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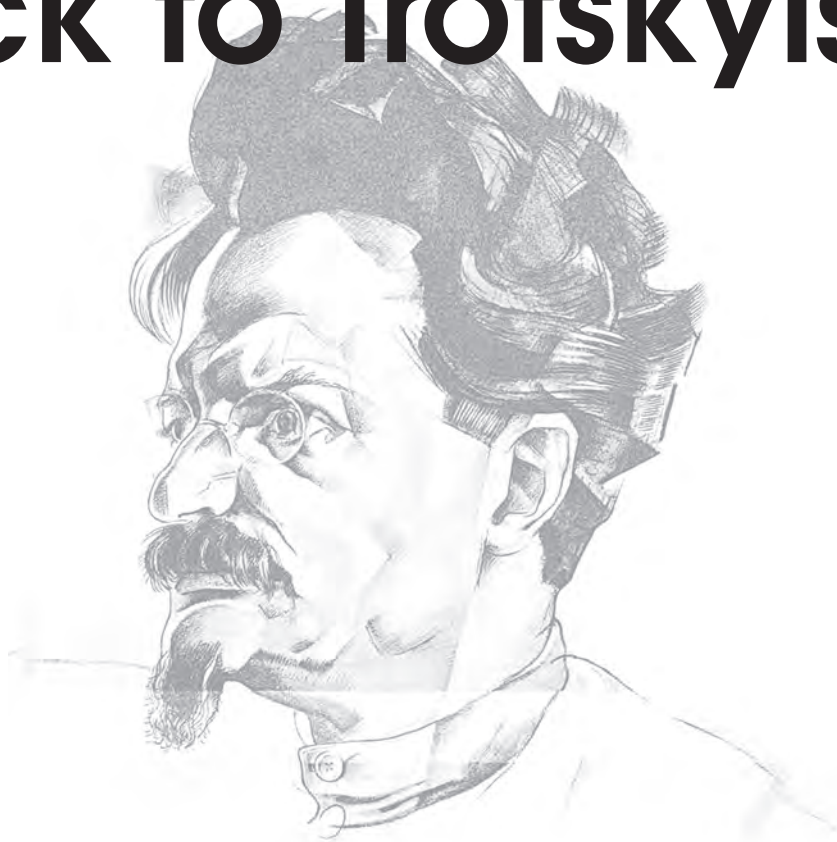
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# Internationalist



**“Better-Late-Than-Never Faction” Expelled by the Spartacist League/ICL ...**

## Back to Trotskyism!



**...For Calling to Regroup with the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International**

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## *The* Internationalist

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Front page: Portrait of Trotsky by Yuri Annenkov, from Anatoli Lunacharsky, *Revolutionary Silhouettes* (1923)

# Communism Lives ... Just Not in the SL/ICL

## SL/ICL: Haunted by Revolutionary Trotskyism

### Joint Statement of the expelled Better-Late-Than-Never Faction and the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth International

Zigzagging on fundamental programmatic questions, tripping over the class line and abandoning key principles of Leninism – in short, the centrist degeneration of what was once a revolutionary party – doesn't sit well with those who actually want to fight for socialist revolution. But engaging in an open and sharp debate with their own comrades who uphold the principles and program of authentic Trotskyism which that party once stood for is not in the repertoire of a leadership that has lost its moorings and confidence in the revolutionary capacity of the proletariat.

Over the last two decades, in the wake of the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and the East European bureaucratically deformed workers states, the Spartacist League and its International Communist League have sought refuge from the class struggle in an increasingly inward-directed, self-referential world of their own. At the same time the SL/ICL has revised, and re-revised, one plank after another of the Trotskyist revolutionary program it once championed. And incapable of defending its revisionism in the service of “pulling their hands out of the boiling water” of the class struggle, the latter-day SL/ICL has had to resort to ever cruder means to defend the indefensible.

In contrast, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International, founded by cadres expelled by the SL/ICL in 1996-98, have sought to carry the Trotskyist program into the struggles of the working class and oppressed. Despite its limited forces, the IG/LFI has made modest but significant advances in struggles ranging from workers strikes against imperialist war and workers defense guards in the strike at the National University of Mexico (UNAM), to winning youth and immigrant worker cadres to Trotskyism in struggles for unionization and against deportations and racist police terror.

On April 16, the Better-Late-Than-Never (BLTN) Faction of the International Communist League (ICL) put forward its Declaration of Faction calling to “Return to the Road of Genuine Spartacism” and to “Regroup with the IG/LFI on the Basis of *Their*

Revolutionary Continuity!” The very next day they received a response from the Spartacist League's Los Angeles local claiming that the document was “self-evidently composed in close collaboration with the Internationalist Group,” which was utterly false, and cynically saying “we consider your document a statement of resignation and hereby accept it.”

Comrades Ines and Wright fired off a “Letter to All Members of the ICL” refuting the lie of collaboration with the IG, noting that in order to wage a principled faction fight against the political degeneration of the ICL they had continued to abide by party discipline and did *not* make contact with the IG/LFI. “We are proud autodidacts who took on the task of researching and writing this factional document entirely by ourselves,” they wrote. “For the SL leadership to assert that this is impossible ... is to denigrate the intellectual and political capacity of the ICL membership.”

