

The

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Internationalist



**Bring Down the Imperialist EU Through
Europe-Wide Socialist Revolution!**

The “Brexit” Trap:

**British Left Caught Between “Leave”
and “Remain” in European Union**

**No to Both Sides in the Chauvinist Circus:
Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!**



Immigrant domestic workers in Britain protest slave-labor law, September 2011.

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Front page photo: Immigrant domestic workers in Britain protest outside Parliament against slave labor law tying them to particular employer, September 2011.

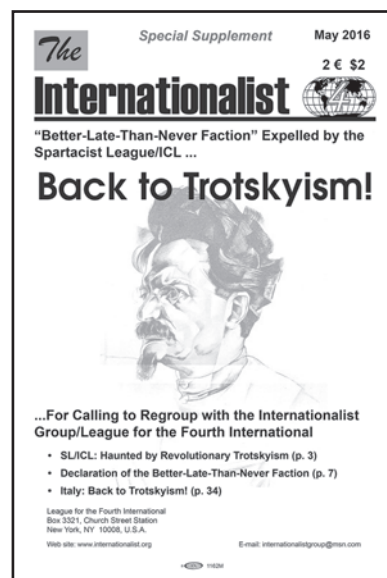
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This special supplement includes documents of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction, summarily expelled by the Spartacist League in April, and by former leaders of the Italian section of the ex-Trotskyist International Communist League explaining their path to the League for the Fourth International.

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The Internationalist



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for the Reforging of the Fourth International

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Abram Negrete, Marjorie Salzburg, Ines Young

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The LFI Advancing on the Road to Reforging the Fourth International

Over the past four months, the League for the Fourth International has had a major expansion with the formation of the Nucleo Internazionalista d'Italia and the fusion of the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the LFI, with the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction expelled by the Spartacist League/U.S. in mid-April (see page 31). Beyond the founding of an Italian section and a local of the IG in Los Angeles, these advances make possible a qualitative increase of the work of the LFI in Europe and elsewhere. This is reflected in the articles in this issue of *The Internationalist* analyzing the European immigration crisis (see page 18) and the British referendum vote to leave the European Union ("Brexit"), beginning on page 4.

Several articles polemicizing with the International Communist League underscore the ICL's flight from revolutionary Trotskyism over the last two decades. The first issue of *L'internazionalista* (below) features articles on the ICL's current capitulation to anti-immigrant sentiment. The founders of the Nid' I were the leadership of the Italian section of the ICL before being driven out for not fully embracing its version of a "new world reality" in which the fight for revolution is off the agenda due to a supposed qualitative regression in workers' consciousness globally. The Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction (see page 35) locates the turning point for the ICL in its abandonment of the Trotskyist analysis of Stalinism in the crucial fight in 1995-96 that led to the expulsion of the founding cadres of the IG/LFI. It was this program that made possible the ICL's intervention fighting against counterrevolution in East Germany and the Soviet

Union in 1989-92, and which the LFI uniquely upholds today in the fight to defend the remaining deformed workers states.

Over the last 18 years, the LFI has systematically intervened on a revolutionary transitional program in workers' struggles to cohere battle-tested Trotskyist organizations in Brazil, Mexico and the U.S. This is reflected in the articles on the Brazil impeachment crisis and the teachers strike that has convulsed Mexico over the last several months. Through revolutionary regroupment on the basis of the Trotskyist program and fighting for class-struggle unionism, the LFI is advancing on the road to reforging a Fourth International that Leon Trotsky would have recognized as his own. ■

League for the Fourth International

LFI, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A. E-mail: internationalistgroup@msn.com

Internationalist Group/U.S.

Internationalist Group, Box 3321, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008, U.S.A.
Tel. (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711
E-mail: internationalistgroup@msn.com
New York Tel. (212) 460-0983 Fax: (212) 614-8711
Los Angeles Tel. (323) 984-8590
Portland Tel. (971) 282-7903

Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil

Brazil: write to Caixa Postal 084027, CEP 27251-740, Volta Redonda, RJ, Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: write to Caixa Postal 3982, CEP 20001-974, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil
E-mail: lqb1996@yahoo.com.br

LIVI/Deutschland

Germany: write to Postfach 80 97 21, 21007 Hamburg, Germany

Nucleo Internazionalista d'Italia

Italy: write to Anna Chiaraluce, Casella Postale N. 6, 06070 Ellera Umbra (PG), Italy
E-mail: it_internazionalista@yahoo.com

Grupo Internacionalista/México

Mexico: write to Apdo. Postal 70-379, Admón. de Correos No. 70, CP 04511, México, D.F., Mexico
E-mail: grupointernacionalista@yahoo.com.mx
Tel. Mexico, D.F.: 55-3154-7361; Guadalajara: 33-1752-6643; Oaxaca: 951-185-6816; Tijuana: 664-112-5423



The Only Solution to Capitalist Austerity: Europe-Wide Socialist Revolution!

The “Brexit” Trap: British Left Caught Between “Leave” and “Remain” in European Union

On June 23, British voters were called upon to cast their ballot on the issue of whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union (“Brexit”) or remain in it. It was a referendum centered on the question of immigration – this was the reason it was called and the issue that dominated debate throughout the campaign. After the dust settled, it emerged that 51.9% had voted to leave and 48.1% to remain – a clear if not overwhelming decision in favor of Brexit. The result sent shock waves through the political establishment and the markets.

The vote set off fireworks in both of Britain’s major parties. It was a repudiation of Conservative Party prime minister David Cameron, who called the referendum as a maneuver to stifle inner-party discontent among Tory backbenchers in Parliament. He figured that after negotiating some concessions from the EU bureaucrats in Brussels he could get a majority for “Remain.” On the other hand, Tory Brexiteers and the far-right UK Independence Party who led the “Leave” camp were ecstatic: UKIP chief Nigel Farage declared June 24 “independence day.” Meanwhile, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn faced a revolt by MPs (members of Parliament) who accused him of not campaigning hard enough to stay in the EU.

International finance capital was alarmed. The vote immediately led to the fall of the British pound to the lowest level since 1985 and stock market turmoil. The big money men in the City of London financial district were so sure of a victory for “Remain” that many hadn’t hedged their investments against the possibility of a Brexit. There was fear of a new crisis for the euro as Italian banks appeared shaky. But the longer-term repercussions remain unclear, and not only because actual secession from the EU, if it started right now, would take at least two years. Negotiating

**No to Both Sides in the Chauvinist Circus:
Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!**



Neil Hall/Reuters

Supporters of British exit from the European Union celebrate after referendum victory, June 24. Much of the British left joined chauvinist campaign calling for imperialist Britain to “Leave,” while Labour and Tory government called to “Remain” in the imperialist EU. The campaign was dominated by anti-immigrant appeals on both sides.

the various international treaties, including trade pacts, which would replace EU membership would take even longer.

Moreover, leading Conservative campaigners for Brexit like former London mayor Boris Johnson long ago suggested that they would use a referendum victory to negotiate further concessions. What then? If Britain ends up, like Norway, not formally part of the European Union but subject to its legislation (including an obligation to take in European immigrants) as well as co-financing the EU budget, “Leave” supporters will have been duped. But, if, as was leaked to the press at the end of July, an “emergency brake” on migration to the UK for up to seven years is agreed to in order to keep Britain in the fold, it would make a mockery of claims that voting to “Remain” would defend immigrants’ rights.

Now the political repercussions of the unexpected “Leave” victory are playing out in Britain. Cameron, who had planned on a leisurely withdrawal from office this October, resigned precipitously. Among the Tory Brexiteers, “justice” minister Michael Gove sank Johnson’s bid to become prime minister. One candidate after another was eliminated in true “House of Cards” style until Britain suddenly (without any popular election) had a new PM: Theresa May. The former Home Secretary (interior minister) is a virulent immigrant-basher and would-be Maggie Thatcher II. Donald Trump fan Johnson got the Foreign Office, in charge of negotiating Brexit (which a German Social Democrat likened to naming Dracula health minister). As the Remain camp pushes for a revote, May and Johnson are delaying by dragging out Brexit negotiations.

Over in Labour, the right wing seized upon the referendum result to try to topple Corbyn as party Leader. Labour Members of Parliament passed a vote of no confidence by 172 to 40. But the influx of new young members, many of them Corbyn supporters, raising party membership from 200,000 after its defeat in the May 2015 elections to over 500,000 today, could sink the MPs’ revolt. So they are demanding that new members be disenfranchised. If that doesn’t work, the coup plotters may then split to join with the hapless Liberal Democrats to form the “center-left” bourgeois party they have long sought. In response the entire opportunist left is going all-out to save Corbyn, with fervent supporters of Leave now equally fervently backing the man who rounded up Labour votes to Remain in the EU.

Meanwhile, in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which voted heavily for “Remain,” bourgeois nationalist politicians are scrambling to gain favor with the European Union. Scottish National Party leader and First Minister of the Scottish Parliament Nicola Sturgeon declared that a new referendum on independence was on the agenda, and headed to Brussels to unleash a charm offensive, hoping to cut a deal for Scotland to enter the European Union if it leaves the UK. Even if it could overcome opposition from other EU governments (e.g., Spain, worried about Catalan secession), that would mean subjecting Scotland to the same brutal austerity policies that have devastated Greece. In Northern Ireland, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams called for an “All-Ireland forum” to “redesign the constitutional and political future of the island” to stay in the EU.

Revolutionary Marxists are irreconcilable opponents of the European Union – a “Fortress Europe” which condemns refugees at its borders to death every day – and would never advocate voting for this imperialist alliance. Yet when a referendum about EU membership is posed by competing bourgeois forces, the political content of the referendum is a key factor. In this case, where the battle focused on differing formulas for restricting immigration, campaigns by ostensible Marxists for a “Leave” vote meant giving this chauvinist circus a “left” cover. *The only possible course for proletarian revolutionaries*



Luke MacGregor/Bloomberg

Tory “Brexit” campaign leader and fan of Donald Trump, former London mayor Boris Johnson.

was to abstain on the vote (including blank or spoiled ballots) and counterpose to it a class-struggle campaign for asylum for refugees and full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

Moreover, just as the dispute over “Brexit” was going hot and heavy between wings of the British bourgeoisie, just across the Channel France was exploding with massive class battles. From April through June, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth marched, refinery workers cut off fuel supplies, rail workers stopped the trains to protest the anti-labor law of the Socialist government of François Hollande. Yet British leftists were too busy arguing to vote to leave the EU (in a campaign dominated by English chauvinism and anti-immigrant racism) to call to unite with the French workers. The program of the League for the Fourth International to bring down the European Union is not to promote one of its imperialist components against others but to *destroy the imperialist bloc with internationalist class struggle: For a socialist United States of Europe!*

Scapegoating Immigrants

Britain was never more than half-way in the European Union. For decades, the Conservative Party has bandied about anti-“Europe” rhetoric, going back to Margaret Thatcher’s 1979 “I want my money back” jibe. After winning the 2015 general election, Tory prime minister Cameron once again renegotiated the terms of Britain’s membership of the EU, announcing victory after getting a reduction in social services payments to East European workers. He then called the referendum. However, unlike the Labour government which successfully pulled the same “concessions+referendum” maneuver in 1975, Cameron not only faced “Eurosceptics” (i.e., hard-line EU opponents) in his own party, led by Johnson and Gove, but the far-right, anti-immigrant UKIP has been racking up electoral scores of over 10% in recent years.

The Brexit victory was not in response to the vicious anti-worker austerity meted out by the European central bankers. Britain has retained its own currency as well as other “opt-outs.” It didn’t face the brutal treatment that Greece has

received from the EU. The new-found sympathy for the downtrodden from the likes of Johnson/Gove and their railing about foreign “elites” is sheer hypocrisy. No one forced the British government to increase school fees by 300 percent, or to abolish the Education Maintenance Allowance that aided many working-class children to go on to higher education. It was London, not Brussels, that dictated a “bedroom tax” to force poor people out of homes deemed “too large” for them, that opened up the National Health Service to private companies, that cut benefits and imposed slave-labor “zero hours” contracts and all the rest of it.

No, this home-grown austerity was *not* what was fueling fury against the EU. As the rival campaigns got into gear, the partisans of “Brexit” began complaining that they were the victims of “Project Fear” – i.e., a propaganda campaign warning of economic catastrophe in the event of leaving the EU. (It was such a “Project Fear” that turned the tide against Scottish independence in the referendum two years ago.¹) Yet the Leave campaign deployed a far more effective “Project Fear” using all the techniques of the Big Lie, the crudest racist anti-immigrant fear-mongering about a supposed invasion of murderers and rapists. Thus armed forces minister Penny Mordaunt declared (ITV, 22 May):

“A Remain vote in this referendum is a vote to allow people from Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey to move here freely when they join the EU soon.... Many of these countries have high crime rates, problems with gangs and terror cells as well as challenging levels of poverty.”

This was typical of the “post-factual” nature of the campaigning. There was and is not the remotest chance of Turkey rapidly joining the EU. UKIP leader Farage’s masterpiece was a billboard with a huge photo of Middle Eastern refugees lined up ... at the Slovenian border. Boris Johnson actually attributed U.S. president Obama’s support to Remain being due to his Kenyan father, as this supposedly meant that he hated the British Empire. The campaign was finally punctuated by the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox in Yorkshire on June 16. Her killer reportedly shouted “Britain first” and was in contact with fascist circles both in the UK and the U.S. for years. But he was promptly classified “mentally unstable” and forgotten about.

Far from combating the chauvinist tide, the Remain campaign countered the fear-mongering about immigrants by claiming that staying in the European Union was the more effective course to combat “uncontrolled immigration.” At the beginning of the year, Cameron had attacked Labour: “They met with a



Right-wing British press has been whipping up hysteria against immigrants for years. This came to a head over the referendum on staying in the European Union or exiting. In the campaign, both Remain and Leave focused on how to limit immigration. Marxist internationalists oppose both sides, fight instead for full citizenship for immigrants.

bunch of migrants in Calais, they said they could all come to Britain. The only people they never stand up for are the British people and hard-working tax-payers” (*Independent*, 27 January). Yet it was not just the Tories who spewed out anti-immigrant rhetoric. Labour “Remain” campaigner Ed Balls argued, “We need to press Europe to restore proper borders, and put new controls on economic migration” (*Daily Mirror*, 14 June).

For years, the Labour Party not only engaged in anti-immigrant rhetoric but, when it governed Britain from 1997 to 2010, carried out anti-immigrant repression. Under Tony Blair’s “New Labour” regime, his home secretary Jack Straw vilified Roma (“gypsy”) immigrants as burglars, thieves and troublemakers, and set up a network of immigration detention centers where human rights abuses were rampant. Straw’s successor, David Blunkett told Asians in Britain to speak English at home and proposed a “Britishness” test for immigrants. With this kind of instigation from top government officials, there was a surge in racist attacks, with the number of racial incidents quadrupling from 1996/97 to 2003/04 (reported in Richard Seymour, *Corbyn: The Strange Rebirth of Radical Politics* [2016]).

By 2013, some 30,000 people were held in the immigration jails set up by the Blairites, half of them asylum seekers. Sexual abuse of female detainees at the Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Center was widely reported in the press and a focus of a parliamentary Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom. New Labour waged and won elections by appealing to middle-class Tory voters with Thatcherite “free market” policies. But after being cast into opposition in 2010, Labour Party Leader Ed Miliband sought to get back in office with chauvinist appeals to working-class voters summed up under the label “Blue Labour.” This meant

¹ In the Scottish referendum, the League for the Fourth International advocated a critical “yes” vote in favor of independence. See “For a Scottish Workers Republic in a Socialist Federation of the British Isles” (September 2014), reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015.

harping on anti-immigrant and nationalist appeals in order to compete with the likes of the English Defence League and UKIP on their own right-wing terrain.

Not only New Labour and Blue Labour right-wingers in the Labour leadership spouted an anti-immigrant line as they opposed Brexit. So, too, did reputed left-winger Jeremy Corbyn, although less crudely. In an upset vote after Labour's dismal showing in the 2015 general elections, Corbyn was elected as party Leader representing a more traditional variant of reformism.² Although a critic of the EU himself, Corbyn campaigned for Remain, attacking the Tory cabinet as incapable of actually restricting immigration. In an opinion piece in the *Guardian* (20 February), Corbyn complained that "Cameron's much-heralded 'emergency brake' on in-work migrants' benefits will do nothing to cut inward migration to Britain." Corbyn complained to the BBC that "we are reliant on importing nurses and doctors from abroad."

In mid-June, Corbyn rose in Parliament to demand reinstating the Migrant Impact Fund, which had been introduced by Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2008 and then abolished by Cameron. Corbyn neglected to mention that this money, supposedly to compensate towns and regions for the "burden" of an influx of immigrants, *comes from fees levied on non-EU students and immigrants!* As Labour spokesman John Denham bragged, "Every penny was funded by a levy on migrants themselves, not the taxpayer" (*Guardian*, 6 August 2010). Meanwhile, deputy Labour leader Tom Watson and Corbyn ally John McDonnell called to restrict free movement of labor within the EU. The fact is that every side in the referendum battle – both "Leave" and "Remain," from UKIP racists to Labour reformists – engaged in immigrant-bashing.

As the referendum approached, there was a crescendo of anti-immigrant propaganda, part of a deliberate marketing strategy by the right-wing Brexiteers. Johnson and Grove called for an Australian-style "points-based" system giving capitalists carte blanche to import skilled labor as needed. Actually, the Australian system is based on a "blow them out of the water" military strategy to prevent refugees and "illegal" immigrants from reaching Australian shores. While playing the anti-immigrant card to the hilt, contrary to the delusions of many of their voters, the right-wing Brexit campaigners' intention was not to stop immigration but to give capitalists greater control over which immigrants get in, while terrorizing those who make it, and setting one section of the working class against another.

² See "Corbynmania Sweeps Britain," *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.



Demagogic immigrant-bashing campaign billboard unveiled by Nigel Farage (shown in photo), leader of far-right UK Independence Party, in closing days of campaign for Brexit. Using photo of Middle Eastern refugees entering Slovenia, UKIP stroked frenzy calling to "take control of our borders."

Then after the vote there was an explosion of hate crimes. Leaflets distributed in letter boxes in Huntingdon read "Leave the EU – No more Polish vermin." The Polish cultural centre in Hammersmith, west London was vandalized. There were numerous reports of people deemed to be immigrants (some of whom have been in Britain for five generations) stopped in the street and told, "We voted Leave, so it's time for you to leave." And there were actual physical assaults. The number of such cases reported doubled in the week after the vote. Notably, some of the abuse was directed against Muslims: either the EU was believed to be responsible for them as well, or the racists thought the vote had given them a green light to attack any and all "foreigners." The fact is that the Brexit referendum was infused with xenophobia – *on both sides*.

The Pro-Imperialist Labour Euroleft

There is a "soft left" in Labour which despaired long ago of stopping Thatcher or her successors through mobilizing the strength of the working class. Like many other reformists throughout Europe, they pretend that the representatives of the European bourgeoisies, when in Brussels, can be persuaded to do the exact opposite of what they are doing in their home countries. Former London mayor Ken Livingstone thus declared, "On its own the sovereign nation state is no longer up to the job of dealing with the many pressing issues, such as the power of multinational corporations ... The socialist project goes through Europe or it probably goes nowhere" (*Guardian* [London], 21 November 1991). This blew up in their faces after 2008 as the EU openly became the enforcer for capitalist austerity as dictated by German imperialism.

An extreme form of this pro-EU sentiment is represented by the "Red Flag" group in the Labour Party, which paints the Brexit vote as a "severe setback." It talks of the "progressive

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Brexit Vote Intensifies Inter-Imperialist Rivalries

“Willkommen in der Festung Europa”

Hitler tried but failed to consolidate a German-dominated *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe) by blitzkrieg in World War II. Kaiser Wilhelm tried the same gambit in World War I (the ill-fated Schlieffen Plan). Particularly since the capitalist reunification of Germany in 1990, the “democratic” imperialist rulers in Berlin and the bankers in Frankfurt have sought to achieve suzerainty on the continent by economic domination of the European Union. Yet what emperors, fascists and financiers couldn’t achieve could now be the result of a British exit from the EU, should it occur.

How long German imperialist ascendancy in Europe would last is another matter – certainly no “Thousand-Year Fourth Reich.” Already the day after the Brexit vote, the Rome (Italy) daily *Il Messaggero* (claiming to speak on behalf of “all European citizens”) editorialized: “Europe doesn’t deserve to be at Germany’s beck and call.” And surveying the opinions of Eastern European politicians, Spiegel online (24 June) reported: “Not least, Great Britain was valued in the East as a counterweight to the hegemonic power, Germany.”

Already, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble runs the Eurogroup of finance ministers which controls economic affairs in the EU, issuing *diktats* to bring weaker members to heel – most recently Greece, but also Ireland, Portugal, Spain and even Italy – forcing pension cutbacks, mass layoffs, slashing social services and cutting wages. The European Central Bank, which controls the common currency



Bloomberg

Euro sign sculpture in front of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany: the dictatorship of finance capital.

(the euro), is headquartered in the German banking center of Frankfurt. France alone, with its ailing economy, is too weak to constitute a countervailing force resisting orders from Berlin. The result could be a shift of European foreign policy away from the U.S./British axis that has dominated Western Europe since the end of World War II.

Immediately after the Brexit vote, leading German political figures demanded a hard line against *perfidus Albion*. Christian Democrat hardliner Schäuble repeated his warning to Britain made before the referendum, that “*drin heißt drin, und raus heißt raus*” (In is in, and out is out). The same signal from Social

Democratic (SPD) leaders in the coalition government: deputy chancellor Sigmar Gabriel and foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (along with European Parliament president Martin Schulz) demanded a quick Brexit: to avoid splitting Europe as the referendum split Britain, “the heads of state and government must provide clarity, and soon.” For now, chancellor Angela Merkel’s “soft” line prevailed, but pressure is building.

The very day after the Brexit vote, a slew of plans started appearing to reorder the Fortress. The German finance ministry’s contingency plan, “German Strategy Re: Brexit,” foresees “difficult divorce negotiations” with Britain, and “no automatic access to the European single market.” Schäuble has long flirted with calling for a European finance ministry that could

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Frontex

The European Union of repression. The EU’s multinational Frontex border police has been dispatched to round up refugees in Greece. In addition to a beefed up Euro border guard and coast guard, German social democrats want a European FBI.

British EU Referendum: Who Voted for What, and Why

Various commentators seeking to explain the unexpected victory for Brexit declared it a veritable working-class revolt. (As usual, “the working class” is only taken notice of in bourgeois media in order to label it racist.) In paternalist tones it is declared that opposition to racism and chauvinism among some workers is mere middle-class snobbery rather than dictated by the need for united class struggle. Ostensible leftists with an anti-EU position also bought into the claims that it was a working-class vote, to justify their own capitulation. They all had virtually indistinguishable reactions to the referendum results:

- “It is a gross oversimplification to reduce this to a vote over racism. The vote was, above all else, a rebellion by working class people who feel they have had their lives torn apart by the ruling elite” (Socialist Workers Party: Joseph Choonara, “After the leave vote: we can beat back racism and austerity,” *Socialist Review*, July-August 2016).
- “[I]t is completely false to suggest that the exit vote had – in the main – a right wing or racist character. Of course, some of those who voted for exit will have done so for racist or nationalist reasons, but the fundamental character of the exit vote was it was a working class revolt” (Socialist Party of England and Wales, “Britain: After the Brexit referendum,” 27 July).
- “[O]nly the wilfully blind in the workers movement will see the vote for Brexit as simply a boost for UKIP and the Tory right wing. Cameron has resigned, the Conservatives have been bitterly divided, the capitalist rulers of Europe



Ansa

Supporters of “Leave” celebrate the day after the referendum in Parliament Square. The large majority of “Leave” voters were middle-class.

are in shock. The time is ripe for workers struggles to begin to claw back decades of concessions” (Spartacist League/Britain, “Brexit: Defeat for Bankers and Bosses!” 24 June).

Yes, the Brexiteers were able to mobilize a layer of mainly older, white, conservative English workers. But they did not do so on the basis of opposition to capitalism. In fact, in exit polls those who opposed capitalism were split 50-50 between “Remain” and “Leave.” Those who disapproved of “multiculturalism” and “feminism” (whatever they may understand by those terms), as well as immigration and even the Internet, tended to vote for Brexit. Such backward, often pro-Tory sections of the working class are not new. And while previously they may have voted for the Conservatives, in recent elections a certain number of blue-collar workers hit by collapsing living standards and declining numbers of good jobs have been attracted to UKIP, blaming their fate on the arrival of immigrant workers from other EU countries.

The claims that Brexit was a working-class revolt are cheap populism based on a perversion of the statistics. First of all, some 64% of Labour Party supporters voted to stay in the EU. Secondly, many workers did not vote at all. While Leave won with 17.4 million votes, as against 16.1 million for Remain, some 13 million registered voters did not go to the polls and another 7 million eligible voters are not registered. As in most advanced capitalist bourgeois democracies, the proportion of non-voters is greatest among workers, poor and young people. According to an analysis in *BMJ* (formerly British

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North News and Pictures

Brexit supporters in Sunderland in northern England cheer referendum vote, June 24. Numbers of mainly older conservative white workers voted for Brexit, but focusing blame for job losses and cuts to social services on the EU let British rulers off the hook.



Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn, formerly a critic of the European Union, campaigning in Aberdeen, Scotland in June to stay in the imperialist EU. Now leftist supporters of Leave and Remain are back together to support reformist Corbyn against Labour right-wingers.

“Brexit” Trap...

continued from page 7

impulse in the EU” in the “processes of economic integration” that supposedly “raises humanity’s productivity.” (Try selling that to Greek workers!) In its previous incarnation as Workers Power, this group had some “Trotskyist” pretensions; it now clearly wants to be a pseudo-Marxist “brains trust” for the Corbyn wing of Labour. While it correctly points to the anti-immigrant tide, its main complaint is that Brexit represents a step backward from the imaginary supranational European state which they imagine exists and think is progressive.

In fact, Lenin’s analysis in this matter a century ago has stood the test of time:

“From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism – i.e., the export of capital and the division of the world by the ‘advanced’ and ‘civilized’ colonial powers – a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary....

“Of course, temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists ... but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America”

–V. I. Lenin, “On the Slogan for a United States of Europe” (August 1915)

Leon Trotsky likewise emphasized during World War I, in articles he quoted in *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), his *magnus opus* against Stalin’s anti-Marxist dogma of building “socialism in one country”:

“The imperialist half-unification of Europe might be achieved ... as a result of a decisive victory of one group of the great

powers as well as a consequence of an inconclusive outcome of the war. In either instance, the unification of Europe would signify the complete trampling underfoot of the principle of self-determination with respect to all weak nations and the preservation and centralization of all the forces and weapons of European reaction: monarchies, standing armies and secret diplomacy.”

Trotsky’s conclusion: “Consequently the United States of Europe represents the form – the only conceivable form – of the dictatorship of the European proletariat.” Or as he later put it as a slogan: *For a Soviet United States of Europe!*

The European Union is not an embryonic super-state; it is a bloc of bourgeois nation-states balancing their often-conflicting interests. Its origin is in the European Economic Community (EEC), or Common Market, which was originally set up in the mid-

1950s as part of the U.S.-directed reorganization of West Europe against the Soviet bloc. Far from being a “progressive impulse,” it was essentially an economic compromise between the French and German bourgeoisies in the framework of the Cold War imperialist political/military alliance against the bureaucratically degenerated Soviet workers state. France obtained a massive subsidy for its agriculture – the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – to prop up the peasant electorate of the bourgeois parties. Germany rearmed and rebuilt its economic juggernaut with a wider market.

Thus the European “Community” was designed to cement an anti-Soviet alliance under the aegis of U.S. imperialism, which British membership reinforced. (French president Charles de Gaulle called the UK an American Trojan Horse, and twice vetoed British membership in the EEC.) After the counterrevolution in the USSR and Eastern Europe, including the capitalist reunification of Germany, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty created the European Union. The EU became increasingly a cover for German domination of Europe, nailed down with the adoption in 1999 of a common currency, the euro (€), which as we wrote then was really the “Deutschmark in drag.” Britain often served as a brake to German ambitions, occasionally creating tensions with Washington, tempered by the overwhelming U.S. military might.

Another pro-EU left group is the social-democratic Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) of Sean Matgamna, which politically supports the pro-Corbyn Momentum movement in Labour. It is also active in the Another Europe Is Possible popular-front coalition, which includes Alan Thornett’s Socialist Resistance, Left Unity and various petty-bourgeois and bourgeois “progressives,” and has the approval of former



Crime doesn't pay: pro-imperialist Labourite euroleft wanted to be Corbyn braintrusts, so they called to Remain. Now they're under attack by New Labour witchhunters looking for reds under the bed.

Greek finance minister Yanis Varoufakis. Yet the fact is that *"another Europe" without vicious anti-worker and anti-immigrant policies is not possible under capitalism.* It's not a matter of changing "neoliberal" policies, nor are we in a cyclical "recession." In its already eight-year-old *depression*, decaying capitalism must massively impoverish the workers to shore up the falling profit rate.

The most dramatic proof of the impossibility of resuscitating "welfare state" reforms under capitalism, or just fending off wage cuts, layoffs and slashing of social programs ordered by the imperialist financiers with protests, marches, "general strikes" and elections is the experience of the bourgeois populist SYRIZA government in Greece last year, in which Varoufakis was a leading figure. After a bogus referendum voted "no" on the Eurobankers' demands in July 2015, the next day SYRIZA prime minister Alexis Tsipras (who called the referendum and campaigned for "no") turned around and implemented their austerity program anyway, as he had to.³

In the wake of the Brexit vote, Corbyn and his left cheerleaders are being rewarded for doing yeoman's work in campaigning for Remain (thus defending the EU imperialist

alliance) as right-wing Labourites seek to throw the lot out of the party. In recent days there has been an explosion of "reds under the beds" exposés. Labour deputy leader Watson told the *Guardian* (9 August) in an interview that the party is "at risk of being taken over by hard-left 'Trotsky entryists,' who are 'twisting the arms' of young members." The red-baiting attacks on "Trot infiltrators" single out the AWL, the Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW) and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), demanding that they be expelled, just as the Militant group was purged from Labour by Neil Kinnock in the 1980s when he was stabbing the militant coal miners' strike in the back.

Lexit: "Little England" Chauvinism and Labourite Reformism

Attempts have been made by ostensible Marxists to claim that the Brexit vote "objectively" had an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist character. At a "Left Leave" meeting in London on May 18, SWP guru Alex Callinicos declared, "A vote to Leave is a vote against the EU, IMF and NATO axis, but it's also a vote against our own ruling class." Not when it posits that the main enemy is Eurocapitalism rather than in Westminster. As for NATO, one result of Brexit could be a stepped-up British role in the U.S.-dominated military alliance. This was underlined when Parliament voted on July 18 to replace the fleet of Trident submarines as a nuclear weapons platform at a cost of £42 billion (at least). And with the prospect of Britain leaving, there is a new push for an autonomous European military not under the Pentagon's thumb. Given the UK's privileged, fringe position in the EU, the British vote will probably mean a "leaner, meaner" EU, with Berlin rather than Brussels bureaucrats more openly calling the shots.

During the referendum campaign, the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) vainly applied to the Electoral Commission in April to be designated as the official representative for "Leave." This coalition consists of some Stalinist leftovers who have learned nothing and forgotten nothing since the Communist Party's "British Road to Socialism" in the 1950s, the RMT and other trade unionists, and the SPEW, the British section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI), as well as the "union" of prison guards led by these pseudo-socialists. The TUSC was created in 2010, by much the same forces that the year before had fielded a slate called "No2EU" in elections for the insipid European Parliament.

This came after strikes in large construction projects across the UK in 2009. These involved employers subcontracting the construction of a refinery extension to an Italian company which planned to employ Italian and Portuguese workers under EU rules. Rather than fighting for a closed shop and union control of hiring, the trade-union bureaucrats, in particular UNITE, pushed the line of "British jobs for British workers." After giving some lip service to the need for unionization, the SPEW then openly endorsed calls for putting the interests of "local" (i.e., British) workers first. In addition to supporting a chauvinist strike against immigrant workers, these reformists consider cops – the armed

³ See "Greek Workers: Defeat the Bankers' Diktat, Occupy the Banks and Ports!" (4 July 2015) and "Greece: The Naked Rule of Finance Capital" (18 July 2015) in *The Internationalist* No. 41 (September-October 2015).



The Socialist Party of England and Wales has made a practice trying to put a left cover on capitulation to British chauvinism. Real Trotskyists call to bring down the bosses' EU with class struggle leading to socialist revolution.

fist of capital – part of the working class.⁴

Neither the Socialist Party nor the TUSC may have contributed much in the way of votes to “Leave,” but what they did do is decisively intervene in one of the more significant workers’ struggles of the last decade to help ensure that it took a chauvinist direction. The SPEW repeated this betrayal in March of this year, when construction workers blocked a biomass power station being built in Rotherham, Yorkshire by low-wage Croatian workers. Meanwhile “No2EU” has morphed into “Trade Unionists Against the EU,” which demands nothing less than “Exit the EU on the basis of socialist policies.” And what might those be? “No to EU militarisation and an EU army,” they say. And Her Majesty’s Armed Forces?

As reformists, the Socialist Party accepts the limits of decrepit British capitalism. SPEW general secretary Peter Taaffe expected to see “fear and resentment that scarce resources in housing, education and the NHS will not be sufficient if a new wave of immigrants comes to Britain.” He complained that “even Cameron’s attempt to limit Polish immigration to Britain was met with a flat rejection by the Polish Prime Minister, Ewa Kopacz.” Taaffe is so gangrened by chauvinism that he sees a good side if Eastern European workers were barred from the UK: “If they were forced to stay [in Poland], she and the Polish capitalists would be confronted by a massive rebellion of Polish workers” (*Socialist*, 10 June 2015).

So Brexit won. Did this promote greater working-class unity against national chauvinism in Europe? Not hardly. What about Polish workers today, in Britain and in Poland, do they benefit from Brexit? Not at all. And did the “left” Brexiteers in Britain

lift a finger to join in struggle with French strikers who were waging an actual struggle against capitalist austerity? No again.

Little enough distinguishes the basic Socialist Workers Party position from that of SPEW other than a somewhat different clientele and language. This, of course, means two competing coalitions, the SWP having enticed the Communist Party as well as ex-SWPers like Counterfire over to its shop, the Left Leave Campaign, or #Lexit. But like the SPEW/TUSC, the SWP/LEXIT has an abiding faith in the reformability of the British bourgeois state. The SWP’s “Six myths about the EU” (*Socialist Worker*, 30 March), which does not even mention the word capitalism at all, happily says that “some British workplace legislation, such as health and safety, is stronger than the EU demands,” and that much EU labor law is already written into British legislation.

If the hallmark of the SPEW’s campaign to leave the EU is giving a “socialist” cover to anti-immigrant chauvinism, the SWP’s Lexit campaign is all about calculating the odds to get a “left” government of the capitalist state. “The EU is even harder to reform than national governments are,” says its “Six myths” centerfold. “Britain’s rulers fight bitterly against any attempt at progressive reforms at home. But to force reforms on the EU would mean overpowering their resistance too.” The same theme is echoed by Tariq Ali in a debate on the EU, “Forget removing privatisation if we’re in the EU.” And again from Scottish ex-SWPer Neil Davidson: “it would be easier to achieve reforms in Westminster than in the EU, where it requires winning unanimity in the Council” (“A socialist case for leaving the EU,” *Bella Caledonia*, 1 March).

Although Davidson lambastes “lesser evilism,” his arguments, as well as those of Ali and the SWP’s point man on Brexit, Choonara, are all about the “lesser evil” of getting Jeremy Corbyn into the Prime Minister’s office in 10 Downing Street – or in Davidson’s case, to get the bourgeois Scottish nationalists to break from their embrace of the EU. In reality, in this period of putrefying capitalism it would be pretty difficult to undo privatization and renationalize the railways, as Corbyn proposes, whether in Westminster or Brussels. But even were that to occur, it would not alter the capitalist nature of the state one whit, nor would it do anything to get rid of poverty, mass unemployment, social service cuts, anti-immigrant repression or imperialist war. That requires nothing less than socialist revolution, which has nothing to do with Lexit.

After the “Leave” victory, the various Lexiteers are peddling the line that “People who are generally forgotten, ignored or sneered at delivered a stunning blow against the people at the top of society,” etc. (*Socialist Worker*, 28 June). They do admit that “the reasons for that rebellion are contradictory,” but do everything possible to play down the impact of the English chauvinism and scapegoating of immigrants and refugees that marked the campaign. There certainly was anger at an “elite,” the “establishment” and the posh boys on top telling those at the bottom how to vote. But this populist sentiment was channeled in a reactionary direction, and there is no evidence that more than a tiny percentage of voters cast a ballot for Brexit for the reasons that the Lexit crowd presented as their “left”

⁴ See “Her Majesty’s Social Democrats in bed with the Police,” *The Internationalist* No. 29, Summer 2009.

Photos: Telegraph [top], North News [bottom]



In early 2009, strikes broke out at Lindsey oil refinery (above) and other energy plants (below, Wilton Chemical Complex, Teeside) demanding “British jobs for British workers.” SPEW endorsed the strike, trying to hide Union Jack chauvinism by talking of “local jobs.”

justifications for lining up behind the chauvinist campaign.

To buttress its tale of a working-class revolt, the SWP insists that business interests were solidly against Brexit, with the exception of the stray hedge fund, small businessmen and other supposedly inconsequential sectors. “So, if the interests of British capitalism placed it firmly in the Remain camp, why all the fuss in the Tory party?” asks SWPer Callinicos in his on-line *International Socialism* (Summer 2016) wrap-up, “Brexit: A World-Historic Turn.” His response: “Thatcher and UKIP.” He then goes further, claiming that “Just as with Donald Trump’s capture of the Republican Party” in the U.S., “we have the paradox of the main party of big business pulling away from the interests of capital.” This is sheer fiction.

The banking industry, which has grown enormously in recent years and stands to lose its position as the financial pivot of Europe, certainly wants to stay in the EU. But that hardly represents the interests of “capital” as a whole. A reported majority of the Tory MPs for Brexit represents a significant section of capital, and as for the Docklands media, the biggest circulation papers (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Star*,

Sun, *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Times*) came out for Leave. The head of the British Chambers of Commerce called for “out now” and many BCC members shared his views. In fact, a major reason why Labour’s 1975 referendum passed and the Tories’ 2016 vote failed is that 40 years ago there was a solid bourgeois consensus to join the EEC, while today the British bourgeoisie is divided.

And as soon as the referendum was over, the differences over Leave and Remain were soon forgot as the reformists are back together tailing after the Labour left. Callinicos’ main complaint about the leaders of the labor movement was that they failed to deliver a left critique of the EU, and “not necessarily an internationalist and anti-capitalist one,” he added: a Tony Benn-style “left reformist critique ... would serve quite well.” Rather than putting forward a revolutionary program, as always the chummy opportunists seek to “make the lefts fight.” So why not oppose all sides in this squabble within the bourgeoisie? “Abstention will simply mean invisibility and, consequently, irrelevance,” writes Davidson. Only to an inveterate parliamentary cretinist. But a hard fight against the chauvinism of both Leave and Remain concretized in internationalist class-struggle mobilizations demanding asylum for refugees and full citizenship rights for all immigrants, to shut down all the detention prisons and let the detainees out, and to block the Chunnel in support of French workers would hardly be invisible.

After three decades of vicious Thatcherite anti-working-class policies, both under the Tories (Thatcher, Major, now Cameron) and Labour (Blair and Gordon), which have massively privatized British industry and gutted services, from the mines and railways to the post office and National Health Service; after years of declining wages and seeing whole swaths of northern England turn into an industrial wasteland, there is anger aplenty in the working class that could be mobilized in struggle against the arrogant capitalist rulers who have destroyed the livelihoods of millions. But by pushing for either Leave or Remain, and thus tailing after the feuding factions of the capitalist ruling class, the not-so-radical left has done its best to squander the possibility of sharp *class* struggle pointing toward workers revolution.

Forever chasing what’s popular, and squabbling among themselves when (as now) they differ over who to tail after, these reformists are incapable of seeing the class line. Such tailists are incapable of actually leading the working class to victory. This is shown whenever there is sharp struggle. During the 1984-85 coal strike, Socialist Workers Party founder Tony Cliff bragged about SWP supporters crossing miners’ picket lines in half a dozen steel plants. Cliff split from the Fourth International at the dawn of the anti-Soviet Cold War declaring the Stalinized USSR “state capitalist” and refusing to defend it against imperialist attack in the Korean War.

