



Trotskyism's Legacy Today

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Introduction

On 8 February 2024, the Internationalist Group and League for the Fourth International (LFI) held a well-attended forum in New York City, titled “Trotskyism’s Legacy Today: Which Way Forward? Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership and Perspectives for Reforging Trotsky’s World Party of Socialist Revolution.” The context of the event was the debate held the previous month between the LFI, of which the Internationalist Group is the U.S. section, and the International Communist League (ICL), whose U.S. section is the Spartacist League.

Today many millions of workers and youth recognize that capitalism is in an advanced state of decay, posing a deadly danger to humanity. Marxism has never been more relevant, more essential than it is now. Over a century of experience has shown that the revolutionary program of Trotskyism – built on the experience of preparing, carrying out and defending the 1917 October Revolution in Russia – represents the Marxism of our time.

This experience includes the struggle by Trotsky’s Left Opposition against the Stalinist bureaucratic degeneration of the world’s first workers state, defending Marxist internationalism

against Stalin’s anti-Marxist dogma of “socialism in one country,” the extension of the program of “permanent revolution” beyond Russia (where Trotsky first formulated it in the period of the 1905 revolution) to colonial and semicolonial countries, the struggle against fascism and against the class-collaborations “popular fronts” that paved the way for reaction from Spain in the 1930s to Indonesia in 1965 to Chile in 1973, and authentic Trotskyism’s defense of the Leninist understanding that a revolutionary vanguard party of the proletariat is essential to the fight against all forms of oppression and to the victory of socialist revolution worldwide.

Yet today, the large majority of groups that identify themselves as Trotskyist are political light-years away from what Trotsky, and the Fourth International that he and his co-thinkers founded in 1938, stood for. Among the topics this pamphlet addresses is how this happened. Connected to that is our discussion of the programmatic heritage of the Spartacist tendency, which waged a 30-year struggle to defend and advance authentic Trotskyism. Demoralized by the wave of capitalist counterrevolutions that destroyed the bureaucratically degenerated and deformed workers states of the Soviet bloc in 1989-91, the ICL underwent a major crisis (leading to the expulsion in 1996 of founding cadres of the LFI), and eventually a self-declared “collapse.”

This was followed in turn by a new leadership that soon set about openly junking ever-larger parts of the Spartacist heritage. For the LFI, that programmatic heritage is crucial for revolutionary struggle today – and we fight to bring it into the class struggle. For the “born-again” ICL, it is mere ballast to be tossed overboard as they try out one get-rich-quick gimmick after another. Back in 1996, the ICL put out a bulletin smearing us as “Shamefaced Defectors from Trotskyism.” Today the ICL’s defection from Spartacism is bold-faced (doubtless with more programmatic repudiations on the way).

While the ICL itself has become increasingly irrelevant, the political issues discussed in this pamphlet are very much alive, from the struggle to defeat imperialist war and to mobilize workers action in defense of the Palestinian people, to what the “permanent revolution” actually means, the Leninist approach to the fight for black liberation and against the oppression of women, and many other topics.

The first part of this pamphlet consists of the presentation and summary at the February 2024 forum by Abram Negrete of the LFI, edited for publication. Together with subheads, we have added footnotes, which readers are encouraged to consult for additional background on topics addressed in the text.

The pamphlet’s second part consists of materials related to the January 2024 debate, including the LFI speakers’ presentations, rebuttal and summaries.¹

¹ For the remarks of the ICL speakers at the debate, see the Spartacist pamphlet *Debate: The Fight for the 4th International Today* (2025), which also includes some of the interventions by supporters of both sides during the debate’s discussion period.

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December 2025



Trotskyism's Legacy Today

By Abram Negrete

Let's begin by describing the reasons for this forum and some of the topics it will address. It is titled "Trotskyism's Legacy Today" and will discuss what Trotskyism is, starting with the situation today and some basic points of the Trotskyist program. We will do this within the context of taking a look at what's referred to as the "world Trotskyist movement." This is a big and involved topic, so we'll be covering a lot of material this evening. For some, it's an esoteric subject – but not for us, as Trotskyists. It is important to look at basic aspects of the history of Trotskyism and at the current state of the political currents that lay claim to the heritage of the world party of socialist revolution, the Fourth International, which was founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938.

The League for the Fourth International, of which the Internationalist Group is the United States section, seeks to **reforge Trotsky's Fourth International**.¹ The specific context for this forum is the recent debate between the LFI and the International Communist League (ICL), represented in the U.S. by the Spartacist League. The debate, which was titled "The Fight for the Fourth International Today," was important for our organization, whose founders were expelled from the Spartacist tendency in 1996. In large part the debate was about what the basis should be for reforging the Fourth International.

Much revolved around what we of the LFI referred to at the debate as the **historic programmatic legacy of the Spartacist tendency**. Explaining what that means is a key goal of this forum. I see a lot of new people here tonight, which is great. I am going to ask you to bear with me, as some of this may seem a bit intricate. But our argument is that this legacy is absolutely essential to the struggle for socialist revolution today. To understand that, it's necessary to get into some of the basic history of the Trotskyist movement.

Socialist Revolution More Urgent Than Ever

What probably brings most people to an event like this one is an understanding that the existing social order has to go. Right now we are witnessing a genocidal war – a **U.S./Israel war** as we continue to emphasize – against the Palestinian people. Literal genocide has been advocated and is in the process of being carried out in this war, in which every bomb dropped on the people of Gaza comes from the U.S. imperialists. And this comes from the Democratic Party administration of Joe Biden. Meanwhile, as happens every four years with the Democratic candidate, he will be pitched to the U.S. population as purportedly the only possibility, the "lesser evil," the inevitable and necessary "choice," etc.

What does it mean to vote for the Democratic Party? The answer is one that we Trotskyists have insisted on since the inception of the Trotskyist movement – and before that, the original genuine socialist movement that gave rise to the Com-

¹ See the LFI's founding declaration, *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.



Alexander Buchman

Leon Trotsky in exile in Coyoacán, Mexico, 1940.

munist Party. The CP was founded right after World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, and out of it arose the Trotskyist movement in 1928. We have always insisted that the working class must give no support to the Democratic Party or any of its candidates. To vote for the Democratic Party is to vote for one of the two key parties that are pillars of the capitalist political system in this country: parties of war, in this case genocidal war, of imperialism, capitalist exploitation, racism and repression. The working class must establish its **own** class party, as we've insisted on all the way back to Marx.²

At the same time as the war on Gaza today, the U.S. and its imperialist partners in the war alliance called North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are carrying out a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. Revolutionary Marxists are for the defeat of the U.S./Israel war against the Palestinian people and for the defense of Gaza and the Palestinian people. We fight for workers action to stop the flow of arms to that war. To call on the imperialists to please cease being imperialists, to call on them to please be humane, and so forth, is to delude the working masses and the oppressed. It's necessary to use the

² See Karl Marx, "Apropos of Working-Class Political Action," September 1871.



Armed soldiers marching on the Kremlin in Moscow with banner reading “Communism,” 2 November 1917.

class power of the working class to stop the flow of arms to the U.S./Israel war on Gaza, to mobilize workers actions on an international scale to defend the Palestinian people. And we’ve been fighting for that – in Portland, Oregon, for example, supporters of the Internationalist Group succeeded in getting resolutions passed in some construction workers unions calling for labor action to stop the flow of arms to the war on Gaza.

In the case of the U.S./NATO proxy war in Ukraine, Trotskyists stand for the defeat of the imperialists and their proxy regime, and for the defense of those targeted by them. This means: to defend Russia, which is not an imperialist country, but is a capitalist regional power, whose government revolutionary Marxists give absolutely no political support to. However, Marxists must take a clear stand against the combined imperialist powers targeting a country for war in order to assert imperialist domination throughout the world. And as we have insisted repeatedly, the war in Ukraine by the U.S. and NATO imperialists is a stepping stone toward war against China.³

Despite the political rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy, which governs through the Chinese Communist Party – despite the fact that under its rule there has been a significant and dangerous penetration of capitalism there – China remains the state created

by a great, world-historic revolution: the Chinese Revolution of 1949. It is above all because of this, in other words because China is what Trotskyists call a bureaucratically deformed workers state, that since 1949 the U.S. imperialists have been driving to destroy this obstacle to their untrammelled domination of the planet.

The destruction of the Chinese deformed workers state by imperialism would be a terrible defeat for the world working class. Trotsky insisted that despite the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet workers state, the working class had to **defend the Soviet Union** against imperialism and capitalist counterrevolution. We upheld that in practice throughout the period leading up to the destruction of the USSR and Soviet bloc states (which we will be discussing in a little while), when almost all of the “left” refused to defend the degenerated/deformed workers states against capitalist counterrevolution. We said that the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and East Europe would be a terrible defeat for the world working class. And it has been. Yet today most “leftists” refuse to defend China against the imperialists.

Marxists stand for the military defense of all the states where capitalism has been overthrown, and for the working class to carry out a political revolution to replace the parasitic and nationalist Stalinist bureaucracies with proletarian democracy, the workers democracy of soviets – workers councils as in the first years of the Russian Revolution – and the policy of revolutionary internationalism. This means fighting to spread the gains of the revolution all around the world and, most

³ See “For International Workers Action Against the Genocidal U.S./Israel War on Gaza!” *The Internationalist* No. 72, January-May 2024, and “Defend Russia, China Against War-Crazed U.S. Rulers,” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022.



“Our politics must be working-class politics. The workers’ party must never be the tagtail of any bourgeois party; it must be independent and have its goal and its own policy.”

– Karl Marx, “Apropos of Working-Class Political Action,” 21 September 1871

decisively, to the dominant capitalist, imperialist countries.

What we have been stating and is becoming increasingly clear is that the U.S./NATO war in Ukraine is directly connected to their war drive against China – and this is stated, in one or another way, by military and political leaders of U.S. imperialism and its NATO allies. These events are part of U.S. imperialism’s drive toward a Third World War. Imperialism is inseparable from war, and unlike pacifists, social-democrats, Stalinists, etc., Trotskyists have always put forward Lenin’s explanation that the only way to put an end to imperialist war is through proletarian revolution.⁴

What’s In a Name?

“Trotskyism” is, in brief, the name of revolutionary Marxism in the modern era. Trotskyism upholds the program of the October Revolution of 1917. This was the seizure of power by the working class of the old Russian Empire in October 1917 by the old (Julian) calendar of Russia. By the Western (Gregorian) calendar, it was November 7, 1917. The Bolshevik Party, the revolutionary Marxist party of V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, led that revolution with the conception that it was to be the first of a series of revolutions spreading proletarian power

⁴ See “Only Socialist Revolution Can Defeat U.S. Imperialism’s Drive To WWII,” *Revolution* No. 20, September 2023; Trotsky, “War and the Fourth International,” June 1934; and James P. Cannon’s lively polemical pamphlet *The Road to Peace: According to Stalin and According to Lenin* (1951).

internationally, which would establish the basis for socialism. This was the essence of what the Bolshevik Party taught to the working class at the time of, and in the making of, the October Revolution. And it was the basis on which they formed the Third or Communist International in 1919.⁵

But this fundamental programmatic understanding came under attack with the bureaucratic degeneration of the workers state created by the Russian Revolution. Russia was, economically and culturally, a very backward country, already before the ravages of World War I. This backwardness was exacerbated by that first imperialist world war, which caused terrible damage and destruction to Russia. The war led to the October 1917 revolution – but then after that enormous victory, during the Russian Civil War (1918-22) the overthrown capitalists and landlords wreaked even more havoc and destruction on Soviet Russia. They did this with the support of at least 14 capitalist countries that invaded the country, among them the British, U.S., French and Japanese imperialists. They sought not just to isolate and encircle the workers state, which they did, but to completely destroy and uproot the Bolshevik Revolution.

These events are what lay behind the eventual degeneration of the Soviet workers state. It suffered a bureaucratic degeneration with the rise, not of a new ruling class, but of what Trotsky characterized as a parasitic bureaucracy sitting on top of the gains of October.⁶ The bureaucracy made as its banner the slogan that Stalin launched after Lenin’s death in 1924: “socialism in one country.” This completely anti-Marxist program became the central dogma of Stalinism. Against that, Trotsky fought for the program of world revolution, and, in countries of belated capitalist development, the program of *permanent revolution*.⁷

The Stalinists’ corollary to “socialism in one country” was seeking to find friends in capitalist countries’ governments, at the expense of the struggle for proletarian revolution. In line with this, they revived the old Menshevik program of “two-stage revolution.” This meant that in colonial and semicolonial countries there would supposedly be a first, bourgeois-democratic stage, and only then, after some period of capitalist development, could there be a second, proletarian-socialist stage. The Stalinists revived that Menshevik program and imposed it – to give a crucial example – on the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27. In April 1927 this led to a catastrophic defeat. In the course of the political struggle over this, Trotsky fought against the program of class collaboration, and generalized the program for permanent revolution, not two-stage revolution.⁸

⁵ See Lenin’s “Founding of the Communist International,” March 1919, and “The Third International and Its Place in History,” April 1919, and Trotsky’s “Manifesto of the Communist International,” March 1919.

⁶ See “Is the Bureaucracy a Ruling Class?” in Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1937) and Tom Kemp’s incisive “Class, Caste and State in the Soviet Union” in the Spartacist pamphlet *What Is Revolutionary Leadership?* (1970).

⁷ See Trotsky’s *The Third International After Lenin* (1928), Part I, “The Program of International Revolution or a Program of Socialism in One Country?” and *The Permanent Revolution* (1929).

⁸ See Trotsky, “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution,” August 1939, and the sections on this topic in the Internationalist pamphlet *What Is Trotskyism?* (2012).



Communist League of America marching on May Day 1934 in New York City.

Trotskyism as a set of ideas and as a program for struggle rests on the entire history of the communist movement. This goes back to even before the Communist Manifesto, and through the long series of events leading to the formation of the Communist International (“Comintern”) in 1919 and the key lessons codified in its congresses under Lenin and Trotsky. And it rests on the struggles of Trotsky and his co-thinkers beginning in 1923-24 (Lenin died in January 1924) to understand and come to grips politically with the Stalinist bureaucratization of the Soviet state as well as burning issues like the rise of fascism, first in Italy and then in Germany. The writings by Trotsky compiled in a book titled *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* are one of the most important conquests of revolutionary Marxism. These were part of his struggle for mobilizing the working class of Germany to smash the fascist danger and his warnings of what this danger meant for the Soviet Union, for the proletariat of Germany and internationally.

