

A letter to the IG on SL history

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 reformatting 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:

"It's hard to understand how any ostensible Trotskyists could disagree with this statement two weeks after the signing of the Sapo accord, 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 leadership's 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 Miseducation!" 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 CLA's [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 BAPT 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'état against Logan and forced him to resign from the Chairman of the SL/B (6 October 1978).

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

"It would appear that thereafter the iSt membership had been mobilised for the sacking of Logan. And this the iSt had decided to do in the grand style of a trial by an authoritative or a virtual international Trial Body. It would appear they expected to publicise this trial as a step forward in the 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

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

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