Authentic Trotskyists defended the Soviet bureaucratically degenerated workers state to the end while fighting for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist betrayers. Not surprisingly, when counterrevolution swept through the Soviet bloc in 1989-92, the anti-Trotskyist renegades and scabherders of the SWP cheered the U.S.-backed “democratic” counter-revolutionaries led by Boris Yeltsin – as did the leaders of the AWL (Matgamna), Workers Power, SPEW (Peter Taaffe) and the rest of the Labourite opportunists.

Today the pseudo-socialist Labourite chums are at it again, this time for and against Brexit, and then all together for Corbyn. The sorry spectacle of supposed radical leftists lining up on both sides of the dispute within the ruling class of British imperialism underscores the need to forge a Bolshevik revolutionary party in Britain. Today the League for the Fourth International calls to frontally oppose all the imperialists and bring down the EU’s Fortress Europe through internationalist class struggle to defend immigrants and smash capitalist austerity with socialist revolution. ■

Festung Europa...

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directly order other countries to cut expenditures, eliminate deficits and impose even more brutal austerity on the working class. SPD bigwigs Gabriel and Schulz, in contrast, immediately issued a prepared-in-advance paper, “Refounding Europe,” calling for “more growth-friendly” economic policies and turning the European Commission into “a real European government.”

That won’t happen since the EU is an imperialist bloc, and cannot supplant the national imperialisms under capitalism. Meanwhile, the more operational elements of these plans focus on military and police measures. Social Democrats Gabriel and Schulz call for a “European FBI,” the “effective securing of the EU’s external borders” with “corresponding structures,” a “common European immigration law” and a single foreign policy so that the EU can act as a “single regional force for order.” In the same vein, the Berlin government’s *White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Bundeswehr* (July 2016) calls for “strengthening national and regional capacity for autonomous security preparations” in “common action by the EU.” In particular it seeks to control immigration policy, for which the “effective protection of European external borders is of central importance.”

In view of Germany’s history, its imperialist rulers repeatedly stress the importance of NATO and “partnership” with the U.S. But a different tone is coming post-Brexit from the Eurocrats. A document on “European Union Global Strategy,” *Shared Vision, Common Action, A Stronger Europe* (June 2016) issued after the British vote by European Commission vice president and foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini stressed that, beyond NATO, Europe must be prepared “to act autonomously if and when necessary,” with an “appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy” to “safeguard security within and beyond its borders.” The paper calls for operations involving a new European Border and Coast Guard “to enhance border protection and maritime security.”



German weekly *Der Spiegel* headlined following the Brexit vote, “Europe Is Dead.” But the immediate effect of the British referendum has been to strengthen German domination of the EU.

Following the Brexit vote, various media and politicians wring their hands, moaning that “Europe Is Dead,” as *Der Spiegel* (25 June) headlined on its front page (above a smaller subhead “Long Live Europe?”). Before this there was the Netherlands referendum in April in which almost two-thirds of voters rejected a Ukraine-EU association treaty, leading to talk of “Nexit.” Some pundits are saying that next up is “QuitItaly,” as Italian banks wobble, mass unemployment persists, the Democratic Party government in Rome grows more unpopular and the populist Five Star Movement advances in the polls. A break-up of the EU could be an eventual outcome, *but the immediate effect of the British referendum has been to strengthen German imperialist domination of Europe.*

For sure, British departure from the European Union, if it actually takes place, could screw up the longstanding U.S. policy of dominating Europe through NATO and via its “special relationship” with Britain. Barack Obama was quite frank in pushing for a “Remain” vote, saying “your powerful voice in Europe ensures that Europe takes a strong stance in the world ... closely linked to its allies on the other side of the Atlantic” (*Guardian* [London], 22 April). But the U.S. still has Ireland (where IT giants have their European operations) as an English-speaking back-up channel to the EU, and can use East European allies to undercut any move to détente with Russia. Rather than being a blow against imperialism, Brexit will increase inter-imperialist rivalries. What’s needed is a struggle to *overthrow imperialism, and bring down the imperialist EU by the revolutionary struggle of workers throughout Europe.* ■

ICL: The Main Enemy Is in Brussels

So the positions on Brexit by the various social-democratic reformist left groups were ... thoroughly social-democratic and reformist – what a surprise! Whether they supported Leave or Remain, they did so strictly within the capitalist framework, and whatever their ostensible rationales, they ended up tailing after one or the other side in the reactionary, immigrant-bashing circus. The International Communist League (ICL) and its British section, the Spartacist League (SL/B), on the other hand, swore that they were “standing on the revolutionary, proletarian and internationalist principles of Marxism” when they called for a “Leave” vote (“EU: enemy of workers and immigrants,” *Workers Hammer*, Spring 2016). Yet as we have shown (see “British EU Referendum: Who Voted for What, and Why,” in this issue), the post-referendum assessment by these ex-Trotskyist centrists was strikingly similar to that of the reformist Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and Socialist Party of England and Wales (SPEW).

While the SWP declared the vote for Brexit a “stunning blow against the people at the top of society” (*Socialist Worker*, 28 June), the SL/B and ICL called it a “stunning defeat for the City of London, for the bosses and bankers of Europe as a whole as well as for Wall Street and the US imperialist government” (*Workers Hammer*, Summer 2016). For the bosses and bankers as a whole? In its previous issue *WH* explained in some detail that “opinion in the City of London is also divided”: hedge funds were for Brexit (to escape EU regulations), the investment banks (mostly U.S., German and Swiss) were against. So if it gets too costly, the big banks will just shift EU operations across the Channel, or the Irish Sea. An inconvenience, to be sure, but hardly a stunning defeat. Ditto for industrial bosses: car manufacturers like BMW will just ratchet down production of the Mini at Oxford and Swindon and up it at their Born, Netherlands plant.

Both before and after the vote, *Workers Hammer* argued that a British exit from the EU would “creat[e] more favourable conditions for working-class struggle across Europe.” So how does imposing further restrictions on Polish workers entering Britain (the main selling point for Brexit) aid workers struggle in Europe, or in Britain? How does voting for “Britain Out” in a campaign dominated by English chauvinism bring German and French workers closer together in common class struggle? How does it embolden Italian workers to revolt against the *diktat* of the Eurobankers that would wipe out their retirement savings if tottering Italian banks go under? How does it encourage Scottish workers to



Toby Melville/Reuters

Supporters of “Brexit” celebrate, June 24. Victory in British referendum for vote to leave the European Union a “stunning defeat for the City of London, for the bosses and bankers,” as Spartacist League/Britain claims? Not at all. The British bourgeoisie and even representatives of finance capital were split.

direct their ire at their Scottish nationalist rulers? How does it mobilize British workers to act in support of French workers who at that very moment were striking against anti-labor laws? Answer: it doesn’t.

And if in fact the Brexit vote is “an expression of hostility from the downtrodden and dispossessed” (*Workers Hammer*) or a “revolt against the rich” by “people who are generally forgotten, ignored or sneered at” (*Socialist Worker*), in calling for a vote to Leave the EU, these opportunists have helped *divert* this unfocused sentiment *away from* their main enemy, *British capitalism* (recall that Britain is not part of the Schengen free-transit agreement, nor is it subject to the austerity decrees of the masters of the euro). The SL/B argues that Brexit would “further destabilize” the EU. Quite likely, although by how much remains to be seen. But such destabilization could go in sharply different directions: it could certainly embolden right-wing racist and outright fascist forces such as the National Front in France, as it already has.

The SL/B and SWP both downplayed the impact of the anti-immigrant campaign. The SL hasn’t even bothered to mention the post-referendum upsurge in anti-immigrant attacks. They both justified their call for Leave by saying that if racist forces were prominent it was Labour and the trade-union tops who were responsible by not fighting against the EU. That does not alter the fact that xenophobic and nationalist appeals drove the Leave vote. *Workers Hammer* raises the additional argument that “both pro- and anti-EU camps in the Tory party whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism.” Precisely, which is a key reason why genuine Trotskyists opposed both sides in this referendum that was fought out over how best to limit immigration.

The basic ICL argument is fairly simple: that the European Union is bad, and therefore anything against it is good. It has made the EU into the *summum malum*, the supreme evil. When the EEC was the economic adjunct of the NATO imperialist alliance against the Soviet Union, which Trotskyists defended to the end, despite and against the Stalinist betrayers, that is one thing. But in the context of inter-imperialist rivalries British imperialism outside the imperialist EU is no less an evil, as Scottish and Northern Irish workers may agree. As we have said, because it is an imperialist bloc, genuine Trotskyists would not vote in favor of the EU, whether to join or to stay. However, when the drive to leave it is led by reactionary bourgeois forces, the position taken by revolutionary Marxists depends on a concrete analysis of the circumstances. As Trotsky wrote about a different plebiscite, the so-called “Red Referendum” in Prussia in 1931:

“The question of the coincidence of the voting with the Fascists is consequently viewed by us not from the point of view of some abstract principle, but from the point of view of the actual struggle of the classes for power, and the relationship of forces at a given stage of this struggle.”

—Leon Trotsky, “Against National Communism!” (August 1931)¹

In this case, the Brexit campaign and vote, dominated by anti-immigrant and English-chauvinist bourgeois forces, have heightened inter-imperialist rivalries without strengthening the class consciousness, militancy and international solidarity of the working class.

The ICL argues, correctly, that the EU is not a supranational state but an imperialist-dominated alliance or trading bloc, established by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Trotskyists are opposed to the EU and seek to bring it down. But how? The only answer given by the ICL (along with most of the reformist pseudo-radical left) is to withdraw. But that leaves the imperialists in power on both sides of the Channel. Last year in the battle over the brutal austerity imposed by the European central bankers on Greece, the ICL’s answer was to call for Greece to leave the EU (“Grexit”). What about calling instead, as the League for the Fourth International did, to *bring down*

¹ We previously quoted Trotsky’s analysis of (and opposition to) the Stalinists’ support for the German nationalists and fascists in the Prussian referendum in our polemic on the issue of Brazil impeachment. See “Stumbling in the Dark With ‘Blown-Out Lanterns,’” *The Internationalist*, June 2016.



Reuters

While tailing British bourgeois chauvinist forces in calling for Britain out of the European Union, the ICL did not even mention, much less call for united action with, strikes in France. French workers at the Donges refinery and other refineries and fuel depots around the country struck in May, cutting off fuel supplies.

the whole structure of capitalist/imperialist Europe through sharp class struggle leading to continent-wide socialist revolution? This is never mentioned, not by the reformists nor by the centrist ICL. Why not? Because they believe it is impossible, a pipe dream. Consequently, from Grexit in 2015 to Brexit in 2016, the response of the pseudo- and ex-Trotskyists of different denominations to every crisis in the imperialist EU is a *bourgeois* program.

To get a little historical perspective, consider another case: the imperialist post-World War I order established by the 1919 Versailles Treaty. Bolsheviks were naturally opposed to Versailles as inherently anti-working class. But German nationalist forces including Hitler’s Nazis also opposed this “victor’s peace.” What should communists do? The Stalinized KPD (German Communist Party) on more than one occasion sided with the German nationalists. Here’s what Trotsky had to say about that:

“The political crisis in Germany brings into question the Versailles regime in Europe. The Central Committee of the German Communist Party declares that, having taken power, the German proletariat will liquidate the Versailles documents. Is that all? The abolition of the Versailles Treaty as the highest achievement of the proletarian revolution! What is to be put in its place? There is not a word about this. Such a negative way of putting the question brings the party close to the National Socialists. The Soviet United States of Europe – that is the only correct slogan which points the way out of the splintering of Europe, which threatens not only Germany but all of Europe with complete economic and cultural decline.

“The slogan of the proletarian unification of Europe is simultaneously a very important weapon in the struggle

against the abomination of fascist chauvinism, the baiting of France, and so forth. The most incorrect, the most dangerous policy is that of passive adaptation to the enemy by painting oneself to look like him. The slogans of national despair and national frenzy must be opposed by slogans of international liberation.”

—Leon Trotsky, “The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany” (September 1930)

In the guise of competing with the xenophobic rightists for “oppositional ground,” the ICL has taken the same tack as groups like *Lutte Ouvrière* in France and the Socialist Party of England and Wales. These pseudo-Trotskyists justify embracing anti-immigrant campaigns (banning the Islamic *hijab*, “British jobs for British workers”) by the need to win over backward sections of the working class, competing on the same political terrain as the National Front and UKIP. This is what the ICL has done with its opposition to calling for asylum for Syrian refugees, and to calls for freedom of travel for immigrants within the EU (see “Strange Encounters with the ICL,” *The Internationalist*, August 2015). And now we have a repeat over Brexit. It all fits together.

The ICL’s call for the imperialist UK to break from the imperialist EU is yet another renunciation of its own revolutionary past. At the beginning of the 1980s, the German section of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) initially responded to the rise of a nationalist peace movement with the slogan “Germany Out of NATO.” This was corrected, the Maoist

and Stalinoid groups that raised this slogan were criticized for promoting the idea of a “peace-loving” “neutral” German imperialism, ultimately aiming at counterrevolution in East Germany. Instead the ICL called for “Down with NATO! Defend the Soviet Union!”

In 1982 the iSt put out a statement during a tour of Europe by Ronald Reagan. It called for “Down with NATO and the Common Market!” not for each imperialist country to withdraw from those imperialist alliances. Rather, it looked to “the mobilization of the working masses against all imperialism.” The statement was headlined: “The Main Enemy Is at Home!” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 307, 11 June 1982. But that was when the Spartacist tendency stood on the program of revolutionary Trotskyism. Today the “post-Trotskyist” ICL’s headline would be: “The Main Enemy Is in Brussels.”

Oh yes, the ICL continues to raise the slogan of a Socialist United States of Europe – as do most of the reformists for that matter, giving it their own social-democratic twist. It also calls for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, although that is now qualified with the phrase “for all those who have made it here.” (Refugees need not apply, as ICL no longer calls for asylum.) But these slogans are reduced to ritual incantations – “pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye,” as the revolutionary syndicalists of the IWW used to say – a “maximum program” suitable for Sunday speechifying. Above all, they are not linked to the current class struggles, and in fact are contradicted by the ICL’s support for Brexit, Grexit. Notably, with all its calls for “Britain Out!” of the EU, *Workers Hammer* is silent about the roiling strikes in France.

It is striking that the centrist SL/B concludes its Brexit balance sheet with a call to “repulse any and every attempt by Labour’s right wing to regain control of the party.” This is the same appeal as the entire reformist left, and comes right after Corbyn led Labour to Remain in the imperialist EU! For our part, the League for the Fourth International has insisted – in several articles on the crisis in Greece last year and more recently on the immigration crisis in Italy and now on Brexit – that what’s key is to build a revolutionary workers party on a program of *internationalist class struggle* leading to Europe-wide socialist revolution. As we wrote last year:

“A revolutionary opposition, both outside and inside the Labour Party, would underline that fighting austerity and regenerating the British economy can only be accomplished through workers revolution laying the basis for international socialist planning. It would stress that the haughty British ruling class is armed and dangerous and will use that force to smash resistance unless it is checked and defeated by a greater power, of a mobilized working class armed with a class-struggle program and led by a Leninist-Trotskyist party prepared to sweep away the cops, goons, strikebreakers and court orders, as well as the Labour leaders, left and right, who are the biggest obstacle to victory.”

– “Corbynmania Sweeps Britain,” *The Internationalist* No.41, September-October 2015 ■

The Road to Peace: Smash NATO's Anti-Soviet War Drive Through Proletarian Revolution!

TALKLANDS. THE MAIN ENEMY IS AT HOME

SPARTACIST LEAGUE

WAR BREEDS REVOLUTION - BRING DOWN THATCHER, GALTIER!

THE MAIN ENEMY IS AT HOME!

Statement of the International Executive Committee of the International Spartacist tendency

Down with NATO and the Common Market
Down with the Atlantic Alliance and the "Force de Frappe"

terrified the German people. In con- The driving force toward World War the fitting continuation of that unholy

Back when the Spartacist tendency stood on the program of revolutionary Trotskyism, calling for opposition to all imperialism and proletarian revolution to bring down NATO and the Common Market (*Workers Vanguard* No. 307, 11 June 1982. Today for the “post-Trotskyist” Spartacist League/Britain, the main enemy is no longer at home. The ICL joins much of the British reformist left in calling for imperialist Britain to leave the imperialist European Union.

**Down with Racist Fortress Europe!
Full Citizenship Rights for all Immigrants!
For a Socialist United States of Europe!**

Italy: The Refugee Crisis and Capitalist Barbarism

Marina Militare Italiana



Italian navy photo shows refugees jumping into water as overcrowded boat capsizes off Libya, May 25. In the last week of May more than 1,000 drowned in the Mediterranean.

The following is the lead article of L'Internazionalista No. 1, publication of the Nucleo Internazionalista d'Italia, the newly founded Italian section of the League for the Fourth International.

The graphic images of lifeless bodies stretched out along shorelines and in the sea, of decrepit makeshift vessels – death-traps with people crammed in like sardines in a can – aimlessly drifting at sea, of traumatized exhausted survivors weeping for the loss of their loved ones, have put the European refugee crisis in the spotlight. Countless others silently die of cold, hunger and disease in isolated places or makeshift camps. According to official figures (surely grossly underestimated), over 3,700 migrants died in Mediterranean crossings last year, and more than 2,500 in the first five months of 2016. More than 1,000 drowned just in the last week of May. Meanwhile, some 66,000 immigrants arrived in Italy during the first half of the year, including over 10,000 in the last few days of June.

The massive flow of desperate refugees and immigrants toward Europe is a result of the imperialist devastation of the Near East, Africa and parts of Asia, and the legacy of over a century of brutal colonial/semi-colonial rule and economic rape. The imperialist wars of conquest, the massive devastation and massacres in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria have forced millions to leave their homes (if they still exist) and migrate. In Syria, a country of a little over 20 million people, 12 million have been forced to migrate, 8 million internally in Syria and 4 million abroad.

Italy has played an important role in the imperialist wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. The massive bombardment of Libya in 2011, by NATO warplanes taking off from Italian bases, destroyed the entire industrial infrastructure and Libya itself as a viable country. Even today the North African country can only manage to export about a quarter of the petroleum that it did before 2011. Italian imperialism conquered and enslaved Libya as a colony from 1911 to 1931, both before and during Mussolini's fascist regime, killing over 200,000 people. This included terrible atrocities at concentration camps like El Agheila. (See Eric Salerno, *Genocidio in Libia* [Genocide in Libya] on the magnitude of Italian imperialism's crimes in Libya.)

The reaction of the European Union (EU) countries to the flow of refugees has been to build fences to keep them out, as has been done in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey. Security has been beefed up at the borders and the Mediterranean greatly militarized. Thousands are held in detention camps (known in Italy as *lager*). In addition, the imperialist rulers have enacted deportation laws and signed deportation agreements with other countries. All of this is accompanied with racist demagoguery about a foreign "invasion," whipping up hysteria about "terrorists" sneaking in, as well as spewing anti-Islamic bigotry and railing about defense of European Christian culture.

The bourgeoisies of the EU, like those of all capitalist countries, want to control immigration so that only those can



Refugees seeking asylum are warehoused at detention center in Mineo, Sicily. Former U.S. army base is the biggest CARA (reception center for asylum seekers) in Italy, housing more than 1,000 immigrants behind barbed wire and armored cars.

enter that are potentially useful for them to churn out profits. The rest are summarily rejected, with no thought as to their likely miserable destiny. The bosses only want people with useful skills and a certain number of vulnerable workers with absolutely no rights, to be exploited in semi-slave conditions. In Italy these brutally oppressed workers (usually lacking legal documents) often work for 10 or 12 hours in agricultural fields under the watchful eyes of the armed labor gang bosses, the *caporali*, for a miserable 10 to 30 euros a day. They then return to overcrowded barracks without electricity or heat, in unsanitary conditions, where they often must walk long distances just to obtain drinkable water.

Militarized Immigration “Management” for Profit

On 3 October 2013, a refugee boat which set out from the Libyan port of Misurata sank just outside the harbor of the island of Lampedusa, killing 366 people. In response to the wave of outrage, the Italian government launched Operation Mare Nostrum, taking up the claim of the Roman Empire that the Mediterranean is “our sea.” Billed as a “military humanitarian” mission, it did rescue some tens of thousands of migrants at sea, but that was not its purpose. Operating in conjunction with Frontex, the EU immigration “management” agency, Mare Nostrum was intended to find boats with refugees and force them back to the racist hell of Libya. As part of this operation, in January 2014 the Italian naval vessel *Aliseo* opened fire with machine guns on a boat, sinking it (after taking the 176 refugees on board). But even this trickle was too much for the masters of European imperialism, so after less than a year, Mare Nostrum was replaced by Operation Triton, directly run by Frontex.

Then, a year later, in May 2015 the EU launched the EU-NAVFOR MED Operation which is led by Italian imperialism,

with headquarters in Rome and tasked with pushing the military perimeter of the EU imperialist countries outwards, including into the territorial waters of North African countries. Its stated purpose is “disrupting the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Mediterranean” and “strengthening the EU’s external borders.” Contrary to Italian premier Matteo Renzi’s constant babble about “saving lives,” this is an offensive military operation, even if it may carry out an occasional rescue for PR purposes. Many Italian fishermen are wary of rescuing refugees out of fear of having their boats sequestered, losing days of work and facing possible criminal charges for aiding “illegal” migrants – yet many courageously do so anyway,

and numerous residents of the island of Lampedusa have taken in refugees as guests.

EUNAVFOR MED is intended to put a stop to this. It is especially important to the Italian bourgeoisie because they fear that with the Balkans immigration flow largely cut off by the recent EU-Turkey agreement, many desperate refugees will be forced to try the far more dangerous Libya-Italy sea route. Thus EUNAVFOR is backed up by the EUSUR pan-European border surveillance system and coupled with a proposed EU border guard system and the “use of new technologies.”

Once refugees arrive in Italy, an elaborate bureaucratic maze awaits them. The Italian and EU bourgeoisies have resorted to massive incarceration and deportation of refugees. In Italy there are presently five Centers of Identification and Expulsion (CIEs), whose inmates are to be immediately deported, and nine “assistance centers” (CDAs) and “reception centers for asylum seekers” (CARAs). Although there are differences, in reality all are detention centers for immigrants and refugees. In addition, there are 1,800 “temporary” structures for locking up refugees. These concentration camps are used for identification, including forced fingerprinting, together with detention and deportation. In 2011 there were revolts by immigrants demanding freedom at a *lager* in Lampedusa, where the center was burned to the ground, and in Pozzallo, where they were being held in a huge hangar. The Italian government plans to expand its detention center capacity for refugees from 100,000 to 150,000 in 2016.

The refugee prisoners are incarcerated without knowing why and often without having any idea of what is happening to them. They usually have no access to translators or legal counsel. Many have a “*foglio di soggiorno*” (temporary residency permit) but are imprisoned anyway, even if they may just be tourists. Lawyers, journalists and humanitarian associations are routinely forbidden from entering these jails. Any inmate who

Ansa



“Reception center for asylum seekers” on island of Lampedusa in flames, 2009. The center was burned down by detainees again in September 2011 and this past May. Trotskyists demand that these concentration camps for immigrants be shut down.

objects to the situation is subject to the reprisals common to all *lagers*, including physical abuse. These centers are usually managed by private cooperatives and awarded to the lowest bidder. A scandal known as “Rome Mafia Capital” exploded in late 2014 around the CARA in Catania, Sicily, managed by Massimo Carminati, former member of the fascist-terrorist NAR organization. Phone taps nailed one of Carminati’s collaborators, Salvatore Buzzi, saying: “Do you have any idea of how much I earn from the immigrants? Drug trafficking is less profitable” (quoted from Marco Pascuiti, “Mafia Capitale,” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 22 December 2014).

Even if in theory refugees have the right to be taken to the nearest “safe” port and apply for political asylum, in practice this rarely occurs. Italy has signed agreements with Egypt in 2007, Tunisia in 2011 and also Libya which call for what amounts to summary expulsions and the forcible removal of refugees to their country of origin, including turning the vessels back on the high seas. Italy has helped to finance three concentration camps (“holding centers”) at Misrata and elsewhere in the Libyan desert, where physical abuse is rampant and food and water scarce. Now the EU, with Italian premier Renzi in the forefront, is working to reach agreements with Sudan and Eritrea to stem migration by providing military aid and instituting more severe deportation agreements.

Reality check: While many political forces in the EU hysterically scream about a refugee “invasion,” the fact is that there are over 2 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey, about 1 million in tiny Lebanon and some 630,000 in Jordan, but less than 350,000 in all of the EU.

The Struggle for Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants

It must be said straight-off that there is no solution under capitalism to the refugee crisis and mass migration flows.

The imperialist plunder and economic devastation of countries subjected to neocolonial domination, as well as the racist oppressive nature of the imperialist metropolises is endemic to the system. This won’t change substantially whether under governments of the right or “left.” Thus the Nucleo Internazionalista d’Italia and the League for the Fourth International say that the only real answer to the refugee crisis is to fight for *socialist revolution on both sides of the Mediterranean*.

Pointing to that necessary conclusion, we put forward a transitional program for workers action including the call for *asylum for Syrian and other refugees fleeing war and persecution and full citizenship rights for all immigrants*. In addition we call to *close the detention centers. Down with the racist deportation laws!* For workers actions to *stop deportations*, as when Air France pilots refused to fly planes deporting immigrants back to Mali. In addition, the NId’I and LFI call for *integrated workers defense guards to stop anti-immigrant terror*. To defend the growing number of immigrant workers,

the unions must launch a drive to *organize the unorganized with full union-scale wages for all*. Fighting on behalf of immigrants and young workers subjected to precarious jobs, we demand *equal pay for equal work*, and regular contracts with job stability for all.

Trotskyists call for “*Casa, lavoro, sindacato sono un diritto dell’immigrato – e di tutti*” (housing, jobs and unions are the right of every immigrant, and everyone). Spelling this out, in the face of double-digit mass unemployment, class-conscious workers should fight for a *drastic reduction in the workweek at full pay to provide jobs for all*. Likewise, housing is a basic necessity and right that is denied to many. Earthquake survivors in Aquila (Abruzzo) are living in temporary housing seven years after the quake hit, while the city center is still in rubble. Many others have simply moved away. Faced with the acute housing shortage in urban centers, many abandoned buildings, former factories and houses have been occupied by activist groups and others who defy eviction. The workers movement must fight for “*case popolari*” (public housing) *for all those in need* – including immigrants.

Uniting immigrant and Italian-born workers in class struggle can reinvigorate the workers movement and pull it out of its reformist doldrums. Workers in northern factories who migrated from southern Italy in the 1960s were highly militant, leading battles that put Italy in the forefront of European labor struggles such as in the *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) of 1969. The growth of the SI COBAS unions, most recently their work among the brutally exploited agricultural workers in Puglia and Campagna, and the courageous strikes by largely immigrant workers in small worksites show a similar willingness to struggle by immigrant workers today, with their increasing social power in key parts of industry. To achieve the potential for integrated class struggle on a mass scale, the workers movement must fight directly against the special oppression



Refugees threatened with deportation protest on the roof of the CIE (Center for Identification and Expulsion) Ponte Galeria in Rome, July 2009. Trotskyists demand full citizenship rights for all immigrants.

of immigrants. This includes *strikes and occupations to stop raids or firings by bosses or the state against our class sisters and brothers*, irrespective of where they were born or what papers they do or don't have.

Solidarity strikes across national borders are urgently necessary. Recent sharp struggles in France involving strategic sections of the proletariat protesting against the union-busting El Khomri labor law cry out for solidarity action across Europe. Workers in Italy have responded. The strikes and demonstration of the largely immigrant workers in Milan on June 6 in solidarity with French workers' strikes the same day showed an awareness of the importance of such proletarian internationalism. A few days later, hundreds of SI COBAS workers and others picketed and blocked traffic to and from the vital Interporto logistics center in Bologna in support of the French workers striking on the same day. *For united strike action against the capitalist governments to smash the El Khomri law in France and the Jobs Act in Italy!*

The struggle for *full citizenship rights for all immigrants* is inseparable from the fight for a *Socialist United States of Europe*. In fact, this simple democratic right has only been realized through revolution – in the French Revolution of 1789-99, by the Paris Commune of 1871 and in the Russian October Revolution of 1917 (see box). However, such a struggle pointing directly to socialist revolution goes against the class-collaborationist programs of various groups which erroneously claim to be Trotskyist. The maximum demand on immigration of the Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori (PCL) of Marco Ferrando and Franco Grisolia, for example, is for “equal rights for equal work, between European and immigrant workers.” Skirting the call for full citizenship rights, this sug-

gests something less, such as work permits (*permessi di soggiorno*), granted by the *questura*, the police, for limited periods. But that would leave immigrant workers in a second-class status politically particularly in the face of the anti-immigrant xenophobia whipped up by far-right forces such as the Lega Nord.

The rest of the program put forward by the PCL (“For an Anti-Capitalist Solution to the Immigration Drama,” *Unità di Classe*, May 2015) makes it clear that what it is calling for is a program of measures by a “left” government *of the capitalist state*. Thus it calls for “a program of public works, in each country and on a Europe-wide scale, financed by the rich, in favor of European and immigrant workers,” and for “requisitioning in every country the big real estate holding compa-

nies, to make real European and immigrant workers' right to housing.” So who will enact and pay for the program of public workers or requisition the housing? It can only be the state. And what state? In calling for a “government of the working people” the PCL is pointedly *not* calling for a “workers government” based on workers councils (soviets) that is, the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather for a class-collaborationist government representing as well petty-bourgeois professionals and small proprietors to administer rather than overthrow the capitalist state.

Thus behind the differing calls for “equal rights for equal work” and for “full citizenship rights” there lurks a fundamental difference in the class nature of the program between pseudo- and authentic Trotskyists – and also a qualitative difference in the consequences for immigrant workers. However, some locals of the PCL have raised the call for full citizenship rights for immigrants, as the Naples local did recently (March 1) along with demands to close the CIEs and to “close the fascist hideouts.” But, again, who is supposed to carry out such calls? Calling for the capitalist state to repress the fascists will only strengthen bonapartist reaction. The article by the Naples PCL rightly notes that the limited demands on behalf of immigrants put forward by various civic associations and the main union federations “only lead these struggles into the dead-end of institutionalized politics (perhaps of the ‘orange’ variety).” Yet in 2011 the PCL voted on the second (decisive) round of the Naples mayoral election in favor of the victorious bourgeois candidate Luigi De Magistris, who went on to found the Orange Movement!

Authentic Trotskyists look instead to mobilize the power of the united working class by drawing a *class line* against all

wings of the bourgeoisie. The PCL said it was voting for the ex-magistrate De Magistris (as well as for Giuliano Pisapia, the bourgeois popular-front candidate for mayor of Milan) “as demanded by the entire people of the left,” in order to “join in defeating the policies of Berlusconi, of his government and of his reactionary candidates” (“Vote for Pisapia and De Magistris, But Without Illusions,” PCL web site, 26 May 2011). This “fight the right” policy is the constant refrain of the *popular front*, which chains the left and workers movement to sectors of the bourgeoisie. It was the policy of the Stalinist Italian Communist Party (PCI) which led to the defeat of the potential revolution during 1943-48. As the PCI evolved increasingly to the right, ultimately splintering, with remnants forming the bourgeois Democratic Party (PD) together with elements of Christian Democracy, the banner of popular frontism was taken up by Rifondazione Comunista (RC).

The second largest ostensibly Trotskyist organization in Italy, the Partito di Alternativa Comunista (PdAC) of Franco Ricci, part of the International Workers League (LIT, the current founded by Argentine pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno), raises the call for citizenship for all immigrants, but as we have noted “does not link this directly to revolutionary action by the working class.”¹ When the PdAC talks (in the document of its Fourth Congress) of “bringing down capitalism and constructing a socialist economy,” it is not calling for socialist revolution but rather to “fight for a socialist system” which they identify with “nationalization without compensation of all strategic sectors of industry,” “workers control of factories that are closing, carry out layoffs or harm the environment,” “nationalization of the banks and creation of a single national bank,” etc.² This could be the program of a “left” government of the capitalist state. Or not-so-left: recall that from the end of World War II until the 1970s, well over half of the Italian economy was in the hands of capitalist state-owned enterprises – presided over by the Christian Democrats.³

In particular, the PdAC is not advocating replacing parliament with proletarian rule based on workers councils, such as the soviet republic led by Lenin and Trotsky that came out of the October 1917 revolution in Russia. This is no accident, for its congress document bases itself on the LIT’s theses on *Revolutions of the Twentieth Century*, written by Nahuel Moreno in 1984, which call for “February Revolutions” (referring to the February 1917 overthrow of the Russian tsar) rather than for new October Revolutions (when the proletariat, led by the Bolsheviks, took power). Consequently, the Morenoites call for “democratic revolution” rather than socialist revolution. Thus the PdAC’s call for citizenship rights for immigrants is part of a purely (bourgeois) democratic program *counterposed*

to socialist revolution, which is what it will take to win this democratic right.

Both the PCL and PdAC were part of the Proposta current in Rifondazione Comunista from before it supported the government of the Ulivo popular front (1996-98) under Christian Democrat Romano Prodi, the former head of the IRI who presided over the extensive privatization of IRI assets. They stayed in RC up until 2006, when they left and split from each other on no clear political basis. *Proposta* (13 June 1996) hailed the electoral victory of the first Prodi government, saying: “Certainly, the right has been defeated and this is good” and “it is correct to avoid abstract neutrality between the center-right and the center-left and work as communists to defeat the right.”

The first Prodi government, backed by RC and thus by Proposta, meant blood and tears for the working class and oppressed. It enacted the racist Napolitano law which set up concentration camps for immigrants and large-scale deportations. It also made deep cuts in social services and passed the Treu law that established lower wages for workers in the South, and the renting out of workers under very short-term contracts. The Prodi government also strengthened the presence of Italian imperialism in Albania and presided over the rape and torture of Somalis by Italian military personnel. The historic leaderships of the PCL (Ferrando and Grisolia) and PdAC (Ricci) have never distanced themselves from their class betrayals while in Proposta, but instead defend them, because they have the same politics of “critical support” to popular-frontism today. As part of RC when it kept the Ulivo government in power, they sought to keep the more combative sections of the working class politically chained to the bourgeoisie, and that’s the biggest obstacle to revolutionary struggle today.

Revolutionary-minded militants in the PCL or PdAC who would fight for a policy of class independence rather than class collaboration must be aware that their leaders are past masters in the double-talk that is the common vocabulary of pseudo-Trotskyists who pretend to oppose popular frontism while giving it “critical” support at every key juncture. While mouthing Trotskyist-sounding verbiage, they have a decades-long history of supporting bourgeois candidates and reformist (or as Lenin called them, bourgeois workers) parties that take part in capitalist governments. All bourgeois governments are racist, anti-women, and in Italy anti-Southerner. Today, the PCL declares “Do as in France!” (leaflet, May 29) while the PdAC calls for a “front of struggle” like that in France where workers have been striking against the French “Jobs Act” of Socialist president François Hollande. Yet in 2012, the PCL called to vote for Hollande, and 15 years earlier Ferrando, Grisolia and Ricci all supported the election of the Socialist Lionel Jospin against the rightist Alain Juppé, declaring:

“The defeat of the Juppé government is certainly a positive event and also considering the nature of its project a success for the workers movement.”

–*Proposta*, July-August 1997

If the PCL did not support bourgeois candidates or popular-front formations in the 2016 elections as it did in 2011, it was not due to their class character, but only because

¹ See “Back to Trotskyism,” *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June and Special Supplement, May 2016.

² From Atti del IV Congresso del Partito di Alternativa Comunista (2015).

³ The Institute of Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) controlled STET (telephones), ILVA (steel), RAI (broadcasting), docks, railroads, superhighways, Alitalia, as well as much of the banking system. ENI had a monopoly of oil and energy. EFIM took control of a number of smaller manufacturing companies.



Demonstration demanding right of asylum and freedom of travel for all, Torino, 21 January 2012.

“Renzi’s Democratic Party (PD) and his government are the most reactionary since after World War II,” and the Cinque Stelle (Five Star) movement founded by Pepe Grillo “is a reactionary mass movement.” But even if they made a pretense of more “progressive” policies, they would still be bourgeois. To defend immigrants and bring down racist, capitalist Fortress Europe it is necessary to forge genuinely Bolshevik communist parties that break sharply with class-collaborationist politics *on principle*, fighting for proletarian opposition to *all* capitalist politicians, parties or political formations such as popular fronts. This is the program of the Nucleo Internazionalista d’Italia and the League for the Fourth International.

ICL: Border Guards of (and Within) the EU?

Faced with the Europe-wide refugee crisis, the main response of the International Communist League (ICL), the once-Trotskyist organization from which our founding cadre were expelled, has been to go on the warpath against “liberal humanitarianism,” calls for “freedom of transit” for immigrants and refugees within Europe, and illusory calls for “open borders” under capitalism. The latest issue of *Spartaco* (April 2016), published by the ICL’s affiliate, the Lega Trotskista d’Italia (LTd’I), spends almost a third of its lead article (over 1,000 words) polemicizing against “Apostles of ‘Humanitarian’ Imperialism.” On the other hand, its only reference to the anti-immigrant racists of the Lega Nord, and fascists like the National Front in France, is to accuse the union bureaucracy of playing into their hands by promoting the idea of a “social Europe”! Notably, in an article about “Racist Fortress Europe and the Refugee Crisis,” *Spartaco* does *not* call for asylum for Syrian refugees, or indeed for any refugees. This absence is no accident.

Instead, the LTd’I takes aim at “Reformist left groups [which] have promoted illusions in the possibility that the imperialists, directly responsible for the ‘humanitarian catastrophe,’ can ‘do something’ to help the refugees and immigrants.”

In some cases, this is a correct criticism, though hardly the biggest threat. The ControCorrente group, part of the Committee for a Workers International led by Peter Taaffe, described Mare Nostrum as “a military and humanitarian mission whose principal objective was maritime assistance and the rescue of migrants,” and called for a “an international rescue plan on the high seas,” and “if necessary, in Libyan national waters.” As we noted above, the actual purpose of Mare Nostrum was interdiction, to force refugee boats back to Libya, and NATO naval forces intruding in Libyan territorial waters is imperialist aggression.

Spartaco goes after the PCL, particularly for its call for “a dignified welcoming plan for migrants, starting with refugees, on a European level. For freedom of travel for immigrants within Europe. Cancellation of the anti-immigrant laws, in every country and on a European level.” The LTd’I comments: “This kind of demands feeds the illusion that the imperialist European Union can be forced to act

on the basis of humanitarian principles, ‘freedom of travel’ and ‘dignity.’” The idea that imperialist Europe is going to give a “dignified welcome” to refugees is certainly a reformist illusion. But claiming that calls for freedom of movement of immigrants within Europe and for abolition of anti-immigrant laws amount to prettifying imperialism is another matter altogether. Before saying goodbye to revolutionary Trotskyism, drawing defeatist lessons from the historic defeat of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, the ICL *always* opposed *all* racist, anti-immigrant laws, while explaining that there can be no equitable immigration policy under capitalism.

Even in May 2015, *Spartaco* wrote: “The workers movement must oppose racist immigration laws.” But here is the latter-day ICL saying that to call to abrogate such laws creates illusions in “humanitarian imperialism.” So the workers movement should do nothing about such laws? What sophistry! Interestingly, the LTd’I does *not* attack the PCL for not calling for full citizenship rights for immigrants. Indeed, it attacks the PCL *from the right*, notably over calls for the free movement of immigrants and refugees within Europe. According to *Spartaco*:

“Under the form of the slogan of ‘open borders,’ the PCL’s call for ‘freedom of travel for immigrants in Europe’ is common to the entire reformist left and all more or less liberal capitalist forces. But all variants of the slogan of ‘open borders’ come down to calling for the abolition of national states under capitalism: an impossibility. The supporters of ‘open borders’ wrongly see the European Union as some kind of super-state above the nation-states, with the power to cancel internal borders.”

The EU is hardly a “super-state,” as the wrangling over immigration policy demonstrates. And the PCL doesn’t actually call here for “open borders.” But the reality is that citizens of EU countries are given the right to travel and work around Europe, while immigrants, even those with the requisite papers,

risk being picked up and deported if they are stopped while traveling to another EU country.