Trotsky and the Fourth International

These were some of the most important political struggles facing Marxists in the 20th century, and they continue to be crucial for us today. They go together with the experience of an entire series of struggles in one country after another during the lifetime of Leon Trotsky. He called for the formation of the Fourth International, World Party of Socialist Revolution, in 1933. This came after ten years of struggle by the Left Opposition that Trotsky and his co-thinkers had founded in Russia in 1923. It spread internationally in the late 1920s, a process in which U.S. Communist James P. Cannon played an important role, bringing Trotsky’s 1928 critique of the Stalinization of the Comintern to an international audience. This expansion led to the establishment of the International Left Opposition, which fought for years to reform the Communist International on the basis of Bolshevik internationalism.

But in January 1933, the Stalinist leadership of the Comintern allowed the Nazis to take power in Germany without a shot being fired. Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor (prime minister) by the so-called “lesser-evil” candidate, General Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg, the commander of the

German Imperial Army in World War I, who had been reelected president with the support of the social democrats. When the Communist and Social Democratic parties allowed Hitler to take power, and to begin his deadly rampage against the proletariat and the oppressed without resistance, Trotsky called for the formation of a new, Fourth International (FI). It took five years of struggle before the FI was founded in 1938. *The task of the Fourth International: to lead the proletariat in socialist revolution all across the planet.*

However, World War II began very shortly thereafter. Trotsky was

quite cognizant that a new world war was on the horizon when the FI was founded – and this is one of the reasons why its being founded then was so important. But during the course of that war, a very large proportion of the Trotskyist movement’s experienced cadres were killed. Many of them were killed by the fascists, many of them were killed by the Stalinists. In Greece, for example, hundreds of Trotskyists were shot, both by the Stalinists and by the fascists.⁹ A long time ago, I had the chance to meet a veteran Greek Trotskyist who told me about how he was shot on the streets of Athens during the

⁹ “We killed more than 800 Trotskyists” during the war was reportedly the boast (likely inflating the figure) of a member of the Greek Communist Party’s Political Bureau in 1947 (*Cahiers Léon Trotsky*, September 1985).



Cartoon from U.S. Trotskyists’ *New Militant*, 1935.

war. He was shot by some Stalinists and fell down on the street, but then he saw that a squad of fascists was approaching. He had to pick himself up and run off of the plaza where he was lying, because otherwise he would be finished off by the fascists.

In one country after another, the Trotskyists were either killed or imprisoned. The United States, being a very wealthy imperialist country, found it sufficient to imprison the leaders of the Trotskyist party, the 18 leaders of the Socialist Workers Party and of the Minneapolis Teamsters who had led one of the great general strikes of 1934. They survived and were able to provide some human continuity for the Trotskyist movement. But at the end of the war, the Trotskyist movement internationally, particularly in Europe, found itself much reduced, both in terms of experience and in many other ways. The death of so many key cadres was one of the things that made the movement more vulnerable to the challenges of trying to understand the situation after World War II. Many of the predictions Trotsky had made were fulfilled, but some did not come to pass. The Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy survived the war and found its international prestige significantly increased among big sectors of the working class because it was the Soviet Union that – despite the betrayals and crimes of Stalin – had defeated Nazi fascism, at the cost of an estimated 27 million Soviet dead.

Together with this, starting in the course of the war and then shortly after it, Stalinist rule actually spread to a number of countries. At the end of the war, the Soviet army liberating Eastern Europe from the Nazis – including Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany and other countries – meant the establishment, by military-bureaucratic means, of states that were qualitatively of the same kind as the Soviet degenerated workers state. So new *bureaucratically deformed workers states* were created by the Soviet army in a whole series of countries in Eastern Europe. This was very difficult to understand for many in the Trotskyist movement.

In writings by Trotsky collected in the book *In Defense of Marxism* (1940), he had provided analysis that was highly pertinent to these events that occurred several years after his death. But for many in the Trotskyist movement, the fact that capitalist states had been smashed, and states qualitatively the same as the Soviet degenerated workers state were created, was hard to grasp. So too, but even more so, when the same outcome resulted from a peasant-based revolution militarily organized by a Stalinist party in Yugoslavia.¹⁰ And then it occurred in 1949 in China, here too not through a proletarian insurrection but through a peasant-based war. In all these

¹⁰ See Jan Norden, *Yugoslavia, East Europe and the Fourth International* (1993).



James P. Cannon in 1945 in his first public speech after being imprisoned for the Trotskyists' internationalist opposition to the imperialist World War II.

cases it was crucial to apply the Trotskyist program on the "Russian Question," of *unconditional military defense* of the workers state against imperialism and internal counter-revolution, together with *proletarian political revolution* to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy, establish workers democracy and extend the revolution internationally. Only this could open the way to socialism.

Origins and Effects of "Pabloism"

Within the Fourth International's leading body, the International Secretariat (I.S.), a fellow named Michalis Raptis, who went by the name Michel Pablo, came to see these events as the wave of the future rather than the product of exceptional historical circumstances. Pablo had come to the fore during World War II amidst the decimation of so many leading cadres. In the postwar period he was the head of the I.S., and began putting forward a set of conceptions that posed the liquidation of the Trotskyist movement, with a methodology of tailing after the existing leaderships – whatever was the dominant leadership of the working class and oppressed in a particular country.

This meant tailing after the Stalinist Communist parties, in places where they were the mass parties of the working class, whose authority had been reinforced during the war by their role in partisan combats and underground struggles against the Nazi occupation. It is important to understand that the prestige of the CPs in France, Italy and Greece, for example, had grown substantially in light of the heroism of so many of their members during those years. In France, they became known as *le parti des fusillés*, the party of the shot. In Paris, plaques were put up in all sorts of places with the names of CP members who had been shot there during the war.

Pablo demanded that the Trotskyists not just adapt themselves to the Stalinist parties but actually join them in France,

Italy and elsewhere, to carry out what he called “entrism *sui generis*” (of a special type). This meant joining for an indefinite time, perhaps decades. In some cases they did just that, hiding their politics and seeking or hoping to push the Stalinist parties to the left. But the Pabloists did not just apply this to Stalinist parties – in countries where the social democracy was the dominant current in the working class, the Pabloists called for doing basically the same thing. In Germany, Pablo’s followers joined the Social Democratic Party – there weren’t that many of them, but some stayed in it for decades. They joined the social democracy in Austria as well. For what Marxists call colonial and semicolonial countries, where struggles for independence intensified after WWII, the Pabloists advocated tailing after and in some cases joining the parties and/or regimes of bourgeois nationalism.¹¹

What came to be called *Pabloism* can’t be understood as just this or that “tactic” in a particular time and place. It is a question of program that goes far beyond that. Pabloism’s systematic adaptation to an endless series of existing leaderships and non-proletarian forces meant liquidating the struggle for independent revolutionary Marxist, i.e., Trotskyist parties to lead the socialist revolution. It meant liquidating the Fourth International’s very reason for existence: to resolve the *crisis of revolutionary leadership* described in its founding program.

In the early 1950s, the Fourth International went through a crisis that led to a fundamental split toward the end of 1953, between Pabloists and anti-Pabloists. I encourage people to read more about it.¹² The forces opposing Pablo

¹¹ Pablo himself became an advisor to Ahmed Ben Bella, Algeria’s first president after it won independence in 1962, and a functionary in his government until Ben Bella was overthrown in the 1965 coup by his own army chief. This is detailed in Hal Greenland’s oddly titled but useful biography of Pablo, *The Well-Dressed Revolutionary* (2023).

¹² These events are discussed in depth in *Yugoslavia, East Europe and the Fourth International*, cited above, which also reprints the seminal article “Genesis of Pabloism” from *Spartacist* No. 21, Fall 1972.

in 1953, notably the U.S. Socialist Workers Party led by James P. Cannon, the majority of the FI’s French section, a group in Britain and some others, formed something called the International Committee. We will take up some aspects of it in a little while. On the other side of the split was the International Secretariat, led centrally by Pablo, together with Ernest Mandel from Belgium (who subsequently became Pabloism’s central figure), Pierre Frank from France and Livio Maitan from Italy.

The Second International historically betrayed the interests of the world proletariat in 1914, with its main parties’ support to their “own” ruling classes in the imperialist First World War. The Third International did so in 1933 when, under Stalin’s command, it (together with the Second) let Hitler take power without a shot being fired. But even under Pablo, the Fourth International did not commit a definitive and world-historic betrayal of the interests of the international working class. What *did* happen, in our view, was that in 1951-53 the Fourth International was destroyed as an organization. Its program, the “Transitional Program” written by Trotsky and adopted by the FI at the time of its foundation in 1938, remained and remains valid and crucial.¹³ The task is to “re-forg” the Fourth International.

Why the Term “Reforge” (the Fourth International)?

This is a good moment to explain why we use the term *reforge*. During the recent debate with the ICL, I noted that originally the Spartacist tendency, like some other organizations in the Trotskyist movement, had called to “reconstruct” the Fourth International. Most of you here know – and this was discussed a lot at the debate last month – that our organization came out of the Spartacist tendency, which for three decades upheld revolutionary Trotskyism. We were purged bureaucratically from it in 1996,¹⁴ as part of the political degeneration that has resulted in its current, very *ex-Trotskyist* politics, which were on display at the debate.

To get back to “reforge”: the 1970s the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency decided that *re-construct* wasn’t such a great term. Why? Because what many forces in the “international Trotskyist movement” meant by it was to take a piece from one tendency or group and a piece from another, and a little from over there, smushing them together, forgetting past differences and avoiding

¹³ Trotsky, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (“The Transitional Program”), Internationalist pamphlet (1997). Also see “In Defense of the Transitional Program,” *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998, answering the ICL’s revisionist “discovery” that the central thesis of the FI’s founding program – that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership – was supposedly no longer valid.

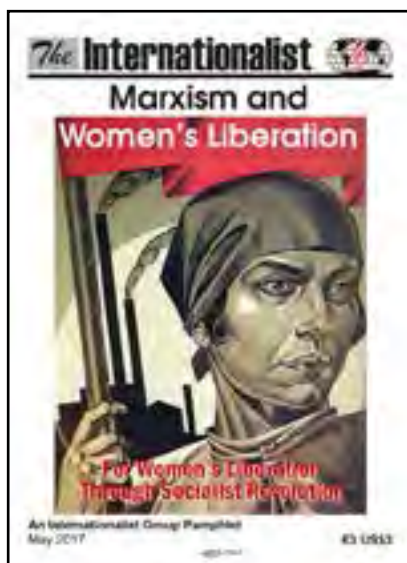
¹⁴ See *After Spartacist League Purges Leading Cadres, ICL Flees from Class Battle in Brazil: From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle* (1996).

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Ernest Mandel (left) and Michel Pablo

the hard confrontation and debate of crucial programmatic ideas. The result: constructing a political mishmash. And then their bloc would fall apart and the pieces would reorganize themselves again in – to change metaphors – an eternal game of musical chairs. This kept happening with a range of different “Trotskyist” currents – very much so in the 1970s.

Then, in the Spartacist tendency, comrades came up with another formulation: “For the *rebirth* of the Fourth International,” and we (that was “we” at the time) used that term for some years. But then someone pointed out that in German and some other languages, “rebirth” sounded religious, a bit like calling for the resurrection of the Fourth International. So comrades came up with the term “Reforge the Fourth International.” It refers to what you do when you forge a piece of metal, heating, hammering and transforming it into a tool. So it’s a concentrated effort in which you’re repeatedly heating it up, hammering away at it, transforming it – you’re reforging it. And that was the term we settled on and continue to use today, working to reforge the FI on the basis of *struggle for the revolutionary program* – in deeds, not just in words.

In part, what the need to reforge the FI reflects is the fact that the 1953 split in the FI, between pro- and anti-Pablo forces, was what we’d call a ragged split: it was uneven, unfinished and came later than it should have. The anti-Pablo forces grouped together in the International Committee did not sufficiently carry the political struggle through or really take it to the many sections of the FI that had been lined up by the Pabloists.

But it’s crucial to be clear that though not sufficient, the fight launched in 1953 was definitely necessary! In that split we emphatically take the side of the International Committee and of Cannon. He emphasized that the fundamental question at issue was that of the Leninist vanguard party: the indispensable need for an independent revolutionary Marxist party to

lead the working class to power – that there could be no substitute.¹⁵ You could not make some petty-bourgeois or reformist force take the place of the conscious revolutionary vanguard.

But in terms of the organizational divisions within the Trotskyist movement, or who ended up on which side, it really was a ragged split. For example, in Argentina the grouping aligned with the International Committee was led by a guy named Hugo Bressano, whose party name was Nahuel Moreno. And though he wrote all kinds of things against Pabloism, and called himself an “orthodox Trotskyist,” Moreno was carrying out essentially Pabloist entrism – not even into a reformist workers party but into the *bourgeois* nationalist movement of General Juan Domingo Perón (Argentina’s 1946-55 president).

Nahuel Moreno got to the point where the paper he published starting in the mid-1950s, *Palabra Obrera* (Workers Word), proclaimed itself to be “under the discipline of General Perón and the Peronist Supreme Council.” So he was helping the bourgeois nationalists tie the combative working class of Argentina to the bourgeois state.¹⁶ The many branches of the “Morenoite” current today bear the imprint of his deep-going opportunism and maneuverism.

In Bolivia, there were dedicated and courageous cadres, including very impressive cadres in the miners union, in both the pro-Pablo group and the group led by Guillermo Lora, which in its own idiosyncratic way claimed to be anti-Pabloist, but at key moments pursued a Menshevik line that contributed to terrible defeats for the heroic workers of Bolivia. Another example: there was a very courageous group of Trotskyists in Cuba, mainly workers, called the Revolutionary Workers Party, that participated in important struggles in the early period of the revolution. They were fighting for proletarian democracy, for the spread of the revolution, for a range of things we consider correct (as well as some we would not).

Those comrades in Cuba wanted to fight for Trotskyism, but they were on the other side from the International Committee. They had found themselves aligned with the Pablo forces and then with the man who had been Pablo’s lieutenant in Latin America: a colorful and eccentric figure called Juan Posadas. So in some key ways, what they wanted politically and where they found themselves organizationally were in contradiction. They were repressed by the bureaucracy in Cuba; their printing presses were seized, the typesetting for Trotsky’s book *The Permanent Revolution* was smashed; several of them were

¹⁵ As Cannon stated in November 1953: “The essence of Pabloist revisionism is the overthrow of that part of Trotskyism which is today its most vital part – the conception of the crisis of mankind as the crisis of the leadership of the labor movement summed up in the question of the party” (“*Factional Struggle and Party Leadership*”).

