

Trotskyist Bulletin No. 6:

Polemics with the IG

International Bolshevik Tendency

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Introduction

Jan Norden, the longtime editor of *Workers Vanguard* (WV), was purged from the Spartacist League/U.S. (SL) along with several other important cadres in June 1996. The “Nordenites” promptly launched the Internationalist Group (IG) and established links with the Brazilian Liga Quarta-Internacionalista (LQB—which Norden had earlier contacted on behalf of the SL) and small groupings of former Spartacists in France and Mexico.

The IG is the latest, and perhaps the last, group of cadres purged from James Robertson’s Spartacist League with enough political energy to set up a competing organization. Although neither large nor influential, the IG is of particular interest to us because of its formal programmatic proximity, and its claim to represent the continuity of the revolutionary SL of the 1960s and 70s.

The IG’s founders have tended to regard the political decline of the SL as coincident with their own fall from grace, but, in fact, the SL was already degenerating 20 years ago. When Norden *et al.* objected to their bureaucratic treatment by the SL leadership, the Robertsonites sneered that they were merely echoing our earlier complaints, and labelled the IG the “ET of the 1990s” (the External Tendency of the iSt [ET], forerunner of the International Bolshevik Tendency [IBT]). Yet the IG continues to adamantly deny agreeing with us about practically anything.

IBT/IG Polemics

The first five items in this bulletin are polemics between the IBT and IG. The first document, our initial assessment of the IG, appeared originally in 1917 No. 18. The IG responded in their first publication, “From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle,” with a one-page article reiterating various slanders the SL leadership has thrown at us over the years.¹ This attempt to distance themselves from us appeared in a pamphlet full of descriptions of exactly the same sort of organizational abuse that we had exposed a decade earlier.²

In December 1996, we replied to the IG polemic in a lengthy letter which posed a variety of questions regarding the history of the Spartacist tendency.³ In April 1997, we had our first opportunity for a serious face-to-face political exchange with the IG when they gave a public forum in St. Catharines, Ontario. An IBT comrade who attended the event observed that the IGers:

“acted as if they were still in the ICL [the International Communist League—the SL’s international]. During their forum they were bragging about ICL work around Mumia, etc., just as if they *were* the ICL, not a micro-splinter. We thought it would not be clear to the audience why to join the IG rather than the ICL! They think it was okay for the ICL to stretch points, etc., against us because they were the ‘real’ party....”

Jan Norden’s 18 July 1998 letter to the Marxist Educational Group (MEG)⁴ uncritically endorses everything the Robertson regime did prior to purging the IG. This posture is presumably calculated to appeal to the layer of longtime ICL

members, supporters and sympathizers who remain an important constituency for the IG.

The IG’s “political” explanation for the SL’s degeneration, which they contrast to our “Kremlinology,”⁵ is limited to issues that have arisen since 1996. It is clear that Norden *et al.* would prefer to avoid serious discussion of the SL’s earlier history. It’s not hard to see why. The founding cadres of the IG must all have been long aware, on some level, that something was profoundly wrong with the SL. IG members remain, to differing degrees, conflicted about their experience in the SL and their own acquiescence (or worse) in the process of its degeneration. Any serious discussion of their common political history would doubtless reveal a considerable range of opinion within the IG. This should be no cause for alarm; indeed it is to be expected in a democratic-centralist organization. But the IG has thus far chosen to stick to simple-minded assertions that the Robertson regime had a spotless record of revolutionary integrity until it was Norden’s turn to walk the plank.

Discussions Between MEG and IG

The last seven documents in this bulletin contain correspondence between the IG and the Marxist Educational Group, a small collective in Albany, New York. The MEG was initiated by former members of the Revolutionary Workers League (RWL), an ostensibly Trotskyist organization founded in the mid-1970s by two former contacts of the SL’s Boston branch. For somewhat obscure reasons they chose not to join the then-revolutionary SL, but instead started their own centrist group and subsequently moved back to Michigan where they had grown up. While the RWL copied many of its programmatic positions from the SL, it tended to blunt the sharp edges and duck many of the hard questions.

In the early 1990s, the RWL underwent a period of explosive growth, and briefly attracted dozens of militant youth through its anti-fascist activities and its role in defending abortion clinics. Most of these recruits were soon burned out by the RWL’s frenetic pace and mindless activism, but the militants who launched the MEG sought to make some sense of their political experience. In investigating the RWL’s political origins, they became interested in its professed identification with the anti-revisionist political tradition of the early SL and the Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party in the U.S. At the same time, the Albany comrades’ exposure to the obnoxious sectarianism of the contemporary Spartacist League led them to dismiss it as a credible alternative, and so, in early 1998, they began to seriously investigate both the IG and IBT.

Initially the MEG comrades thought that the IBT and IG merely disagreed over the precise chronology of the SL’s political degeneration, but they gradually came to see that more substantive issues were involved. While we do not take political responsibility for all the formulations in MEG materials produced prior to its initiators’ recruitment to the IBT, we

1 see Document No. 2

2 see Document No. 5

3 Document No. 3

4 Document No. 11

5 Document No. 4

consider their correspondence with the IG important enough to warrant publication.

Pabloite Appetite & the SL/IG

In the “Road to Jimstown,” our 1985 analysis of the degeneration of the SL, we noted that the Robertson regime’s policy of pre-empting factional struggle through leadership-initiated purges of potential dissidents was:

“both the first form of its departure from Leninism and the framework within which all of the subsequent revisionist departures have taken place....The Spartacist League today, crippled by years of suppression of any and all dissident opinion, has lost the capacity to correct the errors of the leadership as it begins to attack the programmatic foundations of the movement.”

One of the major issues in the polemics between ourselves and the SL leadership during the 1980s was the Spartacist leadership’s episodic political adaptations toward elements of the Stalinist oligarchy. The first polemics on this question involved Robertson’s identification with Yuri Andropov, the former KGB chief who took over as head of the Soviet bureaucracy when Leonid Brezhnev died in 1982.¹ We subsequently pointed out that while the SL was loudly proclaiming the “Klan Doesn’t Ride in Moscow,” elements of the ruling Stalinist bureaucracy (in an anticipation of today’s noxious Red-Brown coalition) were incubating fascistic nativist Russian currents like Pamyat.² In 1917 No. 9, prior to the 1991 “Desert Storm” attack on Iraq, we sharply criticized the SL’s absurd pleas to the Soviet bureaucracy in general, and General B.V. Snetkov in particular, to make “vigorous efforts” to resist imperialist aggression, even though WV itself acknowledged that the Kremlin was openly backing preparations for the murderous U.S.-led assault.

In the process of purging Norden, the SL leadership suddenly discovered that he had been guilty of adaptation to Stalinism, particularly in the former DDR (German Democratic Republic) where he had been in charge of the ICL’s intervention in the turbulent winter of 1989–90. The 5 July 1996 issue of *Workers Vanguard*, which featured the first of many attacks on the IG, chastised Norden for his supposed orientation to elements of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the East German deformed workers’ state.

In reality Norden was only implementing the ICL leadership’s opportunist policy. Hans Modrow, the liberal Stalinist who took over as DDR prime minister in mid-November 1989, had clearly signaled his willingness to capitulate to imperialism when he talked of creating a “treaty community” between the two German states. Gregor Gysi, then head of the SED, supported Modrow’s scheme. Yet instead of seeking to politically expose Gysi, Modrow and the other SED “reformers,”³ the ICL sought a bloc with a section of the Stalinist apparatus.

In response to the ICL leadership’s brazen attempt to saddle Norden with sole responsibility for this opportunist orientation we recalled how:

“in 1989–90 the SL/ICL sought ‘Unity With the SED’ and James Robertson tried to arrange personal meetings with Gregor Gysi (party leader), Soviet General B.V. Snetkov and DDR master-spy Markus Wolf. The meetings never oc-

curred because the Stalinists were not interested in Robertson’s advice.”⁴

The SL has yet to explain how Robertson’s meetings with a few Stalinist bigwigs were supposed to further the proletarian political revolution they claimed was then underway.

A Tale of Two Labor Actions

Among our many disputes with the Robertsonians over the years (most of which are documented in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 5), one of the most important concerned the SL’s scandalous attempt to sabotage a 1984 anti-apartheid boycott of South African cargo aboard the *Nedlloyd Kimberley*. This action by longshoremen in the San Francisco Bay Area was led by Howard Keylor, an IBT supporter and longtime militant in the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). In a powerful display of internationalism, the longshoremen refused to handle the apartheid cargo for 11 days. On the first night of the boycott, the SL set up a “picket line” in front of the ship and denounced the 25 (predominantly black) longshore militants who went on board to initiate the action as “scabs.” In the end, the action was broken by a federal court injunction which cited an SL-supported union publication as “Exhibit 1.”

The SL’s activities throughout the boycott were driven by cynical petty factionalism. Three former SL cadres who had been involved in trade-union work for many years wrote a letter to WV (dated 27 January 1985) charging:

“your chief motivation throughout this event seemed to have nothing to do with international working-class solidarity with the black toilers of South Africa, or even with showing how the action was weakened and endangered by betrayal and misleadership within the ILWU leadership; since SL actions were focused almost entirely on finding new ways to ‘expose’ (read ‘get’) Howard Keylor and, to a lesser extent, various other former SL supporters.”⁵

The SL acted in a similarly unprincipled and factional manner this year by attacking Jack Heyman and other key organizers of the 24 April one-day shutdown of all U.S. West Coast ports in solidarity with Mumia Abu-Jamal. In this case, to its credit, the IG joined us, and most of the rest of the left, in supporting this important labor action and condemning the SL’s dead-end sectarianism.⁶

Marxists can make mistakes, but no revolutionary organization could make this kind of “mistake”—refusing to back a workers’ solidarity action out of pure sectarian malice. In our 1996 letter to the IG, we drew a parallel between the SL leadership’s opposition to the 1984 longshore boycott (a position which WV attempted to cover up at the time) and the SL’s attempts to undermine the trade-union work of the IG’s co-thinkers in Brazil. Perhaps this recent experience with the ILWU will lead the IG to a reassessment of the events on San Francisco’s Pier 80 in 1984 which, as we noted at the time, demonstrated that the political degeneration of the Spartacist League was qualitatively complete.

All items in this bulletin have been corrected for spelling and punctuation.

—International Bolshevik Tendency, August 1999

1 Our debate with the SL on this and other aspects of the Russian question is reprinted in *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 1.

2 see 1917 No. 6

3 see 1917 No. 10

4 1917 No. 18

5 reprinted in *Bulletin of the ET*, No. 4, May 1985

6 see *Internationalist* No. 7, April-May; WV Nos. 710, 713, 716 (16 April, 28 May, 9 July); and 1917 No. 21

Document No. 1

Healyites of the Second Mobilization

Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized

Reprinted below is the 1 July 1996 statement of the International Bolshevik Tendency on the expulsion of Jan Norden et al. from the Spartacist League/U.S.

The Spartacist League is currently retailing an “internal” bulletin on the recent purge of several members of their top leadership. SL founder/leader James Robertson opines that had they:

“gone on just a little bit more, I think we’d have found a roaring fire gutting our version of the theoretical edifice that Marx and Lenin and Trotsky built.”

The hero of the piece is Al Nelson, who, Robertson “jocularly” suggests, deserves to be honored by a “motion that all party comrades shall hang in their homes a picture of Al, not less than one foot square.” Al is credited with discovering that Jan Norden, editor of *Workers Vanguard* (WV) for the past 23 years, was a “revisionist,” a “cliquist,” an “impressionist” and an assortment of other bad things. Possessed of phenomenal energy, Norden was the SL’s best linguist, their most prolific writer, and quite possibly their best administrator. We predict that this purge will soon be apparent in the journalistic quality, and perhaps also the frequency, of the SL’s press.

The political issues ostensibly posed in Norden’s removal chiefly concern events in the International Communist League’s (ICL) German section, the Spartakist-Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SpAD). The dispute involves various documents not included in the SL’s recent bulletin. One of the key issues appears to be differences on the evaluation of the ICL’s failed intervention in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in 1989–90 (for our assessment see “Robertsonites in Wonderland,” 1917 No. 10). For much of this period Norden was one of the senior ICL cadres on the spot, and was responsible for the production of the group’s daily German newsheet. Nelson’s attack on Norden hinges on the claim that in his January 1995 public speech on the collapse of the DDR at Humboldt University in Berlin, Norden capitulated politically to the Communist Platform (the left wing of the social-democratic Party of Democratic Socialism—successor to the former ruling party in the DDR).

Apart from the laudatory treatment of the ICL’s activities, Norden’s remarks at Humboldt seem unobjectionable enough. Nelson focuses on Norden’s observation that given the tiny size of the ICL’s German group, and its lack of connections to the working class, it could not have posed itself as an immediate contender for power. Nelson quotes Norden as saying:

“Look at the reality: we came in from the outside to the DDR, and at times at the height of our intervention at the end of 1989 and beginning of 1990 we only had eight comrades in Berlin who spoke German.”

The fact is that the SpAD was never able to mobilize even 100 people in its own name. Nelson displayed his political acumen during his sojourn in Berlin with the prediction that the SpAD would get hundreds of thousands of votes in the 1990 election. In fact it only got a couple of thousand. His insistence that only a “revisionist” would deny that the SpAD stood ready “to take the power, just as Lenin said in 1917,” demonstrates that even hindsight is not 20/20 for everyone.

Once he knew where to look, Len Meyers, the facile cynic

who has succeeded Norden as WV editor, soon came up with more shocking evidence of revisionism. Toward the end of his speech Norden attempted to explain how the policy of seeking to make deals with imperialism at the expense of workers’ revolution (i.e., “peaceful coexistence”) did not originate with Khrushchev, as some hard Stalinists in the Communist Platform imagine, but can rather be traced directly to Stalin himself. To illustrate this, Norden used an example that his audience would be familiar with:

“Stalin’s policy of ‘peaceful coexistence’ also led to enormous concessions to imperialism. That was why the Soviet Union sent only limited amounts of munitions during the Spanish Civil War, because it didn’t want to directly go against the blockade decreed by the imperialist ‘democracies.’”

Meyers deliberately wrests Norden’s example out of its context and treats it as if it had been put forward as an alternative analysis of the Kremlin’s betrayal of the Spanish Revolution. He claims to have been “struck” by the “left-Stalinist or left-democratic critique of the Soviet bureaucracy on the Spanish Revolution” contained in the above passage and claims that:

“this statement, which it is hard to imagine coming from anyone even remotely sympathetic to the Trotskyist analysis of the betrayal of the Spanish Revolution, well politically epitomizes the conciliationism which permeates the Humboldt presentation.”

It seems to us that Meyers’ critique “well politically epitomizes” the logic-chopping that passes for political criticism among the Robertsonians these days.

Norden’s Group

What the SL bulletin refers to as “Norden’s ‘Group’” includes his companion, Marjorie Salzburg, a highly experienced and capable alternate member of the SL Central Committee. As well as being a prominent public spokesperson for the SL, Salzburg also functioned as WV’s “*de facto*” managing editor.” She had also been the initiator of the ICL’s South African work. The “Norden Group” also includes Negrete who, until he was recently purged, had been the leading figure in the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM), the ICL’s Mexican branch. As such he had worked closely with Norden, who ran the ICL’s Latin American work. The fourth member of the “group” is Socorro, an 18-year ICL cadre, who had also been a leader in the GEM.

But it seems that this may not exhaust the list of supporters of the “Norden Group.” The final pretext for kicking out Norden and Salzburg was their refusal to turn over their personal phone bills so the leadership could go after anyone unwise enough to have accepted a call from them recently. Norden/Salzburg characterized this as a “fishing expedition,” and while insisting they had not engaged in any “public political activity” behind the back of the SL, refused to implicate comrades whose only crime was having spoken to them on the phone. In his 7 June postscript, Robertson comments: “We are indeed left wondering *who* in fact he [Norden] has been in phone/fax contact with since the first of the year.” Robertson may one day be able to make a pretty good guess.

Liz Gordon, apparently still a nominal member of the SL leadership, was a collateral target of the assault on Norden. Gordon and Norden, with Joseph Seymour, were the key Political Bureau members involved in the production of *Workers Vanguard* over the years. They were central to the “WV collective,” which was denounced in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Spartacist* as “furiously defensive, turf-conscious, hypersensitive, arrogant, cliquist [and] anti-Leninist.” In the recently released ICL document, Gordon, the former Secretary of the ICL’s International Secretariat, is denounced for running “the would-be splitters as a cliquist operation out of New York behind the back of the party.” Nelson quotes Robertson to the effect that, “Norden, Marjorie and Gordon stand revealed as the architects of an impressionistic opportunism, as shameful as it is dimwitted.” Gordon, a highly political but introverted and emotionally fragile woman who has been periodically trashed by Robertson over the years, does not seem to have much of a future as a leader of the SL/ICL.

Robertson’s Midnight Ramblers

In their resignation statement, Norden and Salzburg denounce the charges against them as an “entire fantasy of groundless assumptions, wild conjectures and filthy smears,” and protest that they were “framed up” for expulsion “on the basis of speculation based on suppositions based on lies.” This seems fair enough, judging from the materials published in the SL bulletin. Salzburg and Norden have not entirely lost their sense of humor:

“In recent months, we have been called Stalinophilic, Castroite, Shachtmanite, Pabloite of the second mobilization, accused of running a Healyite regime, with a touch of Loganism, like the BT, like Hansen, and partly like Goldman-Morrow and Cochran-Clarke. Oh yes, and also believers in Saddam Hussein’s war propaganda. To be all that at once is quite a feat.”

This kind of overkill will be familiar to anyone who has had the pleasure of witnessing one of the ICL’s purge campaigns up close. The Norden/Salzburg claim that the leadership’s charges “abound in utterly false statements” sounds about par for the course, as does their account of how they were notified of their suspension: a “hefty repo squad” arrived at their apartment around midnight, notified them that they had been removed from the leadership and demanded that they turn over their keys, computer and fax machine. The following example of double-think has also featured in other purges:

“all opposition to the line of the I.S. [ICL International Secretariat] was labelled ‘anti-internationalist’ and fundamentally deviant on the party question. We replied that the Germany dispute was a false fight to find a Stalinophilic deviation, that the alleged facts, analysis and conclusions bore no resemblance to reality. *Defenders of the I.S. and IEC line declared that if we thought that, then we must believe that they are bureaucratic witchhunters.*”

—emphasis added

In the ICL a “hostile” attitude to the leadership is incompatible with membership. Those who dispute accusations by the leadership must believe that the leadership levels false charges. But such a belief constitutes “hostility.” And so the circle is closed.

Mexican Leadership Purged

The SL has not been able to assimilate many of the handful of cadres they have regrouped internationally over the past 15 years. This is attributable to the disparity between the ICL’s orthodox Trotskyist facade and the unpleasant reality of life on the inside. One of the main charges made in the

purge of Negrete and Socorro was “anti-internationalism.” Roughly translated, this means daring to disagree with instructions from the U.S. leadership. After the purge of Negrete, who, perhaps for cosmetic reasons, was apparently not suspended but rather placed on (involuntary) leave, Socorro was brought back to New York to stand trial on a variety of charges, including “breaking discipline” by getting separated from other GEM members in the midst of the several hundred thousand participants in Mexico City’s May Day demonstration. This is the kind of infraction that only a perceived factional opponent would ever have to stand trial for in the first place. The result of the trial was of course a forgone conclusion: she was found guilty.

Two days later she criticized the ICL’s trial procedure at an internal SL meeting:

“I was, a number of years ago, abducted and raped and the fucking bourgeois court gave the rapist more justice than I got. And that is the truth. That is the truth. And it is a travesty and it’s a shame on this party.”

The next day the SL Political Bureau, citing this remark, responded:

“Membership must be based on something other than open hatred, contempt and derision, fundamentally counterposed to our basic principles. To therefore hereby expel Socorro for her comment...”

In other words, criticism of the SL’s juridical procedures is now an expellable offense. One of the more puzzling features of the Salzburg/Norden resignation statement is their characterization of Socorro’s remark as “unconscionable and false.” We were not present at either trial, but judging from the SL’s own account of the procedure, as well as Salzburg/Norden’s observations, it is not apparent why her comment was either “unconscionable” or “false.”

Democratic-Centralism in the SL

Perhaps Norden/Salzburg have good reason for their criticism of Socorro, but it seems more probable that their comment somehow reflects the influence of a quarter of a century spent in the Spartacist League. This is also evident in their claim that:

“Over the recent period, *and particularly in the past several weeks*, the I.S. has taken a series of measures breaking sharply with our Spartacist traditions and norms of internal debate governed by Leninist democratic centralism and instead imposing increasing restrictions and reprisals.”

—emphasis added

While it was necessary to have some room for political debate at the top of the SL (particularly within the editorial board), the fact is that the internal political life of the SL and its satellites has been pretty arid for the last couple of *decades*. As we noted in our initial declaration in October 1982, the SL/iSt had not had an internal tendency or faction since 1968. We commented that this distinguished the internal regime of the SL from that of Lenin’s Bolshevik Party, Trotsky’s Fourth International and 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 and author of *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*] 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.”

The ICL leadership has naturally always been a bit shy about addressing this question, but such a record strongly

suggests that the SL's departure from Leninist democracy occurred years ago, not weeks ago. ICL cadres (like Healyites or Stalinists) who suddenly find themselves outside the organization to which they devoted their lives are forced to spend some time thinking back and trying to make sense of their experience. It is not uncommon for them to begin with the assumption that things were basically okay—that there was at least rough justice—in most, if not all, cases that preceded their own. But often after further reflection and/or investigation, they realize that their experience was not really unique or unprecedented after all.

'WV Collective' Terminated

The impact of these events for the ICL can hardly be overestimated. Robertson is well aware of this, which is why he has rushed to circulate this latest "internal" bulletin. As usual, his main concern is preserving his dues base. He evidently figures that it is best to undergo a short, sharp shock—particularly since it is clearly all going to come out anyway. Everyone familiar with the SL knows that this represents a deep split in the core cadre of the group. The apolitical authority fights, which have reduced every section of the ICL to shells directed by people deficient in either brain or backbone (or both), have now taken their toll on the *Workers Vanguard* editorial board. This can only further erode any expectation on the part of the aging layer of those who joined in the early 1970s and still remain in "Jimstown" that somehow, someday, things might start to turn around.

In the leaflet we distributed at the SL's debate with Ernest Mandel in November 1994 we commented that the internal difficulties of the SL leadership foreshadowed a "succession struggle" that "will erupt when Number One is no longer around to settle all disputes by personal fiat." We also noted that, "The current targets [of Robertson's inner circle] seem to be the leading members of the editorial board of *Workers Vanguard*" and commented that:

"The members of the WV collective, who have slavishly endured such abuse for years, may be missing a few vertebrae, but they constitute the brightest and most political elements in the group, and are therefore the most logical candidates for future leadership."

Norden is no longer short-listed for the job of taking over the post-Robertson SL, but he and Salzburg did demonstrate that there were at least a few vertebrae intact among the "WV collective."

Joseph Seymour is now the only one left at the top of the SL from the "cliquist" literati denounced in *Spartacist* several years ago. He only appears in the bulletin as the author of an opaque farewell to Norden, with whom he toiled for so many years in WV. Long pained by Robertson's insistence on driving out most of the more political and talented SL recruits, while promoting "reliable" low-caliber apparatchiks, Seymour might be feeling a bit lonely right now. His letter to Norden ignores the specifics of the various charges and instead chides him for thinking that it is possible to make a breakthrough in this period. This, says Seymour, marks Norden as a "man of the pre-1976 era," i.e., someone who is out of sync with the shrunken historic possibilities of the moment.

In his letter to Norden, Seymour comments: "I sometimes find it conceptually useful to look at our organization as if I were *not* a member of it." As the group's leading intellectual, Seymour has traditionally been permitted a considerable degree of detachment from the operational side of the SL. Norden *et al.*, on the other hand, have had their detachment thrust upon them. Whatever one's vantage point, the picture must be discouraging for those who accept Robertson's dic-

tum that only the ICL possesses the capacity to "facilitate the emancipation of the proletariat internationally."

Ascension of Prince Albert

A revolutionary organization cannot be built upon the principle of deference to the whims of a single individual. But a political obedience cult can have no other basis. The history of the Spartacist League over the past two decades is that of an organization in transition from the one to the other. The termination of the "Norden Group" appears to be the culmination of the protracted process of pulverizing any sense of political independence in the leading cadre who remain from the revolutionary SL of the 1970s. The SL's bulletin is entitled "Norden's 'Group': Shamefaced Defectors From Trotskyism," but there is little evidence that they have so far defected from anything but the obligation to accept that "the party leadership," i.e., James Robertson and his surrogates, is always right. In a speech delivered in Germany in late January, Al Nelson put his finger on the real reason for getting rid of Norden:

"In the past when one of these episodes provoked a fight in the party he [Norden] would grudgingly yield to the party's judgment and go on to something else. But not this time. For six months he has categorically defied the party's judgment..."

Nelson concluded his January 16 document attacking Norden with the following classical statement of an apparatus man:

"It is the responsibility and duty of party leaders who steer the party off its programmatic course to *assist* the party in correcting that departure. You can't do that by standing back and thumbing your nose at the party. You can't be right against the whole party."

In the SL these days "the whole party" doesn't add up to a great deal, as Nelson's preeminence indicates. Norden's opposition was tolerated for as long as it was because he was so important to the whole operation. In their resignation statement, Norden and Salzburg recount how Norden was gradually stripped of one post after another, in what was evidently an attempt to isolate him internally, while gradually increasing the pressure on him to capitulate. In response to the leadership's charge that Norden had gradually wiggled out of his political responsibilities, they write:

"This cynical question is designed to get around the fact, which the I.S. knows full well, that Norden didn't 'unilaterally suspend his political responsibilities,' but rather *he was removed from them*. Following the 20 July 1995 I.S. meeting, Norden was removed step by step from operational responsibility for the work in areas which he previously oversaw. This was immediately true for everything concerning Germany except work on *Spartakist*; Brosius took over phone contact with the SpAD. On Mexico, Richard D. was assigned to maintain regular communication with the GEM. This can be verified simply by looking at the reports and fax traffic. On Brazil, Norden supervised the trip by Abrao and Adam in August 1995, but after that communication with Brazil was handled through other comrades. "This culminated in the January 1996 IEC meeting, where Norden was removed from full IEC membership; thereafter he was no longer responsible for any particular area of work in the I.S...."

In the Spartacist League today the selection of cadres does not take place on the basis of their political capacities and commitment to the program of Trotskyism, but rather on the basis of their "loyalty" to the leadership. It is therefore somehow fitting that faithful Al Nelson (the only veteran, besides Robertson himself, of the SL's predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party/U.S.) should

emerge as the victor in the fight which defines and shapes the final, irreversible decline of the ICL. Nelson's detractors may grumble that he's rather dull, very insecure, has a tendency to be a bully and is sometimes a bit unstable. But they ignore his other qualities: he has a certain base cunning, and, more importantly, he is thoroughly, deeply, unremittingly loyal to Robertson. Robertson is well aware of Nelson's limitations and has occasionally had to jerk his chain—but one needs to do that with pit bulls.

While the SL degenerated beyond recognition, its press

continued to publish some first rate articles. *Workers Vanguard* was the main reason why anyone would want to join the SL. But a high-quality political newspaper requires high-quality political people to produce it. It cannot be written without discussion and argument—phenomena which the Robertson regime, in its desire for absolute control, profoundly distrusts. With the expulsion of Norden/Salzburg, and the triumph of the hacks over the “WV collective,” the SL leadership divests itself of the one thing that has unnaturally prolonged its life: a compelling literary facade.

Document No. 2

A Note on the “Bolshevik” Tendency

The following statement was included in the IG's first publication, “From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle.”

Hoping to derive some profit from the recent purge in the ICL, the “Bolshevik Tendency” has published a gloating leaflet which reads like a blend of the *National Enquirer* and cut-rate Kremlinology. While clothed in smarmy personalistic “analyses,” it should be clear to all that the BT's “critiques” come from the *right*.

The immediate issues crystallizing the recent purge campaign had to do with Brazil, where in tandem with our expulsions the ICL leadership disloyally broke relations with Luta Metalurgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil. This accompanied a cowardly, headlong flight from class struggle over the effort to separate police from the Volta Redonda municipal workers union. But it will be evident to those who know the BTs that class struggle in a largely black, turbulent place like Brazil is hardly their cup of tea. What the SL has always said about the BTs is true. They are rightist liars and slanderers who ran away from the pressures and dangers of being a red in the Reagan years.

I personally witnessed the BT's lies, provocative behavior and unashamed orientation to the white labor aristocracy from the beginning. For example, I was less than ten feet away from Bob Mandel on the SF [San Francisco] Greyhound picket line when he was supposedly the victim of an attack by SL members—an attack that never happened! This *slandorous invention* was cooked up precisely when the SL was being witchhunted by the state. I saw how they accused the SL of a “ghetto” orientation while blaming us for firings during the 1983 phone strike; how they tried to rush the stage at a Geronimo Pratt demonstration in Oakland; and many other incidents that proved to the hilt the SL's characterizations. Since then the BTs have continued to make their nature clear. They called for workers' defense guards (sic) to stop “vio-

lence” like the Los Angeles upheaval, and joined “Cop-watch,” a group with the professed aim of police “accountability” (so it was no surprise when their former long-time spokesman Gerald, now of the “CWG,” [Communist Workers Group] said “We are not anti-police”). They rejected “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan” with classic Stalinophobic arguments. They immersed themselves in unprincipled pop-frontist coalitions during the Gulf War. Now they have published an entire pamphlet in defense of *crossing picket lines!* Any genuine revolutionary can only scorn the BT.

Their supposedly Soviet-defensist posture of support to the August 1991 “Gang of Eight” coup in the Soviet Union should fool no one: they gave after-the-fact “military” support to Stalinist has-beens who didn't militarily lift a finger against Yeltsin (not even cutting his phone lines to Washington) and assured the capitalists of their support for “market reforms.” At the same time, the BT rushed to declare the Soviet degenerated workers' state dead and gone. Writing off all perspective of struggle in the then-USSR, they sought to get the Russian Question off their backs while donning a bit of “defensist” window-dressing. Thus it is no accident that their line parallels that of virulent national-centrist outfits in Latin America like the Argentine PBCI and its partners in the Brazilian LBI, open advisors to the pro-police faction in the Volta Redonda municipal workers union.

The bottom-feeding scavengers of the BT live off anti-communism. Thoughtful members of the ICL must face this harsh reality: running away from a class battle in Brazil has more in common with the BT's Second International-tinged pseudo-Trotskyism than with the program and traditions on which the Spartacist tendency was built.

—Negrete, 25 July 1996

Document No. 3

IBT letter to IG/LQB

The following letter, written in December 1996, was sent to both the IG and the LQB in February 1997 after substantial portions of it were translated into Portuguese. The IG acknowledged receipt but did not reply.

15 December 1996

To: Internationalist Group (U.S.) and Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil

Dear comrades,

We have studied with interest the materials concerning your recent separation from the ICL [International Communist League, headed by Spartacist League/U.S. (SL)]. We find in them a familiar pattern: a cynical purge of cadre whose main infraction appears to have been a reluctance to swallow everything laid down by those in positions of authority. Many comrades have been purged from the International Communist League/international Spartacist tendency [ICL/iSt] for similar reasons in the past.

We find ourselves in substantial agreement with much in your written materials, for example, the conjunctural perspective outlined by Norden in “The Post-Soviet Period: Bourgeois Offensive and Sharp Class Battles.” In this letter, however, we wish to address a variety of political, historical and factual issues over which we disagree.

Given that you are advancing a critique of the SL that clearly overlaps, at least partially, with our own, and that our three groups are, to our knowledge, the only organizations on the planet to claim the tradition of the RT/iSt [the Revolutionary Tendency was the progenitor of the SL] (outside of the ICL itself), it seems appropriate to address the questions that divide us in order to, if nothing else, clarify the scope of our differences.

We have always said that the absence of a democratic internal life within the iSt/ICL could only produce a bureaucratized and largely depoliticized organization. Your recent experience would appear to confirm this estimate. Over the years the SL leadership has also propounded a range of formal programmatic deviations from the Trotskyist heritage it once championed. The ICL today is a formation which, despite pretenses of Trotskyist orthodoxy, is an *obstacle* to the reforging of the Fourth International. The IG and LQB [Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, formerly known as Luta Metalúrgica (LM)] have both reached similar conclusions—although it seems that we differ sharply with the IG over the history of the ICL’s degeneration.

‘It Is Necessary to Study the Facts’

The LQB’s statement on the ICL describes a group in which things have gone badly wrong:

“Marxism teaches that before drawing major conclusions it is necessary to study the facts. This is part of dialectical materialism. But we believe that in Parks’ draft letters there were many affirmations that were not based on facts, together with many furious statements (psychological pressure techniques frequently used by Causa Operaria—we can cite their polemical documents against LM), without a Marxist consideration of the situation. But not only that. In the draft letters, and in recent letters sent to us, we see deductions which are drawn from a ‘reality’ that does not exist. There is a name for this: idealism, or even illusionism. Every Marxist must face the reality of the class struggle which, like a ‘Twister’-type tornado, will shatter the glass houses of those who try to hide from it.”

We agree that it is only by “studying the facts” that one can come to understand how the selection of leading cadres in the once-revolutionary SL produced such a leadership. This is not a question of prestige, personal pique or individual personalities; it is not ancient history or sectarian trivia; it is a political question of vital importance in the struggle for continuity, and thus for the creation of the Trotskyist cadres of the future.

Our three organizations naturally approach this question from different angles, based on our different experiences. The IBT is largely composed of former iSt/ICL comrades who have long held a highly critical view of the ICL, and are viewed with animosity by its leadership. The LQB had very little experience with the ICL, and so was understandably shocked by its behavior. As the comrades of the LQB become acquainted with the full political record of the SL/ICL, we expect that they will come to the conclusion that the ICL leadership’s behavior was not out of character. The IG comrades, despite their decades of experience in the ICL, were apparently also surprised by what happened to them. They so far seem unable to provide a satisfactory explanation of their own experience. The issues posed are considerably more complicated, and personally more difficult, for the IG comrades because coming to grips with what happened requires that they first establish some critical distance from their own political histories, and begin to rethink many of the assumptions that they have operated on for years.

A Few Questions for the Internationalist Group

The picture of the ICL circa 1996 presented by the IG comrades is one of an organization that for decades operated as a model of Leninist democracy and was then transmogrified almost overnight into a cynical, bureaucratized sect. This flies in the face of both elementary logic and the facts.

If the SL was until very recently characterized by a scrupulous regard for truth in its dealings with internal (as well as external) opponents then why would the cadres so eagerly repeat the lies and the false charges made against you? Why would they be willing to condemn comrades without studying the documents? How could a trial body composed of long-time SL members be willing to stack the deck so blatantly against the defendants? Why would every single ICL section (with the sole exception of the unassimilated LM) immediately support the bogus charges without even asking any questions? And why would the membership of a healthy Trotskyist group, with an experienced cadre, accept, with hardly a murmur of dissent, the rupture of relations with the LM over such a cynical and absurd pretext?

No one with any political experience can take seriously the contention that revolutionary cadres, forged over decades in an atmosphere where critical thinking was encouraged, where differences were openly debated and minority opinions respected, could suddenly be transformed into a solid bloc of hand-raisers, liars and political cowards.

The IG comrades can only maintain their present position on the history of the iSt/ICL by denying their own experience. No revolutionary organization in the history of the

workers' movement has ever undergone the process the IG describes. The *only* explanation is that much of the revolutionary fibre of the ICL cadres had been destroyed long before the campaign against Norden-Stamberg-Negrete-Socorro was launched.

A rigorous and critical accounting of the history of the Trotskyist movement is an essential element in forging the cadres of the future. We recognize that in his 1993 document tracing the genesis of Pabloism to the disorientation of the post war Fourth International over Yugoslavia comrade Norden made an important contribution to the historiography of our movement. The same seriousness and detachment must guide our approach to the history of our own time.

'Marines Alive': the SL's Big Flinch

The LQB has characterized as an "act of cowardice" the ICL leadership's severing of fraternal relations at the moment that the fight against cops in the union intensified. We find this explanation less than compelling. For example, in replying to the ICL leaders' declaration that they would not "set foot" in Volta Redonda because of the possibility of a "blood-bath," the LQB pointed out it was they, and not Parks et. al., who had to run the risks. While there is clearly an element of cowardice involved, we think the primary motivation for the ICL leaders' behavior was the narrow factional objective of maintaining their absolute organizational control. If the LQB leadership could not be induced to denounce Norden and Negrete, the two ICL cadres with whom they had worked most closely, then the LQB could emerge within the ICL as the nucleus of a future opposition. The fact that the LQB would enjoy the prestige of being the only ICL section with any kind of proletarian base added to the danger. Such bureaucratic calculations would explain the maneuvers reported by the LQB:

"In your [the ICL] previous letter, dated 11 June, Parks wrote that Norden and Abrão wanted to destroy the LQB's Fraternal Relations with the ICL. Then on 17 June, six days later, you wrote to break Fraternal Relations!"

—"From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle," p 84

It seems clear that Parks' blather about the dangers of confrontation was simply a rationale for demanding that the LQB prove its "loyalty" to the ICL leadership by dissolving its trade union work and walking away from the struggles it initiated.

But if cowardice was not the main factor in this case, the iSt/ICL leadership *has* certainly been guilty of cowardly flinches in the past. The most egregious of these was the call to save the lives of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon. The bombing of the Marine compound in Beirut in October 1983 killed 240-odd Marines—the biggest single setback for the U.S. military since the Viet Cong's 1968 Tet offensive. In our initial statement, we characterized the SL's call to save the surviving Marines as a "profile in cowardice." In the introduction to a collection of the polemics between ourselves and *Workers Vanguard* over this question, we analyzed its origins:

"The sudden concern for the well-being of the Marines, who only a year earlier *Workers Vanguard* had described as among 'the world's most notorious imperialist butchers,' marked a radical departure from the SL's formal posture as the continuators of orthodox Trotskyism. It illuminated starkly the programmatic dimension to the SL's evolution from Trotskyism to political banditry—a peculiar and eclectic form of centrism, chiefly characterized by a capacity for wild and capricious programmatic gyrations. The SL's degeneration is rooted, in the final analysis, in a loss of confidence in the possibility of winning the working class to the revolutionary program, however it is overlaid by a substan-

tial element of leader-cultism. Indulging the fancies and fantasies of James Robertson has become an increasingly important determinant of the real activity of the group in its decline.

"Political bandits are always willing to subordinate questions of formal political line to the exigencies of their perceived immediate organizational requirements. The cowardly reflex exhibited by the SL leadership over the Marines in Lebanon was clearly motivated by fear of incurring the displeasure of their own ruling class. For Robertson, it is apparently more important to safeguard his privileged position, the groupies and the extravagant personal lifestyle which he affords himself as the big frog in the little pond of the Spartacist League than his claim to represent the continuity of Trotskyism."

—Preface to *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 2, "Marxism vs. Social-Patriotism," December 1984

But what seems like a "smart" move in a panicky moment often turns out to be an embarrassment later. The SL leadership lacks the integrity simply to acknowledge that we were right and they were wrong over "Marines Alive." Instead they have tried to squirm out of their error by retroactively adjusting the facts. Thus a decade after the event, when an SL-supporter drew a parallel between the situation in Lebanon in the early 1980s and the communal conflicts then underway in Bosnia, the 2 July 1993 *Workers Vanguard* asserted that this was a "misapplied historical analogy" and disingenuously claimed that, "The few hundred U.S. Marines sent to 'guard' the Beirut airport hardly constituted imperialist military intervention..."

In commenting on this in 1917 No. 13, we recalled that only a month before the bombing WV (23 September 1983) had taken a very different view:

"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."

On one day alone (19 September 1983) U.S. ships offshore had pounded the Phalangists' Muslim opponents with 360 *five-inch shells!* That surely qualifies as "imperialist military intervention" in anybody's book. But even after we pointed out this misrepresentation, no retraction or correction appeared in WV.

A few years later, another cowardly flinch by the SL leadership occurred when the space shuttle *Challenger*, loaded with anti-Soviet spy technology and U.S. military officers, spontaneously combusted in January 1986. On that occasion *Workers Vanguard* (14 February 1986) wrote:

"What we feel toward the astronauts [i.e., the military specialists whose mission it was to deploy an advanced spy satellite] 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."

In 1917 No. 2 we commented that we thought there must be something seriously wrong with "revolutionary communists" who feel "no more and no less" sympathy for impoverished refugees from rightist terror than for a bunch of U.S. imperialism's Star Warriors.

Corruption in the SL/ICL?

The IG has thus far denied any element of corruption in the Robertson regime, and has even suggested that such accusations are characteristic of "crude anti-communists." In 1917 No. 4 we reported on the SL's internal fund drive to purchase and refurbish a commodious Bay Area house for comrade Robertson. We recalled how, in 1971, *Workers Van-*

guard had sharply criticized Huey P. Newton of the Black Panther Party for securing luxurious accommodation for himself at the expense of his membership.

To our knowledge, only Robertson and a few close associates enjoy any significant material privileges. Indeed, the rest of the functionaries live very modestly. But there is also corruption of a political/moral sort, where comrades are forced into situations where they must either compromise their integrity or break from the movement to which they have dedicated a good part of their lives. The demand that the LQB comrades support the expulsion of Norden/Stamberg, without either reading the documents or hearing the arguments, is an example of this sort of “corruption.” Comrade Negrete refers to a layer of “self-conscious fabricators and liars” in the ICL. The existence of such elements is in itself evidence of corruption, and also suggests that the problems in the ICL are not of recent origin. In our 1985 article, “The Road to Jimstown,” we noted that the ICL:

“holds congresses about as frequently as Stalin’s Comintern. There is no discipline for the privileged leadership of the American section (which doubles as the international leadership) while complete obedience is demanded from all the others, down to the most trivial organizational details.”