Let us try to unravel the “logic” of what the ICL is saying here. The ICL claims it is for citizenship for all immigrants. But if it opposes calling for immigrants to have the right to free movement within Europe, does that mean it is proposing some kind of second-class status, in which citizens of non-European origin should not have this right? Alternatively, is it saying that they could have that right once they are citizens, but not beforehand? Either way, this can only be a reactionary anti-immigrant position. Or just maybe, given its claim that “freedom of travel” equals “open borders” and abolition of the nation-state, the ICL is really saying that current EU citizens shouldn’t be able to travel freely around Europe either, as that could create illusions in the EU’s Schengen treaty!

Spartaco ludicrously tries to pretend that the call for freedom of movement for immigrants is actually a chauvinist demand pushed by anti-immigrant forces. It quotes the notorious racist mayor of Verona, Flavio Tosi, calling on the Italian government to “grant humanitarian permission to refugees for freedom of travel in Europe.” The LTd’I also cites the Italian government’s call to repeal the EU’s Dublin III regulation, which says that refugees must be processed in their country of entry to Europe. This racist regulation prevents refugees from leaving Greece and Italy for northern Europe where they can find work and/or join family members. For refugees who manage to make it to northern Europe, it means they can be sent back to their country of entry in southern Europe, where they will be locked up and likely deported back to their country of origin. In reality, immigrant-bashing reactionaries are opposed to freedom of travel. Thus Lega Nord chief Matteo Salvini has called for “internal checks of EU citizens at the borders of France and Austria” (*La Repubblica*, 11 June).

Today the ICL, with the LTd’I in tow, has taken a line on the refugee crisis placing it to the right of sections of the bourgeoisie at times, and of many bourgeois organizations. In waving about the spectre of how “unlimited mass immigration can threaten the right of national self-determination” with respect to Italy, *Spartaco* is taking up the bugbear of the national chauvinists. This danger can be real for small, economically weak countries such as Palestine inundated by Zionist immigration, or Caribbean island nations that could be swamped by rich Americans buying up property. But as an imagined threat to imperialist Italy it is absurd. Internationalist communists do not raise the illusory call for open borders, since the elimination of national borders under capitalism would be utopian and even a workers state would need to have border guards. But in focusing on the fantasy of “open borders” for the purpose of opposing calls for freedom of travel for immigrants within Europe, the LTd’I/ICL are not opposing the reformists who seek to administer the capitalist state. Far from it – in fact they are taking on the role of border guards of the EU and within the EU.

Trotskyists say that immigrants and refugees, whatever their status, should have full citizenship rights and the same freedom of travel within Europe as everyone else. *Down with the racist*

Dublin III fast-track deportation law! Class-conscious workers must mobilize their power to *defend immigrants against fascist and racist attacks*, and to *block deportations with union action*. All of these demands are directed against the bourgeois state, which cannot do without racist treatment of immigrant workers. They must be part of a program of *transitional demands for workers action aiming at socialist revolution* to put an end to capitalist exploitation. Above all, to free immigrants and refugees from the nightmarish conditions they have endured in order to survive and in hopes of achieving a decent life, it is necessary to go to the root causes of such mass population movements, which are to be found in the brutal superexploitation and wars spawned by decaying capitalism.

Supporters of the ICL should consider this concerning its opposition to calls for freedom of transit for immigrants within Europe, on the grounds that it is not possible to achieve under capitalism: The same objection could be made to calls for full citizenship rights, which historically have only been achieved by revolution. Methodologically, this objection amounts to rejecting the whole of Trotsky’s Transitional Program, of demands which cannot be fully realized short of socialist revolution. The ICL has already declared outdated the central thesis of that founding program of the Fourth International – that the historical crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary proletarian leadership – on the grounds that it “predates the present deep regression of proletarian consciousness,” as asserted in the ICL’s “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program” (1998). It’s not surprising, then, that the ICL rejects transitional demands concerning immigrants ... and overall: witness its rejections of LFI calls for workers control in Greece. It all fits.

The result is “revolutionary” justifications for what in practice is a program tailored to what’s possible under capitalism. In France in the 1880s it was called “possibilism.” Today...

For Workers Revolution on Both Sides of the Mediterranean

Mass migration – such as the wave of several hundred thousand refugees who made the perilous crossing from Turkey to Greece, then trekked on foot for weeks through the Balkans, or the tens of thousands who risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean in rickety boats – is the result of desperate conditions: war, famine, religious and ethnic persecution. In the face of the current European refugee crisis, revolutionaries not only seek to provide proletarian solidarity with the victims, but also address the origins of their ordeal. In these cases, the immediate factors are the ongoing all-sided ethnic/sectarian communalist war intensified by imperialist bombardment that has pulverized Syria, and the destruction of Libya in 2011 by the NATO air war and Western-armed Islamist gangs. In both cases, not only are the U.S. and European imperialists the main instigators and predators, they have been aided by some of the same reformist leftists who today claim to be defending immigrants.

In Libya in 2011, the PdAC and the Morenoite International Workers League to which it belongs called on the NATO



Immigrants supported by SI COBAS unions protest in Taranto, 6 August 2015. "Enough Dead Immigrants, Against the Policies of War and Poverty!"

powers to provide heavy weapons and military technology to the bloodthirsty "rebel" brigades and called on "all governments" – notably that of Silvio Berlusconi in imperialist Italy – to "split away from the Libyan regime" of the erratic nationalist strongman Muammar Qaddafi. An article in *Progetto Comunista* (11 September 2011) proclaimed: "Long live the Libyan Revolution which destroyed the regime of Qaddafi." This "victory," which involved widespread racist persecution of black African workers in Libya, sharply increased the numbers of refugees risking all to cross the Mediterranean to Italy. Against the reactionary Islamist mercenaries and the betrayal by pro-imperialist leftists like the PdAC, the League for the Fourth International took a proletarian internationalist stand for military defense of Libya against imperialist attack, while giving no political support to Qaddafi.

If the PdAC was shamelessly pro-imperialist in Libya, the PCL was more shamefaced. It initially hailed the revolt against the regime, even though PCL leader Ferrando later admitted that "The leadership of the Libyan revolution was concentrated from the start in the hands of a counterrevolutionary entourage" ("The Fall of Qaddafi – Revolution and Counterrevolution in Libya," PCL, 26 August 2011). Once NATO started bombing, the PCL resorted to double-talk, claiming to "be against imperialism and at the same time on the side of the insurgents who applaud the imperialist intervention" ("Against the Imperialist Intervention, But On the Side of the Libyan Revolution," PCL, 25 March 2011). What the PCL did *not* do was defend Libya as it was being pulverized by warplanes taking off from Italian airbases. The LFI, standing on the program of authentic Trotskyism, sharply opposed this shilly-shallying in support of the pro-imperialist "rebels" (see "Imperialist Marauders in the Quicksands of North Africa," and "Defend Libya Against Imperialist Attack! Defeat U.S./U.N./NATO Assault!" in *The Internationalist* No. 33, Summer 2011).

On Syria, the PdAC and LIT (led by the Brazilian PSTU) are once again openly pro-imperialist, repeating every lie com-

ing from the CIA and Pentagon, backing the puppet "Free Syrian Army" against the authoritarian regime of Bashar Assad while demanding that NATO send the FSA heavy weapons and even surface-to-air missiles (see "Brazil: Leftists in the Camp of Pro-Imperialist Syrian Islamists," *The Internationalist* No. 36, January-February 2014). For their part, the PCL and its partners in the Coordinating Committee for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CCRFI) led by the Argentine Partido Obrero of Jorge Altamira, following the same playbook as in Libya, started out hailing the "Syrian Revolution" and continued to defend the pro-

imperialist rebels up to mid-2013. But by September of that year, as the U.S. threatened to bomb Syria (using the pretext of the chemical weapons attack falsely blamed on the Assad regime), the CCRFI switched gears and called for "No to the War Against Syria!"

In the squalid sectarian bloodbaths along ethnic and religious lines now engulfing Syria and Iraq, the overriding aim of revolutionary Marxists must be to drive the imperialists, the biggest mass murderers of all, from the region. As the LFI has pointed out, there are several intertwined and overlapping wars going on simultaneously in Syria; the U.S./NATO bombing, where we call to drive the imperialists out; an inter-communal/sectarian civil war between pro-imperialist Islamist militias, Al Qaeda Islamists, the Syrian government and the Islamic State (I.S.), in which we oppose all sides; the right of communal self-defense of all ethnic/religious communities threatened with massacres; and the Kurdish struggle for self-determination. The LFI has stated unambiguously that any real blow against the imperialist invaders, even by ultra-reactionaries such as the I.S., is in the interest of the world's workers. Recently, as the U.S. and its Kurdish semi-allies have launched a drive on the I.S. "capital" of Raqqa, we have called to defend the population under imperialist attack.

The wars wracking the Middle East and North Africa, along with the war unleashed on working people by European central bankers, are expressions of the New World *Disorder* resulting from the destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European bureaucratically deformed workers states in 1989-92. In the decade leading up to that momentous defeat for the world's workers, almost all pseudo-Trotskyist currents sided with imperialism, opposing Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and supporting the anti-Soviet Polish Solidarność. Genuine Trotskyists, in contrast, said "Hail Red Army in Afghanistan!" and "Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution!" When the counter-revolution came to a head, the LIT celebrated the overthrow of the USSR in 1991-92 as a "great revolutionary victory,"

Full Citizenship Rights for Foreign Workers in Soviet Russia

The following clauses were included in the first Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, approved by the Fifth Pan-Russian Congress of Soviets, 10 July 1918:

20. In consequence of the solidarity of the workers of all nations, the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic grants all political rights of Russian citizens to foreigners who live in the territory of the Russian Republic and are engaged in work and who belong to the working class. The Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic also recognizes the right of local soviets to grant citizenship to such foreigners without complicated formality.

21. The Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic offers shelter to all foreigners who seek refuge from political or religious persecution.

Right: statue of Soviet border guard in the Moscow subway. The revolutionary workers state, while it needed to defend its borders against counterrevolutionary threats, granted full citizenship rights to all foreign workers who lived and worked in Soviet territory.



while Altamira didn't lift a finger to defend the homeland of the October Revolution, falsely claiming that the rump Stalinists were leading the restoration of capitalism. Once again the authentic Trotskyists, then in the International Communist League, fought tooth and nail against the capitalist reunification of Germany and subsequently in the USSR, issuing the call: "Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution."

The bourgeois triumphalism accompanying counterrevolution in the Soviet bloc was expressed in imperialist wars on Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and elsewhere that generated the mass exodus of refugees. Today both the Morenoites of the PdAC and the Altamiraites of the PCL label China a capitalist state, refusing to defend it against imperialism and internal counterrevolution. They thereby disarm Chinese workers in the coming decisive battles. The virulently Stalinophobic LIT goes even further, declaring Cuba, North Korea and Vietnam capitalist. This reached the point that in the mid-1990s, the Mexican Morenoites published an article hailing a demonstration by *gusano* counterrevolutionaries in Miami (*El Socialista*, October 1994), euphemistically saying that "the Cuban proletariat in the U.S. is propelling the anti-bureaucratic revolution"! Counterposed to the pro-imperialist propaganda of the pseudo-Trotskyists, the LFI calls for proletarian political revolution to oust the sellout bureaucracy in the deformed workers states *to defend the remaining revolutionary gains against the looming threat of counterrevolution*.

The once-Trotskyist ICL, meanwhile, has turned its back on its revolutionary intervention in East Germany and the USSR, adopting the rationale of those who refused to defend them (namely that the Stalinists, rather than the imperialists, supposedly led the counterrevolution). Blaming a putative across-the-board "deep regression of proletarian consciousness" for its flight from the class struggle, the latter-day ICL has capitulated time and again before the imperialist rulers. In

each case, its revisions of the Trotskyist program came when it was put to the test in a crisis. Thus the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon led the ICL to drop its call for the defeat of U.S. imperialism. This reached the point that in 2010 it vociferously supported the U.S. invasion of Haiti in the name of providing earthquake relief. By now utterly divorced from the reality of the class struggle, the ICL tries to make up for that betrayal by militarily siding with the Islamic State (in the name of struggle against imperialism) as the I.S. carries out communalist slaughter of Kurds. The ICL's current refusal to call for asylum for refugees is its "new Haiti," in which with a knee-jerk reaction to the liberal reformism of the opportunist left it sides with arch-reactionary forces.

A real defense of immigrants trapped in the barbarism of putrefying capitalism can only be based on the program of authentic Trotskyism. Yet on the Middle East and North Africa, pseudo-Trotskyists make ritual references to permanent revolution while supporting pro-imperialist "rebels" (or in the case of the ICL, the Islamist *jihadis* of the I.S.). The League for the Fourth International looks instead to the millions-strong Turkish, Kurdish and Egyptian proletariats. In Italy, ostensible Trotskyists claim to oppose popular frontism yet give "critical support" to popular-front politicians. In order to put a stop to the orgy of destruction that rips millions from their homes, destroying countless lives and forcing survivors to undertake a perilous migration; to overcome the terrible sectarian divisions so that the region can flower in all its diversity; to defend the living standards of the working people of Europe from the assault by capitalist rulers, it will take socialist revolution on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The LFI seeks to build the nuclei of genuinely communist workers parties based on the Bolshevik program of Lenin and Trotsky to lead all the oppressed in this fight for a Socialist United States of Europe. ■

“Communists” Who Oppose Calls for Asylum for Syrian Refugees Strange Encounters with the ICL

At the Lutte Ouvrière Fête outside Paris in May we had some rather strange “discussions,” if you can call them that, with leading spokesmen and members of the International Communist League (ICL). As we were standing there with our supplement to *The Internationalist* headlined “Back to Trotskyism,” we were accosted by a fellow screaming over and over that we are “bleeding-heart liberals.” If we call for letting refugees into the EU (European Union), he said, all of Africa would want to come in. Not recognizing him at first, we thought he might be some kind of right-wing immigrant-basher who somehow got into that *kermesse* of the reformist left. But it soon turned out that he was a long-time member of the ICL, and this was only the foretaste of our exchanges that lasted, off and on, for the next two days. Close encounters of the fourth kind, you might say, weirder even than the 1977 movie about meeting extraterrestrials.

The ICL had put together a team to harass the supporters of the League for the Fourth International and the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction recently expelled by the Spartacist League/U.S. They were particularly exercised by the statement in our article (see “Back to Trotskyism,” *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016) that: “Militant sectors of the Italian working class engaging in sharp struggle against imperialist war can play a leading role ... by defending full citizenship rights for all immigrants and asylum for all refugees, to be won through workers action and the struggle for socialist revolution on both sides of the Mediterranean.” They vituperated that we are supposedly fostering illusions in the possibility of “humane” imperialism by calling for asylum for those seeking to escape war and persecution, that this would amount to “opening the borders” (which it doesn’t). If you call for asylum for Syrian refugees, they insisted, what about Eritrean refugees, what about refugees from the civil war in Yemen? (Meaning what, that you want to keep them out?)

Trying to bring the exchange back to earth, we said “But what about the Syrian refugees? There are several hundred thousand banging on Europe’s doors right now, what do you say to them?” The response, by Len Meyers, editor of English-language *Spartacist*, to Jan Norden, editor of *The Internationalist*, was: “Oh, so you and [German chancellor



Refugees coming ashore on the Greek island of Lesbos, early August 2015. Spartacist League/U.S. and the International Communist League refuse to call for asylum for Syrian and other refugees.

Angela] Merkel are going to save all the Syrian refugees, is that it?” To this astounding statement, our response was that, of course Merkel was letting in Syrian refugees for her own imperialist purposes, but here the ICL was siding with right-wing anti-immigrant forces in Germany. We asked, what about the Syrians amassed on the Turkish coast seeking to enter Europe, what are they supposed to do? After trying to obfuscate by saying there were also Afghans and even Pakistanis among them, the response was finally that they could stay and fight at home. Fight in Syria – for whom? According to the ICL’s line, Syrian Kurds (and others) should militarily side with the Islamic State, which would massacre them.

Digesting the arguments by the ICL spokesman, we came back to this some time later, asking what about the Greek soldiers who announced they were refusing to carry out anti-immigrant orders on the border between Thrace and Turkey? (See our article, “General Strikes Are Back in Greece: Revolutionary Leadership Needed,” *The Internationalist* No. 42, January-February 2016). If they refused to round up refugees trying to get into Greece, or helped them make it through the fence, would that be supporting “humanitarian imperialism”? All the ICLers would say was that if the refugees managed to get through, then they should have citizenship. But what about the Greeks who helped pull refugees out of the water in Lesbos, is that aiding imperialism? No answer. For the ICL, the idea of workers’ action in support of refugees trying to get across the border would be denounced as “open borders liberalism.”

For genuine Trotskyists, such action would be welcomed as a refreshing expression of international solidarity, and an act of elementary human decency.

Another ICL zinger was to claim that our call for “Full citizenship for all immigrants and refugees!” was saying that an immigrant living in France should have citizenship in Germany. And so it went, each argument more absurd or reactionary than the last. In reality, a main purpose of the brouhaha over refugees was to deflect the BLTN Faction Declaration’s challenge to the ICL over who led the counterrevolution in East Germany and the Soviet Union: the imperialists (as the ICL correctly said at the time) or the Stalinists (as it later claimed in the course of its 1996 expulsion of the founders of the LFI, and then codified in its Declaration of Principles). “The Kremlin bureaucrats,” insisted Meyers, while others said “the imperialists, of course.” A week earlier at May Day in New York City the ICL’s diversionary ploy was to accuse the LFI and our Brazilian section of supporting the popular front (even though our headline explicitly said “no political support to the popular-front government”) for our opposition to the right-wing impeachment drive spearheading a capitalist attack on the working class (see “SL/ICL Impeached By Its Own Past,” on p. 69 of this issue).

ICL Internal Fight Over Rights of Refugees

But behind all the diversions, non sequiturs, *reductio ad absurdum* arguments and vituperation there is something else, not immediately obvious to an uninformed observer: over the last year, the ICL has had an extended internal fight over exactly these issues. It started with two articles that were pulled at the last minute from *Workers Vanguard* (29 May 2015), one of which stated:

“The International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist) demands full citizenship rights for all immigrants, migrant workers and refugees seeking asylum. This includes the right to travel to any EU country as well as the right to vote and equal access to all existing health and social services. We also call for the full and unrestricted right of asylum [...].”

After objections from SL national chairman Jim Robertson, a May 28 motion of the ICL’s International Secretariat decreed that that this amounted to “a reactionary utopian ‘open the borders’ line, reflecting a species of humanitarian liberalism. The articles eliminated the distinction between immigrants who have made it to a country and those who have not. Additionally, the EU article pushed calls that amounted to a ‘social Europe’.” As so often with the SL/ICL, the frenzy of their denunciations of the Internationalist Group/LFI is partly because *they are polemicizing against themselves*.

So after decades of calling for full citizenship rights for all immigrants, the ICL is now carefully limiting it to “those who have made it here,” as the April 2016 *Spartaco* put it. But beyond turning what was before an evocative pro-immigrant

Then-Trotskyist SWP called to let in refugees from Hitler’s terror in 1938. Ex-Trotskyist ICL says Syrian refugees are really “displaced persons” seeking a “better life,” and shamefully refuses to call for asylum or just to let them in. But it “sympathizes with their plight.”

declaration (everyone who made it here should be able to stay with the same rights as everyone else) into an exclusionary clause, the latter-day ICL has now proceeded to revise its own previous positions on demanding asylum for refugees extending over decades. Thus a 15 October 2015 resolution of the ICL’s I.S. retrospectively declared the call, in an article from Italy in *Workers Vanguard* (27 May 2011), “For the right of asylum for all refugees from Libya!” was “too broad.” But it’s not just the LTd’I or today’s ICL that has committed the cardinal sin of calling for asylum for refugees, the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency repeatedly called for:

- asylum for victims of right-wing terror fleeing Chile after the 1973 Pinochet coup;
- asylum for Tamils fleeing pogroms in Sri Lanka (1981, 1983 and many years after);
- asylum for Salvadorans trying to escape the murderous U.S.-backed army (1982);
- asylum for “Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran and all refugees of death squad terror” (1985, 1987);
- freeing Haitians locked up in Reagan’s concentration camps (1982, 1984);
- “Asylum Now for Haitian Refugees!” (1992);
- Etc.

Did this just apply to refugees who had “made it here”? No. Was this promoting illusions in “humanitarian imperialism”? Did this mean that the entire population of the Caribbean or Central America would move to the U.S.? Hardly.

The latter-day ICL claims that the demand for asylum for all refugees at a particular time means calling for asylum for any potential refugee anytime anywhere, then argues that this would amount to “open borders,” *all in order to justify not calling to let the refugees in*. In doing so, it is not only renouncing its own honorable past but also the heritage of revolutionary Trotskyism

going back to the 1930s, as it is well aware. Thus the original (LTd'I) author of the pulled WV article wrote (in a 30 May 2015 internal document) that he took the call for “free and unrestricted right of asylum” from the U.S. Socialist Workers Party following the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogroms in Germany. As *Workers Vanguard* of 13 March 2013 noted, “the SWP spearheaded a nationwide labor-centered campaign demanding **unrestricted immigration** for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Nazi terror.” The SWP’s *Socialist Appeal* (26 November 1938) headlined “ENOUGH PIOUS TEARS! ADMIT THE REFUGEES!” The same issue reported on a resolution of the Trotskyist-led General Drivers Union Local 544 in Minneapolis, calling to “open the gates of the United States to the oppressed of Europe.”

Similarly, to justify its current keep-the-refugees-out position, the ICL has redefined “refugee.” “For us, ‘refugees’ is a political term, used to refer to victims of right-wing terror” (as Eibhlín McDonald, leader of the British section put it in a 27 May 2015 document). *Spartacist* editor Meyers argued (in a 16 July 2015 document) that “those fleeing ‘the dislocations of war’ are not refugees in any politically meaningful sense, but rather ‘displaced persons’.” Breathtaking. “Displaced Persons” was used to describe the infamous “DP camps” where Jews who had survived the Holocaust were held *and prevented from entering the United States*. The term “displaced persons” was invented in order to deny them the status of refugees with certain supposed legal rights. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was so anti-Semitic that President Truman said in signing it that “this bill is flagrantly discriminatory” and “excludes Jewish displaced persons.” This *exclusionary term* is now apparently the ICL’s preferred designation because “refugee” implies a right to asylum, *which it now refuses to call for*.

We might add that when the refugee issue came up again inside the ICL a few months later, Meyers wrote (5 October 2015): “The vast majority of those seeking entry into EU countries (or the U.S.) are simply seeking a better, safer life. We sympathize with their plight. But we know the answer to their problems does not lie in trying to move from country to country but in fighting the capitalist exploiters wherever they are.” This is the same line he spouted at the L.O. Fête, that instead of fleeing they could (should) fight at home. In the previous sentence of the same document, in order to buttress his argument that there is no “right to asylum in ... the country of one’s choice,” he refers to the famous case of 900 Jews aboard the *St. Louis* who were refused entry by Cuba, the U.S. and Canada in 1939. Yet the fact that they wanted to come to the U.S. and were refused was an outrage. One wonders: Does he perhaps think that instead of calling, as the SWP did in 1939, for a “free and unrestricted right of asylum” it should have told them they should go back and fight Hitler in Germany? No doubt Syrian refugees will be duly appreciative of the ICL’s empty “sympathy” for their “plight.” Sympathy, but no asylum.



Immigrants “transferred” (deported) from Germany under European Union’s Dublin III regulations are sent primarily to Bulgaria, Italy and Spain where they are incarcerated and then expelled from the EU territory. ICL denounces calls for abolishing Dublin III, absurdly claiming that this creates illusions in a “kinder, gentler” EU.

Down with the Dublin III Deportation Decree!

The fight over immigration and asylum resurfaced in the ICL in September 2015 when some members of its German section, the SpAD, objected to a polemic in a draft *Spartacist* article criticizing RIO (Revolutionäre Internationale Organisation, affiliated with the Fracción Trotskista led by the Argentine PTS), Arbeitermacht (Workers Power, the sister organization of the Red Flag Platform of the British Labour Party) and the SAV (part of the Committee for a Workers International [CWI] led by Peter Taaffe) not only for their liberal utopian call for “open borders” but also for opposing the EU’s Dublin III provisions. As we have noted, Dublin III (officially EU Regulation 604/2013) mandates that refugees requesting asylum be processed in the first EU country they enter, thus laying the basis for those who make it to northern Europe to be “transferred” back to Greece or Italy, to be jailed prior to being deported. Dublin III is a “fast track deportation” provision, which revolutionary Marxists must clearly oppose just as we oppose deportations of immigrants and refugees overall.

Yet *Workers Vanguard* (No. 1077, 30 October 2015), the “flagship newspaper” of the ICL, criticized the CWI for calling to end Dublin III, and proclaimed: “Marxists do not take a position on refugee ‘burden sharing’ between capitalist governments.” Internally, *Spartacist League/Britain* leader McDonald put it more bluntly: it is not the ICL’s “business to get involved in which country immigrants and asylum seekers are sent to” (27 May 2015). So if someone is picked up and “sent” (deported) to another EU state, that’s “none of our business” for these pretend Trotskyists? The WV 1077 article goes on to claim, “Rather, we oppose all deportations, irrespective of their legal basis.” But in refusing to oppose Dublin III, the ICL accepts the “legal basis” used by the bourgeoisie to keep refugees out of northern European countries and to terrorize (as well as deport) those who make it there. This is in line with its denunciation of calls for “cancellation of the anti-

immigrant laws” (in *Spartaco*, April 2016). In contrast, the LFI calls for *workers action to prevent all deportations*, and also to *oppose all racist and discriminatory immigration laws* as the ICL did in the past.

Moreover, the ICL’s current refusal to oppose Dublin III contradicts the program it fought for when it based itself on revolutionary Trotskyism. In 1992-93 the German parliament voted the “asylum compromise” between Christian Democrats, Free Democrats and Social Democrats which gutted the previous law upholding the unlimited right of refugees to asylum that had been written into the constitutions of both the Federal Republic of Germany and the DDR (East Germany). Henceforth, any refugee arriving from another EU country or “secure” third country would be ineligible for asylum, and could be expelled from Germany. Dublin III is simply the acceptance by the rest of the EU of the German law. During the “asylum debate,” *Spartakist* headlined “Workers: Defend Immigrants and the Right to Asylum!” (May 1992) and “Racist Popular Front Seeks to Destroy the Right to Asylum!” (November-December 1992) with a photo of an SpAD banner demanding “Full Citizenship Rights for Immigrant Workers and Families.” Under the new law, less than 2% of all applications for asylum were recognized.

In response to the calls by dissident ICL members in Germany and Britain to oppose Dublin III, the ICL leadership declared that this “partakes of the social-democratic framework of a kinder, gentler Europe and buys into the liberal myth of ‘open borders’ between states that have signed the Schengen agreement” (I.S. motion, 20 October 2015). Simultaneously, as repeated in the article in *Spartaco* (April 2016), it opposed calls for “freedom of travel within the EU” for immigrants as likewise equivalent to calling for “open borders,” even though non-immigrant citizens are able to do so. In short, the ICL’s turn over the last year to refusing to call for the right to asylum for refugees and its opposition to calls to oppose the Dublin III deportation regime and in favor of refugees’ right to freedom of travel in the EU, all contradict its purported support for citizenship rights for all immigrants.

What exactly “full citizenship rights” even mean in the eyes of the latter-day ICL is anybody’s guess. McDonald castigates the pulled *Workers Vanguard* draft for “ridiculously deluded demands on the EU imperialists, including that the ‘welfare state’ should be applied to immigrants” (27 May 2015). So “citizenship rights,” but no health care? In fact, the ICL’s new line is a capitulation to anti-immigrant chauvinism, amid a crisis which has dramatically escalated such sentiment. By focusing exclusively on opposition to the liberal bourgeois



U.S. troops from 82nd Airborne Division patrol Haiti’s capital of Port-au-Prince, January 2010. ICL now claims its support for U.S. occupation was due to excessive concern for fate of the oppressed Haitian masses. Nonsense, it was social-imperialist support for its bourgeois rulers, as the ICL itself admitted. Now it’s repeating the betrayal, lining up with reactionary anti-immigrant forces in refusing to call for asylum for refugees.

illusion of “open borders” under capitalism, in practice it has allied itself with the most retrograde xenophobic elements.

It is instructive to read the self-criticisms and self-serving explanations by the various actors in the ICL psychodrama as to why they (horrors!) were about to publish a call for asylum for those fleeing Middle Eastern wars. WV editorial board member Alan Wilde wrote (30 May 2015) that in adopting a line of “let them in” they would “replace the necessity of proletarian revolution and working-class power with social-work do-goodism.” Another cadre, R., wrote (27 May 2015): “I thought, where would you draw the line? When people get into the boats? When they reach Libya? Or before that?” McDonald referred (27 May 2015) to the desire to address “people in the boats, who were drowning by the thousands, or to those who are waiting to get on boats to try and get to Europe. One of the pressures towards liberalism comes from not wanting to be seen as ‘indifferent’ to the plight of desperate refugees. But we could do a bit better at withstanding this pressure.” She should rest easy, the ICL has gotten pretty good at that (being seen as indifferent to the refugees’ fate). But authentic Trotskyists have a different task, of mobilizing the working class to defend the oppressed.

In a particularly gross perversion of reality, ICL leaders pretend that what got them in trouble was being overly concerned with the plight of the oppressed. “The liberal-humanitarian desire to offer something concrete for these desperate souls was precisely the impulse that led us five years ago into the Haiti betrayal,” wrote Ray Bishop (1 June 2015), referring to the ICL’s three-month-long support for the U.S. invasion of Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake. Wilde echoed

this, saying the methodology “is similar to that followed with the Haiti betrayal – i.e., masses are suffering and dying, and we have to come up with an immediate program to address their situation. In the case of Haiti, it led to capitulation to U.S. imperialism; in this case, it led to liberalism and utopia, as well as echoing the ‘Social Europe’ line.”

So if they had been harder-hearted about the fate of earthquake victims they wouldn’t have ended up embracing the U.S. Army as humanitarian saviors?! This is a cynical after-the-fact *rationalization* and cover-up for their social-imperialist betrayal. The *reason* for it was the ICL’s growing capitulation to its own imperialist rulers – from dropping the demand for independence for Puerto Rico in 1998 (and later the French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique) to dropping the call for defeat of one’s own imperialism in war post 9/11.

At the time of the ICL’s “savage indictment” of its line on Haiti, we wrote that “for those who do not wish to keep on gyrating in centrist confusion while insisting they ‘are’ the revolutionary leadership, there must be a thorough-going search for the causes of the betrayal. Those genuinely looking for the roots of the SL’s pro-imperialist ‘politics of the possible’ over Haiti would do well to examine the real record of its adaptations and capitulations to ‘its own’ bourgeoisie over the past years” (see “Open Letter from the Internationalist Group to the Spartacist League and ICL,” in *The Internationalist* No. 31, May 2010). Having failed to carry out such an examination of the roots of its betrayal on Haiti, the ICL was condemned to repeat it – which it is now doing, lining up with the most retrograde elements of the bourgeoisie, including fascists and racists, while hyperventilating about the dangers of “open borders” and “unlimited mass migration” in order to justify not calling to let Syrian refugees in.

Members of the ICL should ask themselves if they really want to say to refugees in rubber dinghies off Lesbos island in Greece that they are not refugees but “displaced persons” who have no right to enter Fortress Europe; to tell Agyemin from Ghana and Mohammad from Gambia held in a “welcome camp” in Sicily (“Displaced Again and Again, Some African Migrants Had No Plan to Land in Italy,” *New York Times*, 2 May 2015) it’s of no concern to the ICL that they cannot travel to northern Europe because to call for that would mean “open borders” and threaten Germany or Sweden’s right of self-determination (see “Italy: The Refugee Crisis and Capitalist Barbarism” in this issue); to inform the parents of Alan Kurdi (the two-year-old whose body washed up on a beach in Turkey, becoming the icon for the terrible ordeal of Syrian refugees) that they should have stayed in Kobanê and fought on the side of the Islamic State which threatened to massacre the Kurds. If you can say all that and still claim with a straight face to defend full citizenship rights for all immigrants, then the ICL is the place for you.

If, however, you seek to be a Leninist “tribune of the people,” championing the cause of all the oppressed, then it is high time to make your way back to Trotskyism in the League for the Fourth International, which stands on the historic program the ICL has abandoned. ■

Who Voted for What...

continued from page 9

Medical Journal) of 6 July, 59% of those who voted for Leave were middle-class and only 24% were semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers or the poor.

That said, there were significant numbers of working-class voters in depressed industrial areas of northern England who voted for Brexit. Article after article focusing on particular localities described genuine concerns in the population about the shrinking number of jobs, schools and hospital beds fueling the vote against the EU. But this sentiment simply accepts that these things are going to continue to disappear, it accepts the rotten state of decrepit British capitalism as a given and advocates that *somebody else* (i.e., immigrants) should pay. This in turn is the product of decades of capitulation to Thatcherite austerity, maintained and deepened of course by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown’s pro-capitalist Labour governments.

Even allegedly more militant trade union leaders, such as the RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers) accept this framework, seeking to persuade the capitalists not to hire foreign labor or get the capitalist state to ban it, rather than making a serious attempt to organize immigrant workers themselves. They posture as the best defenders of the “national” interest. Thus the RMT protest against the takeover of Northern Rail by Arriva (a subsidiary of Deutsche Bahn) this April was a stunt which consisted of raising the German flag over Manchester station. And Bob Crow, the RMT general secretary who died in 2014 had declared “Free movement within the EU impoverishes workers.”

Those workers who supported Brexit did not do so on a class basis but largely on a nationalist appeal. Nor did calling on them to vote for Leave in a campaign dominated by denunciations of “uncontrolled immigration” raise their class consciousness. There were, after all, plenty of workers in Scotland and Northern Ireland who voted to Remain, as did 67% of Asian voters, 73% of black voters and 73% of 18 to 24-year olds. And then there were the 2 million immigrants from EU countries, who were excluded from voting. In addition to the large number of European immigrants in health care, more than 40% of the workforce in canning, bottling and packing plants are immigrants, as are one-third of all manufacturing workers.

Immigrant workers are now part of the core of the proletariat in the British Isles. Opposition to all of the divide and rule schemes, to any attempt to scapegoat them for the crisis of British capitalism, is a matter of life and death if there is going to be any kind of successful working-class fight against that crisis. That is why in the referendum battle, in which both sides attacked immigrants, revolutionary Marxists had no side, and why *we in the League for the Fourth International counterpose the fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants to both Leave and Remain*. As for bringing down the imperialist bloc of the European Union, that cause will not be furthered under the Union Jack of British imperialism (or the Cross of St. George flag brandished by English chauvinist Brexiteers) but under the red flag of proletarian internationalism. ■

Better-Late-Than-Never Faction Fuses with Internationalist Group

After ten days of intensive discussions at the beginning of May followed by three and a half months of joint work, the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction of the International Communist League and the Internationalist Group have decided to join forces and henceforth constitute a single organization, the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. This fusion not only is an important step forward for the IG, establishing a Los Angeles local, but for the LFI as a whole. Along with the Portland local of the IG we can foresee common work by the West Coast locals, and collaboration with the Grupo Internacionalista/México. Even more importantly, together with the formation of the Nucleo Internazionalista d'Italia by the former leaders of the Italian section of the ICL, the BLTN Faction's international experience and connections will help lay the basis for the LFI to undertake systematic work in Europe and explore opportunities in Asia. Taken together, these revolutionary regroupments based on the program of authentic Trotskyism mark an important step forward in the process of reforging the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution.

For the Internationalist Group, the unexpected appearance of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction is a vindication of the struggle waged over the last two decades to uphold the Bolshevik program of international socialist revolution. Seeing from their own experience how the ICL had turned its back on the revolutionary program on which it had been founded, the BLTN Faction investigated the origins of this political degeneration. They found that the ICL made its first decisive turn away from revolutionary Trotskyism under the pressure of demoralization in the wake of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European bureaucratically deformed workers states. Despairing of the revolutionary capacity of the working class, the ICL leadership decided to rid itself of the leading comrades who, even in the face of this historic defeat, insisted on continuing revolutionary intervention in the class struggle. This came to a head in the 1995-96 fight in the ICL over Germany, then in Mexico and Brazil and later France, as the ICL wrote defeatist conclusions



Internationalist photo

New Los Angeles local of the Internationalist Group held a “speakout against police terror from L.A. to Oaxaca,” at Cal State L.A. on September 1.

into its program and sealed this with a series of expulsions and a mountain of lies to justify its retreat from the class struggle (and in Brazil, desertion in the heat of battle).

As the ICL revised one key element of its once-revolutionary program after another, repeatedly capitulating to the bourgeoisie leading up to its social-imperialist support for the U.S. invasion of Haiti in 2010, the contradiction between its Marxist pretensions and its actual practice became ever more glaring. From within the ICL, the comrades who formed the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction independently arrived at the same political conclusions as the LFI. They sought to win comrades within the ICL to the realization that if they genuinely wanted to fight for revolution, it would mean, as their document said, to “Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!” But the ICL leadership immediately moved to prevent such internal discussion by summarily expelling the BLTN Faction the day after they submitted their declaration. This bureaucratic action deprived the Faction of the right to fight for leadership on the basis of their program, and denied the ranks of the ICL the possibility of debating this. But it has not stopped the BLTN comrades from carrying out their program, as we are now doing.

Over the last three months there were important developments in the class struggle – including the impeachment drive in Brazil, direct U.S. military ground attack in Syria,

the immigration crisis in Europe, and the British vote to leave the European Union (“Brexit”) – in which the League for the Fourth International has demonstrated its programmatic fidelity to our common Bolshevik-Leninist heritage. The ICL, on the other hand, called on Brazilian workers to do nothing in the face of the concerted capitalist assault, and in Europe has sided with the most retrograde anti-immigrant bourgeois reactionaries, positively glorying in Brexit, rather than put forward a program for class struggle to bring down the imperialist EU.

During our period of common work, the BLTN and IG/LFI have collaborated closely in seeking to win potential revolutionaries from the ICL milieu to authentic Trotskyism, as outlined in our May 4 Agreement for Common Work. This was highlighted by our joint intervention along with a comrade from Italy in the Lutte Ouvrière Fête in France in mid-May and at the Left Forum in New York a week later. In these reformist and social-democratic/liberal gab fests we had the opportunity to engage in interchanges of a sort with members of the SL/ICL and sold scores of copies of the supplement to *The Internationalist* titled “Back to Trotskyism,” containing the Italian comrades’ statement of political solidarity with the LFI, the BLTN Faction document and other materials, and a joint BLTN-IG statement (“SL/ICL: Haunted by Revolutionary Trotskyism”). It is telling that more than four months after expelling the BLTN comrades on the basis of their document, the SL has yet to answer their political arguments, instead limiting its responses to trivial snide remarks.

A high point of our joint work was participation by the BLTN comrades at the Second National Conference of the Grupo Internacionalista, the Mexican section of the LFI, and seeing first-hand, from Mexico City to Oaxaca, the intensive action of the section in the explosive teachers strike that has convulsed the country for over three months. The GI’s work has been a model of innovative Trotskyist intervention, concretely defending the strike, mobilizing brigades of teachers to carry out our call to extend the strike to key sectors of the proletariat, and fighting against bourgeois populism and popular-frontism, while selling thousands of newspapers and holding weekly study groups and daily film showings and political discussions at the strikers’ *plantones* (tent cities).

The contrast could not be sharper to the ICL, which has not only abstained from the struggle, but actually defends the arm of the capitalist state that is spearheading the attack on the strike – the SNTE corporatist pseudo-union which was created by and remains directly controlled by the government in order to prevent the rise of genuine workers organizations, like the CNTE. A dramatic confirmation of the bankruptcy of the latter-day ICL occurred at a GI forum at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) where Oaxaca teachers powerfully spoke (and chanted) against the assertion by the leader of the ICL’s Mexican group that there is no class difference between the striking CNTE and the strike-breaking SNTE, and in support of

the intervention against the ICL made by a comrade of the BLTN faction.

Despite its silence, the SL will not be able to avoid the devastating challenge to its tattered, ostensibly revolutionary credentials by the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction. The appearance of the BLTN is a challenge as well to any would-be revolutionary militants in and around the ex-Trotskyist ICL, showing that there is a way out for those who really seek to struggle on the Trotskyist program that the Spartacist tendency once embodied. This fusion confirms the validity of the LFI’s orientation looking to revolutionary regroupment, not as a game of musical chairs among various pseudo-Marxist groupings, but on the solid programmatic ground of Leninism and Trotskyism. As the LFI wrote last year:

“We must continue to seek opportunities to intersect struggles and engage revolutionary-minded militants with our Trotskyist propaganda wherever and whenever we are able to do so. Ultimately what will be required is revolutionary regroupment(s) of cadres breaking from opportunist organizations to embrace authentic Trotskyism.”

