members had, for example, sincerely believed the charges against comrade Logan (whose purge was the highest-profile expulsion in the history of the iSt). It was therefore appropriate to evaluate carefully and critically this episode and its significance in the context of the degeneration of the iSt. As the article noted:

"One major item in pre-fusion discussions was to separate the truth from the lies. This was necessary to clear the record and prevent the repetition of similar mistakes."

It is now an article of faith for the IBT, and presumably a criteria of membership, even for those who weren't at our 1979 conference and haven't heard the evidence, to assert that Logan is innocent: "The allegations made at the 1979 trial, that Logan was an evil genius who routinely interfered in the sexual lives of members to gratify his bizarre sadistic urges, were never anything more than a malicious invention on the part of Robertson and his acolytes." That's a pretty hard pill to swallow for anyone who heard the anguished testimony of Logan's victims at the 1979 conference, as did some IBTers who were then members of our organization. Some of them were even delegates to the conference and voted for Logan's expulsion (the decision was unanimous). It is certainly not much of an advertisement for the revolutionary integrity of these IBTers that they sat through what they now claim was a vicious frame-up without raising even a question, much less a hint of protest.

No. 53

Our position on the 1979 Logan expulsion is no more an "article of faith" than, for example, our position on Gerry Healy's expulsion of James Robertson from the 1966 London Conference, Kay Ellens' 1968 split from the SL, the SL's 1978 "clone" purge or other episodes in the history of our movement. The SL leadership purports to be disturbed that IBT members "who weren't at our 1979 conference and haven't heard the evidence" should express an opinion. We have made all the evidence we possess available to our members. We are quite prepared to pay for copying the audio tapes of the 1979 iSt conference, so that our members will be able to hear the testimony presented there for themselves. Is the ICL prepared to make copies available? We suggest they do so—for such tapes will provide a much more comprehensive record of what took place than the iSt internal bulletins now available.

The IBT statement attempts to explain: "The matter was complicated by the fact that charges against Logan contained certain distorted and exaggerated elements of truth." We are never told what, exactly, they consider to be true about the charges. The IBT admits that, under Logan's leadership, "a commandist leadership style, a punishing work schedule and lack of consideration for members' individual needs seriously marred the [SL/ANZ's] internal life." But Logan was not expelled for any of these things. *He was expelled for acts—18 specific counts of harmful, hurtful, interference in the personal/sexual lives of comrades, forcing couples apart or making them stay together, and for forcing a comrade to give up her baby.*

No. 54

The SL/ANZ membership was driven harder and more intensely than that of any other iSt section, but the operation of the SL/ANZ in the 1970s was not qualitatively different from that of the SL/US at the time. The organization interfered in the personal lives of the comrades through inordinate pressure for transfers and through the extreme personal strains that resulted from the attempt to meet the leadership's overly ambitious goals. The "punishing work schedule" in the SL/ANZ meant a "lack of consideration for members' individual needs." This can be attributed to the youth, inexperience, isolation and political insecurity of the SL/ANZ leadership (including Logan, Hannah *and* the in-transfers from the SL/US).

Yet the IBT acts like none of this ever happened. Instead, they argue that Logan was framed by a maliciously bureaucratic leadership in New York whose totalitarian powers were so vast as to convince virtually the entire membership of our remote Australian section to fabricate stories against him. And all that without even Stalin's trappings of state power. One would think that such an organization could only be considered as completely counterposed to the liberating goals of international proletarian socialist revolution. Yet according to the BT at the time we expelled Logan our international tendency was still a revolutionary party!

No. 55

The New York leadership cynically and maliciously manipulated the genuine grievances of the SL/ANZ membership to demonize Logan, who was one of the few individuals with personal authority and an independent base in the membership of the iSt. This expulsion was only one of a series of episodes that transformed the once-revolutionary Spartacist League into the pseudo-Trotskyist obedience cult it is today. It was a milestone in the degeneration of the iSt, but by itself was not the final and definitive proof that the core cadres of the Spartacist tendency lacked the capacity for self-correction.

Moreover, the new IBT “line” on Logan is at some variance with what Logan argued in his own defense in 1979. Then Logan claimed inexperience, ignorance and isolation as the basis for his actions: “My opportunities to assimilate the norms of the tendency have been very limited, and, for example, it seems clear to me now that I never developed a clear conception of what a couple was.” (!)