The accusations of “anti-internationalism” directed at the GEM leaders for failing to bow to every whim of those placed in charge in New York, the breaking of fraternal relations with the LQB when the Brazilian comrades ignored their injunction to abandon their trade-union work—all this is part of a pattern that goes back years.

The 1981 Purge of the Australian Section

We suggest that the comrades of the IG (as well as the LQB) critically review some of the “fights” in the iSt/ICL over the past two decades in the light of your recent experiences. We note that the 1981 purge of the Australian section is obliquely referred to by the IG:

“As the reporter for the I.S. at the second international conference, Brosius, put it, the Australian section has been the ‘bellwether of social-democratic deviations in the ICL.’ At the beginning of the 1980s it flinched badly on the Russian question, beginning with dropping the slogan ‘Defense of Cuba, USSR Begins in El Salvador.’”

—“From a Drift...” pp 37–8

The 1981 “fight” in the SL/ANZ around this slogan is worth revisiting, for it was one of the best documented and most “political” of the wave of purges that swept the iSt in that period. We presume that you have access to the two internal SL/ANZ documents produced on this purge (“The Fight Against the Anti-Soviet Opposition,” Parts 1 and 2).

After visiting the SL/ANZ in January 1981, Helene Brosius of the iSt’s International Secretariat wrote a report, dated 2 February 1981, in which she commented: “I worry about the noticeable softness of the section. Practically all of the leading cadre are either known rightists...or pretty conservative” (Pt. 1, p 3). A few months later, when the iSt launched its “Anti-Imperialist Contingents” (AICs), calling for military victory to the leftist insurgents in El Salvador, the SL/ANZ dropped the more angular slogan (“Defense of the USSR Begins in El Salvador”) at a 13 June 1981 demonstration in Sydney. This was apparently done in pursuit of a “united front” contingent with the Third Campist International Socialists. This was sharply criticized in a 3 July 1981 motion by the iSt’s International Secretariat, which called for “a period of discussion in the SL/ANZ with the aim of correcting what appears to be a softening of the section as a whole.”

Chris Korwin (the SL/ANZ National Chairman who had been sent in from New York a few years earlier) and other

leading members of the SL/ANZ quickly put forward motions criticizing their error in dropping the slogan, and also the group’s general disorientation on the question. All of these motions passed unanimously. But there was a widespread expectation among the more experienced SL/ANZ members that this would not suffice, and that a “fight” was on the horizon. All that remained was to identify the target. Having jointly shared responsibility for the original lapse, all the leading members were eager to demonstrate their opposition to such deviations and anxious for the chance to fight for the party. At the same time they knew enough about how things worked in the iSt not to launch a “fight” (particularly against an existing regime) without first getting the green light. Thus the stage was set for the tragi-comic drama that followed.

On 22 July, during a Sydney exec discussion of slogans for the SL/ANZ contingent in an upcoming Hiroshima Day demonstration, Chris suggested adding “Defense of the USSR Begins in Alice Springs.” Pip, one of the four full members of the SL/ANZ Central Committee at the time, expressed concern that as “we had just used a similar wording on the El Salvador slogan it would be confusing” (Pt. 2, p 1). The next night (23 July), at an *Australasian Spartacist* editorial board meeting, Chris put forward, withdrew, and finally reiterated, a suggestion that the SL/ANZ raise a call for “labor action” against a tour by the South African Springbok rugby team. On 24 July Chris flew to Melbourne after drafting two motions, the first of which stated:

“That rejecting the slogan ‘Defense of Vietnam and the USSR begins in Diego Garcia, the Indian Ocean and Alice Springs,’ on *any* grounds—such as the secondary one that ‘begins in’ applies globally more to the El Salvador civil war—without replacing it with an appropriate angular *equivalent*, would represent a capitulation by the section to insular, social-patriotic and social-democratic Australian nationalism.”

—Pt. 1, p 21

On 25 July Robbye (the partner of Chris and also a full CC member) phoned Helene in New York to read her Chris’s motions. At the time Pip suspected that the first motion was at least implicitly directed at her. According to her subsequent account: “Jim [Shaughnessy—a leading figure in the 1978 regroupment from the British Workers Socialist League (WSL) in Britain, and a veteran of several ‘fights’ during his time in the iSt] demanded that the tape [of Robbye’s call with Helene] be played in its entirety to all comrades present, he didn’t want to allow that some part of it might not be accessible to all” (pt. 2, p 1). Jim S. knew how important it was to make sure that you were onside with the New York leadership. Pip recounts how, after this exchange between Jim and Robbye:

“I went back to Jim and Patsy’s [Patsy had also come from the WSL regroupment] flat and there was discussion about the state of the leadership. Jim was rankling over the fact that in the Springbok discussion Chris had withdrawn the formulation ‘Stop the tour through labour action’ only to immediately put up motions in the next round expressing the same thing (which were voted for by Jim and me). Jim said that overseas (ie US, Britain) you don’t just vacate a position—there’s always a round to make sure you really have. A comment I remember is that probably Robbye is upset because she is smart enough to realise that Chris is in trouble, shaky etc and could be pulled from the section.”

At the 26 July local meeting in Sydney, Jim and Patsy went on the offensive, charging that Robbye was being defensive about discussing the question of the AIC slogans and trying to avoid a fight. It was decided to hold the local meeting over until 28 July when Chris was back from Melbourne. After returning from the Sydney local meeting, Jim S. called Helene

to express concern over “a tendency to slough over and bury political differences” regarding the AIC demo, the Springbok tour, playing the IS tapes, etc. In a report on his call, dated 28 July, Jim S. stated:

“I also said to Helene that the motion on 13 June didn’t draw the real political lessons—it blunted and softened the point rather than sharpening it. I said the June 13 rally was an unprincipled opportunist manoeuvre to pull the anti-Soviet IS into a rotten propaganda bloc and represented a programmatic liquidation, not an ‘error’ or reflecting a ‘blindspot.’ And I told Helene my worries about the tendency to ‘wait for the IS [iSt International Secretariat] letter’—namely that this was an attempt to *avoid* confronting the issues we must confront. I added that I had also called to say that I wanted to fight this stuff, that I had felt frustrated about not fighting things that irked me in the past and that I felt very determined about this.

“Helene observed first that she was glad that I had called since one of the IS’s worries had been that there was never enough knowledge of what people like myself, Paul etc were doing, and that there was too much of a monopoly on this sort of communication by Chris and Robbye....On the Springbok discussion she said: 1) it would have been a tip off that there was considerable disorientation in the section even if she hadn’t known already....3) She noted that the appetite to be on the field disrupting the games was very bad and had a nationalist, chauvinist component which was rotten....She indicated agreement that June 13 was a programmatic liquidation....while it would be preferable to have a fight over questions like the USSR, probably any political fight would be useful right now. She said that concern for people’s personal morale etc was misplaced now, and that we would be accomplishing a great deal if we forced some political fights over the next two weeks....She was very insistent that we had to have the fights here—someone could be sent out but this would solve nothing.”

—Pt. 1, pp 22–23

Jim S. also wrote that in a short conversation with Patsy, “Helene said she was appalled that we had a fight over whether to have a discussion of the IS tapes at Sunday’s local.” Pip reports that later “Robbye heard from Jim that he’d phoned Helene and was furious because he had done it from home and therefore it was not on tape” (Pt. 2, p 2). Robbye had also been around for a while and knew how important it was to get the signals from New York first-hand.

When Chris put forward his “Alice Springs” motion at the 27 July Melbourne local meeting it passed unanimously. The next day, upon his return to Sydney, Chris was showing comrades his motions when, according to Pip, “Jim walked in, took one look at the motions and said, ‘Ah, these are rotten,’ and I just clicked off, I sided with the opposition against the enemy, Chris” (Pt. 2, p 3).

When Chris put his “Alice Springs” motion up for a vote at the Sydney local meeting that night Patsy promptly moved a counter-motion: “To reaffirm the iSt line ‘Defense of Cuba, USSR begins in El Salvador.’” Patsy insisted that the two be voted *counterposed*. Only Chris opposed this procedure. Everyone else (including Robbye) supported Patsy’s maneuver against Chris because they thought that this signaled the opening of the long-anticipated campaign against rightist liquidationism, with Chris as the designated target. It therefore didn’t matter what Chris’s motions said; they were to be defeated simply because he had moved them. When the motions were voted, all of the comrades, *including Chris*, voted against his “Alice Springs” motion (which he and the entire Melbourne local had unanimously approved only the day before), and Patsy’s motion passed unopposed.

It is clear that what was going on here had little to do with a scholastic dispute about where Soviet defensism “begins”

(itself reminiscent of Maoist contortions over the relative precedence of the “principal” versus the “main” contradiction in the world). While this method of forcing “political fights” doubtless confused many SL/ANZ members, for the leading comrades the decisive issue was the need to demonstrate loyalty to the international leadership. Jim S. had called New York and was presumed by everyone, at least in Sydney, to have the endorsement of the International Secretariat. So everyone snapped to attention. The record of this epic struggle against the “Anti-Soviet Opposition” contained in the SL/ANZ internals is in fact a case study in the Zinovievist machinations that poisoned the internal life of the iSt.

One of the SL/ANZ bulletins contains notes passed between several of the “mutineers” at the 28 July meeting that convey a bit of how they saw themselves. Patsy’s note to Kyle M. said: “This is a *desperately serious fight*—the question of the Aust Revolution—JSh, P2 & KM [Jim, Patsy and Kyle] can do it—but centrist garbage can’t.” Kyle replied: “You were quite right—I’ll vote down CK’s motion—an appeal to Aussie nationalism. The main enemy, objectively is Reagan—we fight what we can, ie Aussie bourgeoisie.” In a subsequent note Kyle wrote:

“Comrades have to think about what this discussion would be like if the comrades on the IS tape were in this room know (sic) fighting—my only question is Robertson and NY have not abandoned the leadership here—but the leadership has to respond to this discussion or be bypassed (sic).”

Patsy replied with a phrase that she no doubt recalled from the “overthrow” of the Logan regime in London in 1978: “The Lords of the Admiralty do not lightly side with the mutineers (you, me, Jim)—but they *do want* the Aust revolution and they don’t care who leads it” (Pt. 1, p 28).

The SL/ANZ documents also contain a partial transcript of a 29 July phone conversation between Jim and Robbye in Sydney and Steve Hooper and Paul Connor in Melbourne. For some reason Steve and Paul stubbornly rejected the arguments that had seemed so persuasive to Chris and the rest of the Sydney branch the night before. There is no indication in the documentation that Steve and Paul had been tipped that in this case “the Admiralty” was not in fact backing the “mutineers,” but, given the way that the iSt leadership operated, that seems possible.

Pip recounts how, on 30 July after another Sydney local meeting in which the “mutineers” ruled the roost, she showed John Sheridan (the fourth full member of the SL/ANZ CC) a note which read: “Phone Melb, phone IS.” The next day, after calling New York, Sheridan got back to Pip:

“On Friday [31 July] I got a phone call from John in the late morning saying he wanted to see me after he finished work. He sounded grim but wouldn’t elaborate. (He had called Helene). I met Jeff for lunch and he came out with crap about Robbye being a second Logan, sexually manipulating, etc, that she was nasty, enjoyed ‘making Merry cry’ etc.”

—Pt. 2, p 4

This provides an interesting sidelight on how the “sexual manipulation” charge could be employed in the iSt in this period, as well as on the lessons drawn by the SL/ANZ ranks from the Logan trial. But, alerted by Sheridan that the winds had shifted, Pip chose not to seize on Jeff’s complaints as raw material to be worked into an indictment against Robbye and Chris. Instead she stepped back and told Jeff he should:

“think about the Russian question instead. Which he said he would. But what he was doing had been simply acting on the logic of the previous night’s vote.”

In Sheridan’s 15 August retrospective account (Pt 2, p. 9), he recalled how, prior to his call to Helene, at the 30 July meeting:

“I was one of the factionalizers—screaming that [Robbye] D’Amico was Samarakkody, that I did not know who were the real Russian defensists and that maybe Chris was not.”

After the meeting he had gone to dinner with a number of comrades where:

“I suggested that there ought to be a trip to Melbourne to ‘straighten out’ the comrades there...and I think that I also suggested that Dave R. write up a short statement on why Chris’s motions on defense of the USSR were nationalist.”

After dinner, Sheridan continues:

“I went home and phoned Helene...I related the counterposition to which her response was that you guys just voted down defense of the USSR in your region. It was not only obvious, it was to say the least shattering.”

Of course, had the vote gone the other way, Helene could, with equal justification, have charged that they had just voted down “the iSt line ‘Defense of Cuba, USSR begins in El Salvador.’” This confusing pseudo-political counterposition clarified nothing and had little, if anything, to do with Australian nationalism, Third Campism, social-democratic capitulation, Soviet defensism or anything else, except the generalized desire to vote for whatever they thought New York wanted. It is a pretty damning example of how degenerated the iSt was becoming even a decade and a half ago.

After Sheridan’s conversation with Helene, the denouement came swiftly. The SL/ANZ Central Committee met on August 1–2 and *unanimously* passed a motion recognizing:

“That Korwin’s motion on the ‘Russian question in our region’ defeated unanimously at the SSL [Sydney SL] meeting on 28 July is politically true.”

Among those voting for this were Jim S., Patsy, John Sheridan, Dave Reynolds, Pip, and all the other erstwhile “oppositionists” present.

Any politically experienced person should recognize that something must be wrong in an organization where a motion *unanimously* adopted in Melbourne on 27 July, is then *unanimously* voted down in Sydney the next day (including by its mover!), only to be *unanimously* endorsed again by the same people four days later.

Having sorted out the “politics” of this bizarre exercise at the CC meeting, all that remained was to dispose of the bodies. For this purpose an “emergency conference” was called for two weeks later. On the eve of this event a “Bolshevik Faction” was declared on the basis that:

“The fundamental axis of the opposition is the rejection of the fundamental proposition that for the Australian section defense of the Soviet Union and Vietnam begins at home against the Australian bourgeoisie. Further, an explicit challenge was made to international democratic centralism. These are split issues and incompatible with membership in the iSt.”

—Pt 2, p 11

The “Bolshevik Faction” was in fact a mechanism for the re-registration of the membership. Those not permitted to join the faction (including four of the seven CC members) were quickly shown the door, in what Paul Connor candidly described in a 30 September 1981 document described as:

“an ‘isolate and destroy’ tactic against the opposition after the extent of their wrecking operation and cavalier cynicism became clear...their departure from our program was I think clear prior to that, clarified for most comrades by the reports of the IS reps.”

—Pt. 2, p 27

But it is quite clear from the documents that all that was really “clarified for most comrades” was that one must always do whatever the leadership demands. A few weeks after the dust settled, Chris K. and Robbye were pulled out of the sec-

tion and sent back to New York. On the way back they got off in the Bay Area and phoned in their resignations. This meant that of a pre-purge total of seven full and alternate SL/ANZ CCers, only one, Connor, remained in the group. Pip was subsequently permitted to crawl back.

We suggest that you go back and review these documents for yourselves and confirm that this is an accurate account of what took place. Having done so we think that you may be willing to agree that it was really not such a stretch from the 1981 SL/ANZ purge to the recent events in the GEM.

In the SL/ANZ purge, as in the others, the formal “programmatic” issues were only a cover for authority fights. The 1981 “fight” in the Australian section, like most if not all the others during that period, could not contribute to the development of revolutionary cadres. It was instead a moment in the transformation of the consciousness of the membership of the iSt/ICL into people who would passively accept the kinds of things described in the IG’s recent pamphlet.

As a footnote to this controversy we recall another instance where the relationship between Soviet defensism and the Central American revolution was hotly debated. This was in a polemic between ourselves and the Trotskyist League ([TL] the ICL’s Canadian section). The Summer 1988 issue of *Spartacist Canada* criticized our declaration at a TL forum in April 1988 that:

“the key question in Nicaragua today in our view is *not* defense of the Soviet Union, that’s not the central question posed there today, but rather defense of the *Nicaraguan* Revolution.”

We responded to their attack with a leaflet entitled “Dazed and Confused,” dated 17 September 1988:

“Its hard to understand how any ostensible Trotskyists could disagree with this statement two weeks after the signing of the Sapoa accords, where the Sandinistas promised to ‘democratize’ in accordance [with] the dictates of the Central American neo-colonial rulers and Washington’s mercenary contras. But for the TL this simple observation is evidence of...Shachtmanism! Recalling how Max Shachtman refused to defend the Soviet Union in its war with Finland in 1939, the TL concludes: ‘For him then, as for the BT now, defense of the USSR was never “the central question” and thus never to be fought where it counts.’

“Perhaps to atone for the sins of founder/leader James Robertson, who left the Stalinists for the Shachtmanites just as the cold war was gathering steam in the late 1940s, the Spartacists have decided that Soviet defensism is the ‘central question’ at all times and in all places. Those who don’t agree are automatically denounced as State Department socialists. This travesty of the Trotskyist position of defense of the Soviet Union has one advantage. It is easy to teach to new recruits. But if revolutionary politics were so simple a moderately intelligent myna bird could learn the formula in a matter of weeks.”

The ICL and the IBT

The ICL has been inordinately interested in (and sensitive to) our political criticisms over the years, and we have enjoyed the distinction of being the target of more polemics than any other political organization in the pages of *WV*. In its 27 September 1991 issue, for example, *WV* ran two articles on the response of the international left to Yeltsin’s victory: one dealt with our position and the other with the rest of the left! Most of the “Hate Trotskyism” series issued in the last 15 years have featured the IBT (although the IG/LQB have now also been honored by being included).

We have reciprocated the ICL leadership’s close attention and have written numerous polemics against them. We have also repeatedly challenged them to debate, an offer they have

consistently refused (with the exception of an impromptu debate in Wellington in 1994, for which the Australian leadership, who approved the debate, were duly chastised by New York). There is of course a good reason why we receive so much polemical attention in the ICL press while at the same time the leadership flatly refuses to engage in an open political confrontation: our criticisms hit home in a way that those of the various fake-Trotskyists do not.

To harden up the SL ranks against our criticism, the SL leadership has employed a variety of tactics over the years, including the cop-baiting innuendo that those who expose the SL leaderships' political deviations and the seamy aspects of their internal regime are acting in a "COINTELPRO-like" manner. For example an article in the 15 May 1987 issue of *Workers Vanguard* entitled "Garbage Doesn't Walk By Itself—What Makes BT Run?" purported to find something particularly sinister in the fact that, after being hounded out of the iSt, we had not quit politics altogether. The very fact that we remained politically active and continued to lay claim to the historic tradition of the RT/SL was taken as indicative of a malevolent hidden hand:

"The whole tone of the BT recalls nothing so much as the insinuating style of the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO..."

"Ex-members of the socialist movement do sometimes bear malice toward the organizations that 'failed' them. But people who voluntarily leave even very bad organizations normally find that their grievances recede as they go on with their lives. Hostility doesn't make a program and ex-membership in a party doesn't provide a sufficient reason for publishing a newspaper or crossing North America and Europe year after year seeking others similarly inclined. The BT is manifestly an assemblage of garbage, a heap made up of worse than worn-out people, the worst of those who have departed from the SL, which we think is a pretty good revolutionary organization. But to take that refuse heap and make it move like a loathsome living thing requires something more, an animating principle like Dr. Frankenstein used to imbue his monster with life."

If the comrades of the IG do not soon renounce the political legacy of the RT/SL, they too may find themselves subject to the same "critique." Indeed at the SL's 1 August New York forum one SLer did indeed direct an equivalent slander at comrade Socorro, as we discuss below.

Such methods have a long pedigree: the social democrats smeared Lenin with charges of "German gold," the Stalinists slandered the Trotskyists as agents of the Gestapo, and, closer to home, Tim Wohlforth's Workers League charged the Spartacist League with being the "finger man for the world capitalists." In each case these slanders are designed to avoid having to deal politically with left criticisms. The ICL leadership apparently concluded that their smears were counter-productive and so, for the past several years, they have been quietly shelved in favor of a more "political" approach. We raise this unpleasant history both in the interests of clearing the air and as a reminder to the IG comrades of some of the precedents for the practices you now so rightly object to.

Lessons of the DDR: 1989–90

The intervention in the terminal crisis of the East German deformed workers' state in 1989–90 was the largest initiative ever undertaken by the iSt/ICL. Comrade Norden's key role in the DDR campaign was evidently a major element in the disputes within the ICL prior to his and Stenberg's resignations. As we pointed out in our 1 July statement, it is absurd for the ICL leadership to try to load all the responsibility onto Norden for the political shortcomings of its DDR intervention.

After four decades of Stalinist rule, the DDR workers were

largely de-politicized, and pro-socialist sentiment was very shallowly rooted. The collapse of the DDR was conditioned by the fact that no socialist organization had sufficient roots in the proletariat to initiate the kind of struggles that could have changed that consciousness. The ICL's mistaken proclamations that the amorphous and politically naive mass demonstrations that followed Honecker's exit constituted a "workers' political revolution," proved to be the starting point for its subsequent disorientation, summarized by our German comrades as follows:

"It was impossible for the ICL, without roots in the proletariat, to directly influence events in the DDR [German Democratic Republic]. However, the pressure of the sweeping political developments demanded an answer. At that time, the SED [Socialist Unity Party—today known as the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)] was the only organization with significant influence over the leftist sections of the working class. The ICL leadership adapted to the pressure, and attempted to *bloc with sections of the shaken SED bureaucracy*, which led the ICL straight to opportunism. Robertson's efforts to find a shortcut to building a party gave the ICL's revisionism new impetus.

"...the ICL attempted to swim with the stream. Formulations like 'we need a new communist party based on Leninist norms' (*Arprekor* no 5, 13 December 1989) were *deliberately* unclear about how would be communists in the SED should organize against the Gysi leadership and its support for the Modrow regime. It was *left open* as to whether the Leninist party the ICL advocated could be a reformed SED..."

—translated in "Robertsonites in Wonderland,"
1917 No. 10

The unexpected coup on New Year's Eve, when Gunther M. (at that time a contact) succeeded in getting the acting SED leadership to endorse the proposed Treptow demonstration, led Robertson to imagine that he had found a means to establish direct contact with senior figures in the Stalinist apparat. Gunther was instructed to try to arrange meetings for Robertson with party leader Gregor Gysi, Soviet General Snetkov and DDR master-spy Markus Wolf. The fact that Robertson was known to be angling for a bloc with a wing of the SED no doubt explains the absence of Trotskyist cutting edge in the speech written for comrade Renate to deliver to the SED's base at the Treptow demonstration. The sharpest criticism of the SED leadership raised in her remarks was the observation that:

"Our economy is suffering from waste and obsolescence. The SED party dictatorship has shown that it is incompetent to fight this. East Germany [i.e., the DDR] urgently needs...a selective modernization of existing industry."

—WV 12 January 1990

The fact is that the SED bureaucrats were a good deal more than incompetent economic managers. After politically atomizing the working class with 40 years of Stalinist lies, police repression and a massive program of citizen informers, the leading stratum of the SED was already preparing to capitulate to imperialism. The task of Trotskyists in this situation was to seek to expose the PDS/SED "reformers" and drive a wedge between them and the pro-socialist sections of the workers. But Robertson sought instead to pursue a bloc with a section of the disintegrating Stalinist party in the hope of gaining influence over its mass base. Norden denies this:

"This is not a minor question. The professional anti-Spartacists of the Bolshevik Tendency, in their pamphlet on the ICL in Germany in 1989–90, have a whole section claiming that 'Unity of the SED' was the actual policy of the SpAD, just as Clemens [of the ICL] said five years later."

—"From a Drift..." p 15

There is no point in trying to dance around the fundamental issue, and Robertson's spurned attempt to play footsie with the Stalinist tops says it all. This skewed orientation was also evident in the publicity WV gave to letters that the ICL mailed to Soviet general Snetkov suggesting that "we"—i.e., the Stalinist military elite and the ICL!—should pursue a policy similar to that of the Bolsheviks under Lenin (see "Desperately Seeking Snetkov," 1917 No. 9). In the end the ICL leadership's policy only succeeded in disorienting and demoralizing their own supporters. We note that the official resolution of the ICL's Second International Conference in 1992 complained that the "demoralization [of the masses in the DDR] found its way into our organization" and continued:

"This disorientation was expressed in the proposed slogan 'For the unity of the SED,' reflecting an unrealistic expectation that the decomposing East German bureaucracy would resist incorporation into West Germany. This was quickly corrected through intervention by the International Secretariat. But from virtually the founding of the SpAD in mid-January up to mid-February, the section was gripped by near-paralysis, so that nothing was done in the period of the election campaign. This cost us valuable time in our efforts to marshal working-class resistance to capitalist unification."

—Resolution of the Second International Conference of the ICL, *Spartacist* (English edition), Winter 1992–93 p 21

Norden and Stamberg accuse Parks, the current ICL International Secretary, of being the originator of the slogan, and along with (then) IS secretary Helene Brosius "claiming (wrongly) that this was suggested by comrade Robertson." An ICL document at the time presented a slightly different picture:

"On the question of 'Unity with the SED,' comrades have the feeling that this was not merely the product of a single person who misunderstood and incorrectly repeated what Jim [Robertson] had said, but that this was in part the result of the exhaustion of the leading cadre there and in part a reflection of the panic that many felt in the DDR"

—Translation of supplement by Lizzy to the reports of William and Rachel on the iSt financial deliberations, 2 February 1990

The question of *who* in the ICL was responsible for the slogan of "Unity with the SED" is not particularly important in any case, because the slogan itself was but one part of a larger erroneous perspective, one that began with the delusion that a workers' political revolution was taking place. It was evident to us at the time that, while a political revolution was one possibility, there were also lots of *other* possibilities. The assessment of the situation in our January 1990 special German-language 1917 supplement proved considerably more accurate than the ICL's projection:

"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 on 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

In many heated discussions with ICL comrades on this issue we were derided for our "pessimistic" refusal to recognize

a political revolution when it was right in front of our faces. In the years since, several former ICL members have recalled these exchanges and admitted that our estimate had proved correct.

We note that comrade Norden is currently being attacked for his similarly "pessimistic" denial that the SpAD constituted a "revolutionary leadership" vying for power in the DDR. The idea that a tiny propaganda group without influence in the proletariat and unable at any point to assemble even 100 people under its own banner was nonetheless somehow a contender for state power is a notion worthy of a Posadas or a Healy. To Norden's credit he "flinched" from such an absurdity. But there was a price to pay. His unwillingness to renounce his views and affirm the correctness of the official line clearly played a major role in the final decision to terminate him.

IBT 'Stalinophobia' in the DDR

Norden/Stamberg's reply to the ICL leadership attempts to "reverse the charges" of affinity to the IBT:

"Seymour, as well, argues that it is impossible today for a section of the bureaucracy to come over to the workers in a political revolution.

"You will look in vain in ICL materials on Germany in 1989–90, or in the 1992 ICL conference document for the claim that the SED 'led the counterrevolution.' You will, however, find it in the publications of the Stalinophobic BT, who in 1989–90 were screaming at Spartakist meetings that DDR prime minister and SED leader Modrow was the main enemy."

This is backed up with the following abstractly correct generalization:

"the line that the bureaucracy as a whole could lead the counterrevolution, without fracturing, would mean that the class nature of this social formation was different from that analyzed by Trotsky, who always emphasised the *dual* nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy."

—"From a Drift..." p 25

We did indeed criticize the SpAD for failing to alert the DDR workers to the treacherous path that the SED's leading elements were embarking upon. We would remind you that in "Stalin After the Finnish Experience," 13 March 1940, Trotsky commented:

"I consider the main source of danger to the USSR in the present international period to be Stalin and the oligarchy headed by him. An open struggle against them, in the view of world public opinion, is inseparably connected for me with the defense of the USSR."

It seems to us that this assessment was just as applicable in the period when Modrow's "reformers" were proceeding with their plans to hand over the DDR to German imperialism.

The complaint that we directed most of our criticism at the SED/PDS instead of the openly restorationist SPD [Social Democratic Party] and the bourgeois parties recalls the centrists' objections to Trotsky concentrating his political attacks on the Popular Front, and particularly on its "far-left" component, the POUM [Workers' Party of Marxist Unification], during the Spanish Civil War. After all, was not Franco the "main enemy"? The same criticisms were made of Lenin in 1917, when the Bolsheviks directed most of their polemics at the fake-left misleaders rather than the Tsarists, Black Hundreds and other open counterrevolutionaries. This is of course A-B-C for Trotskyists, but the talk of "main enemy" in the DDR perhaps makes it worth reiterating.

If you look at what our comrades wrote at *the time* you will find a remarkably clear description of the role of the Stalinist bureaucrats:

“A new Modrow regime with the bourgeois opposition exerting the dominant influence has, as a pro-capitalist regime, the task of ensuring the safety of the social counterrevolution through the politics of *Anschluss* with the BRD [West Germany]. Pushed to the wall by imperialist pressure, and threatened with the dissolution of their apparatus of power, the rightist faction of the Stalinist bureaucracy seeks a capitalist ticket to the salvation of their privileges and makes itself the direct agent of the bourgeoisie.... The weak bonapartist Modrow distances himself from the SED-PDS and shows his definitive capitulation with the removal of the last hurdles for West German capital.”

—*Bulletin* No. 1 [Gruppe IV Internationale],
January 1990

The ICL could not provide comparably clear, hard-edged Trotskyist analysis because of the leadership’s fundamentally flawed political orientation. The pamphlet published by our German comrades on the ICL intervention in the collapse of the DDR (excerpted in *1917* No. 10) provides a useful overview of the course of events:

“With his perspective of a ‘treaty community’ between the DDR and the BRD [West Germany], Prime Minister Modrow had already signalled his readiness to capitulate to West German imperialism when the new government was formed on 17 November 1989. The concessions he offered did not, however, give the bureaucracy its anticipated breathing space, but only provided further impetus to the counterrevolutionaries. The right won on the ground, while confusion prevailed among the more politically conscious workers who trusted the ‘honest, reformed’ Stalinists. This is why the Modrow regime was *especially dangerous*, and why it was *imperative to warn* the workers against it.

“The ever thinner threads that had connected the bonapartist regime to the proletarian economic foundations of the DDR (state control over the means of production) were finally severed. With the formation of a ‘grand coalition’ at the end of January 1990, Modrow was transformed initially from a *sellout leader* of the DDR deformed workers state to a *buyer* for the West German capitalists, and by this to their direct representative...”

—*1917* No. 10, *op-cit*

Norden/Stamberg are quite right that the Stalinist bureaucracy is not “able to lead” counterrevolution “without fracturing.” But the fragmentation of the Stalinist regime was underway at least from the collapse of the Honecker regime. Modrow’s “reformed” Stalinist regime, with its social-democratic, restorationist program, represented the elements in the bureaucracy who sought to secure their own futures by opening the door to the West German bourgeoisie. There is no doubt that a section of the SED would have come over to the side of the proletariat *had there been a revolutionary upsurge*. But the ICL’s repeated announcements that a workers’ political revolution was “underway” proved to be no substitute for the real thing.

The ICL comrades poured a huge amount of energy and work into an agitational campaign, but it is necessary to see that it was politically flawed from the outset. Because of our much slighter resources, our intervention had a more limited impact. Yet the propaganda produced by our comrades was politically superior to that of the ICL to the extent that it clearly linked calls for defending the DDR against capitalist restoration and the necessity of a Trotskyist party without either soft-pedaling criticism of the bankrupt Stalinists or promoting illusions that a struggle for power by the working class was unfolding. In our 23 February 1990 letter of critical support to the SpAD electoral candidates we reminded the ICL comrades of Trotsky’s admonition that:

“On ascending the stairs a different type of movement is required from that which is needed to descend. Most dangerous is such a situation as finds a man, with the lights out, raising his foot to ascend when the steps before him lead downward.”

The ICL’s faulty (“optimistic”) political prognosis profoundly flawed its intervention in the DDR and has continued to disorient its cadre to this day.

From Yuri Andropov to Gregor Gysi

The adaptation to the SED in the DDR was prepared politically by a series of earlier programmatic errors on the question of Stalinism. The most egregious of these was the 1982 designation of an SL contingent to the anti-fascist mobilization in Washington D.C. as the “Yuri Andropov Battalion,” after the chief Kremlin bureaucrat. In a 13 December 1982 letter to the SL criticizing this decision (at the time we were still the non-public “External Tendency of the iSt”) we reminded the SL that: “On the most general level Andropov and the bureaucrats he represents are counterposed to everything that Trotsky fought for.” We also recalled 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....”

Comrade Robertson responded in August 1983 with the gentle suggestion that we were perhaps drifting in the direction of the Third Camp. In our reply we reminded him of Trotsky’s comment that Stalinism was:

“an apparatus of the privileged, a brake upon historical progress, an agency of world imperialism. Stalinism and Bolshevism are mortal enemies.”

In the letter we commented:

“Calling yourselves the ‘Yuri Andropov Brigade’ was a mistake. All of your very considerable political experience as well as the talents of the capable and devoted Marxists who produce *WV* can’t change that. If we were to offer you some advice it would be this: don’t try to defend the indefensible, it can only produce bad results.”

The “bad results” were pretty clear in the response to our letter, dated 3 January 1984, from SL leader Reuben Samuels. Reuben’s defense of the SL’s “Andropov Brigade” casts a revealing light on the leadership’s thinking at the time:

“Andropov is known as a decisive and efficient administrator who used the KGB not only to persecute dissidents but to fight crime and corruption in the highest levels of the bureaucracy, including Brezhnev’s immediate family. Confronted by Reagan’s nuclear Armageddon, the bureaucracy evidently felt the need for a leader who would shake out the sloth, corruption and mismanagement of the Brezhnev years.”

—*Workers Vanguard* 17 February 1984

Andropov died before Reuben made it to a mailbox, so his letter ended up appearing in the same issue of *WV* that featured a black-bordered obituary for Andropov on its front page. We made the following observation:

“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 Brezhnev, 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, and *Trotskyist Bulletin*, No. 1

As head of the KGB, Andropov was responsible for crushing political life in the USSR. The 13 February 1976 *Workers Vanguard* ran an article entitled “Stop Stalinist ‘Psychiatric’ Torture in USSR!” denouncing “the repulsive atrocities of the Russian bureaucracy.” On his way up the ladder Andropov played a key role in the repression of the Hungarian workers after the 1956 political revolution, as we pointed out in our 22 April 1984 letter. According to Bill Lomax:

“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...”

In defending the SL leadership’s vicarious identification with Andropov, *Workers Vanguard* suggested that our criticism revealed evidence of Stalinophobia, social democratic softness, etc. Today, a dozen years later, the Andropov Brigade can only be an embarrassment to ICL regime loyalists. This is one question that you comrades may wish to review closely as one of the strands in the history of the political degeneration of the SL.

Revolution and Truth

In the IG document Norden/Stamberg assert that:

“A notable aspect of the recent fights and sharp turn to the right by the ICL has been its systematic use of distortion and outright lies, in flagrant contradiction to the proud tradition of the Spartacist tendency.”

Unfortunately there is nothing “recent” about the appearance of “outright lies” in the SL press. For years now *WV* has been willing to take considerable liberties with the truth for factional purposes. An early example was the report in *Workers Vanguard* (5 March 1982) of an alleged “walkout” by a group of ex-members from a memorial meeting for Toni Randell, a respected SL cadre. In fact no walkout occurred. The late Nedy Ryan, a long-time SL cadre and at that time secretary to George Foster, then Political Chairman of the San Francisco Bay Area Spartacist League, wrote a remarkable deposition dated 28 December 1983 (reprinted in *ETB* 3), which casts light on this:

“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.

“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...”

Another example of factionally-motivated misrepresentation occurred when the 29 August 1986 issue of *WV* reported that:

“One would-be bureaucrat and renegade, Howard Keylor, in the San Francisco longshore union has called for ‘union control of drug testing’—that is, union narcs.”

This “quote” was simply an invention—neither Keylor nor any other IBT supporter ever said or wrote any such thing. We characterized this as “an out and out lie” in a public statement dated 20 September 1986, but no correction or retraction ever appeared in *WV*. The entire exchange (including the original issue of *Militant Longshoreman*, *WV*’s attacks and our responses is reprinted in our 1987 SL “truth kit.”)

In some cases the ICL’s falsifications have been aimed at improving its own record retroactively. We have already discussed the 1993 attempt to rewrite the U.S. intervention in Lebanon a decade earlier. This also appears to be a factor in the current attempt to offload all responsibility for the ICL’s failures in the DDR onto Norden.

A recent example this ICL technique (and one which is fully documented) occurred when, in the midst of a polemic against us on Quebec, the 3 November 1995 *WV* asserted:

“Three years ago, the BT refused to vote No to Mulroney’s Charlottetown gambit [Canada’s 1992 constitutional referendum]. Their statement failed even to defend Quebec’s right to independence.”

It is true that we did not take sides in the bourgeois wrangle over reforming Canada’s constitution. But our October 1992 statement (which we reprinted in *1917* No. 12) included the following explicit defense of the national rights of the Québécois:

“The designation of Quebec as a ‘distinct society’ within Canada obscures the fact that it is a nation, and as such, has an unalienable and unconditional right to self-determination. If the Québécois decide to separate and form their own state (something that we do not advocate at present) we will support their right to do so. If the Canadian bourgeoisie attempts to forcibly retain Quebec, it would be the duty of class-conscious workers across English Canada to defend the Québécois with every means at their disposal, including protests, strikes and even military assistance.”

Once again, even after we pointed out that *WV*’s statement was flatly untrue, there was no retraction or correction. We could cite other examples, but think these are sufficient to demonstrate the “systematic distortion and outright lies” employed against the IG and LQB are hardly unprecedented. Naturally such techniques appear in sharper focus when one is on the receiving end.

The IG: Between the ICL and the IBT

While it is perhaps natural that the IG comrades would prefer to avoid having to review the ICL’s record critically, there is no getting around the necessity of honestly confront-

ing the mistakes of the past. The SL leadership is taunting the IG comrades for suggesting that everything was fine in the ICL until just before they were thrown out. Robertson takes the opposite approach in his recent reply to an IG supporter (WV 27 September) where he backdates the problems with Norden to a 1973 difference over events in Vietnam! This is supposedly an example of how, according to Robertson, Norden “undermined his revolutionary political self-confidence and did his standing in the eyes of other comrades no good either” which in turn undercut his ability to assume a leading role in the Spartacist League. But the fact is that in the SL *no one* (except of course comrade Robertson himself) is permitted the luxury of “revolutionary political self-confidence.” In others this trait is generally diagnosed as “hubris”—a condition which is treated by briskly removing the rug from beneath the afflicted individual.

Most of the purges over the years have been aimed at eliminating, or at least humbling, cadres too inclined to think for themselves. The escalating internal pressure brought to bear on Norden and Stamberg was designed to “undermine [their] standing in the eyes of the other comrades,” and no doubt contributed to their “lack of support in the membership” which Robertson gloats about in WV. His sneers about their “lack of appetite for principled political struggle” and “their ‘non-factional’ and mealy-mouthed opposition” do have a certain resonance—but only because the IG’s line on the evolution of the ICL is so implausible. *If* the ICL had been a model of Leninist democracy until early 1996 (as IG literature suggests) then the refusal by Norden/Stamberg to launch an organized factional struggle would indeed have demonstrated an aversion to principled political struggle.

Norden/Stamberg’s attempt to maintain a “non-factional” tactical stance led them to vote for Socorro’s expulsion. We will deal with the procedural improprieties of her trial below; but we note that *Workers Vanguard* (27 September) has recently proclaimed that Socorro “crossed the class line” (!) by unfavorably comparing the SL’s trial procedures to those of the bourgeois courts! Would Robertson consider it “crossing the class line” to suggest that the average defendant in the U.S. courts in the 1930s got more justice than the Left Oppositionists did in the Soviet workers’ state under Stalin? At the SL’s forum in New York on 1 August, Richard G., an SL member, publicly suggested that anyone who claimed, as Socorro had, that there was more justice to be had in the bourgeois courts than at the hands of the SL, could easily wind up in the pay of the capitalist state. This cop-baiting innuendo is scandalous, and the IG comrades have been quite right to object to it. But the IG’s condemnation of Socorro tends to undercut its protest.

Norden and Stamberg made a mistake to vote for Socorro’s expulsion. She was guilty of nothing more than telling the truth. While the IG comrades have been softening their characterization of Socorro’s remark (in the Norden/Stamberg original resignation statement it is “unconscionable and false” while in their later document it is upgraded to merely “impermissible”), we suggest that a good place for the IG to begin its reassessment of the iSt/ICL is by coming out and forthrightly *repudiating* the expulsion.

A next step might be to discuss frankly why senior comrades like Norden, Stamberg and Negrete felt compelled to opt for a “non-factional” stance internally, despite the pattern of gross violations of Leninist practise they report. They did not exercise their “rights” to declare a faction because they knew that it was no more *possible* to conduct a serious internal political struggle in the ICL than it had been for Rob-

ertson to do so in Gerry Healy’s International Committee in 1966.