–“International Perspectives of the League for the Fourth International” (April 2015), reprinted in *The Internationalist* No. 40 (Summer 2015)

That document states that “the immediate prospects may be limited” for such regroupments. But then the unexpected happens. As we wrote in the “Declaration of the League for the Fourth International” (May 1998):

“The reforging of the Fourth International requires defeating Pabloism and all other currents which betray the revolutionary Trotskyist program. An important component of this fight, and of the struggle to overcome the disparity between the tasks we face and our limited forces, will be the tactic of revolutionary regroupment on the program of Leninist internationalism. We foresee a series of splits from revisionist organizations and fusions with those genuinely seeking to be communists, in building the vanguard party.”

During our period of common work, the BLTN and IG also collaborated in producing propaganda to intervene in protests against the persecution of a Los Angeles-area Black Lives Matter activist, selling *The Internationalist* and other LFI publications, and launching campus work and industrial sales in the Los Angeles area, as foreseen in our May 4 agreement. While the methods of political work of the IG/LFI and SL/ICL differ substantially – notably assuring, as our Brazilian comrades put it, that our deeds match our words, seeking to carry out where possible what we call for rather than spouting empty rhetoric – we found, from the very first moment after coming into contact, that the comrades of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction and the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International share common values and revolutionary commitment. Having used this period to get to know each other, and since in fact we are already acting as a common organization, we have decided to formalize our Leninist fusion. *Forward to the reforging of a genuinely Leninist and Trotskyist Fourth International!*

27 August 2016

Internationalist Group



League for the Fourth International

Agreement for Common Work Between the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction and the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International

New York, 4 May 2016

On April 16, unbeknownst to the Internationalist Group, the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction of the International Communist League (ICL) submitted its declaration of faction calling to “Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!” The very next day, in violation of its own organizational rules, the Spartacist League/U.S. leadership cynically and lyingly declared that the Faction’s Declaration constituted a “resignation.” Following the Faction’s protest that it had not resigned, and intended to wage a principled fight for leadership on the basis of authentic Trotskyist politics, six days later the SL sent a second letter declaring the Faction had been expelled.

Claiming that the faction platform was “self-evidently composed in close collaboration with the Internationalist Group,” which is entirely false, the action by the SL tops showed their inability to defend their centrist politics, and a conviction that their members are incapable of thinking for themselves. The Internationalist Group was, to say the least, pleasantly surprised to learn of the Faction’s existence when it first established contact with the IG on April 22.

Following the bureaucratic and cowardly expulsion solely on the basis of its political views, the Faction traveled to New York to follow through on its perspective of regroupment with the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the League for the Fourth International. Following several days of discussion, and jointly participating in the May Day march in NYC, the IG/LFI and the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction hereby agree to carry out common work aiming at an early fusion of our forces on the basis of:

–the Document of the First National Conference of the Internationalist Group, “The Trotskyist Struggle for International Socialist Revolution” (April 2015);

–the “International Perspectives of the League for the Fourth International” (April 2015), notably including the sections outlining the policy of proletarian internationalism on Syria, and polemicizing against the ICL on this issue;

–the “Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction” (April 2016) which powerfully reaffirms the struggle of the IG/LFI to uphold and put into practice Bolshevik politics from Germany to Mexico, Brazil and elsewhere in the period since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, homeland of the October Revolution, which we defended to



Internationalist photo

BLTN Faction and IG marched together in NYC on May Day.

the end, despite and against the Stalinist bureaucratic betrayers.

The Faction’s defense of the Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism against the ICL’s zigzagging revisionism upholds the program that is key to proletarian political revolution which is integral to the defense of China, Cuba and the other remaining bureaucratically deformed workers states against imperialism and counterrevolution.

The expelled faction did groundbreaking work in opposing the latter-day SL’s class-collaborationist policy in industry, insisting that walking bosses in the ILWU are management, and management must not be in the unions, the mass organizations of workers struggle. Further joint investigation together with the IG confirms the correctness of the Faction’s fight to uphold the class line. A class-struggle opposition in the industry would demand that union members must not have managerial functions (hiring, firing, discipline) and fight for union safety committees and delegates with the authority to shut down unsafe operations.

The Internationalist Group and the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction agree to:

- 1) Work together exploring further opportunities to win people from the ICL milieu to authentic Trotskyism;
- 2) Jointly write a brief article for *The Internationalist* No. 43 on the struggle and expulsion of the Faction, and the perspective of revolutionary regroupment on the Trotskyist program;
- 3) Identify one priority campus and one priority industrial sale in the Los Angeles area. ■

Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction

Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism!

Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!

By Ines and Wright

16 April 2016

The ICL leadership has bent under the pressures of imperialism, dragging the good name of Spartacism through the mud of political capitulation to the bourgeoisie and loss of confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat. The first signs of this degeneration were recognized two decades ago by ICL leaders and youth comrades in several sections who were expelled for pointing it out, and went on to found the IG/LFI as the means to keep genuine Spartacism alive. After blindly trusting the ICL leadership's smokescreens and lies for far too long we have finally woken up and reviewed the evidence for ourselves. The *only* road back to genuine Spartacism is regroupment with the IG/LFI on the basis of *their* revolutionary continuity!

1) The Russian Question

The first paragraph of the draft document for the February 2016 SpAD conference¹ stated that the force "*centrally responsible*" for the counterrevolutionary destruction of the DDR was the Stalinist bureaucracies in the DDR and "above all" the Soviet Union. This latest rehash of the wrong conception that the Stalinists "*led*" the counterrevolution negates the correct political orientation that made possible the ICL's proud fight against counterrevolution in the DDR, and on which future struggles for political revolution in China and the other deformed workers' states must also be based.

A month after the Treptow demonstration, when the German bourgeoisie's drive to capitalist reunification had gone into high gear, WV wrote under the headline "Gorbachev Yielding to a Fourth Reich": "Meanwhile the Social Democracy (SPD) has seized the initiative as the *spearhead* of reunification ... Yet the response of the SED-PDS tops to this polarization is *paralysis and collapse*."² This was completely in line with Trotsky's understanding in "The Class Nature of the Soviet State," where he writes:

"A real civil war could develop not between the Stalinist bureaucracy and the resurgent proletariat but between the proletariat and the *active forces* of the counterrevolution. In the event of an open clash between the two mass camps, there cannot even be talk of the bureaucracy playing an *independent role*. Its polar flanks would be flung to the different

sides of the barricades."³

Note that here the Stalinist bureaucracy is not even considered to be among the "*active forces* of the counterrevolution," it is deemed incapable of "playing an independent role," and certainly not placed above the bourgeoisie and social democracy as the force that is "*leading*" or is "*centrally responsible*" for the drive to counterrevolution.

In accordance with Trotsky's understanding, the "What Do the Spartakists Want" box printed in nearly every issue of *Arprekorr* distributed by the ICL in the DDR in 1989-90 rightly declared:

"We stand with those members and recent ex-members of the Stalinist SED, as well as numerous others seeking to build a socialist world, who vow that the heirs of Hitler must not expropriate that which, by the workers' toil, has arisen out of the ruins."⁴

In contrast to the ICL's correct attempts in the DDR to realize the perspective of regroupment with elements of the shattering Stalinist apparatus who could be won to Trotskyism, the BT, Northites and other Stalinophobes slandered our orientation as Stalinophilic, claiming that the Stalinist ruling party was *leading* the counterrevolution. For example, the Northites wrote: "The TLD ignores the fact that today the ruling Stalinist bureaucracies from Gorbachev to Gysi are themselves the *biggest supporters* of capitalism and push its restoration"⁵ and "In the DDR, the Stalinist bureaucracy is the *driving force* for the carrying through of capitalist restoration."⁶ Meanwhile, the BT raised the slogan "No to the Modrow Regime – *Main Danger* to the DDR!" (Modrow was then SED prime minister of the DDR). The real purpose of these arguments was to *cover for social democracy, which was actually spearheading the counterrevolution*.

The Treptow united front, mobilized to *stop* counterrevolution, obviously would not have included the SED if they were in fact the *leaders* of the counterrevolution. That is why the social democrats were *not* invited – they were, as we said at the time, the "Trojan horse of counterrevolution," or as Renate put it from the platform at Treptow: "The means for selling out the DDR is the Social Democracy – that had better be known to

³ Trotsky, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State," October 1933 (our emphasis).

⁴ Scans of original issues of *Arprekorr* (Workers Press Correspondence) can be found online at marxists.org.

⁵ From a leaflet titled "The TLD – Provocative Defenders of Stalinism," *Neue Arbeiterpresse*, 15 Dec 1989 (our emphasis).

⁶ From the election program of the Northite BSA for the March 1990 Volkskammer elections (our emphasis).

¹ According to the Berlin organizer, this draft conference document was scrapped altogether less than two weeks before the SpAD conference because the IS felt it was too ambitious.

² WV 495, 9 Feb 1990.

us all.”⁷ Meanwhile, the BT, who instead labelled the Stalinists as the “main danger,” denounced us for not inviting the Social Democrats to speak. To organize a united front with those who were actually *spearheading* a drive for counterrevolution would have been utterly reactionary, whereas organizing a united front with the ruling party of a deformed workers state that was misleading the working class by *capitulating* in the face of this drive was a principled part of our fight to become the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat by defeating the present misleaders in the course of struggle. So if you accept the idea that the Stalinist bureaucracy “led” or was “centrally responsible” for counterrevolution, what does that say about the nature of the Treptow demonstration?

Six years after the counterrevolution in the DDR, the line that the likes of the BT and Northites had used to denounce our Treptow demonstration found its way into the ICL. In what has become known as the “Norden fight” there was one section of the leadership who wanted to maintain our correct position that the bourgeoisie and social democratic running dogs led the counterrevolution and another that wanted to rewrite our program and history to say that the Stalinists led the counterrevolution. The former, Norden and his co-thinkers, were driven out of the leadership and the latter, dubbed the “new IS,” claimed that the fact that Norden and his co-thinkers could not “grasp” the idea that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution” was proof that they were “Pabloites of the second mobilization.” Having expelled Norden and his co-thinkers in 1996, the “new IS” was able to codify their revisionism in the ICL’s 1998 Declaration of Principles, which states:

“The Kremlin abetted by the East German Stalinists *led the counterrevolution* in the DDR, rushing to hand the country over to the Fourth Reich.”

So, did the ICL act in accordance with this line and warn the workers of the DDR that the Kremlin was leading the counterrevolution? Absolutely not! That was the poisonous lie of the pseudo-Trotskyists intended to mobilize workers behind the call for a withdrawal of Soviet troops from the DDR. The ICL took a very clear stance against this Stalinophobic line, insisting that the removal of Soviet troops would open the door to the imperialists.

Many ICL members mistakenly believe that there was a subsequent correction clarifying that it was wrong to say that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution.” This mistaken impression is a product of the following pseudo-correction passed at the ICL’s 2003 conference:

“It is not correct to say ‘the PDS led the counterrevolution in the DDR’ and ‘we were the revolutionary leadership’ in the incipient political revolution in the DDR in 1989-90. These formulations are better: ‘We were the only contender for revolutionary leadership of the working class in the revolutionary situation in the DDR in 1989-90. We can be proud of our fight for revolutionary leadership.’ And ‘When the Kremlin sold out the DDR to West German capitalism, the SED-PDS tops adapted to the betrayal and became the PDS’.”

However, the current ICL Declaration of Principles still

states that “The Kremlin abetted by the East German Stalinists *led the counterrevolution* in the DDR” (this was also *not* corrected in the 2010 preface). And in 2011, WV 974 printed an article translated from *Espartaco* No. 12 stating (without comment) that:

“The IG uses the same lying description of ‘paralyzed’ victims that [IG leader Jan] Norden used to clean up the image of the Stalinists of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany), who in 1990 *led the counterrevolution* and presented the East German workers state as a gift to imperialism.”

If one looks more closely, they can see that the 2003 “correction” was *not* a change from “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution” to “the Stalinists did not lead the counterrevolution,” but merely a change from saying “the DDR Stalinists led the counterrevolution” to “the Soviet Stalinists led the counterrevolution.” The line that “the PDS led the counterrevolution” was “corrected” for not mentioning the Kremlin as the real mastermind behind this “Stalinist led” counterrevolution, not for its real crime of whitewashing the role of the bourgeoisie and its social democratic running dogs.

This pseudo-correction served two purposes: 1) to pacify those in the party who might object to the idea that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution” with the illusion that the “correction” was a reaffirmation of Trotsky’s understanding on the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and 2) to meanwhile continue on the same revisionist course of the leadership, and in fact entrench it by stupefying any potential opposition – thus leaving unscathed the “correctness” of the fight against Norden.

This has allowed the ICL to speak out of both sides of its mouth on this question to best suit its purposes. It could stop saying “led the counterrevolution” when it would appear as an embarrassing mockery of Trotskyism, and meanwhile keep up the lie that Norden was a “Pabloite” for not grasping that the Stalinists led the counterrevolution.

We were initially surprised by the “centrally responsible” line in Germany because we were among those duped by the “correction,” as were, apparently, some SpAD members who tried to defend the line by arguing: “yes, it was wrong to say the Stalinists led the counterrevolution, but this is different.” Now we understand what’s going on – it is a case of co-existence through intentional obfuscation – co-existence, that is, between those who think Stalinist bureaucracies can lead counterrevolutions and those who don’t.

The advantages for the leadership of sustaining this co-existence are obvious – most youth who are motivated enough to consider joining the ICL will probably have also bothered to read at least something on Trotsky’s understanding of the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and without recruits the party would wither away in old age. However, this co-existence is not a sustainable cure for the ICL leadership’s predicament – when the next battle between political revolution and counterrevolution is sharply posed, the polar flanks of the ICL will be flung to the different sides of the barricades.

A correct understanding of the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy is essential to the fight to defend China and the

⁷ See transcript of Renate’s speech in “Trotskyist Addresses SED-Supported Rally,” WV 493, 12 Jan 1990.

other deformed workers states today. To fight against counter-revolution it is essential that the proletariat understand who is leading it. The Stalinophobes would have them believe that the Stalinist bureaucracy is the “main danger” and thereby cover for the “democratic” running dogs of bourgeois reaction who will actually spearhead the counterrevolution. For the revolutionary vanguard to fall into that trap is to cease being Trotskyist, to become instead an obstacle to the fight for new October revolutions.

The revisionism that triumphed out of the “Norden fight” has already put the ICL on record as being hostile to basic Trotskyism. Following in the footsteps of the BT and Northites, the ICL went on the offensive to attack the position of genuine Trotskyism on China in order to “get” the IG:

“[W]e warn that the main force leading the drive for capitalist restoration today is the Stalinist regime itself. Not so the IG... The IG’s central theoretical argument is that because the Stalinist bureaucracy is a ‘contradictory, parasitic layer,’ and not a social class, it cannot lead the counterrevolution. Norden has long fumed over our statement that the East German Stalinists led the counterrevolution there. Now the IG writes:

‘The leading force for bourgeois counterrevolution in China today is the *bourgeoisie* and powerful capitalist restorationist forces inside and around the bureaucracy who are allied with it. Likewise, it was the German bourgeoisie of the Fourth Reich and its social democratic running dogs who led the drive for capitalist reunification that obliterated the DDR in 1990’ [emphasis in original].

“What bourgeoisie in China? Despite massive inroads by Taiwanese and Hong Kong capital on the mainland, it is the CCP bureaucracy which holds the reins of state power in Beijing. And Jiang Zemin & Co. have made no secret of their intention to lead a forced march to “free market” exploitation...”

– “IG on China: Looking for a Few Good Stalinist Bureaucrats,” WV 715, 11 June 1999

In a 16 June 2000 motion, the IS admitted internally that: “A step further in capitulation to Stalinophobia was the polemic against the IG in WV No. 715, 11 June 1999. This article as published selectively and dishonestly quoted from Trotsky to serve an alien appetite to accept capitalist restoration as inevitable.... More generally, this article in several places asserts in effect that the bureaucracy as a whole is leading the counterrevolution. This formulation, typical of Stalinophobic groups, invests the bureaucracy with the attributes of a new ruling class, implying that they are no longer subject to the constraints of the collectivized property forms and the proletariat itself.”⁸

However, attempts to get to the roots of this revisionism or even to make this correction public were effectively blocked. In the lead up to the 2003 ICL conference, members from various sections started implicitly and explicitly arguing that the Declaration of Principles needed to be corrected on this question, but before such an initiative could inspire a wider party discussion (which would logically lead straight back to a reassessment of the Norden fight in favor of Norden), alarm bells were rung that the existence of the ICL had supposedly

been put into grave danger by a “false fight” that was “heading towards a split without programmatic differences.” And what were the political-sounding ploys that these unprincipled power-players were trying to use to wreck the party? None other than the arguments against the line that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution.” In his *mea culpa*, K. repents:

“I agree with [Petersen]’s ‘Contribution to Post Conference Discussion’ that we all incorrectly raised rejection of ‘SED/PDS led the counterrevolution’ into a principled question, similar to the IS in 1999. Thus I wrote in my 13 November letter to [E.] and [J.]: ‘The main point of my document was that one conclusion we drew from the counterrevolution in the DDR and the Soviet Union was at least a partial repudiation of Trotsky’s analysis that the Stalinist bureaucracies in the degenerated/ deformed workers states have a dual character.’ This latter statement is too categorical and reflects that at this point we thought we might have found the ‘original sin’. A ‘partial repudiation’ of the ‘dual character’ can open the door to ‘the road towards Shachtmanism’ or to being ‘soft on Stalinism’. There were no substantial differences on the China article and any ‘partial repudiation’ was not there. There was a small difference over how to describe that the Chinese bureaucracy’s policies will lead to counterrevolution unless a proletarian political revolution stops them... I really was hot in the collar about [E.]’s interpretation of Trotsky that ‘the bureaucracy was fully capable of the ‘overthrow’ of collectivized property.’ While I think it is correct to say that this prognosis will probably not apply to China, it certainly did apply to the Soviet Union.”⁹

J. succinctly expressed the “understanding” that won out and was codified in the 2003 “correction”:

“Let me stipulate from the beginning that I think the slogan ‘the PDS led the counterrevolution’ to be absurd and should be dropped. I was never particularly enamoured of the formulation ‘the Stalinists led the counterrevolution’ by itself, in isolation because I thought it one-sided. However, I am afraid some comrades are pushing for an overcorrection reducing the role of the Stalinists to one of capitulation. To leave it like that is to draw a picture of passive accommodation. Compare that with our statement in the declaration of principles that: ‘The Kremlin, abetted by the East German Stalinists, led the counterrevolution in the DDR, rushing to turn the country over to the Fourth Reich.’ I do not believe there is anything to *correct* in this statement.”¹⁰

Although not politically won away from their opposition to the line in the Declaration of Principles, many backed down as a result of a clever organizational “compromise.” As Peterson writes:

“He [Jim Robertson] wanted to avoid that the German Section splits and therefore made the proposal that the IS should move to Paris, with [K.] and [S.] as central components and to include at least two German comrades. The condition that he made was that the split course was to stop. At that point everyone backed down. I thought, at that moment, that the entire polarization had become ridiculous, where the people

⁹ “Anatomy of the False Fight and the Struggle to Reconstruct the Party,” K., 25 Jan 2004, IIB No. 64, p. 77.

¹⁰ “The Stalinists Were Not Just Passive, They Actively Sold Out the DDR,” J., 30 Nov 2003, IIB No. 64, p. 40.

⁸ 16 June 2000 IS meeting, IDB No. 53, p. 58.

that we, or I, looked on as opponents, with whom I had to fight on principle over the Russian Question, were in favor of an IS in Paris with the composition which Jim had proposed. That must mean that the programmatic differences which we had escalated up must have been fantasy on our side.”¹¹

Far from building on the 2000 correction on China to revise the Declaration of Principles, as Peterson had set out to do, he ended up adopting the “understanding” that the 2000 correction needed to be recorrected for the sake of party unity:

“This fight was partial and there was something wrong with it, it was led with the whole method and language, not only of Norden, but also of the ‘New IS’, that is to brand assumed or real opponents as ‘Stalinophobic’, ‘Schachtmanite’ or ‘social democratic opposition’ and to hammer against that.”¹²

The party was rallied behind the idea that the most imminent danger to the party was the bureaucratic methods of the ex-“New IS,” and because the ex-“New IS” had wielded false charges of Stalinophobia against its victims, a successful fight against it could only be carried out by united “anti-bureaucratic” forces who agreed to not wield these same charges, even in cases where they might be true (such as waging a fight to correct the Declaration of Principles). Needless to say, this was all a bunch of bullshit to protect the incoming IS as it pursued its own Stalinophobic and bureaucratic course.

Even if ICL members who figured that documents from a “false fight” must not be worth reading give the ICL the benefit of the doubt and suppose that this was just an honest mistake, and an oversight to not correct the Declaration of Principles, they still should have trouble digesting the idea that it was only after eight years of presenting the Stalinist bureaucracy as the leading force behind counterrevolution that the ICL felt the need to stop repeating such a statement so at odds with basic Trotskyism, and then, rather than recognizing it as the *capitulation to imperialism* that it truly was, it was chalked up as merely a problem of “polemical excess,” just another “formulation” that could have been “better.” This is a far cry from the ICL’s past tradition of calling revisionist betrayals by their right name, as it did, for example, on this very same question in the February 1990 pamphlet *Trotskyism: What It Isn’t and What It Is!*:

“The BSA calls to ‘Overthrow the Stalinist Bureaucracy! Build Workers’ Councils in East Germany!’ On the surface of it, this would appear to echo Trotsky’s call for a proletarian political revolution. In fact, the BSA’s characterization of the Stalinist bureaucracy as ‘counterrevolutionary through and through’ owes more to the social-democratic anti-Sovietism of Max Shachtman and equates simple membership in the Communist Party with being a part of the bureaucracy.

“In the *Transitional Program*, the founding document of the Fourth International, Trotsky wrote that ‘all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko).’ Trotsky saw that the bureaucracy was not a new ruling class but a brittle and contradictory caste. He foresaw

that under the impact of proletarian political revolution a section of the bureaucracy would come over to the side of those rebelling against Stalinist rule. This was witnessed during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.”

In the struggle for proletarian political revolution in China it will be likewise necessary to look to the possibility of winning to the Trotskyist program and party a sector from among the recalcitrant elements of the Chinese bureaucracy, even if it is rather small, as Trotsky foresaw. In order to paint Norden as “Stalinophilic” for defending this long-held position of the ICL, Seymour reoriented the party towards a wholesale rejection of Trotsky’s understanding of the possibility of a Reiss faction by redefining it as a product of personal residual consciousness from the bureaucrats’ past lives as “leftist militants in reactionary capitalist states,” rather than, as Trotsky explained, a possibility inherent to the class nature of a Stalinist bureaucracy as “not a new ruling class but a brittle and contradictory caste.” Seymour’s revisionist nonsense made it into *Spartacist* in 1999:

“A Reiss faction in the specific sense that Trotsky conceived it was no longer possible in the bureaucracies of the post-World War II Sino-Soviet states. But could a ‘Reiss faction’ in a looser sense – a left opposition of a roughly centrist character – have developed in the postwar Stalinist regimes? I believe this was possible only in the first generation of the bureaucracy when many of its members were originally leftist militants in reactionary capitalist states... To search for a ‘Reiss faction’ in the present-day Chinese, North Korean, Vietnamese and Cuban bureaucracies would be futile and totally disoriented.”¹³

Political revolution in China will require the kind of party the ICL was during its intervention in the DDR, the kind of party that went onto Soviet army bases to introduce Trotskyism to gatherings of hundreds of Soviet soldiers and officers and recruited DDR officers and soldiers who had formed soldiers’ councils. Not the kind of party that in a demoralized frenzy after the fall of the DDR invented “theoretical” justifications for why no Reiss faction was ever possible again, who renounced Norden’s fine speech at Humboldt University and went on to adopt essentially the same line as the BT’s intervention against Norden’s speech – that there was a “blood line” between the officers of the East German army and East German workers. A SpAD member who was a former NVA tank commander got up and powerfully refuted the BT Stalinophobes at the time...but now? The majority of SpAD members today can’t even bring themselves to refute their leadership’s obviously Stalinophobic line that the Stalinist bureaucracy was “centrally responsible” for the counterrevolution!

The ICL is no longer the same party that fought for the defense of the Soviet Union and DDR, and with its current line cannot lead the necessary struggle to defend and extend the gains of the remaining deformed workers’ states. The line that the Stalinist bureaucracies “led the counterrevolution,” adopted as bogus ammunition to expel Norden and his co-

¹¹ “Contribution to Post-Conference Discussion,” Petersen, 1 Jan 2004, IIB No. 64, p. 97.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “On Trotsky’s Concept of a ‘Reiss Faction’ in the Soviet Bureaucracy,” published in *Spartacist* No. 55, Autumn 1999.

thinkers from the leadership of the party, negates the entire history of the ICL's principled fight against the real leaders of the counterrevolution (the capitalist class and its social democratic running dogs). Despite the internal pseudo-correction in 2003, anyone who reads the currently distributed ICL Declaration of Principles (in Chinese or any other language) can see that "the Stalinist bureaucracy led the counterrevolution" continues to be the official line of the ICL today. The ICL leadership is clearly more concerned with not admitting that Norden was right about them dumping Trotskyism on the Russian question than they are with actually returning to Trotskyism on the Russian question today. This ongoing repudiation of the most basic Trotskyist understanding of the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy, means that the ICL has nothing to offer the Chinese proletariat, except perhaps a slick-sounding centrist mouthpiece to provide a left cover for the "democratic" forces of counterrevolution, made all the more effective by appearing to stand on the authority of the ICL's proud history in the Soviet Union and DDR. The IG/LFI uniquely maintains the program and determination of these interventions, and thus alone is in a position to apply those lessons in China and the other deformed workers' states today.

For a genuine Trotskyist perspective against the ICL's revisionism on the Russian question, see:

- *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*, IG pamphlet, July 1996
- "Open Letter from a Former Member to the SpAD and the ICL," *The Internationalist*, No. 7, April-May 1999
- "Stalinists Led the Counterrevolution? ICL Between Shachtman and Trotsky," *The Internationalist*, No. 9, Jan-Feb 2001
- "ICL Still Caught Between Shachtman and Trotsky," *The Internationalist*, No. 11, Summer 2001
- "ICL Decrees: No More 'Reiss Factions'," *The Internationalist*, No. 11, Summer 2001
- "Letter to the ICL," *The Internationalist*, No. 15, Jan-Feb 2003, p. 42-43
- "Post-Soviet SL/ICL: New Zigzags on the Centrist Road," *The Internationalist*, No. 19, Summer 2004

2) The Class Line

[...]

Foremen in the Unions?

The SL leadership used to see the class line separating longshore workers and the "walking bosses" who discipline them on behalf of the capitalists...but no longer. Now they capitulate to the illusion pushed by the class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy that these agents of management should be embraced as "union brothers" in order to "maximize the ILWU's hold on the walking bosses." In fact, now they have one-upped the bureaucrats in tactics to blur the class line even further by calling for "Walking bosses back to the

longshore locals!" Behind this is none other than political capitulation to the bourgeoisie and loss of confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat – desperately looking for "solutions" to "protect" the union absent of class struggle. This brings the SL leadership to the absurd notion that agents paid by capitalists to carry out the "job" of disciplining workers to maximize profit can be convinced to do the exact opposite (discipline the workers in the interest of the workers), on an ongoing basis, in the absence of class struggle, if, of course, the union does a good enough job of winning their hearts and minds by cozying up with them as close as possible, preferably in the same union hall. The idea that walking bosses "acting as a significant buffer between the company and the workers" would be a good thing, demonstrates that they are viewing the question through the lens of labor bureaucrats trying to protect their positions through well-buffered class peace, rather than that of a proletarian vanguard trying to sharpen clarity over the class line to prepare for future battles.

This revisionism was codified at the December 2015 SL/US national conference with the following motion from the PB:

"Wright and Ines wrongly conflate foremen with ILWU walking bosses, which is contrary to fact and counterposed to a Marxist approach. To concur with Francis' 24 September document, which shows how walking bosses are more akin to leadmen, often acting as a significant buffer between the company and the workers. The PMA would like nothing better than to transform them into genuine foremen on the side of the companies and not least because walking bosses would uniquely have the capacity to mobilize a scab workforce, to train and lead scabs, in the complicated operations on the docks. We oppose the bosses' attempts to coopt ILWU walking bosses into becoming company men. As Francis noted:

'We seek to roll backwards the process the PMA promotes and hence to maximize the ILWU's hold on the walking bosses. Their class consciousness is of course affected by their isolation in the small, highly paid walking boss locals, and the companies' pull is magnified when they become steady men. So we call for: No steady men on the docks! Walking bosses back to the longshore locals!'"

We stand by the motions proposed by Ines and Wright at the 15 August 2015 LA local meeting:

"Motion: To uphold our position on foremen as stated in the Programmatic Statement:

'We are unalterably opposed to organizing security guards, prison guards and cops—strikebreaking henchmen of the bourgeoisie—into the labor movement and demand and work for their ouster from the unions. We also oppose the unionization of representatives of management—foremen and bosses with the right to discipline workers under their supervision'."

"Motion: The facts and anecdotes given in Francis' 30 October 2002 report on walking bosses indicate that this job position fits into the category of "representatives of management—foremen and bosses with the right to discipline workers under their supervision."

“Motion: To recommend that the TUC and PB consider the following position in regards to walking bosses/foremen in longshore:

‘The inclusion of walking bosses/foremen in the ILWU is part of a whole class-collaborationist perspective through which the pro-capitalist union misleaders undermine workers’ class consciousness and tie them to the class enemy, its state and political parties. It is a betrayal of the most elementary principles of working-class struggle. The walking bosses/foremen are part of management. Their job is to drive workers to meet the demands of the money-hungry shipping companies by enforcing speedup, flaunting safety regulations and gutting the power of the union. Walking bosses/foremen are the ones who initiate disciplinary proceedings, drag workers in for drug tests and serve as a reserve army of strikebreakers. By including these agents of the class enemy in the union, the ILWU bureaucracy undercuts the very purpose of the union, which was forged in struggle against the bosses’ attacks. Walking bosses/foremen out of the union!’”

“Motion: All walking bosses/foremen who want to come back over to this side of the class line and do longshore work out of the hiring hall, should be welcomed into the longshoremen’s union, on the condition that they only take jobs that do not include the right to discipline workers under their supervision.”

“Motion: We oppose any attempts to bar workers from union membership on the basis of a false categorization of them as ‘supervisors’ when they do not in fact have the right to discipline workers under their supervision. As we wrote in WV 882:

‘True supervisors, who hire, fire and/or discipline workers, are agents of the class enemy and do not belong in the unions—but it is for the workers to keep them out of their labor organizations. Any attempt by the capitalist state to determine who should belong to a union is a blow against labor.’”

For more background on the fight over walking bosses see:

- “Walking Bosses: Some Information and Anecdotes,” Francis, 30 Oct 2002, SL/US IDB No. 79
- “Confusion on the Class Line,” Wright, 15 July 2015, (Confusion15g15.doc)
- “Foremen in the Unions: Workers Control or Control of Workers?” Wright and Ines, 3 Sept 2015 (ReForemen-Disc3i15.doc)

[...]

The IG has usefully exposed the degeneration of the SL on key trade union questions, for example in the case of the Longview strike – from deferring to the opinion of the ILWU tops as a condition for endorsing the 23 January 2012 New York united front protest in solidarity with Longview, to taking a side with the bureaucrats’ disruption of the 12 January 2012 Seattle Labor Solidarity Forum. For more details, see:

- “Exchange with the Spartacist League on the January 23 Protest,” *The Internationalist*, January 2012
- “‘Socialist’ Excuses for Disruption of Labor Solidarity

Forum,” *The Internationalist*, February 2012

- “Gofers for the ILWU Bureaucracy – SL’s Wrong Lessons of Longview,” *The Internationalist*, March 2012
- Internationalist Video “Seattle Labor Solidarity Forum Disruption” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRFPz8qsc1k>
- Reuben’s shameful intervention in the youtube video “At SFTWSC Forum Spartacists Concerned About ILWU Bureaucrats at Seattle Longview Solidarity Meeting” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp78Pr1o_cc

3) The State

For our position on the foremen question we have been accused of being “anti-union,” “union-busters” akin to the IG on the corporatist unions in Mexico. So we read up on the question of corporatist unions in Mexico and found that far from being a position “in defense of the unions,” the ICL’s revisionism on Mexico not only falsifies party history, but amounts to alibiing the key arm of the capitalist state used to suppress class struggle.

Basic Mexican History: How Corporatist Unions Became “Company Unions on a Grand Scale”

The ICL used to be very clear about the class nature of Mexico’s corporatist “union” federations such as the CTM. For example, WV 629 explained:

“The CTM is an extreme example of what Leon Trotsky, in his 1940 essay on ‘Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,’ referred to as the tendency of modern trade unions to ‘draw close to and grow together with the state power.’ The CTM is a company union on a grand scale. It is formally one of the three ‘sectors’ of the ruling capitalist party, the PRI, and frequently acts as a virtual labor contractor. It often mobilizes goon squads working together with the police and army to repress labor ‘dissidence.’ Thus the struggle for the political independence of the working class in Mexico is intimately bound up with the fight to break the iron grip of the capitalist state’s ‘labor’ cops.”¹⁴

So how did this phenomenon come to be? First, starting in the 1920s the Mexican government sent political operatives to Fascist Italy to copy their model of corporatist state control and implement it in all sectors including the unions. As Trotsky explained in “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay”:

“There is one common feature in the development, or more correctly the degeneration, of modern trade union organizations throughout the world: it is their drawing close to and growing together with the state power By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism.”¹⁵

WV 621 added:

“In Mexico, he [Trotsky] noted, the unions were formally turned into semi-state institutions, and even though this

¹⁴ “Mexican Ford Workers Strike Against Starvation Wages,” WV 629, 22 Sept 1995, p. 3.

¹⁵ “Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay,” Trotsky, 1940.

from *Workers Vanguard* No. 629, 22 September 1995

Mexican Ford Workers Strike Against Starvation Wages

Auto workers at a Ford Motor Company subsidiary in the Mexican border city of Nuevo Laredo won a tentative victory in a wildcat strike in July. For four days workers occupied Ford's Lamosa *maquiladora* (free-trade zone) plant, which produces catalytic converters and axle rods, in a struggle that pitted them against the corporatist CTM "union" bosses who are part of the apparatus of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the capitalist ruling party in Mexico for the last six and a half decades.

The sit-down strike erupted on Monday, July 17, when workers came back from a two-week plant shutdown to learn that in their absence the CTM tops had signed a secret agreement with Ford accepting a measly 7 percent salary increase for this year. Workers had been demanding a 30 percent increase. The drastic devaluation of the peso earlier this year has meant a huge drop in the purchasing power of the already starvation-level wages in the *maquiladoras*.

According to reports in the *CJM Newsletter* (Summer 1995), put out by the San Antonio-based Coalition for Justice in the *Maquiladoras*, anger boiled over when the workers learned that the bureaucrats had negotiated a 30 percent increase for themselves. Workers stormed out of the plant as hated CTM regional leader "Chema" Morales arrived to try to force them to call off their action. But the workers quickly seized the facility, and Ford management fled the plant.

The strikers held out for four tense days, while the CTM denounced the strike as illegal. Ford threatened to close down the plant for good, while heavily armed state police circled the factory in cars and pickup trucks. Rumors circulated that Chema Morales



Ford workers occupy Lamosa parts plant in Nuevo Laredo last July, demanding 30 percent wage increase in wake of drastic peso devaluation.

might soon send in the cops to break up the strike, as occurred with fierce brutality in the Sony *maquiladora* strike in Nuevo Laredo last year (see our two-part article, "Labor Organizing in the *Maquiladoras*," WV Nos. 620 and 621, 7 and 21 April). The very fact that this bureaucrat could order a police attack is vivid proof that the CTM is a straitjacket for capitalist control by the PRI-government.

The CTM is an extreme example of what Leon Trotsky, in his 1940 essay on "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," referred to as the tendency of modern trade unions to "draw close to and grow together with the state power." The CTM is a company union on a grand scale. It is formally one of the three "sectors" of the ruling capitalist party, the PRI, and frequently acts as a

virtual labor contractor. It often mobilizes goon squads working together with the police and army to repress labor "dis-sidence." Thus the struggle for the political independence of the working class in Mexico is intimately bound up with the fight to break the iron grip of the capitalist state's "labor" cops.

Ford finally caved in, agreeing to a 30 percent salary increase, but payable only in "food coupons" rather than cash. Management and the CTM tops agreed to remove the official CTM plant committee and allow new union elections. And the company agreed to pay the week of the strike in full and no reprisals

against strikers (*La Jornada* [Mexico City], 22 July). But although union elections were held at Lamosa on August 15, workers report that the promised increase still had not come, and the word was it may be replaced by a one-time bonus.

The imposition of the NAFTA "free trade" pact in January 1994 was a scheme for U.S. imperialist plunder of Mexico. But the brutal superexploitation of largely women workers in the *maquiladoras* sparked a series of strikes, this year in the northern border zone from Ciudad Juarez to Nuevo Laredo. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of troops of the Mexican army have occupied the desperately poor southern state of Chiapas ever since the Zapatista-led peasant uprising on New Year's Day 1994.

As burgeoning workers unrest spread through the northern area early this year, and then 15,000 Mexico City bus drivers were summarily fired, the 94-year-old "dinosaur" who heads the CTM, Fidel Velázquez, canceled the official May Day march in the capital, fearing militant labor protest. Yet, half a million workers and Zapatista supporters turned out in the largest independent May Day mobilization in decades.

The road to victory for the courageous workers in the *maquiladoras* is through internationalist unity of workers' struggles on both sides of the border. The Spartacist League and the Grupo Espartaquista de México, sections of the International Communist League, have opposed the NAFTA "free trade" rape of Mexico. The GEM has underlined the need to throw off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM and form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle, and to champion the cause of women workers who are hideously oppressed and exploited in the *maquiladora* sweatshops. The key is to build revolutionary workers parties in the U.S. and Mexico as part of the ICL's struggle to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International. ■

Spartacist Events

arrangement was presented as aiding the workers, it would be turned into a weapon against them. This was particularly true under bonapartist rule, and because imperialist capital dominates the Mexican state."¹⁶

As Trotsky predicted, the system of corporatist unions was in fact "turned into a weapon against them" when quantity turned into quality with a pivotal point in Mexican labor history known as the "*Charrazo*" (coined after the nickname for Jesus Díaz de León, the infamous government lackey who first implemented this transformation and was particularly fond of dressing like a cowboy or "*charro*" in Spanish).

The *Charrazo* began in the **rail workers union** in 1948. In *Mexican Workers and the State*, Norman Caulfield explains: "Fearing that rank and file and leaders from other unions would join the railroaders' battle to defend their autonomy, the government sent 100 policemen disguised as workers to assist Díaz de León in taking over union headquarters. As Díaz de León and the police successfully occupied headquarters, federal soldiers seized all other railroad locals in

Mexico City."¹⁷

Next the *Charrazo* spread to the **petroleum workers' union**:

"At the petroleum workers' Sixth Convention in December 1949, the government monitored proceedings closely. State officials and police packed the meeting and prevented rank and filers from entering. The absence of workers allowed a bogus election of Gustavo Roldan Vargas, a bureaucrat formerly accused of misusing union funds. Internal dissension, police agents and antidemocratic tactics carried out by the government had resulted in the imposition of *charrismo* in the nation's most important industry."¹⁸

Then the state moved to impose *charro* leadership on the **miners' union** at their Sixth Convention in 1950:

"Secretary of Labor Manuel Ramirez Vazquez tried the same tactics that he had used against the railroad workers and petroleum workers—packing the meeting with illegitimate delegates and using police and thugs to exclude the dually elected representatives. With Ramirez Vasquez's delegates in

¹⁶ "Labor Organizing in the *Maquiladoras*," Part Two, WV 621, 21 April 1995, p. 5-6.