But now the IBT claims that everything Logan and Hannah did was approved by New York and that they were “the star pupils and most able practitioners of the Robertson school of party building.” This “Robertson made me do it” defense has a certain demented logic for the BT. It is, however, patently absurd on the face of it. Not even the IBT has ever asserted that the Spartacist leadership decrees which couples will be separated and which allowed to remain together, or pressures mothers into giving up their babies. But that’s exactly what Logan did. And is it an accident that such practices stopped in Australia as soon as he left the section?

Nos. 56-57

At the time of his trial, comrade Logan did not, and perhaps could not, fully understand what was driving the SL leadership. Nonetheless, his comment does not seem to us to conflict with the observations we have made above. Comrades who were separated by the (voluntary) transfers did not claim to be couples; they were mostly very young and the ethos of the 1970s had not lent itself to the easy development of stable relationships. In fact it is clear that (despite the protestations of the leadership) the “norms of the tendency” at the time would not have treated such comrades as couples. However, it is clear that the movement of comrades between localities was an added barrier to the development of personal relationships, and it is also clear that comrade Logan was the central figure in a leadership that was so intent on driving the group forward, that it was quite prepared to do so at the expense of the personal needs of the members.

Within the iSt, the SL/ANZ under Logan and Hannah was held up as a model of how to build a national section from scratch. The 1976 iSt European summer camp scheduled a presentation by them on precisely this question (a presentation that was subsequently pre-empted). We have never asserted that Robertson *made* Logan “do it,” merely that life in the SL/ANZ was not so very different from the SL/US.

The SL brazenly asserts that:

“Not even the IBT has ever asserted that the Spartacist leadership decrees which couples will be separated and which allowed to remain together...”

The comrades really should do their homework more carefully. On page seven of “The Road to Jimstown,” our most comprehensive (and widely read) article on the history of the degeneration of the SL/US, we wrote:

“Stalin is reported to have told the Lovestoneites in Moscow in 1929 that ‘When you get back to America, nobody will stay with you except your wives.’ Robertson is more ambitious. Frequently in the course of SL purges, extraordinary efforts are directed at splitting couples and getting one to testify against the other. Conversely, those who refuse to split up with soon-to-be ex-comrades know that they will not long survive them in the organization.”

We wrote that because it is the simple truth and is well known by many who have had the pleasure of spending time in Jimstown.

A report from the Permanent Revolution Group (published as part of the Riker/Smith document collection reprinted in *Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League* No. 8) gives evidence that Logan is up to his old tricks. This report positively describes a “communist criticism” session, in which “all comrades were expected to comment openly and frankly on the good and bad characteristics of other comrades.” At the end of this torment—which lasted *three days*—the organizer, who had a young baby, resigned for not showing enough “vigour and consistency.” Such “methods” were used for years to break critics and mold mindless hacks in Stalinist organizations, and they were also adopted by the moralists of the New Left. But they are antithetical to the training of critical Leninist cadres. And look who’s calling us a “cult”!

No. 58

The PRG “commcrit” exercise in early 1993 was perfectly innocuous. The organization was overdue for adjustments to the division of labour, and one result of the exercise was the election of a new organizer. Having spent a number of years in this demanding post, the PRG organizer was interested in changing his role in the organization. There was no question of any loss of political authority.

Beyond such normal organizational adjustments, it was also necessary to address the fact that the political functioning of some comrades had begun to slip. There were various other symptoms of political demoralization and expressions of dissatisfaction which also had to be dealt with. These ranged from criticisms of the operation of the group as a whole and the performance of various members (particularly leading comrades) to calling into question the fundamental programmatic basis of the Marxist movement.

Initially the PRG executive had intended to raise its concerns with the functioning of various comrades as personnel points in the regular Wellington branch meeting. But it was subsequently proposed that the essential points could be made equally well if, instead of simply focusing on the shortcomings of a few, the discussion were broadened to include the functioning and political development of the group as a whole, from the leadership down to the most recent recruit.

The exercise, which was always projected as a “one-off” event, took place over three branch meetings. While some comrades (including some leading comrades) found it a bit uncomfortable at points, everyone, including the (now ex-) comrades who had been the initial source of concern, felt that it was a positive experience and had helped to clear the air.