The ICL leaders' response has a certain perverse logic to it: since they have been spinning around endlessly, swinging from one position to its opposite on key programmatic questions and capitulating before virtually every major test in the last two decades, why should they believe that any among their members are capable of incisive Marxist thought? But perhaps concluding that the pretext for “resignating” the BLTN Faction was all too transparent, the SL then sent a second letter to the Faction explicitly expelling it for “organizational and political loyalty” to the IG. The parallel to the 1963 expulsion of the leaders of the Revolutionary Tendency (who went on to found the Spartacist League) by the degenerating Socialist Workers Party for having a “hostile and disloyal attitude” was hard to miss.

Only on April 22 did the Internationalist Group learn of the existence of the Faction when it first established contact with the IG five days after its expulsion from the ICL.

The platform of the BLTN Faction took the ICL leadership to task for their anti-Trotskyist revisionism in four key areas: “The Russian Question,” “The Class Line,” “The State” and the struggle to “Reforge

a Fourth International That Trotsky Would Call His Own.” It exposed how the party that had uniquely waged a principled and heroic struggle to defend the DDR (East Germany) and Soviet Union responded to defeat by dumping Trotsky’s analysis of the dual nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy and whitewashing the role of the bourgeoisie and its social-democratic agents in the capitalist counterrevolution. The new line, that “the Stalinists led the counterrevolution,” was concocted in the course of the 1995-96 fight leading to the expulsion of the cadres who subsequently founded the Internationalist Group, and codified in the ICL’s 1998 “Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program.”

As the BLTN Faction pointed out, the ICL cannot even claim originality. It picked up this line after hearing it again and again in polemics against the ICL’s work in the DDR by wretched Stalinophobes like the misnamed International Bolshevik Tendency and David North & Co. (d/b/a the World Socialist Web Site). The Shachtmanite and Cliffite renegades from Trotskyism used this line to mislabel the Stalinist bureaucracy a new exploiting class, in order not to have to defend the USSR against imperialism. The ICL waged the hard fight to defend the gains of the October revolution to the end, only to start whipping itself for doing so just 6 years later. While the ICL leadership acts as if this is an unending game of words, it is spreading a conception that politically disarms those who would actually fight for proletarian political revolution in the remaining deformed workers states, which is crucial to their defense against imperialism and counterrevolution.

ICL members should ask why this issue keeps coming back to haunt their tendency. First and foremost because, as the founder of American Trotskyism, James P. Cannon said in his 1939 Speech on the Russian Question, “Who touches the Russian question, touches a revolution.” Therefore, he counseled, “Be serious about it. Don’t play with it.” The ICL also continues to stumble over this cornerstone of Trotskyism because what came to be known as the “Norden fight” was really a fight over its own history. To embrace the new line meant to renounce the ICL’s fight against counterrevolution in the DDR and USSR, one of its proudest moments.

After all, on 3 January 1990, the ICL initiated a united-front demonstration together with the Stalinist ruling party, bringing out a quarter million people protesting against Nazi defacing of a Soviet war memorial and against capitalist reunification of Germany. As the Faction Declaration asked:

“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?”

The question has been asked before, but never answered by the ICL.

We encourage readers to study the Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction which is available on the IG/LFI web site ([www.internationalist.org](http://www.internationalist.org)). It wades through (with hip boots and a shovel, as Cannon said of polemics with Shachtman) the muck of lies, distortions and obfuscations the ICL leadership has thrown out to cover its own betrayals, starting with abandoning and stabbing in the back the comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil in their unprecedented struggle to remove police from the unions (which the ICL always called for but never tried to carry out). The ICL then falsely accused the LQB of suing the union when its comrades were the union leaders who were sued and removed by the courts. To this day, the ICL repeats the lies of pro-police elements who used the power of the bourgeois state against the Brazilian Trotskyists.

What was particularly impressive to the IG about the Declaration was how the comrades independently investigated key political differences between the ICL and the LFI. This included the question of corporatist “unions” in Mexico which are actually an agency of state control to prevent the rise of genuine workers unions. This heritage of the one-party regime that governed Mexico for seven decades can be difficult to grasp for those who have never experienced a system where virtually all social institutions were state-controlled. But for Mexican workers, and anyone claiming to provide revolutionary leadership, understanding this issue is literally a life-or-death question as the corporatist pseudo-unions have murdered hundreds of their own members in line with their social function of integrating “labor” organizations directly into the capitalist state apparatus. The Faction established that the current ICL line, treating these labor cops as genuine unions, flatly contradicts its own published line for a decade prior to the 1996 expulsions, when *Workers Vanguard* rightly described Mexican corporatist unions as “company unions on a grand scale.”

Similarly, while fighting the popular front had been the cornerstone of its Mexican section’s work from its inception in 1988 until the section’s leaders and youth militants were expelled in the 1996 purges, the latter-day SL/ICL imagines that claiming that there is not, never has been and cannot be a popular front in Mexico will help them discredit the LFI. Quite the opposite – by denying reality and their own past, in the end they can only discredit themselves.

Those in the ICL and others reading the Faction’s Declaration will be struck also by the fact



that the BLTN comrades began fighting on other issues, notably over crude distortions regarding the so-called “theory” of “white skin privilege,” with a leader of the L.A. Spartacist League incredibly claiming that, because white workers are the majority in the U.S., “in the aggregate” white workers are even “more exploited and miserable” than black workers.

The BLTN Faction also took up the issue of walking bosses (foremen who directly represent the shipping bosses) in the West Coast International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). The Faction took up the issue as the SL backtracked on its earlier position that walking bosses are management and therefore should not be in the union. After reading the materials from the Faction, investigating labor and SL archives on the ILWU and speaking with former activists in the caucus the SL had politically supported in the union, the IG, which had not studied the question before, concluded that the BLTN comrades’ position was correct. They upheld the class line against attempts by the SL to obscure it and promote class collaboration on the docks. This is no small matter in one of the most powerful and key unions in the United States.