¹⁷ *Mexican Workers and the State*, Norman Caulfield, 1998, p. 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

the majority, the convention elected Jesus Carrasco general secretary...Fearing the rank and file, Carrasco then moved to suspend the rights of the more militant locals...[T]he excluded delegations protested Carrasco's actions and held a rival convention, which elected Garcia Moreno as general secretary of the new National Miners' Union. The new union advocated autonomy, opposition to wage freezes, freedom of political affiliation for its members and solidarity pacts with other industrial unions. The government reacted to the insurgency by notifying employers that Carrasco's union had exclusive bargaining rights. It then used police to break up dissident meetings and cooperated with employers in firing workers who resisted Carrasco's authority."¹⁹

The crushing of the anti-CTM **Nueva Rosita strike** is widely recognized as the definitive blow that consolidated the power of the *charro* CTM. In *The Crisis of Mexican Labor* Dan La Botz recounts (on the basis of Armondo Rodriguez Suarez's account in *La huelga de Nueva Rosita*, 1959):

"The strikers were submitted to the most brutal repression. Being on strike, the miners had no income, and given the decline in real wages in those years, they had no savings. The hunger began almost at once. Gas and electricity were cut off. The government seized the union's funds, closed the local consumers' cooperative, and closed the local medical clinic. The Nueva Rosita Chamber of Commerce forbade local merchants from selling food to the miners.

"Economic hardships led to great suffering, including the death of infants and small children from cold and hunger. In addition to the suffering caused by poverty, the workers lost their rights. The army occupied the mining town and established martial law: soldiers with machine guns patrolled the streets; meetings were forbidden; residents were harassed, registered, and interrogated. Strike leaders Jose Diaz and Jose Alvarado were arrested and taken to an unknown location. The company ran the operation with scabs, known as *panzas blancas*, who slept and ate in the plant. As Jorge Basurto writes, Nueva Rosita 'was turned into a giant concentration camp.'... By December, 3600 of 5800 union workers had returned to work, and the company had hired some 1500 scabs. Nevertheless, on Christmas day of 1950 the strikers' 5000 children gathered to break the piñata, an effigy of the *charro* Jesus Carrasco and when it broke they shouted with their parents, 'Long live the right to strike! Death to Jesus Carrasco! Death to the scabs!'"²⁰

With the *Charrazo*, direct state control over these three powerhouses of the Mexican proletariat – railroad, petroleum and mining – had been consolidated, and as a result:

"For decades the semi-corporatist 'unions' of the CTM have maintained a rigid stranglehold on the millions-strong Mexican proletariat, chaining it to the PRI, within which CTM leader Fidel Velazquez' machine represents a hard right wing. Wildcat strikes and opposition currents are brutally suppressed by CTM *charro* thugs working together with the police. Where unrest can't simply be suppressed, the regime has had recourse to the replacement *charrismo* of the other components of the CT (Congress of Labor), including the CROC, CROM, etc."²¹

¹⁹ *Mexican Workers and the State*, Norman Caulfield, 1998, p. 98-99.

²⁰ *The Crisis of Mexican Labor*, Dan La Botz, 1988, p. 95.

²¹ "Mexico in Turmoil," WV 604, 5 Aug 1994.

The ICL Rewrites History, Alibis Labor Cops, Slanders its Previous Self

Parallel to the Stalinophobic line that the Stalinists led the counterrevolution, the ICL adopted a revisionist position that disappeared the class line dividing the Stalinist misleadership of the corporatist CTM before the *Charrazo* and the state-appointed labor cops of the CTM after it was transformed into "a company union on a grand scale."

In the same issue announcing that the GEM "garnered" the endorsement of a CTM local for the Bay Area February 9, 2002 protest, WV 775 opportunistically disappeared its previous understanding of the history and nature of the CTM, and even slandered it as IG "mythology" proclaiming:

"We Spartacists do not recognize a class difference between the CTM-affiliated unions and other unions. Ultimately, a union with a right-wing leadership is better than no union at all... The so-called 'charrazo' marked the end of the 'democratic' pretensions of the bureaucracies, but to maintain that it made any qualitative, class difference is simply ridiculous."

In their excitement to paint the IG/LFI as "anti-union" and "third world nationalists" they didn't notice (or didn't care) that this position was the *exact opposite* of the Trotskyist understanding "we Spartacists" actually recognized ever since our tendency started to really get its feet wet in Mexico in the 1980s. Anyone who has a clue about Mexican labor history can tell that this new line would retrospectively place Trotskyism on the wrong side of the barricades in key class battles against the *Charrazo* like the Nueva Rosita strike – instead of defense of the miners heroic fight to break the CTM stranglehold, it would mean siding with the "defense" of Carrasco's CTM "union" against the Nueva Rosita "union-busting" rebels. If we assume that the author of the ICL's new revisionist line actually read the relevant books on the subject before coming up with their "understanding" on the nature of the CTM, we can only conclude that instead of drawing a Marxist conclusion from the historical facts that social democratic authors like Dan La Botz present, the current ICL position ignores the facts while using the same anti-Marxist methodology as La Botz – to look at concrete institutions simply in terms of how "democratic" they are without seeing as primary which class they represent, i.e. whether, as Trotsky predicted, the corporatist union system was turned into a weapon of the state against the workers. WV 775 writes: "The so-called 'charrazo' marked the end of the 'democratic' pretensions of the bureaucracies, but to maintain that it made any qualitative, class difference is simply ridiculous." Just the formulation "so-called 'charrazo'" speaks volumes about the ICL's willful ignorance and detachment from the class struggle in Mexico. This is not just an idle historical debate, the stranglehold of the CTM consolidated through the *Charrazo* remains around the necks of workers to this day. And the system requires continual upkeep, whenever dissident union organizations rise up, the government tries to crush them with new *charrazos* based on the model of the original *Charrazo* of 1948. This is an ongoing burning question in Mexico, about which Marxists cannot be indifferent, much less on the wrong side.

from "Class Struggle in the 'Global Sweatshop,'" *Women and Revolution* No. 34, Spring 1988



Rally in support of striking garment workers at Vestamex/Camisas de Juárez demands: "Freedom of organization in the maquilas, forward with workers resistance!" Ahora [Ciudad Juárez]

The LFI's call to throw off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM and form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle, which the latter-day ICL slanders as "anti-union," is precisely what the ICL fought for in the 1980s and 90s. For example, in 1988 *Women and Revolution* No. 34 put out a powerful article clearly siding with women workers struggling to build a genuine union where a CTM "union" already existed. If written in accordance with the ICL's current line, these workers would have instead been condemned for "union-busting." Here are some excerpts from that article:

"The idea of a union of garment workers took root among the survivors camped out in tent cities amid the rubble. Today Evangelina Corona is general secretary of the '19th of September' National Union of Seamstresses. It was truly, as they say, 'a union born from the ruins.' Through strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations, these courageous women are fighting to organize tens of thousands of brutally exploited Mexican garment workers. They have struggled for recognition of their independent union against the combined onslaught of the sweatshop bosses, the bourgeois state and the 'charros' – bureaucrats of the government-controlled CTM union federation, who function as labor contractors enforcing sweetheart deals with the owners..."

"The *Wall Street Journal* (16 January 1987) reported:

'At one dress factory in Mexico City last year, for example, 18 gunmen from the CTM showed up on the day of a union vote, brandished weapons, and terrified the women into voting for a PRI-affiliated union. At a men's underwear factory, two busloads of thugs rolled up the night before a certification vote, climbed to the roof, and pelted voting seamstresses with rocks.'

"Today '19th of September' is still extremely weak, with only 4,500 members and 13 contracts signed. While the union

is now officially registered, the *charros* have not given up their attempts to co-opt it or wipe it out. Above all, these courageous proletarian militants who see themselves as 'the voice of those who died in the earthquake' must understand that fighting sweatshop exploitation and women's oppression requires a struggle against the capitalist system itself."

The ICL used to recognize that for the workers to fight in this context of state-run "company unions on a grand scale" they would need to adopt methods quite different from those used in the context of genuine unions led by pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats. As we can see above, *W&R* clearly did not see the CTM as a genuine workers' organization or else they would have criticized the "19th of September" movement for writing off the CTM in the same way that Trotskyists rightly criticized those who wrote off the AFL unions in the US. They would have warned that breaking off and forming a new rival union federation where a large one already existed would divide the proletariat, weakening its ability to wage industry-wide struggles and that the task was to fight within the existing union for revolutionary leadership, etc. But *W&R* said none of this, because they correctly understood that the CTM was no more of a workers' organization than is a company "union." In accordance with the understanding that the *charros* were not just union misleaders, but actually agents of the class enemy, *WV* wrote in "Mexico in Turmoil" (*WV* 604, 5 August 1994):

"While Mexican workers are presently held in thrall by a pervasive repressive apparatus, they have tremendous potential power. Against crackdowns by the police and labor contractors/company cops of the CTM, *plant occupations* backed up by *workers defense committees* can be a powerful response, sparking wide support and extending the struggle to other sectors (as happened at Ford-Cuautithin)."

As we can see, the ICL used to recognize the obvious fact that when a union is taken over by the state at gun-point it ceases to be a union and becomes its opposite – a pseudo-union akin to a company union, only with the full force of the capitalist state directly behind its efforts to smash worker unrest. The ICL used to recognize that in such a case workers' must organize independently of the existing "union" to even "lay the basis for genuine unions." Now the ICL would have us believe that unions controlled by trade union bureaucrats and unions controlled by direct agents of the state are just two different variants of "a union with a right-wing leadership" which "is better than no union at all." Again, the ICL can no longer even see the class line, rendering them incapable of waging class war. But this time the ICL is directly capitulating to the capitalist state.

The 1958-1959 Railroad Strikes

The Mexican section is slated to have a discussion at its upcoming national conference on the 1958-1959 railroad strikes. In reading up on this, we found that these strikes are a clear example demonstrating the correctness of the old ICL line upheld by the LFI today. Railroad workers within the CTM stranglehold understood that in order to engage in struggle they had to consciously circumvent the entire existing "union" apparatus and build new clandestine forms of organization nationwide. In *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico* Robert F. Alegre explains:

"Dissidents organized two strikes that summer, the first in June and the second in August. These strikes did not occur 'spontaneously' after years of 'labor peace,' as the most popular account of the movement maintains. [Endnote: 'Alonso frames the movement as 'spontaneous struggles.' Alonso, *El movimiento ferrocarrilero*, 99"] On the contrary, activists who had been organizing clandestinely tapped into widespread dissatisfaction with *charro* representatives and declining wages...

"STFRM and FNM officials did not know that the organizers carefully calculated the political implications of circumventing *charro* leaders. Dissidents planned their rejection of *charros* and the demand for a higher wage to coincide with the presidential campaign of Adolfo Lopez Mateos. For the next several months, railway activists rallied their base around the proposal for a wage increase. They visited work sites, conducted clandestine meetings, and made contacts with other industrial union members, preparing to take advantage of the political opening presented by the national election.... [Clandestinely] Informing thousands of members across a territory as large as Mexico about their plans took time, which explains why it was not until May 2, 1958, that dissidents met in Mexico City to take inventory of their efforts and decide how to proceed...

"Meanwhile, each local created a Pro-Raise Commission that worked outside the official union bureaucracy and communicated directly with the newly formed Grand Pro-Raise Commission, headed by [Demetrio] Vallejo [organizer of the 1958-59 railroad strikes who 'caught detractors within the *charro* union off guard when he emerged as one of the main leaders of the movement in the spring of 1958']."

The only reading for the upcoming discussion that specifically refers to the 1958-59 strikes, is Antonio Alonso's *El movimiento ferrocarrilero en Mexico, 1958-1959* which, as noted above, paints the strikes as "spontaneous" in order to whitewash the class line dividing the workers who organized themselves anew, outside of the "union" structure, to prepare the strikes and the surprised *charro* establishment that their struggle was pitted against. According to Sacramento, Alonso's book is "by far the best I could find on the subject" and "I could not find anything substantial in English"²². In fact, there are many other studies documenting the specific methods and events of the 1958-59 strikes, including in English. And while Sacramento suggests reading the "Then and Now" article in WV 1050 and 1051 "mostly by way of contrast to what happened here and why," he does not draw comrades' attention to the many WV articles from the 1980s and 90s that offer a Trotskyist analysis of struggles that are far more analogous to the 1958-59 strike. For example, when auto workers organized in the CTM went on strike, WV 629 explained this as "a struggle that pitted them against the corporatist CTM 'union' bosses" and urged the CTM-organized workforce to "form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle":

"The sit-down strike erupted on Monday, July 17, when workers came back from a two-week plant shutdown to learn that in their absence the CTM tops had signed a secret agreement with Ford accepting a measly 7 percent salary increase for this year. Workers had been demanding a 30 percent increase... Workers stormed out of the plant as hated CTM regional leader 'Chema' Morales arrived to try to force them to call off their action. But the workers quickly seized the facility, and Ford management fled the plant. The strikers held out for four tense days, while the CTM denounced the strike as illegal... Rumors circulated that Chema Morales might soon send in the cops to break up the strike, as occurred with fierce brutality in the Sony maquiladora strike in Nuevo Laredo last year (see our two-part article, 'Labor Organizing in the Maquiladoras,' WV Nos. 620 and 621, 7 and 21 April). The very fact that this bureaucrat could order a police attack is vivid proof that the CTM is a straitjacket for capitalist control by the PRI -government....

"The CTM is a company union on a grand scale... The GEM has underlined the need to throw off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM and form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle.... The key is to build revolutionary workers parties in the U.S. and Mexico as part of the ICL's struggle to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International."

In this context, as in the 1958-59 railroad strike, the *charros* would dub the actions of the workers "anti-union," while communists would respond: "quite the opposite!" If there were a law preventing workers from organizing genuine unions where such pseudo-unions already exist, communists would obviously oppose it, right? Not so the latter-day ICL.

In 2001, the ICL announced its defection to the opposite side of the barricades in such struggles by supporting the legal "exclusion clause," which is used to protect the hegemony

²² "Readings for the GEM national conference," Sacramento, 15 Feb 2016.

of the *charro* CTM by declaring illegal the formation of any rival workers' organizations where CTM "unions" already exist. In the footsteps of many fake-

leftists who have made their peace with the Mexican state, the ICL now uses "Marxist" verbiage about "defense of trade unions" to **cover for the state** as it wields this "exclusion clause" as a legal club **against** the urgently necessary struggle the ICL previously sought to lead – "to throw off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM and form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle."

As the LFI explains in "ICL Supports Anti-Union Exclusion Clause in Mexico" (*The Internationalist*, No. 11):

"Militant unionists support the closed shop in order to strengthen labor against the bosses; for the same reason we support throwing scabs out of the unions and running them out of the plants. But what WV dishonestly translates as 'closed shop' is not a contract provision to ensure that all workers are union members, much less an anti-scab provision, but the opposite: the legal 'exclusion clause' (*clausula de exclusion*) which for decades has been a centerpiece of the system of corporatist control of labor, used to prevent the appearance of unions independent of state control, to expel unionists who refused to join the bourgeois Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which administered Mexican capitalism for more than seven decades, and in particular to fire communists..."

"As far back as 1947, on the eve of the original *Charrazo* in the rail workers union, the Mexican section of the Fourth International opposed the 'exclusion clause' along with the PRI regime's labor courts and other forms of state control of labor. And it is directly counterposed to the program formerly defended by the Spartacist tendency itself against the whole panoply of Mexican fake leftists who made their peace with the PRI regime."

In intervening against the IG, ICL members are told to use WV 470 to prove that the current ICL position is the same as it has always been. There is only one problem with this: WV 470 is the **exception to the rule**, the vast majority of ICL articles on the subject before and after WV 470 (until 1996) clearly support the IG's position, not the ICL's current revisionism. Unfortunately, while Norden was away from his post as editor of WV, to help lead the fight against counterrevolution in the DDR, WV 470 took a temporary dive in the same direction as the ICL's later revisionism by including false analogies between the state-run STPRM and the teamsters under Hoffa as well as between defending STPRM and defending the deformed workers' states, failing to recognize that with the 1949 *Charrazo* in the petroleum workers union (described above) the STPRM had already been transformed from a semi-state workers organization to a thinly disguised weapon against the workers. However, less than three months later, WV 476 brought the party back on track. Only after 1996 did the ICL stop "underlin[ing] the need to throw off the stranglehold of the corporatist CTM and form genuine unions as organs of workers struggle."

from *Workers Vanguard* No. 604, 5 August 1994

No to Cárdenas Popular Front! For a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Now the ICL ascribes to the idea that anyone who tries to organize a genuine union behind the back of an existing *charro* "union" is a "union buster" – thus

adopting not merely the lens of labor bureaucrats in fear of wild cats, but actually that of the state that wants workers to believe that it is the legitimate guardian of workers' interests.

Whether you see state-controlled unions as organizations to defend or defeat really depends on your attitude towards the state. US imperialism's support for the imposition of *charro* "unions" is, for example, in accordance with their **positive** attitude toward the Mexican state (vis-à-vis the working class that is). But for a purported Leninist organization, why would a union **directly controlled by the state** be considered any more of a union than a union directly controlled by the bosses (i.e. a white union)? Such a position should be reserved for those who believe that unlike the bosses, the state can be neutral or even act in the interests of the workers. This is precisely the false consciousness that plagues much of the working class in Mexico, and the ICL is not only not fighting against it, but in fact partaking in it.

WV 775 writes "The mythical 'popular fronts' that the IG invents around the two Cardenases is nothing but an attempt to mask the bourgeois class nature of their respective parties." Compare this to what WV 468 correctly wrote in "Break with Cardenas Popular Front!" in 1989:

"This crisis of leadership, which cripples the entire Mexican proletariat – economically powerful but politically disarmed – can be resolved only through building an authentically Trotskyist vanguard party. The key is breaking with the bourgeois politics of popular-frontism which spell defeat for the working class."

As the LFI points out, in order to fight the popular front, you need to recognize it exists! For more on the ICL's capitulation to the popular front in Mexico, see:

- "Mexico: To Fight the Popular Front, You Have to Recognize that it Exists," *The Internationalist*, No. 3, Sept-Oct 1997
- "Mexico: Cárdenas Popular Front Chains Workers to Capitalism," *The Internationalist*, No. 3, Sept-Oct 1997
- "GEM: Caboose of the Mexican Popular Front," *The Internationalist*, No. 25, Jan-Feb 2007

While obscuring both current reality and party history in order to denounce the LFI for continuing on the road of Spartacism, the ICL's polemics against the LFI on Mexican corporatist unions make one thing crystal clear: the ICL no longer puts itself forward as a party interested in assuming leadership of the struggle to free the Mexican proletariat from the corporatist straightjacket. At first this revisionism might seem to be a product of ignorance about Mexican conditions, perhaps fueled by some arrogance on the part of the US-based leadership. But all they had to do was read their own previous publications to understand the correct line – certainly those

writing articles are capable of opening up the bound volumes before putting pen to paper. Upon further investigation, it appears that the problem is much more fundamental: The ICL leadership, in fear of the risks to their fragile organization in a reactionary period, has adopted the approach of “protecting” the vanguard by steering clear of the class struggle.

A History of Abstentionist Betrayal

Our further research into party history has uncovered that this revisionism on corporatist unions in Mexico followed closely on the heels of the ICL’s sudden desertion of a struggle waged by its fraternal comrades in Brazil to remove cops from their union, and a prolonged policy of abstentionism during the UNAM strike. While the abstentionist betrayal during the UNAM strike was eventually admitted (at least internally at one point until “recorrected”)²³, to admit what really happened in Brazil would pull a key basis of the ICL’s claim to being the revolutionary continuity right out from underneath it. (Yes, we know this question is “untouchable,” but because the truth is more important than anyone’s pride, we’re gonna go there.) When fraternal comrades in Brazil led a battle to actually put our slogan for “cops out of the unions” into practice (a principled and historic step), the ICL got cold feet and broke fraternal relations (literally the night before a meeting was to be held to disaffiliate the cops from the union). The mountains of lies and slanders the ICL built up in its campaign of defamation against these comrades (often lifted from the local police provocateur) only serve to disgrace the ICL. And the IS’s excuses at the time about “unacceptable risks to the vanguard” and the virtues of “pulling our hands out of boiling water,” make all too clear the real nature of this cowardly flight.

Anyone who takes the time to review the published evidence on both sides, will see for themselves that truth is clearly on the IG’s side. As their 2010 dossier “Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists” summarizes:

“The SL/ICL accusations are brazen lies, accusing the LQB of ‘suing the union’ in Brazil when the exact opposite was the case: the LQB *never* sued the union, and in fact LQB militants were the duly elected leadership of the Municipal Workers Union of Volta Redonda (SFPMMVR) who were hauled into court and ousted from their union leadership positions by the bourgeois ‘justice’ system. Their supposed ‘crime’ was to remove municipal police from the union. As a result of this, the LQB comrades were hit with no less than nine separate court suits promoted by pro-cop elements in the SFPMMVR and by the employer, the city government. In the face of this repression by a popular front government including Stalinists (PCdoB), social democrats (PTB) and bourgeois populists (PSB), as we sought (successfully) to build international support, the SL/ICL sought to *sabotage* their defense by retailing the lies about the Brazilian Trotskyists spread by those who actually did drag the union into the courts.

“...As we showed then, this mudslinging was part of a bureaucratic purge of leading cadres in the ICL. The barrage of lies was intended to cover up the ICL’s own criminal deser-

tion from the struggle to oust the police from the union out of fear that the cop reaction could hit it.”

For a full review of the IG’s side of the story, read the following three pamphlets:

- *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle* (July 1996)
- *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil* (February 1997)
- *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* (May 2010)

But actually, you don’t even need to read anything from the IG/LFI to uncover the betrayal for yourself. The ICL leadership’s own words tell the story. The ICL leadership referred to the observation that “the ICL ran away from the final conflict with the cops in the municipal workers’ union” as a “fiction,” an “absurd invention” and a “red herring.” The IS’ intro to the International Bulletin No. 40 (IB 40), claims “we broke off fraternal relations because we did not, in fact, have agreement on a revolutionary perspective.” In a way it is true that the break of fraternal relations was due to lack of “agreement on a revolutionary perspective” – in the sense that *the ICL got cold feet and suddenly disagreed with the revolutionary perspective both parties had previously agreed to pursue*. The IS’ own words speak for themselves:

- Parks for the IS, 7 April 1996 (IB 40, p.105):
“Our comrades strongly concur with your [LM/LQB] proposals. Your projections are fully in accordance with discussions at the London IEC meeting and with proposals raised by the ICL in written correspondence with LM/LQB to move fraternal relations forward.
“The campaign waged by Luta Metalurgica and the ICL against the police provocation in the Volta Redonda municipal workers union has drawn our organizations closer together in struggle, and helped clarify agreement on the fundamental question of the state. Surely there is no organized political tendency apart from the ICL that fights against the presence of cops in the labor movement and in Brazil, it has been you comrades who have withstood the pressures and dangers by waging a hard and principled fight on this question. With the military police being called against you, it certainly must be clear that to join with us may bring trouble your way but is indispensable to advance the proletarian struggle for state power by forging a revolutionary internationalist Leninist vanguard party. It is precisely this application of Marxism in practice on key questions such as this – and showing that our words match our deeds – that earns the ICL the hostile attentions of the bourgeois state. Elsewhere as in Volta Redonda, we have seen that the bourgeoisie’s drive to repress a genuine communist opposition, however nascent, is often abetted by the fake leftists for whom ‘Marxism’ amounts to fair words as the socialist camouflage for accommodation to their rulers.”

- IS motion, 5 June 1996 (IB 40, p.129):

“Due to ominous provocations and threats of state repression, prominent public association of the ICL with LM’s only present public work - the leadership of the municipal

²³ See: “Abstentionism, Lies and (Somewhat) True Confessions – ICL Clueless and Gutless in the UNAM Strike,” *The Internationalist*, August 2013

workers union - poses unacceptable risks to the vanguard, to our fraternal comrades and indeed to the union as a whole.”

- IS letter breaking fraternal relations, by Parks, 17 June 1996 (IB 40, p. 149):

“Indeed, the provocations have continued and have now escalated to a campaign of dirty tricks and violence which threaten not only the perspectives for a Trotskyist vanguard, but the physical safety, possible arrest, and imprisonment (or worse) of LM/LQB comrades, as well as ICL representatives, and also threaten the very existence of the union itself.”

Fighting through a class battle to rid the union of cops would “threaten the very existence of the union itself”?! The concept of “protecting” unions by advising them not to rear their heads is not new, but adopting it was certainly a new low for the ICL. Since then, we can see how this conception now guides the ICL’s trade union work: from deference to the opinion of ILWU bureaucrats on the united front to build solidarity with Longview, to siding with the bureaucrats’ disruption aimed at stopping rank and file workers from defying Taft-Hartley, to railing that to remove foremen from the ILWU would “cut off the arms of the union,” as Finnegan has oft repeated.

In order to protect its authority as it led the party in a defeatist headlong dive toward abandoning the class struggle, the “New IS” not only broke with Leninist norms to purge comrades who opposed this new orientation, but even proved willing to throw fundamental tenets of Trotskyism out the window in order to cover its tracks. The comrades who had the guts to prioritize the continuity of our revolutionary program over personal acceptance by the “New IS” ended up founding the IG/LFI as the means to continue the struggle for new October revolutions. They were then joined by two Mexican comrades who were expelled three days after submitting a document in opposition to the IS’ Brazil betrayal and concomitant purges²⁴, as well as by two North African comrades in France who were expelled for waging a principled faction fight in political solidarity with the IG.²⁵

But for the IS, the inherent challenges of trying to lay claim to Trotskyism while steering clear of all “risks to the vanguard” did not stop there. The next puzzle for the ICL leadership would be how to maintain the semblance of a Trotskyist party while keeping their hands out of the boiling water in Mexico, where state-controlled labor cop federations masquerade as “union” federations to better organize state violence and scabbing operations, preventing the organization of genuine unions. The urgent struggle to free the powerful Mexican proletariat from the stranglehold of these labor cops was not merely a matter of a political struggle against sell-out bureaucrats within a union, but posed a direct challenge to the capitalist state itself. Fighting for leadership of such a struggle, which the GEM

had announced as its task in the pages of *Espartaco* would necessarily place the party in the same kind of boiling water that posed “unacceptable risks to the vanguard” in Brazil. So again the ICL had to rewrite its history, lie about current reality, and hope that no one would know enough about Mexico to notice this betrayal.

4) Reforge a Fourth International That Trotsky Would Call His Own!

In 2010, the ICL was forced to admit that it had committed a *social imperialist betrayal, akin to the social democrats voting for war credits in 1914*, by supporting the US invasion of Haiti, no serious attempt was made to figure out how the ICL got there. Why is this? Perhaps it’s because the leadership is acutely aware that the answers lie in the string of revisionist betrayals that preceded it, which they feel forced to keep covered in mountains of lies and slanders, in fear that the truth would strip the “vanguard” they have worked so hard to “protect” of its very purpose of existence – its claim to uphold the banner the Fourth International – which is rightfully reserved for those who follow a quite different set of rules:

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

– *The Transitional Program*, Leon Trotsky, 1938

For those who wish to abide by these rules, there is a way back to the road of the Fourth International: Regroup with the LFI! Better late than never!

The LFI uniquely had, as the ICL was forced to admit, “the only revolutionary internationalist position” on Haiti, and it appears that their continued respect for the above rules is precisely the reason for that. They were schooled in the program and traditions of the ICL when it was revolutionary and have carried those traditions forward to today. The predicament that many ICL members now find themselves in – the desire to be revolutionaries while organized in a party that has for two decades strayed from the rules of the Fourth International – can be resolved by regrouping with the LFI. The question is merely how many others like us will we leave in the grip of centrism if we do not wage a fight for clarity. It is towards this goal that we declare the Better-Late-Than-Never faction. To try to combine the forces of all those who want to make a solid break with the roots of revisionism behind the Haiti betrayal. To fight together to salvage all that can be salvaged for Trotskyism and cast aside the rest.

The ICL as it is today would not have even been admitted into the Third International. In the 21 conditions for admission into the Communist International, point 8 states:

“Parties in countries whose bourgeoisie possess colonies and oppress other nations must pursue a most well-defined and clear-cut policy in respect of colonies and oppressed nations. Any party wishing to join the Third International must ruth-

²⁴ Buenaventura and Teodorico, “Letter to ICL Comrades,” 16 Oct 1996.

²⁵ See: “Permanent Revolution Faction statement, ‘Communism Lives’,” *The Internationalist*, No. 5, April-May 1998; “Once Again on the Permanent Revolution,” *The Internationalist*, No. 5, April-May 1998.

from *Workers Vanguard* No. 134, 19 November 1976

Poor Showing for Independistas in Colonial Elections

Puerto Rico Must Be Independent!

Pro-independence parties made a surprisingly poor showing in the Puerto Rican elections November 2, pulling only 6 percent of the vote, or about half what analysts had predicted. At the same time, the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP), allied to the Republicans, won an upset victory over the incumbent Popular Democrats (PPD). The “populares”—connected with mainland Democrats—have been running the colony for the U.S. during most of the last 35 years under the guise of “Commonwealth” status. The swing to the conservative statehood party was interpreted as a protest vote against the island’s dire economic situation.

The U.S. government could scarcely contain its delight with the meager returns for the *independistas*, both the bourgeois Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) and the social-democratic Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP). Seeing another opportunity to stymie the PSP’s perennial hat-in-hand pilgrimages to the United Nations begging for Puerto Rican independence, the imperialist bourgeoisie is flaunting

Mari Bras to reveal who gave him the tapes.

As the PSP maintains, the phone company is undoubtedly funneling information to the FBI and CIA for use in their long campaign of harassment which has led to a number of physical attacks on *independistas* since 1971. Last March, Mari Bras’ brother, Santiago Mari Pesquera, was savagely assassinated while the PSP leader was touring the U.S. and speaking before the UN Committee on Decolonization. During the campaign even the bourgeois gubernatorial candidate, the PNP’s Romero Barcelo, complained that the phone company president’s wife, who was running on the Popular Democrat ticket, used information about PNP finances which could only have been gained through illegal wiretapping!

Clearly the U.S. imperialists and their PDP and PNP lackeys will stop at nothing to prevent the independence of Puerto Rico, a key political and military outpost crucial to U.S. control of the Caribbean. But the low vote for the *independista* parties also reflects the undeniable fact that at present the



Latin NY

Juan Mari Bras with tapes proving illegal wiretapping of PSP candidates.

lessly expose the colonial machinations of the imperialists in its ‘own’ country, must support – in deed, not merely in word – every colonial liberation movement, demand the expulsion of its compatriot imperialists from the colonies, inculcate in the hearts of the workers of its own country an attitude of true brotherhood with the working population of the colonies and oppressed nations, and conduct systematic agitation among the armed forces against all oppression of the colonial peoples.”

After decades of demanding the *immediate unconditional independence of Puerto Rico* from *inherently oppressive* colonial rule, the ICL issued the following “correction” in WV 696:

“We do not currently advocate independence for Puerto Rico, not least because the vast majority of the population there is not in favor of it at this time. As the article in WV No. 694 noted, ‘While there is deep resentment among Puerto Ricans over their colonial oppression, most are contradicted and loath to relinquish the benefits of U.S. citizenship—such as the right to work on the mainland—and fear that independence would mean falling into the crushing immiseration typical of capitalist Caribbean states such as the Dominican Republic.’”

This acceptance of colonialism as potentially beneficial is not just a wrong theoretical conflation of the national and colonial questions but, *like Haiti, a social imperialist betrayal!*

For more on the ICL’s Puerto Rico betrayal, see:

- “ICL Renounces Fight for Puerto Rican Independence,” *The Internationalist*, No. 6, Nov-Dec 1998
- “ICL on Puerto Rico: Lies in the Service of Social Chauvinism,” *The Internationalist*, No. 8, June 2000

The left centrist path taken by the ICL was a demoralized reaction to the 1989-92 wave of counterrevolution that

destroyed the Soviet Union and the East European workers’ states. Defeats have their effect on consciousness. For example, one comrade despaired that “the world of ‘Mass Strike’ and kindred groups is gone forever.”²⁶ Unfortunately, that comrade happened to be a leading theoretician of the ICL, Joseph Seymour. And he was not the only one. The general membership came to abandon as “outdated” the understanding of the founding document of the Fourth International that “the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership,” instead blaming the party’s difficulties on a supposed sudden erasure of socialist consciousness from the minds of the working class. The ICL leadership prettified the past to absolve themselves in advance of blame for future defeats claiming that “for the first time since the Paris commune, the masses of workers in struggle do not identify their immediate felt needs with the ideals of socialism or the program of socialist revolution.”²⁷ In reality, when Trotsky wrote the Transitional Program the “masses of workers in struggle” also did not “identify their immediate felt needs with the ideals of socialism or the program of socialist revolution,” that is precisely why transitional demands were needed – to demonstrate to workers that there was such a link. The fruits of this theoretical degeneration have been borne, for example, in the less than transitional demands put forward in Greece. The IG’s polemics on this are spot on:

- “The Post-Soviet Period: Bourgeois Offensive and Sharp Class Battles,” *The Internationalist*, No. 1, Jan-Feb 1997

²⁶ “Letter to Norden,” Seymour, 24 April 1996, *International Bulletin* 38, p. 97.

²⁷ Memorandum of the ICL International Executive Committee, January 1996.

- “In Defense of the Transitional Program,” *The Internationalist*, No. 5, April-May 1998
- “Crisis in the ICL,” *The Internationalist*, No. 5, April-May 1998
- “The ICL on Greece: Goodbye Trotsky, Hello Minimum Program,” *The Internationalist*, No. 41, Sept-Oct 2015
- “ICL Consigns Revolution to the Greek Calends,” *The Internationalist*, No. 42, Jan-Feb 2016

“Retrogression of consciousness” is not a guide to action. It has become the ICL’s go-to excuse for keeping a “safe” distance from class battles – because if the workers are too backward to win anyway, why risk destroying the “vanguard” by trying to lead them? Meanwhile, the ICL has made clear that the kind of “class war” they really do want to be intimately involved in is the so-called “Class War in the British Labour Party” (as headlined in WV 1081). We are here of course referring to how the SL/B jumped on the Corbynmania bandwagon with its not-so-critical “critical support.” The LFI rightly polemicizes against this in their article:

- “Corbynmania Sweeps Britain,” *The Internationalist*, No. 41, Oct 2015

The black question is central to the fight for proletarian revolution in the belly of the imperialist beast. This was driven home by the crucial intervention on this question by Lenin and Trotsky’s Communist International. As Cannon wrote: “everything new and progressive on the Negro question came from Moscow, after the revolution of 1917, and as a result of the revolution.” When the SWP degenerated, they degenerated centrally on the Russian question and the black question. We can see that the ICL today is following suit.

Recent internal discussion on the bogus theory of “White Skin Privilege” has unearthed widespread impulses to deny the reality of black oppression and reject basic Marxist class theory. In a presentation on how to combat WSP, long-time member L. implicitly instructed the LA local to respond to WSP race-baiting with the argument that because white workers are the majority, “in the aggregate” white workers are even “more exploited and miserable” than black workers. Ines and Wright wrote documents objecting to this statement, as well as against L.’s claim that the theory of WSP actually applies in South Africa:

- “LA discussion on ‘white skin privilege,’” Ines, 2 June 2015, SL/US IDB No. 123, p. 23
- “[L.] on White Skin Misery,” Wright, 5 July 2015, SL/US IDB No. 125, p. 15

The party leadership responded by defending L.’s arguments, and ridiculously slandering Ines and Wright as supposedly simultaneously denying that whites are privileged in South Africa and imagining that whites are privileged in the US. The first charge was based on the party leadership’s objection to Ines’ statement that black and white workers in South Africa

have a common objective interest in socialist revolution. The second charge was based on their opposition to Ines’ correct point that just refuting the use of the word “privilege” on the basis of empirical evidence in a specific context fails to refute WSP theory’s fundamental denial of the common objective class interest of workers of all races, which is anti-Marxist in any context.

Far from carrying out the elementary Marxist task of outright refuting the bogus theoretical assumption of WSP that racist divisions can objectively benefit sections of the working class, the SL leadership engaged in a debate over which sections of the working class in which countries objectively benefit from racist divisions and which ones don’t. For example, L. wrote:

“A point I made was that the white working class in the U.S. in the main does not benefit objectively from the racist divisions that the ruling class fosters, *unlike*, for example, South Africa.”²⁸

The majority concurred, demonstrating that in the latter-day ICL the idea that white workers can be said to “objectively benefit” from black oppression is no longer categorically rejected on the basis of a Marxist understanding of irreconcilable objective class interests, but considered a real possibility that can emerge when the inequality gap reaches a certain threshold, for example in South Africa. According to this schema, one’s ability to disprove that racist divisions benefit white workers is dependent on proving empirically that the level of inequality is not as significant as advocates of WSP might believe. Or in other words, effectiveness in “combatting WSP” is deemed proportional to one’s ability to prove that the gap between blacks and whites under racist American capitalism is really not that big after all. Hence L.’s “in the aggregate...” strategy. The ICL leadership has gotten itself in quite a predicament. While formally maintaining that blacks are specially oppressed at the bottom of society, they can’t even admit that there is inequality in terms of advantages/disadvantages between whites and blacks because it would make their whole argument against WSP theory fall apart like a house of cards. Moreover, in any context where the inequality gap is simply too extreme to deny the existence of “relative privileges,” like South Africa, its goodbye Marxist class theory, hello black nationalism.

Within the party leadership only one longtime black cadre swam against the stream by coming out against this disturbing line of reasoning:

“If rejection of WSP was interpreted to mean that we can’t point out, for example, that white households have an increasingly higher income on average compared to black households, we would be committing a serious error and engaging in a serious deviation. The basic confusion as I see it is that some people are conflating the objective recognition of the existence of racial inequality with the notion that this recognition must mean accepting the notion that white workers fundamentally benefit from racial oppression. This

²⁸ “Reply to Ines 2 June doc LA discussion on ‘white skin privilege,’” L., 4 June 2015, SL/US IDB No. 123, p. 24.

conflation is an adaptation to the classless petty-bourgeois liberal worldview. It is a rejection of the centrality of class contradictions.”²⁹

Rather than heading this wake-up call, the majority simply dismissed his argument, and remain committed to their twisted logic that to say white workers even have “relative advantages” in comparison to blacks inevitably connotes that they “benefit from racist divisions.” Nevermind that it is precisely this lie – that sections of the working class can “benefit from racist divisions” (i.e. have common objective interests with the ruling class) – that is in fact the crux of the guilty delusion that is the theory of WSP.

In fear of defeats, the ICL leadership now seeks “the line of least resistance”: Puerto Ricans should just put up with colonialism; Haitians should welcome US invasion; longshoremen should defer to their walking boss “union brothers” to protect their safety on the job; Mexican workers should put up with state-controlled “unions”; Greek workers should wait for better times before fighting for transitional demands; British workers should accept old Labour reformism as “class war”; etc.

In contrast, rather than fearing obstacles, the IG/LFI bases their program on the logic of the class struggle, in the true tradition of the ICL when it was revolutionary – when it led principled struggles in which comrades proudly risked their lives to carry forward the banner of the Fourth International against all obstacles.

²⁹ “Again on ‘White Skin Privilege,’” 7 Oct 2015, SL/US IDB No. 125, p. 20.

If during its intervention in the DDR and Soviet Union the ICL had instead pushed its current revisionist line that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution” it would have meant in practice the abandonment of the Trotskyist fight to defend the degenerated/deformed workers’ states, just as the BT, Northites, and so many other revisionists landed on the wrong side of the barricades with the exact same line as justification. For a thoroughgoing fight against this anti-Marxist revisionism! For a return to Trotsky’s analysis of the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy!

Seeing as the ICL is the organization that has departed from Trotskyism, not the LFI, the ICL’s “polemics” against the LFI are forced to resort to either attacks on their own previous positions, outright lies and slanders or a combination of both. The oft repeated charge of “third world nationalism” is nothing more than a smokescreen of lies spewed by the ICL leadership as they mislead would-be revolutionaries towards the safety of first world nationalism.

All members of the ICL who are serious about maintaining the revolutionary continuity of Trotskyism should insist that the ICL renounce all its revisionist line changes, rescind the expulsions of all those expelled for fighting this revisionism, and begin negotiations towards regroupment with the organization that has been keeping the program of Trotskyism alive while the ICL zig-zaged towards the abyss. The political, material and financial resources of the ICL should be utilized to further Trotskyism not centrism. ***Return to the road of genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI! ■***

And the ICL’s Response...

Spartacist League

Box 29574 Los Feliz Station
Los Angeles, CA 90029
(213) 380-8239

Los Angeles, 17 April 2016

To Ines and Wright:

Yesterday we received your 16 April 2016 document “Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction; Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!” The letter is self-evidently composed in close collaboration with the Internationalist Group (IG). Over the past year your increasingly petulant defense of your personal Menshevism has morphed into a political opposition, which appropriately enough landed you in the embrace of the IG.