An Ex-Clone’s Conscience

In “The Road to Jimstown” we recounted how, in 1978:

“Robertson launched a purge of the young male writers of *YSp* [*Young Spartacus*] (dubbed ‘clones’) whom he perceived as a potential base for someone’s faction somewhere down the line. The clone purge began the ‘second transformation’ of the SL. In many ways nothing had changed—the group had been more or less run by Jim’s fiat for years. Yet this abusive and destructive purge did represent something new. For one thing, the leadership openly admitted it was ‘sub-political’. More importantly, the clone hunt was deliberately intended to destroy and drive out an entire layer of talented young cadres. This was a significant new development. Before long, the treatment dished out to the ‘clones’ was used on other elements of the cadre. Initially those hardest hit were the trade unionists. The common denominator of those who got the chop was that they were thought capable of becoming oppositionists at some future date.”

Comrade Negrete was one of those targetted in the clone purge. He survived, as Arturo survived the recent purge in Mexico, by accepting the legitimacy of the charges and assiduously seeking to win the trust of the top leadership of the SL. But even “rabid witchhunters” are not safe if they fall afoul of the designated leadership of the ICL, as comrade Arturo may himself one day discover.

Inevitably the IG’s criticisms of the behavior of the SL regime led to you being “BT”-baited. In an apparent attempt to distance the IG from this association, comrade Negrete cranked out his 25 July “Note on the ‘Bolshevik’ Tendency,” which amounts to little more than a catalogue of stock ICL slanders. Negrete appears to be a victim of a technique we described over a decade ago in “The Road to Jimstown”:

“The purpose of such slander in the left, whether practiced by Stalinists, Healyites or Robertsonites, is always the same—to discredit one’s opponents without having to answer them politically. It also has the effect of ‘locking in’ those members who participate. Every time someone engages in slander or violence against an opponent, he is tied that much more closely to the degenerate leaders that ordered it. Even when people break from such an organization, most feel themselves so deeply compromised by their own participation in such practices that they tend to leave politics entirely.”

It is good that the IG comrades are not prepared to leave politics. But to play a role in the future of Trotskyism, as well as its past, they must be able to render a serious account of their political experiences over the last 20 years as well as of the history of the iSt/ICL.

Liquidation of SL Trade Union Work

Negrete claims in his 25 July “Note on the BT” that we have some aversion to “class struggle in a largely black, turbulent place like Brazil.” This echoes a slander that dates back to the early 1980s, when the SL leadership attempted to cover its liquidation of long-standing trade-union fractions in strategic American unions by race-baiting anyone who criticized this move. The SL leadership decided to divest itself of its trade-union work because it required a considerable political investment and the pay-offs through the 1970s had been relatively small. Moreover, as the screws were tightened in the SL, the Robertson leadership became fearful that trade unionists who acquired an independent view of social reality and real authority in the working class could prove to be a pole of internal political opposition. Particularly in the

phoneworkers' union, but also among West Coast dockers and Detroit autoworkers, SL-supported caucuses had some authority among the workforce, and were seen as a potentially formidable opposition by the union bureaucrats.

We recall that comrade Negrete was among those active in the phoneworkers when the SL abandoned its trade-union orientation. In our June 1983 pamphlet entitled "Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work! Break with the Robertson-Foster-Nelson Misleadership!" we reprinted a 16 May 1983 leaflet distributed to phoneworkers in Los Angeles at the conclusion of a successful campaign which defeated the bureaucrats' attempts to remove SL supporters as shop stewards. The leaflet began, "The Militant Action Caucus would like to thank all the sisters and brothers of this local who came out to support us in our fight to be reinstated as stewards in this local" and went on to announce that "all caucus stewards will be submitting the following letter of resignation to the union." In our document we wrote:

"The authority that the SL cadre in LI, T1, T2, II and BI [various industrial sectors] accumulated through years of sweat, blood and persecution is being pissed away overnight; the SL leadership knows that the effects of this liquidation are nearly irreversible....the wholesale resignations of MAC [Militant Action Caucus—SL supporters in the U.S. phone industry] stewards are already bringing them the reputation of being quitters....

"You don't lead people into battle and then desert them. Yet that is just what MAC is doing. Having fought and won in Local 11502 to retain its stewardships, MAC thanked the many stewards and members who defended it...and quit. Also, in Local 9410, where just six months ago 1000 members rallied to Kathy's defense, demanding an end to her trial and the recall of the bureaucrats, MAC is quitting. Stan, member of the SL-supported Militant Caucus [in longshore], correctly put forward a motion, at a membership meeting, for a union stop work action to protest Nazi activities at Oroville. The motion passed. Then he was ordered to flip-flop, abjectly criticize himself, not go to Oroville, and attack those longshoremen who went and carried signs calling for Labor/Black defense guards to smash fascists. This abstentionism has fed into a pool of bureaucratically fanned resentment that made it easier for the leadership to discredit him."

If the SL was guilty of abstentionism over events like the 1983 Oroville demonstration, its retreat from the unions was abstentionism on a grand scale. We can also see in it the precedent for the demand that the LQB liquidate its work in Volta Redonda. In both cases those who resisted the SL leadership's ultimatums were accused of "trade union opportunism." Norden/Stamberg refer to "the decimation of the SL trade union fractions in the late 1970s through lay-offs," [p37] but that is only part of the story. The SL leadership downgraded and dismantled all the trade union fractions that were not destroyed through layoffs. The result is that today the SL has no organized intervention in any union in the U.S.

Howard Keylor, one of two prominent SL supporters in longshore, continued his union activity as a supporter of the ET/BT. In 1984 he was the initiator and one of the leaders of an 11-day dockers' boycott of South African apartheid cargo at Pier 80 in San Francisco in 1984 (see *ET Bulletin* No. 4). In this case the SL did worse than abstain—it denounced the action, put up a "picket line" to abort it, characterized the workers who carried it out as "scabs" and finally, in open defiance of union policy, had its supporters provide documentary evidence (in the form of a "militant" leaflet) that the boycott was a sanctioned union action. This was what the employers needed to secure a federal injunction to break the boycott. When scores of leftists joined a half-dozen dockers in setting up a picket line in defiance of the injunction, SLers on the

scene refused to join! And then, after the action was all over, WV retroactively praised it. The motivation for the SL's actions throughout was the same as for the demand that the LQB abandon its union activity—petty organizational sectarianism.

The SL leadership's talk of a "70 percent Black party" was used to characterize those who had doubts about the turn away from the unions as motivated by (at least latent) racism. While liquidating its trade union base, the SL leadership launched the stillborn "Labor/Black Struggle Leagues" (LBSLs), which were supposed to generate a mass influx from the black community.

Norden/Stamberg assert that we "sneered at the Spartacist League's labor/black mobilizations to stop the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] as 'ghetto work.'" This is not true. We never sneered at the SL's anti-Klan mobilizations, and in fact joined them when we could, just as we have joined those initiated by other leftists. We never referred to either the LBSLs or the anti-Klan mobilizations as "ghetto work." The only place you can find this term employed is in the pages of WV, where it was repeatedly attributed to us.

We have always maintained that the key to black liberation in America is through linking the struggles of the black masses to the social power of the organized workers' movement. This requires a fight for a new, revolutionary leadership in the unions. This was the axis of our critique in the June 1983 document denouncing the SL's retreat from the unions:

"The tactic of the LBSL is fine; it is only wrong if it is counterposed to and built on the corpses of the union-centred caucuses [i.e., groups of SL-supporters fighting for the Transitional Program within the unions]....

"Without the anchor of the trade unions and the nucleus of their leadership in the caucuses, the effect of the 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 unorganised drawn by Cannon from the CLAs [Communist League of America] experiences in the 1930s."

Unable to answer politically, the SL leadership unleashed a barrage of race-baiting and insinuated that our defence of a proletarian perspective reflected racist contempt for the ghetto masses. In echoing this slander comrade Negrete's document does the IG no credit.

To demand that the mainly black Brazilian comrades give up their trade-union work in the interest of the ICL's "possibilities" in Brazil was a gross abuse of the LQB comrades and one which they quite rightly rejected. Unable to split the LQB cadre (the Robertson leadership's preferred tactic in these situations) New York demanded that they abandon their base in the working class. Why? Presumably because the ICL leadership feared that linked to the North American dissidents who later formed the IG a grouping of Brazilian workers' leaders with roots in the unions could prove a formidable political opponent. If nothing else this shows that the SL leadership's paranoia is color-blind.

In Robertson's ICL the priority has always been ensuring the leadership's absolute control. As a first step toward it's "integration," the LQB had to prove its "loyalty" by abandoning its union work and repeating, parrot-fashion, the denunciations of "the Norden group." The LQB's refusal to do so led the SL/ICL to break relations.

The IG's suggestion that the problems in the ICL are of recent origin and can be traced to the activity of Parks and her circle, who withheld the truth from comrade Robertson, reminds us of the Russian peasants who blamed the Tsar's evil ministers for the brutality of his regime. "If the Tsar only knew..." they would console themselves. But the Tsar *did* know—and so does Robertson. Perhaps the fact that Robert-

son takes personal credit for the response to the letter from an IG sympathizer in the 27 September issue of *WV* may satisfy the IG on that score.

Black Liberation & ‘Workers Defense Guards’

We hope that after careful investigation comrade Negrete will retract his charge that we ever “called for ‘workers defense guards’ (sic) to stop ‘violence’ like the Los Angeles upheaval.” If he is not prepared to do so, we invite him to specify the grounds for this allegation. Our statement on the 1992 LA upheaval had an entirely different thrust regarding the “violent” outbreak following the acquittal of the racist cops who had brutally assaulted Rodney King:

“in the racist climate of the 1990s the overwhelmingly white jury was not concerned with appearances. Their verdict merely affirmed explicitly what Bush, the Supreme Court and the U.S. Congress have been saying for years: that blacks are less human than whites; that the kind of treatment meted out to Rodney King is not only to be winked at, but commended; that thousands more victims of police terror can expect more of the same without hope of redress in the courts; that batons and lethal injections are a degenerate system’s only answer to the despair of America’s impoverished urban ghettos. As revolutionary Marxists, we share the rage of South-Central Los Angeles.

“Marxists can have nothing but contempt for the hypocritical condemnations of ‘violence’ and ‘lawlessness’ now gushing forth from newsrooms, pulpits and capitalist presidential aspirants. Yet serious militants also recognize that racism, poverty and the violence of the capitalist state will not be ended by unorganized explosions of black and minority rage, however justified. Because the black masses lack the program and leadership to fight for a real social revolution, their spontaneous anger often strikes at the wrong targets, and leaves their real exploiters and oppressors untouched.

“Blacks and minorities form a large percentage of the industrial working class in the US. They are also concentrated in the unions that maintain the nation’s cities. These workers run the buses and trains, collect the garbage, sweep the streets and staff the hospitals. They can provide the necessary link between the ghetto and the organized working class. A single general strike against police brutality could bring cities like LA to a halt, and would prove an infinitely more potent weapon than a hundred ghetto upheavals. Such strikes could open the way for a powerful working-class counteroffensive against racism and capitalist austerity. But this requires a militant, class struggle leadership committed to breaking the stranglehold of trade-union bureaucrats and Democratic Party BEO’s [black elected officials]. The Bolshevik Tendency is dedicated to forging such a leadership in the struggle for a socialist society, which alone can deliver justice to Rodney King and countless other victims of the ‘new world order.’”

—“LA: Days Of Rage,” *1917* supplement, May 1992

It is quite true, as Negrete states, that we worked with “Copwatch” in the Bay Area. We explained why in *1917* No. 13:

“The BABT had been active in Copwatch, a loosely organized Berkeley group aimed at combatting police brutality. Copwatch was composed mainly of anarchists and liberals. Although we do not share their worldview, we are also opposed to police brutality, and can participate in such single-issue groups in good faith, provided we are permitted full freedom to advocate our revolutionary program.”

Do you comrades find anything wrong in principle with such an approach? We believe that the SL’s inclination to avoid engaging in common activity with other political cur-

rents is integrally connected to its frequently abstentionist practice.

In October 1992 we published an issue of *1917 West* entitled “Cops, Crime and Capitalism” to challenge the anarcho/liberal notions prevalent among the youth participating in Copwatch. This article, which was absurdly caricatured in a polemic that appeared in *Workers Vanguard* (12 February 1993), made our attitude to the armed fist of the bourgeoisie very clear:

“The link between fear of crime and the race question creates a formidable barrier to working-class unity. The political and economic status quo is secure as long as the working class, and other victims of the system, are divided against themselves. Capitalism needs racism and breeds racism—because it keeps the working class divided.”

“The police are not part of the working class, and their ‘unions’ are not part of the workers movement. They should be thrown out of all trade union federations and other working-class organizations. The police serve as the first line of defence of capitalist property and safeguard the dictatorship of the capitalist class over society. As an arm of the state, the police are not neutral in any dispute between the powerless and the powerful, workers and bosses, tenants and landlords or oppressed and oppressor. Cops enforce a capitalist law and order which places the defence of property, wealth and social privilege above all else.”

In the *1917 West* text we did call for “workers’ defense guards” but in a manner diametrically opposed to Negrete’s claim:

“It is vitally important to link the activities of organizations which monitor the police and defend victims of the police to the organizations of the working class. The same cops who hassle homeless people and black youth also escort scabs through picket lines and beat picketers while breaking strikes....

“Only the proletariat has the social power and the objective interest to eliminate the causes of crime. A strong workers movement which established integrated workers defense guards could take a big step toward defending workers and the oppressed from both crime and police brutality....

“To be effective workers defense guards should be integrated to cut through the racism which so divides the working class. They would generally be initiated in response to attacks upon workers’ picket lines by the capitalist state, its fascist allies or the private goons of individual employers. Once engaged in class struggle, workers will quickly see the usefulness of defense guards in protecting workers and the oppressed in other areas of their life, including the fight to be free of crime and police harassment.”

—“Cops, Crime and Capitalism,” *1917 West* no. 2, October 1992

We would like comrade Negrete to explain exactly what he thinks is wrong with this way of posing the call for workers’ defense guards.

Finally we note that while Negrete is apparently happy to recycle the SL slanders about our supposed indifference to black oppression he neglected to mention that Gerald Smith, the former IBT member quoted as saying that he is not “anti-cop,” was also a former member of the Black Panther Party as well as the Spartacist League. Nor does he mention that in 1983 the SL approached Smith and proposed that he head the SL’s LBSLs! Smith was unwilling to appear as the figurehead for a hollow front group. However, he remained in the SL’s orbit and the next year he agreed to participate in the SL’s “picket line” against the 1984 longshore boycott of the apartheid cargo at Pier 80 in San Francisco. He was so appalled by the sectarian wrecking he witnessed that night that he broke with the SL once and for all. He subsequently joined the BT and was a prominent member of our Bay Area branch for a

number of years. In the early 1990s he began to drift to the right, and finally left the IBT in 1993....

ICL: Sectarian Abstention during the Gulf War

Negrete's other complaints about the IBT are also recycled from the SL. He accuses us of "immersing [ourselves] in unprincipled pop-frontist coalitions during the Gulf War," a charge we refuted at some length in our recent "ICL vs. IBT" pamphlet. We intervened in the various anti-war coalitions and fought to constitute them on a united-front basis, i.e., that they permit the expression of anti-imperialist and socialist views in addition to the pacifism and liberalism. This was exactly the approach taken by the SL in the 1960s at the time of the Vietnam war, as we documented in our article in *1917* No. 9. When it was clear that the various anti-Gulf War formations were consolidating on a popular frontist basis, and would not permit the expression of Marxist politics, we broke from them. We don't consider that to constitute "immersion" in pop frontism. Do you?

SL members attended many of the same formative meetings of the various "anti-war" coalitions, but, unlike our comrades, they did *not* fight to turn them in the direction of becoming genuine united fronts where revolutionaries could get a hearing. Instead they were satisfied merely to denounce the reformism of the initiators and walk out. Their failure to even attempt to challenge the hegemony of popular frontism in a movement that, prior to the rapid imperialist victory in January 1991, was attracting thousands of young people new to leftist politics, was a *classic* example of sectarian abstentionism. The difference between the SL's intervention in the anti-war movement of the 1960s and its abstentionism in 1990 is the difference between a revolutionary Trotskyist organization and a calcifying sect.

For years the SL has exhibited a sectarian impulse to avoid participation in united fronts with other organizations, even where substantial agreement exists. There have been isolated exceptions, but in general the SL/ICL tends to avoid situations where its members will have to work together with other leftists in a common action. Typically one or another reformist position of its opponents is used as a political justification for abstention, but the fact is that, outside of activities that it controls, the SL frequently confines itself to strictly literary interventions.

In some cases, notably the defense of abortion clinics (where our comrades participated alongside virtually every other left group), the disparity between the SL's literary solidarity and its absence on the ground was quite striking (and widely noted). When it realized that the Sollenbergerites [Revolutionary Workers League] and the ISO [International Socialists Organization] in particular had recruited heavily from their work in the clinic defense campaigns, the SL leadership made a turn toward participation. But the usual response is to sneer at such activity as "reformist," and counterpose talk about the importance of "building the revolutionary party."

ICL and the General Strike: 'A Caricature of Trotskyism'

We agree that the ICL's new opposition to raising a propagandistic call for general strikes in the absence of a hegemonic revolutionary workers' party is indeed "a caricature of Trotskyism," as the IG comrades suggest. "What about the campaign of the French Trotskyists for a general strike in the mid-1930s?" they ask. A good question, but not one that the ICL is anxious to answer.

We think that the question of the general strike is posed

for French Trotskyists in the mid-1990s as well. As we explained in our article in *1917* No. 18, the situation in December 1995 seems to us to be a circumstance where revolutionaries should have made their agitational focus the call for a general strike to bring down Juppé, concretized with calls for elected strike committees in each workplace, coordinated on local, regional and national levels. This could have intersected the consciousness of the more militant union members who were attempting to push the bureaucrats in this direction, and have provided an opening for revolutionary militants to extend their political influence. Yet, while calling for extending the strikes into the private sector, the Ligue Trotskyiste de France deliberately refrained from calling for a general strike, instead asserting that "the question of power is posed." Its central slogan was a call to build a "new revolutionary leadership," (i.e., the LTF). While many of the observations and specific proposals in the LTF's propaganda were correct, its suggestion that "the urgent task of the hour" was to prepare for taking state power seems to us to qualify as another "caricature of Trotskyism."

In 1974 *Workers Vanguard* (with Norden as managing editor) addressed the question of when and how revolutionaries should raise the call for a general strike in situations where reformist bureaucrats have political hegemony. The article, entitled "Why We Call for a General Strike in Britain Now" (1 March 1974), dealt with the showdown between the British unions and Edward Heath's Tory government. It is a very thoughtful and serious contribution. In our article on the Paris 1995 events in *1917* No. 18 we wrote:

"The French events demonstrate that, in a period when the ruling classes are on the attack, even defensive struggles of the working class cannot long remain confined to the economic sphere. The strike of railway workers soon became a magnet for the entire proletariat and other oppressed groups. They quickly began to demand not only the withdrawal of the Juppé plan, but the resignation of Juppé himself. But who was to replace Juppé? In the larger, strategic sense, a general strike would have posed the question of political power, at least implicitly. In such situations there is no substitute for a revolutionary party capable of contending for state power.

"Yet the absence of such a leadership does not imply that the most advanced elements in the class should simply have sat on their hands or, what amounts to the same thing, insisted that 'building a revolutionary party' was a pre-condition for confronting Juppé aggressively. It is of course impossible to guarantee a victory in advance, particularly given the treacherous character of the union leaderships, but to use the possibility of betrayal as a reason not to advocate broadening and generalizing the struggle, or directing it against the Juppé government, can only be called surrender."

Norden and Stamberg do not criticize the ICL/LTF stance in Paris, and even appear to implicitly endorse Parks' struggle against "passivity" in the LTF. This seems to us to be another case in which the IG comrades have so far failed to generalize sufficiently from a fundamentally correct criticism.

In Canada the ICL/TL is currently refusing to raise the call for a general strike in Ontario despite the fact that the union bureaucracy has organized a series of impotent one-day, one-city "general strikes" (which have so far involved hundreds of thousands of workers). The bureaucrats want to allow the ranks to vent anger, but at the same time they hope to avoid a serious confrontation with the government while gaining a bit of leverage by showing the bosses that there *could* be trouble if the Tories push things too far. This is a situation where revolutionaries must seek to exploit the contradiction between the desire of the masses to struggle and the half-steps taken by the cowardly leadership through agitation for the

practical measures necessary to move toward mobilizing the power and anger of the rank and file against government attacks. Concretely we have advocated a general strike that is “organized and controlled by democratically-elected strike committees in every workplace coordinated through delegated regional and provincial assemblies.” By contrast the TL is making its main agitational call the demand for “building a revolutionary party”—i.e., itself.

Socialists, Strike Support and ‘Scabbing’

The IG comrades have made much of the claim that we “scabbed” on the New York building cleaners’ strike last winter. This is a serious issue, which we addressed at some length in our correspondence with WV (recently published by our New York branch as a pamphlet). As we pointed out, there are often situations where strikers from one enterprise stand in front of an entrance that is shared with workers in entirely different enterprises that are not being struck (e.g., plazas, industrial parks, office buildings). The optimal response in such cases is for the workers of the other companies to join their brothers and sisters and increase pressure on the struck facility through sympathy strikes. But when this is not feasible it is not the duty of isolated militants to carry out an individual “sympathy strike,” when doing so is likely to result in getting fired.

WV’s campaign over this was a factionally motivated attempt to vilify Jim C., an IBT supporter who may have done more to aid the strikers than all New York SL members combined. Jim C. took the lead among the shop stewards in his workplace in getting union members to donate a total of \$3000 to the six striking workers who normally cleaned their building. The stewards also ensured that no strikebreakers were permitted inside the building during the strike, and that the struck company received no money from their employer for the duration. No trade union militant would consider this “scabbing.”

An interesting footnote to this whole dispute was provided by comrade Marie Hayes (a former 23-year cadre of the iSt/ICL) at a public forum at this year’s Lutte Ouvriere fete. She responded to ICL denunciations of us as “scabs” by recounting how, while in the New York SL, she was confronted by an analogous situation when a few picketers from a different company appeared outside the Pan Am building where she worked. She called the SL office to ask for instructions, and was told that, as the picketers had no relation to her employer, there was no reason not to go to work!

We note that Norden and Stamberg report that in Australia ICLers recently worked through a general strike! This is treated rather casually, yet it sounds like this really *was* scabbing. Were any ICL comrades disciplined for this? Was any statement repudiating their behavior ever published?

ICL vs. IBT & the Russian Question

In his one-page litany comrade Negrete complains that we rejected the ICL’s call for “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan” with “Stalinophobic arguments.” In fact we rejected “Hail Red Army” in favour of “Military Victory to the Red Army in Afghanistan.” We did so because “hailing” Brezhnev’s military intervention in Afghanistan tended to blur the critical distinction between *political* and *military* support. Trotskyists supported the Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan militarily just as the SL supported the Vietcong against the U.S. in Vietnam militarily. It was the Pabloites who “hailed” Ho Chi Minh’s armies and paraded around waving the Vietcong flag. We saw no reason to apply different criteria in Afghanistan (see our article in 1917 No. 5).

The flip side of the ICL’s sometime Stalinophilic devia-

tions came when they refused to side militarily with the demoralised Kremlin “hardliners” against Yeltsin in August 1991. Negrete’s mockery of the coup-plotters’ irresoluteness and incompetence echoes the pseudo-Trotskyists who claim that Yanayev, Pugo *et al.* were just as pro-capitalist as Yeltsin. Negrete accuses us of being anxious to abandon Soviet defensism because we recognized, *at the time*, that Yeltsin’s victory represented the “Triumph of Counterrevolution.” The main document at the ICL’s second international conference contained the following muddled (and self-amnestying) back-handed acknowledgment of the correctness of our assessment:

“The August 1991 events (‘coup’ and ‘countercoup’) appear to have been decisive in the direction of development of the SU [Soviet Union], but only those who are under the sway of capitalist ideology would have been hasty to draw this conclusion at the time.”

—WV, 27 November 1992

The August coup was “decisive” precisely because it pitted the restorationists against those remnants of the bureaucracy that wished to maintain the status quo. That is why Soviet defensists had a side in the showdown. The ICL’s claim that the coup plotters were not seeking to defend the tottering workers’ state, but only to launch a capitalist empire, can only mean that the restorationist forces had triumphed *before* the August coup.

The ICL’s refusal to take sides in the final confrontation led inevitably to the next mistake, as it adamantly refused, for over a year, to acknowledge that the Soviet degenerated workers’ state had in fact been destroyed. To this day the ICL cannot say when the Soviet workers’ state ceased to exist. We expect that in the course of reexamining the history of the iSt/ICL this will be among the questions you will wish to take up again.

Negrete’s attempt to identify us with the PBCI because we hold similar positions on the August 1991 coup is not an argument, but an amalgam. We could just as easily point out that the PBCI, like the ICL (and IG?), claims that the Soviet workers’ state survived under Yeltsin. What would that prove?

The Purge of the IG: ‘Deja Vu All Over Again’

The IG cadres’ notion that they are the first victims of abuse in the ICL is not unusual, as we noted in our 1 July statement:

“ICL cadres (like Healyites or Stalinists) who suddenly find themselves outside the organization to which they devoted their lives are forced to spend some time thinking back and trying to make sense of their experience. It is not uncommon for them to begin with the assumption that things were basically OK—that there was at least rough justice—in most but not all cases that preceded their own. But often after further reflection and/or investigation, they realize that their experience was not really unique or unprecedented after all.”

But if the treatment of the IG was indeed unprecedented in the history of the iSt/ICL, why would the IG’s descriptions of what happened to them so closely parallel those we published ten years ago? For example, Norden and Stamberg describe how Negrete was attacked for “sexism” in the GEM:

“The method of spewing out a barrage of false charges with no regard for the facts was repeatedly used in the Germany fight...and again in the lightning strike to remove the leadership of the Mexican section claiming Negrete was a ‘sexist bully,’ conciliated the LQB and isolated the section from international discussion.”

—“From a Drift...” p 29

Negrete confirms this account:

“Having gone through the ‘Brazil/Mexico fight,’ I can state categorically that the current campaign involves a chain of willful fabrications. The fight blew up when Camila and I had questions about significantly inaccurate statements on Brazil in an IS mailing cover letter. At the same time as some of these statements were then explicitly corrected, a story was fabricated that I had behaved as a ‘sexist bully’ towards Camila (which Camila herself denied was true) and had browbeaten her into posing the questions she put in writing. When witnesses said and wrote that this is not what happened, not only was the content of what they said ignored, but they were smeared as cliquists, personalists and anti-internationalists. At the same time as requests by Socorro and myself for a formal investigation of the charge were rejected out of hand, the lie was not only repeated but inflated into a supposed pattern.”

—*Ibid.* pp 74–75

Compare the above to the account in “The Robertson School of Party Building” (1917 No 1, Winter 1986) where we described how an accusation of “sexual manipulation” was used in the iSt:

“When the accused inquired how this charge could be made when he denied it, and all his purported victims denied it, he was informed that this was the *worst* kind of manipulation—it had been done so skillfully that, even under considerable party pressure, the victims themselves couldn’t see what happened! Such is the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of the ‘richly democratic’ internal life of the Spartacist tendency. Sexual manipulation, like everything else in the SL, means exactly what the leadership wants it to mean.”

Another example is Norden/Stamberg’s description of how purge targets are subjected to a barrage of unsubstantiated accusations:

“When we objected to the multiple inaccuracies and unsupported outrageous claims, Parks flew into a rage and proceeded to purge first Negrete and Socorro from Mexico and then Norden from the I.S. In both cases, invented charges were tossed about with abandon, and when one didn’t fly it was simply replaced by a new one. The mud-slinging is an all-too familiar witchhunting technique, based on the assumption that eventually something will stick or the targets will tire of scraping off the slime.”

—*Op Cit.* p 29

Negrete makes the same point:

“Once again the grossly distorted picture was backed up by a series of demonstrably false statements. Yet each statement, once it collapsed, gave way to a new one. It was false that the IEC [ICL International Executive Committee] memorandum was not translated, that it was not distributed, that it was not discussed, that it was discussed only once. It was false that the Germany fight was covered up, that it was discussed only once, that it was discussed very briefly, etc. It was false that the fight in France, the fight in Italy, the ‘unlimited general strike,’ the fight with Y. Rad, the fight over Quebec, etc., were not discussed, that discussions did not occur in meetings, that materials were not translated (dozens were), etc. It was false and absurd to state that I cited ‘cultural differences’ as an argument for building a different, non-Leninist type of party in the Third World....

“It was totally false—as everyone who visited Mexico knows—that there was a poisonous atmosphere in the section, squelching the development and education of young comrades, particularly women. Again, Parks’ report on her ‘tour of inspection’ last fall states the exact opposite.

“The above is only a sample of the false statements piled one on top of the other in that fight. Yet a number of well-meaning comrades have urged that all these ‘details’ be overlooked in favour of the ‘big picture’. But first of all, the rules of the Fourth International tell us to ‘be true in little

things as in big ones’. And secondly, in this case the ‘big picture’ is made up of a lot of ‘little’ lies and fabrications, which keep getting bigger.”

—*Ibid.* pp 75–76

Once again, compare the IG comrades’ accounts to our 1985 description of a typical SL “fight”:

“Here’s how it works in the SL. A meeting is called where the designated comrade is called to account for mistakes which he allegedly committed. Each item on the bill of particulars is grossly exaggerated and extrapolated; perfidious motivations (political and/or personal) are attributed. Incidental personal criticisms of the individual’s mannerism’s, lifestyle or demeanour are thrown in for good measure. Those leading the attack typically do a good deal of histrionic screaming and posturing in order to create the proper emotionally-charged atmosphere. The assembled membership is expected to provide the chorus: repeating and embellishing on the accusations.... There is no beating the rap. If you can prove that some of the accusations are false, new ones are quickly invented. Or you are charged with using ‘lawyer’s arguments’ and attempting to obscure the overall picture by quibbling over ‘details’...”

—“The Road to Jimstown”

The resemblance between our accounts and the IG’s can be explained in one of two ways: either the SL leadership carefully studied our invented descriptions of their purge techniques and decided to employ them for the first time against Norden, Stamberg, Socorro and Negrete, *or* the treatment of the IG comrades followed the pattern of earlier purges.

The IG’s complaints about abusive and bureaucratic treatment by the SL (which are entirely credible) do not sit easily beside their insistence that there is *no connection* between what happened to them and victims of previous purges. The IG comrades are apparently not very comfortable admitting that the use of smears, shunning and various kinds of psychological and organizational pressure have long been a feature of the ICL’s internal life. But these were not things that Parks improvised in the last few months.

The fundamental problem with the Norden/Stamberg/Negrete documents is that they present a chronology tailored far too closely to their own political histories. We suspect that, at least in part, this is a product of concentration on writing and contacting to the exclusion of the reflection and reexamination required to make sense of the traumatic experience of being forcibly wrenched out of the political/organizational framework within which they had spent virtually their entire adult lives.

The Case of Bill Logan

Negrete recycles the SL’s charge that comrade Bill Logan of the IBT is a “vicious psychopath.” Robertson invested a great deal of political capital in “proving” that Logan, the most prominent iSt leader outside the American section, was no ordinary miscreant, but a “sociopath” who had always been unfit for membership in the workers’ movement. The Logan case was in fact a milestone in the degeneration of the iSt/ICL. Comrade Norden, who was a leading member of the SL/US at the time, may recall the commission that met in the SL’s New York headquarters in August-September 1974 to consider the complaints of John Ebel, a disaffected member of the SL/ANZ. Ebel’s complaints touched on *all* the allegations (including the celebrated one of a female comrade supposedly pressured to give up her child) that five years later the SL leadership was pretending it had just learned of. Yet the 1974 Ebel commission, after considering the evidence, did not find that there were any serious improprieties in the SL/

ANZ. How do the IG comrades account for that?

We have never denied that the comrades of the SL/ANZ were indeed abused under the Logan regime; we have merely asserted that life in the SL/ANZ was not qualitatively different than in the SL/U.S. This is attested to by the fact that none of the experienced cadres sent from the SL/US noticed anything fundamentally different about life in the SL/ANZ, and that they were all assimilated into the regime without undue difficulty. We dealt with the Logan case at some length in our *Trotskyist Bulletin* No. 5 (“ICL vs. IBT”) and invite you to consider the points raised there. We are quite willing to discuss any and all aspects of this case with you and will, if necessary, make available to you copies of any relevant documentation we possess.

The refusal of Edmund Samarakkody, the veteran Sri Lankan Trotskyist and only member of the trial body who was not a member of the iSt, to go along with the findings of the Logan Commission led to a rupture in the fraternal relations between the Sri Lankan Revolutionary Workers Party [RWP] and the iSt. Samarakkody’s group, the only principled formation that emerged from the betrayal of the mass-based pseudo-Trotskyist Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP) when the latter entered a popular front, had come to the iSt’s first International Conference with the intention of fusing with the iSt. Despite differences of a rightist/centrist character that would have made the RWP distinct from the mainstream positions of the iSt, these comrades were prepared to abide by international democratic centralist discipline.

On Trial in the ICL: From Logan to Socorro

However uncomfortable it may be for the IG, the fact is that the proceedings against Logan set a precedent for many of the improprieties in Socorro’s trial:

“Representatives of the trial body were told of Socorro’s documented medical condition... We noted that this condition, together with the need for preparation time, were powerful reasons to grant Socorro’s formal request that the trial be postponed. Yet this request was flatly denied—even a one-hour postponement was refused!

“Depositions from witnesses in Mexico were solicited by the prosecution without the defence having the opportunity to pose crucial questions. When we asked to do so in writing, our *entire* series of questions for those eight witnesses was thrown out by the trial body, at the same time as it continued to solicit depositions for the prosecution even while the trial was going on. Throughout the proceedings, this body acted with undisguised bias against the defendant, brazenly leading the two prosecution witnesses, who dutifully said ‘yes’ to ever-wilder assertions regarding Socorro’s supposed actions and motivations. Close to half the defence questions for these two witnesses were squelched. With bald-faced lying and repeated self-contradictions from their witnesses, the prosecution/trial body finally cut the process short, pulling the second of their witnesses off the stand.”

—“From a Drift...” pp 78–79

Compare this to our 1990 account of the Logan trial:

“A hysterical atmosphere was created, as delegates were subjected to endless anti-Logan diatribes by the Spartacist leadership and ‘disabused’ former comrades primed for the occasion. The whole procedure was full of irregularities: Logan was denied counsel in preparing his case, and the organization refused to provide [Aidaire] Hannah [Logan’s then companion and long-time close collaborator], his only witness, with any financial assistance to attend. Needless to say there was plenty of money available to fly in hostile witnesses. Everyone in the organization knew that the results of the trial were a forgone conclusion.

“Ten days after Logan’s expulsion, when Aidaire Hannah attempted to resign from the organization in protest, she was

told that the Colchester [iSt] conference had terminated her membership. Yet the Spartacist leadership had previously told her that there was no reason for her to attend the conference, as she was *not* on trial. Not only was she not given the opportunity to defend herself, she was not even told why she was expelled.”

—1917, No. 9

The ICL leadership has never answered (and cannot answer) these criticisms, for the same reason that they refuse to comment on the IG’s criticisms of the Socorro case. Unlike comrade Socorro’s defender, comrade Logan was at least permitted to question the witnesses at his trial. But this “concession” was only granted after a sharp argument within the trial body, which had initially ruled that the defendant should not have the right to cross-examine witnesses:

“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.

“I disagreed and stated that the right of an accused person to cross-examine witnesses who testify against him was fundamental to a fair trial; that as the control of proceedings was in the hands of the Trial Body it was up to the Trial Body to see that Logan is not permitted to misuse his right to cross-examine.”

—“The Logan Case,” Edmund Samarakkody, 1980

When Robertson learned of Samarakkody’s objections, he instructed the commission to permit Logan to question the witnesses who testified against him. Perhaps if, like Logan, Socorro had been tried by a body with at least one senior member of the workers’ movement not directly subject to the considerable internal pressures of the ICL, the procedures in her case would have been slightly less arbitrary.

Samarakkody’s criticisms of the Logan trial were not limited to procedure:

“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.”

—*Ibid.*

In 1979 agreement with the Logan verdict was a test of loyalty to the iSt leadership. Seventeen years later in the GEM [the ICL’s Mexican group] a similar “argument by authority” was employed:

“In the opening statement for the I.S. delegation to the April 14 GEM meeting, Kidder began by reeling off a list of the names and ranks of eight full or alternate members of the IEC who had written documents on the fight, then saying: ‘You don’t have to take anybody’s word for it in our organization, leadership or not. Yet comrade Negrete would have you believe that these comrades who together represent about 150 years in our international tendency have it all wrong, don’t really know the facts, are simply engaging

in gratuitous insults against him. What kind of organization is Negrete saying you have joined, comrades?’ Beginning with a naked argument by authority, Kidder proceeded to pose the question as a loyalty oath.”

—“From a Drift...” p 31

Samarakkody had objected to just such “naked argument by authority” at the Logan trial:

“I pointed out that the posing of such a question [i.e., as to whether one could trust the leadership of the tendency] 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 [the] volume of documentation that the iSt had[,] prior to the setting up of the Trial Body, had (sic) bureaucratically hatched a plot and carried out a coup d’etat 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 Bolshevization of the iSt. However, my dissent went counter to their aims and expectations in this regard.”

—“The Logan Case” by Edmund Samarakkody (1980)

The Purge of the IG/LQB: Preventive Strikes

The political explanation for the ICL’s purge of the IG comrades and the breaking of fraternal relations with LM/LQB offered by Norden/Stamberg (p 68) is fundamentally correct:

“By upping the pressure on and going after perceived ‘internal opponents’ and trying to force the declaration of a faction, the I.S. clearly has sought to make a preventive strike. The result has been to create a poisonous atmosphere in the party.”

It is also apparent that the break with the LQB was a deeply cynical maneuver. But this poses once more the fundamental contradiction in the explanations of the IG: how could the cadres of a revolutionary Trotskyist organization turn, on command, into purgers, wreckers, witchhunters and hand-raisers? Where did the layer of “self-conscious fabricators and liars” who “boast” of their misdeeds come from? And why were Norden and Stamberg so sure that there was no point in bothering to appear at their scheduled “trial”? In a healthy organization one would expect a sharp reaction from

the membership to the evident improprieties of the trial procedure in Socorro’s case. Why not in the SL? And why didn’t Norden and Stamberg expect the SL rank and file to be appalled by the factionally motivated lies and slanders? Why wouldn’t the account of a surprise visit at midnight by a “hefty repo squad” demanding instant compliance come as a shock to those with decades of experience in the ICL? The reason is that this sort of thing has been going on for a very long time. That is why our descriptions of the techniques employed tally so closely with the IG’s.

It is clear from the declaration of fraternal relations between the LM and the ICL (which we presume that both the LQB and IG stand on) that we not only claim a common political heritage, but share common positions on some central programmatic questions. These include hard opposition to popular frontism; the necessity for the Leninist party to act as the tribune of the oppressed; the inextricable link between black liberation and socialist revolution in both the U.S. and Brazil; and, more generally, a recognition that permanent revolution is the only road to liberation for the masses of the semi-colonial world. The material on the Russian question in the LM/ICL declaration doubtless represented political development in the direction of Trotskyism by the LM. But it is flawed, in our view, to the extent that it reflects the ICL’s position on the collapse of the Soviet bloc. We have other important disagreements, the most important of which we have addressed in this letter.

We have always taken the iSt/ICL seriously and deeply regretted its political destruction as a revolutionary formation. While the ICL published voluminous polemics against us, it has historically refused to debate (much less discuss) the political differences between us either publicly or privately. This stance, which has done it no good, derives, in our view, from the political fragility of this rigidly controlled and increasingly depoliticized organization. Naturally we also perceived the ICL’s refusal to debate as an implicit admission that many of their polemics would not stand close examination. These are the same factors that account for the objectionable techniques employed against you in the “fights” that preceded your departure from the ICL.

We are interested in initiating serious discussions between ourselves and your organizations, with the object of either narrowing the gap between us, or at least clarifying where we stand in relation to each other. Clearly such discussions would also permit the identification and correction of errors in fact or interpretation on either side. Regrettably there are very substantial objective difficulties in pursuing discussions between ourselves and the LQB. In the first place there is the problem that we have no Portuguese language capacity and we do not know if the LQB has either English or German capacity. There is also the problem of our geographical separation. We believe that neither of these problems are insurmountable. But they will pose substantial obstacles to a serious political exchange.

Discussions with the IG are not hampered by either of the above considerations, and, given what we assume to be close political collaboration between the cadres of the IG and LQB, it would perhaps make sense that the first discussions should take place between ourselves and the IG. We hope that you will carefully consider the points we have raised and we look forward to your early response.

Tom Riley
for the IBT

Document No. 4

On 'Bureaucratic Methods' & the ICL

In a March 1998 "Special Supplement" to the *Internationalist*, entitled "Crisis in the ICL," the IG sought to explain the connection between the ICL's "bureaucratic methods and centrist politics" as follows:

"The political *methods* of the ICL leadership show signs of pronounced degeneration, but *behind the high-handed bureaucratic methods is a centrist political course*. Precisely because the I.S. [ICL International Secretariat] undertook a pre-emptive strike to eliminate in advance internal opposition to its desertion in Brazil, and because the new line of the organization is in the process of developing, we did not rush to make a final judgement of where the ICL is going.