¹⁶ See the *Moreno Truth Kit* published by the Spartacist tendency in 1980.

imprisoned. The Spartacist tendency vigorously defended them, while the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) remained silent and subsequently echoed the pretexts for their repression.¹⁷ In a moment we'll be talking more about the SWP as well as the origins of the Spartacist tendency.

These are examples of the "raggedness" of the 1953 split in the FI and how the fight against Pabloism was incomplete. I urge you to read our materials on it, as there's much more to say. Within the limits of this talk we've touched on just some aspects of that struggle and how it relates to the challenges posed by the essential and arduous task of reorganizing the Fourth International. Of course much has changed since 1953 – for starters, the Soviet workers state was destroyed in the early '90s.¹⁸ And the crisis of revolutionary leadership is even *more* extreme today. That means that the struggle to resolve that crisis, on the basis of the genuine Trotskyist program, not only remains the central task for revolutionaries, but is even more urgent.

Ex-Trotskyists' Social-Democratization

At this point I'm going to jump ahead to the present-day state of the so-called Trotskyist movement ("so-called" because most of it isn't actually Trotskyist), before going back to the origins of the Spartacist tendency, whose programmatic legacy we consider so crucial.

There's a lot to say about contemporary groups that identify themselves as Trotskyist – though in another sense there isn't, because unfortunately there's not much there for revolutionaries. Overwhelmingly, the groups that call themselves Trotskyist today are in an advanced state of social-democratic rot. Over the decades their actual politics became increasingly distant from what Trotsky fought for, though some still claim to have some connection to the Fourth Internationalist legacy. That is a real problem, as it means discrediting the very name of Trotskyism, including among sectors of workers and youth interested in revolutionary politics. What accounts for this situation?

To understand what happened we have to take into account, first, the result of decades of tailism by the Pabloists, who were led by Ernest Mandel from the early '60s on, after Pablo himself moved on to other pursuits. To this we must add the trajectory of most of those who proclaimed themselves anti-Pabloists. In both cases, these currents moved further and further away from the Trotskyist program, as they passed through centrism (vacillating between revolutionary and opportunist politics) into outright reformism.

In 1963, the "United Secretariat of the Fourth International" (USec) was formed through the reunification of the followers of Pablo/Mandel and of the SWP, which had been the Trotskyist party in the U.S. The reunification's basis was common support for the strategy of peasant-based guerrilla warfare, together with uncritical political support to Fidel Castro's government in Cuba. That meant not just the abso-

¹⁷ See *Bolivia's Radical Tradition: Permanent Revolution in the Andes*, by S. Sándor John (2009); "Freedom for Cuban Trotskyists," *Spartacist* No. 3, January-February 1965; "In Defense of the Cuban Trotskyists" in *Cuba: A Bureaucratically Deformed Workers State*, Internationalist pamphlet (2010).

¹⁸ See *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*, Internationalist pamphlet (2013).

lutely essential intransigent defense of the Cuban Revolution against imperialism, but political support to the governing bureaucracy. And here it's crucial to get the basic Marxist *distinction between military defense and political support*.

By the time the USec was founded, Cuba had consolidated as a bureaucratically deformed workers state.¹⁹ In Algeria in basically the same period, the guerrilla struggle had resulted in independence (1962), an important defeat for imperialism, but in the form of a reconstituted *bourgeois* state under the nationalist FLN (National Liberation Front), which was also politically supported by the USec at that time. (We will be talking more about the guerrilla warfare strategy.)

So the USec was formed in 1963 on the basis of tailing the growing popularity, at the time, of guerrillaism and of nationalist and Stalinist leaderships in what was then widely called the "Third World." But a few years later, with guerrillaism failing catastrophically from Bolivia to Argentina to the Congo, the winds were changing. By the early 1980s, "popular front" coalitions of class collaboration were moving toward electoral victory, notably in France, where the USec had its largest section. Soon the Mandelites were openly tailing the social democracy, as were the other fairly large "Trotskyist" groups in France. The same was the case with the large majority of their respective co-thinkers in other countries. In fact these tendencies, in terms of their actual politics, were themselves becoming more and more social-democratic.

Afghanistan, Poland, Iran

This really came to a head for these groups in 1979 with the deployment of Soviet troops against counterrevolutionary forces in Afghanistan, which were backed and armed by the U.S.,²⁰ a topic we will return to. While the USec had various

¹⁹ See the above-mentioned pamphlet *Cuba: A Bureaucratically Deformed Workers State* and *Cuba and Marxist Theory, Marxist Bulletin* No. 8 (1973).

²⁰ See "Imperialist Frenzy Over Afghanistan: Hail Red Army!" *Spartacist* No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80, and "Afghanistan and the Left: The Russian Question Point Blank," *Spartacist* No. 29, Summer 1980.



Wojtek Laski / Getty Images

Polish nationalist Solidarność leader Lech Wałęsa is greeted in the Vatican by Pope Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), the Polish pope of counterrevolution, 14 January 1981.



The brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship of Shah Pahlevi in Iran was overthrown by what many leftists hailed as the Iranian Revolution. This installed a theocratic dictatorship, led by Ayatollah Khomeini (shown in poster in 1 January 1979 demonstration in Tehran) that imposed the veil, persecuted ethnic minorities, jailed tens of thousands of leftists and murdered hundreds. The Spartacist tendency uniquely said, “Down with the shah, No to Khomeini!”

factions and groupings, they basically all howled with the imperialist wolves condemning the Soviet action against the ultra-reactionary forces that rose up against even minimal land reform and rights for women, and were armed and fulsomely backed by U.S. imperialism as part of going after the USSR in a new Cold War.

It was the Spartacist tendency that went against the stream on this and so much more, as we will see. In the next part of this forum, we’ll be talking more about what the Spartacist tendency itself put forward at the time, on all these questions, where it came from and what it stood for.

But first I want to briefly outline some other events from this period. In Europe, the USec and other supposed Trotskyists called to vote for the imperialist social democrats François Mitterrand (elected president of France in 1981), a key figure in the anti-Soviet war drive, and Felipe González (elected prime minister of Spain in 1982). In France, another sizeable group, headed by Pierre Lambert, was especially zealous in its support. (The Lambertistes had helped found the International Committee in 1953 but had become one of the most rightist tendencies claiming to be Trotskyist.)

As the imperialists’ Cold War drive heated up even more in 1980-81, the range of pseudo-Trotskyists went all-out with a frenzy of adulation and public relations (and in some cases very real material support) for the clerical-nationalist Solidarność (Solidarity) movement in Poland, led by Lech Walesa. This was the favorite so-called “union” backed by the most virulent, vicious union-busters in the world, U.S. president Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, and blessed, sanctified and sprinkled with holy water by the counterrevolutionary, anti-woman, anti-communist, anti-progress

pope Karol Wojtyła (a/k/a John Paul II).²¹

So by the time we get to the early 1980s, the United Secretariat is pursuing a virulently anti-communist position in sync with the mainstream social democracy. And so were most currents that had historically identified as being opposed to Pabloism. Moreover, this was one of the antecedents for them backing Boris Yeltsin’s forces in the 1991-92 capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the USSR, which had been undermined by decades of Stalinist misrule.²² It is a very sorry picture indeed, utterly counterposed to Trotsky’s position on the Russian Question, which he considered fundamental.

The way had also been paved by their terrible and deadly tailism over Iran in 1978-79. Like the Maoists and so many others on the left, almost all the organizations claiming to be Trotskyist outdid themselves with enthusiasm for what they hailed as the Iranian Revolution, which was led by the clerical caste headed up by the Ayatollah Khomeini. While overthrowing the brutal U.S.-backed Shah of Iran, Khomeini’s forces vowed to exterminate Marxism, to forcibly impose the veil on women, to crush homosexuality, to crush the Kurds, the Azeris, members of the Arab-speaking minority, if they did not obey the diktats of the Persian-chauvinist theocracy. When Khomeini won, he and his followers violently moved to carry through these threats. Militant oil workers, many of them Arab, had gone on strike in 1978-79, but were subordinated to Khomeini by their leaders, who were largely from the Stalinist Tudeh Party. Leftists from virtually all tendencies (including the pseudo-Trotskyist groups), were imprisoned and in many cases executed by Khomeini, despite their support to him.²³

France and Argentina

All of these experiences pushed the majority of the ostensibly Trotskyist movement very far – qualitatively far – to the right of actual Trotskyism, light years away from it in political terms. In France, historically considered a kind of capital of world Trotskyism, the former supporters of Pablo and Mandel are today in something called the New Anti-Capitalist Party, a thoroughly reformist electoral vehicle (which recently split into two completely reformist groups). Then there’s the current we have mentioned known as the Lambertistes, which historically identified as anti-Pabloist but had deep political problems

²¹ See *Solidarność: Polish Company Union for CIA and Bankers*, Spartacist pamphlet (1981). As “solidarity with Solidarność” was all the rage, the Argentine Morenoites adopted the Solidarność symbol for the masthead of their newspaper, as did the USec-aligned Socialist Action group in the U.S.

²² See “Cheerleaders for Counterrevolution,” in *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled*.

²³ “SWP/USec Criminal Tailism in Iran,” *Spartacist* No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80.

going back a long way. For decades it helped run the rightmost of the large union federations, Force Ouvrière, and it became a kind of adjutant to the Socialist Party of Mitterrand et al. Then there is a relatively large, politically idiosyncratic organization called Lutte Ouvrière (Workers Struggle), with some thousands of supporters, many of them trade-unionists. It's a serious, but economist, deeply electoralist and in reality reformist organization, despite the ritualized speeches about communism its candidates give on ceremonial occasions.

I'll very quickly mention Argentina, which has a number of sizable groups claiming to represent Trotskyism. At one point the main one was the organization built by Nahuel Moreno, which in the early 1980s called itself Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS – Movement Toward Socialism). His group adopted that name, signaling its thoroughly reformist political basis, as it sought an electoral breakthrough after the Argentine military junta fell in 1982 due to its defeat in the war over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands. When Moreno died, his tendency split into many fragments, deeply imbued with the maneuverism and scorn for Marxist principles for which he was notorious. “Morenoite” groups in other countries divided accordingly or faded away. In Argentina today, ostensibly Trotskyist groups, including several derived from the MAS plus another very electoralist group called the Partido Obrero (Workers Party), are glommed together in a permanent electoral bloc called the United Left and Workers Front.²⁴

Most prominent is the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (Socialist Workers Party), which runs an international grouping with the somewhat peculiar name “Trotskyist Fraction” (Fracción Trotskista). Here in the U.S., they have a small group of followers called Left Voice (LV). It's a kind of walking embodiment of what opportunism looks like when you try to be opportunists but your gimmicks don't work so well, because you don't have the sort of opportunities that might exist in some other countries. There's plenty to say about the FT, but I wanted at least to mention them here. They sometime present a more leftist image, but as our youth comrades have repeatedly experienced in microcosm locally with LV,²⁵ we're talking about a deeply unprincipled current. While claiming to have transcended Morenoism, the FT keeps replicating a view of politics as one opportunist maneuver after another. We see that writ larger with their group in Mexico (which we've known up-close since its inception in the 1980s), in Bolivia, Brazil, France, etc., as well



Senator Joe McCarthy together with his chief aide Roy Cohn (left) during witch-hunting hearings about “communist influence in Hollywood,” August 1953. McCarthyism took its toll on the SWP.

as Argentina.

I hope that quick, very partial overview of some of the “Trotskyist” groupings was helpful – we will be returning to some of these topics.

Origins of the Spartacist Tendency

What I want to talk about now was a centerpiece of the LFI-ICL debate in January: what is the fundamental program on which the Fourth International can and should be reformed? As we emphasized there, we of the LFI hold that the *historic programmatic legacy of the Spartacist tendency* is crucial for that task. In order to understand why, we need to explain what is meant by “the Spartacist tendency.”

In the last roughly two decades of Trotsky's life, his supporters in the U.S., particularly James P. Cannon, became important collaborators with him in the struggle to uphold and advance the program of Marx and Lenin. The U.S. Trotskyist organization, which by the late 1930s was called the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), was not only one of the largest sections of the Fourth International, but one of the relatively few whose leaders went back to the foundation of the Communist Party during Lenin's lifetime. Some went even further back, such as Cannon, who had been part of the Industrial Workers of the World and the left wing of the Socialist Party.

The SWP in its prime, as part of the international movement, was a very important resource for Trotskyism internationally, in terms of its experience, history and participation in the labor movement,²⁶ its role in publishing Trotsky's writings, etc. Yet after Trotsky's assassination in 1940, and with the

²⁴ “The Left Front in Argentina: A Reformist Electoral Cartel,” *The Internationalist* No. 55, Winter 2019.

²⁵ See, for example, “Why History Matters in the Fight for Abortion Rights,” *Revolution* No. 19, September 2022, and “Real Reds Don't Bow to Anti-Communist Bans,” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2021.

²⁶ See Bryan D. Palmer, *Revolutionary Teamsters: The Minneapolis Teamsters' Strikes of 1934* (2013), and *James P. Cannon and the Emergence of Trotskyism in the United States* (2021).

onset of World War II, the SWP – despite some truly heroic efforts – did not do as much as it should have to help lead the FI. Partly this was due to negative experiences Cannon had had when trying to help resolve problems in the French section before the war.²⁷ Nonetheless, the SWP, which had experienced significant recruitment during World War II, came out of the war quite confident and hopeful about the prospects for proletarian revolution.

Very quickly, however, the anti-Soviet Cold War began, bringing major consequences for the entire left and workers movement. The McCarthyite witch-hunt took off – though the witch hunt was not actually begun by Joseph McCarthy, the right-wing Republican Senator from Wisconsin. It was started in large part by the Democratic Party, notably by people like the Minnesota senator [and future vice president under Lyndon Johnson] Hubert Humphrey.²⁸ The witch hunt against reds and suspected reds was carried out in unions, universities, black organizations, legal defense and civil liberties organizations, cultural institutions, in music, in film, in just about everything. I recommend watching a very good documentary called *Scandalize My Name* (1999), on how McCarthyism targeted black actors, musicians and artists.

The witch hunt had a devastating effect on the SWP, as it did on the rest of the left. The SWP dwindled and experienced terrible isolation. This began to be broken when the so-called “Cold War consensus” in U.S. society started to crack in the late 1950s and early ’60s, under the impact of the civil rights movement.