We consider your document a statement of resignation and hereby accept it. You and the IG deserve each other.

For the Los Angeles Executive Committee,

Finnegan
Finnegan

Letter to All Members of the ICL: In Fear of a Fight, SL Leadership Declares Minority Faction “Non-existent”

By Ines and Wright
18 April 2016

Our 16 April 2016 “Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction: Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of Their Revolutionary Continuity!” was a factional declaration, not a statement of resignation. It was the necessary opening act of a principled faction fight in the ICL to win the majority and fight for leadership on the basis of what we believe to be the program of genuine Spartacism.

In order to maintain the right to wage this fight internally, we continued to abide by party discipline and explicitly did not make contact with the IG/LFI, even after we came to the realization that the struggle to lead the ICL back to Spartacism was precisely the struggle to lead the ICL towards regroupment with the revolutionary continuity maintained by the IG/LFI since its foundation by leading cadre and youth who were expelled for fighting the ICL’s degeneration two decades ago. We are proud autodidacts who took on the task of researching and writing this factional document entirely by ourselves. For the SL leadership to assert that this is impossible – that our factional declaration was “self-evidently composed in close collaboration with the Internationalist Group (IG)” – is to denigrate the intellectual and political capacity of the ICL membership and to (unintentionally of course) compliment the IG.

That the SL leadership would consider as its best recourse to swiftly mislabel our factional declaration as a “statement of resignation” and then “accept it” is (self-evidently) a product of the SL leadership’s inability to politically defend their revisionist course in the face of a genuine Trotskyist critique.

In “The SWP – A Strangled Party” (Spartacist No. 37-38, Summer 1986) the SL explained:

“The SWP leadership decided to codify its bureaucratic treatment of the RT [Revolutionary Tendency – forerunner of the Spartacist League]: this is what organizationally consummated the strangling of the party.

Stripped of the jumbles of paragraphs taken here and there from past SWP organizational resolutions, Dobbs’ document amounted to the destruction of the rights of any minority. Opposition to the majority line was equated with ‘disloyalty’ to the party. In essence, the 1965 rules boil down to the following syllogism: (1) factions are permitted in the SWP; (2) factionalists are disloyal people; (3) disloyal people are expelled from the SWP.”

Following in the footsteps of Dobbs (minus the window dressing of quotes from any organizational resolution), in essence, the SL leadership’s non-political knee-jerk response to our factional declaration boils down to the following syllogism: **(1) factions are permitted in the ICL; (2) factional declarations can be considered resignation statements; (3) resignation statements can be accepted.**

Spartacist League

Box 29574 Los Feliz Station
Los Angeles, CA 90029
(213) 380-8239

Los Angeles, 23 April 2016

To Ines and Wright:

On 17 April, the Los Angeles Executive Committee accepted your hostile quit, expressed in your 16 April document “Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction: Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism! Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their* Revolutionary Continuity!” However, on Saturday, 23 April, the Los Angeles local met and voted unanimously to expel you, given your explicit declaration of organizational and political loyalty to the Internationalist Group.

This letter serves as notice of your expulsion from the Los Angeles local of the Spartacist League, U.S. section of the International Communist League.

For the Los Angeles Local of the Spartacist League/U.S.

Finnegan
Finnegan

ICL on Brazil Impeachment: Stumbling in the Dark With “Blown-Out Lanterns”

Since proclaiming “Brazil Impeachment: Workers Have No Side” (*Workers Vanguard*, 6 May), the Spartacist League and its International Communist League (SL/ICL) have been on a tear launching tirades against the Internationalist Group and our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, sections of the League for the Fourth International. The accusation is that by opposing impeachment the IG, LQB and LFI supposedly support the popular-front government of President Dilma Rousseff of the PT (Workers Party), who has since been suspended from office by the gang of thieves in Brazil’s Congress. How to explain, then, that the headline of the article in the LQB’s *Vanguarda Operária* said emphatically, “No to Impeachment! For Workers Mobilization against the Rightist Bourgeois Offensive – No Political Support to the Bourgeois Popular Front Government” (*The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016)? Easy, the SL/ICL just lops off the last two-thirds of our headline.

In fact, while for the last 13 years the bulk of the Brazilian left tailed after the PT-led government, the LQB and LFI have from the outset uniquely stood for proletarian opposition to the class-collaborationist popular front, in which the workers organizations are chained to capitalist “allies.” We continue to do so today when virtually the entire Brazilian left is lined up with one or the other of the contending capitalist forces. (See “Brazil’s Opportunist Left Tailing After the Bourgeois Blocs” on page 59 of this issue.) The SL/ICL simply asserts that opposing the power grab by hard-line capitalist forces *ipso facto* means taking the side of one bourgeois force in parliament against another, and hence Brazilian workers should ... do nothing. The class struggle never intrudes on the blinkered vision of these paladins of abstentionist neutrality.

After we exposed that the Spartacist League’s new-found principle that one can never ever oppose impeachment contradicted its previous positions (see “SL/ICL Impeached By Its Own Past,” *The Internationalist*, May 2016), *Workers Vanguard* (20 May) fired off a comeback of sorts, “Again on IG’s Defense of Popular Front in Brazil.” In response to our



Marcos Bizotto / Estádio

No bonapartist danger in Brazil? Military Police attack anti-impeachment demo with tear gas and rubber bullets at university in São Paulo, on March 21. Military Police prominently participated in pro-impeachment mobilizations.

noting that, by the SL’s current logic, its 1998 opposition to the impeachment of Bill Clinton was support for the Democrats, *WV* declares “we never did!” But what about its front-page headline “Impeachment Drive Threatens Right to Privacy for All” (*WV*, 25 September 1998)? Oh, that was “simply a statement of fact.” So it’s a “threat to all,” but you didn’t oppose the threat? This cynical ploy is an insult to the intelligence of *WV*’s readers. The SL clearly opposed Clinton’s impeachment in 1998. (Several months later they published another article which tried to hedge their bets on this issue, without ever saying that their earlier position was incorrect.)

So then, two weeks after its first rejoinder, we get a follow-up, “On Brazil Impeachment: ICL Intervention at LO Fête” (*WV*, 3 June), in which it “give[s] a good grade” to the French reformist group Lutte Ouvrière for its refusal to oppose impeachment in Brazil, even though Lutte Ouvrière repeatedly called to vote for the popular front in France (in 1981 and 2007) and participated in popular-front governments on the municipal level. For the first time mentioning the “two ‘regroupments’” of the League for the Fourth International, namely with the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction of the ICL (whose name *WV* refuses to utter) and with the former leaders of the ICL’s Italian section, its response was a string of insults. The former are labeled “frustrated Mensheviks from the ICL in the U.S.” and the latter “two former members in Italy who

quit 15 years ago and have since been politically dormant in an Italian village.”

As we wrote previously, the ICL hadn't written about Brazil for over a decade, and its only interest in the country, the largest in Latin America, has been to smear the LFI and to cover up its betrayal of our Brazilian comrades, deserting them at the height of a key class battle there 20 years ago. Its sudden interest in matters Brazilian is clearly intended to counteract the impact of the powerful documents and statements of the BLTN Faction and Italian comrades, and divert attention from the SL/ICL's shameful actions towards them as well.

The special supplement of *The Internationalist* distributed at the L.O. Fête noted that the comrades in Italy were driven out in what an ICL International Control Commission itself called a “bureaucratic witchhunt” by the central leadership of the ICL, based on “gross exaggerations or outright falsifications” of their political views and the work of the Italian section, in which “these comrades were treated with contempt and hostility” amid grotesque accusations of faking illness (cancer). The 2004 ICC investigation of the earlier 2001 ICC investigation concluded that “the damage done to the ICL by the bureaucratic abuse” was “irreversible.” In consequence, the ICL *never informed* the targets of this abuse that the earlier charges and verdict against them had been found to be entirely false. And that was 12 years ago – talk about guilty silence! It was only when they contacted the LFI that these courageous comrades could read the ICL's confession.

The former leaders of the ICL's once-vibrant Italian section who were subjected to this vile persecution have written a powerful document, “Back to Trotskyism,” laying out a “Program for Revolutionary Class Struggle,” and have founded the Nucleo Internazionalista d'Italia, section of the League for the Fourth International. The ICL's moribund Italian group is reduced to putting out a more-or-less yearly paper consisting mainly of translations. And while we're at it, let us register that, once again, WV refers to the “cowardly defection” from the SL/ICL of the cadres who founded the Internationalist Group and LFI. In fact, in the U.S., Mexico and France they were *expelled* for their political views, as was the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction in particularly ham-handed fashion (falsely declaring the BLTN factional declaration to be a “statement of resignation”) two months ago.¹

Brazil Workers Under Attack, SL/ICL Says Don't Fight Back

So what about WV's “arguments” on Brazil impeachment? It only has one, that by (its) definition, opposition to impeachment is *ipso facto* support for the government. In the ICL's idealist world of binary categories, if you oppose x you therefore support y. This implies that there is no alternative, that you cannot oppose the seizure of power by hardline anti-

¹ See “SL/ICL: Haunted by Revolutionary Trotskyism,” *The Internationalist* No. 34, May-June 2016



No bonapartist threat in Brazil? Demonstrators in Curitiba, headquarters of the Lava Jato (Car Wash) judicial/police investigation, call in December for military intervention.

working-class reactionaries without thereby supporting the popular-front government in office. Why not? Because these pseudo-Marxists restrict themselves to the parliamentary sphere. They equate opposition to impeachment – in which a thoroughly corrupt Congress (two-thirds of whose members are under investigation for bribery or crimes of violence) ousts a government elected by 54 million votes – with a vote of confidence in Dilma Rousseff and her PT-led government.

We explained previously (in “SL/ICL Impeached By Its Own Past”) that “the anti-democratic drive for impeachment is the spearhead of an attack whose real target is the working class and the oppressed population of Brazil. All of this is of no interest to the SL/ICL which – unsurprisingly – presents no program for class struggle in Brazil.” After earlier portraying impeachment as a reaction to the “widespread corruption scandal rocking the country,” WV now admits that there are “growing forces of right-wing reaction aimed at the working class, the poor and the oppressed.” So what is the ICL's program to fight those forces? It still presents none. Its entire “program” is to abstain on the question of impeachment. As those forces seized power, the ICL called to *do nothing*.

For our part, the LQB and LFI have been quite clear in rejecting the claims by supporters of the (now former) PT-led government that impeachment amounted to a coup d'état. But we pointed out that in Brazil today the drive toward a bonapartist “strong state,” which the working class must steadfastly oppose, does not require a military overthrow of the existing political regime. WV (20 May) now ridicules our “explanation of the mounting dangers of an authoritarian regime being installed without a coup d'état” – i.e., through a vote in Congress.” Actually, that's not the only way it could happen: there's also the possibility of action by the courts, both the Supreme Court and the Superior Electoral Court. But even if it were by a parliamentary vote, don't forget that

Hitler's Nazis came to power not through a military overthrow but by a presidential appointment and an enabling act voted by the Reichstag.

WV (6 May) writes that "the IG/LQB cynically rants about 'bonapartism'." The authoritarian danger in Brazil is hardly abstract. We detailed this in our article "For Class Struggle Against the Bonapartist Threat in Brazil" (published in *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016). One would have to be blind not to see the sinister forces behind the rightist mobilizations for impeachment – the blatant participation by Military Police and Federal Police, the calls for military intervention, the dominance of racist ultra-rightists. We also spelled out "The Role of Imperialism and the Military in the Brazilian Political Crisis" (*The Internationalist*, April 2016) including the top commander saying "the army could be called upon to intervene," and the judge leading the Operation Car Wash (Lava Jato) "investigation" working closely with the U.S. Department of Justice and FBI. None of this is alluded to by the ICL. Their articles are not at all intended to explain events in Brazil, much less to indicate a path for struggle. Their sole purpose has been to try – however clumsily and dishonestly – to fend off the impact of the devastating political exposure by its own former comrades of the ICL's zigzag flight from Trotskyism.

A Program For Class Struggle Against the Capitalist Offensive

The mounting authoritarian threat has already begun. In the wake of the May 12 removal of President Rousseff and installation of Michel Temer as interim head of state, schools in the city of São Paulo were attacked by police without judicial authorization, a procedure which the new minister of justice (formerly head of the São Paulo police) said would be used nationwide. In the state of Rio de Janeiro where a teachers strike is now in its fourth month, some 80 schools are occupied, at risk of attack by police and rightist elements. In Volta Redonda a rightist attempt with police protection to break a school occupation was fought off by students, teachers, municipal workers and steel workers including our comrades of the LQB and CLC (Class Struggle Caucus). Also, on May 23, federal deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro (brother of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, the leader of the pro-military caucus in Congress) introduced a bill to outlaw the hammer and sickle, "favorable allusions to communism" or "fomenting class confrontation."

The escalation of police repression was prepared by the popular-front government of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and his hand-picked successor Dilma Rousseff, which the LQB has repeatedly denounced (see our article "Lula's Brazil: Land of Massacres," in *The Internationalist* No. 22, September-October 2005, or "Brazil: No to the World Cup of Repression!" in *The Internationalist* No. 37, May-June 2014). WV, meanwhile, was silent on this – or any other aspect of the class struggle in Brazil – for the past decade. It only raises this now to belittle



Reuters

No bonapartist threat in Brazil? Social Christian deputy Jair Messias Bolsonaro dedicating his vote in Congress for impeachment to the commander of the secret police responsible for the torture of ousted Brazilian president Rousseff under the military regime that ruled from 1964 to 1985. Bolsonaro, a former paratrooper, has praised the dictatorship, justified torture and is pushing his brother's bill to outlaw communism.

the heightened danger, and to attack the LFI while seeking to cover up the ICL's criminal desertion from the struggle waged by the LQB comrades to oust the police from the unions (see our *Dossier: Class Struggle and Repression in Volta, Redonda*, February 1997; and *Dossier: Responses to the ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists*, May 2010).

Meanwhile, the new regime is stepping up the economic attacks on the working class. In mid-May it introduced a constitutional amendment to slash funding for education and health (presently linked to oil profits) at the same time as it raised the salaries of top judges by 41%. It is also stepping up the selloff of Petrobras (the former state monopoly oil company) properties to imperialist investors, a move which has been demanded by the liberal U.S. foreign policy establishment around Hillary Clinton. Against this anti-working-class onslaught crystallized in the movement for impeachment, the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil put forward a program of measures for militant class struggle, including:

- "escalating work stoppages, factory occupations, block-ing of highways and intersections and taking over public buildings";

- preparing to launch an "unlimited general strike to smash the judiciary/police right-wing threat, block impeachment by the nest of corrupt politicians in Congress, prevent the budget cuts and sink the privatizations and labor and pension 'reforms'";

- electing strike and occupation committees, recallable at any time, and unifying them into workers councils; forming workers defense guards to fight against repression; mobilizing to drastically raise the minimum wage, ban layoffs and reduce the workweek without any cut in pay; as well as for a "strike and occupation of all facilities of Petrobras and all

private oil companies in order to impose workers control”;

—and ending with a call for “proletarian opposition against the bourgeois right wing and the bourgeois popular front in power, no vote for any party in such a political alliance of class collaboration”; break with the PT and all the bourgeois workers parties and forge the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party.

Workers Vanguard snorts that “the IG/LQB throws around calls for factory occupations and a general strike, even claiming to politically oppose the government,” pooh-poohing this as the “IG/LQB’s bluster about workers mobilizations.” Aside from the fact that WV makes no call at all for workers action, and instead appeals for *inaction*, there is a kind of perverse anti-Marxist logic behind its dismissive response. Given the ICL’s thesis of a supposed qualitative regression in workers’ consciousness globally, such sharp class struggle challenging capitalist rule must be impossible, and therefore calls for it are phony. Q.E.D. Trouble is, nobody bothered to inform Brazilian and other workers facing capitalist attack. Such workers’ struggles are quite possible – the key missing element is revolutionary leadership. But they won’t get it from the ICL.

Trotsky vs. the ICL on Kornilov and Kerensky

In emphasizing that the drive for impeachment and mobilization of the repressive forces were aimed at ramming through a raft of anti-working-class measures that the PT-led government had been only partly successful in legislating due to worker resistance, the LQB’s *Vanguarda Operária* noted: “There are contradictions which revolutionaries can make use of between the working-class base of the union federations and bourgeois workers parties on the one hand, and the tops in the popular-front government.” Explaining that these “labor lieutenants of capital” are an obstacle to a genuine workers offensive against the bosses, the LQB put forward the above program of demands as a means to intersect those contradictions.

In explaining why and how Trotskyists would oppose impeachment while simultaneously opposing both the right-wing opposition and the popular-front Rousseff government, the LQB pointed to the example of how in Russia in August 1917, when the tsarist general Lavr Kornilov turned on the head of the Provisional Government Aleksandr Kerensky, the Bolsheviks mobilized to oppose Kornilov while still refusing to politically support Kerensky and his bourgeois regime (see “Lesson of History: Trotsky and Lenin on Kornilov and Kerensky,” published in *The Internationalist* No. 43). *Workers Vanguard* (6 May) admits that “Their article lists the ways that the situation in Brazil today is different from Russia in August



Alpha history

Bolsheviks fought tsarist general Kornilov without politically backing Kerensky. Shown here: red guard of Petrograd electrical factory (1917).

1917: Russia was at war, there was a revolutionary situation, there were soviets and a mass revolutionary party.” But, says WV, “they deceitfully omit a significant difference: Russian workers were facing an actual military coup....”

Actually, we explained that while “many pseudo-Trotskyists have deliberately misinterpreted the policy of Lenin and Trotsky at that moment, claiming that the Bolsheviks politically ‘defended’ the Kerensky government,” thus justifying their support to the PT government in Brazil, in fact the lesson is that one can make a bloc in action against a vital threat to the interests of the workers *without giving political support*. According to the ICL, this lesson is invalidated because of the absence of “an actual military coup.” Yet we were quoting from Trotsky’s 1932 pamphlet *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* in which he cited the Kornilov-Kerensky precedent in outlining how to fight the rising threat of fascism. Was there a coup under way or in the offing in Germany at the time? Not at all. Was there a bonapartist danger? Very much so.

Trotsky *repeatedly* raised this lesson at that time. He stressed that Kerensky paved the way for Kornilov’s attack with his repression of the Bolsheviks, as the German Social Democrats’ coalition governments aided the rise of the ultra-rightist and fascist forces. In like manner the PT-led popular-front government in Brazil prepared the rightist/bonapartist offensive with its capitalist economic policies and repression against workers, peasants and black and indigenous poor people. In another article, “For a Workers United Front Against Fascism” (December 1931), Trotsky quoted Lenin’s September 1917 letter to the Bolshevik Central Committee:

“Even at the present time, we are not duty-bound to support the Kerensky government. That would be unprincipled. It is asked: then we are not to fight against Kornilov? Of course we are. But that is not one and the same thing....”



HQ of the Communist Party in Berlin in 1931 with wall slogans to vote for the rightist-sponsored referendum (which the KPD dubbed the “red referendum”) to bring down the state government of Prussia. Trotsky opposed the referendum, without giving any political support to the Social Democratic-liberal coalition then in office.

“We shall fight, we are fighting against Kornilov, but we do not support Kerensky; we are uncovering his weaknesses. The distinction is rather delicate, but highly important, and must not be forgotten.”

The pro-PT left in Brazil “forgets” this distinction, by politically supporting the popular front against the impeachment plotters. The ICL “forgets” it in the opposite direction, by refusing to call for, much less put forward a program for, class struggle to defeat the capitalist offensive behind the impeachment drive. Its only response is to repeat the mantra, “workers have no side.”

“The Greatest Stupidity”

As Trotsky emphasized in the last-cited article, “For Marxists, the question is not decided by a quotation, but by means of the correct method. If one is guided by correct methods, it is not hard also to find suitable quotations.” For those befuddled by the WV’s obfuscations on Brazil, Trotsky’s German writings of 1931-32 are worth studying, for they directly refute the position of the ex-Trotskyist ICL today. In particular, Trotsky addressed the question of the 1931 so-called “Red Referendum” in Germany. In actuality, this was a referendum called by rightist nationalist forces (the “national liberal” German People’s Party and the far-right German National People’s Party) and then backed by Hitler’s National Socialists to unseat the Social Democratic-led coalition government of Prussia by dissolving the state legislature in order to hold new elections. On orders from Stalin, the German Communist Party supported the referendum.

The ICL insists that in Brazil today, “To oppose Rousseff’s impeachment would mean a vote of confidence in – that is, political support to – the PT-led popular front.” The same argument was used by the German Communist Party (KPD),

arguing that “failure to participate in the referendum” called by the rightists and fascists in 1931 “would signify that the Communists support the present reactionary Landtag [state legislature].” As Trotsky remarked, “The whole matter is here reduced to a simple vote of no confidence.” This is exactly how the ICL today portrays the question of impeachment in Brazil. But the founder of the Fourth International approached the matter from a very different standpoint, “from the point of view of the actual struggle of the classes for power.” The referendum “remained fully within the framework of a subsidiary parliamentary maneuver,” he wrote. Nevertheless, “With the aid of the Prussian plebiscite, the National Socialists [Nazis] want to provoke the collapse of the extremely unstable state balance, so as to force the vacillating strata of the bourgeoisie to support them in the cause of a bloody judgment over the workers. For us to assist the fascists would be the greatest stupidity. This is why we are against the fascist plebiscite.”

–L.D. Trotsky, “Against National Communism! (Lessons of the ‘Red Referendum’),” August 2913

Note that Trotsky wasn’t neutral but *opposed* the parliamentary maneuver by the rightist forces in which victory for the referendum would bring down a bourgeois government. Did that mean that he therefore politically *supported* the Social-Democratic/Center Party coalition government? Not at all. But that is exactly what the Stalinists accused him of, just as the ICL blares against us over the Brazil impeachment today. According to the KPD’s *Rote Fahne* (22 December 1931): “In this manner, Trotsky paints the support of Brüning and of the Prussian government as ‘the lesser evil.’” Trotsky had already refuted this smear:

“We Marxists regard [conservative Center Party German chancellor Heinrich] Brüning and Hitler, [Social Democratic Prussian state premier Otto] Braun included, as component parts of one and the same system. The question as to which one of them is the ‘lesser evil’ has no sense, for the system we are fighting against needs all of these elements. But these elements are momentarily involved in conflicts with one another and the party of the proletariat must take advantage of these conflicts in the interest of the revolution.”

–L.D. Trotsky, “For a Workers United Front Against Fascism” (December 1931)

This does not imply that the right-wing parties pushing the authoritarian backlash in Brazil today are “the same as Hitler,” or that Brazil is “on the verge of fascism,” as the pro-PT Brazilian left claims and the ICL falsely imputes to us. What it underscores is that Trotsky’s argument and methodology are completely incompatible with the ICL’s claim that opposing the rightist impeachment drive equals supporting the Rousseff government.

In Brazil, both the right-wing opposition (now in office) and the popular-front government (then in office) are capital-

Cuartoscuro



Opposing impeachment cannot be reduced to a vote in Congress. A revolutionary leadership could seek to mobilize workers action to shut down the bourgeois parliament. Above: blockade of the Mexican Congress by CNTE teachers in 2013 to prevent vote of union-busting “education reform.”

ist, says the ICL, so what’s the big deal? Why the IG’s “own Brazilian comrades” portray this “as a ‘dispute between two bourgeois forces’ that ‘share the same fundamental program of resolving the capitalist economic crisis by attacking the working people’.” Indeed, but what the LQB went on to say, in the last part of the sentence that *WV* conveniently omitted, is that those forces “may differ (at times) only over the rhythm and degree of the attacks.” And those differences are significant from the standpoint of the working class which, unlike the professional abstentionists of the ICL, will have to face the consequences. Indeed, the consequences are already being felt. Not that today’s ICL gives a damn.

How Authentic Trotskyists Fight in Bourgeois Parliaments

So *WV* argues that “If they [the LQB] had a representative in the Brazilian Congress, that would mean voting ‘no,’ i.e.. a vote to keep the head of the popular front in office.” It then cites the case of a 1964 vote by Sri Lankan Trotskyist leader Edmund Samarakkody that brought down the popular-front government of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, a vote which Samarakkody later renounced as a “serious mistake.” The pundits of the latter-day ICL cry foul when we explain that opposing impeachment in Brazil is not at all contradictory to upholding the vote that brought down the Lankan government, which *WV* notes was “a position that IG leader Jan Norden powerfully defended a few decades ago when he was a leading member of our tendency.”² Samarakkody cast a parliamentary vote of no confidence against the government, which was a correct

² See Jan Norden and Jim Robertson, “No ‘Critical Support’ to Popular Frontism,” in the Internationalist Group Class Readings on *The Popular Front: Roadblock to Revolution* (2007).

and principled step. The Brazil impeachment vote was on a move by a parliamentary den of thieves to replace the elected president with a virulently hard-line anti-working-class regime headed by her former vice president as the spearhead of a capitalist/bonapartist offensive.

In the first place, opposing impeachment cannot be reduced to a vote in Congress by a hypothetical LQB legislator, except by parliamentary cretinists like the ICL. The battle is being waged in the streets. There were a number of national anti-impeachment demonstrations of up to half a million protesters prior to the May 12 vote to oust Rousseff. Several of these were attacked by the police, who ostentatiously support the ultra-rightist-led pro-impeachment mobilizations. According to almost every account, a large part of the

demonstrators opposing impeachment, even a majority, also opposed the discredited Lula/Dilma government on almost every issue. But they were quite aware of the clear and present danger represented by that Congressional plotters (and their judiciary/police allies). Even so, we vigilantly distinguish our Trotskyist political opposition to both competing bourgeois forces from the stance of supporters of the popular front.

Moreover, there are a number of tactics one could use inside and outside parliament. One could filibuster for hours attacking the government while opposing the impeachment ploy of the right wing. One could seize the tribune and attempt to stop the proceedings, which Mexican legislators do with some frequency. One could denounce the Congressional den of thieves and be dragged from the chamber. One could surround parliament with thousands of workers to prevent legislators from voting, as the Mexican Social Security workers did in 2004,³ and teachers did in 2013, first at the Chamber of Deputies and then the Senate, forcing legislators to carry out their vote approving the corporate educational “reform” in a Banamex (Citibank) convention center.⁴ Or one could invade parliament with hundreds of workers and bust up the proceedings, as a left-wing landless workers group in Brazil did in 2006. Of course, the ICL, which holds that you can’t boycott elections except on the eve of an armed insurrection,⁵ would never dream of using such tactics.

But what about that hypothetical Trotskyist legislator? Apparently the ICL is claiming it is some kind of principle

³ See “The Mexican Working Class Is Fighting Back,” *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005.

⁴ See “Mexican Powder Keg,” *The Internationalist*, August 2013

⁵ See “Mexico: Grupo Esparquista Boycotts the Class Struggle,” on page 71 of this issue.

to a priori exclude voting against impeachment as an anti-democratic parliamentary maneuver putting a virulently anti-working-class regime in command. This brings us, once again, back to the “Red Referendum” against the Prussian state parliament. It turns out there was a deputy of the KPD (Left Opposition), Oskar Seipold, who in a speech in the Landtag declared: “I will therefore *vote against this proposed referendum of the fascist organizations*” (our emphasis) adding that he would also “vote for the motion of the Communist fraction for the dissolution of the Landtag, because the proletariat, as I have said has no interest in the preservation of this parliament, or in the preservation of parliamentarism in general; *our aim is the extra-parliamentary revolution in permanence, a soviet republic of Germany in a soviet Europe, as the bridge to the world socialist federation.*”

According to historian Louis Sinclair (*Trotsky: A Bibliography*), the speech⁶ was written by Trotsky himself. But in its eagerness to find ever new ways to revise and reject the positions of Trotsky (and Lenin) on issues ranging from the demand for a constituent assembly to running candidates for executive offices to the failed German revolution of 1923, maybe we will hear from the ICL that Seipold was wrong to vote against the 1931 Prussian referendum and he should have instead abstained.

From Pulling Its Hands Out of the “Boiling Water” in Brazil to Social-Imperialist Support for U.S. Invasion of in Haiti

Behind the ICL’s passive neutrality in the face of the capitalist attack on Brazilian workers that is driving impeachment and the bonapartist judiciary/police offensive is its blindness to the actual content of these developments in the class struggle. With its idealist outlook, it only sees categories abstracted from their social reality – and not just in Brazil. The ICL claims that corporatist “unions” in Mexico are real unions, refusing to understand that these are labor cops of the capitalist state to prevent the rise of genuine unions, and in the case of the teachers “union” spearheading government attacks on the workers (while killing over 150 of its members). The ICL called for a “no” vote in the July 2015 Greek referendum based solely on the words on paper, covering up (along with the rest of the Greek left) the swindle by the SYRIZA government and aiding Greek premier Tsipras in pushing through the vicious austerity he had already agreed to.

Behind this methodology is the ICL’s deliberate decision to exit the class struggle. It justified this with its claims (crys-



Oskar Seipold, a leader of the KPD Left Opposition, as a deputy in Prussian legislature voted in 1931 against the rightist referendum backed by the Stalinists.

tallized around the 1996-98 expulsions of the cadres who went on to found the LFI) that in the wake of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union and East Europe, workers’ struggles no longer had any connection with the final socialist goal. It then elaborated the thesis that the consciousness of the world proletariat had suffered a qualitative regression. These sweeping assertions not only masked marked regional differences, they were the “theoretical” underpinning of the ICL’s claim that Trotsky’s thesis that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership – the central justification for the founding of the Fourth International – was outdated.

This is also the ICL’s doctrinal basis for its criminal desertion at the crucial moment from the sharp struggle by the Brazilian comrades to oust the police from the municipal workers union in the steel city of Volta Redonda, which an ICL envoy explained by saying it was necessary to “pull our hands out of the boiling water.” Today WV reasserts this shameful declaration, saying: “Keeping their ‘hands in the boiling water’ in Brazil has so poached the IG/LQB’s brains that they can’t tell the difference between supporting and opposing the class rule of the bourgeoisie.” How totally cute – and totally cynical, repeating the ICL’s line as it stabbed in the back a struggle it originally hailed and encouraged. The ICL’s idea of opposing capitalist rule is to sit on its hands and tell Brazilian workers they “have no side” in the face of the offensive by hard-line capitalist reaction against the working class.

Its sneering dismissal of intervention in the class struggle is testimony to the fact that *it is the ICL’s consciousness that has suffered a qualitative regression*, from Brazil to Mexico to Greece and beyond. Notably there was the ICL’s abandonment of the call to defeat U.S. imperialism in response to the 11 September 2001 attacks on the NYC World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Don’t forget its year-long silence on the U.S.-engineered 2009 coup ousting the president of Honduras. And then there is the ICL’s confessed social-imperialist support to the 2010 U.S. invasion of Haiti. In all these cases, its revisionism is in the service of its “own” imperialist bourgeois rulers. Unsurprisingly, in Brazil it never mentions how the U.S. is working hand-in-glove with the “anti-corruption” investigation pushing for greater “opening” of Brazilian oil to the imperialist monopolies.

As Trotsky wrote of the Stalinists on the “Red Referendum,” the ICL “conducts politics with blown-out lanterns.” In opposing impeachment while giving no political support to the bourgeois popular front, in fighting for a program of class struggle against all the bourgeois factions in Brazil, the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil and the League for the Fourth International uphold the program of revolutionary Trotskyism. ■

⁶ The Seipold speech can be read in German at the site Sozialistische Klassiker 2.0, and an English translation was published by the American Trotskyists in *The Militant* (29 August 1931), also available on-line.

Brazil's Opportunist Left Tailing After the Bourgeois Blocs



Ex-president Lula (center, above CUT banner), at March 18 rally against impeachment. Claiming to fight against the “coup” and an imminent seizure of power by “fascists,” leftists in the PT “camp” give political support to the bourgeois popular front. Genuine Trotskyists draw a class line by opposing impeachment while calling for sharp class struggle against the anti-worker measures of the government and the right-wing opposition.

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For the last year, Brazil has been shaken by an acute political crisis pitting the bourgeois popular-front government of President Dilma Rousseff of the Workers Party (PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores) against the traditional right-wing opposition which wants to throw her out of the Palácio do Planalto (the presidential palace) by parliamentary means (impeachment) or in some other way. However, the government and opposition share the same fundamental program, of resolving the capitalist economic crisis by attacking the working people, while they may differ (at times) only over the rhythm and degree of the attacks. In this context of a dispute between two bourgeois forces, the Brazilian left is divided into two major camps: the pro-PT camp, which chants “*não vai ter golpe*” (there will be no coup d’état), and the anti-PT camp which chants “throw them all out.” Despite the claims of political independence by each camp, in reality they are both appendages of the conflicting capitalist forces within the framework of bourgeois democracy. Now with the addition of escalating arbitrary judicial and police actions on the part of the prosecutors of *Operação Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash)¹,

what’s needed is not an illusory “third camp” on the terrain of bourgeois democracy but a *working-class opposition* with a *program of revolutionary struggle against the entire ruling class and against the danger of an authoritarian outcome.*

The Camp of the PT Left: Seeking to Camouflage the Popular Front

For the PT and pro-PT left, impeachment *is* the coup. This is the constant theme of articles published by the Partido da Causa Operária (PCO – Workers Cause Party), repeating the same refrain of the PT and of the social-democrats of the Partido Comunista do Brasil (PCdoB). The PCO insists that “imperialism wants the overthrow of the PT government,” which is not only an exaggeration, it is political praise for the popular front. Even if opposition forces and strong elements of the state apparatus are pointing to a fateful bonapartist solution, at least for now this doesn’t necessarily imply a coup d’état or fascism (which are two different things).

Consider the analogous situation of the French Third Republic, which during the great capitalist Depression of the 1930s was sinking in a sea of corruption. The fascist and monarchist riot of 6 February 1934 resulted in the installation of a right-wing government under the Radical Gastón Doumergue, but also five days later set off an enormous mobilization of working-class united-

¹ See “Class Struggle Against the Bonapartist Threat in Brazil,” in *The Internationalist* No. 43, May-June 2016.

front opposition. Leon Trotsky in his pamphlet *Whither France?* (November 1934) explained that Doumergue's bonapartist government was raising itself above parliament, basing itself not on a parliamentary majority but instead on the police and army:

"The essence of Bonapartism consists in this: basing itself on the struggle of two camps, it 'saves' the 'nation' with the help of a bureaucratic-military dictatorship.... The Doumergue government represents the first step of the passage from parliamentarianism to bonapartism.... French Fascism does not yet represent a mass force. On the other hand, Bonapartism finds support, neither sure nor very stable but nevertheless a mass support, in the Radicals. Between these two facts there is an inner link. By the social character of its base, Radicalism is the party of the petty bourgeoisie. Fascism can only become a mass force by conquering the petty bourgeoisie. In other words, *fascism can develop in France above all at the expense of the Radicals*. This process is already under way, although still in its early stages."

Fascism seeks to smash the working class, annihilating its organizations at the same time as it eliminates parliamentary institutions and democratic freedoms. Brazil presently finds itself in an initial, transitional phase marked by the evolution of *this* state in a bonapartist direction, not a military barracks revolt or a fascist uprising to overthrow it.

But let us suppose that the situation is as the PCO describes it, that we are on the verge of fascism or an imminent coup d'état (which, we repeat, are not the same thing), what then does it propose? It calls for "permanent mobilization," "intense mobilization in the universities and, at some point, to take the university into the street," "mobilize the people now against the coup," "take the people into the street, make demonstrations, big and small, every day," "multiply actions throughout the country," etc. ("The Coup at High Speed: What Is to Be Done?", *Diário Causa Operária*, 22 March). Really? The fascists or coup plotters are (supposedly) on the brink of taking power and we're going to stop them by going into the streets marching and chanting? There's no class criterion, it's always "the people" or, at the most, "the productive people." And if that isn't enough? The PCO recalls that in the past workers have carried out factory occupations and general strikes, but it doesn't make any concrete appeal, only a vague suggestion that in that case, "we'll raise the bets."

Any class-conscious worker would say, "The gentlemen are playing games, they don't take their own words seriously, you can't have confidence in them." On top of that, the pseudo-Trotskyists of the PCO, far from combating the popular front, have joined it. In 1989, when the PT formalized its popular-frontist course, the internal tendency Causa Operária criticized the Frente Brasil Popular acerbically (although confusedly). Now we read that the March 18 action was called by the CUT (PT-allied union federation), the MST (Landless Rural Workers Movement) and the "Frente Brasil Popular (PCO, PCdoB and PT along with other groups)." If the PCO dreams of obtaining some position of sub-sub-secretary in order to improve its meager electoral score, it has already paid the admission price. It denounces those who "put forward 'leftist' criticisms of the Dilma government" and preaches that "at this moment, all struggles are subordinated" to the struggle against the "coup." A CUT bureaucrat couldn't have

put it better. Will the PCO be rewarded for its words?

In subsequent days the PCO extended its defense of the government to embracing its worst bourgeois politicians. Thus it hailed the continued presence of the representative of agribusiness at the head of the agriculture ministry: "Kátia Abreu breaks with the PMDB and stays in the government" (*Diário Causa Operária*, 30 March). That's the same *fazendeira* (large landowner) who is known by the landless workers as "chain saw."

There are several minor groups, which like the PCO abuse the name Trotskyists, that are headed in the same direction. One of the most cynical, the Frente Comunista dos Trabalhadores (Communist Workers Front), has gone so far as to call "For Lula and Dilma to put the government apparatus in the service of fighting against the Coup!" (Declaration of the FCT, March 17). Not even in your dreams! It couldn't be more clear that the opportunists depend on the capitalist state. Unfortunately for them, the government apparatus is already headed in the opposite direction, and the reach of the president is not at all clear. Another variant of this deluded PT left, the Espaço Marxista (Marxist Space) group, part of the Frente de Resistência, is more modest: it writes that "the Dilma government also needs to react through the available institutional means," and calls for "judicial and administrative measures," such as making a complaint to the National Council of Justice against the "Torquemadas of the PSDB² [Judge] Sergio Moro and [Supreme Court justice] Gilmar Mendes." Later they admit: "Even though such measures won't result in the least punishment ("Considerations About the Coup Plotting Now Underway," 20 March). In contrast, authentic Trotskyists call to combat the bonapartist danger by mobilizing the working class to the fight *against* the bosses' state.

Less delirious but in the same camp is the centrist Liga Bolchevique Internacionalista (LBI). The LBI mislabels the rightist demonstrations and demonstrators as "fascist," and the axis of its policy is the call for a "united front of anti-fascist action." On March 18, in response to a call by the PT, the CUT and others in the PT retinue, some half million supporters took to the streets "in defense of democracy, the rights of the working class and against the coup" (from the CUT call). In a "Preliminary Balance Sheet," the LBI admits that "Lula used the rallies to attempt to again seek a 'broad agreement' with the national bourgeoisie." It also said that "the March 18 demonstrations clearly served as an element in the bargaining by the Popular Front, a demonstration of relative political strength in the framework of its policy of class collaboration." But if on that occasion the LBI urged participation in the rally "without supporting the program it was called on," by the time of the next rally of the PT camp, it declared that "we support the call of the 'People Without Fear Front' for March 24."

Despite its rhetoric of "united front of action," what the LBI is advocating is the formation of a "fighting" popular front, as some socialist groups did in France in the 1930s as Blum's popular front was losing steam. If the LBI wanted a real united front, in the meaning that the Communist International gave to that slogan, what would be the concrete common *action* that it is proposing?

² Party of Brazilian Social Democracy, the largest right-wing bourgeois opposition party.

In reality what it is proposing is a political propaganda bloc with sectors of the left around the PT. Thus it calls on the “People Without Fear Front to join this United Front of Anti-Fascist Action as part of the political-programmatic combat to forge an alternative revolutionary leadership.” This sleight-of-hand of mixing up a political bloc with a united front goes back to Lula’s presidential campaign in 2002. At that time, when the entire left was trying to sidle up to the PT, the LBI, after formally calling to cast a blank ballot, claimed to have discovered “the biggest fraud in history” and called to “unleash a broad mobilization” to insist that the Higher Electoral Court proclaim the victory of the popular front on the first round of voting. We in the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB), in contrast, underlined our “Proletarian Opposition to the Popular Front” and our refusal to vote for Lula and his vice-presidential candidate, the multimillionaire capitalist José Alencar (see *The Internationalist* No. 14, September-October 2002).