"Why did the I.S. desert from the struggle in Brazil? Just because they couldn't line up the LQB against Norden and Negrete, as the Mensheviks of the misnamed Bolshevik Tendency claim? This is penny-ante Kremlinology, not Marxism. Because of cowardice, as the BT and the ICL pretend we say? We accuse the ICL leadership of something far worse—committing a betrayal of the Trotskyist program. The I.S.'s abandonment of the *Iskra* perspective toward North African exiles points to the origins....the I.S. is *turning its back on the struggle to cohere communist nuclei in semi-colonial countries*."

We responded with a letter dated 14 April 1998.

Dear Comrades:

On page 12 of your recent Special Supplement of *The Internationalist* you ask, "Why did the [ICL] I.S. desert from the struggle in Brazil?" You reject our observation that the ICL's behavior was in response to the LQB's refusal to endorse the purge of Norden and Negrete as "penny-ante Kremlinology, not Marxism." But one need not be a Marxist to work out the factional calculation that led to the ICL leadership's abrupt about-face in Volta Redonda.

In a letter to the ICL, the LQB provided the following chronology:

"In your [the ICL's] previous letter, dated 11 June, Parks wrote that Norden and Abrão wanted to destroy the LQB's Fraternal Relations with the ICL. Then on 17 June, six days later, you wrote to break Fraternal Relations!"

—"From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle," pg. 84

The ICL's record in Brazil is one of "betrayal," and a desertion from the class struggle, as you allege, but to label

things is not to explain them. Why did the ICL leadership make such an abrupt change in the space of a week?

The reason seems clear enough: during those intervening six days the LQB comrades indicated that they were not prepared to denounce Negrete and Norden prior to studying the documents and listening to both sides. This attitude is one the ICL leadership refuses to tolerate in its "international." You can look for a more transcendent "political" explanation if you wish, but the motivation for the factional maneuvers of the leaders of the penny-ante Kremlin on Warren Street is all too obvious.

You make a point you believe to be quite profound and which you believe we have failed to grasp—that the leadership of the Spartacist tendency is "turning its back on the struggle to cohere communist nuclei in semi-colonial countries." This is true enough, but it is only one part of a larger picture. The leadership of the international Spartacist tendency/International Communist League has long ceased to regard cohering groups of communist cadres as its central task *anywhere*. The repeated purging of the membership, the severing of the groups' few connections to the organized workers' movement and the occasional expressions of solicitude for U.S. imperialism's military personnel (Reagan's Star Warriors aboard the *Challenger* and the residents of the Marine barracks in Beirut) are all evidence that for years the overriding priority of the ICL leadership has been maintaining its position atop its own little fiefdom.

Leninism is premised on the recognition that the "organizational" question is a political question. As we have pointed out, your reluctance to address the truth about how things actually worked in the ICL makes it difficult for you to account for much of your own experience. Why did comrade Socorro find "more justice" in a bourgeois court than in the ICL? Why is the chief qualification for leadership in the SL "anointment" by Jim Robertson? Why have the SL ranks so easily swallowed the lies about you and the LQB? You prefer to avoid these sorts of questions. But sooner or later you will have to address them. And, in doing so, you will find yourselves compelled to acknowledge that the SL (circa 1996) could not have been a healthy revolutionary organization.

Bolshevik greetings,

Tom Riley
for the IBT

Document No. 5

IG: Ex-Robertsonites in Denial **Willful Blindness**

This article appeared in 1917 No. 20.

In June 1996, the Spartacist League (SL) purged four long-time cadres: Jan Norden, editor-in-chief for 23 years of the group's newspaper, *Workers Vanguard*; his companion and de-facto WV managing editor, Marjorie Stamberg; Negrete, who headed the SL's Mexican affiliate, the Grupo Espartaquista de Mexico (GEM); and Negrete's companion, Socorro, an 18-year member of the Spartacist League. Norden was the most prominent SL cadre ever purged in the group's history; Stamberg joined the SL in the early 1970s, and was a member of its central committee; Negrete and Socorro were their political allies. Immediately following the purge, the International Communist League (ICL—the SL's international) abruptly broke recently established fraternal relations with the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil/Luta Metalúrgica (LQB/LM). The break took place because the Brazilians refused to associate themselves with the purge of Norden and Negrete, who had been their chief ICL contacts, without hearing both sides and reading the documents.

In the year and a half since the purge, the four have refused to be driven out of far-left politics. They have constituted themselves as the "Internationalist Group" (IG), established fraternal links with the LQB/LM, and have won the adherence of two former members of the GEM who initially went along with the Norden purge, but later regretted it. The IG has thus far published three thick issues of *The Internationalist*, with coverage of political developments in half a dozen countries. In their press, in Internet postings, leaflets, and one lengthy bulletin, they have systematically and painstakingly refuted the charges leveled against them by the Spartacist League. Yet, despite its political stamina and feverish activity, the IG has to date proved unequal to the tasks that, for a serious revolutionary group, must come before all others: accounting for its origins and justifying its existence as a separate organization.

Launching a new organization with only a handful of people and a fraternal group thousands of miles away is a difficult undertaking. Any intelligent person contemplating membership in such an organization would want to know why it parted company with a much larger parent outfit whose politics appear nearly identical. The IG has furnished an account of sorts, but, particularly for those familiar with the evolution of the Spartacist League over the past two decades, their version is not plausible.

Beginning with the "Declaration of the External Tendency of the iSt," issued 15 years ago in 1982, we have chronicled the degeneration of the Spartacist League from a genuine democratic-centralist Trotskyist propaganda group into a bureaucratized and politically erratic organization centered on a single individual, the group's National Chairman, James Robertson. We described this degeneration as a slow process, taking place over a period of years, and becoming complete in all important respects by the early 1980s. The techniques employed by Robertson to maintain his regime—psychological gang bangs, pre-emptive strikes against potential opponents, frame-up trials and cop-baiting—have all been documented in our literature.

Norden and his comrades are the latest victims of the Robertson regime. But the indisputable fact is that, for most of the same 15 years, the founders of the Internationalist Group

functioned as Robertson's willing accomplices. With perhaps less enthusiasm than many hardcore hacks, but dutifully nonetheless, they deployed against others—most notably the IBT—many of the same techniques today being used to anathematize them. Norden, in his capacity as editor of *Workers Vanguard*, played an active part in concocting slanders against us. Yet—how much out of a conscious desire to save face, how much out of genuine self-delusion, we cannot know—the IG cadres have stubbornly resisted any re-evaluation or criticism of their own political past.

Thus the Internationalist Group seeks to defend itself against the slanders and unprincipled attacks of the Spartacist League, while at the same time uncritically defending all previous uses of similar techniques by the Robertson regime against others. This stance, in turn, requires them to make a highly implausible claim: that, right up until the fight against the "Norden clique," the SL remained a healthy Trotskyist organization; and that, in a matter of months, this same organization was somehow transformed into a bureaucratic nightmare, employing methods that the IG itself compares to those of Stalin, without a murmur of opposition from anyone beside the luckless four. This flies in the face of both elementary logic and the facts.

An Improbable Account

The Internationalist Group's version of the SL's degeneration goes roughly as follows: after the collapse of the USSR and the deformed workers' states of Eastern Europe, the ICL fell increasingly into the grip of a defeatist mood. Leading elements of the organization began to view the working class as being in long-term retreat, and therefore expected that opportunities for intervention in the class struggle would be few and far between. They concluded that the best the ICL could do under these circumstances was to keep itself intact, issue propaganda of an abstract and passive character, and wait for better times. This shift was embodied by a new leadership, headed by Alison Spencer (a.k.a. Parks). A former leader of the Spartacus Youth, Spencer increasingly took over the reins from Robertson, who went into semi-retirement in California in the late 1980s. This new leadership is, according to the IG, "lacking any experience whatsoever in the class struggle," has an "insecure footing in Marxism," and is "heavily shaped by the stultifying Reagan and post-Reagan years in North America."

The IG contends that the historic pessimism of the SL's new leaders led them to view with suspicion the attempts of Norden and company to pursue real opportunities in the class struggle, and to brand such initiatives as opportunism and attempts to get rich quick. This growing hostility culminated in their purge. Robertson, though initially reluctant, ultimately went along with the anti-Norden campaign in order not to undermine the new leadership. The new SL leadership's abstentionist mentality is, according to the IG, manifested above all in the "cowardly retreat from the class struggle" represented by the rupture of fraternal relations with the LQB/LM. The ICL broke relations just as the LQB/LM was facing repression from the Brazilian state for waging a campaign to expel the police from a union they led in Volta

Redonda, an industrial town not far from Rio de Janeiro. In the course of the Norden purge, the IG argues, democratic-centralist norms were violated, their membership rights were trampled on, deliberately false accusations were leveled at them by the leadership, frame-up trials were conducted and outright lies were printed in *Workers Vanguard*—all, according to the IG, for the *first time* in the history of the Spartacist League.

A Few Comparisons

While this version of events contains many elements of truth, it is fundamentally false. The remarkable similarity between the IG's account of what happened to them, and our descriptions of previous purges, published over ten years earlier, is, in itself, enough to disprove the IG's claim that the SL regime trampled on internal party democracy for the first time in 1996.

Because Negrete, the head of the Mexican group (GEM), was thought to be a Norden ally, the SL sent a special delegation to Mexico to purge the section. Here is Negrete's description:

"Having gone through the 'Brazil/Mexico fight,' I can state categorically that the current campaign involves a chain of willful fabrications. The fight blew up when Camila and I had questions about significantly inaccurate statements on Brazil in an I.S. mailing cover letter. At the same time as some of these statements were then explicitly corrected, a story was fabricated that I had behaved as a 'sexist bully' towards Camila (which Camila herself denied was true) and browbeaten her into posing the questions she put in writing. When witnesses said and wrote that this is not what happened, not only was the content of what they said ignored, but they were smeared as cliquists, personalists and anti-internationalists. At the same time as requests by Socorro and myself for a formal investigation of the charge were rejected out of hand, the lie was not only repeated but inflated into a supposed pattern."

—*From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*

In the first issue of this journal, published in 1986, we recounted another case where a Spartacist cadre who had fallen into disfavor with the regime was accused of "sexual manipulation:"

"When the accused inquired how this charge could be made when he denied it, and all his purported victims denied it, he was informed that this was the *worst* kind of manipulation—it had been done so skillfully that, even under considerable party pressure, the victims themselves couldn't see what happened! Such is the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of the 'richly democratic' internal life of the Spartacist tendency. Sexual manipulation, like everything else in the SL, means exactly what the leadership wants it to mean."

—"The Robertson School of Party Building" 1917 No.1

In another document, Norden and Stamberg describe their own interactions with Spencer, the SL's newly appointed leader:

"When we objected to the multiple inaccuracies and unsupported outrageous claims, Parks [Spencer] flew into a rage and proceeded to purge first Negrete and Socorro from Mexico and then Norden from the I.S. In both cases, invented charges were tossed around with abandon, and when one didn't fly it was simply replaced by a new one. This mud-slinging is an all-too familiar witchhunting technique, based on the assumption that eventually something will stick or the targets will tire of scraping off the slime."

—*Op cit.*

Negrete recounts that during the Mexican purge:

"Once again the grossly distorted picture was backed up by a series of demonstrably false statements. Yet each false-

hood, once it collapsed, gave way to a new one.

"The above is only a sample of the false statements piled one on top of the other in that fight. Yet a number of well-meaning comrades have urged that all these 'details' be overlooked in favor of the 'big picture.' But...in this case the 'big picture' is made up of a lot of 'little' lies and fabrications, which keep getting bigger."

—*Ibid.*

In their description of the same purge, Norden and Stamberg write:

"In the opening statement for the I.S. delegation to the April 14 GEM meeting, Kidder began by reeling off a list of the names and ranks of eight full or alternate members of the IEC who had written documents on the fight, then saying: 'You don't have to take anybody's word for it in our organization, leadership or not. Yet comrade Negrete would have you believe that these comrades who together represent about 150 to 200 years in our international tendency have it all wrong, don't really know the facts, are simply engaging in gratuitous insults against him. What kind of organization is Negrete saying that you have joined, comrades?'"

—*Ibid.*

Compare the above accounts to our own portrayal of a typical SL *auto-da-fé*, written in 1985:

"Here's how it works in the SL. A meeting is called where the designated comrade is called to account for mistakes which he allegedly committed. Each item on the bill of particulars is grossly exaggerated and extrapolated; perfidious motivations (political and/or personal) are attributed. Incidental personal criticisms of the individual's mannerisms, lifestyle or demeanor are thrown in for good measure. Those leading the attack typically do a good deal of histrionic screaming and posturing in order to create the proper emotionally-charged atmosphere. The assembled membership is expected to provide the chorus: repeating and embellishing on the accusations.... There is no beating the rap. If you can prove that some of the allegations are false, new ones are quickly invented. Or you are charged with using 'lawyer's arguments' and attempting to obscure the overall picture by quibbling over 'details'.... After all, if you don't agree with the charges, then you *must* think the campaign against you is a bureaucratic atrocity."

—"The Road to Jimstown" (1985)

The parallels between these accounts leaves two possibilities open: either 1) our accusations were false when we made them in 1985–86, but the SL leadership used our literature as a how-to guide, from which they culled the techniques that were deployed for the first time against Norden, Stamberg, Negrete and Socorro in 1996; or 2) far from being new, these weapons had been part of the leadership's arsenal long before the ill-fated four took their turn as targets.

The Wohlforth School of Cop-Baiting

The Internationalist Group's claim that, in the wake of their expulsion, the Spartacist press for the first time besmirched its formerly spotless reputation for veracity is as preposterous as their claim to be the first victims of bureaucratic treatment in the SL. *The Internationalist* No. 2 laments:

"Founded in 1971, the Spartacist League's *Workers Vanguard* acquired a reputation for accuracy and the hard-hitting integrity of a newspaper seeking to present the program of revolutionary Marxism unblunted by adaptation to the lying ideology of capitalist society. Yet for going on a year now, *WV* has been ripping this hard-earned reputation to shreds."

The same article waxes particularly indignant over the fact that, in *Workers Vanguard*:

“vituperation is a device to cover up the inability to answer us politically. We have charged that the ICL leadership committed a betrayal in Brazil, that its growing tendency to abstentionism led to desertion from a key class battle. The response of *Workers Vanguard* is to say...that the IG is ‘for sale.’ This is a political response?”

The Internationalist aptly compares the WV allegations with the infamous smear tactics of the Healyite Workers League of the 1960s:

“We are compelled to ask: did the new WV crib from [former Workers League leader Tim] Wohlforth its smear job against the Internationalist Group? Particularly when we compare the end of the WV No. 663 article with the peroration of Wohlforth’s classic hack job, which claimed of Spartacist:

“Precisely because it is motivated by subjective considerations and lives particularly on its deep hatred of the Trotskyist movement, its role is very much that of a gun for hire. Neither tradition nor any objective consideration places any limit on what this group can and will do.’ What was *vile slander* from Wohlforth’s pen is no less so when, in almost exactly the same language, the hobbled post-purge WV spews it out against us today...This is a hoary method: if you can’t justify voting for imperialist war credits in World War I, accuse Lenin of taking German gold; if you can’t answer Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinist degeneration, accuse him of working for the Gestapo, the French Deuxième Bureau and the Mikado; if you can’t answer revolutionary criticism, accuse the critic of being ‘for sale,’ or a ‘gun for hire.’”

The IG wants its readers to believe that such politically corrupt practices are completely unprecedented in the history of the SL. But those who peruse the 4 October 1985 issue of WV, with Norden as editor, will find us smeared as “anti-Spartacists for hire”:

“Those who are guided by intense subjective malice as a political program are just asking to be someone’s tool, witting or unwitting (sometimes both)...applying the criterion *cui bono* (who benefits) to the ET/BT suggests answers ranging from the merely unsavory to the downright sinister.”

Was WV, again during Norden’s tenure, cribbing from Wohlforth two years later in its article “Garbage Doesn’t Walk by Itself—What Makes BT Run?” (15 May 1987) when it wrote:

“The whole tone of the BT recalls nothing so much as the insinuating style associated with the FBI’s infamous COINTELPRO....

“Ex-members of the socialist movement do sometimes bear malice toward the organizations that ‘failed’ them. But people who voluntarily leave even very bad organizations normally find that their grievances recede as they go on with their lives. Hostility doesn’t make a program and ex-membership in a party doesn’t provide a sufficient reason for publishing a newspaper....The BT is manifestly an assemblage of garbage....But to take that refuse heap and make it move like a loathsome living thing requires something more, an animating principle like the electric charge Dr. Frankenstein used to imbue his monster with life.”

Or perhaps the IG’s memory goes back at least as far as 1990, when the ICL published *Trotskyism: What It Isn’t and What It Is!*, which alleged:

“Cold War II also produced defectors and renegades from our organization. Today they call themselves the Bolshevik Tendency and the Gruppe Vierte Internationale [forerunner of Gruppe Spartakus, the German section of the IBT—ed]. Based in North America, the BT are parasites who often will put forward a parody of our positions...while staging repeated provocations against our organization. As for the BT’s own political positions, besides hatred of the Soviet

Union, these highly dubious provocateurs appear to dislike American blacks, are solicitous of Zionism and praise the indiscriminant [*sic*] mass killings of Americans. Of the state agencies in the world only the Mossad, the Israeli secret police, has similar appetites....”

These are only the most outrageous examples of cop baiting in the Spartacist press. For reasons of space, we must refrain from citing numerous passages containing such epithets directed against us as: “bureaucrat,” “red-baiter,” “wrecker,” “wife beater,” “petty criminal,” and, most recently, “scab.” To sling mud at the IG, the SL had no need to take a leaf out of Wohlforth’s book; they had only to consult the bound volumes of *Workers Vanguard* for the past ten or twelve years.

In general the SL does not find it necessary to aim such wild slanders at those who stand at greater distance from its own professed politics. The IG and ourselves have been the main objects of these unscrupulous tactics because, as former “insiders,” our criticisms hit home in a way that those of other opponents generally do not. And, as the IG explained, “if you can’t answer Trotsky’s analysis of Stalinist degeneration, accuse him of working for the Gestapo.”

We should, however, note that the SL has on occasion employed similarly unprincipled tactics against other leftists. One example was fully documented in WV 26 July 1985, when a well-known supporter of the state-capitalist League for the Revolutionary Party (LRP) was cop-baited from the platform by a guest speaker at a public meeting of the New York SL. When he “incredibly” demanded that the SL “uphold his purported honor as a socialist,” the SL interpreted this as evidence that: “He wanted us to have to escort him out, which we did.”

The Real Story

The Robertsonites’ allegation that the Internationalist Group are “Pabloites of the second mobilization,” searching for “social forces other than the proletariat and vehicles other than a Leninist vanguard party” (*Workers Vanguard*, 5 July 1996) is clearly no more applicable to the Norden group than to the Spartacist League itself. But the IG have been unable to provide a plausible explanation of why they were driven out of the SL. Their literature puts heavy emphasis on the “cowardly retreat from the class struggle” in Brazil, which culminated in the breaking of relations with the LQB/LM. There was indeed a cowardly retreat with respect to the Brazilian group, but this was *not* the cause of the Norden purge. In fact, the “anti-Norden” struggle in the Spartacist League began more than a year earlier, when the SL leadership claimed to have discovered evidence of “Stalinophilia” in a speech given by Norden at Berlin’s Humboldt University. This accusation, in turn, came as the culmination of tensions that had been brewing for a number of years.

It is always tidier, for public purposes, to locate the reasons for a split in readily comprehensible differences of views or principle, rather than in the petty, squalid internal machinations of a cultist political organization. But facts are stubborn things. It is to such machinations that we must turn to understand the real reasons for the Norden purge.

An inevitable byproduct of the Spartacist League’s degeneration was the depoliticizing of the rank and file. Political wisdom was increasingly attributed to the leader alone. Yet the editorial board of *Workers Vanguard* remained the one vestige of the SL’s intensely political, revolutionary past. It had over the years drawn to itself many of the SL’s brightest, most literate, and most informed members, and political discussion remained an operational necessity for putting out the paper. It was precisely for this reason that the SL’s maximum

leader, James Robertson, regarded the WV editorial board as a nest of potential oppositionists. Where political discussion occurs, there is always the possibility of arriving at conclusions other than those of Number One. The collective trashing of the editorial board, usually before a meeting of the New York local, had therefore almost become a ritual by the time the “Norden group” was finally expelled.

At Robertson’s instigation, Norden would be taken to task for being insensitive to the needs of people who worked under him, driving the production staff too hard, and deeming himself to be above collective discipline (read: obedience to Robertson). In accordance with his usual practice, Robertson sought to exploit the legitimate grievances of Norden’s subordinates. Norden is a workaholic, who did on occasion impose a frenzied pace upon his staff. But in this respect he was hardly more culpable than other leading SLers, whose methods were never so closely scrutinized nor so loudly and frequently denounced before the organization as a whole. Robertson likes to appear before the membership as their defender against abusive, small-time bureaucrats. Both the Tsar and Stalin used to do the same; it’s good public relations.

These ritual denunciations of the *Workers Vanguard* ed board would usually end with a reluctant capitulation on Norden’s part. In 1984, one such episode resulted in the appointment of a Robertson-loyal “editor-in-chief” who, although neither a political heavyweight nor an experienced writer or editor, was given final authority over the paper on closing night, when Norden was barred from the WV offices. He was forced instead to sit by himself in a room on another floor until production was completed, maintaining only telephone contact with the rest of the WV staff. One senior member of the editorial board compared this treatment to that meted out by Mao during the Cultural Revolution to “disloyal” party officials, who were paraded in public wearing dunce caps. And in a stroke truly reminiscent of the Cultural Revolution’s “big character posters,” which were aimed at Mao’s enemies, a poster denouncing Norden was hung in the SL offices. With the passage of time, things gradually returned to normal in the WV bullpen. But by then the organization was well accustomed to the sight of Norden in the pillory.

Several years later, when Robertson moved to California, the scene was set for a succession struggle at the Spartacist League’s New York headquarters. The *Workers Vanguard* collective was now the most cohesive group of senior cadres left in New York, and Norden was the most politically authoritative figure among them. He was therefore the most likely candidate to replace Robertson as head of the SL. Robertson, however, was determined to prevent such an outcome. Even from the comfortable semi-retirement of his marina-side Bay Area house, the supreme leader was not prepared to relinquish control of the group he had trained, through years of “fights” and purges, in the habits of unconditional obedience to him. He was bent on maintaining control from afar by means of his lieutenants. Norden was too brash, too independent, and too full of his own ideas to serve as Robertson’s New York stand-in.

The IG account says that Norden and Co. were purged in order to consolidate the “new leadership” headed by Alison Spencer. But to what or whom does Spencer owe her newfound leading role? To her profound Marxist knowledge? To her immense popularity among the rank and file? In fact, Spencer is a reasonably competent, intelligent and very ambitious apparatchik, but her talents are almost exclusively of the organizational-instrumental variety; she has never been particularly overburdened by theoretical or political concerns. She was appointed by Robertson because she possessed the one qualification that he valued above all others: total subservience. But, though completely loyal to Robertson, Spencer is

too young and politically untutored to possess Robertson’s level of authority, especially in the eyes of the older cadres. Her position could therefore only be consolidated by humbling, or, if necessary, driving out those who would stand in her way. Norden was the biggest such obstacle.

The beginnings of this succession struggle are well documented in a 1993 SL internal bulletin entitled *The Struggle to Forge a Collective Leadership* (read: *The Struggle to Preserve Robertson’s Dictatorship*). Spencer fired the opening shot when, picking up on cues from Robertson, she criticized as insufficiently earnest (read: strident and cliché-ridden) a perfectly unobjectionable WV front-page article on Clinton’s bombing of Baghdad (2 July 1993). Spencer also asserted that the whole issue of the paper was “the worst...we’ve produced in a long time.” Both Norden and the director of party publications, Liz Gordon, responded that, while neither the article nor the issue were top quality, there was basically nothing wrong with them, especially considering the high level of organizational activity at the time, and the multiple demands being made on their time.

From this point on, the battle was joined, as one Robertson loyalist after another rose to denounce Norden and Gordon as “defensive,” “turf-conscious” and “cliquist,” and as attempting to usurp the prerogatives of the admittedly weak Political Bureau and International Secretariat. The climax was yet another collective trashing before the New York local of the members of the WV ed board who had dared to contradict a Robertson-appointed “leader.” The shrill and strident Spencer led the charge. As a result, Gordon resigned as publications director, and Norden and Stamberg, though allowed to continue at their respective WV posts, were once again humiliated.

The Anointing of Alison

In the SL’s printed record of this fight, one episode in particular stands out. This is a report from a Robertson loyalist, Bruce A., on a conversation he had with Norden and Stamberg. Norden told Bruce that: “Jim [Robertson] asked me if I thought I could run the party. I told him that there were things I would have to learn, but I thought I could do the job.” Robertson evidently did not share this opinion. Norden says that: “Jim called me while we were on vacation. He said, I don’t want you to be my leader.” Commenting on Spencer’s criticisms of the *Workers Vanguard* article, Norden reportedly called them a “power play,” and remarked: “Alison is the anointed successor to Jim; she is choosing the fights to build her authority.” Stamberg took the same view: “Alison was anointed by Jim, so Alison can’t lose.”

No sooner was this report circulated internally, than both Norden and Stamberg, who admitted it was substantially true, proffered profuse written apologies. That Norden had confirmed his ambition to succeed Robertson was bad enough. But worse by far was what he had said about how the Spartacist League operates: not according to its professed democratic-centralist norms, but as a one-man dictatorship, in which important decisions are made, and leaders appointed, from the top down. All but the newest or most naive SL members know that this is how things work. To say it, however, is to violate the ultimate internal taboo. Could this mean, one of Robertson’s toadies would no doubt ask, that Norden and Stamberg agreed with the International Bolshevik Tendency on the nature of the SL’s internal regime? Stamberg no doubt saw this question coming a mile away, and anticipated it in her recantation:

“In the framework of the current discussion, I would like to say something about my grotesque remark that Alison was

‘anointed by Jim.’ It was a remark made in bitter anger, an anger probably accumulated in many fights over the years. In leading and trying to forge an effective PB [Political Bureau], Alison certainly has the added authority of Jim’s support—that authority is quite considerable in our party, as well it should be. She has earned that position, and thus has been *elected* and serves with, and because of, the support of the comrades, including my own....”

—*Ibid.*, emphasis in original

Norden was also duly contrite:

“On my terrible statement that Alison was ‘anointed,’ this could be read as an accusation that the party is bureaucratic, something I have never thought. If it were, I obviously wouldn’t be here today.”

Three years later, he was no longer there.

There is a French saying, “*qui s’excuse s’accuse*,”—those who excuse themselves accuse themselves. Norden and Stenberg had already said too much. Robertson did not react immediately; his style is to bide his time and wait for the opportune moment to strike. But their ill-considered remarks were never forgotten. They were no doubt on the mind of one of Robertson’s nastiest attack dogs, Al Nelson, when he went after Norden for “Pabloist” deviations. Nelson’s accusations were without political substance. He accused Norden of over-estimating the possibilities of regroupment with a wing of the PDS (the former East German Stalinists, reconstituted as social democrats), and, in a mind-boggling exhibition of cynicism, cited as evidence of revisionism Norden’s denial that the ICL’s German affiliate constituted a revolutionary leadership during the final crisis of the DDR in 1989. The German group consisted of *eight* members at the time.

For reasons that we can only guess at, Norden did not back down. Nelson comments:

“In the past when one of these episodes provoked a fight in the party he would grudgingly yield to the party’s judgment and go on to something else. But not this time. For six months he has categorically defied the party’s judgment....”

—*Shamefaced Defectors*

Thus began the final anti-Norden campaign in the Spartacist League.

Who Did What in Brazil?

In explaining their purge, the IG stresses the SL’s rupture with the LQB/LM. And in the 18 months since the purge, the exchanges between the SL and the IG have been dominated by accusation and counter-accusation regarding events in Brazil. The IG has addressed every accusation raised by the SL, and clearly comes out on top; their account is better documented and internally consistent. The SL constantly shifts its line of attack, and it is unable to respond directly to the IG’s most important arguments. Despite a welter of demagogic charges against the LQB/LM—charges of class collaboration, opportunism and treachery—the SL is unable to present a convincing account of the break.

The IG’s version of what happened in Brazil goes roughly as follows. The LQB/LM had attained considerable influence in a municipal workers’ union (the SFPMVR) in the city of Volta Redonda, where one of their supporters, Geraldo Ribeiro, was president of the union. At the urging of the ICL leadership, Ribeiro began, starting from about March 1996, a campaign in the union to expel members of the municipal police. This led to a polarization within the union (including the development of a pro-cop faction), harassment from agencies of the state (including a police raid on a union meeting), and legal actions against the union and Ribeiro as its president (including one which suspended and sought to oust him from of-

fice). It was as this struggle was reaching its climax that the ICL severed fraternal relations with the LQB/LM.

Subsequently, when the case ousting him from the union presidency collapsed, and the court offered to restore him to office, Ribeiro refused, on grounds of principled opposition to state interference in the workers’ movement.

The SL has not succeeded in discrediting this story. They sent two fact-finding missions to Volta Redonda, as a result of which they claim to have discovered: 1) that the LQB/LM never really intended to expel the police, and 2) that Ribeiro not only sought the withdrawal of the court order, but had actively sued the union and turned over its minutes and financial records to the courts.

The Internationalist Group has answered every one of these charges. They have produced union leaflets and articles from the local bourgeois press proving that their intention to throw the police out was well known to friend and foe alike for months before the ICL’s termination of fraternal relations. They quote court papers and legal statements documenting difficulties in controlling the lawyers conducting Ribeiro’s defense, and the withdrawal from proceedings initiated improperly in his name. They have produced a statement from one of his lawyers saying that Ribeiro had declined advice to press his advantage in the courts, causing the lawyer to withdraw from the case. Moreover, the IG quote court documents to the effect it was not Ribeiro, but the union accountant, who had the minutes and financial records, and was ordered to hand them over to the court as a result of the suit by the pro-police faction.

We are in no position to pronounce judgment on every detail of this controversy. But important elements of various of the ICL’s versions fly in the face of considerable documentary evidence—evidence which is manifestly in the possession of the ICL. On the other hand, the arguments and evidence presented by the IG seem credible.

ICL’s Dive in Volta Redonda: Not the First Time

While the IG is evidently right against the Spartacist League on the substance of the dispute in Brazil, it is quite mistaken to claim that the breaking of fraternal relations with the LQB/LM was a turning point in the history of the SL/ICL. According to the IG, the reason for the break was political cowardice. By defying the infamously brutal Brazilian police, the LQB/LM exposed itself to real physical hazards: one meeting of the Volta Redonda union was raided by the military police; one leader was arrested for his local leadership role in a general strike; and Ribeiro was sued by the municipality for defamation for defending a black woman who had been fired by the city administration. Faced with these circumstances, according to the IG, the ICL/SL leadership in New York and California decided the situation in Volta Redonda was far too risky. They therefore advised the LQB/LM to move to Rio de Janeiro, and concentrate on propaganda and individual recruitment, rather than direct intervention in the unions. When the LQB proved reluctant to take this advice, the Spartacist League broke relations. With this break, the passivity that had been gaining ground in the SL since the downfall of the USSR (a “drift toward abstentionism”) led to desertion from the class struggle. Like the violation of democratic-centralist norms in the purge of the “Norden group,” this was, in the IG’s version, the first time in the history of the SL that such a departure from its revolutionary principles had ever taken place.

But Brazil is hardly the first place where the SL has demonstrated political cowardice or subordinated the imperatives

of the class struggle to its own narrow, organizational interests. For example, in the early 1980s, the SL liquidated what remained of its carefully built union fractions. Various rationales were advanced, but the real, unstated reason was that Robertson feared that these fractions, several of which had developed real roots, might one day be a base for a factional opposition. [See the June 1983 pamphlet by the External Tendency of the iSt (ET) entitled “Stop the Liquidation of the Trade Union Work!”]

In July 1984, the SL leadership, obviously fearful of repression aimed at itself in conjunction with the Democratic Party convention in San Francisco, volunteered to send a union defense squad to protect the Democrats from an imaginary “threat” of attack by Reaganites and fascists (see: *WV*, 6 July 1984). This bizarre episode, in which the SL suggested that Hitler’s burning of the Reichstag was “a fitting historical model” for the Reaganites, provoked the ridicule of the rest of the left (see: “The Politics of Chicken,” *Bulletin of the ET*, No. 4). Such an overture to one of the twin parties of U.S. imperialism was only possible because decision making in the SL is the prerogative of one unchallengeable leader.

If the SL’s posturing at the Democratic convention had little impact outside its own ranks, this was unfortunately not the case when later that year the SL deliberately sabotaged an 11-day boycott of apartheid cargo by longshoremen in San Francisco. The SL’s response to the first and only anti-apartheid labor action in U.S. history was to set up a “picket line” on the pier where a ship carrying South African cargo was docked. They abused as “scabs” the (mostly black) longshoremen who went aboard to carry out a union decision to unload the vessel selectively, leaving the South African cargo on board. The SL attempted to sabotage this boycott solely because it had been initiated by the External Tendency, forerunner of the IBT. For the SL, the cherished principles of the class struggle have long taken second place when the object is to discredit an opponent.

Pre-emptive Strike Against LQB/LM

The Internationalist Group is unable to explain satisfactorily the SL’s motives for the break with the LQB/LM. To be sure, an element of cowardice was involved; one can hardly expect exemplary courage from an outfit that responded to the 1983 demolition of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon with a call to save the survivors! But the IG seems to have overlooked the most obvious motive, even though it is evident in the documents they themselves have published. In their angry reply to ICL’s severing of fraternal relations, the LQB wrote:

“Comrades Adam, Cirrus and Arturo [of the ICL] asked us several times what we thought of the struggle with Norden, Abrao [Negrete] and other comrades. We answered that before judging, we wanted to see all the documents, since critical analysis is a part of daily life for all Marxists. You refused, arguing that these documents were internal to the organization, and you only sent copies of decisions after the accomplished fact. But then why ask our opinion about things we couldn’t investigate?”

—From *A Drift*...

It is abundantly clear from this that the ICL representatives were trying to line up the LQB/LM in the fight against Norden, which was already in full swing. When the LQB leaders didn’t come up with the right answer, the ICL leadership evidently feared that the LQB/LM, with their previous close relationship with Norden and Negrete, could provide them with a base of support. This led to the ICL’s peremptory break with the LQB/LM. Robertson was adhering to an old pattern. In 1978, in a pre-emptive strike against those he per-

ceived as potential oppositionists, the SL got rid of a whole layer of its youth leadership in the “clone purge.” The following year, with the same motivation, Robertson framed and expelled two of the international Spartacist tendency’s most important international cadres, in the infamous Logan trial. And it was for this same reason—not due to different assessments of the likelihood of repression—that the SL regime ended its relationship with what appears to be a very courageous and dedicated collective of Brazilian militants.

Robertson the Reluctant?

Deliberately or naively, Norden and Co. are just as blind concerning the role of Robertson in their own purge. Comparing Robertson to the historic leader of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), James P. Cannon, Norden and Stamberg write:

“Cannon himself, while not actively leading the fight against the Revolutionary Tendency in the SWP [progenitor of the SL], did condone it, and Robertson has unfortunately played a similar role in the fight against us.

“...with Nelson and Parks [Spencer] firmly determined to smash Norden, comrade Robertson eventually joined the onslaught, evidently seeing this as necessary for the consolidation of the new leadership.”

—From *A Drift*...

For those familiar with the individuals involved, the absurdity of this comparison is nothing short of breathtaking. The entire political training of Nelson and Spencer consists in doing Robertson’s bidding. Do Norden and Stamberg now believe (or wish others to believe) that Nelson and Spencer, in a couple of brief years, started acting as independent agents capable of bending their former master to their purposes? Have Norden and Stamberg forgotten how Robertson, while still resident in New York, and still directly leading the organization, personally orchestrated the nightmarish sessions of the New York local devoted to chastising and humiliating them? What of Robertson’s statement over the phone to Norden that he didn’t want him as his leader? Furthermore, the epithet in the title of the SL’s bulletin on their purge, “Shamefaced Defectors From Trotskyism,” was inspired by a letter from Robertson, published in the same bulletin, which branded Norden as “a shamefaced defector with associated organizational pathology.” And finally, a reply to an SL sympathizer in *Workers Vanguard* (27 September 1996), “drawn heavily” from another Robertson letter, argues that Norden was politically unfit because, among other things, he had disagreed with the SL leadership in 1973 over whether the treaty the North Vietnamese concluded with the U.S. was a sellout. What further evidence of Robertson’s role do Norden and Co. require? Robertson coming at them with a meat cleaver?

In Flight From the Truth

Only one of the SL’s accusations against the IG contains a grain of truth; the suggestion that, for such a tiny organization, its press constitutes something of a Potemkin Village. Normally, one would expect a group of cadres who had broken from an organization to which they were devoted, to make a more serious attempt to trace its degeneration. The IG seeks to avoid such questions, and instead treats the SL prior to its own purge as an organization with an unblemished record. This recalls the Maoists who used to argue that the Soviet Union was transformed from a workers’ paradise to a state-capitalist hell when Joseph Stalin’s heart stopped beating.

With its lengthy articles on the class struggle around the world, *The Internationalist* seems aimed at a readership beyond the reach of the IG. Some of this can be attributed to the

fact that Norden, who ran *WV* for 23 years, no doubt feels like a fish out of water without a publication to edit. It is as if, following his expulsion from the *WV* editorial offices, Norden has simply continued to run on automatic pilot. Yet force of habit can also provide a refuge from truths that are hard to face. And the truth the IG has thus far steadfastly refused to confront is that the organization that expelled them in 1996 had long since degenerated.

The reasons for the IG's psychological resistance to this reality are not difficult to fathom. The SL continues to disguise its seamy reality with the forms and phrases of Marxism. The founders of the IG had, in the years prior to their expulsion, become accustomed to the lack of internal democracy in the ICL. Like many other old-time SL cadres who remain in the ICL, the founders of the IG were not prepared to abandon the organization into which they poured so much effort, in which they had acquired a certain status, and around which their lives had revolved for so many years. And so they refuse to acknowledge the truth, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

Thus, the IG offers an account of its origins that will not stand critical examination. But this creates a certain predicament. The more they analyze the events surrounding their de-

parture from the Spartacist League, the stronger become the echoes of our critique. And the louder these echoes become, the more shrilly the IG tries to drown them out by repeating SL-confected slanders against the IBT. The IG has not, as the SL charges, refrained from polemicizing against opponents. But in reading *The Internationalist*, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the IGers would like to escape from their predicament by putting their political past behind them and going on to better things.

The Internationalist contains analysis—some good—about situations in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere. The IG's political acumen could, however, be rated more highly if they were less oblivious to their own experience. New positions cannot be won without settling old accounts. As long as the IG comrades remain in politics—indeed, as long as they remain thinking individuals—the unanswered questions concerning their political past will not go away. The comrades of the Internationalist Group possess among them many years of political experience, substantial knowledge of Marxism and deep reserves of energy and will—all of which can still be of great value to the working class. In the name of the revolutionary future, we urge them to pause and examine their past with a more reflective eye.

Document No. 6

MEG letter to IG

Albany

March 26, 1998

Dear Negrete and other IG comrades,

Please find enclosed the two affidavit-style statements¹ that you requested. I hope that they are of some use to you. We have taken your criticisms of our cover article in issue three into consideration. We hope to publish a larger run of issue three (revised) early next week (financial difficulty is the only reason for delay). When we print this run we will be happy to send you a copy. I have enclosed the substantial flyer (an edited version of the article) that we distributed at the Jericho march.

I understand that you are already aware that we would each like a copy of issue three of *The Internationalist*. In addition we would like to request a second set of the following documents, particularly the Iraq flyer and:

The Internationalist No. 1

The Internationalist No. 2

The Internationalist No. 4

The dossier with the title: "Class Struggle and Repression..." and the document: *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism...*

We have been able to use some of the articles in issue number four, to engage our contacts in discussions on the truckers strike in France and the situation in Mexico. Regrettably it will probably still be some time before most of these people will display an independent interest in reading about the IG's struggle against centrism in the SL. Right now the general level of political development seems stalled at a subjectively revolutionary level of consciousness and a basic (but expanding) understanding that the root of oppression in this society is capitalism itself. We will continue with the studies and intervening in struggles as they present themselves—and hope that by doing so we will be able to recruit at least a few of those around our periphery to orthodox Trotskyism.

Meanwhile Don and I have both read your latest document, "Crises in the ICL" [International Communist League]. We found it very informative. The introduction is particu-

larly interesting. The one problem that we had was that we felt like it was aimed almost exclusively at those still within the SL. Perhaps this was in fact the document's orientation? There were numerous references to documents that even other ostensibly revolutionary forces, much less the lay reader, would not have access to. In spite of this it was exceptionally clear and lucid and we found ourselves in agreement with your basic points of criticism.

We do however feel that, in the interest of being able to view the whole picture, we would like to be able to look over some of the documents that you cite which we have not seen before. If you could supply these to us we would be more than happy to reimburse you for any costs you might incur in photocopying and shipping these papers to us.

In particular, because of our interest in the question of the general strike (I believe I have in the past mentioned my fondness for Rosa Luxemburg's polemic, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions") we would very much like to see the document referred to by Parks in the 7 November 1997 letter that you reproduce on page 17—[ICL] *International Internal Bulletin* No. 39, "On the General Strike."

Additionally it strikes us that being able to have access to [ICL] *International Internal Bulletin* No. 40 commenting on "the crises in the French section" (as cited on page 10) might also help us to better form an opinion on the situation.

We of course understand and appreciate the sensitive nature of said documents and will be sure to treat them in an appropriate manner.