Then, with the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the aging cadres of the SWP, in their majority, went along with the SWP leadership’s decision to uncritically embrace the Fidel Castro leadership of the revolution. This went together with their push, formalized when the USec was founded, to incorporate into the program of the Trotskyist movement the strategy of peasant-based guerrilla war. In other words, a strategy based not on the *proletariat* as the revolutionary class, but instead on seeking to replicate the military success of Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement throughout Latin America and other parts of what New Leftists and others called the Third World. People should consult the historic materials on these topics that we’ve compiled and published.²⁹

The strategy of guerrillaism was a *recipe for terrible defeat* for thousands of courageous and admirable young people who tried to put it into effect.³⁰

²⁷ See “James P. Cannon,” *Spartacist* No. 38-39, Summer 1986, as well as “Genesis of Pabloism.”

²⁸ See the classic *WV* (*Workers Vanguard*) article “Humphrey Dead at Last,” *WV* No. 189, 28 January 1978.

²⁹ See “Guerrillas in Power,” “For Workers Political Revolution in Cuba” and related materials in *Cuba: A Bureaucratically Deformed Workers State*, as well as *Cuba and Marxist Theory*.

³⁰ The Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP, which is discussed further below, warned against this in its resolution “Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International,” submitted to the SWP’s 1963 conference and reprinted in *Spartacist* No. 1, February-March 1964. On some results of the USec’s pro-guerrillaist line, see the memoirs of one of its foremost promoters, the late Daniel Bensaïd, *An Impatient Life* (2015), particularly the chapter titled “Crying for Argentina,” as well as the “Cold War Calculus” chapter in *Bolivia’s Radical Tradition*.



WSWS

From left: James Cannon, Martin Abern and Max Shachtman in New York, 1938. Two years later Shachtman broke from Trotskyism, refusing to defend the USSR in World War II.

The “Russian Question” and Hungary 1956

Within the SWP, there was a group of young Marxists who had founded what became the party’s youth organization, the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA). The core of the YSA leadership had originally been young followers of a fellow named Max Shachtman. Before going into this, let’s talk briefly about him. Shachtman had been a prominent publicist of Trotskyism up until the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, when – adapting to intellectual fellow-travelers in the New York leftist milieu particularly – he threw into the garbage basically everything that he as a Trotskyist had been upholding on the Russian Question. Precisely at the moment that defending the Soviet Union against his “own” imperialist ruling class was posed most critically, he suddenly stated that the working class should no longer defend the USSR.³¹

Then on June 22, 1941, Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and launched Nazi Germany’s Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Shachtmanites declared a plague on both houses, supposedly – in a war between Hitler’s

³¹ On the crucial 1939-40 struggle against the anti-Soviet SWP minority led by Shachtman and James Burnham, see Trotsky’s *In Defense of Marxism (Against the Petty-Bourgeois Opposition)* (1942) and Cannon’s *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1943).

Germany and the USSR, a workers state which though bureaucratically degenerated was still one of the greatest conquests of the world's working class. Shachtman's adaptation to liberal imperialist opinion in 1939 brought outright renegacy. To justify all this he eventually put forward a nonsense theory that the Soviet bloc was a new kind of society ("bureaucratic collectivism") and the Stalinist bureaucracy was actually a new kind of ruling class, even though its members did not own the means of production.

Nonetheless, in the post-WWII period Shachtman's group attracted some young leftists, including a few who had been in the Communist Party. And a group of them broke with the Shachtmanites in the late 1950s, in large part due to the experience of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. As we've noted, Trotsky had put forward the need for the working class to carry out what he called a *political revolution* in the USSR. He stated that the governing Stalinist bureaucracy was contradictory, having a dual nature: it was parasitic upon, and betrayed, the conquests of the October Revolution, but at the same time, it lived off of those conquests and was sometimes constrained to defend them, albeit in its own contradictory way. All this within the context of its anti-revolutionary politics and anti-Marxist dogma of "socialism in one country," which went together with the "popular fronts" of class collaboration it promoted abroad.

Trotsky held that under the impact of social crisis and polarization, the Stalinist bureaucracy would act not like a ruling *class*, but like the unstable and contradictory *caste* that it was. This was put to the test in Hungary in 1956, when the mass of workers rose up against the very despotic Stalinist regime there and established workers councils – which in Russian are called *soviets*. These Hungarian workers councils said: we will never give back the property that the working class built in this country, the state property coming from the expropriation of the landlords and capitalists, from the defeat of the Horthyite fascists and Nazi occupiers.³² This belongs to

³² Admiral Miklós Horthy became dictator of Hungary as a result of his leading role in the counterrevolution that overthrew the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919. Supporting Adolf Hitler's "crusade against Bolshevism," he brought Hungary into the Axis in World War II. In 1944 Hungary was occupied by Nazi Germany, which was defeated by the Soviet Red Army the following year. Peter Fryer's historic account of 1956, *Hungarian Tragedy*, quotes a worker from the Csepel industrial center: "The West should not believe that the workers fought to bring back Horthy or the landowners and counts. We shall not give back the land or the factories or the mines." After Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev sent a new wave of troops in November 1956 to suppress the uprising, a key declaration of the Greater Budapest workers council stated: "We declare our unshaken loyalty to the principles of socialism. We regard the means of production as collective property which we are at all times ready to defend."



Workers view toppled statue of Stalin during 1956 Hungarian Revolution against Stalinist bureaucratic rule. Insurgents vowed to defend collectivized property and fight for genuine socialism.

the working class and we will fight to defend it, because we are fighting for genuine socialism.

So faced with the workers uprising, the Stalinist bureaucracy split. When the chief of police of Hungary's capital city, Budapest, a fellow called Sándor Kopácsi, was sent by the Stalinist leadership to repress a workers demonstration, he was told it was a counterrevolutionary demonstration. But when he got there, he saw it was largely metalworkers like both he and his father had been, who were raising not counterrevolutionary slogans but slogans for genuine socialism. He went over to the insurrection. So did even some top military officers like Colonel Pál Máleter, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and left-wing Stalinist cadre who became a military leader of the 1956 workers insurrection.³³ Soviet soldiers and officers – who the workers appealed to in the name of their parents' and grandparents' participation in the Russian Revolution – would in October 1956 frequently show sympathy for the workers.

From Revolutionary Tendency to Spartacist League

In the U.S., some of the young Shachtmanites came over to Trotskyism in the late '50s, in good part under the impact of the Hungarian events.³⁴ It took some work. A very talented recruiter from Cannon's Socialist Workers Party, Murry Weiss,

³³ Kopácsi's autobiography, *In the Name of the Working Class*, was published in English translation in 1986. In 1956, Pál Máleter emphasized that "if there's people who do want to go back" to "the old days," then "we'll see," as he put his hand on his revolver. "We don't mean to go back to capitalism. We want socialism in Hungary" (quoted in Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956*). Máleter was executed in 1958 after yet another Stalinist frame-up trial.

³⁴ See Shane Mage, *The Hungarian Revolution* (1957).



March of the Pencils, Havana, 22 December 1961, the finale of the mass literacy campaign, one of the first great gains of the Cuban Revolution.

won them over, which was key to establishing the YSA. But they had been won *to Trotskyist politics, and specifically on the Russian Question* – so when the SWP leadership began to tail after a non-Marxist, petty-bourgeois leadership in Cuba, how did these comrades react?

They said, in the first place, that we here in the U.S. need to be the most militant and intransigent defenders of the Cuban Revolution. An interesting example is the reaction of one of them – Jim Robertson, who later led the founding of the Spartacist tendency – to the U.S.-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion by mercenary *gusanos* (counterrevolutionaries) on



The first issue of *Spartacist*, February-March 1964, following the expulsion of the 1963 Revolutionary Tendency from the Socialist Workers Party.

April 17, 1961, organized by Democratic icon JFK. The next day Robertson sent a letter to the YSA leadership from Indiana, where he was doing YSA work, advocating that the *Young Socialist* newspaper “must avoid at all costs a soft, schmaltzy treatment of the invasion,” and instead feature “rough and political stuff” that would counterpose Trotskyist demands to the liberals, social democrats and Shachtmanites. “So let’s have a bold, bloody over-the-masthead headline about Yankee Imperialist Rape or Solidarity with Every Soviet-supplied Bullet Entering the Bodies of CIAists, or similar,” he wrote.³⁵ Sounds a lot like the Jim Robertson those of us who used to be in the Spartacist tendency came to know.

You can’t exactly put the slogan he proposed on the headline of a newspaper, but you get the idea. He was calling to make it clear – to militantly proclaim – that at the Bay of Pigs the Trotskyists stood on the side of Cuba and the Soviet bloc, against our “own” U.S. imperialist ruling class, and wanted the whole world to know it.

At the same time, within the SWP, the founding leadership of the YSA did not agree with embracing the politics of guerrillaism – as discussed earlier in this forum – and the essentially Stalinist politics of the Castro bureaucracy. This was the first point in the crystallization of a leftist opposition in the SWP called the Revolutionary Tendency (RT). The RT rightly saw the SWP leadership’s position as embracing Pabloism, effectively reversing the party’s political break with Pablo in 1953.³⁶

Secondly, they wanted the SWP/YSA to send young people to the South to work in the Freedom Rides and mass struggles of the civil rights movement, seeking to recruit the most radical activists to Trotskyism, instead of tailing after all the existing leaderships in the black movement. In an increasingly opportunist way, the SWP tailed Martin Luther King and then Malcolm X and then all kinds of different forces, and eventually formally adopted a black-nationalist position. There was much that was truly admirable and important about Malcolm X, particularly his advocacy of the right of armed black self-defense and how he fearlessly told the truth about the racist Democratic Party.³⁷ But for the SWP leadership to present Marxism as consisting of uncritically tailing Malcolm X was a real abdication by the SWP leadership (and a disservice to both him and the many young activists drawn to his courageous militancy).

³⁵ Jim Robertson, “The *Young Socialist* and Cuba Defense,” 18 April 1961, one of several interesting documents in *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, June 1961. *Young Socialist* (May 1961) did run a big over-the-masthead headline, but (though articles in the paper called to stand with Cuba, condemn Kennedy, etc.) it simply said “Hands Off Cuba!”

³⁶ See founding statement of the RT: “In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective” (a/k/a “INDORP,” March 1962), reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 1 (1965). INDORP also linked the RT to the remaining anti-Pabloist forces in the International Committee at the time, endorsing their in-depth 1961 document “The World Prospect for Socialism.”

³⁷ See *Black History and the Class Struggle* No. 2, “On the Civil Rights Movement,” February 1985, and No. 3, “Malcolm X,” February 1993.



Jim Robertson in the Revolutionary Contingent at 1967 NYC protest against the Vietnam war.

Inside the SWP, RTers Jim Robertson and Shirley Stoute put forward a very important document in 1963 called “For Black Trotskyism.” It counterposed the fight for revolutionary leadership to the SWP majority’s opportunism, and, basing itself on the crucial contributions of veteran U.S. Trotskyist Richard Fraser, emphasized the fight for *black liberation through socialist revolution*. This included understanding that the black people of the U.S. are a doubly oppressed “race/color caste,” not a nation. It’s not a national question.

In other words, it is not materially possible to separate and form a separate country when the reality is that, for starters, the black population of the United States is geographically widely divided, living in many different parts of the U.S. There’s no common territory of black Americans that can separate off, no “national” solution (“self-determination”) – but rather a struggle whose material realities underpin the Marxist strategy of what



Shirley Stoute in 1963.

Richard Fraser called “*revolutionary integrationism*.”

The fight for black liberation is the strategic question of the socialist revolution in the United States. It is the Achilles heel of U.S. imperialism. To win that struggle, the racist ruling class must be overthrown by the multiethnic, multinational working class. Thus black nationalism is not just illusory but a political obstacle to winning the fight for black freedom. We fight to bring the power of that multiracial working class into the struggle against every manifestation of racist oppression, today – not in some vague future time – at the same time as we tell the truth that *winning* this fight requires a socialist revolution.³⁸

Together with these points, the RT emphasized the need to not just continue but to politically sharpen and deepen the struggle against Pabloism, and to bring this fight in defense of the Trotskyist program to parts of the world movement where it had not really been carried out.

In 1963-64, the Revolutionary Tendency was expelled from the SWP. Far from giving up, it established the Spartacist group, which in 1966 became the Spartacist League (SL), whose “Declaration of Principles” we continue to stand on today.³⁹ This political current eventually expanded internationally into what we called the international Spartacist tendency, which subsequently became the ICL.

“All Indochina Must Go Communist – For Workers Strikes Against the War!”

What does this early history have to do with subsequent political events, challenges and issues that continue to reverberate today?

We can start with the connection between the Cuba question and other crucial challenges that faced the left. The Spartacist tendency fought for the revolutionary Marxist

³⁸ “For Black Trotskyism” is reprinted in the Internationalist pamphlet *What Strategy for Black Liberation? Trotskyism vs. Black Nationalism* (2010). See also “In Defense of Revolutionary Integrationism,” *Spartacist* No. 49-50, Winter 1993-94; “Black Liberation – Struggle and Strategy,” *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024; and “From Black Nationalism to Maoism to Trotskyism: In Memory of Joe Johnson,” *Revolution* No. 18, September 2021.

³⁹ See *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9 (undated), “Basic Documents of the Spartacist League,” which also reprints the crucial Spartacist declaration to the London conference of the International Committee, and “Black and Red – Class-Struggle Road to Negro Freedom,” both from 1966. The international Spartacist tendency was formally established in 1974. In 1989, amidst upheavals in the Soviet bloc and China, it changed its name to International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist); see *Spartacist* No. 23, Spring 1977, and No. 43-44, Summer 1989.



Spartacist banner at April 1970 Washington, D.C. protest against Vietnam War.

understanding that the state that consolidated as a result of the Cuban Revolution was a bureaucratically deformed workers state (which it still is today). This went together with maintaining that the program developed by Trotsky for the Soviet degenerated workers state applies to Cuba, as it did to the deformed workers states in Yugoslavia and the East European countries, and applies to China, North Korea, Vietnam. That is, the program of unconditional military defense of such states against imperialism and internal counterrevolution, and on that basis the fight for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy, establishing the proletarian democracy of workers soviets, together with the policy of revolutionary internationalism and extending revolution internationally.

Fighting for the Trotskyist position on the Russian Question, which was key to the genesis of the Spartacist tendency, politically armed it to face one key issue after another over the following decades. A crucial one was the fight to defeat U.S. imperialism's counterrevolutionary war on Vietnam, in which we fought for victory to the Vietnamese Revolution – under a banner proclaiming “All Indochina Must Go Communist!” – and for workers strikes against the war. This involved bitter struggles against the social-patriotism (socialism in words, patriotism in deeds) and class collaboration pushed by the SWP, which through its role brokering alliances with bourgeois liberals in the popular-front antiwar movement had become totally reformist.⁴⁰ These struggles were crucial in winning over an increasing number of young activists in the early '70s, myself included, who were fed up with liberal “peace crawls” and wanted the *victory* of the Vietnamese revolution.