The Anti-PT Camp: “Car Wash” Left Tails After the Rightist Opposition

On the other side of the barricade we find the Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PSTU, United Socialist Workers Party) and the trade-union and “popular” federation it leads, Conlutas, with its slogan “Throw Them All Out!” On its banners it always puts the names and photos of Dilma and Lula in first place, so that in practice it coincides with the right-wing protests demanding “Dilma Get Out!” At times the PSTU claims to oppose impeachment, but it is only a façade: recently it refused to accept the slogan “No to impeachment” as a demand for the rallies of the Unity and Action Front which it dominates. And the call by the PSTU for “General Elections Now!” in the current situation amounts to a call to install a right-wing government. This is also advocated by Luciana Genro (ex-presidential candidate of the Party of Socialism and Freedom, PSOL) and even the *Folha de S. Paulo* (a leading “liberal” bourgeois newspaper). Even if it is disguised with the face of Marina Silva, the puppet of the evangelical far right, the agribusiness interests, the bankers and arms industry – in other words, the “BBBB (bible, beef, banks and bullets) parliamentary fraction” – there is nothing democratic about it, given the control of the elections by capital which determines the results of the voting.

However, it’s not very likely that the other parliamentary parties will call new elections, since they are also in the crosshairs of Operation Car Wash. Almost everyone in Congress is corrupt to the core: the way Brazilian bourgeois democracy works is through bribes and the “caixa 2” (second set of accounts). If the president isn’t ousted by parliament via the impeachment



Sindmetal São José dos Campos

Banner of the Conlutas trade-union federation, led by the PSTU, calling for “Throw them all out, general elections now.” Amid pro-impeachment and “Dilma out” mobilizations, this amounts to a call for replacement of the bourgeois popular-front government with the traditional bourgeois right.

process, resulting in a government of Michel Temer (who gets 1% of voters’ preferences in opinion polls), it will be up to the Superior Electoral Court to call new elections. And if that court, not elected by anyone, declines to annul the 2014 elections when Dilma won with 54 million votes, then how does the PSTU intend to expel her from the presidential palace, since we are quite far from a leftist workers uprising? In fact, the slogan “throw them all out” (referring to the politicians, of course) could be used by the ultra-reactionaries who want a bonapartist government under Judge Sérgio Moro (based on the Federal Police).

Let’s take a look at the history of the watchword “*fora todos*” translated from the Spanish, “*¡Que se vayan todos!*” which arose during the Argentine protests in the popular revolt of December 2001 against President Fernando de la Rúa of the conservative Radical Civic Union (UCR) party. Prior to a brief intermission of two years of a UCR government, there had been a decade of the regime of the Justicialista Party (Peronists). And after 18 days of pot-banging (*cacerolazos*), strikes and massive protests that have come to be known as the “*Argentinazo*,” on 1 January 2002 a new Justicialista president (Eduardo Duhalde) was sworn in, who was then succeeded by two more Justicialista presidents (Néstor Kirchner, followed by Cristina Fernández de Kirchner) who governed the country up until December 2015. This is supposed to be a victory or a guideline to be followed?! The slogan “throw them all out!” served to *divert* a potentially revolutionary situation, by limiting it to the bourgeois-democratic framework.

At bottom, there is little to discuss with the PSTU, which is merely a puppet of the right-wing opposition to garner support from the left.

Still, there are two points worth mentioning. For months the PSTU formed a cheering squad applauding the Car Wash “investigation” and the so-called “*petrolão*” (oilgate), just like ten years ago the PSOL acted toward the “*mensalão*” (the fat monthly paycheck, of bribes to congressmen). Recently, in

the face of the adulation of Judge Moro, the PSTU published on its Internet site an article (17 March) with the title, “No confidence in the judicial system” and a subtitle, “Double standards.” It criticizes the “partiality” of the justice system (which it never characterizes as bourgeois, among other things because under the leadership of the PSTU, Conlutas unionizes employees of the capitalist courts, as well as police, the armed thugs of capital, whom it calls “workers in uniform”). It asks, “Why doesn’t Moro go all the way and reveal all the dirty linen of the PSDB?” This accepts the fiction that the “Curitiba Republic”³ is investigating corruption, when in fact it is serving as a vehicle for the judicial/police apparatus to impose itself on the other powers of the bourgeois republic, in the service of the traditional right wing which wants to grab a bigger slice of the juicy pie of Petrobras for the Brazilian bourgeoisie and imperialist sectors (and its front men, like PSDBer José Serra), by further “opening” the national petroleum market.

The second point to be stressed is that the position taken by PSTU/Conlutas is not any kind of lapse, on the contrary it is the finished expression of its supposedly third-campist politics that in reality serve the most reactionary bourgeois sectors and imperialism. In Venezuela its international tendency, the International Workers League (LIT), went so far as to state in an article (9 January) on its site that, “The electoral victory of the right wing,” led and financed by imperialism in the elections of last December, “expresses in a distorted way the outrage” (of the masses) against the bourgeois nationalist government of Chávez-Maduro. In Libya in 2011, the LIT openly supported the NATO attack to overthrow the erratic nationalist Qaddafi. In Egypt in 2013, it gave its support to the coup by General al-Sisi, who was supported by the United States. In Ukraine in 2014 it gave support “from the left” to the nationalist and fascist coup in Kiev, which was supported by the imperialists. In Syria, it supports the bloody Islamist mercenaries of the Free Syrian Army, the mercenaries of the Pentagon and the CIA. As we noted in our article, “Brazil: Leftists in the Camp of Pro-Imperialist Syrian Islamists” (*The Internationalist* No. 36, January-February 2014), “The LIT ‘critically’ tails after ‘democratic’ imperialism.”

The “theoretical” foundation of the bourgeois “democratist” politics of the PSTU and the LIT are to be found in the counter-revolutionary heritage of its founder, the pseudo-Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno and his calls for a “democratic revolution” (or “February revolutions”). This policy is diametrically counterposed to Trotsky’s perspective of *permanent revolution*, which holds that in countries oppressed by imperialism, revolutionary democratic tasks can only be achieved by workers revolution extending to the imperialist centers. Let’s also not forget that with this “democratist” line, the Morenoites of the LIT hailed Boris Yeltsin’s counter-coup in August 1991, which was the historical turning point for the counterrevolution that restored capitalism in the Soviet Union. The LIT sang the praises of the “August Revolution” and the “Great Revolutionary Victory in the USSR” (*Correo Internacional* No. 56, November 1991). The authentic Trotskyists, at the time in the

International Communist League, struggled inside the USSR itself, distributing 50,000 copies of a leaflet in Russian calling for “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution.”

Another Morenoite tendency in Brazil, the CST (Corrente Socialista dos Trabalhadores, Socialist Workers Tendency) inside the PSOL, also calls to “Throw them all out!” The CST doesn’t even hide behind the fig leaf of a call for new elections. They praise the “thousands in the streets [who] are demonstrating their opposition to the government of Dilma/Lula and demand that they resign.” They pretend that the big middle-class protests, sponsored by business and industrial federations and egged on by the Globo media moguls, represent “the break of the masses with the Dilma government” (CST declarations of 18 and 26 March). A third Morenoite current, the MES (Movimento de Esquerda Socialista, Socialist Left Movement) of Luciana Genro, the PSOL candidate in the 2014 presidential elections, agrees with the CST and PSTU in the phony ploy of building a “third camp” (neither PT nor the right), but above all calls for new general elections and vociferously defends the Car Wash “investigation.” While the CST doesn’t bother to hide its attraction to the right-wing parades, the MES is quite open



The Morenoites of the LIT hailed Yeltsin’s August 1991 counter-coup, supported by U.S. imperialism, which led to the destruction of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism in the land of the October Revolution led by Lenin and Trotsky. Shown here is the LIT magazine from November 1991.

³ The “Operation Car Wash” investigation is based in the provincial capital Curitiba.

about sidling up to the candidacy of Marina Silva and her Rede (Network) slate (founded by ex-supporters of the MES. In her blog (March 30) Luciana Genro writes: “Marina is ahead in the opinion polls. So let’s get going in the struggle.”

As in the case of the PSTU, all the swamp denizens of the imaginary “third camp” of “throw them all out” are just toys in the hands of right-wing reaction and the authoritarian forces. Luciana Genro insists that the “government is using fear” when it claims “that there is a threat to democracy, to the democratic state of law. When, actually, there is none of that.... I disagree with the idea that these arbitrary measures against Lula are signs of a ‘coup by the judiciary’.” That interview stirred unease in the PSOL leadership, which put out a note warning against an “institutional coup” and a second statement disavowing Genro and stating that the demonstrations are not the product of a strategy of fear but instead the “response to abuses committed by the judiciary, by business entities, by the monopoly media and by the National Congress.” However, the PSOL leadership (in the hands of the Socialist Unity coalition) is in fact acting as a “lifeline” for the popular front, joining the People Without Fear front from its inception last October.

Like the PSTU, the PSOL is a thoroughly reformist social-

democratic party which supports and depends on the capitalist state. It is an electoralist party *par excellence*, a kind of “substitute PT.” In contrast to a Bolshevik communist party, it is an absurd alphabet soup of internal tendencies with counterposed policies on just about everything, a guarantee that in the face of any crisis (such as the present one) it will be reduced to paralysis, or split apart. As we wrote at the time of the founding of the PSOL, “We Don’t Need a Social Democratic ‘New Party’ of Disillusioned *Lulistas*,” *The Internationalist* No. 20, January-February 2005. As for Luciana Genro’s posture as the heroic standard-bearer of the struggle against corruption, we recall the donations to her 2014 campaign by the Grupo Zaffari (for the details, see “Brazil: The Election Racket of the Bourgeoisie,” *The Internationalist* No. 38, October-November 2014).

The MRT on the Fence, Looking for a Mass Movement to Tail After

In contrast to the reformist social democrats of the PSTU and the PSOL currents, who with their “third-campist” policies serve as satellites of the right-wing opposition, the MRT (Movimento Revolucionário de Trabalhadores, Revolutionary Workers Movement), a centrist ex-Morenoite group, makes an effort to give the appearance of lining up against both sides in the current political crisis. In an article in its digital newspaper, *Esquerda Diário* (20 March), it claims to “Combat impeachment while not supporting the cutback government of Dilma.” While the PSTU calls for new general elections (to install a right-wing government), the MRT comes out in favor of a “free and sovereign constituent assembly.” This supposed neutrality completely ignores the bonapartist offensive, as if it was simply a dispute between two bourgeois tickets. In reality, the democratist policy of these ex-Morenoites is only a kind of shamefaced version of “Morenoism lite.” But if the PSTU is a fellow traveler of the judicial/police right wing, the MRT is a hitchhiker who climbed aboard the Car Wash Express, but after taking a look at the other passengers decided to hop off.

On the eve of the March 18 mobilization “against the coup, for democracy” called by the CUT, the CTB (labor federation led by the PCdoB) and pro-government coalitions, in an article explaining “Why the MRT won’t be part of the March 18 rallies,” it assured readers that “those pro-government organizations are going to focus solely on defense of President Dilma and Lula.” In the entire article there wasn’t a single indication of the existence of a bonapartist danger. Nor did it advocate being present while openly fighting against the anti-working-class policies of the government. The article caused considerable concern and furious rejection among its readers: among the dozens of comments, only a couple defended its line, while the rest said that they were opposed to “almost everything” the PT governments did, but they were still going to the demonstration. A worker at the University of São Paulo wrote: “And what about the threat to democracy? It doesn’t exist? ... And what about the explicit growth of the right, of conservatism? That also doesn’t exist?” However, in an article published after the 18th, the MRT did an about-face and wrote that, “Even though the leaders of the Frente Brasil

[illegible]

The authentic Trotskyists, at the time in the International Communist League, fought inside the USSR against the destruction of the bureaucratically degenerated workers state that led to the restoration of capitalism, distributing 50,000 copies of a leaflet in Russian calling for “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution.”

Extra



Candidates Marina Silva (left) and Luciana Genro (right) along with Eduardo Jorge of the Green Party on TV Globo, October 2014. Today they are joining with the *Folha de S. Paulo* in the right-wing pro-impeachment camp.

Popular did everything they could to turn the character of the rally into defense of Lula and Dilma”:

“For the most part the chants, did not refer to defense of the government but rather a sentiment of ‘no to a coup.’ The most notable sector present was university youth, more prevalent than in the right-wing rallies of March 13... At various workplaces and places of study the distrust of the movements by the judicial power, the Federal Police and the right were not connected to defense of the PT.”

The MRT tacitly admits that it misjudged the sentiment of the masses, above all in the youth. As a result, it empirically changed its policies which was reflected in the report on its national conference, where it says:

“We judge that despite the new phenomenon of reactionary right-wing marches, the offensive of the institutional coup produced a reaction in the whole of society, which was partly shown in the streets in the March 18 rallies called by pro-government forces, but didn’t just come out in order to support Dilma and Lula, were critical toward their government, seeing the clear threat of the right further advancing in the country.”

So what is the programmatic conclusion of this? The MRT proposes to:

“work on the ranks of the big pro-government union federations like the CUT and the CTB, as well as on the student bodies, to require that they break their subordination to the government and call rank-and-file assemblies and a plan of struggle combining work stoppages, demonstrations and culminating in a general strike to block the reactionary institutional coups, the attacks by the governments, particularly of the PT, on the living conditions of the workers and the youth, and opening the way to an effective response to the crisis we are experiencing in the country.”

Here you have a classic example of the Morenoite policy of pressuring the current leaderships to adopt a class-struggle “plan of struggle,” which they are not going to do. In contrast to this illusory program, genuine Trotskyists call for *concrete actions* where one can demand of the unions and workers parties that

they participate, as the LQB did in our 30 March article. This is what the *united front* means: a powerful common class action, beyond the profound political differences. But this also places on the agenda the struggle to break politically with the sellout leaderships who constantly act as an obstacle to workers struggle.

The tactic of the MRT (formerly the LER-QI), and of the international tendency to which it belongs, the Trotskyist Faction, whose main section is the Argentine PTS (Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas – Socialist Workers Party), is one of constant maneuvers always seeking to be the left wing of some mass movement. They run into trouble when they can’t decide between two conflicting movements, when the object of their attentions is indisposed, and when they discover that they are the ones being used instead of the other way around. On the Brazilian terrain they have gone back and forth between tailing after the PSTU and the PSOL. From July until December, the MRT was asking to be admitted as an internal tendency of the latter party which consists of a conglomeration of tendencies, only to see its amorous advances rejected. More recently it concentrated its activity on the “Unity and Struggle Space,” which includes various groups of the extra-parliamentary left that, in the MRT’s imagination, “seek to build an alternative camp in the face of the conjuncture characterized by the dispute between the PT and the right-wing opposition over impeachment.” However, in the latest meeting of this propaganda bloc under the influence of the PSTU, the call to oppose impeachment was brushed aside.

In various polemics against the policies of the PSTU, the main difference the MRT pointed to was that instead of calling for “new elections” it wants a “Free and Sovereign Constituent Assembly.” It calls for a “a democracy where the working people themselves and the entire people decide the direction of the country and how to combat corruption and to put a stop to cutbacks.” Waving this banner of “radical democracy,” it pretends that there is a solution favorable to the workers under bourgeois rule, which is a lie. On the one hand, it proposes that its dreamed-of constituent assembly should decide that “all cases of corruption should be judged by a popular jury, that every public office, from judges to congressmen, be elected and recallable.” Popular juries and the election (and recall) of judges and prosecutors already exist in the U.S., and that doesn’t change a thing about the reactionary *class* character of the justice system, as one can see in the cases of the murders of young black men by racist police, who continue to enjoy impunity. Why? Because the courts are an essential part of the repressive apparatus of the capitalist state, along with the police and the army.

Like the slogan “throw them all out,” the call for a constituent assembly was also a battle cry of the pseudo-Trotskyist groups during and after the “*Argentinazo*” of 2001. As we explained at that time:

The ‘big fish’ in the pseudo-Trotskyist swamp in Argentina are all agreed in calling for a ‘constituent assembly.’ Do they claim that there are still holdovers from feudalism in Argentina, a country without a peasantry (the rural settlements are almost all of agricultural wage workers)? Nor is Argentina

under the boot of a military dictatorship, having instead had a series of elected parliamentary governments. No, this slogan is expressing the desire of these opportunist groups to sidle up to the middle class on a 'democratic' (i.e., bourgeois) and not a socialist basis. It is the current expression of the so-called 'democratic revolution' preached by the late Nahuel Moreno – the godfather of the PTS, MAS and MTS – who raised this slogan echoing the anti-Soviet propaganda of the Reaganites in the 1980s."

—"Mass Upheaval Rocks Argentina, Brazilian Workers Movement Under Attack," *The Internationalist* No. 13, May-June 2002

On the other hand, in its bourgeois-democratic delirium, the MRT would like its imaginary constituent assembly to vote in the "nationalization of foreign trade, the expropriation of large landholdings," "to impose the end of draining of resources from the country by imperialism through payment of the debt," etc. A utopian fantasy, and ultimately reformist. They are attributing to a bourgeois body tasks which in this imperialist epoch can only be carried out by overthrowing the rule of capital. As we underlined in the same article:

"Thus in order to save the working people of Argentina from ruin, it is necessary not only to repudiate the foreign debt but also to expropriate the banks and the rest of the key companies in the country, something no capitalist government is about to do, whatever nationalist rhetoric it may employ. Even a revolutionary workers government would have enormous difficulty in the face of the inevitable reprisals by imperialism in carrying out these essential steps which require international socialist revolution."

Responding to the (justified) worry that any constituent assembly today would facilitate the rise of the reactionary right, and that it would be worse than the one that gave birth to the 1988 Constitution, the spokesmen of the MRT insist that their constituent assembly would be "imposed by the mobilization of the working people." But if the workers mobilize, the revolutionaries would offer them a "radical democratic" rather than a socialist program?! This isn't Trotskyism, it is the reformist "two-stage revolution" so dear to the Stalinists, or in the case of the Morenoites, the social democrats.

Agrarian revolution, democracy for the working people, national liberation from imperialist domination: none of this can be carried out today under the rule of capital. In fact, it was this perception that gave rise to Trotsky's theory of *permanent revolution* and his insistence that in this imperialist epoch, only by means of a workers revolution and its extension into the heart of imperialism can the great tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the past be achieved. While the Morenoites of the PSTU openly reject permanent revolution, following the footsteps of its master Moreno, the ex-Morenoites of the MRT say they uphold that thesis. But in practice they put forward the same program of "democratic" reforms, only proposing to radicalize them a bit, like a constituent assembly instead of new general elections. And as for its slogan of a "government of the working people that breaks with capitalism and imperialism," they separate this from the socialist revolution that overthrows capitalism. The PT itself



Trotsky (left) and Lenin (center) with Kamenev in 1919. Moreno's call for "democratic revolution" is counterposed to Trotsky's permanent revolution. Ex-Morenoites of MRT/Trotskyist Faction balk at Moreno's conclusion but put forward a "democratist" program of constituent assemblies everywhere.

talks of a government of the working people, within the framework of the bourgeois state. We've already seen the result.

Two final comments on the MRT: first, even while rejecting Moreno's thesis of calling for a "democratic revolution," they continue his methodology of looking at everything from a "democratic" viewpoint. And second, it sows utter confusion by comparing the PSTU's policy to that with the German Communist Party when it lined up with the Nazi fascists in the "red referendum" of 1931. The Communist International was repeating the orders of the Kremlin under Stalin, who at that time was pursuing the temporary ultra-leftist line of the so-called "Third Period," which he later abandoned in favor of the policy of the Popular Front. The PSTU today, which the MRT erroneously labels centrist, is a social-democratic tendency that is *reformist* to the core. Trotsky criticized the line of the German CP as an "error" and "adventurist," but the fact that the PSTU's policy today coincides with that of the bourgeois right wing is consistent with its overall outlook of class collaboration.

What is clear from this summary is that the entire Brazilian left – centrists and reformists alike – raises the banner of a bourgeois "democratic" program in the midst of a deep political crisis which requires a working-class and revolutionary response. Only the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista puts forward a program of *proletarian opposition against the bourgeois right-wing and the bourgeois popular front in power*. We call for work stoppages, plant occupations, the formation of elected and recallable strike committees, workers councils and mass workers defense guards to defend against repression. We say that it is necessary to prepare a general strike of unlimited duration in order to smash the judicial/police threat, to bloc impeachment, stop the cutbacks and sink the privatizations and labor and pension "reforms." And to carry all this out, it is necessary to *forge the nucleus of a revolutionary workers party, Leninist and Trotskyist, to fight for a workers and peasants government, the beginning of international socialist revolution.* ■

The Role of Imperialism and the Military in the Brazilian Political Crisis

The following article was published in a special supplement to The Internationalist in May 2016.

In analyzing the political crisis in Brazil, we have to take into account the position of imperialism, particularly that of the United States. There is an old joke in Latin America: why is the United States the only country in the continent where there has never been a coup d'état? Answer: because it's the only country that doesn't have a U.S. embassy. But Brazil is no banana republic, it has a relatively strong bourgeoisie with its own interests.

The PT and pro-PT left is acting as if the Brazilian government is a hindrance for the U.S., which is absurd. Even if U.S. spy agencies bug the telephones of the president (as they also did, and are surely continuing to do, with imperialist allies, such as Chancellor Merkel in Germany), the governments led by the PT have acted as firemen for the International Monetary Fund in Latin America, and as a sheriff for Yankee imperialism in the Caribbean, supplying mercenary troops for the occupation of Haiti. The Brazilian popular front has played a key role in pressuring Venezuela, and beyond that the construction giant Odebrecht is now helping open Cuba for massive capitalist investments, building a port there.

In general, Washington doesn't want any big upheavals in the largest country in Latin America. Even so, there is no reason to presume that the would-be masters of the planet always act with consistence, and there are already indications of changing opinions among imperialist spokesmen. Three months ago, both *The Economist* of London and the *New York Times* came out against impeachment of Dilma Rousseff. Now *The Economist* (26 March) published an article on the Brazilian political crisis with the title, "Time to Go," declaring that "The tarnished president should now resign" rather than be impeached.

At the same time, sectors of the North American ruling class are working in collusion with Judge Sérgio Moro. It was already known that the judge had taken a course for foreign lawyers at Harvard University (one of the main centers of U.S. imperialist "diplomacy" and espionage) and took part in a specialized program on money laundering at the State Department (*Istoé*, 19 December 2014). However, the connection is much



Victoria Hazou/MINUSTAH; Epoca/Globo; Roberto Stuckert Filho

PT-led popular-front governments act as a sheriff for the U.S. in the Caribbean, providing mercenary repressive troops to maintain the imperialist occupation of Haiti. Top: troops of the MINUSTAH under Brazilian command patrol, July 2013. Bottom photos: Lula and Dilma review the Brazilian contingent in Haiti.

closer than that. According to a telegram of the U.S. embassy in Brasília (dated 9 October 2009) which was made public by Wikileaks, Judge Moro was the main Brazilian presenter at a conference of "Project Bridges" sponsored by the U.S. government on illicit financing and "terrorism," which lasted an entire week in Rio and included the participation of judges and prosecutors from every state in Brazil and more than 50 officials of the Federal Police. The telegram encourages practical training for investigators, which:

"should be longer-term and coincide with the formation of training task forces. Two large urban centers with proven judicial support for illicit financing cases, in particular Sao Paulo, Campo Grande, or Curitiba, should be selected as the location for this type of training. Then task forces can be formed, and an actual investigation used as the basis for training..."

Concretely, in Operation Lava Jato (Operation Car Wash), Moro authorized the Federal Police and the Public Prosecutor's Office to work together with the FBI. In June the judge sent teams of investigators to the United States where they "had access to bank records totaling US\$230 million (*Folha Política*, 19 July 2015). In exchange, last October an FBI task-force spent a week in Curitiba working with Moro's team collecting information to be used in court cases in the U.S. against Petrobras.

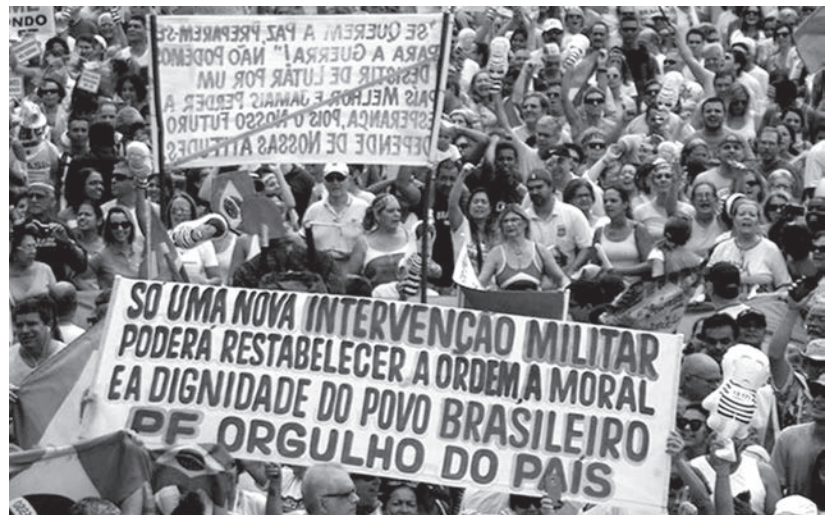
What are these cases? The main one is a class action suit demanding reparations to the tune of billions of dollars for supposed losses suffered by Wall Street investors (among them several Brazilian funds) between 2010 and 2014. They allege that due to corruption, the balance sheets published by Petrobras were distorted in order to hide the bribes and laundering of funds paid to suppliers like Odebrecht. A second corruption investigation of the Brazilian oil company is being carried out by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

In fact, *the entire so-called Car Wash investigation is being carried out together with Brazilian and imperialist sectors which are seeking to break Petrobras' monopoly of oil production from the famous "pre-salt" layer in the Atlantic.* In order to feed the voracious appetites of the imperialists, the popular-front government already organized several auctions of exploration of oil fields. However, above all do to the present extremely low prices of the black gold, the oil majors are particularly interested in engineering services and construction of oil installations. It is precisely in this industry where imperialist companies like giant Halliburton want to win contracts which until now were the private hunting preserve of Odebrecht and the OAS, two of the main targets of Operation Car Wash.

In another State Department telegram unearthed by Wikileaks, from 2 December 2009, the PSDB candidate in the 2010 presidential elections, José Serra, is quoted promising that, if elected, he would "change the rules" which gave Petrobras exclusivity in oil exploration in the pre-salt layer and change the model of "partnership" giving the former state company 30% of oil production. The current legislation (in 2010), approved by Lula's government, already meant an enormous privatization of this strategic resource, guaranteeing private (and above all imperialist) companies 70% of the exploration of the pre-salt layer. According to another law, passed in 2013 in response to the previous year's mobilizations, a percentage (rather small in reality) of the profits from pre-salt production is earmarked for health and education.



A shift in imperialist opinion about the government of Dilma Rousseff.



Banner in the March 13 pro-impeachment rally in Rio de Janeiro says "Only a New Military Intervention Can Reestablish Order, Morality and Dignity to the Brazilian People – Federal Police, the Pride of the Nation."

The imperialists' major interest in this question was indicated in an article published by the liberal journal *Foreign Affairs* (4 March 2015), under the title "Crude Calculus," which stressed the importance of the stipulation requiring 85% local content of technology and equipment, and the "potential for corruption." That journal is part of the base of support of Hillary Clinton who, it should be recalled, gave the green light for the coup d'état which overthrew President José Manuel Zelaya of Honduras, in July 2009. The fact that Barack Obama said of Lula that "he's my man" at a meeting of the G20 doesn't mean that there aren't other imperialist sectors involved, in one way or another, in attempts at "regime change" so popular in Washington. Today, it seems that the right-wing president of Argentina, Mauricio Macri, is the favorite of the White House, and of Wall Street for having agreed to finally pay off the vulture speculators who snapped up at bargain basement prices the loans defaulted on by Buenos Aires 15 years ago.

Loyal to his imperialist patrons, the ex-candidate Serra presented, four days after the giant anti-Dilma mobilization in March 2015, a bill, PL131, that would eliminate the partnership requirement and Petrobras' 30% cut of oil production. The FUP oil workers union, the CUT labor federation and the Workers Party (PT) itself declared their opposition to the bill. However, when it was approved by the Senate this past February 25, President Rousseff *approved* it in hopes of winning the sympathy of the capitalists. As usual, the FUP, CUT and PT didn't mobilize anything, nor did they shut down any facilities to oppose this fateful law.

Note as well that Judge Moro participated in various forums sponsored by the PSDB and that his wife is the lawyer for that party in the state of Paraná, as well as for Royal Dutch Shell oil company that won a slice of the Libra Basin rights in the 2013 auction. It was notable that when Odebrecht published a list of more than 200 recipients of its largesse, the large majority of them with the PMDB and the right-wing opposition parties,

Moro (who lifted the right of privacy for the phone conversations of ex-president Lula and President Dilma) clamped a ban on publication of the details of the payoff list, clearly in order to protect the PSDB, the “Progressive Party” (a rightist-militarist outfit), the Democrats (DEM, the continuation of the political vehicle of the military dictatorship) and the rest.

We do not know the specific connections between Moro and the imperialist companies and governments. But it is quite clear that he is working together with forces who are those most interested in privatizing to the max the formerly state-owned Petrobras, which has been largely sold off to imperialist and Brazilian investors. A 43-year-old judge in a provincial city does not act so aggressively – not only interrogating and jailing officials of Petrobras and the president of the largest contractor and construction company in the country, but also ordering the search, capture and forcible transfer of the ex-president, and the publication of private telephone conversations of the current president, the head of state – without having powerful allies protecting him.

The Position of the Military

The question of the position of the military is of great importance in evaluating the extent and gravity of the confrontation. The attention of the media was caught by the firing of General Antônio Hamilton Martins Mourão, head of the Military Southern Command, last October. At that time, the Army commander, General Eduardo Villas Boas, made statements to the press excluding military intervention in the current crisis, saying in an interview with the newspaper *Zero Hora*: “As to the legal aspect, there is no possibility of military intervention, a coup, nothing of the sort. When I’m asked what the military is going to do, I answer: it’s written down in Article 142 of the Constitution. We laid out the role of the Army to contribute to stability.” He added: “We cannot permit any kind of rift in the structure and among active duty and reserve personnel.”

Nevertheless, it’s necessary to note the opinions of the general who was replaced, who publicly criticized the president (and all the parliamentary politicians) for corruption and was baying about “awakening the patriotic struggle,” speculating about the possibility of a “controlled fall” of the president, “discontinuity” in government or a situation of “crisis” in the current political

context. At the same time, this same General Mourão authorized an official homage to Colonel Brilhante Ustra, “ex-commander of the DOI-Codi [intelligence division] of the Second Army in São Paulo, a unit that was one of the main centers of repression by the military regime and where 45 prisoners died.” It was precisely in this unit where Dilma Rousseff, today president, was tortured during the dictatorship (*Zero Hora*, 30 October 2015).

The removal of General Mourão unleashed a torrent of criticism on social networks by military officials against the “Communist” defense minister Aldo Rebelo, of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), and calls for impeachment of the president. A notable comment came from the former commander of Brazil’s expeditionary force in Haiti, General (retired) Augusto Heleno Pereira, who commented about the reaction to the replacement of Mourão (who commanded the largest military force in the country, with 48,000 troops):

“Lefty psychopaths should cool it... The military are not thinking about taking power. But we aren’t brainless robots, and we still have the right to kick about so many abuses and such thievery!”

The armed forces are surely full of elements like Mourão and Heleno, at every level.

General Eduardo Villas Boas recently reiterated his litany about how there will be no military intervention. But when we read another interview that he gave to the press last October, it’s clear that the Army commander, who was in charge of security during the 2014 World Cup, is keeping his options open:

“The street demonstrations calling for the return of military rule are a complex issue. Our interpretation is that people are not asking for a return of a military government, with a few exceptions. They are calling for a return of values. We are in the midst of an economic, political and ethical crisis. If it should be transformed into a social crisis, it could create problems of public security and the Army could be called upon to intervene.”
—*Diário do Pernambuco*, 17 October 2015

For the moment, the crisis does not seem to have reached into the military institution. The active elements are the Military Police, which has acted as a protagonist of the first order, and the Federal Police, which is acting as if it is the armed wing of the Public Prosecutors Office of Judge Sergio Moro, when in reality it is the police who are calling the shots. It should also be noted that the big right-wing mobilizations are being financed and promoted by the employers’ federations, and that the activity of the Federation of Industry of the State of São Paulo (FIESP) against the current popular-front government recalls its siege of the government of João Goulart in the run-up to the 1964 coup. And that Super-Moro is being promoted as the savior of the nation by the Família Marinho, owners of the media giant Rede Globo (which also vociferously supported the ’64 military takeover).

Indications point to an employer-media-judiciary-police movement with at least some support from imperialism. Even if it does not result in a classic military coup, it points to an authoritarian outcome, a strong state whose job is to impose, with an iron fist, the budget cuts, reforms and privatizations demanded by capital, which the popular-front governments led by the PT have only partially implemented. Now they want to go all the way. ■



General Eduardo Villas Boas: in the event of a social crisis, “the army could be called upon to intervene.”

SL/ICL Impeached By Its Own Past

The following article was published in a special supplement to The Internationalist in May 2016.

So here's a new one. For the first time in ten years, the Spartacist League and its International Communist League (SL/ICL) have published an article on Brazil. Could it be, now that the *New York Times* and other imperialist media have started publishing articles on the acute political crisis wracking the country, that their interest in the class struggle in the largest country in Latin America has been awakened? Actually, no. The main point of the article in *Workers Vanguard* (6 May), and the sole reason for publishing it, was to attack the Internationalist Group and our comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, sections of the League for the Fourth International, as supposed "Militant Supporters of the Popular Front." Why now? The answer is obvious to divert attention from the SL/U.S.' recent expulsion of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction of the ICL, which posed a sharp and effective challenge to its zigzagging opportunism.

What's happening in Brazil today is that after 13 years in office, the Workers Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores) is on the ropes. Its "popular front" government with bourgeois allies is coming apart. As the PT has succeeded in demoralizing many workers and youth with its pro-capitalist policies, the traditional bourgeois right wing, with ominous backing from the repressive apparatus, is moving to reclaim political power in order to ram through even more brutal anti-working class austerity and to further open up Brazil's oil industry to the imperialist monopolies. In this difficult situation the working class must fight against the power-grab by enemies of workers and democratic rights, and also against the popular-front government with its anti-worker policies. In short, the anti-democratic drive for impeachment is the spearhead of an attack whose real target is the working class and the oppressed population of Brazil. All of this is of no interest to the SL/ICL which – unsurprisingly – presents no program for class struggle in Brazil. The WV article sums up their passive neutrality: "Brazil Impeachment: Workers Have No Side."

The single count of WV's indictment of the IG and LQB is that in the current drive to oust Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff, "their line is 'No to Impeachment,' which is a vote of political support for Rousseff's popular-front government." Says who? The LQB has, uniquely on the Brazilian left, opposed the PT-led popular front from the beginning. Although the SL/ICL loves selectively quoting, an attentive reader can see in an illustration that the full headline from the LQB's *Vanguarda Operária* (Workers Vanguard), translated in *The Internationalist*, reads: "No to Impeachment! For Workers Mobilization Against the Rightist Bourgeois Offensive – No Political Support to the Bourgeois Popular Front Government." Later on WV dismisses our "ritually denouncing the popular front and calling not to vote for it" as merely "Marxist-sounding rationales to push the same line as much of the reformist left: save the Rousseff government." Except our headline and article say the opposite, in considerable detail.



Workers Vanguard opposed impeachment of Bill Clinton. By SL/ICL logic of today, this meant politically supporting him.

The SL/ICL's claim that to oppose the seizure of power by the den of thieves in the Brazilian Congress together with a judicial apparatus working hand-in-glove with pro-imperialist reactionaries and increasingly assertive militarized police forces you *must be for* the current government is pure sophistry. When we call to oppose Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Party, that supposedly means we are for Trump and the Republicans? Nonsense, *unless* those making the argument accept that there is no alternative to the "choices" offered by the current bourgeois political system. In fact, that is exactly the SL/ICL's policy in Brazil, since they hold that revolutionary struggle is impossible today, whereas the LQB and LFI present a program for working-class mobilization against *all* wings of the bourgeois ruling class. WV sneeringly dismisses this, saying "the IG/LQB throws around calls for factory occupations and a general strike, even claiming to politically oppose the government."

But the SL/ICL's pathetic attempt to smear the LQB, the IG and the LFI as supporters of the popular-front government we vociferously oppose has an additional problem. As the 20th century was drawing to a close, the latter-day Spartacist League *opposed the impeachment of Bill Clinton*. Take a look at the front-page of *Workers Vanguard* of 25 September 1998: "Imperialist Chief Clinton Witchhunted for Sex, Impeachment Drive Threatens Right to Privacy for All." By the SL's current logic, in opposing impeachment it supported Clinton and the Democrats. When we raised this with SLers buzzing like disoriented bees around our contingent at this year's May Day assembly in NYC's Union Square, they flatly denied that the SL had opposed impeaching Clinton. A few days later, at a Verizon strike rally, one SLer claimed that WV had corrected that line. Except it didn't. In an article on "Clinton Impeachment and U.S. Imperialism," WV (8 January 1999) favorably quoted its earlier article, repeating "Anti-Sex Witchhunt Threatens

Privacy for All,” but opined that if impeachment weakened the imperial presidency it “would not be a bad thing.”

For our part, the IG headline on the issue was, “To Hell with Monicagate and Impeachment – Clinton Is a War Criminal.” Noting that U.S. bombs began falling on Baghdad only hours before the U.S. Congress began voting on the impeachment of the warmonger-in-chief, we declared: “Democrats, Republicans Murder Iraqis, Starve Welfare Moms and Kids” and we called to “Defeat U.S. Imperialism! Defend Iraq!” (*The Internationalist* No. 7, April-May 1999).

Back in the days when *Workers Vanguard* was the voice of revolutionary Trotskyism, the Spartacist League explicitly supported the impeachment of Richard Nixon. In a much-commented-on headline, *WV* No. 43 (26 April 1974) proclaimed, “Impeachment Is Not Enough!” The article stated: “The Spartacist League has pointed out that the labor movement must support a move by the bourgeoisie to impeach Nixon” at the same time as it argued that in response to “the real crimes of Nixon and his class, it is necessary to raise a program which leads to the inescapable conclusion that workers must take power in their own hands.” So according to the present-day SL’s logic, did this mean supporting the Democrats? In fact, it was part of the then-revolutionary SL’s struggle against both bourgeois parties.

The latest *Workers Vanguard* linked the impeachment proceedings against the Rousseff government to “a widespread corruption scandal rocking the country.” This is the ludicrous explanation given for why key sectors of the Brazilian ruling class are so avid to oust the popular front. It simply repeats the pretext spouted by the bourgeois press, and ignores completely how the impeachers (who are among the most corrupt politicians in the country) are gearing up to crush workers resistance to cutbacks, privatizations and anti-labor “reforms.” The *WV* article says “While the IG/LQB cynically rants and raves about ‘bonapartism,’ they admit that a coup in Brazil is unlikely,” but it leaves out our explanation of the mounting dangers of an authoritarian regime being installed without a coup d’état.

Another red herring thrown into its *pot pourri* of lies, distortions and non-sequiturs is a tortured attempt to contrast saying no to impeachment in Brazil to Jan Norden (editor of *The Internationalist* and of *Workers Vanguard* in its revolutionary period) justifying a vote that brought down the government of Sri Lanka in 1964.¹ We uphold both positions, which are in no way contradictory.

In the course of its step-by-step abandonment of revolutionary Trotskyism in a downward spiral of defeatism following the counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet SL has come up with a string of electoral caveats, to wit:

–*thou shalt not* call for a constituent assembly, on principle, even as part of a revolutionary program for soviet power against a dictatorship; but

–*thou shalt* vote for a bourgeois constitution coming out of a constituent assembly in order to oppose the right (in

France, in 1946);

–*thou shalt not* put forward revolutionary candidates running for executive offices (as the then-revolutionary SL, as well as its predecessors in the Marxist movement, did repeatedly); but

–*thou shalt* in certain cases give critical support to candidates of opportunist groups running for executive offices (go figure);

–*thou shalt not* even solidarize with electoral boycotts (as the ICL’s Mexican group timidly did last year, only to be sharply reprimanded, while the Grupo Internacionalista actively participated in workers’ actions against the electoral farce)² except on the eve of insurrection (in which case the bourgeoisie would be insane to call an election); and now

–*thou shalt not* take a side on impeachment (repudiating the SL’s own past positions for the impeachment of Nixon and against the impeachment of Clinton)

This hodgepodge of contradictions is a program for centrist confusion, not revolutionary struggle. For these pettifogging ex-Trotskyist poseurs,

–*thou shalt not* call for any concrete workers struggle against the bourgeoisie to drive police out of the unions, to hot-cargo war material, to have workers strikes against the war, to defeat U.S. imperialism;

and the supreme commandment is

–*thou shalt pull thy hands out of the boiling water of the class struggle*, as the ICL advocated when in 1996 it abandoned and stabbed in the back the struggle of the LQB to remove police from the unions.