It was only after hitting a brick wall in these earlier fights that the comrades who subsequently formed the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction began to dig deeper and investigate the possibility that the IG/LFI might be right in its analysis of the degeneration of the ICL. It is well-known among members of the ICL that the IG/LFI has repeatedly been right against their party, with the SL/ICL’s shameful support for the 2010 U.S. invasion of Haiti in the guise of earthquake relief being only the most egregious example.

After so many changes of line, often going back and forth on the same question, and admitted betrayals, it is impossible for a thinking SL/ICLer not to harbor nagging doubts. But many hesitate to study the LFI’s program and record – as the BLTN Faction boldly and frankly did – because they fear (rightly, as was just demonstrated) that their membership would be quickly terminated. In an organization which has gone to great lengths to be an alternative world for its members in their isolation from intervention in the class struggle, this is a daunting prospect.

The Better-Late-Than-Never Faction Declaration is a challenge to those in the SL/ICL who truly want to make a revolution. What the BLTN comrades discovered as they dug into one question after another, is that the program of the IG/LFI was already familiar to them in its fundamentals – it was the program of revolutionary Trotskyism they had embraced and thought they were fighting for. As the report on the

latest conference of the Spartacist League/U.S. (published in the 22 April issue of *Workers Vanguard*) makes clear, the SL is a dying party. Youth Commission “disbanded,” Labor Black Leagues “moribund,” *WV* to be cut back to 8 pages “in cases of emergency” due to a “paucity of resources,” etc. The references to up-and-coming youth leaders ring hollow when internally the leadership talks of having a Council of Elders to ensure against political wobbles (not much luck so far).

And how can young militants get a solid grounding in Marxism in an organization wracked by cliquism in the leadership, unable to orient itself, which will run against the rocks in any stormy class struggles? Lamenting that “even those who want to fight see little hope for change and lack any understanding of the central role of the working class in putting an end to capitalism” and “even less understand the need for a proletarian vanguard party,” the SL conference concluded that the organization’s central task “is to maintain the continuity of revolutionary Marxism today, i.e., Trotskyism.” That’s a tall order for a tendency that flips back and forth on the role of Stalinism, that can’t tell the difference between death squads and workers unions, can’t see an imperialist “humanitarian” invasion for what it is, and that has self-consciously exited the class struggle.

It is crucial to understand that the decline of the SL/ICL is a direct result of its political/programmatic degeneration. The proclamation of the supposed qualitative degeneration of workers’ consciousness is the SL/ICL’s embrace of the bourgeois false consciousness of the supposed “death of communism,” as a speech by SL spokesman Joseph Seymour makes clear (“Critical Notes on the “Death of Communism” and the Ideological Conditions of the Post-Soviet World,” in *Workers Vanguard*, 1 January 2010). The IG/LFI has opposed this “theoretical” justification for desertion from the class struggle from the start, understanding that the period following the victory of counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union and East European workers states has been a contradictory one, in which workers around the globe, and in the heartland of U.S. imperialism, continue to face class battles where revolutionaries must actively intervene. Only in the course of struggle can revolutionary cadre be forged, and only by fighting alongside the workers in struggle can the revolutionary vanguard demonstrate its capacity to lead its class to victory.

As for the Russian Question, which is at the heart of the Declaration of the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction, its defense of the Trotskyist position against

the ICL's wobbling neo-Shachtmanite revisionism is vital to fight the threat of counterrevolution in China, Cuba and the other remaining deformed workers states. Consider the response by SLers to the expelled Faction as it distributed its Declaration at May Day in New York City, where it marched with the IG/LFI. When confronted by the Faction with the question "Who led the counterrevolution in the DDR?" young SL members gave contradictory answers. One said it's "obvious" from empirical facts that "the Stalinists led the counterrevolution" while another argued that the wrong line that the Stalinists led the counterrevolution was "corrected" a long time ago. A more cynical ICL leader from Germany flatly refused to give an answer to the question "Who led the counterrevolution?" changing the subject after each of the three times the question was asked of her.

The Faction pointed out that this coexistence of counterposed positions within the ICL on the nature of the Stalinist bureaucracy was the result of a pseudo-correction in 2003 and the accompanying diversionary campaign labeling all discussion on this question as part of a "false fight," which the BLTN factional declaration exposed as a conscious fraud to prevent a reevaluation of the 1995-96 fight and expulsions, that represented a turning point for the post-Soviet ICL. With this level of confusion, the Spartacist tendency could never carry out today the crucial intervention, with all its shortcomings, that the ICL mounted in 1989-92. That alone is a guarantee that this badly degenerated party cannot lead victorious struggles in the future.

The SL/ICL is dead for revolution, and the sooner those who want to fight for revolution come to grips with that, the sooner they will be able to make their own contribution to the struggle for humanity's future. Many have put up with years of pulling their punches in hopes of strategically waging single-issue fights to gradually add up to reforming the ICL back to Trotskyism. Some have become demoralized after realizing that even the greatest mental gymnastics exerted toward that goal amounted to running full speed in a hamster wheel. The recent expulsion of the BLTN Faction demonstrates yet again the resolve of the leadership to keep internal oppositionists in their place – i.e. keep quiet or get out. Those who are fed up with the idea that they can only "succeed" through internal self-censorship and endless cliquist cannibalism, and want to exert their energy on actually building a revolutionary party to intervene in the real world, don't belong in the ICL, they belong in the LFI.