We are eagerly looking forward to Ed and Frank's visit. We will of course be happy to provide them with housing and arrange our schedules as best we can to maximize the amount of time that we can all meet together and carry out political discussions. It would be best for us if this meeting could take place in the month of April (as May looks rather worse for our schedules.) Hoping to hear from you again soon.

Comradely greetings,
[Jason]

1 The affidavits concerned the behavior of Spartacist League members toward the Internationalist Group at the Socialist Scholars' Conference in New York City in March 1998.

Document No. 7

MEG letter to IG

Albany
June 4, 1998

Dear IG comrades,

We apologize for the cancellation of our planned visit to Boston this weekend. Please do not view this as a personal or political slight. It was purely conditioned by the extenuating financial circumstances resulting from the loss of Jason W.'s job and our trip to Kingston, Ontario to politically intervene in what will probably be the last of the "Days of Action." The Kingston trip was already in an advanced stage of preparation when we learned of your proposal around the Boston rally. We continue to look forward to returning Ed's visit and to other face-to-face encounters with IG [Internationalist Group] comrades. We are also particularly interested in your proposal to send Negrete and/or Marjorie to Albany for a weekend. As always we welcome your proposal and assure you that we will extend the utmost hospitality.

We are however disappointed by what we understand to be your decision concerning our request (in the letter dated 3/26/98) to be given access to the ICL's [International Communist League] *International Internal Bulletin* No. 39 "On the General Strike." Our understanding, based on a phone call between Jason W. and Ed C. that occurred earlier this afternoon, is that the IG has decided against sending the MEG [Marxist Educational Group] a copy of this document. We were however informed that we would be permitted to read the material in the presence of an IG comrade in your New York City office. We feel this is a most unusual and unconventional procedure and are at a loss to understand your rationale.

We wish to here reiterate our interest in this very important tactical question. We know you are well aware the tactical question of the general strike has a long and controversial history in revolutionary politics. From the Chartists to Engels' criticism of the Bakuninists to Kautsky's perhaps deliberate delay in publishing Engels' 1893 letter on the Belgian general strike. The MEG has spent much time in recent months studying Luxemburg's polemics with the reformists in the SPD on this question and we recently (6/3/98) conducted a study, attended by your comrade Frank, on some of Trotsky's statements on this question (including portions of "The ILP and the Fourth International," "Problems of the British Labor Movement" and "Once Again, Wither France.") The events of Paris 1995 and the "Days of Action" in Ontario (with a similar proposal now being thrown about by the AFL-CIO in the mid-west) have put discussion of the general strike tactic prominently back on the agenda.

Just as at other times the Vietnam war, Bolivia or Afghanistan were key discussions of the day, we feel that the general strike is among the most important issues facing the left in 1998. It is for this reason that we sought to understand how your position is differentiated from what we view as the deeply flawed conception of today's SL [Spartacist League/U.S.]. (We understand from articles appearing in issues 19 and 20 of the IBT's journal 1917 that the position the SL holds today has not always been their position on this subject.)

We have an admittedly confused notion of your position on this topic. We have heard your summary of your position from the "On the General Strike" document mentioned in the letter from Parks that you reprinted in your "Crises in the

ICL" document. And we have been told that this was basically a position of supporting the general strike in Italy but headlining your denunciation of the incipient popular front government. With our limited knowledge of the situation this position seems correct. Then you say that this position should be applied to Canada today. Now we become a bit confused. The reformist NDP thoroughly discredited itself in the last elections and Ontario papers have been reporting its approval rating to be abysmally low. Of course we would oppose a Liberal/NDP/trade union federated pop front style government and think propaganda on the general strike should be quite critical of all the above parties—but we don't understand how your Italy position translates to Ontario. *Down with the NDP*, if that is your position, would make about as much sense today as headlining a flyer in the States with *Down with the Republicans in the White House*. We are also uncertain as to your position on Paris in 1995. Should revolutionary Marxists have supported the call for a general strike or not? We ask you these questions with the aim of achieving programmatic clarity and agreement and not with any hostile intent. We simply want to have your position on these events clarified for us.

To date none of these issues have been clarified adequately in *The Internationalist*. Struggling to sustain our own small press we can well appreciate that a party must be necessarily selective about what it chooses to comment on because of its limited resources. We do not hold the absence of these subjects from the pages of your paper against you in the manner that the SL apparently wishes to use the absence of any articles by your group on China against you. And it is for this reason that we wanted to make it easy on you by asking you to share with us Norden's position on the general strike from the struggle in the ICL.

We have up to this point assumed that one of the purposes of the discussions between the IG and the MEG was the hopeful plotting of a course toward a fusion between the IG and at least some section of the MEG. To that end we have attempted to share a portion of our internal culture with you. We have been up front with you about our dealings with other organizations, namely the BT. We have offered to give you access to the RWL [Revolutionary Workers League], NWROC [National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition], TL [Trotskyist League/U.S., a split from the RWL], CIOC [Communist Internationalist Organizing Committee, another split from the RWL which briefly joined the TL and subsequently split again to form the Marxist Workers Group] and Workers Voice documents in our archives. We allowed Ed access to our contacts when he visited us and have invited Frank to participate in all external MEG functions as well as our studies and business meetings.

We have even considered some of the excellent criticisms of our third issue of *Notebook for Agitators* advanced by Negrete and others and revised this issue accordingly. In fact we appreciate these criticisms and feel the entire issue and our political understanding is improved as a result. My understanding is that the IG's discussions with the MEG has led to the reconsideration of some of the positions that you inherited from the SL as well. In particular the bad formulation the SL ran as a headline after the bombing of the U.S. marine barracks in Lebanon. We believe the IG's rejection of "Marines Out Alive!" is a sign of the relative health of your organiza-

tion, Marxism is, after all, not a religion and we must be willing to constantly reconsider and reject positions that are wrong or unclear. We think that you will find your reconsideration of this U.S.-chauvinist slogan is correct and will improve your position in Latin America where the question of “Yankee imperialism” is much more clear and where other OROs might have slandered the LQB [Liga Quarta-Internacionalista— IG’s Brazilian affiliate] comrades had they been forced to defend that flawed position.

With due respect to the differences in the concrete situations we would like to remind you that the comrades of the LQB wrote the ICL that:

“We answered that before judging, we wanted to see all the documents, since critical analysis is a part of daily life for all Marxists. You refused, arguing that these documents were internal to the organization, and you only sent copies of the decisions after the accomplished fact. But then why ask our opinion about things we couldn’t investigate?”

—*From a Drift Toward Abstentionism*, p 88

In this spirit we implore you to consider your decision once more and the reasoning behind it. Is it simply a holdover from the SL or do you have real reasons for rejecting our request?

For our part we feel your proposal will make it hard for us to examine this document at length, discuss it and form our own opinion on it. Therefore we make the following proposals:

1. Please consider reversing your decision, or;
2. Consider sending this document back to Albany with Frank C. so that we will have a more protracted period to examine it, or;
3. If your reticence is prompted by concern for the security of the SL we would be at least partially satisfied if you sent us Norden’s faction’s statements—since it is really the origins of your position we are interested in, or;

4. If your position has altered since that fight we would be content with even a brief summary of your current views providing it contains:

- a.) your differences, if any, with the SL on this position.
- b.) your differences, if any, with the BT on this position.
- c.) Norden’s position on the general strike in Italy.
- d.) The IG’s position on the situation in France in 1995.
- e.) The IG’s position on the “Ontario Days of Action” if any.

Comradely greetings,

Donald U.

Jason W.

ps. We hope to send out two other letters to you in the next few days. The first, written by Don, will attempt to address issues raised in Ed’s letter from 5/15/98, namely the tactical questions of tribunals and defense guards and the position of these slogans within the RWL and the MEG. And also related issues around transitional demands, dual power and the party question. A second letter, written by Jason, will follow outlining the MEG’s critique of certain SL positions—in particular we wish to examine criticisms we have that may overlap with those of the RWL or the BT. In the course of sending you these two letters we will try to include *Notebook for Agitators* 3R, newly released and polished drafts of the articles set to appear in our upcoming fourth issue: an article on public sex, a general polemic directed at the SL, an article on our proposal around the Jamal campaign and the current strike of transit workers in Philadelphia, a report from the St. Catharines general strike, supplemented by quotes from Engels, Frolich, Luxemburg and Trotsky on the general strike (to be run under our Revolutionary Voices column). Last, but certainly not least, is an important article celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Manifesto. This article will deal directly with issues of revolutionary continuity and the party question and run under the “MEG—Who We Are” column. It represents the most substantial alteration of this column to date.

Document No. 8

MEG letter to IG

While many of the drafts projected in the 4 June letter never materialized, Don U. did send the following letter to Ed C., at that time an Internationalist Group supporter in Boston, in response to criticisms he raised of formulations in articles previously published by the Marxist Educational Group.

Albany

21 June 1998

Dear Ed,

While I agree with the general line of your letter and its criticisms of our articles “The Case Against the Cops” and “Civilian Review Boards vs. Independent Tribunals,” most importantly that the articles are soft on a number of questions, I do believe that the articles draw a class line, but the formulation could be much clearer (certainly the Jericho section of “The Cause that Passes Through A Prison” [issue 3 of *Notebook of an Agitator*—publication of the Marxist Educational Group] is more explicit). On the other hand, there seems to be a certain tendency on your part to deliberately miss the forests for the trees. That is to say that some of your criticisms seem more deliberate mischaracterizations than political criticisms.

First of all, we must begin by making clear that our call for building a “tribunal” around the incidents of racist police brutality in Albany and the surrounding areas was an attempt to unite many different cases under one fight. It was a tactic to unite the struggles and build further actions, not an end constructed to channel these struggles into abstract notions of justice. We attempted many times to make clear in our articles, flyers and public speeches that police brutality can not be brought to an end under capitalism, on the contrary it is endemic to it. The cops are armed bodies of men functioning in the service of the ruling class. Their role is to protect private property and to keep the working class isolated and demoralized through brutality, imprisonment and even murder. To say that the cops are corrupt, ineffective and biased is absolutely true. And it is the task of revolutionaries to expose and champion the fight against these abuses whenever and where ever possible. But our primary objective in doing so is to further expose the nature of capitalism and the state apparatus. To counterpose the fight against these incidents with slogans like “building the party” may read like ultra-left abstentionism in this low period of class struggle, but in a period of higher struggle such abstentionism will only serve to turn important class battles over to the misleadership of bureaucrats and reformists.

Our call for building a “tribunal” to expose these attacks (and the role of the police) was an organizing tool with which the MEG hoped to cultivate roots in the black and working class communities in Albany. We made the call to build the tribunal to counterpose the organized power of the working class against the bourgeois courts and cops. Furthermore, while this tribunal would be unable to execute justice under capitalism (given our mutual understanding that we are not yet in the midst of a revolutionary situation), the call and execution of such a tribunal would be utilized by the MEG to try and demonstrate the relationship between police and class society to those black and working class people we are able to reach.

We did not invent the tactic of constructing tribunals. As you noted this is a slogan we inherited from the RWL [Revolutionary Workers League]. But the RWL can not be credited with its invention either. Clearly the Dewey Commission was

a form of tribunal. And the Healyite/Northite groups have organized many such structures over the years. (see New Park’s pamphlets: *The Truth about the Killing of Daniel Yock*, *The Truth About the Mack Avenue Fire*, and *Death in a Toy Factory*—all reprinting the results of “workers’ inquiry committee” public sittings).

The MEG does not exclusively engineer our efforts toward breaking into mass work as the RWL did. But we do attempt to get our feet wet. There are big battles out there and cadre do gain valuable experiences from building interventions. The fact that the U.S. has no real ORO’s [ostensibly revolutionary organizations] that exercise hegemonic control over the left (or even any ORO’s at all here in Albany), and the fact that the working class has so many illusions (though not necessarily deep convictions) in the benevolence of the Democrats, has caused us to concentrate our efforts on polemicizing against the more influential liberals rather than non-existent opponents in the worker’s movement.

Thus the tribunal was our call to organize working class and black people counterposed to the call for Civilian Review Boards that the liberals raised in order to channel the struggle into lobbying the Democrats. We were using the tribunal in an attempt to polarize this fight, to break the struggle away from the liberal misleadership and to counterpose the social power of the working class to the bourgeoisie and its institutions and repressive apparatus. We understand that “true democracy” for the working class will come with its political victory—the triumph of socialist society. Democracy under capitalism does more or less exist for the bourgeoisie. To say otherwise blurs the class antagonisms of capitalism and leads inevitably to the abstract conjectures on the “nature of Democracy” liberal pundits are so fond of indulging in: “Justice? Truth? Social Contract? blah, blah, blah....” This sort of refuse is the fuel of bourgeois ideology.

This all of course raises the question of dual power. Can we struggle to build workers’ institutions in a period short of insurrection? Are these instruments still legitimately characterized as organs of proletarian [power]? Does their existence automatically create a situation of dual power on some scale—even if only very parochial?

On the question of dual power, the section “Factory Committees,” from [Trotsky’s *Transitional Program*] “The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International” says:

“From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a de facto dual power is established in the factory. By its very essence it represents the transitional state, because it includes in itself two irreconcilable regimes: the capitalist and the proletariat. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely contained in the fact that they open the doors if not to a direct revolutionary, then a prerevolutionary period—between bourgeois and proletarian regimes.”

While I agree that it is entirely inaccurate to refer to a student occupation of an administration building, or our call to build a tribunal against incidents of police brutality in Albany, a situation of dual power, Trotsky makes clear in this (see above) passage that even before a prerevolutionary situation

we must utilize tactics to sharpen class struggle and pose the question of power. (Hence the conversation between Trotsky and Cannon on defense guards/workers' militia slogans...) There is no blueprint for revolution. No easy stages or steps, like the rungs of a ladder, that can be built upon, in order to reach revolution through some sort of natural progression. Trotsky argues that tactics such as calling for forming factory committees in the midst of an international wave of sit-down strikes and factory occupations poses the question of control of bourgeois property in a very deep way. As I tried to make clear earlier, in the struggles of the working class and the oppressed we seek to convey that there are only two great camps in society, two classes that can guide humanity: they are the bourgeoisie who systematically initiates, supports and deepens the attacks on the working class and the oppressed, guiding humanity into barbarism in its search for greater profits; or the working class who must support the struggles of the oppressed against bourgeois repression and guide humanity toward socialism. Being clear on this question is critical to arriving at a correct understanding of revolutionary integration, women's oppression and gay liberation, etc.

Lenin makes clear in *What Is To Be Done?* that the vanguard party can bring revolutionary consciousness to the working class only from without, that is from outside the sphere of purely economic relations. The vanguard must do so through explaining and intervening in the struggles of all layers of the oppressed and winning them to the proletarian banner. Revolutionary integration is one of the most important questions to building the vanguard party in the U.S. and breaking down the divisions between black and white workers in order to win black people to our perspective which understands that the struggle for black liberation is intimately linked to the proletariat's struggle for political power and the international struggle for a socialist society. Our focus on police brutality, the death penalty, class-war prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal etc. is not motivated by liberal guilt—it stems from the importance we place on revolutionary integration. The importance of the black question to the American revolution is based on the fact that the development of capitalism in the U.S. is inextricably linked to racism. Organizations like the RWL, while claiming to stand in the tradition of the Fraser document [Richard Fraser's "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question," originally submitted to the Socialist Workers' Party in 1955 and subsequently reprinted by the Spartacist League as No. 5 in its *Marxist Bulletin* series] gut the theory, emptying it of its revolutionary character in order to tail black misleaders and liberal integrationists (like Jesse Jackson) who channel black struggle into the Democratic Party.

The building takeover at SUNY [State University of New York] Albany, which I inaccurately referred to as a "dual power situation in embryo," occurred when the RWL was able to link up the fight against a gang-rape committed by a fraternity on campus, and the university administration's complicity in covering it up, with the fight against the racist University Police Department [UPD] and the anger sparked when the Rodney King verdict was handed down. The building takeover began as L.A. exploded in rebellion. Under the banner of "throw UPD off campus" students occupied the administration building. Our critique of the role the RWL played in this action can not be reduced to damning their inconsistency or praising the fact that they were able to link these struggles. Rather our critique must focus on the centrism of their political conceptions. The RWL never raised its name in this action, it didn't attempt to win anyone to Trotskyism as such, but simply tried to prove that NWROC [National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition—an RWL front group] was the most militant and ready to fight (physi-

cally in most cases). So the RWL line to independents is join NWROC. Join BAMN [Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action By Any Means Necessary—another RWL front group]. And then later: Since we (the RWL) are the most consistent militants in NWROC/BAMN/fill in the blank: join the RWL. So...program and theory get reduced to secondary importance and from there to none at all.

While there was confusion among the students (who were predominantly black and/or women) as to the demand of UPD off campus, our task as revolutionaries was (and is) not to stand on the sidelines of such struggles genuflecting on the latent liberal racism of the SUNY Albany Women's Study Collective (who were all present at the building takeover and the left-wing of which later became founding members of the RWL local). Our task is to draw the political lessons in this battle, to make the line of demarcation against the university police a class line. The RWL can not be condemned in such actions for not attempting to solve the crises of leadership, during the SUNY take-over in question the RWLers present were in many respects the hegemonic leadership, rather it was a problem of program. They did not attempt to win the most advanced layers to a class-struggle program counterposed to the more backward elements' conception of the building takeover as a pressure tactic on the administration (a program of class collaboration). The demands the MEG of today would raise in such a situation would include: "Disarm/Disband UPD!," "For Worker/Student Control of the University System!," "Fight Racism! Fight Rape!," "No Reliance on the Administration!," "For Campus Workers to Strike and Shut Down the University!," "Black and Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution!"

While Lenin argued against the Menshevik line of giving the "economic struggle itself a political character," he never went so far as to ignore the economic or day-to-day struggles of the workers and the oppressed. You seem to maintain the tendency of the latter-day Spartacist League [SL] to falsely counterpose intervening in these struggles with "building the party." In reality there is a dialectical relationship between these struggles and recruitment to the party. This in some ways finds expression in the formulation of *fighting for the proletariat to become a class for itself and not merely in itself*. It is the method of the ICL [International Communist League—the Spartacist League's international organization] (and DeLeon and maximalist social-democrats) to stand back and abdicate leadership of these struggles to the reformists and the bureaucrats until "the conditions are right." But Trotskyists understand that the question facing humanity is not whether the conditions are ripe enough for the working class to enter onto the stage of history and drive forward all of humanity by claiming state power. The question is one of revolutionary leadership capable of leading this struggle to its historic conclusion. The revolutionary party will *always* face questions of limited resources, there will *always* be things within our reach yet just beyond our grasp, but it is impossible to develop and recruit revolutionary cadre steeled in struggle by abstaining from class struggle.

This abstentionism has caused the Spartacist League to sit out some very important class battles. Two such examples that leap to mind are the abortion rights struggle in Buffalo in 1992 and the Auburn, N.Y. anti-fascist mobilization in 1993. I'm not sure what the SL's line on Buffalo was, but when the RWL initiated a campaign to shut down a fascist demonstration in Auburn (New York) the SL denounced this action as adventurism. In the existing vacuum the RWL was able to become *the* main organizer in building for the Auburn demo and it was their initiative that drew out some 1,000 to 2,000 people from all over upstate New York (especially Albany, Binghamton and Syracuse). While we have some sharp criti-

cisms of the RWL's performance even in Auburn we do think that they led an exemplary organizing efforts under the banner: "No Free Speech for Fascists!" And they won a decisive military victory.

Coming out of the Auburn action, the RWL had about 50 contacts on the SUNY Albany campus, as well as a dozen black and Latina women from SUNY Binghamton. The SL continued to come to SUNY Albany for a while, attempting to intervene in NWROC meetings, but at that point none of our contacts were interested in talking to them. Their sectarian denouncement of the Auburn demo and their ludicrous assertion that the RWL was leading people into a bloodbath discredited the SL in the eyes of these participants who had witnessed for the first time in their lives how good organizing can ensure a victory by creating a situation in which the balance of forces are over-determined at the outset. The SL's subsequent attempts to wreck NWROC meetings fell on deaf ears and cold shoulders—they rendered themselves completely impotent in combating the centrism of the RWL. The RWL for its part lost every single contact at SUNY Binghamton and SUNY Albany in the following period, I was the only one of those fifty contacts to be recruited. This was partially because the RWL had jettisoned Trotskyist theory and the sort of attention to program that was a hallmark of the RT [Revolutionary Tendency—precursor of the SL] and the early SL. What a pity the SL had degenerated to such a sad state that it could not rescue some of these individuals for the Fourth International from the centrist pit of the RWL and their own subsequent disillusion in radical politics.

The tendency of the SL to sit out these important struggles of the oppressed seems to move them more and more toward chucking the Transitional Program altogether. We believe that the SL no longer sees the primary question facing the working class as that of revolutionary leadership. They have disavowed this fundamental Trotskyist tenant and say to the working class: "We are the vanguard party. It is you who have let us down." This is what is really meant when they say that the working class has been knocked backward to the period before 1914.

Since its founding it seems to us that the IG has fought consistently against the political gyrations of the SL and the MEG applauds these effort. Yet we have lingering doubts about your theoretical or programmatic struggles while still members of the SL. Your inability to answer the charges of the BT [Bolshevik Tendency] over SL positions on the Challenger and KAL 007 incidents (as well as other possible indications of SL degeneration such as the obit and brigade for Yuri Andropov, the Red Avengers, Robertson's attempt to meet with Markus Wolf and other German Stalinists and the rejection of demands for nationalization—under workers' control—of factories threatened with closure in favor of demands for a "workers' auction"). Your apparent reluctance to discuss these issues leads me to question the depth of the IG's analysis of the SL and the aspects of your political heritage that you need to come to grips with.

We have taken some time to evaluate the depth of our criticisms of the RWL and agree with your assertion that the RWL's particular brand of centrism finds roots in their misunderstanding of the transitional program. On the one hand the Spartacist League abandons the transitional program "from the left" in a maximalist fashion, while the RWL abandons it "from the right" in a minimalist fashion. The RWL attempts to apply the transitional program most often involve a process of emptying them of their revolutionary character. For example, in their work in Decatur, Illinois (at the height of the Staley, Bridgestone/Firestone, Caterpillar strikes/lock-outs) the RWL raised the slogans "30 Hours Work for 40 Hours Pay At Union Wages!" but *refused* to even raise its

name or the words "workers' revolution," "socialism," etc. A bridge always has two ends and if it doesn't lead to the working class and its struggle for political power and the fight for a socialist society than eventually it will lead to an ideology that maintains bourgeois rule. The RWL used the lasting legacy of McCarthy era red witchhunts in the unions as an alibi to liquidate their politics. Even when they couldn't find so handy an excuse they still found ways to bury the RWL (and their ostensibly Trotskyist heritage) in a myriad of front groups.

Your comments on the RWL's method of building "united fronts" were accurate. Although they never sign political non-aggression pacts (as you put it), the RWL's method of building "united front coalitions" expresses very succinctly the relationship between sectarianism and opportunism. First, the RWL will bury the question of revolutionary leadership, even socialist revolution itself, then proceed to destroy the very "coalitions" that it has itself initiated *not* by raising programmatic questions, but by trying to prove that any other political groupings or tendencies in the "coalition" aren't militant enough. By far the RWL's favorite political epithet is to call someone a petit-bourgeois coward—as if cowardice alone explains their opponents' shortcomings. They try to show that their liberal pals "don't really want to fight"—and thus are on the side of the devil, so to hell with them! These are the kind of "sectarian antics" I was referring to in my letter to Abram. The RWL united front method has more in common with the mass movementistas and Maoists than the transitional program.

Our criticisms of the RWL aren't simply that they weren't consistent enough in their attempts to apply the transitional program, but that their centrist vacillations make it impossible for them to do so. The RWL's tendency toward mass movementism expresses this succinctly. We agree with your criticisms of their slogan "Rebuild a Mass, Militant, Integrated Civil Rights Movement!" It is not a transitional demand, but thoroughly reformist at base. We still believe that the RWL's *raison d'être* for this slogan was to draw out the fact that black liberation can only be achieved through socialist revolution. But their formulation ignores the historical political leadership of the civil rights movement, from A. Philip Randolph to Bayard Rustin to Martin Luther King Jr. It tails the consciousness of the masses and represents the transitional method of [leading American Trotskyist revisionist in the 1970s Joe] Hansen, as you correctly point out. The RWL used it in a substitutionist fashion. Rather than concentrating on building a party they called to rebuild a civil rights movement (led by themselves of course) implying that if they could generate struggle they would have better opportunities farther down the road to build the party. This fundamentally ignores the central role of the vanguard party. Of course if there were a real civil rights movement today we would be duty bound to concentrate resources into intervening in it. But our focus as revolutionaries in this period is on forging a Bolshevik party not attempting to artificially create a communist led mini-mass "movement."

The MEG is guilty of having perpetuated the use of the RWL's poor formulation in the same manner. In the face of our limited resources and very real struggle in the black community in Albany (that catapulted us into a position where we [were] able to fill a vacuum as leaders of the left wing) we substituted the same slogan in the hope of transforming the ongoing struggle, in place of emphasizing the struggle for communism and the crucial need for a party. At this point in our political development we vehemently disavow that relic of our heritage. But we do not for one minute regret attempting, despite our numerical limitations, to act as leadership in the struggle against police brutality.

No. We have never had the conception that the call to

build tribunals or independent investigations are transitional demands. We do believe that they are tactical demands that we must utilize in the struggles of the oppressed. Such interventions point the way forward in the proletariat's struggle for power. See Cannon's discussions with Trotsky on the "defense guard" formulations for example.

In the abortion rights work in Buffalo the MEG would have raised a slogan like: "All Out To Defend the Clinics! Free Quality Abortion on Demand! Women's Liberation through Socialist Revolution!" We do not relegate the working class to just another section of the specially oppressed, but understand its role as the only class with the material interest in fighting for the specially oppressed.

While we applaud the militancy of the youth of the RWL has drawn around it (understanding that subjectively revolutionary youth, wishing to fight sexism, racism and anti-gay bigotry etc. may find the RWL's militant posturing attractive) we seek to break these militants from the centrism and political gyrations—the capitulations to reformism and the military adventures of the RWL. We want to win these individuals away from these militant pressure group politics and to a consistently revolutionary party. We must be very clear on this in order to break the RWL's ranks and win the best elements to the banner of world revolution.

You label us Luxemburgites (hardly an insult) and accuse us of attempting to wither the question of revolutionary leadership without bothering to look closely at the history of the development of the MEG. Our third issue makes explicit the class line we hoped was implicit in the first two issues. And if you had read more carefully you would have noted we do not—and have never, in any of our printed propaganda—considered ourselves a vanguard party. We created the MEG in an attempt to remain politically active and in order to theoretically develop ourselves as much as possible. We have also attempted to create a pole of attraction for former NWROC and RWL cadre who may share some of our criticisms from the time of the resignations. And in our own modest way we believe we have even achieved some success in realizing our perspectives.

In our day-to-day political activity, through our newsletter and flyers, we have attempted to be a revolutionary pole of attraction for left-leaning workers and oppressed youth.

We have also consistently maintained an orientation toward regroupment into an international party/tendency. In the first three months of our existence we met with both the International Trotskyist Opposition (TL/U.S. [Trotskyist League/U.S. a split from the RWL]) and the International Communist League. The discussions with the TL (through Weltman and later Johnson) and the SL (via Parks) were important steps in the MEG's break from the RWL, most necessary steps in that they allowed us to begin to assess more fully where we stood on a number of issues and further break from the methodology of the RWL.

Since our formation we have always attempted to maintain both of our orientations. We have a small group of contacts around us....

As you are well aware we have also been pursuing discussions with both yourselves, the IG/LFI [League for the Fourth International] and the IBT. We have never ignored the importance of the party question, on the contrary, our organization exists because of it. While our press may seem conspicuously silent on the party question, our silence is merely a reflection of the inherent contradictions between our political program and the MEG's current form. We are not a democratic centralist formation because of the stark reality that we have only two fully functioning members. We are a study circle in transition at best to becoming a pre-party formation or merging into another orthodox Trotskyist current. Surely the comrades of the IG are all well aware of that fact. I was under the impression that we have all been, for some time, acting under the assumption that our discussions are specifically directed toward a regroupment perspective.

Until the day arrives in which the MEG is qualitatively transformed our current amorphous structure is a daily stumbling block. A handicap that can only be rectified through the recruitment of a third member or by our joining with a larger democratic centralist party. The prerequisite for either move is of course programmatic agreement on the basis of revolutionary Marxism (orthodox Trotskyism) and a firm commitment to irreconcilable struggle against revisionism....

Don U.
for the Marxist Educational Group

Document No. 9

On the Left:

The Spartacist League—A Case of Political Degeneration

The following is an unpublished draft written for a projected issue of the Marxist Educational Group's Notebook for Agitators which never appeared. It contains references to articles that were never completed. The draft was sent to the Internationalist Group for comment prior to its projected publication. The IG was harshly critical of it (see Document No. 11).

"Men fight and lose the battle, and the thing they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out to be not what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name."

—William Morris

As we noted ("Defend Brazilian Leftists" facing page) the persecution of the LQB [Liga Quarta-Internacionalista] by the bourgeoisie (through the instrument of the Brazilian state) was accompanied by a shameful betrayal from within the proletarian camp itself. The International Communist League (ICL) to which the LQB had become fraternally affiliated in September of 1994 (see: "Declaration of Fraternal Relations," *Spartacist* No. 52) abruptly broke off relations with their Brazilian comrades in a letter dated June 17, 1996, a mere 24 hours before the key union meeting in which the LQB called to "THROW THE GUARDAS OUT OF THE UNION" (*From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion of the Class Struggle*). In a letter to the ICL dated July 4th 1996, the LQB quite correctly characterized this desertion as "an act of cowardice," and added "we feel stabbed in the back" (*Ibid.*)

What sort of ostensibly revolutionary organization stabs its comrades in the back in its cowardly rush to flee from battle? Here in the U.S., where the most influential section of the ICL makes its home, it goes by the name Spartacist League (SL). And the actions of today's Spartacist League have precious little in common with the Trotskyist tradition they purport to represent. The SL has a certain fondness of quoting Leopold Trepper, leader of the Soviet spy network in Nazi-occupied Europe:

"The Trotskyites can lay claim to this honor. Following the example of their leader, who was rewarded for his obstinacy with the end of an ice-ax, they fought Stalinism to the death, and they were the only ones who did. By the time of the great purges, they could only shout their rebellion in the freezing wastelands where they had been dragged in order to be exterminated...their voices were lost in the tundra."

—*The Great Game*, 1977

The ICL's actions in Brazil, astutely described by top SL leadership itself as "pull(ing) our hands out of that boiling water" is clearly antithetical to the behavior of the Soviet Trotskyists who went to their graves refusing to seek "the line of least resistance" and obstinately howling out the truth—even in the frozen wilderness of Stalin's gulags.

One of the regrettable necessities of political life is the need for political polemics. Political neophytes and aloof armchair observers often bemoan the alphabet soup of the left (and Trotskyists in particular) and dismiss it as a dangerous swamp of petty sectarian squabbling. Contemptuously they dismiss the splits that have ripped apart the workers' movement as secondary disputes inflated by little Napoleons to preserve control over their private fiefdoms. As an article appearing in the Fall 1996/97 issue of *Rethinking Marxism* recently put it:

"There is, without question, an element of truth in these observations. For easily understood historical reasons the Trotskyist groups have remained relatively small, though

not entirely without real influence in certain times and places, and small groups do seem especially prone to splits...."

But the author of these words, Murray Smith, goes on to warn, "It is not difficult see why these questions were and are, 'split issues.' Many would have placed the factional antagonists on opposite sides of the barricades!"

The fact is that it is our duty as revolutionaries (as Trotsky put it) "to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be;" and that means putting up a concerted fight for programmatic clarity, instead of deceitfully smoothing over differences for the sake of some artificial and meaningless "unity." Challenging currents of revisionism and disorientation is a vital necessity that must in the long run strengthen the quality of our movement. If we are to overcome the crises of leadership that has for too long granted capitalism an extended stay-of-execution we must be willing to call our opponents within the workers' movement on their capitulation.

In particular the MEG feels the need to begin to commit to paper our criticisms of the increasingly erratic and bankrupt policies of the SL. While our hands-on activist orientation has often led us to focus our newsletter on a practical, agitational orientation we feel compelled to pick up the gauntlet. Unlike the Revolutionary Workers League [RWL], the organization from whose ranks the leading cadre of the MEG resigned, we do not wish to obscure our lineage to the SL—no matter how much their behavior of late makes us wince with embarrassment for them....

The necessity of our current polemic against the SL is imbued with a certain pathos precisely because it was not always such a wretched formation. At one time the SL was clearly the embodiment of living, breathing revolutionary Marxism. The SL organically emerged from the Revolutionary Tendency which fought within the American Socialist Workers Party [SWP—the leading section of Trotsky's Fourth International from the 1930s to the 1950s] for a return to the course of Lenin and Trotsky and against the neo-Pabloism of the Dobbs/Hansen SWP leadership which uncritically embraced the Stalinoid Castro regime in Cuba as unconsciously or objectively revolutionary. The RT also upheld the revolutionary integrationist perspective as developed by Richard Fraser against the SWP's capitulation to Black Nationalism (see our article "Life of a Revolutionary?" *Notebook for Agitators* No. 3). Our its efforts the RT was rewarded with a bureaucratic expulsion from the SWP.

But revolutionary parties are, by their very nature, subject to extreme pressure. They are constantly struggling against the stream, subject to the influence of the ruling ideology that surrounds them. It is a safe bet that in such a hostile ocean sooner or later any revolutionary party will degenerate. As James P. Cannon once wrote:

"On the basis of a long historical experience, it can be written down as a law that revolutionary cadres, who revolt against their social environment and organize parties to lead a revolution, can—if the revolution is too long delayed—themselves degenerate under the continuing influences and pressures of this same environment...."

“But the same historical experience also shows that there are exceptions to this law too. The exceptions are the Marxists who remain Marxists, the revolutionists who remain faithful to the banner. The basic ideas of Marxism...never fail to find representatives in the old organizations to lead the work of reconstruction.”

—Introduction to *The First Ten Years of American Communism*

During the fight against Stalinism, leading Left Oppositionist, Christian Rakovsky, is said to have remarked: “The Bolshevik of 1917 would hardly recognize himself in the Bolshevik of 1928.” So too we are certain that if supporters of the 1963 RT could somehow be transported to 1998 in a time-machine they would look with shame and disgust at the behavior of the SL today. This centrist party (revolutionary in words/reformist in deeds) was certainly not what they set out to create after they were expelled from the SWP. So it falls to the MEG, among others, to carry on the fight begun by the early SL—and this fight includes the necessity of exposing the degeneration of the SL itself.

Not only did the SL run away from the “boiling water” of class struggle in Brazil, but it is reasonable to infer that it did so out of a desire on the part of the SL’s leadership to preserve its bureaucratic hegemony over the ICL. For the rupture of fraternal relations followed closely on the heels of a set of significant purges within the ICL leadership. On April 14, 1996 the ICL ousted two of their veteran comrades, Negrete and Socorro, from the leadership of the Mexican section. Shortly thereafter Socorro was subjected to a psychologically brutal “show trial” with witnesses spoon-fed testimony by the ICL leadership. To no one’s surprise the “trial” culminated in her expulsion. But the rationale given for her expulsion was itself particularly obscene. According to a letter from SL leader Parks to the LQB, “Socorro was expelled...for her statement that there was more justice in the bourgeois courts than in the party” (reprinted in the ICL’s *International Bulletin* No. 41, “The Fight for a Trotskyist Party in Brazil” p 136). From everything the MEG has heard or read about this “trial” we think that there was nothing unprincipled about Socorro’s statement. Clearly she did not have a fair trial. And we would like to pose this question to the SL: who had more justice—James P. Cannon and the leadership of the SWP when they were tried in U.S. courts under the notorious Smith Act, because of their opposition to the WWII war-drive, or Bukharin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, compelled under torture to confess to absurd crimes and sentenced to death in the Stalinist purge trials of the 1930s? The MEG believes a reasonable argument could be made that Cannon received “more justice in the bourgeois courts” than the Bolshevik Old Guard received from the degenerated Soviet workers’ state.

Socorro’s expulsion was the first, others rapidly followed, including Negrete and later Jan Norden (editor of the SL’s main periodical *Workers Vanguard* from issue 19 [April 1973] to issue 646 [May 1996]) and Marjorie Stamberg, *WV*’s *de facto* managing editor and a candidate in multiple SL electoral campaigns.

“And then,” in the words of Norden and Stamberg, “the entire international is called upon to take a position—as is the LQB in Brazil, even though they were given almost none of the documents...[leading Bay Area Comrade] Nelson writes that anyone that does not agree ‘100 percent’ with the expulsion of Socorro should be out of the organization.”

—From *a Drift*, p 33

Norden and Stamberg go on to draw a comparison between the SL’s line and the bureaucratic degeneration of the Comintern that Trotsky fought against. Stalin too demanded that all the national sections of the Third International de-

nounce Trotskyism as a loyalty test. Those leaders who would not do so were expelled.

When the LQB is asked to denounce Norden *et al.* they write to the ICL:

“We answered that before judging, we wanted to see all the documents, since critical analysis is a part of daily life for all Marxists. You refused, arguing that these documents were internal to the organization, and only sent copies of decisions after the accomplished fact. But then why ask our opinion about things we couldn’t investigate?”

—From *A Drift*, p 88

Why indeed? Precisely because this was a loyalty test put forth by the ICL leadership and the LQB, because it took a responsible (and we think correct) position, flunked. This is not without precedent in the ICL. A somewhat similar incident occurred in 1979. At that time Bill Logan, a former leader of both the Australian and British sections of the international was subjected to what appears to have been a rather unfair trial. At that time the SL was pursuing discussions (aimed at a future regroupment of forces) with prominent Ceylonese Trotskyist Edmund Samarakkody and his party, the RWP [Revolutionary Workers’ Party]. At the outset of the trial proceedings it is likely that the SL leadership knew that Samarakkody stood to the right of their party, but they were happy to have such an illustrious name attached to their organization—provided he would obediently fall in line with the leadership’s decrees. Presumably as a loyalty-test Samarakkody was the only independent appointed to a trial body. It should be noted that Samarakkody, “who had an international reputation on the left as a man of principle” also failed his test. It is useful to quote Samarakkody’s explanation of his dissent at length:

“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 summarized 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 of 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 meted out 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 [international Spartacist tendency] leadership.

“I pointed out that the posing of such a question was completely wrong....

“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 comrades of SL/ANZ who gave evidence in the case....

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

“It would appear that thereafter the iSt membership had been mobilized for the sacking of Logan. And this the iSt had decided to do in grand style of a trial by an authoritative or a virtual international Trial Body. It would appear they expected to publicize this trial as a step toward the Bolshevization 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 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), (quoted in *ICL vs. IBT*)

This is a very disturbing account—yet the SL seems to have hardly addressed the substance of it in the documents they printed. We believe that we have had access to most of the relevant materials as published by the iSt (made available to us courtesy of the Detroit-based Marxist Workers Group). We would note that there are some important differences between the Logan and Norden incidents—not least that a relatively impartial observer like Samarakkody concluded that Logan was guilty of “most or all” charges and that the Logan trial process was substantial and took place over months.

Yet the parallels are striking too, as described by Logan’s current group the International Bolshevik Tendency in a pamphlet in which they discuss the issue (*ICL vs. IBT*). The IBT document reports that Logan was living in New York but was allegedly given a copy of the charges a mere 11 days prior to his trial (which took place in England) and was thereby “severely handicapped in preparing his defense.” They also claim that he was denied representation at his trial and was not even advised of the order in which witnesses were to be called. Most damning is the IBT’s assertion that the iSt prevented “the only witness prepared to testify on Logan’s behalf from attending.”

Whatever the problems of the 1979 Logan trial it is clear that by 1996 the internal procedures of the iSt (which in the meantime had renamed itself the ICL) had only become more serious. In getting rid of Norden and his comrades they seem to have moved much more rapidly without presenting serious written charges or even making a pretense of constituting an authoritative trial body. Perhaps the most graphic difference was the change in attitude toward prominent leftists who were politically sympathetic but organizationally outside the ICL. In 1996 the Brazilian LQB appears to have stood in roughly the same relation to the ICL as Samarakkody’s group had in 1979. Yet instead of being allowed access to all materials and being invited to participate in the trial deliberations, as Samarakkody was, this time around the ICL leadership demanded in classic Stalinist-style that the LQB endorse the expulsions prior to either reading all the materials or hearing the accused tell their side of the story. While perhaps not qualitatively different this does suggest that there was a substantial political degeneration in the SL in the intervening years.

At one time the SL was feared by their opponents in the revolutionary left because of their hard-hitting, often angular interventions. They ruthlessly exposed the vacillations of their opponents and sought to win the best elements to a consistently revolutionary program. Alas, the SL of today is just an empty clone of its former self. The treatment of the IG demonstrates that the nature of the internal regime has crushed the spirit of the cadre and suggests that internal discussion, so necessary to maintaining a healthy democratic-centralist party, has been stifled. Observing the SL from the

outside it appears that the revolutionary spark that drew its cadre to class-struggle politics has been all but extinguished. Now SL comrades go through mechanical motions.

Thus the angular interventions that once served to expose centrist vacillations and opportunist flinches are increasingly apolitical fettered rituals often seemingly repeated without rhyme or reason in the hope that such apparent hardness will cover the SL’s own vacillations or insecurities. Where once the SL’s interventions were razor-sharp swords cutting opponents down to size now they are blunt clubs clumsily wielded with the vague hope that they might still be able to bludgeon their opponents into submission.