The SL/ICL then followed this up with accusations that we sued the unions, a flat-out lie, when in fact LQB supporters were the elected leadership of the union who were sued (and removed from office by the courts) by pro-police elements whose lies the ICL has repeated ever since (including in its latest article).³

And as we explained in our “International Perspectives of the League for the Fourth International” (see *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015):

“Recoiling from their social-chauvinist support for U.S. imperialism in Haiti in 2010, the ICL nonetheless still refuses to raise the defeat of U.S. imperialism as a proletarian task. ‘Outsourcing’ this task to the I.S. is yet another example of looking to reactionary social forces after writing off the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat as a result of counterrevolution in the Soviet Union.”

At the May 4 Verizon strike rally, an SLer accosted a young comrade, saying that the Internationalist Group betrayed the workers of Brazil. She responded, “No, you already did that.” And when he claimed that by opposing impeachment we are supporting the popular front, she replied, “No, we fight the popular front, but you don’t care that there is a right-wing offensive against the workers.” Hit the nail on the head. ■

² See “Mexico: Grupo Espartaquista Boycotts the Class Struggle,” *The Internationalist*, March 2016.

³ To read more about the persecution of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, and the ICL’s slanders against them, see: *Dossier: Class Struggle and Repression in Volta, Redonda* (February 1997) and *Dossier: Responses to the ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* (May 2010).

¹ The earlier reference is taken from an article, “No ‘Critical Support’ to Popular Frontism,” included in our bulletin of class readings on *The Popular Front: Roadblock to Revolution* which is available along with other IG pamphlets in the Encyclopedia of Trotskyism On Line.

Mexico: Grupo Espartaquista Boycotts the Class Struggle



Noticias

Five hundred teachers of Section 22 blockade Pemex refinery in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca during the boycott of the June 2015 elections. The call to shut down the phony elections was issued by the CNTE and the parents of the disappeared Ayotzinapa teachers college students.

The following article is translated from Revolución Permanente No. 6 (March 2016), newspaper of the Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International.

In the most recent issue of its magazine, the Grupo Espartaquista de México (GEM) published a front-page article titled, “Trotskyism vs. Radical Populism on Bourgeois Democracy” (*Espartaco*, November 2015). The main aim of the article is to put forward a correction to its position favoring the boycott of the elections last June, and to polemicize against the Grupo Internacionalista on the same subject.

Actually, the GEM’s support for the boycott was quite timid. In a 30 April 2015 leaflet, it wrote: “The call for the boycott ... is both a protest against state brutality and an expression of being fed up with the electioneering parties and the whole electoral circus.... We Spartacists solidarize with the boycott.” But for the priests of the International Communist League (ICL), of which the GEM is the Mexican section, even this modest and abstract gesture, dipping its toe in the waters of the class struggle, was too much. According to its self-criticism, “we should have argued and frankly warned against the use of this tactic under present conditions.”

Up to now, Marxists have held that the revolutionary program should be a guide to action. One of the many innovations introduced by the ICL in its zigzag course in the post-Soviet period has been to convert the program into a recipe for inaction. Thus, in taking up the subject, it goes on at length about

bourgeois “democracy” and the various prophylactic prohibitions it has come up with recently to protect itself against the temptation of opportunism. In particular:

—A ban on “participating in elections for executive posts,” even with a revolutionary program, because a revolution “necessarily implies a settling of accounts with the executive.” But will there be no “settling of accounts” with the bourgeois parliaments? What about parliamentary regimes where any deputy could be a minister tomorrow? For Trotskyists, our opposition to administering the capitalist state does not prevent us from making use, at particular times, of an election campaign as a platform for revolutionary propaganda.

—Opposing, “as a matter of principle, calls for a constituent assembly,” because this “amounts to a bourgeois government.” The clueless Lenin and Trotsky (as well as the ICL in previous decades) had overlooked this universal principle. We’re curious about how this squares with the ICL’s opportunist position of retrospectively coming out in favor of the French Constitution of 1946? We Trotskyists reject the slogan under current conditions in Mexico, but we don’t exclude tactically raising the call for a revolutionary constituent assembly in dictatorial regimes, at the same time as we fight for the formation of soviets to carry out the socialist revolution.

Following this excursion through the looking glass into the pseudo-Marxist wonderland of the post-Soviet ICL, we
continued on page 75

The Battle of the Election Boycott in Guerrero

In Guerrero, the electoral boycott assumed the proportions of a pitched battle between the various police forces and the population, above all in the cities of Tixtla and Tlapa. In Tixtla, residents blocked election activity for several months. Their placards declared, “There Will Be No Elections – We’re Missing 43,” referring to the disappeared students from the nearby Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College. On June 6, the day before the phony ballot, there was a march of some 4,000 people led by the parents of the 43. On voting day there were highway blockades, burning of election material and a massive confrontation between the population and the police, as one can see in the photos here. Protesters were able to shut down half the election districts in the city and to repel an attack by shock troops of the PRI on the city hall, which has been occupied for several months by the CETEG (Guerrero State Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), the local affiliate of the national CNTE.

In Tlapa, the main city of the La Montaña region and a stronghold of the CETEG, the police were even more aggressive. On June 5, a joint commando of municipal and state police evicted the Guerrero Popular Movement (MPG) which has been occupying city hall. The uniformed thugs also attacked a demonstration of teachers and local residents, showering them with rocks and leaving at least ten injured and several arrested. One demonstrator was stabbed by members of the PRI shock troop, *Los Cholos*. In the face of the police assault, demonstrators held a policeman in order to exchange him for their arrested comrades.

On election day, June 7, a commando of the Federal Police penetrated the El Tepeyac barrio looking for a “cell” of the MPG, which they blamed for the burning of a police van. They proceeded to the CETEG headquarters, located



Above and below: Hundreds of residents of Tixtla, Guerrero confront riot police on election day, 7 June 2015.

in the same neighborhood, arresting several teachers. They also burst into the homes of teachers who were prominent for their trade-union militancy, hauling them off to the state capital. In response to this blatant police aggression, church bells summoned the neighbors. Hundreds of residents poured out of their homes. They surrounded the detachment of police and disarmed them, taking them to the chapel where they were held in order to exchange them for arrested protesters.

But the federal police higher-ups refused any negotiation. In the evening they cut off electricity to the barrio and under the cover of darkness, the *federales* launched a lightning attack to seize the detained cops, who by then had risen to 35 in number. They administered a brutal beating to Juan Tenorio, a teacher and leader of the CETEG, and a federal police sniper shooting from the Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe killed the MPG head of security, Antonio Vivar

Díaz. Outraged neighbors responded with a hail of rocks. Once the police managed to get out, a federal police officer ordered, “Escape. We’re out of here, or else these bastards will surround us again. Flee, flee” (“The Battle of Tepeyac,” *Reforma*, 8 June 2015).

The population, with the combative teachers in the lead, courageously resisted. But according to the GEM, they shouldn’t have boycotted these elections which were imposed with blood and fire by the murderous government in order to put an end to the upheaval. To top it off, the pseudo-Trotskyist imposters blame the teachers and the parents of the disappeared students who called the boycott for bringing down the repression. Take a good look at those faces: these are the people the GEM/ICL betrayed. ■



June 5 elections: NO to All the Bourgeois Parties!

Forge a Revolutionary Workers Party!

Mexican Teachers Strike at a Crossroads: *Deepen, Radicalize, Broaden it to Win!*



Revolución Permanente

Women teachers on front line confronting federal police in the “Battle of the Airport,” Oaxaca, May 26. Signs say, “If There Is No Solution [to strike demands], There Will Be a Revolution.”

The following article is translated from a leaflet of the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico in the days before the June 5 state elections in Oaxaca. Last year, the insurgent teachers called to boycott elections in Oaxaca and Guerrero (see article, page 71.)

JUNE 2 – The national strike of the independent teachers movement, now into its third month, has come to a decisive moment. As the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE)¹ has appealed repeatedly for dialogue, the government has slammed the door shut and responded with repression. The heavy-handed official response ranges from rubber bullets, water cannon and tear gas in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, capital of the southern state of Chiapas, to repeated evictions of the CNTE’s protest encampments (*plantones*) in Mexico City, and the unprecedented kidnapping of the teachers, their forcible removal from the national capital to their home states under police custody. The strikers have responded with massive marches of tens of thousands teachers and their allies,

¹ The CNTE is the independent teachers union under attack by the government and its corporatist pseudo-union, the SNTE. Corporatist “labor” bodies in Mexico are in fact union-busting agencies of the capitalist state. For further analysis, see “SL on Corporatism in Mexico: Games Centrists Play,” *The Internationalist*, July 2013.

with the blockade of the Oaxaca airport and the occupation of highways, gas stations and town halls in Chiapas. It is expected that the repression – so far administered in doses, in order not to inflame the ire of a population that still is on the brink of a social explosion – will intensify in the wake of the June 5 elections. Then the rulers who are seeking to impose an education “reform” in the service of capital will go all in.

The government of Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI² declares over and over again that it will not retreat one inch in its “reform” aimed at annihilating public education and the basic labor rights of the teachers. The head of the Department of Public Education, political marketeer Aurelio Nuño, has announced the dismissal of more 3,000 striking teachers. He claims to have a roster of 26,000 scabs made up of retirees, substitute teachers and young aspirants who have yet to be given a position. If he really believes this, he’s in for a rude awakening. The militancy of the teachers and the solid support they have from parents, particularly in Chiapas, have thwarted the intentions of more than one government to dismantle the struggle. However, in spite of the teachers’ heroic will to struggle, the dialogue-seeking

² The Institutional Revolutionary Party which for 70 years was the ruling state-party of Mexico.

policy of the union leadership has undermined the strike and emboldened the employer-state, which will accept nothing less than total surrender. Now, the Executive Committee of Section 22 of the CNTE in the state of Oaxaca seeks to derail the struggle into the politics of bourgeois electoralism.

On May 29 the Section 22 Exec issued a “guidance” for the elections calling for a “punishment vote” against the parties of the Pact for Mexico (PRI, PAN, PRD, PVEM and PANAL)³ that call for “structural reforms.” The document also rules out the PT,⁴ whose gubernatorial candidate voted for the education “reform.” However, it advises a vote for Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA) headed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known by his initials, AMLO.⁵ The Section 22 Exec promises that MORENA has “thrown its total support behind the teachers.” In reality, it is a bourgeois party that seeks to chain the workers and the “people” to the more nationalist sectors of the Mexican ruling class. Its leaders are deserters from the PRD, and many, including AMLO himself, come from the PRI that ruled Mexico for seven decades until 2000 (Oaxaca until 2010). For all its promised “dialogue” with the teachers, MORENA will not stop the privatizing, pro-imperialist and anti-worker program demanded by capital.

Oaxaca teachers and workers have already experienced the trap of “punishment votes.” In **2006**, in the middle of the audacious uprising that was set off by the teachers’ resistance to repression by the murderous PRI governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, Section 22 and the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) called for a “punishment vote” against the PRI. This was a veiled appeal for a vote for López Obrador, who at the time was the presidential candidate of the PRD. And what happened? AMLO didn’t lift a finger against the repression, and the Oaxaca state legislators of the PRD joined with the PRI in calling for Federal Police intervention. In **2010**, the Section 22 leadership called once again to “punish” the PRI at the polls. And so Gabino Cué Monteagudo was elected governor, who in July 2015 unleashed a witchhunt against the Oaxaca teachers.

³ Shortly after taking office, Peña Nieto’s PRI, which has the largest voting bloc in Congress, formed a grand coalition (the “Pact for Mexico”) with the rightist-clericalist National Action Party (PAN), which held the presidency from 2000 to 2012, and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), a populist nationalist capitalist party generally classified as “center-left” and led by former PRI politicians, which holds office in several states. Minor players in this bourgeois governing coalition are the Ecological Green Party (PVEM), a satellite party set up by the PRI, and the New Alliance Party (PANAL) founded by the now-imprisoned head of the corporatist teachers “union,” Elba Esther Gordillo. Together these parties hold over 85% of the seats in Congress. When the Pact was formed in January 2013, its first act was to ram through the education “reform.”

⁴ A completely bourgeois “Labor Party,” also set up by the PRI, that today serves to collect votes for the PRD.

⁵ López Obrador is a former PRI politician who then joined the PRD, becoming the head of government in Mexico City and subsequently ran under the PRD banner for the presidency in 2006 and 2012, losing in both cases amid massive vote fraud. As the PRD moved increasingly to the right, AMLO parted ways with it (“on the best of terms”) following the 2012 elections and formed his National Regeneration Movement on the PRD’s original populist-nationalist program.

This program of the *popular front*, by chaining the workers movement to sectors of the bourgeoisie, always leads to defeat.

Since 2013, the teachers have sought with strikes and marches to fight back against the plans, dictated by imperialist financial institutions, to privatize public education and gut the teachers unions. During all of the past year, since the electoral boycott of 2015,⁶ the teachers have waged a fierce struggle against the government’s determination to impose these “reforms” by fire and blood. However, the leadership lacks a strategy that goes beyond union resistance within the bounds of capitalism. They fail by “limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effects of the existing system,” as Karl Marx wrote in *Value, Price and Profit* (1865). Thus, faced with the brick wall of a government that rejects all negotiation, the leaders of the CNTE see no other way out than to sell out the militant teachers to capital. Searching for a life raft, they call for a “calculated vote” for MORENA. Their “orientation” to the rank and file is to vote for our class enemies, yet again.

The Grupo Internacionalista, Mexican section of the League for the Fourth International, and the Comité de Lucha Proletaria (Proletarian Struggle Caucus) union tendency politically supported by the GI, insist that the only policy that can win this crucial struggle, in which the capitalist government would wipe out over 35 years of struggle for independent unions against corporatism, is one of intransigent struggle for class independence: **not one vote for bourgeois parties or politicians!** For the teachers movement to be victorious, it needs a class-struggle leadership, which far from seeking to ally with the bourgeoisie, would turn to the workers movement, striving for a **real nationwide strike** capable of defeating the murderous government and its fateful “reforms.” Against the electoral farce, it is necessary to **forge a revolutionary workers party** that would fight for a **workers and peasants government**, the starting point of **international socialist revolution**.

History Repeats Itself

Six years ago, two days before the polls that resulted in the election of Gabino Cué, the State Assembly of Section 22 of the CNTE put the teachers on “poll watching” duty with regional brigades. The education workers who had kept up an encampment for over a month in the Zócalo were sent back to their hometowns to cast a punishment vote against the parties “that had repressed the people” (*El Imparcial de Oaxaca*, 3 July 2010). Azael Santiago Chepi, at the time the leader of Section 22, indicated that the teachers would monitor the elections, and even warned of a “popular insurrection” in case of electoral fraud. “The rank and file and the people know who to vote for,” he said. Now, once again, as if history from 2006 to the present has nothing to teach us, the leadership prepares us to vote for AMLO’s MORENA, “the party that has truly stood with the teachers and with the people.” Really?

This past March 21, López Obrador promised to “return”

⁶ See “Mexico: Down With Elections Under the Military Boot!” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015, and “Mexico: Grupo Esparquista Boycotts the Class Struggle,” *The Internationalist*, March 2016.

control of education to the union and put an end to the persecution against the dissident teachers if his protégé Salomón Jara won the governorship. Yet the very next day, the pro-PRI leadership of Section 22 publicly renounced the deal reached between AMLO and the teacher Rogelio Vargas Garfias (member of the political committee of the UTE-FPR⁷), Santiago Chepi, former legislator Flavio Sosa, and former PRD senator Armando Contreras. The latter, who is now the organizer of Morena in Oaxaca, was secretary of indigenous affairs in the government of the murderer Ulises Ruiz (*Proceso*, 21 March 2016). For his part, Salomón Jara was secretary of fisheries in the government of Gabino Cué. Now the rank and file are being *disoriented* by the promise that this gang of former PRI and PRD politicians, who in the past were on the side of the worst oppressors of the teachers, “has truly committed itself to the teachers and the people.”

As bourgeois politicians, López Obrador and his MORENA will be obliged to impose “austerity” and privatization, and to regiment public education in favor of big capital. MORENA now governs five of the 16 *delegaciones* (boroughs) of the Federal District (Mexico City). There it has imposed cutbacks and layoffs that led to angry protests by the government employees union (SUTGDF) during the May Day march. Even if MORENA “returns” the Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education to Section 22, it would do so in order to *make the CNTE complicit in implementing the anti-education “reform.”*

Once again, the nefarious program of the popular front seeks to drown the teachers’ struggle. The tragedy will be all the worse taking place just as the bourgeoisie girds itself to bring “the full extent of the law” down on the heads of the teachers, making more urgent than ever the need for the strike to be *deepened, radicalized and extended*. “Pressuring” the bourgeoisie is doomed to fail. *The war on the teachers union is a capitalist war, and class war is needed to defeat it.*

The Proletarian Struggle Committee and the Grupo Internacionalista which supports it have long insisted that in order to win, it is necessary to stop begging the bourgeoisie, and instead, to take the road of class struggle. A genuine nationwide strike must be unleashed involving key proletarian sectors who produce the profits of the capitalist class.

If the teachers strike alone, the government boasts that it is saving money. But if the teachers set off joint action with the oil workers to take over the oil rigs and refineries, for example in Santa Cruz, Oaxaca which supplies all the Pacific coast states; if subway workers in the capital, Telmex telephone workers, the militant steel workers at the port of Lázaro Cárdenas, the autoworkers of Volkswagen, Honda, Ford, GM, etc., walk out; if the strike extends to the miners of Cananea, the farmworkers of San Quintín, the women *maquiladora* workers of the northern border – that is, to the powerful industrial proletariat of Mexico and internationally – that is how we can win.

Yesterday, teachers discovered police infiltrators in one of the blockades in the city of Oaxaca, and detained them for hours. A bourgeois journalist of Quadratín Oaxaca wrote in

irritation: “The day passes, sweltering, implacable, like the law of the teachers who impose their punishment and torment.” In reality, the punishment and torment are imposed by the capitalist state that has waged a war that has resulted in the murder of over 200,000 people in the past decade, which is responsible for the disappearance and massacre of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa. On the other hand, the implacable “teachers law” could set off the struggle that will finally liberate the “those at the bottom,” the exploited and oppressed, from the long nightmare of bourgeois rule.

To the comrades, women and men, who want to build a genuinely class-struggle leadership to win the strike, who see the necessity of breaking with all bourgeois parties and politicians, we call on you to unite with the Proletarian Struggle Committee and the Grupo Internacionalista, to struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party that fights for international socialist revolution. ■

GEM Boycotts...

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arrive at the core of the “correction.” The self-criticism is right on one point: the GEM’s original leaflet confused an electoral boycott with abstention, saying: “For us, calling for a no vote in this country is nothing new.” While in Spanish and other languages, a boycott clearly means the attempt to stop the elections, the normal meaning of boycott in English is simply not to participate in them. Could this be the reason for confusing the two tactics?

But beyond linguistic confusion, the nub of the question is another invention by the latter-day Spartacists: its definition, according to which an “active boycott” would only be “the antechamber to and conscious preparation for an insurrection,” a tactic which “only has a chance of success in the context of a qualitatively higher level of class struggle than has existed in Mexico in many decades, and perhaps in its entire history.” To shore up its position that an electoral boycott is impossible short of a revolutionary crisis and imminent insurrection, they put forward a series of fraudulent assertions ... and a distorted quotation from Lenin.

In the first place, the GEM’s rectification claims that the boycott covered all of Mexico, when in actuality the only serious attempt to carry out the call put out by the parents of the 43 disappeared students from Ayotzinapa¹ and by the combative teachers of the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers) was in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas. These strongholds of the CNTE have been convulsed by social protest and police repression ever since that fateful night in Iguala, Guerrero in September 2014 [when the students were massacred and kidnapped]. The GEM argues that boycott actions “were limited to a few municipalities,” and that only “Some 600 ballot stations were not installed or were closed for different reasons in all of Mexico, out of a total of 150,000.” Wrong.

It seems that this erroneous data comes from the National Election Institute (INE), but in the state of Oaxaca alone, the

⁷ Education Workers Union-Revolutionary Popular Front, a current in Section 22 associated with the Stalinist Communist Party of Mexico (Marxist-Leninist).

¹ See “Huge Outrage Over Guerrero Massacre,” *The Internationalist* No. 38, October-November 2014.

local branch of the INE reported that “283 election stations were destroyed by the dissident teachers in the 11 electoral districts in the state,” that ballot boxes were stolen from another 26 election stations, that an additional 75 election stations cancelled voting “due to the risk of violence,” and yet another 135 election stations were never set up. And not only that: in order to gussy up its figures, the state INE reduced the total number of election stations from 5,228 initially to 4,059 in the end. At the same time, in Guerrero there were reportedly 113 election stations which were not set up, or where voting was suspended.

In order to back up its supposition that “many leftists must be disappointed by these results, and by the scant effect of the movement for electoral boycott,” the GEM claims that voting participation was the highest in decades in mid-term elections. Not in Oaxaca, where the level of abstention was 59%, and in the central election districts almost three quarters of registered voters (72%) either did not vote or cast a blank ballot. In fact, those who have criticized the boycott, notably the Stalinists of the Frente Popular Revolucionario (FPR), complained not that it was a failure but the opposite: they argue that it aided the PRI, the governing party, because many of those who would have backed the opposition did not vote.

The GEM article distorts the true context of the call for the electoral boycott and that it had an effect. In the southern states wracked by turmoil, months of incursions of the army had been unable to subjugate the population. In dozens of municipalities in Guerrero mayors were expelled by the population, and many were being governed by communal assemblies. In this situation, the murderous government of Enrique Peña Nieto sought to put an end to the rebellion by means of the elections. In the face of this challenge, the rebels called for a boycott in order to block the effort to put an end to the crisis. The federal government ended up sending in tens of thousands of soldiers and gendarmes (an elite unit of the Federal Police set up in 2014) in order to impose the elections at gunpoint. And what does the GEM do? It desolidarizes itself from the boycott.

Not only that. We read: “This effort meant a direct confrontation with the repressive forces of the capitalist state.... The toll, on the other hand, was of dozens of people arrested and injured in clashes with the police, in addition to one teacher murdered.” Forget about the GEM’s pretense of defending the CNTE against the government: these shameless fake-Trotskyists are blaming the teachers, the students and the parents of the Ayotzinapa 43 for having caused the repression. In fact, its criticism of the boycott is a carbon copy of that of the faker Flavio Sosa, a bourgeois politician who is currently acting as the main supporter in Oaxaca of the National Renovation Movement (MORENA) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

The Grupo Internacionalista, in contrast, took sides and acted in the struggle against the electoral farce in those areas where the boycott had mass support, without holding back about its limitations. We wrote then:

“In this worst crisis of bourgeois ‘governability’ that Mexico has seen in the last half century, the Grupo Internacionalista stands with, and has participated in, the struggle of the teachers and parents of the disappeared students against the fraudulent elections, at the same time as we warn that an electoral boycott,

as justified as it is, cannot put an end to the bloodbath and the assault on teachers. If mass action is limited to the confines of the mostly rural states of the southwest, the bosses’ government can hold out, and wait for a more propitious time to give the death blow. As we have emphasized since the beginning of the protests, as well as during the ‘teacher insurgency’ of 2013, what’s needed is a working-class mobilization throughout the country, a *nationwide strike* drawing in key sectors of the Mexican proletariat, *on the road to a socialist revolution to bring down the capitalist regime* that has turned Mexico into a giant cemetery.” —“Mexico: Down With Elections Under the Military Boot!” *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015

In order to condemn the revolutionary class politics of the Grupo Internacionalista, the GEM has resorted to all manner of subterfuges. It proclaims that “the call to prevent the elections could not have won without the mobilization of the working class,” but at the same time ridicules our call for a national strike extending to sectors of the proletariat. The GEM criticizes us for “inventing” a qualitative difference between the CNTE and “the rest of the SNTE, which due to its subordination to the PRI is supposed to be ‘the class enemy’,” while remaining silent about the fact that this corporatist pseudo-union (the SNTE), which is part of the state apparatus, *has murdered more than 150 dissident teachers*. At the same time, it seems to be ignorant of the fact that the leaders of Section 22, the “pelones” and “pozoleros” (two allied cliques), who have been denounced by the rank-and-file, are in fact PRI supporters.

The GEM claims that “Considerations such as the issue of leadership, the balance of forces, the organization and political consciousness of the working class are of little importance to the braggarts and verbal adventurers of the GI, including when they call for a ‘workers rebellion’ in a single, overwhelmingly rural state.” Readers can easily see for themselves that the Grupo Internacionalista fights inside the CNTE against the class-collaborationist policies of the leadership (and of its Stalinist opponents): “In the face of the evident disorientation of the leaders of the CNTE and Section 22, it is urgently necessary to forge a *revolutionary leadership* that is up to the tasks posed by this hard class battle, and whose main axis is *full political independence* from the bourgeois parties and politicians” (“Defeat the Union-Busting Attack on Mexican Teachers,” *The Internationalist*, August 2015). The GEM, on the other hand, does nothing.

The correction by *Espartaco* contains so many distortions, omissions and outright lies that it would be difficult to list them all. It claims that the CNTE “has an extremely limited social power,” when Section 22 has been the axis of the union movement in Oaxaca that in 2006 was able to expel the government and the police from the state capital for five months. (In reality, the GEM’s criticism is the Mexican version of the LCI thesis that Bolivia has no proletariat.) But in order to stamp the seal of authority on its rejection of the boycott, its drop-dead argument is a quote from Lenin. Here it is:

“The connection between boycott and the broad revolutionary upswing is thus obvious: boycott is the most decisive means of struggle, which rejects not the form of organization of the given institution but its very existence. Boycott is a declaration

of open war against the old regime, a direct attack upon it. Unless there is a broad revolutionary upswing, unless there is mass unrest which overflows, as it were, the bounds of the old legality, there can be no question of the boycott succeeding.”
—V.I. Lenin, “Against Boycott” (July 1907)

Now this stance by the Bolshevik leader deals with the question of under what circumstances revolutionaries should call for a boycott, while the present case concerns, as the “rectification” by the GEM admits, the “electoral boycott by the CNTE and its allies, a conjunctural action based on being fed up with the repression and corruption of the PRI, PAN and PRD” [our emphasis]. Secondly, in speaking of a “broad revolutionary upswing” and “mass unrest which overflows ... the bounds of the old legality,” Lenin does not say (as the ICL maintains) that the boycott is only admissible as the “antechamber and conscious preparation of the insurrection.” We of the GI did not take a position until ascertaining that the call had a mass impact, and in fact in the affected areas there was a broad “mass agitation” which “overflowed the old legality.”

However, the most relevant thing about the Lenin quote is that it is referring to 1907. The ICL doesn’t mention that in 1906 the very same Lenin called for a boycott of the tsarist Duma, and that the Bolshevik leader made an emphatic defense of this position against the Mensheviks who raised the same arguments which the GEM and the ICL repeat today. Today these fake Trotskyists say that boycott was dismissed in 1907 because, “The 1905 Revolution had been defeated, and the Russian workers movement was fighting to regroup and overcome demoralization in the midst of police persecution, executions and poverty made more acute by lockouts.” But what did the Bolsheviks say in 1906 when they called for a boycott?

Lenin’s article, “The State Duma and Social-Democratic Tactics” (January 1906) reproduces the resolution of the Bolshevik majority, saying: “The government has drenched the country in blood, shooting down with artillery and machine guns the workers, peasants, soldiers and sailors fighting for liberty.” Lenin comments that, “These considerations – together with the suppression of the insurrection in Moscow and elsewhere, after which some period of lull is necessary to rally and train fresh forces – have naturally been inclining the ‘Minority’ [i.e., the Mensheviks] in the RSDRP (Russian Social Democratic Workers Party) in favor of participation in the election...” Despite the unfavorable balance of the relation of forces, the Majority conference decided that “This conference holds that the Social Democrats must strive to prevent the convocation of this police Duma, and must refuse to take any part in it.”

In a subsequent article, “The Present Situation in Russia and the Tactics of the Workers Party” (February 1906), Lenin writes: “The Russian Social-Democratic Party is passing through a very difficult time. Martial law, shootings and floggings, overcrowded prisons, a proletariat worn out by starvation, chaos in organization, aggravated by destruction of many of the underground centres and by the absence of legal centers, and lastly the controversy over tactics ... are all inevitably causing a certain disarray of Party forces.” Nevertheless, Lenin concludes that “all idea of participating in the Duma must be emphatically discarded. We must more perseveringly and

patiently prepare for a new insurrection and establish closer links with the organizations of the peasantry....”

Not so the Mensheviks: Georgi Plekhanov lambasted the “inopportunistly begun” mass strike which led to the armed uprising in Moscow at the end of 1905, concluding: “The strength of the proletariat proved inadequate for victory. It was not difficult to foresee this. And therefore it was wrong to take up arms.” The task of the hour, explained the theoretician, “is to point out to the proletariat its mistake....” Lenin added: “Quite naturally, Plekhanov also declares against boycotting the Duma....” So just as in 1905 the Menshevik Plekhanov criticized the Moscow workers, saying that “it was wrong to take up arms,” today his offspring, the neo-Plekhanovists of the ICL, say that the Oaxaca and Guerrero workers should not have boycotted the elections.

The ultimatic position of the ICL, that one cannot call for – or even solidarize with – an electoral boycott except on the eve of an armed insurrection, has nothing Bolshevik about it. On the contrary, this is 21st century Menshevism. Nor is it an isolated position. In previous years, these ex-Trotskyists have declared that one cannot call for a general strike without already having a mass revolutionary workers leadership and being prepared for a direct struggle for power. At the same time, in Mexico and more recently in Greece, the ICL has opposed our calls to fight for workers control and rejected any struggle that isn’t simply defensive. Hiding behind its distorted vision of the balance of forces, these centrist opportunists mouth supposedly leftist arguments in order to arrive at the same conclusion as the reformists: accepting the limits of capitalism.

There was nothing passive about the struggle undertaken by the teachers of the CNTE and other trade-unionists to prevent the electoral fraud. We have described how supporters of the boycott shut down the airport with a blockade by hundreds of teachers; how they also blockaded the Pemex fuel depot in El Tule; and how educators in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec blockaded the refinery of Salina Cruz. Trade-unionists from the public health sector and members of the GI participated in all of these actions. In addition, teachers of the combative Section 22 of the CNTE sacked more than a dozen district offices of the INE in Juchitán and elsewhere; and they occupied the Temescal hydroelectric plant in the Cuenca region, one of the most important electrical facilities in the country.

In fact, it is for leading these powerful actions that the government has arrested four of the intermediate-level cadres of Section 22. The Trotskyists of the Grupo Internacionalista have actively participated in forums in the Zócalo (main plaza) of Oaxaca and in caravans to the maximum-security prisons demanding the freeing of the dozens of imprisoned teachers and activists. In contrast, the GEM has done nothing to defend them, apart from a single mention in its magazine, even as it criticizes them for having brought down repression with their exemplary action. With its treacherous and supposedly learned rhetoric, it has become a specialist in “pulling your hands out of the boiling water” of the class struggle. With its shameful critique of the courageous teachers and students for having called the electoral boycott going up against the capitalist state, the ICL and the GEM are boycotting the class struggle. ■

Anne Vigna/Proceso



Over 100 teachers and students protest outside Mexican Consulate in Rio de Janeiro, August 17. LQB signs say “Smash Privatization Offensive of the Bourgeoisie with International Socialist Revolution.”

Tri-National Day of Action...

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been met. While the strike was “suspended” over the opposition of almost two-fifths of the strikers (including the CLC), teachers are still “on strike footing,” and in the middle of the Olympic games the SEPE initiated the tri-national day of solidarity action with the Mexican teachers.

On Wednesday more than 100 teachers, students and their supporters marched to the Mexican consulate in Rio to demonstrate their solidarity with the CNTE and the combative teachers of Oaxaca in particular. A union banner proclaimed “SEPE-RJ and CNTE-Mexico in the International Struggle Against the Privatization of Education.” Signs of the LQB called for a “National Strike Against the Criminal Mexican Government,” “Workers Revolution Will Avenge Our Dead” and “Smash the Privatization Offensive of the Bourgeoisie with International Socialist Revolution.” A contingent of 40 students joined the protest, reflecting the fact that during the strike 92 schools were occupied by the students, which was a major reason that the teachers were able to hold out so long. After the students arrived, the Shock Battalion of the Military Police was called in. Well aware that the police are the armed fist of capital, the demonstrators refused to be intimidated. A telephone connection was established so that the speeches in Rio could be heard simultaneously by demonstrators in Oaxaca and Mexico City.

Oaxaca: Some 200 teachers of Section 22 of the CNTE blockaded entrances to the Oaxaca State Institute of Public Education

(IEEPO), shutting it down, as they have done daily since the beginning of the strike last May 15. For months, the teachers and parents have maintained up to three dozen barricades on highways around the state, as well as shutting down shopping malls where they have targeted “multinational” chain stores, such as Walmart. The local newspaper *Noticias*, which has kept up a steady barrage of anti-union propaganda, carried a headline, “CNTE – A Category 5 Hurricane.” Another story emphasized that a new army plan, DN-III, has been prepared “to attend any contingency.” At the solidarity meeting outside the IEEPO called by Section 22, a number of strikers spoke, as did members of the Grupo Internacionalista. GI speakers emphasized that the supposed education “reform” that teachers are fighting against was designed by the imperialist financial agencies and implemented not only by the *gobierno asesino* (murderous

government) of Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto but in Brazil and the United States. Strikers were also able to hear the speeches being given in Rio de Janeiro, making the international connection real. Signs hung from the gates of the shuttered IEEPO declared, “From NY and Oaxaca to Rio de Janeiro, Workers to Power!”

Mexico City: Simultaneously, a protest was held in Mexico’s capital at the *plantón* (tent city) of striking teachers from the various states. Some 60 teachers attended the meeting, where half a dozen strikers of the CNTE spoke, sending greetings to their fellow teachers in Brazil, as well as chanting, “*SEPE-CNTE, una sola lucha*” (it’s all one struggle). Signs declared, “Oaxaca, Ferguson, Rio de Janeiro,



Revolución Permanente

Sixty striking teachers at the Mexico City plantón joined in solidarity meeting with Brazilian teachers, August 17. Signs say: “Oaxaca, Ferguson, Rio de Janeiro: Only Revolution Will Bring Justice.”

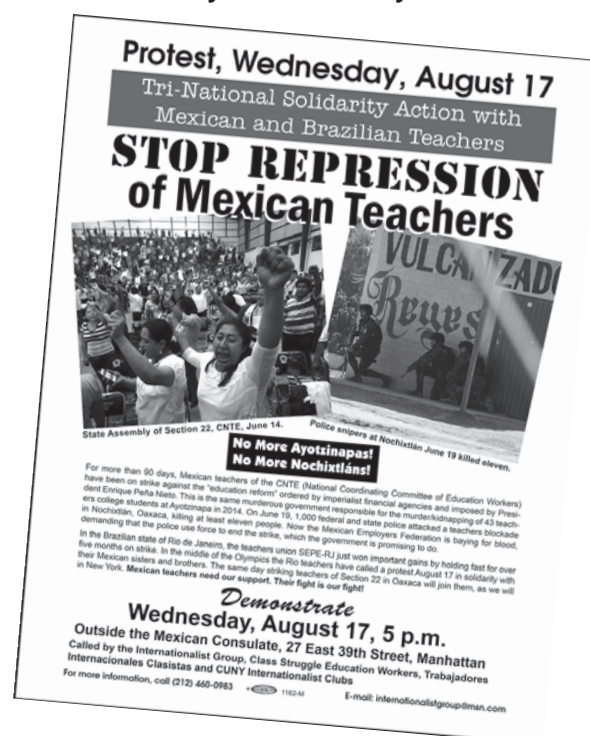
ro, Only Revolution Will Bring Justice” and “Mobilize Workers’ Power Against the Racist Terrorist Police.” A Mexican student in Brazil and a Brazilian student in Mexico, supporters of the League for the Fourth International, spoke, emphasizing the need for international socialist revolution to defeat the capitalist drive for privatization. Speakers from the GI stressed the need to fight for the political independence of the workers against all the capitalist parties, not only the governing PRI and the rightist PAN and nationalist PRD, all of whom voted for the teacher-bashing education “reform,” but also the populist MORENA which claims to support the teachers, but opposes the call for abrogating the privatizing counter-reform.

New York City: A few hours later some 40 protesters picketed outside the Mexican Consulate in NYC in solidarity with the protests in Rio, Oaxaca and Mexico City. The action was called by the Internationalist Group, Class Struggle Education Workers, the Internationalist Clubs at the City University of New York, and the newly formed Trabajadores Internacionales Classistas (TIC – Class Struggle International Workers). The leaflet for the protest demanded, “No More Ayotzinapas! No More Nochixtláns!” A father of one of the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students thanked the teachers, both in Brazil and Mexico, for continuing to struggle against the criminal state. A student who recently traveled to Mexico with a delegation of Internationalist Club members emphasized that racist cop terror was not only endemic in Mexico and the U.S., but rooted in capitalism. The student delegation gave talks at the National University of Mexico and at the teachers’ encampment about the struggle against police murders of African Americans in the U.S. Speakers from the TIC included an immigrant woman worker and a worker from the B&H warehouses, who said that their successful struggle for union representation showed the power of united workers action. Protesters chanted “¡Luchar, vencer, obreros al poder!” (Fight, win, workers to power).

A teacher activist from the CSEW, recently returned from several months in Oaxaca, explained how the CNTE’s fight for union independence from state control is a fight directly against the SNTE, a fake “union” totally controlled by the government, which is scabbing during the bitter teachers strike and offered to supply scabs to replace the thousands of strikers the government intends to fire. Speakers from the Internationalist Group emphasized that teachers in Oaxaca and Rio have shown exemplary militancy, but



Immigrant workers, educators, students and community activists picketed the Mexican Consulate in New York demanding an end to the repression of striking teachers of the CNTE. Protesters chanted “No to Democrats and Republicans, Build a Revolutionary Workers Party.”



even their courageous and inspiring refusal to bow before massacres and state terror is not enough to win. The CNTE’s call for “dialogue” with the murderous government is a trap, and what is urgently required is a struggle to forge a revolutionary workers party, which the League for the Fourth International is seeking to build, notably in playing an important role in international workers struggles such as the August 17 Tri-National Solidarity Action with Mexican and Brazilian teachers. Speakers warned that if the Mexican government tries another bloody crackdown, there will be hell to pay, in Mexico, here and everywhere. ■

**No More Ayotzinapas! No More Nochixtláns!
Workers to Power from Brazil to Mexico and the U.S.!**

Tri-National Day of Action

Solidarity with Mexican and Brazilian Teachers



Revolución Permanente

Oaxaca, Mexico: Two hundred teachers of the CNTE Section 22 shut down the state education department on August 17 and held a meeting in solidarity with the teachers union of Rio de Janeiro. Signs say “Teachers Struggle Is International” and “From NY to Oaxaca and Rio de Janeiro, Workers to Power.”

On Wednesday, August 17, demonstrations were held in three countries and four cities in solidarity with the Mexican teachers who have been waging a courageous strike for more than three months. They are fighting against the bogus “education reform” which in fact is a capitalist attack on public education and teachers unions, not only in Mexico but around the world. In Rio de Janeiro, Oaxaca, Mexico City and New York City, teachers, students, trade unionists and activists demanded “Stop Repression of Mexican Teachers.” During the strike of the CNTE (National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers), teachers in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Michoacán have braved murderous repression. At least a dozen teachers, parents and activists were killed by the police in mid-June in Oaxaca, notably in the June 19 massacre of Nochixtlán, Oaxaca.

Rio de Janeiro: In Brazil, the leadership of the Rio state teachers union, the SEPE-RJ, passed a motion calling for a solidarity action in support of the Mexican teachers. The motion was put up by the Comitê de Luta Classista (CLC – Class-Struggle Committee), a union opposition tendency linked to the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (LQB – Fourth Internationalist League of Brazil). The Rio teachers have just come off a determined strike lasting more than five months (21 weeks, 147 days), the largest and longest in the SEPE’s history. Their tenacity won important gains, including back pay for strike days going back to 1993, the election of school principals by teachers, students and parents, and the elimination of the high-stakes exams which teachers have refused to administer. However, some of the strikers’ key economic demands (including for a 30% raise) have not yet

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