Carrying out our common perspective of revolutionary regroupment on the basis of authentic Trotskyism, on May 4 the BTLN Faction and the Internationalist Group/League for the Fourth Inter-

national adopted an Agreement for Common Work, which states in part:

"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 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."

Among other tasks we agreed to "Work together exploring further opportunities to win people from the ICL milieu to authentic Trotskyism."

James P. Cannon explained factional struggle as "a part of the process of building the revolutionary party," as a necessary "test of leadership." The revisionist ICL leadership rightly feared that they might fail that test, and thus bureaucratically maneuvered to avoid it altogether by expelling the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction forthwith. The leadership's momentary reprieve was secured, however, at the cost of blatantly exposing themselves as just as much of a strangled party as the degenerated American SWP. The Revolutionary Tendency (forerunner of the Spartacist League) was right to fight that degeneration, even though it led to their expulsion and meant they needed to start all over and build a new party from scratch. All those still in and around the ICL who are not too cynical to open their eyes and see should heed the battle cry of the BLTN Faction and join the fight for genuine Trotskyism. Better late than never!

13 May 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!

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 conference<sup>1</sup> 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*."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup>

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."<sup>4</sup>

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"<sup>5</sup> and "In the DDR, the Stalinist bureaucracy is the *driving force* for the carrying through of capitalist restoration."<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>3</sup> Trotsky, "The Class Nature of the Soviet State", October 1933 (our emphasis)

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> WV 495, 9 Feb 1990



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 us all.”<sup>7</sup> 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

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



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 other deformed workers states today. To fight against counterrevolution 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.”<sup>8</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> 16 June 2000 IS meeting, IDB No. 53, p. 58.

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."<sup>9</sup>

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."<sup>10</sup>

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 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."<sup>11</sup>

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."<sup>12</sup>

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

<sup>9</sup> "Anatomy of the False Fight and the Struggle to Reconstruct the Party", K., 25 Jan 2004, IIB No. 64, p. 77.

<sup>10</sup> "The Stalinists Were Not Just Passive, They Actively Sold Out the DDR", J., 30 Nov 2003, IIB No. 64, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> "Contribution to Post-Conference Discussion", Petersen, 1 Jan 2004, IIB No. 64, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> "Contribution to Post-Conference Discussion", Petersen, 1 Jan 2004, IIB No. 64, p. 97.

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."<sup>13</sup>

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

<sup>13</sup> "On Trotsky's Concept of a 'Reiss Faction' in the Soviet Bureaucracy", published in *Spartacist* No. 55, Autumn 1999.

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-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—strike-breaking 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 (ReForemenDisc3i15.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>

[com/watch?v=DRFPz8qsc1k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRFPz8qsc1k)

- Reuben's shameful intervention in the youtube video "At SF TWSC Forum Spartacists Concerned About ILWU Bureaucrats at Seattle Longview Solidarity Meeting" at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp78Pr1o\\_cc](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."<sup>14</sup>

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

<sup>14</sup> "Mexican Ford Workers Strike Against Starvation Wages", WV 629, 22 Sept 1995, p. 3



# 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

the tendencies inherent in imperialism."<sup>15</sup> WV 621 added:

"In Mexico, he [Trotsky] noted, the unions were formally turned into semi-state institutions, and even though this 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."<sup>16</sup>

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."<sup>17</sup>

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 dissention, police agents and antidemocratic tactics carried out by the government had resulted in the imposition of *charrismo* in the nation's most important industry."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay", Trotsky, 1940

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

<sup>17</sup> *Mexican Workers and the State*, Norman Caulfield, 1998, p. 96

<sup>18</sup> *Mexican Workers and the State*, Norman Caulfield, 1998, p. 98



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

"Secretary of Labor Manuel Ramirez Vasquez 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 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."<sup>19</sup>

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 Rodreguez 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!'"<sup>20</sup>

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."<sup>21</sup>

### 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

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

<sup>20</sup> *The Crisis of Mexican Labor*, Dan La Botz, 1988, p. 95

<sup>21</sup> "Mexico in Turmoil", WV 604, 5 Aug 1994



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

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.

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 ‘19<sup>th</sup> 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 weap-



ons, 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 '19<sup>th</sup> 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 "19<sup>th</sup> 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 crack-downs 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”<sup>22</sup>. 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

<sup>22</sup> “Readings for the GEM national conference”, Sacramento, 15 Feb 2016.

gle... 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 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". 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

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

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

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")<sup>23</sup>, to admit what really happened in Brazil would pull a key basis of the ICL's claim to being the revolutionary continu-

<sup>23</sup> See: "Abstentionism, Lies and (Somewhat) True Confessions – ICL Clueless and Gutless in the UNAM Strike", *The Internationalist*, August 2013

ity 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 (SFPMVR) 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 SFPMVR 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 desertion 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 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 purges<sup>24</sup>, 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.<sup>25</sup>

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-

<sup>24</sup> Buenaventura and Teodorico, "Letter to ICL Comrades", 16 Oct 1996

<sup>25</sup> 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

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

## 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.

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 ruthlessly 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”.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, <sup>26</sup> “Letter to Norden”, Seymour, 24 April 1996, *International Bulletin* 38, p. 97



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”<sup>27</sup>. 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
- “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

“Retgression of consciousness” is not a guide to action. It has become the ICL’s go-to excuse for keeping a “safe” .05distance 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 Britian”, *The Interna-*

<sup>27</sup> Memorandum of the ICL International Executive Committee, January 1996

*tionalist*, 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 fos-



ters, *unlike*, for example, South Africa.”<sup>28</sup>

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

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.