Anyone who watches SL cadre in action can attest to the fact that they seem to have memorized their lines from index cards. Thus the shrill cry of today’s “Sperts” remind one more of the Borg in *Star Trek*, with their mantra of “resistance is futile—you shall be assimilated,” than of revolutionary Marxists determined to “speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be.”

After witnessing a recent intervention by a long-time SL comrade at the Socialist Scholars Conference [SSC] in New York City, one observer characterized the incident as being rather like a woman drawing attention to herself by shouting: “hey everybody look at me!” and then defecating on the floor in front of the audience.

At this same event the MEG observed first hand a provocative encounter between SL supporters and the IG that had clearly been orchestrated by the SL. A crowd of approximately ten SL members surrounded Norden, Stamberg, Negrete and Socorro in the lobby of the Borough of Manhattan Community College where the SSC was being held. One older SL comrade was rabidly screaming “Liars! You’re all liars!” and was prevented from hurling himself at Norden only by another comrade holding him back. The whole scene had a rehearsed air, saturated with an implied threat of imminent violence.

Other SL members were busy slandering the LQB. And making ridiculously ultra-left charges about the “LQB having dragged the workers’ movement through the courts.” Several of the SL members began to chant in chorus: “Print the court records.” The behavior of the SL drew the attention of the campus security who intervened to disperse the cluster.

This sort of behavior is very wrong. The defense of basic democratic rights within the workers’ movement should be so basic a principal that it need not be explained. It is ironic that the SL who are so vehement in denouncing the LQB because the organization’s lawyers called labor leaders into court to testify, should then set up a situation in the lobby of the SSC that could have brought in police intervention! According to a wide variety of leftists who know the history of the SL this is not a new phenomenon.

Political degeneration inevitably finds expression in programmatic confusion. As the SL’s internal culture suffocated and they lost or abandoned their foothold in the unions, the organization produced increasingly erratic positions reflecting the pressures of the milieu in which they operated. The SL, which in the 1960s fought against the social chauvinism present in the SWP’s “Bring the Boys Home!” slogan counterposing the correct position “Military Victory to Vietnam!,” eventually began to express confusion on certain very basic questions.

Following the 1983 bombings of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon, *Workers Vanguard* ran a front page headline calling “Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive!” Clearly this position is counterposed to the correct Trotskyist position they stood by in the 1960s that “the withdrawal of U.S. armed forces from Vietnam could be accomplished if the National Liberation Front can drive them into the China Sea,” (Rich-

ard Fraser, quoted in *Prometheus Research Series* No. 3, p 73). In reality the 1983 slogan was a capitulation to U.S. chauvinism. In the years of Reaganite reaction the SL was afraid to sell a paper carrying a headline like “Marines Out of Lebanon—By Any Means Necessary!” Instead, in article after article, they tried to distinguish the social revolution in Vietnam from the more chaotic circumstances prevailing in Lebanon. While on a general level it was true that “no side is fighting imperialism,” the destruction of the most prominent symbol of the imperialist intervention, the Marine barracks, was clearly directed (successfully) at driving the U.S. military out of Lebanon and was therefore objectively a blow aimed at imperialism. To this day the SL feebly alibis this slogan, trying to explain it away as an attempt to intervene with the U.S. working class who they felt would be appalled by this bloody military fiasco. If any other organization offered this explanation the SL would rightly ridicule them. As they in fact did. During the Falklands/Malvinas war in 1982, ex-Healyite Allen Thornett’s *Socialist Organiser* uncritically ran an interview with MP [Member of Parliament] Reg Race calling for “withdrawing the fleet and sparing the precious blood of Britain’s elite forces” and the SL correctly characterized the pack of them as social imperialists. So why was *The Workers Have No Side—The Main Enemy is at Home!* slogan correct in Britain in 1982, but not the U.S.? Perhaps because most of the SL does not call Britain home?

In the same period of time they published a terrible flyer at Harvard University in response to a public sex case similar to the ones we address in this issue in our article: () on page (). We invite our readers to examine the text of the SL flyer () and compare it to our article. The SL’s position displays an poor understanding of gay oppression on the part of the cadre who produced the flyer and a vapid capitulation to New Left style theatrics.

Elsewhere in this issue we have sought to address the SL’s rejection of the general strike slogan. As we point out in this article the workers’ movement has a long and rich history of debate on the general strike slogan. A debate that the cadre of the SL can not be ignorant of. Their revision of their own political heritage and of the heritage of 150 years of revolutionary Marxist continuity is precisely the sort of thing Trotsky had in mind when he wrote:

“Reactionary epochs like ours not only disintegrate and weaken the working class and its vanguard, but also lower the general ideological level of the movement and throw political thinking back to stages long since passed through.”
—“Stalinism and Bolshevism”

The SL is increasingly carried away by this backward flow. It is no longer capable of retaining basic ideological positions. It has lost all moorings in the masses and its sense of connection to revolutionary continuity has become abstract and scholastic. Thus opportunist deviations occur like those around the Lebanon bombing. And they find a natural sectarian compliment in the SL’s abstentionist position around the general strike. The SL’s confusion prevents it from playing the vanguard role its membership purports to monopolize. Far from leading the masses in daily struggle (a difficult task to be sure—and one that it would be unfair to fault them for not accomplishing) they hardly seem capable of producing an article or flyer containing transitional demands! In practice they have abandoned producing propaganda capable of bridging [the gap between] the minimal daily demands of the struggles of the oppressed and the socialist program of revolution. Instead they have substituted a policy of standing on the sidelines, condemning most demonstrations as “popular fronts” and handing out abstract literature, the content of which seems to vary from one situation to another only in the headline. Each SL leaflet seems to contain the same litany of slogans (many of which are formally orthodox) and inevita-

bly ends with the maximum call for revolution. What is almost always absent is a concrete application of theory to the situation [i.e.,] real thinking about applying Marxist politics in action.

The most recent example of this was the SL’s position on Clinton’s recent war drive against Iraq. Even as it seemed increasingly likely that the U.S. would once more bomb Iraq the SL retreated further from its revolutionary heritage. SL cadre informed members of the IG that they opposed calling for political strikes against the war because such slogans would have “no resonance with the working class.” MEG supporters can vividly remember that back when we were in the RWL members of the ISO [International Socialist Organization] objected to our raising our call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism because it would not have “resonance in the working class.” We have always known that the ISOers have a very poor view of the working class and a sufficient, if confused, understanding of their own inability to intervene, but we would have thought the SL was familiar with Lenin’s statement that “Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only...from outside the economic struggle” (*What Is To Be Done?*). We know of course that the SL formally adheres to the belief that such is the task of revolutionaries. So why do they deem the call for political strikes as inappropriate? It is not, after all, as if the IG and others are advocating something ridiculous like the quasi-political Bruderhoff religious sects’ demand that U.S. citizens travel to Iraq and act as “human shields.”

The passive propagandism of the SL derives not only from an internal regime which seems to promotes subservience, but also from their overly pessimistic worldview, some of which is grounded in reality (the enormous setback suffered by the workers’ movement with the collapse of the USSR) but much of which also comes from political demoralization.

The SL pushes things a bit far when they begin to make distinctions between today and the “pre-1991 era.” To this the IG quite correctly replies: “But we are still in the imperialist epoch, defined by Lenin as the final stage of capitalist decay, an era of wars and revolutions.” Norden also points out the essential contradiction of the present moment writing that it “is also a period of turbulent proletarian struggles that can pass from a defensive to the offensive” (*From a Drift...* p 49). Even while the imperialists race to re-partition the world and retract the various concessions they felt compelled to make to the toiling masses they are increasingly likely to push their luck too far. Is it so difficult to conceive that the international proletariat will at some point be so embattled that sections will be compelled to fight back? And in such a situation does not the essential question remain that of conscious leadership? Indeed, as fascism marched triumphantly over much of Europe, Trotsky recognized that workers’ struggles would not be purely defensive in character.

The leaders of the SL recognize that the collapse of the Stalinist regimes—and more importantly the destruction of the deformed workers’ states—has big implications. This is indeed a New World Order, the imperialists are now free to scramble to re-divide the world and also have just the excuse they need to drive the workers of their own countries down.

All these things the SL leaders see, more or less correctly (they’re a wee bit confused about some of the more important details—like when precisely the counterrevolution won its victory and the USSR ceased to be a workers’ state). But they seem to have lost the sense that, “The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crises of the leadership of the proletariat.” To be sure, every SL cadre knows these words by heart. They have repeated them a hundred times. But they seem to feel these words have lost their meaning.

Why? Because for so long they have cultivated a view of

the world, divorced from reality, in which they had a mandate from history to emerge as the leadership of the proletariat. A realistic evaluation of their track-record would tell a different story; so instead they start from a profoundly flawed conception that can only be sustained in an artificial microcosm: *We, says the SL, are the leadership of the working class. And we correctly recognized the danger of counterrevolution in the degenerated USSR and the deformed workers' states of East Europe. And we mobilized to the very best of our abilities to fight it. We threw all our resources into Germany...we bled our organization white. But what happened? Did the working class rally? Did it flock to our banner? Did it follow our leadership?*

In this way the SL translates the failures bred by its own degeneration and the general crises of leadership, into the failure of the working class. This is precisely the reason why the SL had to jettison the prominent and talented cadres of the IG. Norden and those who rallied to his side seem to have viewed themselves as some sort of Ignace Reiss faction fighting for a genuine Bolshevik program against the increasingly alien and abstentionist line of the rest of the ICL leadership. Norden, in his Humboldt speech, offers the most realistic appraisal of the situation in Germany and the proper tactics for the ICL we have yet seen. For this he is pilloried. The resistance of the future IG cadres was most likely the desperate last stand of those elements within the SL who wanted to “remain faithful to the banner” and could not swallow the codification of the SL’s maximalist abstentionism.

With the IG grouping amputated, the SL removed an impediment to its passive propagandist approach and no doubt used the example of the expulsions to intimidate anyone else who offered any potential opposition to the leadership. Thus the way is paved to preach the “new” SL philosophy:

“the crises of the leadership of the proletariat’ predates the present deep repression of proletarian consciousness. The reality of the post-Soviet period adds a new dimension to Trotsky’s observation.”

There are none so blind as those who refuse to see. This very subtle formulation opens the door for a series of revisions that have now only to be codified in writing. Clearly from this point of departure it is easy to arrive at a justification for the SL’s increasing tendency toward abstentionism. After all, we have been thrown back to a period *before* the transitional program; perhaps we have been thrown back to a period prior to that in which transitional demands are valuable. The SL writes: “Marxism must once again win the allegiance of the proletariat,” hence a new emphasis in the SL’s propaganda to present themselves “as the most consistent defenders of the Enlightenment.”

Did Marxism have the “allegiance of the proletariat” in the 1980s? Or was it necessary to struggle to win the allegiance of the working class to Marxist politics even then? And was the chief obstacle in the 1980s not the existence of orga-

nized false consciousness in the workers’ movement—both business unionism and Stalinist/social democratic reformism? The situation is certainly worse than it was when the USSR existed, both materially and in terms of the popularity of the idea that “socialism” is a realistic alternative to capitalism. But it has not presented revolutionaries with a qualitatively new historic task. There remains an enormous gap between the objective need of the working class to resist and ultimately overturn capitalist rule and the program of class collaboration promoted by the labor aristocracy. The historic program of Marxism (as preserved and continued in Trotsky’s *Transitional Program*) remains as applicable to the struggles of Paris in 1995 as it was in 1968.

That the SL has set for itself the task of defending the enlightenment is admirable (as well as providing some of the best recent articles in the post-Norden *Workers Vanguard*). The prevailing backlash against communism has indeed extended its tentacles back in time to challenge the traditional class struggle based interpretation of the bourgeois revolutions. A backlash that has been challenged by a number of Left academics, including E.J. Hobsbawm’s *Echoes of the Marseillaise*. We do not wish to deprecate the importance of understanding the origins of the current bourgeois epoch; but we feel compelled to point out that the more important task for revolutionary Marxists today is to present ourselves as “the most consistent defenders of October 1917” and the most consistent advocates of Trotsky’s *Transitional Program*.

Alas, the tragedy of the SL seems to at last approach its denouement. A party that conceived itself as a vanguard and yet has a record of repeatedly purging valuable cadres because they might pose a threat to its party regime has only ended up weakening and hollowing out itself. Its members are dispirited and appear to lack the self-confidence and the political strength necessary to stand against the current and are instead headed into the dust-bin of history. Refusing to look critically at its own inadequacies, the SL turns inward while pointing to the working class and all but spits: *You have let me down!*

The leadership of the SL is today a spent force. Their organization continues to go through the motions and still, occasionally, can do some good work (e.g., their early Mumia defense work). Yet the most important contributions of the RT and the earlier Spartacist tradition are in the past. We honor that contribution and want to do what we can to preserve and continue it. But the organization which for decades embodied this tradition, the SL, has for some time been an obstacle to the Trotskyist politics it did so much to develop.

To the revolutionary youth of today, and those who come in the future, we say there is no reason to despair—triumphant imperialism remains strategically vulnerable. We still have a “world to win” and the key task remains the creation of that historical instrument (the revolutionary party) necessary to resolve “the crises of proletarian leadership.”

Document No. 10

MEG letter to IG

The following is an abridgement of a lengthy letter given to IGers visiting Albany on 17 July 1998. We have excerpted the portions most relevant to the political discussion between the MEG and the IG. In his letter of 18 July 1998, Jan Norden commented on the erroneous observation that "Abram Leon's The Jewish Question contains a somewhat ahistorical definition of fascism" (see Document No. 11).

Dear Negrete and IG comrades,

I want to apologize for the delay in getting these materials to you and for the density of this package. As the various projects progressed it seemed to make the most sense to send them to you together like this. We hope you don't feel too inundated.

Your criticisms are most important to us so we wanted you to be able to review the tentative contents of the next issue of our newsletter. Please find enclosed the following articles....

Don and I always intended to enter the polemical realm with the newsletter, but our focus on putting out an agitational paper (and on developing ourselves theoretically) delayed the publication of such a piece until now. The first target of our polemics was naturally the RWL [Revolutionary Workers League] (see Don's "Resignation Statement" and *NfA [Notebook for Agitators]* Vol.1 No.1) as this was the organization from which we had split and from whose periphery we hoped to draw our initial cadres. Our other paramount focus has pretty consistently been the SL [Spartacist League]. This is because of our explicit identification with the fight against Pabloism made by the RT [Revolutionary Tendency—forerunner of the SL]....The comrades of the IG are in a unique position to help us further this analyses as you witnessed the degeneration of the SL from the inside and seemed to have waged a pretty committed fight. In fact we think that a reappraisal of the degeneration of the SL and an explicit attempt to catalogue its major contributions as well as its eventual failure would be a useful experience for both our organizations and one which might serve to bring us closer together. A high level of agreement on the issues of revolutionary continuity and programmatic clarity is clearly a pre-requisite before formal regroupment discussions can be initiated.

In addition to the articles set to appear in issue four we have enclosed Don's [21 June 1998] reply to Ed's letter which we hope will make our position clearer. You will note that we took Ed's comments into careful consideration and agree with him on many points. This process has clearly been important in our evaluation of our RWL heritage. It is important for us to be able to distinguish between those aspects of that heritage (centrist though it was) that we feel are valuable enough to keep and those that it is essential to reject....

I'd like to give you a brief run-down of events here in Albany and then raise a couple of political questions that Don and I feel are important.

I'll begin with the report. Our work on the July 4th demonstration [in defense of Mumia Abu Jamal in Philadelphia] is proceeding well despite the disappointing lack of response from a number of left groups (the Albany IWW [Industrial Workers of the World] and the LRP [League for the Revolutionary Party] gave us the most favorable response while the BT [Bolshevik Tendency] was agnostic). We realize now that our conception of a united front of the left was perhaps slightly flawed.

We remain sincerely convinced that the struggle for a class-line in the Jamal defense campaign is a key issue. We do not feel that a concerted fight for this line is incorrect or de-

structive to the over-all organizing efforts. To the contrary, we think clarity is essential on issue of tactics in order to push the defense work forward. And we find confirmation for our position in the writings of Cannon, particularly in his January 1927 article: "Who Can Save Sacco and Vanzetti?" reprinted in *Notebook of an Agitator*. Of course we maintain that through a process of patient explanation, consistency and by counterposing our Marxist program to that of the liberals we could win the best elements of our opponent groups to the banner of the Fourth International. In particular we have inherited a certain orientation to Refuse and Resist [R&R] from the RWL. Refuse and Resist remains a revolving door that pulls in subjectively revolutionary youth but offers them nothing. Many people first come into politics through the anarchist and soft-Maoist milieu and some of these people are worth fighting to win over.

The RWL had great success in the days leading up to Buffalo in pulling people out of the RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party]. In particular we regrouped the youth component of their Baltimore local and for a short time ran it as an RWL organizing committee in Baltimore. These comrades played a key role in counter posing "Trotskyist" politics to Refuse and Resist in Buffalo. For a variety of reasons we recruited a number of young militants in Buffalo and later Baton Rouge who had been initially attracted to R&R, the ISO [International Socialist Organization] or one of the militant radical feminist groups like WHAM! [Women's Health Action and Mobilization!].

It is doubtful that Don and I will reap such immediate rewards in Philadelphia....

I did want to raise a couple of outstanding issues in this letter which I chose not to include in the polemic against the ICL. I dropped these two issues because I didn't want to force a premature rupture in our discussions by rushing into print on them. You could say that I consider them to be serious "mistakes" made by the SL. On the other hand I admit they are not programmatic betrayals and I don't consider our relations to hinge on them as seriously as on say the Afghanistan question or some of the bad positions/slogans we inherited from the RWL.

The first is the *Challenger* incident. During a telephone conversation with Negrete (in May I believe) he dismissed a number of the BT's criticisms of the SL as "point-scoring" and seemed to indicate that he thought these were trivial or hair-splitting. As you know we persisted in our criticism of the Lebanon slogan and did consider it to be of some importance. I believe we have now reached a level of clarity on this issue. In a recent discussion Don pointed out to me just how related he feels the *Challenger* incident and Lebanon are. This caused us to both re-evaluate the incident. The memories this dredged up for both of us were striking.

Don was in fifth grade at the time of the explosion and he vividly remembers the entire class sitting in front of the TV and watching as the shuttle exploded live on TV. He also mentioned that students were forced to send letters of condolence to the astronauts' families.

I recall a somewhat similar experience. My 7th grade shop class was interrupted by a PA announcement describing this “tragedy” and instructing students to observe a moment of silent prayer in honor of the “victims.” I have to report that my class did not get to observe this prayer experience because I vociferously objected to the procedure for the entire extended 60 seconds (not on revolutionary grounds its true) but because at that time I was going through a radical atheist stage. I was rewarded for my obstinacy in insisting on the separation of church and state with a detention.

I have to say that if I could go back and do it over again I would still object to that moment of prayer. But I would be sure to throw some mention of Star Wars and these astronauts’ prior careers as air-force pilots who murdered Vietnamese soldiers and tried to crush the deformed workers’ state. The deaths of these people, with the sole exception of Christa McAuliffe—the school teacher—are not mourned by revolutionary Marxists....

As students at the time, witnessing the outpouring of grief for that teacher, we can appreciate the tremendous pressure that must have born down on the SL in respect to the explosion. This however does not excuse the very poor sentence that appears in the February 14 *WV* [*Workers Vanguard*]: “What we feel toward the astronauts 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 two days before.”

It’s true that the article’s head-line: “*Challenger* Blows Up in Reagan’s Face” was good and the reference to the Salvadorans was, we imagine, in some way directed toward pointing out that the *Challenger* astronauts weren’t the only people who died that week (as the compulsive coverage of the event by the bourgeois press might lead some to believe.) Still the formulation is wrong, all *circumstances* are not equally tragic. Or do you seriously believe that when White army men died in the typhoid epidemics that they should have been mourned with the same sorrow we accord the loss of men like John Reed? This is perhaps an over-statement—but this is where the line of the SL’s reasoning ultimately leads.

The second point of discussion I want to raise concerns the events of November 1984 at San Francisco State University. I want to preface my remarks by making clear that I was involved in similar campaigns to try to resist administration and/or student government campaigns against leftists....

We are both however thoroughly convinced that running around with pig’s noses was not the appropriate response to the attacks the SL faced in 1984. Not only did it represent a poor utilization of resources (and poor judgement) but it also had a bad political line. Street theatre, to be effective, must be clear. No account, even those in *WV*, makes clear the meaning of these performances. While pig-noses and Xandra were as the BT put it, “Halloween,” (“From Trotskyism to Halloween” *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*, No.4) the MEG passes a much harsher verdict on the SL’s use of a Nazi uniform and on the disgusting personalistic attack on a bourgeois feminist.

We feel it is completely inappropriate for Trotskyists to be running around in Nazi uniforms while performing party work. There is already a very dominant paradigm among bourgeois liberals that brands Stalinism (and by the liberals’ extension, Leninism) as fascism or at least a totalitarian twin to Hitlerism. The SL’s antics could only feed this confusion between brown and red in the students’ and workers’ minds on that campus. As you must all be aware the Trotskyists have had to wage a consistent struggle to win people over to our analysis of fascism. We have had to counterpose our materialist analysis of what fascism is and how to fight it to the idealist conceptions of bourgeois intellectuals, social-democrats, Sta-

linists and the fascists themselves. The contributions of Trotsky and later Daniel Guerin are a fresh gulp of water in an arid desert of barren theory that has for too long been dominated by emotional reactions to fascism rather than concrete thinking.

Trotskyists have not always been as clear on this issue as they should have been themselves—I seem to recall that Abram Leon’s *The Jewish Question* contains a somewhat ahistorical definition of fascism. Also the SWP distributes to this day a pamphlet by Cannon and Hansen (“What is American Fascism?”) that we feel mislabels right-wingers like McCarthy and Father Coughlin as fascists. By contrast I think the SWP’s George Weissman makes this point rather well in his 1969 introduction to “Fascism, What It Is and How to Fight It,” writing:

“Liberals and even most of those who consider themselves Marxists are guilty of using the word *fascist* very loosely today. They fling it around as an epithet or political swear-word against right-wing figures whom they particularly despise....Indiscriminate use of the term reflects vagueness about its meaning....But there is a Marxist analysis of fascism. It was made by Leon Trotsky....”

If the MEG had been in the SL at that time we would have waged a fight against such a “theatrical” policy....

The flip-side of the SL’s immersion into this weird cultish action is the matter of what they did not do. That is, stand up and make a concerted fight to regain their legality. Defense campaigns against attacks on socialist organizations and individual comrades are often circumstances where revolutionary organizations are able to exercise considerably broader influence, attracting the support of those who may not be in complete agreement with the politics of those under attack, but who recognize the formal democratic rights of revolutionaries. Indeed, it seems to me a successful defense campaign must be premised upon drawing upon the support of those liberals and civil libertarians who share an interest in seeing bourgeois democratic rights defended or extended. As such, my guess is that the SL’s carnival antics were practically designed to drive away those it really ought to have been appealing to as allies in a broad defense campaign.

When I was under attack at Antioch [for agitating among students to forcibly run some Nazi-skinheads off campus] (and actually prohibited from attending classes and forced to enter and exit my dorm from the fire-escape—see “Free Speech, CSB, and Campus Angst....” *Antioch Community Record*)... RWL comrades came down from Detroit and started a mass petitioning campaign on my behalf. Very few students at this traditionally “left” school came to my defense. Even a number of the so-called anarchists believed Trotskyism and fascism were twins and therefore they were not obligated to take sides. The broadest layer of liberals believed that my agitation infringed upon the democratic rights of the fascists and that alibied their complacency in the face of the university’s and a few right-wingers’ attempts to get rid of me. But the petitioning campaign, and an aggressive political campaign, including hosting a number of forums to explain our analysis of fascism and how to fight it, led to our gaining some numerically small but important defenders. When people calling themselves “situationalists” attempted to drown out a forum building for my defense, anarchists associated with the Greens (influenced by Murray Bookchin) brought the room to order so I could speak and later wrote articles in the student paper expressing solidarity with me against my persecutors. A group of lesbian-separatists, who had first alerted an acquaintance of mine to the arrival of the nazis on campus, were so incensed by later attempts by the liberals to pretend these individuals were somehow not *real* fascists, that they were willing to join a protest picket in defense of a man out-

side of my hearing. Ultimately the charges were dropped....

Later, at SUNY Albany, we used similar tactics and a broader campaign to defend three RWL comrades (and one ex-member) from an attack by the university administration with only slightly less success. The Revisionist Zionists Association, a group of student followers of Binyamin Kahane, proved a powerful school and community opponent in its efforts to have NWROC [National Women's Rights Organizing Coalition] and the RWL booted from campus and our leading student members expelled after we disrupted a speech by Kahane on campus. The university gladly took over the persecution and the deliberately vindictive nature of the campaign was quite clear since black nationalists and liberal Jews who had also protested the event were not brought up on charges and the founding NWROC member, Andi M., who had since dropped out of the RWL/NWROC, was also brought up on charges despite the fact that she had only passed near the vicinity of the demo and taken a flyer from me. The university was of course unaware of Andi's political break, they had been looking for an opportunity to punish the most public cadre for their role in the building take over two years before and thus they seized on this opportunity to go after the individuals they considered to be the "ringleaders." Sarah W., one of the defendants and the RWL's comrade in charge of campus work wrote in an editorial in the *Albany Student Press*, "Conspiracy To Silence Students" (Friday, December 3, 1993) which made a broad appeal for our political defense pointing out that:

"The hypocrisy of this administration is obvious; they fight to the death to enable Kahane to speak, but strictly forbid Kwame Toure from speaking on campus last year because he advocates militant anti-racist fightback. Free speech on this campus is reserved for those who promise not to stir up trouble for the administration....Our administration also represses anyone who tries to build independent action on campus. NWROC has been the subject of repeated threats and attacks from the administration."

Sarah's editorial went on to link the struggles on SUNY Albany with the campaign against the arming of campus cops at SUNY Binghamton (another action NWROC was building support for) and ended with the usual rhetoric about building "Independent militant anti-racist organizations...." and "...a militant integrated student/worker movement to defend the gains of the past and to expand them, while building a movement that can lead to the liberation of all the oppressed"—typically liquidating the call for a Leninist party into mass movementism.

Nonetheless, the RWL invested substantial resources into a fight to preserve our democratic rights to formally exist on

the campus as an organization, flying the org's attorney in from Detroit to serve as our informal counsel and building pickets outside every day the Star Chamber procedures dragged on. In the end, the university's case was weakened by the very vindictiveness with which it had hounded us when it was reasonably established that Andi had not been involved in the demo and that I had been yards away from a key skirmish at the door doing paper sales....

On Thursday March 17, [1994] a truly right-wing student government consisting of a bloc of Zionists and Republicans succeeded where the administration failed when they stripped NWROC, the RWL and the ISO (who they misconstrued as another RWL front group) of their recognition as student groups and cut off its right to utilize student activity dues funds. The RWL defense work was far more erratic at this stage of the game. The organization seemed to have grown tired of campus work (this was at the height of the frenzied anti-fascist actions in the Midwest with all east coast members being required to travel to Detroit, Ohio, Indiana, etc., weekly). It substituted a great deal of maneuvering with a minority block of Democrats, NYPIRG and Green party types in the student government, etc. It did make re-recognition a key component of an electoral slate it ran in the student union elections. Emily ran for president, I ran for vice-president and Sarah W. ran for student senate. It was during the midst of this campaign that I quit the RWL, but I stood on the slate during the debates and on election day specifically because of my commitment to the elections as a form of propaganda demanding the re-recognition of the democratic rights of the RWL, NWROC and the ISO. While Emily and I polled the fewest number of votes of any of the six slates running in the broader senate elections Sarah was able to win a seat and Don U. won a place on a write-in campaign. It was from their vantage point on the student senate that Sarah and Don were later able to lead a dogged campaign that eventually led to the group being reinstated late the following autumn.

It is from these sorts of experiences that I draw what I believe to be a well-founded conclusion that the antics at SF State could only serve to alienate and weaken the SL and not to build it. I believe it was such inherent weaknesses in the SL that prevented it from winning an audience from RWL cadre and periphery. I believe this is a handicap that the IG comrades must move to cast off. SF State is not in our view a "split issue" but it is for us an indicator that there were things seriously wrong in the ICL long before your expulsions.

Comradely,
Jason W.

Document No. 11

IG letter to MEG

New York
18 July 1998

Dear comrades,

This is a belated response to your letter of 4 June and your circular about the Mumia Abu-Jamal defense, as well as some comments on your recent draft articles which we only received last night. It is intended to contribute to the conversations you are having this weekend with comrades Marjorie, Frank and Ed. We apologize for the delay: I had already a good part of a letter on the question of a general strike when the Puerto Rican general strike arose and we decided it was urgent to have a presence and propaganda there. So this letter includes the earlier material, amplified and underlined by the experience in Puerto Rico. Hopefully you have seen the leaflet we distributed there prior to the general strike, and we will be writing a second article on the strike itself. In addition, we had a number of criticisms of your Mumia circular which we discussed over the phone. I'm glad to see that your 4 July leaflet headlined "Labor: Strike to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!" takes many of those points into account, at least insofar as it doesn't repeat the charges in the earlier circular, although the same idea reappears at least indirectly in a reference in a polemic against the SL [Spartacist League/U.S.] to the latter's "early Mumia defense work" (more on this below).

Here I would like to begin by raising our sharp disagreements with your polemic against the ICL [International Communist League, headed by SL/U.S.], which hopefully has not yet been published anywhere. I want to put this bluntly, because it goes to the heart of what we must discuss: your article is a collection of anti-Spartacist prejudices, distortions and falsifications, apparently assembled from the various centrist outfits who have little in common save their hatred of the ICL, and not just or even mainly the ICL of today. For years there was an anti-SL "fraternity" of the BT [Bolshevik Tendency], RWL [Revolutionary Workers League], assorted Mandelites and others who circulated a potpourri of slanders about the ICL, seeking to denigrate it precisely because it represented over the space of three decades the revolutionary political continuity of Marxism. We are at war with this anti-Spartacist swamp. We have nothing but contempt for the anti-communist ravings of the likes of the BT, which retail the worst kind of McCarthyite "god that failed" smears against the ICL, that are designed to be (and have been) picked up by rightist forces. The main criticism of the ICL that we would make in this regard is that it didn't sufficiently combat the anti-Soviet, labor-aristocratic politics of the BT *et al.*

I understand that in conversations with Frank you have expressed the view that the Internationalist Group has not come to grips with the alleged fact that the ICL supposedly degenerated long before the fight over Brazil. As you know, the fight that led to our expulsions and the break of fraternal relations with the Brazilian LQB [Liga Quarta-Internacionalista] by the "new I.S." began a year earlier in a sharp dispute over the ICL's work in Germany. More generally, we have pointed to the origins of the ICL's political degeneration in a demoralized reaction to the historic political defeat for the proletariat represented by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers' state and the bureaucratically deformed workers' states of East Europe during the period 1989-92. But up until the recent fights and the sharp turn of the ICL in 1995-97, which has led it to commit a betrayal in

Brazil and to revise a whole series of fundamental programmatic points (on the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy, the question of the popular front, on the theory of permanent revolution, on working-class action against imperialist war), *the Spartacist tendency represented authentic Trotskyism*. In rejecting the lying filth spewed out by the Anti-Spartacist League, we underline that *the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International represent the political continuity of the Trotskyist ICL*. We uphold this heritage against the present leadership and political line of the ICL, which in key aspects are politically approaching the pseudo-Trotskyist centrists we always fought and whom we continue to fight.

Before taking up in detail the points in your 4 June letter, I would like to make a few comments about your draft article against the Spartacist League. The first is about a relatively minor, but I think significant, point. At the outset of your polemic you write that "one of the regrettable necessities of political life is the need for political polemics." But for Marxists, sharp polemics against various centrist and reformist forces are hardly regrettable but *essential* in being able to establish where the revolutionary interests of the proletariat lie. Sharp political debate is the way we sort these questions out. The other method of political "discussion," of course, is through organizational measures, expulsions and even violence, such as both the Stalinists and social democrats use against their revolutionary critics. While you rightly dismiss "political neophytes and aloof arm-chair observers ([who] often bemoan the alphabet soup of the Left (and Trotskyists in particular)," your remarks are an appeal to such politically backward elements to overcome their hostility to such "regrettable but necessary" fights.

In contrast, we seek to direct our propaganda to the most politically advanced workers and revolutionary-minded youth and intellectuals, who in fact are avid to read such polemics. People, in short, such as yourselves. The Leninist party is built through winning and educating *cadres*. This is the proper focus of a small Trotskyist fighting propaganda group, which in no way excludes intervention in mass struggles when the opportunity presents itself (witness our intervention in the Puerto Rican general strike and the struggles leading up to it). On the contrary, and this has been a key issue in our fight with the new ICL leadership, such intervention is *obligatory*, for without it you cannot defend, let alone develop the revolutionary program. When the ICL repeats its incantations about "building the party" as an excuse for refusing to intervene in the struggles of the working class, it is not just being lazy. Its passive propagandism and abstentionism represents another program, not Leninism but DeLeonism, as we have written, and it is part of a more general slide into a left-wing variant of "maximalist" *social democracy*. But when you write of your "hands-on activist orientation," I think this also indicates a non-Leninist program for an activist party or movement party rather than a communist cadre party. This is taken up in comrade Ed's letter to you of 15 May, which keeps returning to the key party question not as a ritual incantation but in terms of how Trotskyists intervene in the class struggle.

You write of your "lineage to the SL," and later say that "it falls to the MEG [Marxist Educational Group], among others, to carry on the fight begun by the early SL." Certainly no

false modesty there, but of itself that's no crime: the revolution will not be led by a bunch of wilting flowers. As an appetite it's even admirable. But you evidence no real understanding of what the fight of the "early SL" was, or of the later ICL—and even more fundamentally, you show no awareness of the yawning gap between your pretensions and your actual politics. What lineage to the early SL? The RWL, from which you comrades come, was built from the beginning *in opposition* to the Spartacist tendency. You take up the cudgels for our comrade Socorro, who was subjected to a grotesque witchhunt and anti-Leninist travesty of a trial by the ICL leadership, but then defend her mistaken and unacceptable statement, which she herself retracted hours after she said it. To compare her ordeal to the torture and forced confessions of Bukharin, Kamenev and Zinoviev, as you do, is a wild exaggeration that lacks any sense of proportion. Certainly those who are really guilty of attacking Leninism are the ICL leaders who rigged Socorro's frame-up trial, and for this they would deserve to be expelled from any organization laying claim to Trotskyism. But we and she do not need the kind of solidarity raised in your polemic.

To then compare the various "trials" and expulsions of the Spartacist cadres who then founded the IG [Internationalist Group] with the trial and expulsion of Bill Logan is grotesque. Logan was guilty of what he was charged with, and these were not minor charges: abuse of comrades to the point of trying to force a woman not to have a baby. In fact, the lengthy quote from Samarakkody that you cite even states that Logan was guilty, while arguing that everyone should share the blame. (But even then, failure of the iSt [international Spartacist tendency—today the ICL] leadership to take steps to correct the bureaucratic tendencies that were apparent in the SL/ANZ [Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand], as Samarakkody charges, is very different than *committing* those bureaucratic abuses. Besides which, the iSt did take measures to correct the abuses, by transferring the core of the SL/ANZ leadership.) Not only was he guilty as charged, the Logan trial took place in accordance with the rules of the iSt.

In contrast, the "trials" of the ICL cadres in May–June 1996 were straight-out frame-ups, from start to finish, and they directly violated the ICL organizational rules—in fact, they had to violate those rules. Socorro was tried, in another country, *four days and one hour* after she was informed of the trial date, not seven days as required by the rules. She was not allowed to make a statement to the trial body, her medical objections to an immediate trial were repeatedly dismissed, she was not allowed to cross-examine "witnesses" to expose their lies, it was all based on an after-the-fact invention, etc., etc. In order to expel the rest of us, the leadership invented a right to examine phone bills, declared that members of the ICL's highest body, the International Executive Committee, did not have the right to talk with each other, raised slanderous accusations of "outside funding" without a shred of evidence, etc., etc. There are not "striking parallels" between these two trials, they are opposites.

Moreover, Samarakkody was not placed on the trial body as a supposed "independent" (that would be a direct negation of Leninism, for this was a party trial) or as a "loyalty test." He was the leader of a fraternal tendency that was having discussions of possible fusion with the international Spartacist tendency, and this was an act of opening our internal party life to the RWP [Revolutionary Workers Party (Sri Lanka)] so they could see what we were. And contrary to Samarakkody's self-serving claim, the RWP's break with the iSt was not over the Logan trial but came after a sharp discussion on the popular front, in particular over Samarakkody's renunciation of the RWP's honorable act of voting against (and hence bring-

ing down) the popular front SLFP [Sri Lanka Freedom Party] government. The RWP's vote in parliament was the embodiment of our proletarian opposition to the bourgeois popular front, and insisting on denouncing it, Samarakkody consciously undercut any *programmatic* basis for a fusion. He then packed his bags and walked out in a huff just before the scheduled discussion of Lanka (Ceylon). This is amply documented in the report of the first delegated conference of the iSt in *Spartacist* Nos. 27–28 (Winter 1979–80), which if you haven't read (you should have) we can supply you with a copy.

You go on to give an account of the political confrontation between the IG and the SL at the Socialist Scholars Conference which you witnessed. The account is factually flawed in at least one aspect (no one was "prevented from hurling himself" at me, nor was I even present), but is also accompanied by a disgusting reference to a woman that should never see the light of day. Also, the account of the ICL's slanders against the LQB referred to in this account is inaccurate in an important aspect: Geraldo Ribeiro's lawyers, who broke with him over his categorical refusal to use the bosses' courts against the unions, never "called labor leaders into court to testify."

Collapse of Stalinism

Your article then writes (referring to the 1980s): "As the SL's internal culture suffocated and they lost or abandoned their foothold in the unions the organization produced increasingly erratic positions reflecting the pressures of the milieu in which they operated." Every element of this sentence is wrong. First, the "internal culture," whatever that is, did not suffocate. On the contrary, the ICL's mobilization over the Russian question produced reams of internal discussion. One bulletin documented a fight against unassimilated ex-Stalinist elements in the Ligue Trotskyiste de France and part of the LTF leadership against our proposal to send an international brigade to Afghanistan. The ICL's all-out international mobilization to fight to stop counterrevolution in East Germany and the Soviet Union produced an eight-volume series of internal bulletins on "Documents and Discussion on the Collapse of Stalinism." There was extensive discussion around the document of the ICL's second international conference (1992). Following that, there was a six-volume discussion on "Post-Soviet Russia and the New World Disorder" focusing on a fight against a proto-Stalinist/nationalist faction that arose in the Canadian section. In all of these fights and discussions, the ICL cadres who later founded the Internationalist Group played a leading role.

Later on in your article, you refer to the ICL being "a wee bit confused about some of the more important details" concerning the Soviet Union "like when precisely the counterrevolution won its victory amid the USSR ceased to be a workers' state." This is hardly a detail, even ironically speaking. The ICL clearly stated, in a motion voted at its second international conference in 1992, that the definitive passing over from degenerated workers' state to a capitalist state (however weak) took place over a period of time following the takeover by the counterrevolutionary Yeltsin government in August 1991 and late 1992, and was marked by the absence of working-class or military resistance to the social counterrevolution. This is explained in the Spartacist pamphlet, "How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled," and in particular the article with the same title. We stand on this analysis, and indeed the founders of the IG played a leading role in formulating and defending it at the time. If the ICL is allegedly "a wee bit confused" about that cardinal event, your criticism is no less directed at the IG. But where does the MEG stand on

this? The BT's claim that the USSR ceased to be a workers' state virtually overnight in August 1991 was not only methodologically wrong, it was a way to wash its hands of the last-ditch struggle to defend the Soviet Union against capitalist restoration. Where the ICL issued 50,000 copies of a leaflet in Russian calling for "Soviet Workers: Smash Yeltsin/Bush Counterrevolution!" the BT called for "military support" for the "Gang of 8" coup plotters who did *not* attack the Yeltsin counterrevolutionary counter coup, who ordered the workers *not* to mobilize, and who promised the imperialists to defend and extend private property.

On a related issue, the BT's line in East Germany in 1989–90 was that the main danger was coming from Modrow, the last Stalinist prime minister of the DDR [German Democratic Republic], whereas the ICL correctly pointed to the West German Social Democracy (SPD) and its allies as the "Trojan Horse of counterrevolution" and the "spearhead of capitalist reunification." Today, the ICL's new line is that the Stalinists led the counterrevolution, which is substantively the same position as the BT and the contrary of what the ICL said at the time. This is shown starkly in the 3 January 1990 demonstration at the Soviet war memorial in Treptow, which was initiated by the ICL and where speakers from the Stalinist SED—PDS [Socialist Unity Party—Party of Democratic Socialism] and the ICL appeared on the same platform before 250,000 people who came out to protest the threat of counterrevolution. We have pointed out that if the SED was "leading" the counterrevolution at this point, this would not have been a united-front protest but a betrayal. Yet the reality is that the German bourgeoisie was leading the counterrevolution, using the SPD as its spearhead, with the BT arguing along with Helmut Kohl and Willy Brandt that Modrow was the main danger. Where does the MEG stand on this?