Commenting on the SL’s allegations that these meetings were about “breaking critics” and “molding mindless hacks,” comrade Marcus Hayes remarked:

“I can’t see any objection in principle, and the only question to me then is: was the actual event in practice abusive and unhealthy? It’s entirely a *contingent* question.... “Concerns based on what the exercise might have been like in other circumstances, or what these things can sometimes turn into, etc., etc., in fact assume circumstances different from what we actually had, that is, something less than a healthy regime.”

By projecting their own internal life onto us, the SL scribes conjure up a truly nightmarish scenario. Their conviction that it must necessarily have been an abusive psychological torture session is presumably grounded in their own experience. In a similar fashion many ex-Communists concluded that Lenin’s democratic centralism led inexorably to Stalin’s gulag. But in politics the truth is always concrete.

That a person, particularly one who claims to be dedicated to fighting for a communist future for humanity, would find personal gratification in the overtly sadistic exercise of power over others is a concept that is foreign to most of us. Such characters are not unknown in both literature and history, and also can often be found in the administrative apparatus of oppressive class rule. But, needless to say, they have no place in the revolutionary Marxist movement.

For the ICL the trial and expulsion of Logan was simply a necessary measure of self-protection, for the organization and its individual members. No more, no less. But what can be said for the IBT which not only made the affirmation of Bill Logan's good character a central premise of its formation as an "international" tendency but for whom the monster Logan is now their guiding light? The IBT is a political animal of a truly bizarre and dubious sort. ■

Nos. 59-60

In the history of the left over the past few decades there are many stories of energetic and talented people (usually, but not always, men) with strong personalities and sizeable egos, who began as "dedicated fighters for the communist future" but, unable to fulfil their ambitious plans, and ground down by the pressures of isolation, eventually became demoralized and settled for the pleasures of being a big fish in a little pond. James Robertson (unlike Jack Barnes, Nahuel Moreno, Bob Avakian and dozens of other equivalent little *lider maximos*) at least has the distinction of having once made some important political contributions.

The suggestion that the expulsion of Bill Logan "was simply a necessary measure of self-protection for the organization" is only true insofar as Logan (who could not be relied upon automatically to endorse each and every instruction from the SL's perfect master) represented at least a potential political threat. Logan's prominence within the iSt, and his demonstrated leadership capacity (under his tenure the London Spartacist Group made the largest and most important cadre regroupment in the history of the iSt) led to Robertson's attempt to bury him under a mountain of slander.

The question is not whether comrades were seriously mistreated in the SL/ANZ under the "Logan regime." They were. But the commandism, hyper-activity and unreasonable personal pressures on members were aimed at accelerating the growth and influence of Spartacist politics in Australia. The SL/US leadership knew all the contours of the operation and backed the Logan/Hannah leadership on every occasion. Our contention is simply that any reasonable person who investigates the circumstances and weighs the evidence will conclude that Robertson's "trial" was a hatchet-job.

Comrades Logan and Hannah made serious mistakes, but they have made an honest accounting of them. As we commented in our article announcing the creation of the IBT, "The most cogent refutation of the Spartacist slanders against Logan and Hannah...is their political record since their expulsion." Despite their bitter experience in the iSt, they remained faithful to the historic program of Trotskyism, and were instrumental in forging the New Zealand section of the IBT on the basis of genuine democratic centralism. The "party question" is an essential one for Leninists:

"From the origins of our tendency we have insisted that the organizational question is a political question of the first order for a revolutionary grouping. A revolutionary tendency need not always be correct—indeed it cannot always be correct—but it must always be correctible. Whether or not it is correctible is a function of the internal regime which prevails....

"A vibrant and democratic internal political life in a revolutionary organization is not a desirable option but a vital necessity. It is simultaneously the only mechanism for the correction of errors by the leadership and the only framework within which revolutionary cadres can be created. Groupings like the SL of the late 1970s, in which

the leadership is able to appropriate an effective monopoly of political expression internally, in the interests of 'efficiency' (i.e., by short-circuiting the necessarily time-consuming and difficult process of settling political disputes through democratic internal struggle) prepare their own inevitable political degeneration."

—1917 No. 1

Sometimes people who make mistakes are able to transcend them. Those who do, and who are prepared to make a serious contribution to building a real Leninist organization, are welcome to take their place in the IBT.

Forward to the Rebirth of the Fourth International!

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*The complete text of the ICL's pamphlet,
"The International Bolshevik Tendency —
What is it?" with a point-by-point reply.*