Another example was on the question of the *Sino-Soviet split*, which divided the

official “international Communist movement” throughout the world. It put Mao Zedong's Stalinist bureaucracy in China at loggerheads with the Soviet bureaucracy led by the direct successors of Stalin. In 1963, this resulted in an enormous split between the two, each pledged to “socialism in one country” – *their own* country. Still today many left groups from Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico to parts of Europe to the Indian subcontinent to the Philippines trace their origins to that split.

The *nature of Maoism* was a polemical issue for quite a few years. In the 1960s and early '70s, much of the left deceived itself that Mao's

“Stalinism under the gun,” as the SL called it, was fundamentally different from the boring, gray Stalinist bureaucrats of the Soviet Union. As a militant-sounding but false alternative to the dreary Moscow bureaucracy, Maoism gave a terrible miseducation to hundreds of thousands of youth radicalized by the upheavals of the 1960s. For their part, most ostensible Trotskyist groups supported Mao's so-called “Cultural Revolution” in the bureaucratic faction fight between different wings of China's governing caste, which broke out in 1966 and lasted for about a decade.

In contrast, the Spartacist tendency was able to see, and explain to leftists seeking a genuinely revolutionary program, that tailing after Maoism was no better than tailing after Soviet Stalinism, and to warn against any illusions in the Maoist variant of Stalinism. This was important – and one of the biggest examples of how important it was occurred in 1965. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) – the biggest CP in the world other than the ruling parties of the USSR and China – followed Mao's program for a “bloc of four classes” (workers, peasants, petty bourgeoisie



Betman Archive

Indonesian soldiers guarding prisoners accused of being Communists. An estimated one million were killed, as a result of Mao's call to “unite” with “progressive” bourgeois forces in an “anti-imperialist united front.”

⁴⁰ Some key materials on this are included in the Spartacist pamphlet *Stalinism and Trotskyism in Vietnam* (1976).



Stalinist betrayal: Mao Zedong feted Richard Nixon as U.S. was carpet-bombing North Vietnam in 1972.

and “national bourgeoisie”) and the “anti-imperialist united front.”

Allied with the bourgeois nationalists led by Indonesia’s President Sukarno, the PKI was hailed and promoted internationally by Mao Zedong, who saluted its drive to “unite all the progressive patriotic forces” and expand even further the so-called “national democratic united front.”⁴¹ This led Indonesia’s working class, poor peasants, leftist students, women and intellectuals to their massacre by the bourgeois-nationalist army, with an estimated one million Indonesian communists killed. Maoism led to this devastating defeat for the cause of revolution in Asia and internationally.

Already in 1969 – in the midst of the “Cultural Revolution,” when the bulk of the left took Mao’s ostensible radicalism as good coin – the Spartacist tendency’s Trotskyist understanding of Stalinism and the “Russian Question” enabled the SL to “warn against the growing objective possibility ... of a U.S. deal with China.” In a major document from its 1969 national conference, the SL noted: “Should the imperialists adjust their policies in terms of their long-run interests ... the Chinese would be as willing as the Russians are at present to build ‘Socialism in One Country’ through deals with imperialism at the expense of internationalism.”

Sure enough, in 1972, a grotesque alliance between Mao’s China and Richard Nixon’s U.S.A. was sealed, as U.S. imperialism rained bombs on the heroic workers and peasants of Vietnam. The anti-revolutionary repercussions of Mao’s deal with this imperialist war criminal reached from Bangladesh to the Philippines, Angola to the Middle East to Chile, where anti-communist dictator Augusto Pinochet declared that Mao’s China “has behaved well.”⁴² Yet in recent years, there has

⁴¹ The quotation from Mao is from “Chairman Mao Greets 45th Anniversary Of Indonesian C.P.,” *Peking Review*, 28 May 1965. On the 1965 catastrophe, see “Indonesia: Lesson in Betrayal,” *Spartacist* No. 5, November-December 1965, and *China, Class Collaboration, and the Killing Fields of Indonesia in 1965* by James Robb (2014).

⁴² The 1969 SL quotation is from “Development and Tactics of the Spartacist League,” reprinted in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9. In 1976 the Spartacus Youth League published a hard-hitting pamphlet on the bitter consequences of the Mao/Nixon pact: *China’s Alliance with U.S. Imperialism*.

been an increase in interest in Maoism and Maoist-influenced “Marxist-Leninism” among some youth who are largely unaware of Maoism’s actual history.

From Kabul to Warsaw, Berlin and Moscow

The 1970s and ’80s brought further major tests related to the “Russian Question.” Throughout the ’70s, pseudo-Trotskyists spread illusions in many Soviet-bloc “dissidents” who they presented as progressive, even socialist, but who soon showed themselves to be pro-imperialist. This went together with the social-democratization of groups like the USec and others, which we discussed earlier.

And then, as referred to earlier in this talk, an enormous test came over Afghanistan. In 1978, a petty-bourgeois nationalist government, led by the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, took power and carried out a number of reforms, including a limited land reform, education for girls and not just boys, limiting the “bride price,” etc. The theocratic layer of mullahs, the parasitic clerical caste in Afghanistan, declared a holy war against this government. The Afghan government was not the government of a workers state, it was not “communist” or Marxist (despite descriptions in the Western media). But it was a left-nationalist government that was allied with, and a client of, the Soviet Union. The so-called holy warriors (*mujahedin*) began a reactionary war against it, for the intolerable sin of teaching girls to read and allowing women to be the majority of students at the university in Kabul, who were generally not wearing the veil, and for the moderate land reform and other measures it enacted.

When the theocratic caste rose up in this holy war, the United States and its intelligence agencies and arms suppliers began to arm, back and fund this reactionary insurgency to the max. The Soviet government, despite the conservative bureaucracy’s yearning for “peaceful coexistence” with imperialism, found itself compelled to intervene in Afghanistan – and the Spartacist tendency said “*Hail Red Army in Afghanistan! Extend Social Gains of the October Revolution to Afghan Peoples!*” In contrast, almost all of the left screamed bloody murder – in effect for the bloody murder of “red” schoolteachers in Afghanistan and of the Soviet troops.

In January 1980 there was an extremely violent attack by both Maoists and Khomeini supporters against Spartacist activists in Berlin, with several comrades seriously injured, one of them literally almost murdered when he was stabbed with a knife. This was because one of them had spoken to defend our position on Afghanistan during a public event.⁴³ We stood for the defense of the Soviet Union and the defeat of the reactionary insurgency in Afghanistan.

And then in the late 1980s, the crisis of Stalinism reached an apogee. In Poland in 1980-81, as noted earlier, there was the rise of Solidarność, which took legitimate grievances of sections of the Polish workers, most famously at the Gdansk shipyards, and pushed them toward what consolidated not as a union but as a clerical-nationalist, right-wing political movement for the restoration of capitalism. This meant a drive for restoring the crucifix in classrooms, the banning of abortion, the persecution of minorities,

⁴³ “Attempted Murder of German Spartacist,” *Spartacist* No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80. Also see other materials in that issue and in *Spartacist* No. 29, Summer 1980.

Against CIA's Cutthroats Afghanistan: Scenes of Civil War



As part of our solidarity with embattled Afghanistan, including offering to send an international brigade to join in fighting against the CIA's cutthroats, in July 1989 the ICL sent a correspondent to Kabul and Jalalabad (above).



Women were fighting to defend the right to cast off the head-to-toe chador (above) imposed by the U.S.-backed mujahedin ("holy warriors").



the promotion of homophobia and antisemitism, for making the fascistic interwar dictator Józef Piłsudski a national hero of Poland. When this movement prepared to seize power in Poland, the Spartacist tendency had the honesty and the courage to tell the truth about it, and to call to *"Stop Solidarność Counterrevolution."* It was essentially alone in the left in this, based on an understanding of the Russian Question, going back to the RT's fight over Cuba, the lessons of Hungary 1956 and Trotsky's key writings.⁴⁴

With U.S. imperialism's anti-Soviet war drive really turn-

ing the screws on the Soviet bloc, the Soviet bureaucracy under the "reform" leader Mikhail Gorbachev found itself in an enormous crisis. The Spartacist tendency was able to use its Trotskyist understanding of the Russian Question to intervene, particularly in East Germany (the DDR – German Democratic Republic), against the drive for the capitalist reunification of Germany. In other words, against the capitalist annexation of the DDR by West Germany, at that time the front line of NATO. We used the term *"Anschluss"* to describe capitalist reunification, harking back to Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938. Imperialist West Germany annexing and destroying the deformed workers state of East Germany meant destroying the conquests of the overthrow of capitalism there and providing an enormous boost to NATO imperialism.

Against this, the Spartacist tendency was able to intervene with a Trotskyist line.⁴⁵ Among other things this led to winning over not only workers in key industrial centers but a number of soldiers and even officers of the East German army. These were people who had been trained in the understanding that they were the front line of defending the Soviet bloc and the USSR itself against NATO imperialism and were outraged that Gorbachev and the East German Stalinist bureaucracy were preparing to capitulate to Western imperialism's drive for counterrevolution – that is, to sell out the DDR.

This struggle in East Germany involved the biggest mobilization of members and resources in the

Spartacist tendency's history. It was of enormous importance. At the ICL-LFI debate, we noted the present-day ICL's rejection of one historic position after another of the Spartacist tendency, and their ugly branding of it as "deformed at birth." The ICL's main speaker said that they "do not throw away our whole legacy," adding: "What do we stand on? We stand on

⁴⁵ Readers of this pamphlet are encouraged to consult the online archives of the ICL's press from that time, which heavily covered these events. See, for example, "No to Capitalist Reunification! East Germany: Build Workers Councils, Now!" and other articles in *WV* No. 492, 29 December 1989.

⁴⁴ See *Spartacist* No. 30, Autumn 1980, and No. 33, Spring 1982.



In the 1989-90 fight against capitalist reunification of Germany and for proletarian political revolution in the DDR to oust the sellout Stalinist bureaucracy, the ICL published a near-daily news bulletin, *Spartakist Arbeiterkorrespondenz* (Workers Press Correspondence). Title reads: “No Sellout of the DDR! Workers and Soldiers Councils, Now!

the proudest moment of the ICL,” its intervention in the DDR. But that intervention *would not have been possible* without the Spartacist tendency’s whole preceding series of struggles on the Russian Question, from Cuba to Vietnam, the Sino-Soviet split, Afghanistan, Poland, as well as on a vast range of other topics. On one after another of these, the present-day, born-again ICL is throwing that legacy into the garbage.

And in terms of the work in the DDR: as the ICL well knows, among the founders of the IG/LFI were comrades who had pushed for that work and played a leading role in it, Jan Norden and Marjorie Stamberg. The record of that work was in fact a key part of the “fights” that led to the bureaucratic purge against us in 1996.⁴⁶ We will return to this topic shortly.

The struggle against the Yeltsin-Bush counterrevolution in the former USSR has been briefly mentioned, and there isn’t time to go into it much more now. But in addition to the *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled* pamphlet (1993), people should go back and read some of the key issues of *Spartacist* from that period.⁴⁷ The ICL established a small “station” in the former USSR, which distributed over 100,000 copies in Russian of the article “*Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution!*” In February 1992, comrade Martha Phillips, who was a leader of this work in Moscow and whom those of us that later founded the IG knew very well, was murdered there, in circumstances that were never cleared up.⁴⁸

The capitalist counterrevolution that destroyed the Soviet

⁴⁶ See *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*, July 1996.

⁴⁷ See “Return to the Road of Lenin and Trotsky,” “For Workers Political Revolution in the USSR,” and other materials in *Spartacist* No. 41-42, Winter 1987-88, No. 43-44, Summer 1989, and No. 47-48, Winter 1992-93.

⁴⁸ “Soviet Workers: Defeat Yeltsin-Bush Counterrevolution,” *WV* No. 533, 30 August 1991; and see “In Honor of Our Slain Comrade Martha Phillips,” *Women and Revolution* No. 41, Summer-Autumn 1992.

and East European workers states was a historic defeat for the workers and oppressed throughout the world. One key index of this, within those countries, has been the devastating effects of the counterrevolution on the rights of women and the gains they had made despite the bureaucratic deformation of those states. This was something we wrote about extensively at the time.⁴⁹

The record of the Spartacist tendency, fighting to put into practice the program of Lenin and Trotsky, is a crucial part of the LFI’s political legacy. And the lessons of this are crucial today, particularly with regard to the defense of the Chinese deformed workers state.⁵⁰

The Leninist Party: “Tribune of the People”

In terms of other aspects of the Spartacist programmatic legacy, we have talked about the importance of its program for revolutionary integrationism in the struggle for black liberation in the United States. This was not abstract for the then-revolutionary SL – for example, it organized extremely important labor/black mobilizations that stopped Ku Klux Klan provocations in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere.⁵¹

The RT’s struggle for a genuinely Marxist approach in the fight for black freedom laid the basis for the Spartacist tendency’s emphasis over the years on the Leninist position regarding what Marxists call *special oppression*. While all workers are oppressed, on top of this there are different kinds of special (i.e., double, sometimes triple) oppression. Women’s oppression, the oldest form of social oppression, is another central example. The revolutionary Marxist position on this crucial topic is far more radical than bourgeois approaches that evade getting to its roots and instead put forward a program for class collaboration such as feminism’s appeal for “sisterhood” between bourgeois and proletarian women. Reading about these issues is one of the best introductions to Marxist historical materialism and the

⁴⁹ A major article in *Women and Revolution* No. 42, Spring/Summer 1993, “From East Berlin to Tashkent: Capitalist Counterrevolution Tramples on Women,” was devoted to this subject.

⁵⁰ In one of Trotsky’s most important articles on the Russian Question, “*The Class Character of the Soviet State*” (October 1933), he emphasized: “Every political tendency that waves its hand hopelessly at the Soviet Union, under the pretext of its ‘non-proletarian’ character, runs the risk of becoming the passive instrument of imperialism. From our standpoint, of course, the tragic possibility is not excluded that the first workers’ state, weakened by its bureaucracy, will fall under the joint blows of its internal and external enemies. But in the event of this worst possible variant, a tremendous significance for the subsequent course of the revolutionary struggle will be borne by the question: *where* are those guilty for the catastrophe? Not the slightest taint of guilt must fall upon the revolutionary internationalists. In the hour of mortal danger, they must remain on the last barricade.” Unlike the other ostensibly Trotskyist currents – many of which were literally on the other side – that is what the Spartacist tendency did.