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! ■***

**To contact the Better-Late-Than-Never Faction,  
send an e-mail to [bltnfaction@gmail.com](mailto:bltnfaction@gmail.com)**

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

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

# Spartacist League

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

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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



# Spartacist League

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

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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



## 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.**

## Back to Trotskyism...

*continued from page 34*

the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union. While that certainly had an impact on workers' consciousness, although unevenly, it is the ICL, as well as other opportunist leftists, that has experienced the qualitative historic regression of revolutionary consciousness it ascribes to the working class. Is it the working class that has decreed that its struggles are no longer related to the final goal of socialism? No, it is the International Communist League. For those willing to take the trouble, go back and read the International Executive Committee thesis of January 1996.

We were not the first ones to experience the consequences of this political degeneration of the ICL. We certainly knew that the organization had become bureaucratized, but for a time we had a hard time grappling with this. With time, the accumulation of programmatic revisions – with the ICL's 2010 support for the U.S. imperialist invasion of Haiti being a big one – began to pull the pieces together. Meanwhile, the long-time cadres expelled by the ICL in 1996-97 went on to form the League for the Fourth International and have fought to build a vanguard in action of the proletariat. We are now joining with them, on the program all of us fought for. Over the years, although small, the LFI has grown with the class struggle, while the ICL has withdrawn from the class struggle and begun betraying ever more programmatic points of Trotskyism (not only in action or more often non-action, but also formally codified). The main line of the degeneration of the ICL has been capitulation to its own bourgeoisie and imperialist rulers:

- abandoning and betraying the fight to oust the police from the trade unions in Brazil (1996),
- dropping the fight against and even denying the existence of the popular front in Mexico (1997),
- the social colonialist position of dropping the call for independence for Puerto Rico (1998) and the French colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique (2009),
- dropping the call to defeat one's own imperialism (post 9/11, 2001),
- dropping the call for hot-cargoes military goods in wartime (2002),
- dropping the call for workers strikes against the war because “it has no resonance in the working class” (culminating in 2008), and
- the ICL's three-month-long support, which it vociferously defended, for the brutal U.S. imperialist invasion of Haiti (2010).

More recently, in Greece (2015), the ICL raised the call for an amorphous “government which will act in the interests of the working people and be subordinated to them.” This is the typical type of weaselly formula-

tion used by a myriad of centrist and reformist groups to call for support of a bourgeois government, which led to bloody defeats in Chile 1973 and during the Spanish Civil War and was the position of the Mensheviks in 1917. The ICL's de facto call for Grexit (Greek exit from the euro and the European Union) under bourgeois rule – even though Greece may be forced to undertake such a step – is hardly a revolutionary program, and could undercut the fight to unite European workers against capitalist austerity, to replace the Europe of bankers and militarists with a red Europe of workers councils, through socialist revolution continent-wide and beyond. Behind the ICL's fixation on this is its belief that such revolution is impossible today. The LFI fights for workers revolution inside or outside the E.U.

In another key conflict of recent years, the LFI has correctly insisted that the main enemy in Syria and the region is imperialism, which must be defeated and driven out, while warning that any alliance with the U.S./NATO imperialists is suicidal. Any real blow struck against the imperialists, including by the utter reactionaries of the Islamic State, is in the interests of working people around the world. But the fundamental character of the fighting in Syria and Iraq continues to be a sectarian civil war in which Trotskyists oppose all sides. The victory of one side or another in that civil war means a bloodbath of the conquered people. While the ICL gives military support to the I.S. against imperialism “and its allies,” the immediate targets of the I.S.' holy war are the Shiite, Yazidi, Christian and Kurdish populations of Syria and Iraq. To claim that a victory of the I.S. against the Kurds, with its inevitable bloodbath and return to 8th century oppressive social norms, would be a blow against U.S. imperialism is not only false but shows a callous indifference to the fate of neo-colonial peoples and women.

Internationalist communists fight for crushing all the Islamist armed gangs through workers action, looking centrally to the millions-strong Turkish, Kurdish and Egyptian proletariats. Militant sectors of the Italian working class engaging in sharp struggle against imperialist war can play a leading role in this respect 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.

The ICL's abandonment of the revolutionary program has had a direct effect on the Italian national terrain as well. The LTd'I now has the position that “after the collapse of the USSR, the working class did not conceive of any alternative to capitalist society,” and since a real general strike, not a four- or eight- or 24-hour stoppage plus a parade, would pose the question of which class rules, and since fake-leftists often call for general strikes as the antechamber to a popular front with sections of the bourgeoisie, it is wrong to call



for general strikes. To call this scholasticism would be a polite understatement. But when the working masses want to struggle against attacks by capital and pressure is building from the ranks, and when that pressure is being resisted by the bureaucrats terrified of the consequences, revolutionaries should put forward a program for full-scale mobilization of the working class leading to socialist revolution while fighting against attempts to divert the anger into a popular front. Not to do so in these circumstances means aiding the reformist misleaders.

A general strike (which the revolutionary syndicalists idealized) and even factory occupations are not a panacea, as the tragic experience of Italy's *biennio rosso* of 1919-20 showed. But they can be key steps to revolution. To prepare the working class to fight to win the battles already under way in these cases, it is necessary to put forward a transitional program of workers action leading to the formation of a workers government based on workers councils, the beginning of the socialist revolution. Revolutionaries call for workers defense guards, defense of immigrants, elected strike committees that could become workers councils, and an all-out general strike, along with other transitional demands. But the key to victory is building the indispensable revolutionary workers party, acting as a tribune of the oppressed, to lead the struggle forward.