Grenada/Lebanon

Then there is the matter of the SL's greatly diminished presence in the unions, a refrain of the laborite BT. At least in your account, you refer to the "loss" or abandonment, but even this is overstated. In fact, in the mid-1980s, we had a significant phoneworkers' fraction, which two of the founding cadres of the IG had led or were then still helping lead. We have indicated that there were real problems regarding withdrawal from trade-union work, but they were not what you say. In particular, like the BT, you claim that as a result of this the SL adopted a social-patriotic position over the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Lebanon. This is false to the core. So false, in fact, that I am led to ask a simple question: have you ever read, or even seen, the article in *Workers Vanguard* in question? In case you haven't, our comrades have brought with them a full-page xerox of articles from that issue of *WV* so you can read what this is all about. I submit that no honest socialist-minded reader could maintain that our article, or even our headline, was social-patriotic (or a "capitulation to U.S. chauvinism" as you write) after looking at it. The BT, of course, has read it, and their account is a lying distortion, which is par for the course with them as anti-Spartacist slanders is their stock in trade. If you have not actually seen and read the *WV* article, you should do so, and think about how dangerous it is to take someone else's word about something.

You write that *WV* "ran a front page head-line calling Marines Out of Lebanon, Now, Alive." In fact, this was part of a two-slogan reverse box, the other slogan being: "U.S. Out of Grenada, Dead or Alive!" That is a call for *military support for the forces in direct combat with the armed forces of U.S. imperialism*, a call that is spelled out in the text. There is no way, at any time in history, that this could be seen as support

for "our own" bourgeoisie. The headline and the article sought to contrast the situation in Grenada, where revolutionaries took a side with the Cubans and Grenadian radicals who fought the U.S. invaders, and the communal civil war in Lebanon where the working class did not have a side, but we of course called for U.S. out. In fact, you will see that above that headline was a box prominently headlined, "We Salute Heroic Cuban Fighters!" To isolate the slogan about Lebanon from the slogan about Grenada is either due to ignorance (you hadn't actually seen the paper) or it is dishonest. Of the two possibilities, ignorance is certainly preferable.

There is a lot more that could be said about this BT canard, but contrary to the assertion in your 4 June letter, the IG does not reject the slogan in *WV*. To the extent there were problems with the Grenada/Lebanon formulation, it was that it could be misused by anti-communist demagogues in willfully misinterpreting and distortedly portraying it as social-patriotic, where in fact we took sides where there was in fact a military struggle against imperialism, underlining that this would result in dead American soldiers. You write, "In the years of Reaganite reaction the SL was afraid to sell a paper carrying a head-line like Marines Out of Lebanon—By Any Means Necessary!" This is absurd. During the years of Reaganite reaction, the SL more than any other political tendency directly fought the anti-Soviet war drive, bringing threats from the *Wall Street Journal* (over our demonstrations to "Stop Solidarnosc Counterrevolution" in Poland), actions by the FBI classifying us as potential "terrorists," cop exclusions and thug attacks by popular-front leftists. We carried slogans "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" that clearly sided with "the enemy," while the likes of the BT squirmed around trying to find an inoffensive slogan. We called in headlines to "Kill the invaders!" in Nicaragua, referring to the U.S.-armed and directed contras. To say that the SL was afraid of confronting its own bourgeoisie in the years of Reaganite reaction is not only a slander, it is a cover for those who did capitulate to the pressure of the bourgeoisie, such as the BT and RWL.

Defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal

There are a number of other issues raised by your article that could be commented on, but I want to single out the statement that the SL "still, occasionally, can do some good work (e.g., their early Mumia defense work)." As noted above, this is the same line we objected to in your circular. We have many sharp criticisms of the ICL leadership's turn, its abandonment of key Trotskyist programmatic positions, its desertion from a key class battle in Brazil, its anti-communist expulsions. But we have not criticized the ICL's work in defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal, and we consider it irresponsible to do so. To put it succinctly, without the ICL's continued support for and work in the defense effort, Mumia would have been executed long ago. No other tendency took on this task and continues to put thousands of dollars and cadre hours into this vital work. The fight for genuine communist policies against the ICL leadership's revisions and betrayal can only be harmed by raising such false charges, not to mention potential harm to Mumia's defense.

I want to emphatically repeat here what I said on the phone: defense work is something that we take very seriously, and one must be very careful about the charges one makes. Those who have assumed the responsibility for defending particular cases are in a very different situation than those who give support from the outside, and outsiders should be extremely wary of making unfounded charges unless the substance is absolutely clear. In this case, to put it un-diplomatically, you don't know what you are talking about—

and in such a situation, it is better to hold off on criticisms of the ICL's defense work, while calls for appropriate working-class [action] in defense of Mumia (such as you do in your article) are quite in order and necessary. As I think I noted on the phone, your criticisms of the SL over Mumia seemed to echo those of the BT in its article "For United Front Defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal!" (1917 No. 17, 1996). First of all, the BT has a terrible record on defense of Mumia, remaining largely silent for years, while its only comment on the Philadelphia MOVE organization which Mumia supports was a disgusting piece in the first issue of 1917 (Winter 1986) denouncing the SL for not politically polemicizing against two MOVE spokesmen at a memorial meeting we held in the summer of 1985 for the victims of the police bombing of MOVE.

But beyond that, the BT's conception of "united-front defense" is deeply flawed. Its 1996 article argues that the SL should have set up a united-front defense committee, and then talks positively of the 12 August 1995 demonstration of up to 10,000 in Philadelphia as "the largest single event in the U.S. campaign" and an example of what "small groups working in concert" can accomplish. But that demonstration, rigidly run by Sam Marcy's Workers World Party, showed precisely the pitfalls of such on-going "united-front committees" which in fact turn into miniature popular fronts. In the event, the Marcyites refused to permit speakers from the SL and Partisan Defense Committee (or even the Maoist RCP [Revolutionary Communist Party]). Moreover, as we mentioned to you, there were attempts to censor WV's criticisms of Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam. The WV articles at the time make clear that a genuine united-front defense of Mumia was called for, seeking joint actions where possible and not censoring any tendency. The ICL's particular focus was correctly on working-class centered mobilizations.

On this general subject, comrade Negrete dug up an article by James P. Cannon (on "The Union Square Meeting," July 1931) criticizing those who used defense meetings as a platform for polemics among left groups. This was a point Cannon made more than once. As I noted on the phone, when the International Labor Defense under Cannon's leadership sharply attacked the other defense committees in the case of Sacco and Vanzetti it was because there were several competing committees, and the AFL-sponsored outfit accused the ILD [International Labor Defense] of trying to get Sacco and Vanzetti killed by continuing demonstrations after the sentencing (which supposedly would anger the conservative Massachusetts governor). Our point here is not that one can never criticize defense work, but rather that revolutionaries should be wary of mixing two different forms of struggle in a situation where there are high stakes involved.

General Strike

Another question you have raised, specifically in your letter of 4 June and in conversations with Frank and Ed, is the question of the general strike. At one level, this is a tactical question, but because it is directly linked to the struggle for power, it is an issue that throws into stark relief the actual policies of various tendencies.

Before getting to the substance of the general strike question, I want to make an observation concerning the ICL's *International Internal Bulletin* on the matter. You requested we send you this bulletin, and after consideration we decided not to. The fundamental reason is that we did not see sufficient political basis for doing so. We did send you a copy of the document I wrote in late 1994 on "Popular Front and General Strike in Italy," on the condition that you not quote it or pass it on to others, as we have not gone over it for security questions. This should give you a very good idea of our views

on the question. We will be distributing this and some other documents from discussion inside the ICL on the subject of the general strike after going over them. However, we will choose what of those materials to distribute publicly, because from the standpoint of the League for the Fourth International, as the political continuity of the best traditions of the ICL, those are the internal bulletins of our tendency. I think if you see it in that light, you will readily understand why we do not simply hand out those documents to all interested parties.

First of all, I want to make a general observation on this question. You write that, "Just as at other times the Vietnam war, Bolivia or Afghanistan were key discussions of the day, we feel that the general strike is among the most important issues facing the Left in 1998." While events in Bolivia have had more of a regional impact, notably the failed opportunities for workers' revolution in 1952 and 1970-71, the Vietnam War had a global impact unleashing an "antiwar movement" that involved millions and radicalized hundreds of thousands of youth, turning many toward communism; and the U.S. made opposition to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan against CIA-fanned feudalist *mujahedin* (holy warriors) the opening shot of the second anti-Soviet Cold War, ultimately leading to the collapse of the Soviet bloc degenerated/deformed workers' states. To put the general strike "in general" in that category is confusionist and ultimately tailist. The general strike is a question that arises as an immediate matter in particular places at particular times. Why would you pose it at a higher level, as some kind of worldwide phenomenon?

I think the answer is the following: after the wave of counterrevolution swept East Europe, the imperialist bourgeoisies went on a triumphalist binge. American presidents (both Bush and Clinton) proclaimed a post-Soviet "New World Order" dominated by the U.S., State Department ideologues proclaimed the "end of history," and in a frenzy to further drive up the rate of exploitation now that they didn't have the "red menace" to worry about, capitalists all over the world launched an offensive against workers' gains, unions and social welfare programs. The ICL saw this as a period of all-round defeat, concluding that it was necessary to circle the wagons, withdraw from workers' struggles (which supposedly for the first time since the Paris Commune were not linked to the struggle for socialism) and defend the revolutionary program in the abstract. What this meant in reality for the ICL was to abandon the revolutionary program in the class struggle, leading to wholesale revisions and outright betrayal (in Brazil). However, the class struggle continued unabated, and even intensified in the face of the bourgeois offensive.

Various reformists and centrists made a similar analysis to that of the ICL leadership, and concluded that it was necessary to drop references to Leninism and socialist revolution in order to concentrate on labor struggles. That was certainly evident in the recent Puerto Rico general strike, where the bourgeoisie vociferously red-baited the strikers, pointing to all the well-known radicals who were active in the telephone strike. In this context of renewed and often sharp labor struggle, a variety of centrist groups have raised the general strike as the crowning demand of their labor-centered minimum program. In their hands, this slogan becomes the embodiment of the Pabloist program of "make the lefts fight." The cornerstone of Trotskyism, expressed in the 1938 *Transitional Program*, is the understanding that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership of the proletariat, and that this can only be solved by building a new world party of socialist revolution, the Fourth International. Pabloism negated that conception, arguing that one or another non-revolutionary, non-proletarian leadership could

be pressured into approximating a revolutionary policy. In calling for general strikes anywhere and everywhere, the latter-day Pabloists paint the labor bureaucracy as the latest “new vanguard.”

The ICL until recently and the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International today have insisted that this fundamental thesis of the program of the Fourth International remains valid. But in the recent post-Soviet period, various groups that in the past would have tailed after the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front or the Allende popular front in Chile or Mitterrand in France are busily chasing after the wave of labor struggles. In centering their program on calls for general strikes in Italy, France, Britain, Ontario (!), Argentina, Australia and elsewhere, these pseudo-Trotskyists are trying to pressure the top labor bureaucrats to adopt a more militant posture. But as Trotsky pointed out repeatedly, the general strike poses directly the question of which class shall rule. To call for general strikes everywhere as the central or crowning demand begs the key question of revolutionary leadership. It poses the question of state power without preparing the working class to resolve it, through the struggle for a revolutionary workers’ party, that is a Leninist-Trotskyist party. The ICL leadership’s response to this is essentially to oppose the call for general strikes in the absence of a cohered revolutionary party, that is to say, everywhere in the world today. This was the line Parks took in the fight in the Lega Trotskista d’Italia [LTD’I] in 1994.

The League for the Fourth International takes a different line: we stress that in situations where a general strike is concretely posed (for example in France in November-December 1995, in Korea in early 1998 or Puerto Rico today), the task of revolutionaries is to raise this in a way that emphasizes the need for mobilizing the exploited and oppressed on the basis of working-class politics, to break from the bourgeoisie and build a revolutionary vanguard that can lead the struggle for power to victory. In cases where the general strike is bandied about by reformist labor fakery and their centrist tails as a means for building pressure to form a new popular front or to bring a labourite government into office, we expose these class-collaborationist schemes, emphasizing the need for sharp class struggle and for building a revolutionary workers’ party. In both cases, we seek to address the immediate struggles of the working people and oppressed with transitional demands pointing to and explicitly calling for the struggle for socialist revolution. You can see an example of the LFI’s [League for the Fourth International, headed by IG] approach in our leaflet on Puerto Rico, or in the document sent you previously on Italy in 1994.

Let me briefly summarize the debate in Italy. In September 1992, there was an explosion of working-class anger when the union tops sold out the sliding scale of wages, a key defense against inflation that was one of the main gains of the 1969 worker/student struggles in Italy. In demonstrations from Rome to Torino, the leaders of the metalworkers’ union were pelted with eggs, tomatoes, coins, rocks and bolts by the union ranks. So when, in September 1994, the right-wing government called for slashing pensions and other elements of the “welfare state,” the reformist party and union bureaucrats could easily imagine this scenario repeating itself on a larger scale. At the same time, they saw an opportunity to tap petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois dissatisfaction with the government led by the sinister media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, a member of the secret P-2 “masonic” lodge that was behind a lot of the government’s dirty war tactics during the “years of lead” in the 1970s, and the fascist Gianfranco Fini. So the bureaucrats decided to get out in front of the discontent before it got out of hand. They called a series of one-day “general strikes” (there were three of them that fall) in or-

der to blow off steam, and to build pressure for the formation of a popular front with some remnants of the Christian Democracy.

Italy is a country where this kind of tactic is frequently used, and where everyone including the working class is acutely attuned to what is really behind the different political maneuvers. (They even have a word for it, *diestrologia*, the science of what’s behind it all.) So when a few days before the first of these fake “general strikes,” Gino, a member of the leadership of the Italian section of the ICL, the LTD’I, sent in a proposal for a leaflet to be distributed there calling in the headline “For an Authentic General Strike to Defeat the Financial Law,” I immediately said that this was a disguised call to build a popular front. It was a call for a more militant version of what the reformist tops pretended to be doing. But what they were actually doing was heading off an explosion of militant labor struggle before it could get going.

The Italian “general strikes” in the fall of 1994 were quite large, with demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of workers, but they were essentially parades. At no point did a rank-and-file revolt break out that burst the bureaucratic straitjacket, and it was evident beforehand that this would be the case. Even bourgeois newspaper accounts made it clear that the bureaucrats were firmly in control, in contrast to 1992. The COBAS (syndicalist “rank and file committees”) that were strong in certain places, such as the Alfa Romeo auto plant in Milano, were speaking from the bureaucrats’ platforms instead of organizing breakaways as they had in ‘92. In these circumstances, to center on calls for a more combative, “authentic” or “unlimited” general strike amounted to calling on the bureaucrats to act more militant and thus to build more pressure for a bourgeois popular front to squelch the potential for a working-class revolt.

Most of the pseudo-Trotskyist left adopted exactly that policy. Grisolia/Ferrando of the Proposta group inside Rifondazione Comunista (who are also leaders of the “International Trotskyist Opposition” sort of in the United Secretariat [Usec]); Livio Maitan’s Usec majority, also inside Rifondazione; the Falcemartello (hammer and sickle) group, followers of Ted Grant’s Militant tendency inside the British Labour Party—all of them called for one or another form of “unlimited general strike” as a militant expression of their *pressure politics*. And that is what some of our comrades wanted to do as well. But as Trotskyists, we want to break the ranks from the control of their pro-capitalist misleaders. As I wrote in the document sent you earlier, if there had been pressure for a general strike building from below, against the opposition of the reformist tops, then an agitational call for a general strike would have been in order, as it was in 1992 when we called for it. But in this very different situation, the centrists’ general strike calls were an attempt to lobby the reformists, to act as midwives for the popular front in gestation.

Just a few weeks after the end of the strike, a popular front was formed (the Ulivo, or Olive Tree coalition), it won the elections with a former Christian Democratic technocrat (Prodi) as its leader, and once in office this class-collaborationist bourgeois government began carrying out the anti-working-class austerity measures that the Berlusconi/Fini right-wing government had been unable to ram down the workers’ throats. The various pseudo-Trotskyists who earlier called for a “real general strike” now claim to oppose the Ulivo coalition, but they call to vote for Rifondazione Comunista, whose parliamentary deputies are crucial to keeping Prodi and the popular front in office. Gino quit the LTD’I shortly before we visited there in December 1994, and soon joined Rifondazione where as far as I know he remains today along with Maitan, Grisolia and a host of other pseudo-Trotskyists.

In your 4 June letter you raise “the events of Paris 1995 and the ‘Days of Action’ in Ontario (with a similar proposal now being thrown about by the AFL-CIO in the mid-west).” These are fundamentally different situations, and if you don’t see that from the outset you won’t be able to understand the task of revolutionaries. The idea that the groveling pro-Democratic Party labor lieutenants of U.S. imperialism in the AFL-CIO could lead a general strike or anything remotely approximating it is absurd. John Sweeney is no less a diehard enemy of labor radicalism than were George Meany or Lane Kirkland, he just has to adapt to a different situation in which there is a lot of pent-up anger over the destruction of the unions that the AFL-CIO tops have helped carry out. The Ontario “Days of Action” were essentially gimmicks by the labor officialdom to recoup working-class support after the disastrous experience of the social-democratic NDP government of Bob Rae, which initiated many of the drastic cuts of social programs that the Tory government Mike Harris is now carrying out. Still, in some cases, these big demonstrations did take on considerable size and shook up the ruling class somewhat. Paris in November-December 1995 was a very different situation of explosive working-class struggle where the possibility of a general strike was concretely posed.

Let’s deal with the union-sponsored “days of action” in Ontario first, because it is simpler. There have been 11 so far in the last couple years. In some cases they have been quite large and militant as in the fall of 1996 when many tens of thousands of unionists from around the province demonstrated in Toronto against Harris cuts. Lately these labor demonstrations have dwindled to a few thousand in St. Catharines on May Day 1998 and a reported 5,000 (according to the CUPE public employees union) in Kingston on June 8. As you were present in the latter case, you will know better what the actual situation was. But even in the largest protests, what these amount to is an extra-parliamentary pressure tactic on the Tory government. They were initiated from the top, there was no indication of mass pressure to turn them into an all-out strike, they did not seriously attempt to stop government actions. They were, in short, day-long union demonstrations, nothing more, masquerading under the name of a general strike.

You don’t believe us? Then ask yourself this: why, in September 1997, when Tory Harris’ Bill 136 which attacked public workers’ right to strike was under debate, didn’t the Ontario Federation of Labour tops simply shut down the province? Instead there was a demonstration in North Bay of somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 and that was it. Or why, a month later, when the province’s 126,000 teachers struck against the Harris government’s Bill 160, which would hand control over the entire educational system to one man, wasn’t there an all-out general strike, or even a strike by all public sector workers in support of the teachers? Because these were attempts to blow off steam and give a veneer of militancy to the NDP/OFL [New Democratic Party/Ontario Federation of Labour] sellouts. Those like the International Socialists, Socialist Action and the BT who call for a province-wide general strike in this context, are simply aiding the social-democratic fakers to refurbish their image. Their entire program is one of *tailism*. This is Pabloism in a “labor” guise.

Where is the program for the struggle for power? At least the I.S. and Socialist Action advertise their general strike calls as a means to “kick out the Tories.” What does that mean in practice? That in the next elections, these left-reformists will help to put back in the NDP, offering it “critical” support as they invariably do. The BT, for its part, explicitly states:

“A general strike against the Harris government would not likely lead to an immediate struggle for proletarian power. But a defensive victory won through mass action would cer-

tainly alter the entire political landscape in favor of the workers and their allies, and make it easier to win future struggles.”

—“Once Again on the General Strike Slogan:
In Defense of Tactics,” 1917 No. 20, 1998

So they explicitly reject Trotsky’s position (who based himself on Engels, as you know) that a general strike necessarily poses the question of power. For the BT to assert the opposite means that, in fact, they are not talking about a real general strike but a more militant version of what the OFL tops are calling for, a pressure tactic. In fact, what they are calling for is a strike for a less hostile bourgeois government.

The BT claims that this is what we called for in *Workers Vanguard* No. 39 (1 March 1974), in the article “Why We Call for a General Strike in Britain Now.” As you know, I pointed to this same article in my 1994 Italy document, to explain that at times Trotskyists do call for defensive general strikes. But we did not say in 1974 that the question of power would not be posed. On the contrary, we wrote then: “Should such a strike be victorious, even under reformist leaders and despite their inevitable attempts to sabotage the struggle, it would then open up a prerevolutionary situation.” As opposed to the Mandelites who called (*Red Weekly*, 1 January 1974) on the labor officialdom to lead the struggle (“TUC Must Act—General Strike”) we called for the strike to be organized through shop stewards councils. And we called “For a Labour Party/TUC Government Pledged to a Socialist Program of Expropriating the Capitalist Class.” This formula meant that such a government including the TUC would be non-parliamentary in character.

The policy of the League for the Fourth international today is the direct continuity of our policies in 1974. This directly contradicts the tailist line of the BT and the abstentionist policy of the ICL leadership today. We fight to build a genuinely communist party, including through unmasking the revolutionary pretensions of various pretenders to the mantle of Trotskyism, and in conjunction with this through intervention in the class struggle.

This brings me to Paris in November–December 1995. Both you and the IBT [International Bolshevik Tendency] claim that the ICL did not call for a general strike then. The BT writes: “while calling for extending the strikes into the private sector, the Ligue Trotskyste de France deliberately refrained from calling for a general strike, instead asserting that ‘the question of power is posed’” (from a letter to the IG, an excerpt of which was published in 1917 No. 20 [1998]). No, the LTF did not center its propaganda on calls for a general strike, as the BT claims revolutionaries should have done and as various French centrists did. But did it leave matters to an abstract assertion that the question of power is posed? Not at all. In a leaflet issued in mid-December 1995 (reprinted in *WV* No. 636, 5 January 1996), just as the struggle in Paris was coming to a head, the LTF wrote: “For some time now, the situation has been moving toward a total general strike, which would pose the question of who will be the master in this country.... What is posed in this historic strike is workers’ rule of society. What is posed is the struggle for a workers’ government, for the overthrow of the capitalist system which is destined to perish and not to be reformed.”

Contrast this with the BT’s proposed “call for a general strike to bring down Juppé”—to replace the conservative government with what? In the situation in France at the time, this was in fact a call for a general strike to bring in a new popular-front government.

Nor did the LTF leaflet limit itself to the “maximum program,” it also raised a series of transitional demands for elected strike committees that could be transformed into factory committees, for mass pickets, for worker-immigrant

defense guards, for a sliding scale of wages and hours. We referred to the Transitional Program of the Fourth International and the documents of the Third Congress of the Third International posing the need for such demands to bridge the gap between the strikers' defensive smuggles and a revolutionary fight for power. This was in sharp distinction to Pouvoir Ouvrier [PO], for example, the French affiliate of Workers Power, which published leaflet after leaflet headlined "[For an] Unlimited General Strike!" The PO leaflets make it clear they are pressuring the reformist bureaucrats to act, calling: "it is necessary to demand that the union leaders lead an effective united struggle, an unlimited general strike." As for the burning need for a revolutionary party, PO only calls (occasionally, in passing) for "a new party of working people and youth"—not a word about Trotskyism.

I think that there should in fact have been a greater emphasis on the question of the program for a general strike in the propaganda of the LTF. This was downplayed in the initial supplement issued by the LTF a week earlier. This was because there were differences in the leadership over this. We were all agreed that to center the program on a call for a general strike, as the centrists did, was a policy of tailism in a situation where the bureaucrats were still firmly in control. Every single one of the demonstrations was called by the top FO [Force Ouvrière] and CGT [Confédération Générale du Travail] leadership, and when they decided to call it all off they were able to do so. Yet because the huge demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of workers were combined with an actual strike of railroad and postal workers, in which the continuation of the strike was voted on in mass assemblies every day, this had the potential of getting out of hand. In that situation, the key was to call, as the LTF did, for building a revolutionary leadership fighting on a transitional program. There was in fact resistance (from Parks) to putting any mention of a general strike in the mid-December leaflet, but in fact it was included and spelled out in some detail. This was also the case in the post-strike article in *Workers Vanguard*.

Reforge an Authentically Trotskyist Fourth International!

This raises a point which you mentioned in a phone call with Ed. You reportedly said of the Italy document that it seemed Norden made a bloc with Parks, given the differences over calling in any way for a general strike. In Italy, I did block with Parks *against Gino*, whose policy was *a cover for the popular front*. In that situation, to call on the bureaucrats (who were the only ones in a position to do so) to organize an unlimited general strike meant calling for more union militancy in order to lay the basis for a center-left coalition to kick out the right-wing Berlusconi/Fini government. A "bloc" against the proto-factional opposition to the Trotskyist program presented by Gino was not only principled but *obligatory*. It was utterly necessary to form a majority to fight against the popular-frontist challenge. Perhaps you don't believe that this was Gino's thrust, but the evidence is there as he immediately joined Rifondazione, the "outside" prop for the Prodi government.

In France as well, you might say there was a bloc in December 1995 between myself and Parks, against a French leadership that had utterly liquidated in the face of the greatest working-class upsurge since 1968. The LTF CC [Central Committee] was incapable of even producing a leaflet to intervene in the November–December 1995 strike movement. And, in fact, through intervention from the International Secretariat, the essentials of a revolutionary policy were eventually presented in the LTF propaganda—not enough in my

opinion, but the key demands were there. And that policy contrasts sharply with the *centrist general strike-mongers à la the BT* and Workers Power.

I understand as well, that you have said that you do not see why the BT and the IG can't find "common ground." This is to understand nothing of the issues we raised in our press, in our letters and conversations with you. It is also echoing the BT's line in the latest *1917*. In fact, you and the BT appear to share a similar viewpoint on the ICL. Your article on the Spartacist League is overwhelmingly focused on organizational questions, with next to nothing on program. The BT has likewise sought to make the question of the party regime into an independent issue, separate from the revolutionary program. In the 1939–40 fight against the Shachtman/Burnham opposition in the Socialist Workers Party, Trotsky and Cannon repeatedly emphasized that the organizational question cannot be divorced from the fundamental programmatic questions.

The BT adopts the outlook of a host of social-democratic ex-Trotskyists who have made a living from peddling horror stories of organizational atrocities committed by the Stalinists and by various fake-Trotskyists. Your reported remark and the BT's evident appetites toward the IG betray the same social-democratic viewpoint. You fail to understand that while the BT is quite obviously the right opposition to the ICL today, the IG/LFI represents a left opposition upholding the previous program that the new leadership now wants to chop off in bits and pieces. There is a long history of calls such as yours, going back to those who wanted Trotsky to ally with Bukharin against Stalin after the latter two fell out in 1929. This was a particular hobby horse of Pierre Broué in his 1988 biography of Trotsky. Broué polemicizes against Isaac Deutscher for writing that: "The whole attitude of the Opposition was guided by the following principle: 'With Stalin against Bukharin? Yes. With Bukharin against Stalin? Never.'" Broué advocates such a left-right bloc over the regime question, a policy we polemicized against in the *Spartacist* (Nos. 45–46, Winter 1990–91) review of Broué's *Trotsky*.

Broué claims that this is apocryphal, that Deutscher just made it up since he doesn't provide a supporting quote. Yet following the exile of Trotsky, his principal effort in 1929 as the International Left Opposition was being launched was to sharply differentiate between the left and right oppositions to the Stalin regime. In an article on "Groupings in the Communist Opposition" (March 1929), Trotsky writes:

"The Opposition is now taking shape on the basis of principled *ideological demarcation* and not on the basis of *mass actions*. This corresponds to the character of our era....mass actions tend as a rule to wash away secondary and episodic disagreements and to aid the fusion of friendly and close tendencies. Conversely, ideological groupings in a period of stagnation or ebb tide disclose a great tendency toward differentiation, splits, and internal struggles. We cannot leap out of the period in which we live. We must pass through it. A clear, precise ideological differentiation is unconditionally necessary. It prepares future successes."

At the same time, a letter to co-thinkers internationally ("Tasks of the Opposition," March 1929) begins with the categorical statement:

"Two irreconcilably opposed tendencies are usually listed under the label of opposition: the revolutionary tendency and the opportunist tendency. A hostile attitude toward centrism and toward the 'regime' is the only thing they have in common. But this is a purely negative bond. Our struggle against centrism derives from the fact that centrism is semi-

opportunist and covers up full-blown opportunism, despite temporary and sharp disagreements with the latter. For this reason there cannot even be talk of a bloc between the Left Opposition and the Right Opposition. This requires no commentary.”

I think the core of what the MEG has been arguing is there should be such a left-right bloc of the IG and the BT against the SL, a position that we reject, and any genuine Trotskyist must reject, *in principle*.

Comrades, we have sought to pose key programmatic questions which would be the basis for serious discussions about the basis for reforging a Fourth International “that Trotsky would have recognized as his own,” as we put it in a felicitous phrase that we used in the ICL and continue to use today.

We have raised the issue that *picket lines mean don't cross*. This is not a pious vow but a fundamental principle of working-class action, and one that the reformist union bureaucracy and a host of centrist pseudo-Trotskyists violate repeatedly. Jim Cullen of the BT is not the only one to waltz across picket lines. So, too, did Andrew Pulley, the American SWP's [Socialist Workers Party] one-time presidential candidate when he was a steel worker in Chicago; so too does Barry Weisleder in Canada, the leading Mandeliste spokesman there; so too did British SWP steel workers at the Ravenscraig plant during the 1985–86 coal strike. Their excuse was always that it was another union's picket line, and usually that they were “building support for the strikers on the inside.” We say that it is *impossible* to build support for strikers by crossing picket lines. We say that any socialist who crosses a picket line is a scab, and we have nothing to discuss with such class traitors. If there is to be a basis for future discussions between us, we need to know where you stand on this key question.

Likewise, the Russian Question has always been a key line of demarcation among those who claim to represent the continuity of revolutionary Marxism. When the second Cold War was kicked off by the imperialist hue and cry over “poor little Afghanistan” supposedly languishing under the Soviet boot, the Spartacist tendency proclaimed “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!” The BT flinched in the face of the Reaganite onslaught, eventually admitting that they opposed that slogan (as we said from the beginning that they really did), trying to weasel around with talk of supposedly defending the Soviet intervention. This was a litmus test in the heat of the international class struggle. We proudly stand on the slogan and program we defended at that time, which was deeply and explicitly counterposed to the Stalinist program of “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism and intimately linked to our fight for proletarian political revolution in the Soviet Union itself. We would like to know where the MEG stands on this slogan: do you support “Hail Red Army in Afghanistan” or not?

Similarly over the issues that have arisen in the fight with the ICL leadership: is there an opposition popular front in Mexico (as the ICL said for more than a decade [and] we say today) or not (as the ICL now claims)? Did the Stalinist bureaucracy “lead” the counterrevolution in East Germany, as the ICL says today, or was it led by the bourgeoisie of the

Fourth Reich and its SPD lieutenants, as the ICL said then and we say now?

In other words, as one says in Spanish, we are calling on you to “define yourselves”—in English, to take a stand—politically. Obviously, if you oppose crossing picket lines on principle and support the slogan unambiguously standing for Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, this will mean a break with the BT. You must ask yourselves if you wish to pursue your political lives in the company of those who defend scabbing but flinch over defending the Soviet Army fighting the CIA-backed counterrevolutionary cutthroats. If you want to visualize what BT politics mean in practice, think about what would happen to them if they tried to cross telephone workers' picket lines in Puerto Rico today, or what they would say to Afghan women who have been thrown into a living hell after Gorbachev withdrew the troops from the Soviet intervention we hailed and the BT waffled on.

Finally, a brief comment on the letter you gave our comrades in Albany today. You go on at length about the Spartacus Youth Club's [SYC] fight against an anti-democratic attempt to silence it on the San Francisco State University [SFSU] campus in the mid-80s. You talk of your “objections to SLers parading in Third Reich regalia” at SFSU, pontificating it is “completely inappropriate for Trotskyists to be running around in Nazi uniforms while performing party work,” declaring that “The SL's antics could only feed this confusion between brown and red in the students' and workers' minds on that campus,” and denouncing the SL/SYC's “disgusting personalistic attack on a bourgeois feminist.” This is entirely taken from the anti-Spartacist filth spewed out by the anti-communists of the BT, who willfully seek to distort the SL/SYC's mocking of the student government and official feminist bureaucrats who tried (and failed) to prevent us from fighting for communism on that campus. Far from causing confusion, everyone on that campus knew this was guerrilla theater. The BT pretends not to in order to curry favor with the anti-communist witchhunters.

Moreover, in the course of this letter (in which you also repeat the BT's absurd distortions over KAL 007 and the Challenger explosion) you mention as an aside that you think “Abram Leon's *The Jewish Question* contains a somewhat ahistorical definition of fascism.” Thus you brush aside the fundamental Trotskyist work on the Jewish question, one which we and several generations of Trotskyists before us have stood on. On what basis do you make such claims? And what does that have to do with the Red Avenger campaign at SFSU? We must state clearly that your anti-SL polemic and this latest letter from you are counterposed to Trotskyism. Furthermore, they are downright ridiculous in many respects. Is this BT-derived mishmash what you understand as Bolshevik politics? If so, you are grievously mistaken.

If you genuinely aspire to be communists, you must come to grips with the fundamental programmatic issues. Enough already.

For Bolshevism,
Jan Norden
for the Internationalist Group

Document No. 12

MEG letter to IG

Albany, New York
February 10, 1999

“...indeed it be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for, while both are dear, piety requires us to honor truth above our friends.”

— Aristotle (*Ethics*)

Dear Comrades,

It was with a sense of regret that we read your reply (dated 18 July [1998]) to our letter of 4 June [1998]. And it is with a sense of profound necessity that we commit to paper our reply. While never explicitly stated we had hoped the meetings that occurred between members of the IG [Internationalist Group] and the MEG [Marxist Educational Group] throughout the first half of 1998 would be able to lead to some form of principled regroupment. Our reading of your last letter discourages us from believing such an event is at all likely to occur at any time in the near future. The better part of the first ten pages of this 17 page letter are devoted to an attack on the draft of an unpublished polemic we had sent you directed against the Spartacist League [SL]. Your unhesitating defense of the ICL [International Communist League]—the organization from which your leading cadres were bureaucratically purged in a thoroughly grotesque manner—was delivered by Marjorie Stamberg to our member, Don U. in Albany with an explicit statement that should our criticisms of the SL ever see the light of day you would cease all contact with the MEG.

We can appreciate the difficulty for all of the IG comrades in re-evaluating something in which you have invested so much of your lives. But don't you owe something to that investment? I find inspiration in a comment attributed to James P. Cannon that his youth followed him the whole of his life, looking over his shoulder and whispering: “Be true to me, for I am your youth—don't betray me.”

You describe our polemic as “a collection of anti-Spartacist prejudices, distortions and falsifications...” (IG to MEG 7/18/98) and declare: “We must state clearly that your anti-SL polemic and this latest letter from you are counterposed to Trotskyism” (*Ibid.*). And in closing write “If you genuinely aspire to be communists, you must come to grips with the fundamental programmatic issues. Enough already” (*Ibid.*). We are disappointed by these dismissive polemical attacks on us.

Our understanding of Trotskyism is specifically that Trotsky made a difficult and principled fight to save Marxism from Stalinist perversion. That this battle cost him his position as an official in the USSR, the lives of his closest family and friends and ultimately his own life. Even in exile he devoted his energy and resources to an attempt to preserve the programmatic heritage of Marxism and ultimately to build a new, revolutionary international whose task he described as being:

“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base ones program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour of action arrives....”

Trotsky subjected the degeneration of the Bolshevik party to rigorous analysis—at several times substantially reorienting his views in light of material reality. (Most significantly his

decision to break from a perspective of acting as an external Left Opposition on the Communist parties in favor of constituting the Fourth International, a reaction to the profound betrayals of the Stalinist parties that paved the way for Hitler's ascension to power in 1933. Trotsky's shift was codified in two documents written in July of 1933: “It Is Necessary to Build Communist Parties and an International Anew” and “It Is Impossible to Remain in the Same International with the Stalins, Manuilskys, Lozovskys & Co.” [both reprinted in English in the Pathfinder anthology *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*]) We find such analysis lacking in the IG's accounts of the degeneration of the ICL. The IG defends every position promulgated up to virtually the eve of your own expulsion and then repeatedly points:

“to the origins of the ICL's political degeneration in a demoralized reaction to the historic political defeat for the proletariat represented by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet degenerated workers' state and the bureaucratically deformed workers' states in East Europe during the period of 1989–92.”

—*Ibid.* pp 1–2

Yet, with the significant exception of the fight around Norden's position on what factors accounted for the collapse of the DDR [German Democratic Republic] (the “Humboldt Speech”) the IG does not advance a single public disagreement with the ICL's line on the collapse of Stalinism. In fact on page 4 of your letter to us you confirm your support of the political line of the Spartacist pamphlet, “How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled.” You write: “We stand on this analysis, and indeed the founders of the IG played a leading role in formulating and defending it at the time,” (*Ibid.*).

Time and again the IG comrades have reiterated the fallacy that “the organization question is not a political question;” yet the Spartacist League of the 1970s was capable of producing fine polemical and historical materials. For example “The Stalinist School of Falsification Revisited” and “Genesis of Pabloism.” These writings are of tremendous value in educating new generations of Trotskyist cadres and in probing the theoretical and programmatic underpinnings of the degeneration of the USec [United Secretariat of the Fourth International] and the SWP [Socialist Workers Party/U.S.]. This capacity for serious analysis is one aspect of the gulf which separated the early SL from the Healyites; both organizations opposed Pabloist liquidationism, but the Healyites proved incapable of developing a coherent and thorough-going analyses of events in the post-World War II world. The SL set out on a different course and simultaneously attempted to provide a Trotskyist analysis of the crises of the Fourth International *and* to forge a way forward. We can not fully comprehend comrade Norden's incapacity to attempt to produce a similar study of the SL today. Instead the IG offers apologetics while scrupulously avoiding the tricky questions.

What We Are

You ask us to define ourselves, “to take a stand—politically” but we think you know very well how we stand. Every issue of our newsletter has carried a column that states clearly that:

“We base our political understanding on the pioneering research of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. We identify, po-

litically, with the October Revolution and Lenin's revolutionary Third International. Finally, we trace our theoretical heritage through the political struggle waged by Leon Trotsky against the growing bureaucratization of the Soviet Union under the rule of Stalin. We champion the building of the revolutionary Fourth International just as Trotsky did."

We know the IG is also aware of the MEG's stance on the crises of world Trotskyism. We are against Pabloite liquidation. Norden writes to us:

"You write of your 'lineage to the SL,' and later say that 'it falls to the MEG, among others, to carry on the fight begun by the early SL.' Certainly no false modesty there, but of itself that's no crime: the revolution will not be made by a bunch of wilting flowers. As an appetite it's even admirable. But you evidence no real understanding of what the fight of the 'early SL' was...."

For good measure you later add, "you show no awareness of the yawning gap between your pretensions and your actual politics."

We will attempt to clarify our position once more for the record. We agree with the proposition that:

"the Fourth International was destroyed as the world party of socialist revolution some 40 years ago, at the hands of the liquidationist current headed by Michel Pablo (Raptis). The Pabloists abandoned the fight for an independent Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard of the proletariat and instead chased after the Stalinists and a host of other petty-bourgeois and even bourgeois misleaders, justifying their capitulation by relying on the pressures of the supposed 'objective revolutionary process.'"

—Jan Norden, *Prometheus Research Series* No. 4:

"Yugoslavia, East Europe and the Fourth International: The Evolution of Pabloist Liquidationism"

We believe James P. Cannon led an important struggle against this liquidationism in the 1950s blocking with other anti-Pablo forces grouped in the IC (International Committee) most importantly Healy in Britain and Lambert in France. But we believe that this struggle was flawed in fundamental ways, not least among these shortcomings was the fact that the IC conducted the fight along organizational rather than theoretical lines. The IC did not attempt to search for the roots of the Pabloite deviation in the Fourth International's belated recognition of the deformed workers' states and flawed understanding of the development of the Yugoslav and later Chinese revolution. As Norden made clear the IC "virtually ignored the Yugoslav affair because of their own complicity," (*Ibid.*).

Thus when the Cuban revolution occurred the IC was no more clear on the contradictory elements of its unfolding than it had been about the Yugoslav revolution. The SWP's position on Cuba (as formulated by party veteran Joseph Hansen) was fundamentally in agreement with that of the Pabloites and this put the two international groupings on a conversion course. But a small layer of SWP cadres gathered in the Revolutionary Tendency [RT] fought this revisionist course. Tim Wohlforth, Jim Robertson and Shane Mage produced important minority documents correctly characterizing the unfolding of the Cuban revolution and criticizing the SWP majority's approach (see *Marxist Bulletin* No. 8: "Cuba and Marxist Theory"). The RT also opposed reunification discussions between the IC and the Pabloites and criticized:

"the failure of the SWP leadership to apply and develop the theory and method of Marxism (that) has resulted in a dangerous drift from a revolutionary world perspective. The adoption in practice of the empiricist and objectivist approach of the Pabloites, the minimization of the critical importance of the creation of the new Marxist proletarian

leadership in all countries, the consistent underplaying of the counterrevolutionary role and potential of Stalinism, the powerful tendencies toward accommodation to non-proletarian leadership in the colonial revolution—these pose, if not countered, a serious threat to the future development of the SWP itself."

—"In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective" reprinted as *Marxist Bulletin* No. 1

As we all know the RT lost its battle inside the SWP and the majority leadership actually rewrote the party statutes in order to bureaucratically expel the minority. The SWP in expelling the RT deprived itself of the ability to self-correct. The leading RT comrades of course went on to found the Spartacist League.