⁵¹ See, for example, “We Stopped the Klan!” and other materials in *WV* No. 319, 10 December 1982. A main role in sparking these SL-led labor/black mass actions was played by our comrade Marjorie, a founding member of the IG and LFI (“*Marjorie Stamberg [1944-2024]: Revolutionary Trotskyist, Marxist Educator, A Leader of Struggles for All the Oppressed*,” *The Internationalist* No. 73, June-August 2024).



The editorial board of *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker), an organ of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party that special groups for work among women used in agitating among women workers. It and the Bolsheviks' Zhenotdel (Department of Women Workers and Peasant Women) inspired the SL journal *Women and Revolution*.

revolutionary program. Connected to this is the oppression of gay, lesbian and trans people, whose very existence is seen as transgressing the boundaries and "norms" of the bourgeois family.⁵² And of course this society perpetuates innumerable other forms of special oppression, each with its own particularities.

With the rise of the 1960s women's movement, the SL dug into the history of Bolshevik work among women and brought to a wide audience the authentic Marxist tradition on the struggle for *women's liberation through socialist revolution*, emphasizing that overcoming the central institution of women's oppression, the nuclear family, requires a thoroughgoing social transformation.⁵³ This also meant going against

⁵² A good place to start is with our pamphlets *Marxism and Women's Liberation* (2017) and *Bolsheviks and the Liberation of Women* (2011); and see "Against Trump's Blitzkrieg of Bigotry, Labor Must Defend Trans Rights," *The Internationalist* No. 75, January-May 2025.

⁵³ In a February 1969 letter to the late Chris Kinder (reprinted in *Spartacist League Internal Bulletin*, July 1969), Jim Robertson addressed this point with striking clarity, at a time when the New Left was mainly clueless or worse on the "woman question."

the tailing by the opportunist left – including most pseudo-Trotskyist groups – of the sectoralism promoted by the "New Left." Counterposed to this, the Spartacist tendency upheld the concept of *the Leninist party as tribune of all the oppressed* – what Lenin in *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) called the "tribune of the people ... able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears."

Fighting to mobilize the power of the proletariat against every form of oppression was crucial to the development of the Spartacist tendency's work on these issues, including, as I mentioned at the debate, the publication of the magnificent journal *Women and Revolution*, which made real contributions to Marxist history and understanding on many questions. The SL's fusion in 1977 with a group of gay revolutionary Marxists called the Red Flag Union made waves on the left and was an important example of our work.⁵⁴

On the *trade-union question*, the Spartacist tendency's work was fundamentally different from that of other groups. It insisted that revolutionaries' work in the unions must be based on the revolutionary program, not on presenting a program that doesn't break with capitalist politics, supporting and/or running for union office together with more "democratic" pro-capitalist bureaucrats, etc. Let alone ones that come to power with the blessings or under the auspices of the govern-

⁵⁴ A special supplement on the fusion with the Red Flag Union is included in *WV* No. 172, 9 September 1977.



Women and Revolution, the journal of the Women's Commission of the Spartacist League, put forward the Marxist program for women's liberation through socialist revolution, in contrast to feminism, also including wide-ranging analysis of important cultural issues.

ment, like Arnold Miller in the United Mine Workers (UMW), who the left went wild over when the Labor Department helped him get elected president of the UMW in 1973, or other “reformers” like Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which sued the union and provided the government with a blueprint for “reorganizing” it.

The SL insisted on the importance of bringing the Transitional Program into the unions and building an opposition based on it. This could have a range of organizational forms – caucuses, tendencies that extend through various unions, etc. – but whatever the form, programmatically based on the Transitional Program.⁵⁵

Against the Popular Front, Road to Bloody Defeats

On the question of the *popular front*, a class-collaborationist alliance between the workers movement and capitalist politicians and parties, the Spartacist tendency staked out a crucial position. This came to the fore in 1970 when the Unidad Popular (UP – People’s Unity) coalition ran in the elections, headed by Salvador Allende, leader of Chile’s Socialist Party, in alliance with the pro-Moscow Communist Party and some bourgeois politicians. In one way or another, the various pseudo-Trotskyist tendencies tailed after this, even though Trotsky had denounced popular frontism as “not a tactic but the greatest crime.”⁵⁶ For the opportunists, what mattered most was that the UP and the “*compañero presidente*” Allende were highly popular at the time.

In sharp contrast to the whole range of opportunist organizations, *Spartacist* wrote in 1970:

“Any ‘critical support’ to the Allende coalition is class

⁵⁵ See “For a Class-Struggle Opposition in the Union Movement,” in *The Internationalist* special issue, July 2012. On Arnold Miller, see materials in the Spartacist pamphlet *The Great Coal Strike of 1978* (whose main author is a supporter of the IG). In *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, see the section on trade-union work in “Development and Tactics of the Spartacist League” (1969) as well as the “Trade-Union Memorandum” (1972). The formative 1973 series by Chris Knox (Kinder), “Trotskyist Work in the Trade Unions,” is included in our pamphlet *Trotskyism and Trade-Union Struggle* (2005). From the late 1960s on, the Spartacist press covered class-struggle oppositionists in the auto, longshore/warehouse, maritime, phone, steel, urban transport and other unions in the U.S., dockyard workers in Australia, postal workers in Canada, auto workers in France, etc.

⁵⁶ “The Dutch Section and the International” (15-16 July 1936), in *Writings of Leon Trotsky* (1935-36). In the same document Trotsky wrote: “In reality, the People’s Front is the main question of proletarian class strategy for this epoch. It also offers the best criterion for the difference between Bolshevism and Menshevism.... All the People’s Fronts in Europe are only a pale copy and often a caricature of the Russian People’s Front of 1917,” that is, the bourgeois Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky overthrown in the October Revolution.



Reuters

Workers of the Unidad Popular government were rounded up and many executed in the 11 September 1973 coup by General Augusto Pinochet, who had been appointed defense minister by President Salvador Allende. *Spartacist* warned against illusions in the popular front with the supposed “progressive” or “constitutional” bourgeoisie. Today many leftists continue to repeat the illusory UP slogan, “*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” (The people united with never be defeated).

treason, paving the way for a bloody defeat for the Chilean working people when domestic reaction, abetted by international imperialism, is ready.”⁵⁷

This warning was tragically borne out three years later.

The Spartacist tendency swam against the stream and told the truth about Chile’s supposed “peaceful road to socialism”; it sought to warn the workers of Chile, Latin America and the world against the class-collaborationist chaining of the workers to the supposed “progressive” bourgeoisie and military. That was the actual meaning of the Unidad Popular’s slogan, “*El pueblo unido jamás será vencido*” (The people united will never be defeated), which you can hear many marchers heedlessly chanting at demonstrations here and internationally today.

The terrible defeat that the popular front led to in 1973 occurred in one of the most important countries of Latin America. Chile had a highly politicized and militant working class that could have taken power, that wanted to break the isolation of the Cuban Revolution, that believed in socialism, that believed it was being led to socialism – but was led to the terrible defeat of September 11, 1973 when Augusto Pinochet, appointed head of the army by Salvador Allende, led the bloody military coup. The lessons of this are crucial for the working class, everywhere.

Yet in Europe, popular-frontism grew in the ’70s and early ’80s, from France and Spain to Portugal. Unlike the USec and other social-democratized “Trotskyist” currents, the Spartacist tendency called sharply to *not* vote for the popular front, including the workers parties in the popular front. This

⁵⁷ “Chilean Popular Front,” *Spartacist* No. 19, November-December 1970.



In 1994 the ICL established fraternal relations with the Luta Metalúrgica (LM) group of workers in Volta Redonda, Brazil, which arose from key struggles including the November 1988 strike at the CSN steel strike (above). The ICL broke relations in the heat of struggle to remove police from municipal workers union, waged by LM, which became the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, section of the LFI.

was key to a series of regroupments with leftists from other tendencies in that period.⁵⁸

And it was key to the regroupment we carried out years later with a group of Brazilian comrades who were mainly black steelworkers from the largest steel plant in Latin America, in the city of Volta Redonda. They had originally been a part of Lula's Workers Party (PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores) and were expelled from it for opposing the class-collaborationist alliances the PT formed. In 1994, they got in touch to tell us that they had come out in opposition to voting for the PT in the popular-front coalition. First called Luta Metalúrgica (Metal Workers Struggle), they became the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil (Fourth Internationalist League of Brazil), which in 1998 was a founding section of the LFI.⁵⁹

“Interpenetrated Peoples” and Proletarian Revolution

There's a lot more to say, but I want to move on to the question of *interpenetrated peoples*. It may sound exotic or esoteric, but it's not. For one thing, understanding this topic is key for a Marxist program to defeat the Zionist oppression

⁵⁸ This refusal to vote for any parties of such *bourgeois* political formations was a centerpiece of the Spartacist tendency's work in Europe in the 1980s, distinguishing it from all the different varieties of pseudo-Trotskyism, which, with various different formulas, were drawn into the wake of popular-frontist class collaboration. See the Internationalist pamphlet, *The Popular Front: Roadblock to Revolution* (May 2007).

⁵⁹ “No ‘Critical Support’ to Popular Frontism,” *Spartacist* No. 27-28, Winter 1979-80; “Declaration of Fraternal Relations Between Luta Metalúrgica (Brazil) and the International Communist League,” *Spartacist* No. 52, Autumn 1995; “Workers Struggle vs. Popular Frontism in Brazil,” *The Internationalist* No. 14, September-October 2002.

of the Palestinian people today. The understanding that the Spartacist tendency developed on this subject was based on the experience of the Bolsheviks in the multinational tsarist empire, notably in the Caucasus.

What is the situation when you have two or more people interpenetrated with each other, mixed together sharing the same geographical region, but with competing national claims? Some examples: The Balkans, as in the former Yugoslavia. The Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan, formerly in the USSR, where Armenians and Azeris have long been in conflict. Cyprus, with a long history of conflict between Turks and Greeks. Northern Ireland – it's a bit different there, but the same fundamental ideas are pertinent. And Israel-Palestine, where two different nations, one oppressed and one oppressor, are

interpenetrated with each other.

In such situations, under capitalism there is no equitable, democratic solution of the competing national claims. We stand *with the oppressed Palestinian people* against Zionism, against the innately oppressive Israeli state. We are for the defense of the Palestinians and the defeat of the Zionist terror against them. We stand for bringing out workers power internationally, *now*, to stop the flow of arms to Israel and defend the Palestinians. But to achieve real victory for their struggle against oppression, a strategic position is needed that is capable of splitting Israeli society in combination with struggle throughout the region. And this connects to the point that only under a workers state, the rule of the working class – the dictatorship of the proletariat – is it possible to carry out an equitable solution to competing claims of interpenetrated peoples or nations, including the Palestinian people and what we call the Hebrew-speaking people there.⁶⁰

This point was shown in the negative and then in the positive in Yugoslavia, where five different peoples – Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Slovenes – fought against and massacred each other perennially. But as Jim Robertson in particular used to emphasize to us in the SL, it was under the red star of Josip Tito's Yugoslav partisans – despite the fact that he was a Stalinist, although a somewhat idiosyncratic one – that those different nationalities fought not to kill each other but to defeat and crush the landlords, capitalists and Nazi occupiers. I won't talk about my cousin Bándi who escaped from the Bor forced-labor camp and fought with Tito's partisans in that war... But it led to the social revolution that won in 1945.

The overthrow of capitalism in Yugoslavia produced a

⁶⁰ See *The Internationalist* No. 9, January-February 2001, special issue titled “Defend the Palestinian People! For an Arab/Hebrew Workers Republic in a Socialist Federation of the Near East!”



Roza Papo with three comrades in the Yugoslav Communist-led partisans during World War II. From a Jewish family in Sarajevo, Papo became a doctor and joined the partisan army, where she became a general.

workers state that, though bureaucratically deformed, was able to change the situation of internecine conflict so prevalent up until the revolution there. Then in the 1990s, counterrevolutionary nationalism was the battering ram to destroy the Yugoslav deformed workers state, setting one nationality against another and showing once again, in the negative, the importance of our understanding of interpenetrated peoples.⁶¹

Nothing Lasts Forever

For three decades, the Spartacist tendency defended the revolutionary program, based on the accumulated experience of life-and-death struggles of the workers and oppressed. We have discussed some (though far from all) of the characteristic positions that are part of its fundamental programmatic legacy, which we consider enormously important and are building on today.

What happened to the Spartacist tendency? It is in fact a long story, but as materialists, Marxists understand that nothing

⁶¹ See “East Europe: Nationalism and Counterrevolution,” WV No. 547, 20 March 1992, and No. 548, 3 April 1992. As we predicted, the born-again ICL is now junking the historic Spartacist position on interpenetrated peoples too.

ing – including revolutionary organizations – lasts forever or lives forever. And the political degeneration of the SL and ICL emerged from a particular historical and material context, some of which goes back to the effects of the “Reagan years,” in the 1980s. These had a significant effect on the Spartacist tendency. They were years of deep-going social and political reaction, union-busting, decline in union membership, anti-communism, the anti-Soviet war drive, anti-sex witch hunts, anti-education witch hunts and all the rest of it. No wonder the U.S. bourgeoisie, not just Republicans but the Democrats too, hail Ronald Reagan today as one of their heroes.

The terrible layoffs and plant closures in the U.S., beginning under Jimmy Carter and escalating under Reagan, took a very big toll on the party’s [i.e., the SL’s] industrial fractions, eliminating some of them completely. Partly as a result of this, there was an increasing weight in the organization of sectors that had gotten jobs in tech and IT or were in labor-aristocratic craft-union sectors. There is nothing innately wrong with some comrades having that kind of job – but it had an increasing specific weight in the organization. (This is something I raised internally in 1994, a couple of years before our expulsion.) These were some of the factors leading to the political vulnerability of the SL/ICL. Together with this, it experienced the aging of its cadres overall and what one might call a certain social conservatism of not a few of them.

The *fundamental* thing, however, was that the Spartacist tendency carried out an enormous struggle against capitalist counterrevolution in East Germany and the Soviet Union – and was defeated. The working class was defeated and the revolutionaries who fought to prevent that were defeated. Almost all the left succumbed to the capitalist triumphalism of the “New World Order” proclaimed by George H.W. Bush, and the supposed death of communism. And this began to have serious effects within the Spartacist tendency as well. Comrades had made a huge effort, putting major hopes into it, and in reality many were really demoralized by the defeats.