Acting as a rearguard to the proletariat as workers are pushing forward to fight is not new to the ICL, but is typical of its overall retreat from the class struggle. One example really caught our attention. In December 2005 there was a crucial labor showdown in New York City, when the strategic and powerful TWU subway and transport union went on strike. The Spartacist League (U.S. section of the ICL) did not call for the strike before it happened and did not criticize the head union bureaucrat Toussaint during the strike in its leaflet directed to the union members. Later, when a critical reader questioned this policy in a letter published in *Workers Vanguard* No. 872 (June 2006) WV replied, "The leaflet did not directly attack Toussaint. Since we could not point to an alternative leadership of the strike, to do so would only have weakened the strike."

So according to the ICL, to criticize the trade-union bureaucrats during a strike weakens the strike! This is the logic of opportunists everywhere. Yet that leadership *sold out* the strike which had paralyzed the center of world finance capital, leading to a defeat in which the ICL with its pro-bureaucratic abstentionism was in fact complicit. Furthermore, the TWU is one of the very few unions where the SL has supporters, yet it says it "could not point to an alternative leadership." This is an admission that the ICL has renounced the fight for revolutionary leadership in the trade unions, a conscious policy. In contrast, every day of the strike the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the LFI,

distributed on the picket lines thousands of its daily strike bulletins agitating for class-struggle action (see *The Internationalist* articles at <http://www.internationalist.org/nyctransitstriketoc.html>).

While the ICL betrayed the fight to remove the police from the unions in Brazil in 1996, stabbing the comrades in the back and siding with the forces of the popular front to slander the struggle, the LFI helped continue the fight and fused with the comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brazil. While the ICL section in Mexico remained willfully passive during the historic UNAM university strike in 1999-2000, the tiny LFI group sparked the formation of workers defense guards to protect the occupation against police attack and grew significantly. After intervening in the revolt in southern Mexico (Oaxaca) in 2006 and other battles, the LFI's Grupo Internacionalista/Mexico now has four locals in different cities while the ICL section remains stagnant.

While the LFI in the U.S. agitated and worked for five years to bring about the historic May Day 2008 West Coast port strike against the war, the ICL did nothing to build it, confining its efforts to sneering at it after the fact. The LFI later fused with a group of working-class militants in Portland in 2012 who had played a key role in a port shutdown there during the brief upsurge of the populist Occupy movement. While the office-bound SL in New York has negligible public presence (perhaps it's too "busy" churning out internal bulletins about how youth cannot even imagine a socialist society today), the IG/LFI has been winning revolutionary cadres among immigrant workers organizing the unorganized, winning youth during mass protests against racist police murders, putting out a youth paper, and carrying out highly visible dynamic activity. The SL, in contrast, recently announced it was dissolving its youth commission and its Labor Black Leagues. But again, this all goes back to program.

### **A Program for Revolutionary Class Struggle**

The ICL, which claims that Trotsky's emphasis on the crisis of revolutionary leadership has become outdated, is incapable of providing such leadership today. Yet as sharp struggles break out in one country after another, from North Africa to Southern Europe, in Latin America, Asia and even the United States, yet go down to defeat one after another, it is clear that the raw material for revolutionary struggle is there. As capitalism spirals downward into barbarism, the centrality of reforging an authentic Trotskyist Fourth International is as crucial as ever. We want to contribute to that effort.

There is a profound crisis of capitalism mired in world-wide depression, which is bitterly felt and in front of the eyes of all. In the case of Italy most youth have little present and less future under capitalism.

With two-month and three-month contracts and the exploding use of “vouchers” where you are literally paid by the hour, a “permanent contract” is now for three years. Many work for free “to have something to put on their CVs” at an endless succession of degrading job interviews, where the few jobs are reserved for those with “friends in high places.” While a large and ever-increasing sector of pensioners now live in poverty, youth will have no pensions at all. While 10% of the population lives in absolute poverty, the South is abandoned to sink into ever greater immiseration, desperation and the deindustrialization of what little is left.

If life is hell for men, it's doubly hell for women who are the real backbone of “welfare” in this country of the Vatican. Significantly lower pay and pensions, massive unemployment, absence of availability of abortion services due to the “conscientious objector” clause (permitting doctors to refuse to perform the procedure), practically forced to say in job interviews that they will never have children, together with daily degradation, are routine parts of life for the female majority. Unpayable childcare costs and having to take care of the old and infirm due to the progressive dismantling of the medical system weigh down heavily. And then the bourgeois rulers blame women for declining birth rates!

Thousands of desperate refugees drown in the Mediterranean, or are left to silently die of cold and disease, incarcerated and deported back to face likely death. Meanwhile, Italy and its imperialist allies gear up for another imperialist war in Libya and elsewhere, like the imperialist massacre in Libya in 2011. While seeking to accelerate deportation procedures with the fast-track “Dublin III” regulation, the European Union seeks to push out newly arriving immigrants (who threaten to throw themselves into the sea). Meanwhile, the E.U. is beefing up its Frontex paramilitary immigration police and expanding the *lager*, concentration camps for undocumented immigrants, not only the CIE (Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione, the deportation camps) but also the CDAs and CARAs that supposedly are reception centers, but are beset by profiteers and racists.