When we refer to the RT and the early SL it is to this heritage we refer. It is this heritage we see as the "common ground" between the IBT [International Bolshevik Tendency], the IG and the MEG. Norden writes that my suggestion that there should be "common ground" is tantamount to "understanding nothing of the issues we raise in our press, in our letters and conversations with you," (IG p 14). What we understand is that we are among the few calling ourselves Trotskyists today who have some theoretical understanding of the way in which Pabloism disarms the working class and sabotages the cause of revolutionary Marxism. We know that you hold a similar position—you emphasize in your letter to us that "*the Internationalist Group and the League for the Fourth International represent the political continuity of the Trotskyist ICL*" (*Ibid.* p 2). The IBT has also committed itself to:

"the struggle to ensure that the heritage which the SL carried forward is not lost. The critical task which we face in the next period is to regroup the cadres necessary to rebuild the nucleus of an authentically Bolshevik organization in North America and internationally, an organization that will be worthy of the heroic tradition of Cannon, Trotsky and Lenin."

—"The Road to Jimstown" in *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* No. 4, May 1985, p 14

Certainly the IG must be aware that to the public in general, the three organizations' positions on revolutionary continuity must seem identical at least in terms of historical analysis. It at least seemed reasonable to us to suppose that we shared a high enough level of political agreement among us that we would benefit from seriously grappling with the political differences that would prevent us being in one common organization rather than three separate ones. We were aware that there were differences in our analysis of certain events (including the degeneration of the ICL) but we wanted to explore the depth and breadth of these differences through political struggle before drawing definitive conclusions. We knew for example that the IG stood by the SL's historic position of "hailing" the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The IG is of course aware that we share with the IBT a belief that this slogan is Stalinophilic and tends to confuse an extension of "political support" to the Stalinists where we feel the issue should really be one of military support. As numerous IG comrades, including Ed C. and Norden, expressed to both Don U. and I on multiple occasions the key issue lay in whether or not one defended the USSR and saw the defeat of the reactionary clerical mujahdeen as progressive. Clearly the IBT, like ourselves, the IG and the ICL were fundamentally on the same side of the barricades—in marked contrast to the Pabloites and the Cliffites.

Similar disagreements over Solidarnosc stemmed over whether or not one should (as the SL proposed) be prepared to take responsibility in advance for any crimes committed by the Stalinists in the course of suppressing Solidarnosc. We

know both you and the ICL probably view us as being Stalinophobic because of our general unwillingness to act as public apologists for the Stalinists (a task not shirked by the SWP providing the Stalinists in question are of Cuban origin).

Nonetheless we believe that the fundamental question lay in our common recognition of Solidarnosc as a counter-revolutionary movement in the face of the vast majority of ostensible Trotskyists (including the RWL [Revolutionary Workers League] to which we used to adhere) characterizing this movement as a revolutionary anti-Stalinist [movement].

Disagreements over the extent to which one should extend support to the Stalinists are of course extremely significant. But we believed that at this stage in the development of the revolutionary movement we could coexist in the same organization. For our part we would have been willing to constitute a minority tendency opposed to “hailing” the Red Army and favoring instead a call for its “military victory” within a larger party providing we were all on the same side of the class-line i.e., Soviet defensist. In truth we expected such historical differences would recede in prominence as we were provided with opportunities to develop responses to similar situations in the future through common discussion and common action.

A Left-Right Opposition?

You claim our criticisms of the SL to be the RWL and the BT’s warmed over and you state that you “are at war with this anti-Spartacist swamp.” We do not deny that an anti-Trotskyist milieu exists or that the various Pabloite, state cap and Maoist outfits attack the ICL from the right. But the Spartacist League leadership has also promoted the notion that most of the rest of the left is one vast anti-SL fraternity in an attempt to secure its control over its members and place itself above all criticism. The ICL seems to suggest that those that attack it are Cold War liberals, born-again McCarthyites or worse—meanwhile *Workers Vanguard* is free to run their *National Enquirer* style exposés on other organizations, exposés that bear increasingly less relation to the truth as the years pass.

We fundamentally disagree with Norden’s assertion that what “the MEG has been arguing is that there should be a left-right bloc of the IG and the BT against the SL.” We have most definitely not been arguing such a perspective, what we have been putting forward is the position outlined above. Clearly the crux of our disagreement lies not in whether a left-right bloc is principled (we think that it is not) but whether or not the IBT represents some sort of Right Opposition to the ICL while the IG represents the Left. In fact it appears to us that instead of the ICL being between the IBT and the IG it is actually the IG which is somewhere between the BT and the ICL.

In asserting that the BT “are rightist liars and slanderers who ran away from the pressures of being red in the Reagan years” (A. Negrete, “A Note on the ‘Bolshevik’ Tendency” in *From A Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion of the Class Struggle*) you are recycling the slander of the Spartacist League. And a pretty hollow slander at that! We have told you on several occasions that we do not understand how the SL can in one breath describe the IBT as “virulently anti-Soviet” (*Workers Vanguard* 15 May 1987, “Garbage Doesn’t Run By Itself”) Cold War “defectors and renegades” (“Trotskyism: What It Isn’t and What It Is!”) fleeing revolutionary politics due to the conservative pressures of the Reaganite 80s and in the next breath call the IBT “bloodthirsty” because they did not mourn the death of the Star Warriors aboard *Challenger*, characterized the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon as an objective blow against U.S. imperialism, and defended the USSR’s right to down spy planes in the case of KAL

007. In what world do Cold War deserters publish articles celebrating set-backs (or as WV puts it: “groove on violence” *Ibid.*) for their own war-mongering imperialist rulers? We noticed that you have not felt so inclined to recycle the SL’s implications (in “Garbage Doesn’t Run By Itself”) that there is a sinister “animating principle” behind the IBT that “recalls nothing so much as the insinuating style associated with the FBI’s infamous COINTELPRO.” We presume that having now been on the receiving end of such slanderous attacks from the ICL these kind of accusations now are all too familiar.

Of course criticisms can always come from the left or the right. It is not simply enough to dismiss it as originating in “the swamp.” The SL’s articles in the 70s polemicized against the SWP from a Trotskyist position while Healy’s slander campaign was an attack from the gutter. If Jack Barnes had described both sets of attacks as originating in some sort of “anti-SWP swamp” that would not have changed the fact there was a qualitative difference between these polemics and that those of the SL were essentially correct while those of Healy’s WRP [Workers Revolutionary Party] were repulsive slanders that had to be denounced.

One determines whether a criticism comes from the Right or the Left based on its underlying program, and on its own merit. We note that you paraphrase Lenin, warning us to “think about how dangerous it is to take someone else’s word about something.” In fact we are most concerned that the IG has not gone through and attempted to evaluate the criticisms of the IBT in light of their own experiences in the SL.

On the basis of our observations and study we soon concluded that the criticisms of the ICL by both the IG and the IBT were substantially accurate, unlike the polemics of a host of centrist and reformist outfits. So we initially viewed the real difference between the IBT and the IG as a question of when precisely the degeneration of the iSt/ICL went from quantity to quality. Within the ranks of the early Trotskyist movement there was clearly diverse opinion over when precisely the Stalinist parties had become too degenerate to struggle within. Victor Serge of course dates the degeneration quite early, in some of his writings linking it to the development of the Cheka and the political defeat of the Workers’ Opposition. Yet it was not this “timetable” over which Serge and Trotsky broke, but rather Serge’s demoralized attempts to give political support to popular front formations in Spain and later France. Likewise Ignace Reiss remained within the Stalinized party for several years (up until 1937) following Trotsky’s expulsion yet it is clear Trotsky still regarded him as a representative of “genuine Bolshevism” (Leon Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capital...*).

We do not consider ourselves to be fools and believe we have evaluated political criticisms of the SL on their own merits. Thus even a very poor critic, such as the RWL, could sometimes make telling criticisms of the SL as when they characterized certain “methods resembling pre-Marxist petty-bourgeois socialism in a series of simply bizarre positions, such as the rejection of the demand for nationalization under workers’ control of factories threatened with closure, in favor of the demand for a ‘workers’ auction’ of plants being closed” (*International Trotskyist Review [ITR]* No.1 January 1985, p 23). We believe the SL did deliberately alter their line on KAL 007 from one issue of *Workers Vanguard* to another. The proof can be found by comparing the initial statement on the USSR’s downing of the famous spy flight was “*worse than a barbaric atrocity*” (my emphasis, WV No. 337 9 September 1983) with the version contained in the next issue (No. 338 23 September 1983) in which the above quoted phrase was erased without so much as an ellipsis. (Contemporary documentation of the shift of position was provided by

the forerunner of the IBT, the External Tendency of the iSt, in an article appearing in the second issue of their *Bulletin*.) We have attempted to judge these criticisms independently and by their own merit and we find that they have the ring of truth. We invite you to re-evaluate them in the same manner.

In your letter to us you write that:

“for Marxists, sharp polemics against various centrist and reformist forces are hardly regrettable but essential in being able to establish where the revolutionary interests of the proletariat lie.”

—IG Letter

Yet you yourselves are willing to commit precious few of your criticisms of the SL to paper. In fact you have visibly vacillated on the issue of the Lebanon bombing, Frank C., Ed. C. and Jan Norden having all admitted some truth to the IBT’s criticisms of the slogan “Marines Out of Lebanon Alive!” in various conversations with us, yet your most recent letter takes great pains to offer up a total defense of these same articles (*Ibid.* the section Grenada/Lebanon).

Your approach to political criticism of the SL stands in sharp contrast to the Spartacist tradition you purport to defend. The SL was unflinching in subjecting the history of the SWP to criticism despite the fact that this was the heritage that they defended. Did not the early SL decide that the Vern/Ryan minority was right in criticizing the SWP’s complicity in supporting the Popular Front in Bolivia? Did the early *Workers Vanguard* not run a series of excellent articles for the party press criticising the SWP’s tendency to rely on maneuvering among wings of the trade union bureaucracies over the strategy of building programmatically based caucuses? Did not comrade Norden himself elaborate a series of criticisms of the SWP leadership’s insufficiently clear struggle against Pabloism? What the IG desperately needs today is the political courage to apply the same sort of rigorous criticisms to the SL as Jim Robertson once applied to the SWP.

We now view the differences between the IBT and the IG as being a question of direction. Does the IG have the ability to throw off the shackles of the degenerated SL’s bureaucratic and abstentionist heritage and move in a healthy, revolutionary direction as the founding cadres of the IBT did? Or will it try to remain in the middle indefinitely?

General Strikes

We requested you send us the ICL internals on the general strike question both because with the recent events in Italy, France, Toronto and Puerto Rico this is of immediate tactical concern, and secondly because you have described it in your own literature as a point of difference between yourselves and the present leadership of the ICL. We also noted that the IBT had written several polemics against what they pretty clearly perceived as a revision—towards sectarian abstentionism—on the part of the modern day Spartacist League on this question. As we know you are well aware the IBT reprinted (in issue No. 19 of 1917) an older Spartacist article (originally appearing in the 1 March 1974 *Workers Vanguard*) on the subject of the general strike to show how the ICL has revised its own political heritage and to point out that the IBT’s position is much more consistent with the positions of the early SL and of orthodox Trotskyism.

After our third request for these materials was put *in writing* you finally permitted us to see Jan Norden’s intervention into the debate within the ICL on the general strike in Italy. You decided not to allow us to read the positions of the other participants, expecting us to accept your version of what they said. We prefer to read all sides of an argument and then decide for ourselves, just as you advise with your warnings about “how dangerous it is to take someone else’s word about

something” (letter from comrade Norden).

You offer as rationale for selecting the materials which we could have access to, the claim that because of your “political continuity of the best traditions of the ICL, [these] are the internal bulletins of [your] tendency” (*Ibid.*). But if indeed this debate represents the best “best traditions of the ICL” then why was it necessary for you to fight with the “new ICL leadership” on such a basic tactical question? If, on the other hand, it is true that you really did take a principled stand against the revisionist elements in the Spartacist leadership who subsequently purged you, then surely you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by making this debate public. After all, why not let people like us decide for ourselves which, if any, of the participants took a positions consistent with those of genuine Trotskyism? As for keeping things in the family, we note that the ICL has been selling copies of the internal bulletins concerning your expulsions to anyone willing to cough up \$7.

Since you have not allowed us to read these materials for ourselves, we can not at this juncture form a definitive position of the substance of the debate over Italy within the ICL. It does appear to us though that, contrary to your previous assertions, you did bloc with comrade Parks—so this hardly seems a definitive struggle against the “new ICL leadership” which she heads. We draw this conclusion from the end of your section on the general strike where you make repeated references to the “leadership team” which implicitly includes both Norden and Parks. It does not seem to us from the document you showed us that you took a particularly firm position against what you describe as Parks’ line that it is necessary “to oppose the call for general strikes in the absence of a cohered revolutionary party, that is to say, everywhere in the world today” (*Ibid.*).

We think this position, which you attribute to Parks, is a travesty of Trotskyism that any conscious revolutionary would oppose. We can imagine some of the tactical considerations that may have prevented you from opposing this line more forcefully at the time—but in the absence of *all* the materials relating to this discussion it is impossible for us to be certain. Nor, of course, can we be certain that Parks’ position was as bald as you present it, though in light the ICL’s treatment of the general strike question recently this seems quite possible.

Your position on the recent “Days of Action” city-wide shutdowns in Ontario we find disappointing in the extreme. You accuse the BT of Pabloite deviations and tailing after labor bureaucrats because they write that a “general strike against the Harris government would not likely lead to an immediate struggle for proletarian power,” (1917 No. 20 1998). And you go on to assert that this amounts to a rejection of “Trotsky’s position...that a general strike necessarily poses the question of power” (*op. cit.*).

Indeed, we are aware that Trotsky, like Frederick Engels and Rosa Luxemburg, recognized that a general strike could develop into a revolutionary situation and we are also aware that Trotsky, like Engels, warned that attempts by revolutionaries to launch a general strike when the class was not ready was to invite disaster (“The ILP and the Fourth International,” September 18, 1935 in *Writings of 1935–1936*). But you might want to study Trotsky further on the tactic of the general strike—for there is another strike which Trotsky wrote about that more closely parallels the situation in Ontario.

For the Ontario “Days of Action,” like the British General Strike of 1926 were:

“dictated far more by the logic of the situation than the logic of consciousness. The British working class had no other alternative. The struggle—no matter what was the mecha-

nism behind the scenes—was forced on them by the mechanical pressure of the whole situation.”

—Leon Trotsky, *Trotsky on Britain*, Monad, 1973, p 170

Trotsky’s critique of the role of the Stalinized Comintern during the British General Strike was a pivotal part of the initial program of the Left Opposition. Trotsky recognized that in Britain in 1926, as in Canada 70 years later, the labor misleaders held tight control over the unfolding actions:

“Those, however, who in the course of events have been placed at the ‘head’ of the general strike, are fighting against (it) with all their strength. And herein lies the chief danger: men who did not want the general strike, who deny the political character of the general strike, who fear nothing so much as the consequences of a victorious strike, must inevitably direct all their efforts to keeping the strike within the scope of a semi-political, semi-strike....”

—*Ibid.*

Trotsky summed up the situation in this manner:

“The main efforts of the official leaders of the Labour Party and of a considerable number of the official trade union leaders will not be directed towards paralyzing the bourgeois state by means of the strike, but towards paralyzing the general strike with the aid of the bourgeois state....”

—*Ibid.*, p 171

Clearly then Trotsky did not expect this strike was guaranteed to put revolution on the agenda in London. On the contrary, he displays the most acute awareness that the workers’ movement is being fettered by its own leadership. But his response is far different from the ICL and others who refused to raise the call for *turning the one-day, single city “Days of Action” in Ontario into a province-wide general strike*, run by elected rank-and-file strike committees, to defeat the Tory austerity attacks. Trotsky did not counterpose the necessity of the creation of a mass revolutionary party to the limited and timid actions that the labor bureaucrats felt compelled to make in response to capitalist attacks. Instead he urged revolutionaries to:

“support the unity of mass action in every way, but (we) cannot permit any appearance of unity with the opportunist leaders of the Labor Party and the trade unions. The most important piece of work for the truly revolutionary participants in the general strike will be to fight relentlessly against every trace or act of treachery and mercilessly expose reformist illusions.”

—*Ibid.*, p 172

On the contrary, Trotsky sharply criticized abstention from day-to-day struggles, writing that,

“to shy away from battle, when the battle is forced by the objective situation, is to lead inevitably to the most fatal and demoralizing of all possible defeats.”

—*Op. Cit.* p 138–139

The job of revolutionaries in such situations is not to focus exclusively on the inadequacies and shortcomings of the existing actions, not to counterpose the task of building a revolutionary vanguard party to active intervention in the struggles of today. Trotsky argued that the Marxist wing of the labor movement should intervene at every stage in the struggles of the masses to show the more advanced workers the necessary next step. In this way revolutionaries both expose the inadequacies, cowardice and treason of the labor statesmen and begin to lay the basis for the emergence of a new revolutionary leadership within the workers’ movement.

We believe that in Ontario the ICL (and, at one remove, the IG, which seems to follow the ICL on this) failed to provide the workers with the right answers about what to do next. The ICL’s ultra-“revolutionary” posture on this question was a classic example of sterile, sectarian abstentionism.

We are somewhat surprised the IG has refused to see this. The ICL’s intervention may have had a more leftist sound, but in fact it was no more revolutionary in content than the activity of the International Socialists and various other self-proclaimed Marxists who enthused about the scope of the actions and who advocated little more than that workers should pressure their existing leadership to fight harder. At one rally we attended, in St. Catharines, a prominent Canadian IS leader (Carolyn Egan) was even permitted to appear on the platform along with a bunch of the other labor misleaders. When she spoke (as the designated representative of the Steelworkers’ leadership) she did not raise a single criticism or put forward a single demand that went beyond the anti-Tory rhetoric of the union bureaucrats.

We collected and studied the propaganda distributed by the different left groups and we were also able to see them in action on the streets in both the Kingston and St. Catharines’ “Days of Action.” We found the BT closest in spirit to Trotsky.

We believe the Ontario “Days of Action” essentially represented a defensive battle on the part of the working class. We saw these actions first-hand, marched in the demonstrations and visited some of the picket lines around the factories and government buildings. We find your attempts to discredit this struggle by raising the spectre of some sort of incipient Popular Front issuing from a collapse of the (ruling) Tory government to be absolutely bizarre. If the Tory government had been toppled through a successful general strike it would have been an extremely significant event. Given the current level of political consciousness across North America (including Ontario) it seems unlikely that even a victory of this scale would result in the immediate creation of a revolutionary situation. But if workers’ struggles were to bring down a right-wing government in Ontario, after decades of retreat, it would have been a highly significant event in the history of class struggles in English-speaking North America. The fact that cowardice and betrayals of the labor aristocracy, combined with the opportunism and marginal social weight of the socialist left, made this a very unlikely outcome is no reason for Marxists not to raise the correct slogans, as the BT did (following the excellent example set by the SL in 1974 in Britain).

We also note that you yourselves have now come under fire from the SL for advocating the use of the general strike weapon. We saw a polemic printed in *Workers Vanguard* (No.702, 4 December 1998), regarding propaganda issued by your Brazilian section (the LQB [Liga Quarta-Internacionalista]), where you suggested that:

“The bourgeois offensive against all the working people must be answered with a class-struggle offensive fighting for power. The necessary response would begin with a strike of all public workers, then extending to the private sector in a *general strike paralyzing all large industry, transport and commerce, which would be a showdown with the bourgeois power.*” (my emphasis)

The SL churned out a criticism of your call that epitomizes their new line and their continued departure from a once revolutionary heritage, writing:

“But in the absence of a revolutionary party in Brazil today and on the eve of a presidential election, what would the LQB’s call for a ‘general strike’ mean if not support to the workers’ current leadership—the PT [Workers’ Party] and the popular front?”

It seems to us you can not have it both ways—regurgitating the revised SL line from Italy and France and applying it to Canada, and then in the next breath applying the old SL

position (as codified in Britain in 1974) to Puerto Rico and Brazil.

Once Again: The Russian Question, the Collapse of Stalinism & the August Coup

You are of course quite correct in arguing that the question of the collapse of the degenerated workers' state in the Soviet Union "is hardly a detail." While we believe we have on many occasions expressed our views on the Russian question to you we are aware that we have never committed our position on this fundamental question on paper and welcome the opportunity to do so here. Indeed our view on this issue has undergone a fundamental evolution since our rupture with our erstwhile comrades in the ITC [International Trotskyist Committee].

Neither Don nor I were a part of a left organization at the time of the August coup. For my part I had recently severed my relations with DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] over their social-patriotic capitulation during the Gulf War. At the time of the coup I was working in the receiving room of a large store. The work we did there was monotonous and exhausting and one of our few sources of relief on the job was that we were permitted to listen to the radio. I can vividly recall the consternation caused by news of the coup and the follow up reports of Yeltsin's mobilization. I worked at that job alongside the man who initially recruited me to the DSA (and who is a prominent supporter of theirs to this day as far as I know) and the two of us were often asked our political interpretations of events by our co-workers. I recall that this DSAer and I disagreed on this event; while he remained true to the Harrington/Howe fold and called for support to Yeltsin (as a representative of "democracy") I hoped that an upsurge of Soviet workers might prevent capitalist restoration while at the same time smashing the Stalinist bureaucracy. Both this DSA supporter and I were far too Stalinophobic to entertain the notion of supporting the Soviet coup.

When I officially became a member of the RWL in December of 1992 I did not have to modify my views of the events in the Soviet Union at all. They too believed that:

"it was impossible to support either side in this coup, since neither side was in any real sense defending collectivized property. Both (Yeltsin and the Stalinist 'hard liners'— J.W.) proposed further attacks on the working class—differing only on how those attacks could most effectively be launched."

—*Fighting Worker* V. 12, No. 8 (101) October 1991

In the early months of my membership in the RWL (the National Chair) Leland S. was busy drafting the ITC's statement on "the Russian Question" eventually published in 50 pages of small print as *International Trotskyist Review* Number 4: "The Workers' State and the Proletarian Property Form: An Intervention on Marxist Methodology." I was present as an observer at an important Central Committee meeting in February of 1993 where a substantially shorter draft of this document produced the first heated debate I was ever to witness within the RWL. Keith H., a former ISO supporter, a member of Bay Area Local exec and one of the *Fighting Worker's* most talented journalists, raised a series of sharp disagreements with the leadership's line. Keith mysteriously disappeared from Detroit that night and it was not until the following weekend that I learned he had flown back to the Bay posthaste to begin work on a factional document titled "Beyond the Impasse of the Revolutionary Workers League." This document raised a series of criticisms of Leland's draft which it correctly characterized as:

"Chock-full of metaphysics cloaked in pseudo-Marxist phraseology, this brilliant piece of theoretical obfuscation

succeeds in stupefying the reader under the ruse of 'eliminating confusion'. In truth this document serves only to kick sand in the face of the reader, in order to blind him to the increasingly apparent reality of the bourgeois counter-revolution that has overtaken and strangled the world's first workers' state."

—"Beyond the Impasse..." pp 11–12

ITR No. 4 reads like something produced by the Healyites in their worst period, dragging dialectical materialism from the earth and into the realm of heavenly idealism. For instance, the document plunges frequently into an abstract dissertation on word etymology as in the following quotation:

"For Marxism and even in political discussion among non-Marxists, the word state, when used precisely, has two related but distinct senses: 1) as a synonym for nation-state, and 2) as a term for the entire network of political institutions that express the political unity and secure the economic cohesion and the economic and geographical boundaries of every nation-state.

"That is, the term state refers, on the one hand, to the entire network of social, economic, and political institutions that, taken as a whole, make up the national society of a nation-state. And it refers, on the other hand, specifically to the entire network of political relationships that make up the institutions of political power of a nation-state. As in other cases in science and politics, the same term must be used to refer to different things, here both a whole phenomenon and a particular aspect of it."

—ITR No. 4 p 4

And so this ornate diatribe runs, concerned for the better part of 10 pages with proving that confusion over the definition of the workers' states is terminological in origin. But ultimately the document is preoccupied with proving that no counterrevolution has occurred in the USSR:

"there are political trends that agree with us on this question that have what we regard as completely wrong positions on the acid-test question of the Soviet coup attempt of August 1991 and disagree fundamentally among themselves (that is, they lean either toward the 'Stalinist' coup attempt of August 1991 or toward Yeltsin). And, on the other hand, there are trends that in general agree with our position on the events of August 1991 (neither political support for nor a military bloc with either the leaders of the failed coup or Yeltsin; mobilization of the Soviet working class strictly independently of and counter posed to both forces), who are eager to declare Russia under Yeltsin a 'capitalist state.'"

—*Ibid.* p 1

One particularly vocal proponent of what Leland S. characterized as "our position on the events of August 1991" was of course the Spartacist League, which shared the RWL's position of "neither political support for nor a military bloc with either the leaders of the failed coup or Yeltsin." In fact for the better part of a year the SL shared the RWL's delusion that there had been no fundamental change in the USSR which they continued to characterize as a workers' state. The SL had only recently shifted their position to belatedly recognize the triumph of counter-revolution within the former Soviet Union. Thus it was immediately apparent to most members of the RWL that Keith had written his minority document in close collaboration with the SL. Indeed he begins his document writing that "I have contrasted many of the RWL's positions with the corresponding positions of...the SL" and ends his document advocating "discussions with the Spartacist League, which I hope would put us on a fusion course" (*op. cit.* pp 1, 22). The document contained the standard roll-call of SL polemical points: Afghanistan, Solidarnosc and the picket line question. From that moment on the leadership clearly marked Keith H. as an SL agent.

Keith's comments did in fact reverberate with me and with a number of other RWL comrades; it seemed to us that reality clearly pointed to the fact that something profound was changing in the USSR and that capitalism was being or had been restored. Yet Keith's connection to the SL made it difficult for us to conceive of lining up in a faction with him. We had little or no doubt that the leadership was right that Keith was an SL agent and as a spy must be expelled from the ITC for security purposes. Since leaving the RWL I have learned from former SL cadres that Keith was indeed in regular contact with leading SL comrades and participating in the SL's internal party life—so clearly the RWL was not far from the mark in this instance. The leadership attempted to make it clear to the membership that they were bending over backwards to accommodate Keith and “protect” his rights. While they attempted to isolate him from daily work, ostensibly for “security purposes,” they pledged that if he remained a member and followed discipline he would be permitted to present a minority position on the USSR at the upcoming national conference. I don't honestly know what conditions were really like for Keith in the Bay and to what degree he was run out of the RWL. I certainly witnessed my share of flagrant and obscene abuses of comrades and the sort of perverse psychological warfare that substituted for an internal culture within the RWL.

Reluctant to join with Keith, which we saw as signing up to be a part of the SL, an organization most RWL members viewed as being cultish and mechanical as well as “centrist” and bureaucratically deformed, a number of us did individually question the leadership about the draft document. If my experiences raising this issue with Leland S. were typical, as I believe they were, then other comrades like me were lectured on dialectical materialism, told to carefully study the document's footnotes such as:

“...the word state also refers to pre-capitalist forms of ‘national society’ and their corresponding political institutions, as, as for example, the city-state of the ancient Greek and Roman slave-based societies or the various forms of feudal state that arose to take the place of the city states of the ancient classical societies and evolved eventually into the modern state...”

At base the RWL relied on an economist argument based on the level of privatization, but the kernel was cloaked in a lofty lecture in dialectics and phenomenology that served to obfuscate the base analysis. When I asked how that really explained the events of August 1991 I was accused of being petit-bourgeois, ignorant of the fundamental ABC's of Marxism and an unrepentant social-democrat (my DSA background tainting me.) For that matter Keith was himself dismissed as being a petty-bourgeois oppositionist whose deviations were connected to his previous ISO membership and who had been bribed into joining the SL through some sort of Faustian bargain in which he would be granted the privilege of writing for *Workers Vanguard* in exchange for conducting this struggle within the RWL.

We did not have a clear understanding of the political issues that were posed and so found it easier to acquiesce to the leadership's line than to be constantly subjected to the meat-grinder of psychological warfare. Leland's document, while not really making much sense, appeared to us to be a smooth Marxist presentation on the question so a number of us took pride in the style even though we didn't feel we quite understood the content. I didn't so much bury my differences with Leland as allow myself to be convinced that I truly did not understand Marxism and was just too ignorant to understand the nuances of the ITC position. Several times I dutifully attempted exhaustive studies of this document and all of the books cited within it (ranging from *Anti-Dühring* to *In Defense of Marxism*).

Keith quit the RWL before the National Conference so he never presented the SL position from the floor, but I remain convinced that even had he done so he would not have succeeded in winning converts. A part of the RWL's peculiar character was that it demanded excessive sacrifice and absolute loyalty and commitment more than rigorous political thought. One was caught in the contradiction of having joined a supposedly revolutionary party in order to rebel against an intolerable and destructive social system (capitalism) only to be trained to act with military precision as a mindless automaton at the whim of the leadership. This is something I believe the SL, in its often shrill polemics against the RWL, never took into account and why their repeated attempts to regroup from the RWL never bore much fruit. Perhaps it was the symmetry between the SL and the RWL's internal cultures that caused this facet to be overlooked.

Looking back on it, there was another symmetry between the positions of the SL and those of the RWL which I had been unaware of at the time that would probably have rendered Keith's interventions worthless. Neither the RWL nor the SL is willing to acknowledge the defeat of the August 1991 coup as the decisive counter-revolutionary event in the former USSR. This stems from a mutual unwillingness to give military support to the Stalinist hard-liners in the coup attempt. Both the RWL and the SL seemed so intent upon waiting on a monumental uprising of the Russian working class that they equated the tired, demoralized remnants of the Stalinist bureaucracy, headed by Yanayev, which was attempting, for its own reasons, to put an obstacle in the path of counter revolution with the counterrevolutionary camp headed by Yeltsin. It was as if both the SL and the RWL had spent so much time reading the old SL literature (RWL veterans reported SL materials being frequently used as study-guides in the group's early years) that they could not comprehend the unfolding of events along a different road than previously imagined. Alas, as materialists we are forced to acknowledge that wishing for something does not make it so.

Keith's document did provide an excellent platform for the RWL leadership to attempt to give an exposition of a select history of the group's positions to the new layer of youth who had been drawn into the organization following the Gulf War and the RWL's vigorous work in abortion clinic defense over the spring and summer of 1992. This led to the circulation of a long-forgotten document on Afghanistan and a discussion on Solidarnosc. Leland and Co. proved amazingly sheepish when it came to the issue of Poland, merely circulating a portion of the original Solidarnosc program in an attempt to show that the movement was “contradictory.” But in 20/20 hindsight the RWL seemed prepared to admit that Solidarnosc had really “ended up” by being counter-revolutionary and that the *Fighting Worker* articles of the time had been a mistake. This was perhaps an easier admission to make since one of the inspirers of the line, Peter Sollenberger, was no longer in the group—having split in 1991 to create his own franchise (the Trotskyist League).

I was one of the RWL members who was most vocal in support of producing an article or document formally retracting its past position. I would have to say that realizing that Solidarnosc was a mistake and that the RWL and much of the ostensibly Trotskyist left ended up on the wrong side of the barricades on this issue was one of the things that caused me to begin over time to look at the question of the 1991 coup more critically.

Regrettably, this period of internal discussion did not last long as the RWL was due for another of its wild oscillations, this time from lashing raw recruits and youth for being unserious and non-Marxist, to a fresh hyperactive drive of anti-fascist organizing. As the demands of the day shifted—from community based anti-police brutality work and the

production of international literature to semi-adventurist confrontations with the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] in the Midwest—the leadership found new scapegoats; now older cadres and “intellectuals” were accused of being worn and tired, of dragging their feet and being incapable of rising to the demands of a higher period of class struggle. Terry O., a Political Committee [PC] member and a major financial supporter of the party, the organization’s attorney and editor of *Fighting Worker*, was singled out for a particularly sharp attack. In a joint Albany/Detroit local meeting at the National office, Leland and fellow PC member Luke M. publicly criticized an article, “Yeltsin’s Coup Targets Russian Workers,” by Terry O. published in the November 1993 issue of *Fighting Worker*. This somewhat garbled article epitomized the RWL’s centrist confusion, in one breath half retracting the RWL’s earlier errors:

“Solidarnosc in 1980–1981 showed ‘self-managing’ socialism is a trap. Against the power of the bureaucrats, there is only one progressive alternative: the power of local, regional, national and union-wide councils of urban and agricultural workers and soldiers!”

But only a few short steps after recognizing that Solidarnosc was a “trap” we are back to the RWL’s traditional line about “revamped Stalinists sporting a program of gradual privatization....” So the RWL equates the Polish movement dominated by the thoroughly reactionary forces of the Vatican and the CIA with the decrepid remnants of Stalinism actively resisting Yeltsin’s privatizations.

Yet the article as a whole encompassed a distinct shift of position—one that Leland and the rest of the leadership body clearly did not approve of—Terry O writes: “in fighting to preserve their own positions...the Stalinists believed that it was necessary to grant more concessions to the working class than Yeltsin wanted to give.” This is a somewhat closer approximation of reality but it implicitly poses the question of whether it would be principled to form a military bloc with the Stalinists against Yeltsin. As we have already seen the ITC answers with an emphatic “No!”—except, that is, in this rare 1993 *Fighting Worker* [FW] gem in which we are told the Russian proletariat has a side—militarily blocking with the Red-Brown alliance holed up in Parliament against Yeltsin, “(b)ecause of the threat posed to workers’ rights by the combined Yeltsinite-military attack, it was necessary to defend Parliament....”

I bring up this seemingly trivial incident of this historically insignificant group because the situation in fact so closely parallels the ICL’s own flip-flop on the “red-brown coalition” as documented by the IBT (1917 No. 13, 1994 “Spartacist League Flip-Flop on Rutskoj”). While the SL originally (and we think correctly) described the “long-running feud between the Kremlin and the White House...as a squabble between corrupt and cynical factions” and characterized the “red-brown” coalition as “tightly bound to the monarchist/fascist scum” and “lackeys for the corporatist wing of the fledgling bourgeoisie” (*Workers Vanguard* 8 October 1993), they later changed their positions to one not unlike Terry O’s. In the 5 November 1993 issue of *Workers Vanguard* we are told “it was necessary to call on the working class to actively resist” Yeltsin.

I personally believe that both the SL’s correction and the RWL piece by Terry O. reflected an awareness, on some level, that it had been a mistake to equate the two sides in August 1991 when the decrepid Stalinist bureaucracy and the forces of capitalist restoration headed by Yeltsin collided. This was the crucial conflict, but rather than retracting the mistakes of 1991, WV and FW attempted to bend the stick the other way until they ended up again in the wrong—this time taking sides in the falling out between counter revolutionaries. But two wrongs do not make a right for either the ICL or the ITC.

Terry’s position on the October 1993 events so irritated Leland that Luke M. was placed above him as “political editor” of *Fighting Worker*, yet it soon became clear that Luke didn’t have a clue as to how to edit a paper. The RWL found it increasingly difficult to contain its centrist tension and so chose to shut down *Fighting Worker* (the final issue, No. 117, appearing in January of 1994). Since that time, to the best of our knowledge, the RWL has issued no printed statements on international events and hides its grey rad-lib commentary on domestic issues under the banner of *The Liberator*, the newsletter of its latest front group, BAMN [By Any Means Necessary]. We are left to assume that the RWL still stands behind ITR No. 4 and the view (at least from Detroit) that Russia remains a degenerated workers’ state and that the counter-revolution is yet to occur.

From the beginning Don, myself and others from the RWL milieu who initiated the MEG adamantly rejected the RWL’s position on Solidarnosc and began a long process of re-evaluating our views on the collapse of Stalinism. By late 1994 we were in basic agreement that counterrevolution was indeed triumphant and that the pivotal confrontation was that of the coup and Yeltsin’s counter-coup in 1991. It was actually a relief to be free of the heavy burden of the RWL’s nonsensical formulations. We began also to investigate the RWL’s self-proclaimed link to the tradition of the RT and read for the first time some of the basic SL documents contained in the *Marxist Bulletin* series and also read the publications of the Prometheus Research Library. It was in these documents that we learned the origin of the RWL’s position on revolutionary integration and the Cuban revolution.

It was also in 1994 that we began to encounter IBT literature at demonstrations in New York City. Sam T., who we had known when he was in the SL, sold us several copies of 1917 which we read and considered both well written and politically correct. Thus early in 1998 we contacted the IG and the IBT because we considered these two organizations to be the most programmatically consistent expressions of what we believed to be Trotskyism.

In your conversations with us you have often repeated the Spartacist canard that the IBT issued no statements on the collapse of Stalinism until well after counterrevolution had triumphed. This assertion is as ridiculous as it is dishonorable. We assume you have as ready access to a complete collection of 1917 back issues as we do. If you would trouble yourselves to actually read them you would find a wealth of articles documenting the IBT’s positions on the crises of Stalinism. For example: No. 4, “Whither Gorbachev’s USSR?”; No. 6: “Perestroika: a Pandora’s Box”; No. 8: “Death Agony of Stalinism”; No. 10: “Soviet Stalinism in Extremis”; No. 10: “The National Question in the USSR.”

In addition we note that the statement “Counterrevolution Triumphs in the USSR” was published first as a flyer in September of 1991, only a couple of weeks after the coup—certainly this is the sort of contemporary commentary you persistently deny knowledge of the existence of.

We know that you have been wont to dismiss the coup as merely a “press conference,” but it is all too easy to dismiss an event that ends in failure as a non-event. If the Bolsheviks and the proletarian masses had not gone to the defense of the February government, Kornilov might well have succeeded in his march and the February events been reduced to just another heroic dress-rehearsal in the mold of the Paris Commune and 1905. But in 1917 counterrevolution was set back and the Bolsheviks were given breathing space to prepare for October because, thankfully, Lenin and Trotsky were better tacticians (and in a better position to turn their thoughts into action) than Jim Robertson is today.

You question whether a military bloc with the “gang of 8”

is principled—I prefer to let Trotsky respond, his words are far more succinct and eloquent than mine:

“To the Bolshevik leaders of the districts, Kornilov’s uprising had not been in the least unexpected. They had foreseen and forewarned, and they were there first to appear at their posts...the Bolshevik party had taken all measures available to it in order to inform the people of the danger and prepare for defense; the Bolsheviks announced their willingness to co-ordinate their military work with the organs of the Executive Committee...and at the same time (measures were taken) to prepare for the creation of a revolutionary government of workers and soldiers.”

—Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution*

Here we have an example of Bolshevik tactics, a coordinated military bloc against a common enemy at a time when Lenin was forced into hiding and Trotsky jailed by the very government the party was compelled to defend. The Bolshevik Party was able to form a temporary united front without taking the preparations for revolution off their agenda. And Trotsky would hold this lesson up as an example years later as fascism crushed the German proletariat under the jackboot:

“What course did the Bolshevik Party take? Not for an instant did it hesitate to conclude a practical alliance to fight against Kornilov with its jailers—Kerensky, Tsereteli, Dan etc.,....

“One might have said, ‘For Bolsheviks, Kornilovism begins only with Kornilov. But isn’t Kerensky a Kornilovite? Aren’t his policies aimed toward strangling the revolution? Isn’t he crushing the peasants by means of punitive expeditions? Doesn’t he organize lockouts? Doesn’t Lenin have to hide underground? And all this we must put up with?’

“So far as I recall, I can’t think of a single Bolshevik rash enough to have advanced such arguments. But were he to be found, he would have been answered something after this fashion. ‘We accuse Kerensky of preparing for and facilitating the coming of Kornilov to power. But does this relieve us of the duty of rushing to repel Kornilov’s attack? We accuse the gatekeeper of leaving the gates ajar for the bandit. But must we therefore shrug our shoulders and let the gates go hang?’”

—Leon Trotsky, “What Next?,” in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder Press, 1971

In Conclusion

We have carefully studied the documents, we have read the originals published in *Workers Vanguard* and the replies of the ET/BT/IBT and above all we have read the “IBT vs. ICL” document published while you were editor of *WV* and we find that on virtually every question where it is possible for someone who was not there at the time to make an intelligent judgement, the IBT position makes more sense, and adheres more closely to what we understand to be Trotskyism. Moreover we note that, unlike the SL, the IBT line does not have to shift back and forth (as they document in IBT vs. ICL on Lebanon and on the 1991 Yeltsin coup). Moreover we find that the comments of the IBT even on the circumstances of your own expulsion (particularly your assertion that Socorro deserved to be expelled) make more sense than your convoluted explanations. How could it have been “criminal” for her to have said that there was little justice to be had in the SL if, the very next week, it was correct for comrades Jan and Marjorie to refuse a summons to participate in the same kind of kangaroo court that Socorro complained about? If it was criminal for Socorro to suggest that the accused get more justice in bourgeois courts than defendants get in SL trials, why weren’t comrades Norden and Stamberg willing to avail themselves of all the advantages of an SL trial? I cannot imagine how you can rationalize this obvious contradiction.

We are disappointed that it has proved impossible, due entirely to the IG’s refusal to participate, to organize a serious exchange of views between those organizations which have arisen from the SL and which claim to adhere to the authentic RT tradition of an uncompromising struggle for Trotskyism and against Pabloite liquidation. On the basis of our experiences, and discussions with both the IG and the IBT, we have decided that our place and the place of any who claims to stand by the early, revolutionary tradition of the Spartacist tendency, is inside the International Bolshevik Tendency. Thus, Donald U. and myself have elected to apply for membership in the IBT.

For Bolshevism,
Jason W.