This culminated in 1995-96, in a “fight” spearheaded by what began calling itself the ICL’s “new I.S.” (International Secretariat). In the course of and coming out of this, they “discovered” something that would have made the ICL’s 1989-90 work in the DDR *impossible* if it had been the organization’s line: that, supposedly, it was the Stalinist bureaucracy itself that *led* the capitalist counterrevolutions in East Europe and the USSR.⁶² This was not just factually false but a funda-

⁶² This revisionist line was cooked up in denouncing the January 1995 speech by Jan Norden, titled “Who Defended the DDR? Who Fought Against Capitalist Reunification? The Spartakists on the Collapse of Stalinist Rule in East Europe?” at Humboldt University in Berlin. See the ICL’s publicly distributed *International Bulletin* No. 36 (June 1996), Norden’s “Group: Shamefaced Defectors from Trotskyism,” which includes the Humboldt’s speech and Al Nelson’s document stating (on page 57 of that bulletin) that in 1989-90 the DDR’s Stalinist governing party “was *leading* the counterrevolution.” This claim was then deepened, extended and made into an article of faith for the ICL ... until it was jettisoned eight years later. For an instructive diagram about some of the ICL’s zigzags on the Russian question between 1996 and 2011, see the IG’s reprint of the pamphlet *How the Soviet Workers State Was Strangled* (January 2013), between pages 67 and 68.



Banner of the Trotzlistische Liga Deutschlands (TLD) at the 3 January 1990 demonstration that the ICL initiated in Treptow Park in East Berlin. 250,000 came out to denounce Nazi desecration of Soviet soldiers' tombs and to oppose capitalist "reunification" with imperialist West Germany.

mental revision of Trotskyism on the Russian Question. The bureaucracy paved the way for, and capitulated to, capitalist counterrevolution – but that counterrevolution was led by the imperialists. The bureaucracy is an unstable, parasitic caste, not a class.⁶³

If the Stalinist bureaucracy itself had been leading the capitalist counterrevolution in East Germany, it would have been impossible, for example, to have the historic joint demonstration at Treptow Park in East Berlin on January 3, 1990. This massive protest against the fascist desecration of a monument to Soviet soldiers was called by the ICL's German section and joined by the DDR's governing party. For the first time, Trotskyists spoke publicly to a mass demonstration in a deformed workers state – a quarter million people came out.⁶⁴ You obviously would not and **could not** do that with the leaders of a counterrevolution.

During this period, we were able to give speeches and distribute literature in the barracks of the Soviet army and of the DDR's army, about Trotskyism – in the barracks! You don't – and couldn't – do that

⁶³ See "Stalinists Led the Counterrevolution? ICL Between Shachtman and Trotsky," *The Internationalist* No. 9, January-February 2000, and "ICL Still Caught Between Shachtman and Trotsky," *The Internationalist* No. 11, Summer 2001.

⁶⁴ "250,000 Say: No Nazis in East Germany!" *Workers Vanguard* No. 493, 12 January 1990.

with an army under the command of a government that is itself leading capitalist counterrevolution, much less would you be able to recruit those officers. This is crucial for understanding and putting forward a revolutionary perspective on China or Cuba today.

So the ICL leadership, in the process of reconfiguring itself, was carrying out a struggle that involved a fundamental revision of Trotskyism. In this struggle it targeted the editor of *Workers Vanguard* for 23 years, Jan Norden, and Marjorie Stamberg, a key long-term cadre, extending in 1996 to leaders of the ICL's Mexican section. Those of us who led the establishment of fraternal relations with the group of mainly black Trotskyist steelworkers in Volta Redonda were targeted for pushing and defending this struggle for Trotskyism in Brazil.

In 1996, we were expelled. We were targeted with a series of frame-ups and eleven days after our expulsion, the ICL broke relations with the comrades in Brazil, one day before the workers' assembly they had organized in the union of municipal workers of Volta Redonda in order to throw the police out of the union. So when this struggle to put the Trotskyist



May 1991: German and Polish comrades of the ICL address 300 Soviet officers and soldiers commemorating Red Army victory over Nazi Third Reich, at air base in East Germany.



program into effect was at its high point, that was precisely the moment when the Spartacist tendency broke relations with these comrades, stabbing the struggle in the back. These events spoke volumes then, and despite the passage of years they still do today.

We can talk more about the dénouement in the discussion – I’ve got to wrap up this presentation – but what ensued in the ICL was a whole series of zigzags, changes of position, corrections, then corrections of corrections... A lot of it, though by no means all, was about the Russian Question. They decided that in China, the Stalinist bureaucracy was “leading the counterrevolution.” There had not been a counterrevolution in China. But they decided the same thing was supposedly happening there that they alleged – then sort of dis-alleged, re-alleged, then re-re-alleged and dis-alleged – had happened in East Germany and the USSR.

They went through a whole series of revisions, too many to list here, and blatant capitulations to U.S. imperialism. In response to 9/11 they renounced and stridently denounced the call to defeat U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan and Iraq. They not only dropped but opposed the call for workers to “hot-cargo” (refuse to handle) military goods for the invasion of Iraq, using the same arguments as the head of the longshore union bureaucracy. They renounced the basic Leninist call for the independence of Puerto Rico (and all colonies). They proclaimed that there was no popular front in Mexico – and that there couldn’t be any popular front in countries like Mexico.

Haiti Betrayal, “Hydra” Mania, Revisionist “Rebirth”

Then in 2010, they literally supported the U.S. occupation of Haiti after the earthquake there – something they now avoid mentioning at all. After months of screaming in our faces in support of this grotesque position, they admitted it was a capitulation to U.S. imperialism. In 2015-16 they adopted a chauvinist position on refugees.⁶⁵ (It is incredible that today they make the claim that throughout all of this and so much more, the ICL and LFI were basically the same!) Meanwhile they went through a cascading series of internal regimes and innumerable, seemingly endless internal crises and convulsions, leading to what they now admit was a complete “collapse” in 2020 amid the largest sustained mass protests in U.S. history.

That came after the ICL trumpeting their adherence to bourgeois nationalism to the world, in 2017. They did this with a document about a mythical creature: the fearsome “Hydra.” If this seems weird, that’s because it’s pretty weird. They published a document called “The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra,” which I recommend that everyone read.⁶⁶ It’s quite

⁶⁵ The IG/LFI addressed each of these topics at the time in our press; useful summaries of many of them can be found in conference documents published in *The Internationalist* No. 40, Summer 2015, and No. 50, Winter 2017, and the May 2016 special supplement, *Back to Trotskyism!*

⁶⁶ *Spartacist* No. 65, Summer 2017. The PDF of that issue oddly seems to have disappeared from the ICL website (though the text of the document itself is linked at <https://old.iclfi.org/english/esp/65/hydra.html>).



From Spartacist No. 65, Summer 2017.

Batshit crazy: the “Hydra” document (2017), ICL’s bizarre self-denunciation proclaiming embrace of bourgeois nationalism, falsifying Lenin to justify anti-democratic official language laws in Quebec and Catalonia.

a document, featuring some curious things. For example, up until then I had never read in the publication of an ostensibly Trotskyist organization the repeated statement that their activity was carried out under the guidance of a certain comrade – under “a leadership guided by comrade Coelho,” that is, the latest (at that time) head of their International Secretariat.

I have to confess that I found myself a little bit bewildered by the “Hydra” document. So I looked in all of the dictionaries of Marxist terms – like this *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Marxism, Socialism and Communism* [holds up book] and many other dictionaries and encyclopedias of Marxism – to try to find the correct, scientific Marxist term for this document. And I finally found it. It’s here under “B”: batshit crazy.

That it was. But to paraphrase the old cliché, there was a method to the craziness, and that was the proclamation of bourgeois nationalism. This took place around the question of compulsory official language laws. In Quebec, where the key component of the new ICL leadership was active, there are laws making the French language the compulsory official language. In the Spartacist tendency over the decades, the idea of compulsory official language laws had always been opposed. That wasn’t anything new: it’s a position that Lenin repeatedly stated in his writings on the national question, such as “Liberals and Democrats on the Language Question” and “Critical Remarks on the National Question” from 1913, etc.

In “Critical Remarks,” for example, he says: “The national program of working-class democracy is: absolutely no privileges for any one nation or any one language” – *against* any privilege of any kind for one of the nations and *for* the equality of nations. Regarding the tsarist empire, the “prison house of nations,” he repeatedly wrote that Marxists’ opposition to national privileges obviously applied to the dominant



V.I. Lenin in 1914, shortly after he wrote “Critical Remarks on the National Question” (December 1913), in which he opposed privileges for any languages.

nation and language – the Russians and their language – but also applied to the oppressed nations and peoples. He specifically stated that it applied to the most oppressed, persecuted group in Russia at that time, the Jews, and polemicized against Ukrainian nationalists and others who pushed an undemocratic, nationalist position.

But now as part of its “rebirth” on the basis of increasingly flagrant revisionism, the ICL was loudly embracing discriminatory, compulsory official language laws in Quebec and also in Catalonia. To justify this, what they did was quote Lenin on this subject – and then assert, and habituate their members to asserting, that despite what Lenin wrote, what he really *meant* was the exact opposite. This procedure became systematic for them on one question after another.

It now extends even to the question of permanent revolution, which is central to the very definition of what “Trotskyism” means. At the January debate, we showed how the ICL has rewritten the history of the Russian Revolution and controversies within the Russian Marxist movement. [See *Part II of this pamphlet*.] The purpose: to make the totally false claim that Lenin’s original formula of “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” (RDDPP) – a transitory, radical Jacobin-type government that he thought would be necessarily constrained within the limits of bourgeois property relations – was essentially *the same* strategically as Trotsky’s “permanent revolution.”

They insisted on this claim despite Trotsky’s repeated emphasis on the difference. Permanent revolution means the democratic tasks can only be fulfilled under the dictatorship of the proletariat; it means *expropriation* of the bourgeoisie.

And Lenin came over in practice to the permanent revolution in April 1917. Moreover, Trotsky sharply warned *against* reviving the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” slogan, for example during the 1931 upheaval in Spain. The Stalinists were putting it forward at that time, and Trotsky wrote:

“It is an illusion and a deception. It is a diabolical snare which will be transformed tomorrow into a noose around your neck. Do not believe in it, advanced workers of Spain! Study the lessons of the Russian Revolution and the lessons of the defeats of the epigones.”⁶⁷

This reflects the fact that after the experience of the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution in 1927, Trotsky had intensified his critique of those who sought to bring back the “RDDPP” slogan, and went on to warn, again and again, against doing so.

But the ICL now insists on, and has its members pay obeisance to, an outright historical *fabrication* on this topic. In the service of what? In the service of seeking a political alliance with bourgeois forces, in line with their revival of the “anti-imperialist united front.” In other words, a slogan that was used by class-collaborationist forces from China to India to Argentina to Bolivia, where it helped shipwreck the Bolivian Revolution of 1952. All under that banner of class-collaboration, now revived by the born-again ICL.

SUMMARY

Thank you for the questions and comments. On a side note, before I address them: it’s interesting and a bit curious that the Spartacist League is not here today. This is a publicly advertised forum following up on our debate with them. Nor, of course, is Left Voice, which generally doesn’t venture into or expose its members to the turbulent waters of in-person debate among left groups.

One of the questions was whether Lenin wrote about “entrism.” In 1920, the Communists in Britain were trying to establish their own party and at the same time faced widespread working-class support for the reformist British Labour Party (BLP). The trade unions were affiliated to the BLP, which was seen by masses of workers as “their” class party; the bourgeois parties were denouncing it; the BLP had never won national elections and was going to be running independently. Famously, Lenin said the Communists should support the candidate of the BLP “like a rope supports a hanging man,” to expose it and win the workers away from it. He also proposed that the Communists affiliate with the BLP, given its union base and particular structure, while maintaining their own party and complete freedom to denounce the BLP’s betrayals.

This is a far cry from Pablo’s “entrism *sui generis*” (or the decades-long entrism of British “Trotskyist” Ted Grant’s

⁶⁷ “The Spanish Revolution and the Dangers Threatening It,” 28 May 1931, in *The Spanish Revolution (1931-39)* (1973). Trotsky goes on to highlight the crucial difference between the permanent revolution and the “RDDPP” formula that Lenin broke from in April 1917. By “epigones,” he means the Stalinists, who used the “democratic dictatorship” slogan to justify the class-collaborationist line that led to the defeat of the 1925-27 Chinese revolution.

followers in the BLP many years later).⁶⁸ Of course they tried to justify what they were doing by referring back to Britain in 1920, and also to the “French Turn” carried out by Trotskyists in France and the U.S. in the 1930s. This was very much distorted by Pablo et al., who proposed essentially liquidating into social-democratic and/or Stalinist parties. The “French Turn” was a short-term entry into Socialist parties designed to win over fresh leftward-moving forces at a time when huge events in the world were pushing young and working-class elements of those parties sharply to the left. And Trotsky fought hard against those who wanted to stick around in those parties instead of getting out promptly.⁶⁹

In the discussion period tonight, a number of questions were about the origins and history of Maoism, which is a specific variant of Stalinism. This is one of the topics addressed in our *What Is Trotskyism?* pamphlet, which reprints the old *Workers Vanguard* series “Stalin School of Falsification Revisited” that was made into a Spartacus Youth League pamphlet in 1975. In addition to the 1925-27 events, the pamphlet has a section on the Third Chinese Revolution, i.e., the Chinese Revolution of 1949, and a chapter titled “Mao’s China: From Stalin to Nixon,” on how Maoism eventually led to an alliance with U.S. imperialism.

That alliance, formed in 1972, might seem strange today, given that U.S. imperialism’s objective of strangling the state that arose from the 1949 revolution has been escalating sharply. But Mao’s “socialism in one country” *for China* led him to see the Soviet Union (with its own bureaucracy’s pursuit of supposed “socialism in one country” *for the USSR*) as an obstacle to making deals with the U.S. imperialists. The U.S. sought to leverage that against the Soviet degenerated workers state, whose military and industrial strength made it the biggest obstacle to unlimited U.S. domination of the planet. And Mao’s bloc with Nixon against the USSR meant undermining, not strengthening, the defense of China against imperialism. I will address some other things about China toward the end of the summary.