Trotskyists fight for full citizenship rights for all immigrants. Amid the anti-immigrant frenzy whipped up by racist rightists, some opportunist “far left” groups, like the Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori (PCL – Communist Workers Party) of Marco Ferrando and Grisolia, limit their program to calling for *permesso di soggiorno* (temporary work permits) for immigrants (to be granted by the *questura* – the police – for limited periods of time) and an “end to racist laws,” although some local sections do raise the call for citizenship rights for all. The Partito di Alternativa Comunista (PDAC – Party of the Communist Alternative) of Francesco Ricci does raise this call in a list of reforms, but

does not link this directly to revolutionary action by the working class. For the social democrats of the International Workers League (LIT, followers of the late Argentine pseudo-Trotsky Nahuel Moreno), to which the PDAC belongs, “bringing down capitalism and constructing a socialist economy” means nationalizations and other measures leaving the capitalist state intact. Yet the democratic demand for full citizenship rights for immigrants has only been realized by revolutionary means, in the French Revolution of 1789-92, in the Paris Commune of 1871 and in the Russian October Revolution of 1917.

At every turn, defensive workers struggles and struggles for democratic rights cannot be won under decaying capitalism. There are great reservoirs of hatred and bitterness towards this capitalist system, on both the European and African shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and many who hate it desire a revolution. The ultra-rightist racist Matteo Salvini is constantly hotly contested in all of Italy. The SI COBAS (the Rank and File Committees Intersectorial Union) has carried out numerous strikes of brutally exploited immigrant workers (who are also a human bridge for the fight for proletarian revolution in their countries of origin) and Italian workers and has won some partial victories in spite of victimizations, threats of deportations and all-sided repression. It organized a national general strike against imperialist war including war on working people and immigrants here on March 18. But still the working class groans under the straitjacket of a sellout trade-union bureaucracy, which tries to eliminate all internal dissent, from the CGIL led by pro-PD (Democratic Party) bureaucrats to the FIOM (metal workers) union of Maurizio Landini.

Public workers have had their wages frozen for over six years and are carrying out a series of strikes and protests. Education workers and students are fighting against the cuts in public education and the “reform” which gives the school directors dictatorial powers and attacks trade-union gains. There is anger among the ranks of health workers over successive cuts, privatizations and increasingly impossible working conditions. ILVA steel workers in Taranto are waging a key fight for their jobs and safety. Students and youth repeatedly demonstrate for affordable quality secular education. To unite these struggles, it is necessary to fight for communist leadership in the trade unions and workers movement.

To overcome the sabotage of the trade-union bureaucracy and the division of the working class in different unions it is necessary to fight for the formation of elected and recallable mass strike committees or similar organisms that unite different sectors of the working class in struggle. In 1984 the workers councils formed in the course of an enormous struggle had the

potential to become soviets, the basis of workers power. But instead of waging hard-hitting working-class actions, the pro-capitalist PCI (Italian Communist Party), Democrazia Proletaria and others sold out the powerful movement for a meaningless popular referendum on the *scala mobile* (“sliding-scale” cost-of-living adjustment).

The historically politically advanced and militant proletariat in Italy has gone through two revolutionary situations and numerous powerful upheavals and revolts. But it has been constantly betrayed by its leadership. Following Italy’s defeat in World War I, in September 1920 at the culmination of a two-year virtual civil war, the proletariat occupied the factories, had control of much of the countryside and there were massive revolts in the army. The failure of any wing of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) to even try to take state power was paid for with over two decades of fascism.

Again at the end of World War II, proletarian revolt, centered in Turin, was decisive in bringing down the fascists. The PCI, with its Stalinist class-collaborationist theory of “socialism in one country” and popular-front program, sold out the revolutionary situation of 1943-48. With the *svolta di Salerno* (Salerno turn) executed by Palmiro Togliatti under direct orders of Stalin, the PCI disarmed the partisans and worked to prop up the Christian Democrats and Vatican.

Since then the PCI, Democrazia Proletaria, later Rifondazione Comunista, and their utterly fake “Trotskyist” tails (sometimes inside and sometimes outside of DP and RC), have constantly supported popular frontism, which subordinates the workers movement to the bourgeoisie. The present day PCL as well as the PDAC have pushed popular-frontist class collaborationist politics for decades. They only broke with RC in 2006 when it entered the Prodi government and Prodi demanded that Ferrando and Ricci not be candidates for the senate. These misleaders all supported anti-Soviet Polish Solidarność of the pope Wojtyła, Reagan and Thatcher; they deny that China is a deformed workers state that must be unconditionally defended against imperialism and the forces of counterrevolution, and they sided with the counterrevolutionary CIA-financed student occupation movement in Hong Kong in 2014.

While the PCL committed blatant class treason by supporting the bourgeois politicians Pisapia in Milan in 2011 and De Magistris in Naples, the PDAC calls China “the most barbaric capitalist country in the history of the world” and says “long live the revolution in East Europe, which overturned the Stalinist dictatorship” (and drove the population into desperate poverty and drastically shortened their lifespans). The PDAC supports the pro-imperialist

Islamist “rebels” of the Free Syrian Army. These pseudo-Trotskyists are in fact apologists for counter-revolution, imperialism and Italian capitalism. For all those many who justifiably feel betrayed by this lot of fake proletarian leaders – not least of which is the ex-PCI, which has been totally transformed into a bourgeois party headed by the tax collector for the rapacious EU bankers, Renzi – it is necessary to draw the lessons. It is necessary to forge a Leninist party by engaging in and mobilizing for the class struggle. We fight for:

- Strikes against imperialist war. Bring down the imperialist E.U. and NATO through Europe-wide class struggle leading to socialist revolution!

