

From the SL to Trotskyism

In the last number of *1917*, we published an open letter to *Workers Vanguard* (“Getting Russia Right”) by a former Spartacus Youth Club (SYC) activist who had been driven out after having expressed strong reservations concerning the Spartacist League’s assertion that Russia under Yeltsin remained a workers’ state. Shortly thereafter, the comrade became a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT). In this issue, we have the pleasure of reporting that Alexander H.—another outstanding youth activist of the SYC and the Spartacist League—has joined the IBT. Alex became acquainted with our literature and was won to some of our positions while still a member of the SL.

Recruited to the SYC in January 1994, Alex became an SL spokesperson at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Soon afterward, he began reading *1917*, which initially raised questions in his mind concerning the SL’s Stalinophilic slogan “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” and its position of neutrality during the attempted 1991 Stalinist coup in Moscow. As a loyal SL member, Alex considered it his duty to raise these questions internally in the hope that he might win a majority to his point of view. This is how members of democratic-centralist organizations are supposed to act. At the suggestion of a local SL leader, Alex declared his intention to write a document setting forth his differences. But, before he could do so, the Robertsonians made him the object of their favorite tactic for dealing with anyone deemed capable of internal dissent: the pre-emptive strike.

In June 1995 he was invited to dinner by the organizer of the Boston branch (to which he was assigned). Cordial in demeanor, and professing nothing but comradely interest, the organizer encouraged him to talk about his recent political thinking, especially regarding points of disagreement between the SL and IBT. The purpose of this tête-à-tête became evident a few days later, when a meeting of the Boston local was called for the exclusive purpose of denouncing this errant teenager. Heavies from out of town were brought in to lead the attack, including the SL’s nominal second-in-command, George Foster. The meeting featured the usual chorus of hysterical name calling, followed by the obligatory motions of condemnation. One motion passed against Alex declared that, since he appeared to agree with every IBT position he knew about, and because the purpose of the IBT is to destroy the SL, that he too must desire the SL’s destruction.

The object of the above exercise was obviously to brand Alex an “enemy of the party,” isolate him, intimidate the rest of the membership and prevent other members from associating or even entering into political discussion with him. But Alex refused to give up without a fight. He handed in a document entitled “A Confused Neutrality—The SL on the Moscow August 1991 Coup,” in which he stated:

“The counterrevolutionary victory of Boris Yeltsin and his cronies over the last remnants of Soviet Stalinism known as the ‘Emergency Committee’ in August 1991 has already [been] shown to be one of the most defining events of the 20th century. The destruction of the remaining gains of the October revolution (i.e., planned economy) which grew from this victory is something that the working-class of the world is paying dearly for and will be for some time. It is axiomatic that Trotskyists defend unconditionally these gains from all attempts at capitalist restoration, which may at times mean a military bloc with Stalinism. For despite its parasitical and counter revolutionary na-

ture, Stalinism derives its privileges from proletarian property forms and is thus at times forced to defend them. “The Spartacist League has abided by this Trotskyist [principle] for most of its existence, including when it has been quite unpopular with the rest of the left. However this continuum ended with the SL’s\ICL’s reaction to the Soviet degenerated worker’s state most desperate hour of those days of August 19-21. Unlike their earlier correct positions of blocking militarily with Stalinists, like in Afghanistan and Poland, the SL\ICL’s position on August ‘91 fails to draw any correct conclusions, and is confusing to say the least. While claiming to see Yeltsin as the main danger, its position on how revolutionaries should have oriented to the Stalinists of the ‘Emergency Committee’ can only be described as a neutralist [one]. While the SL\ICL seems to have many versions on who the coup plotters were and what they represented, all these explanations fail to correctly state that Trotskyists should have been in a temporary military bloc with the Stalinists of the ‘Emergency Committee’ against Yeltsin.”

Only one junior SL member ventured a (rather unoriginal) reply to this document. When Alex approached individuals to discuss politics, they would either respond with stony silence or hysterical denunciation. With no apparent sense of the absurdity of their behavior, SL members repeatedly demanded that Alex quit, while at the same time denouncing the founders of the IBT as “gutless quitters” who left the SL years earlier without first fighting for their politics internally! In the end Alex concluded that he had no choice but to resign, given the total impossibility of conducting a serious political discussion that could lead to the further clarification of either his positions or the views of the majority. In a document submitted with his resignation, Alex wrote:

“For the past year I have studied seriously the program of the IBT in comparison with the SL’s and have found myself in increasing agreement with their perspectives. These issues however have not been met head on by the SL in any clear political way but [have] instead been clouded by slander and hysteria toward the IBT. Also add in the fact that the SL has flat out refused to debate the IBT, despite many offers by them. When a couple of comrades in Australia did debate the IBT, they were quickly disciplined by New York!”

The loss of some of their most political youth to the IBT was apparently a major consideration in publishing yet another pamphlet aimed at us. This latest attempt is entitled *The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?* While it cannot be recommended as an honest or even, for the most part, a political polemic, it does provide a compendium of their arguments against us.

The SL’s persistent refusal to debate openly the main questions that divide our two organizations is a reflection of the Robertsonians’ declining capacity for political intervention. Cheerleading, posturing and mudslinging have almost completely taken the place of politics in the Spartacist League. This, as much as the present reactionary period, accounts for their difficulty in recruiting new members, and in holding on to any intelligent, political youth they do manage to attract. We are committed to uphold the program and tradition of the revolutionary Spartacist League of the 1960s and 1970s—long since abandoned by the moribund leader cult that now retains nothing but the formal trappings of its Trotskyist past. ■