- Hot-cargoing military goods, like Italian train workers and antiwar activists did outside of Vicenza in February 2003 when they stopped a NATO war train.

- Integrated workers defense guards to teach the racist lynch mobs a well-deserved lesson. Down with racist Fortress Europe! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants and refugees!

- Organize the unorganized and fight for full trade-union wages for all, equal pay for equal work!

- Down with the “conscientious objector” clause! Free abortion on demand and free quality health care for all!

- Drastically reduce the work week at full pay to provide employment for all. Solidarity strikes across national borders are urgently needed.

- For a socialist united states of Europe! For the rebirth of the Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution!

Proletarian power will not come from bourgeois parliamentarism. The key question is revolutionary leadership. There is no “more human” capitalism. Either a Bolshevik party leads the proletariat to victory or we face complete barbarism that is already descending upon us. As Trotsky wrote at the founding of the Fourth International in 1938, “the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership.” This thesis, now declared outdated by the ICL although its validity is constantly confirmed, is the very reason the Fourth International was founded in a period of deep defeats for the working class, and why it must be forged anew as the world party of socialist revolution.

The present ICL is no place for a communist. For those in the ICL who may still want to be communists, we urge you to read and study the literature of the League for the Fourth International, as we did and in doing so recognized the genuinely Trotskyist program we were won to years ago. Politically, this is a life or death question for those who would be communist revolutionaries. Lenin once said that only idiots do not study both sides of a controversy. Don’t be an idiot. It is time to go forward with the LFI. ■



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# FORWARD TO REFORGE THE IV INTERNATIONAL WORLD PARTY OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

## Back to Trotskyism!

By Giulia and Carlo

11 May 2016

We declare our political solidarity with the League for the Fourth International (LFI), which is the continuation of Spartacism before it degenerated, and want to struggle to help reforge the world party of socialist revolution, the Fourth International. With 21 and 27 years in the Spartacist tendency respectively, we were the recognized leaders of the Lega Trotskista d'Italia (LTd'I), Italian section of the International Communist League (ICL), from 1993-1999. This period included the Prodi/Rifondazione Comunista (RC) popular-front government, which fell with RC's departure in October 1998 (due to the massive desertion of its angry base), as well as the imperialist massacre in Serbia which provoked large-scale protest and resistance in Italy. With the policy of proletarian political opposition to all popular fronts, based on the program of revolutionary Trotskyism the LTd'I doubled its size in two and a half years, set up a local in Naples, had contacts from Puglia to Switzerland, put the pseudo-Trotskyists on the defensive, and was successfully doing the concrete work to significantly enlarge the organization.

Then came the stab in the back from the ICL international leadership in 1999 which launched a two-year-long witch hunt against us, sent us to New York, liquidated the Naples local and completely sabotaged the work. The tremendous opportunity of significant growth was completely thrown away. The ICL reprimanded us for not bringing the understanding of the "new period" after the capitalist counterrevolutions in the Soviet Union and East European deformed workers states along with the new "qualitative historic regression in the political consciousness of the working class and left internationally" into the section. This was the ICL leadership's version of the bourgeois myth of the "death of communism" that swept most of the left, and which we failed to understand. Since we were forced out, over the following 17 years the LTd'I has been a moribund organization, an empty shell of its former self, lately publishing an issue of *Spartaco* once a year or so consisting overwhelmingly of translations and making no intervention in the class struggle.

In 1999-2001 we were subjected to a political witch hunt culminating in an International Control Commission "investigation" involving grotesque accusations of faking illness (cancer), making false "charges" against

the ICL leadership and hiding political differences. It was a hideous frame-up from start to finish. It is not just us saying this. A subsequent 2004 ICL "ICC Investigation Reopening October 2001 ICC Investigation" declared that "the findings of the October 2001 ICC were based on manipulated evidence and therefore cannot be considered valid." It went further, concluding:

"In simplest terms, the question is whether Carlo and Giulia were subjected to a bureaucratic witchhunt. The answer is yes, with the consequences that these comrades were treated with contempt and hostility, marked by pulling them from their assignments in Italy.... The record demonstrates that Carlo and Giulia's 'crime' was their refusal to agree to political conclusions and characterizations insisted on primarily by [the] then I.S. [International Secretariat] secretary, and backed up by other members of the I.S. and IEC [International Executive Committee], about their political views and the work of the LTd'I, which in key particulars were in fact gross exaggerations or outright falsifications."

Yet while the evidence was laid out in painful detail, the report concluded that "the damage done to the ICL by the bureaucratic abuse documented in this ICC is irrevocable." This might appear to be an honest coming to terms, but in fact it served to continue to cover up the abuse. Although this document was published in an internal bulletin over 11 years ago, we were never informed that the charges against us had been found to be false. It was only after we entered into contact with the LFI that we learned from them of the "reinvestigation of the investigation" and were able to read the incriminating bulletin. A striking fact is that the techniques used against us were so close to those used in the 1996-97 purge of ICL cadres who went on to found the Internationalist Group and LFI. But the most important thing to understand about the bureaucratic abuse and political cowardice is that it was the product of the latter-day ICL's abandonment of the authentic Trotskyist revolutionary program that for decades we fought for, and for which we are again taking up the struggle today.

### ICL Suffers a Qualitative Historic Regression of Consciousness

After three decades of upholding the revolutionary continuity of Trotskyism, the ICL drew defeatist conclusions from the world historic defeat that was

*continued on page 30*