Stalinism and Its Variants

There were a number of other questions related to Stalinism and the Russian Question in the broad sense of the term. One was about the 1968 events in Czechoslovakia, which caused a significant crisis among members of pro-Moscow CPs in many countries. In Czechoslovakia the mass of the working class had remained pro-socialist, despite having experienced Stalinist crimes like the Moscow Trial-type trials of long-time

Communists in the 1950s. (Similar trials were held in Hungary and elsewhere in East Europe.) In 1968, the reform-minded Stalinist Alexander Dubček – his slogan was “socialism with a human face” – became the head of the CP, the governing party in the Czechoslovak deformed workers state that was part of the Soviet bloc.

What wound up being called the “Prague Spring” was not a political revolution by the working class. But the loosening up of the regime scared the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy with the possibility that it could lead to something like what happened in Hungary in 1956. In other words, they were afraid that an actual proletarian political revolution might break out. To pre-empt that, the Soviet bureaucracy ordered the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, which Trotskyists opposed. If there had been a Trotskyist party there – unfortunately there wasn’t one – we would have sought to fraternize with and win over the Soviet troops, which Hungarian workers had sought to do with some success in October 1956.

Another question was, “Did Tito and Castro have Stalinist baggage?” As the head of the 26 of July Movement that fought to overthrow the Batista dictatorship, Fidel Castro was a radical petty-bourgeois nationalist – but he was led in exceptional historical circumstances to become the head of what, by late 1960 and early ’61, had become a deformed workers state. In the course of this, he adopted Stalinist ideology, the ideology of the governing bureaucracy of a deformed workers state. We discuss this in detail in our materials on Cuba.⁷⁰

In the case of Tito, he didn’t just have Stalinist “baggage” but was the head of the Stalinist CP in Yugoslavia going back to the late 1930s, and the head of the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia, in other words the deformed workers state, established at the end of World War II. In 1948 he broke from Stalin. Some people, including quite a few at the time in the Trotskyist movement, thought that this meant Tito could no longer be a Stalinist. But he remained the head of the bureaucratic layer that had governed the deformed workers state since its inception – and his break with Stalin was on a national, not a programmatic basis: he stood for “socialism in one country,” *his* country, and for his own national bureaucracy’s leeway to make its own deals with the imperialists, declaring “neutrality” in the Korean War, for example.⁷¹

Related to this was the question about whether Stalinism has a “through-line,” in other words something connecting, and common to, the different variants of Stalinism. One of the articles in our pamphlet *Cuba: A Bureaucratically Deformed Workers State* gives this definition: “Stalinism [is] the system of ideology and political domination corresponding to a parasitic bureaucracy sitting atop the property forms of a workers state.” Followers of that bureaucracy elsewhere echo that ideology, as was the case, for example, with pro-Moscow Stalinists in France, Maoists in the U.S., West Germany or Latin America, and so forth.

⁷⁰ On Cuba, see footnote 29.

⁷¹ Regarding Yugoslavia, see footnotes 10 and 61. The 1988 Spartacist pamphlet “*Market Socialism*” in *Eastern Europe* includes valuable additional material on the “Yugoslav model,” Hungary and the relation between planned economy and workers democracy.

⁶⁸ The “Grantite” organization formerly called International Marxist Tendency changed its name to “Revolutionary Communist International” (RCI) in June 2024. See articles on the RCI in *Revolution* No. 21, September 2024, and “*Proclaiming Yourself a Communist Doesn’t Make You One.*” *The Internationalist* No. 75, January-May 2025.

⁶⁹ See Lenin, “*Left-Wing*” *Communism – An Infantile Disorder* and “Speech on Affiliation to the British Labour Party” (1920); Trotsky, *The Crisis of the French Section (1935-36)* (1977); chapters on entrism in Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944) and Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Emergence of Trotskyism in the United States, 1928-38* (2021).

“Socialism in one country” and the practice of class collaboration are fundamental to Stalinist politics and its counterposition to basic concepts of Marx and Lenin. Lenin repeatedly emphasized that socialism has to be international. Socialism is a classless, stateless society based on abundance and the radical reduction of human labor time.⁷² Stalin invented the anti-Marxist dogma of socialism in one country as the ideological banner for the bureaucracy, the privileged layer that usurped political power from the working class in Soviet Russia. The corollary of “socialism in one country” at home was popular-front class collaboration abroad.

But – and this relates to some of the questions in the discussion – is the practice of class collaboration adhered to 100% by all Stalinists always? No. In 1953, during the fight in the SWP against a grouping aligned with Pablo [the Cochran-Clark faction], a supporter of the majority declared that “Stalinism is counterrevolutionary through and through.” When this inaccurate formulation was defended, that gave ammunition to Pablo’s supporters.

The reality was that in China, for example, rather than being slaughtered by the enemy and faced with a drive to do just that, a Stalinist-led peasant army was pushed into carrying out a deformed social revolution. To Mao’s credit, he did not put down his arms in 1945-49, though he kept trying to form a coalition government with Chiang Kai-shek’s bloody Guomindang (Nationalist Party). The victory of Mao’s forces in China followed the Yugoslav Revolution led by Tito a few years before. In Vietnam, after many years of struggle, the workers and peasants defeated U.S. imperialism – a major victory for the workers and oppressed worldwide. But the revolutions carried out by these Stalinist-led guerrilla armies – in the exceptional cases where they prevailed and led to a social overturn (contradicting the Stalinists’ own “two-stage revolution” program) – produced bureaucratically *deformed* workers states. The anti-capitalist gains were constantly menaced by the governing bureaucracy. Without a proletarian political revolution opening the way to socialism, capitalist counterrevolution was a constant danger. Tragically, history has repeatedly shown this Trotskyist warning to be correct.

Marxism and Guerrilla Warfare

There were requests in the discussion period for some more background on guerrilla warfare. It’s important to note that those who tried to replicate the guerrilla war strategy of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara or Mao Zedong, etc., were in the large majority of cases militarily crushed. Where that wasn’t the case it most often led to the regeneration of a *bourgeois* state, as in Algeria, in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, in Nicaragua and some other places. Very rarely has it led to the overthrow of bourgeois property relations, and that’s been in exceptional conditions.

Someone asked if Stalinism originated guerrilla warfare.

⁷² See, for example, Lenin’s “Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat,” October 1919. For an enduringly useful discussion of these issues, see Joseph Seymour, “The Poverty of Maoist Economics,” in the 1977 Spartacus Youth League pamphlet *Trotskyism versus Maoism: Why the U.S.S.R. Is Not Capitalist*.



Che Guevara’s manual on guerrilla war. Cover photo: Camilo Cienfuegos after victory at Yaguajay, days before dictator Fulgencio Batista fled on 1 January 1959.

No, the term (*guerra de guerrillas*) goes back to the “irregular forces,” as distinct from a traditional official army, that fought against the French occupation of Spain in the early 1800s. But this kind of warfare was waged in many different contexts, from George Washington’s forces versus the British “red coats” to partisan forces during World War II. In China, after Stalin’s subordination of the Communist Party to the Guomindang led to the urban proletariat’s terrible defeat in 1927, the surviving CPers went deep into the countryside, where they built a peasant army and many years later, in conditions shaped by WWII, were militarily victorious.

Faced with the drive to exterminate them, it was not really an option to keep trying to carry through Mao’s repeatedly stated program (in “On New Democracy” [1940], “On Coalition Government” [1945], etc.) of *not* overthrowing capitalism. The Chinese Communists’ survival depended largely on the poor peasants’ upheaval against the landlords – agrarian revolution by the poor peasants – and also, the Soviets eventually gave Mao weaponry captured from the Japanese. And the U.S. was not going to just permit a Chinese Communist victory. Survival depended on the imperialists’ puppets in China being defeated and smashed.

But particularly after the Cuban Revolution, many young leftists (including me before I was won to Trotskyism) saw guerrilla warfare as key to revolutionary strategy. In reality, to generalize guerrilla warfare as a strategy means abandoning the basis of communism. For Marx, the proletariat, the international, propertyless, collectively laboring class that is central to capitalist production, is identified with communism; it is the class of communism. The proletariat can and must group

other sectors of the exploited and oppressed behind it. But if it abandons its own class standpoint, **communism** in the most fundamental ways that Marx, Engels and Lenin understood it will not be victorious.

This is related to the questions on the peasantry. The doctrine of guerrilla warfare based on the peasantry was a kind of revival of the peasant-based populism of the Russian “Narodniks.” Russian Marxism was forged in political combat **against** this.⁷³ We are for the struggles of the peasantry against the landlords, but a strategy based on small commodity producers is far removed from the revolutionary-internationalist working-class politics of Marxism.

Pabloists vs. Workerists

Some important comments were made by another participant in the discussion, who pointed out that Pabloism offered an ostensible answer to questions that some of the other Trotskyist currents were unable to answer. The Pabloists, sometimes called Pabloites, pointed to the reality of post-WWII revolutions – and drew opportunist conclusions. Some other tendencies, seeking to avoid opportunism, found themselves flatly denying reality.⁷⁴

The organization with perhaps the most dogmatic, “logical” but illogical long-term evasion of social reality on this question is Lutte Ouvrière (LO), the French organization we talked about earlier. LO’s outlook is characterized by “workerism”: fetishization of the working class as it is today and adaptation to its current consciousness. It’s almost their calling card. Yet LO has some thousands of serious working-class people following it who consider themselves Trotskyists.

With regard to the post-WWII revolutions, a key question for Trotskyists, LO has a very simple, simplistically “logical” doctrine. It goes like this: only the workers can make a workers revolution, therefore **only** the USSR, product of a workers insurrection, was a workers state. The other countries claiming to be non-capitalist, which other Trotskyist groups have called deformed workers states – says LO – are no such thing. Why? Because those revolutions weren’t made by the working class. Period.⁷⁵

End of discussion, that’s it, there’s nothing else to say, per LO... But wait a minute, you might say: it was the Soviet army that installed the post-WWII governments in East Europe. And it was largely the Soviets that changed those governments’ composition repeatedly over the decades. So it’s pretty strange to claim that those were all capitalist states and societies – while admitting that the USSR was a workers state. Let alone how the economy operated in the Soviet-bloc states.

Or if you take a look at Cuba when Che Guevara was in

charge of its economy, to pick another example that should make LO supporters think. You could basically not even sell an ice cream cone except through the entities established after the revolution, which expropriated not just the U.S. companies but the whole Cuban bourgeoisie. Everything was nationalized. And the economy was not run by profit or the profit motive. When Che decided that public phone booth calls should be free, for example, they became free overnight. (Since phone booths were scarce, the result was big lines of people waiting to make a call.)⁷⁶ More broadly, in the Soviet bloc, in Mao’s China, Castro’s Cuba, etc., what was built, what was made, where resources went was not determined by the rate of profit, as in a capitalist society.

To which LO’s answer has always been, in essence: don’t confuse us with the facts; whatever the actual workings of the society, even if essentially identical to the Soviet degenerated workers state, those other countries can’t be and aren’t any kind of workers state. So were the Soviet-bloc states except for the Soviet Union *capitalist* states? Even the devastating results of actual capitalist restoration there have not led them to question their dogma. It’s, “Move along – nothing to see here.” The real theoretical issues that were posed for would-be Trotskyists are side-stepped, since, according to this outlook, to admit reality would mean falling into opportunism.

Meanwhile, the Pabloists recognized the reality that capitalist class rule had been overthrown in East Europe and China (and later in Cuba and Vietnam). But the conclusion that they drew was essentially that the objective “dynamic” was for Stalinism to be or become a revolutionary force – and a conscious revolutionary Marxist leadership for proletarian revolution was no longer really necessary.

Logical in his own opportunist way, Pablo said: so let’s enter Stalinist parties and tail petty-bourgeois nationalist forces in the “Third World,” apply a little pressure where we can, and help history do its thing. This “objectivism” and liquidationism continued to guide Pablo’s followers and political heirs, who thereby ceased to be Trotskyist – and became obstacles to Trotskyism. While in the long run (sometimes *very* long run) they mainly abandoned entrism *sui generis*, the ingrained tailism remained. Those who joined the Pablo/Mandel current in their youth, at the height of pro-guerrillaist enthusiasm in the ’60s, would doubtless have been shocked to see where this tailism would lead them: to social-democratic reformism.

More on Permanent Revolution

In the discussion there was also a request for more on the contrast between Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” and the formula that Lenin put forward and later vacated: “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” As people will be able to see in the [video of the ICL-LFI debate](#), this was a key topic in Jan’s presentation in the special section on permanent revolution there, in which Jan debated a leading ICLer.

⁷⁶ A very interesting article titled “‘Radical Egalitarian’ Stalinism: A Post-Mortem,” published in *Spartacist* No. 25, Summer 1978, addressed Guevara’s views on economics and “the new man under socialism,” among other subjects.

⁷³ See Trotsky’s above-cited “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution” and Lenin’s *What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* (1894).

⁷⁴ This is addressed in “Spartacist Statement to International Conference” (1966) in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 9, as well as “Genesis of Pabloism” (1972) and other materials in *Yugoslavia, East Europe and the Fourth International*.

⁷⁵ See, for example, “The People’s Democracies” (1976) on [the-spark.net](#), website of LO’s U.S. co-thinkers.

[Shows pamphlet.] This is the old 1970 Spartacist pamphlet *What Is the Permanent Revolution?* reprinting Trotsky's "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution." At the debate I mentioned having first read it for an early 1970s SL/RCY [Revolutionary Communist Youth] study group. It was enormously exciting to read, as it helped clarify things I had been looking for answers on, not only about the Russian Revolution but on Cuba and Vietnam.

As opposed to the Mensheviks, Lenin pointed out, in writings such as *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* (1905), that the bourgeoisie was **not** going to lead any kind of revolutionary struggle in Russia.⁷⁷ He said that fundamental bourgeois-democratic tasks such as the destruction of tsarism and landlordism, the conquest of basic democratic rights, etc., could only be carried through by a revolutionary upheaval, in which the proletariat would be central, in alliance with the peasantry. So far so good.

But at the time Lenin formulated this, he had still not broken out of the framework that in backward Russia there would have to be a two-stage revolution, first a bourgeois-democratic stage and later on a proletarian-socialist stage. He was still basing his view on the then-existing "orthodoxy" that, given the level of Russia's socioeconomic development, it was not yet possible for the Russian proletariat to overthrow capitalism and begin to carry out socialist tasks. In other words, he still did not think that the dictatorship of the proletariat, otherwise known as a workers state, could yet be established until the bourgeois-democratic tasks were carried out, clearing the way for further economic development that would make a socialist revolution possible. He was very clear and frank about it. But on this he was mistaken, as shown 12 years after 1905.

Trotsky shared with Lenin's 1905 position the understanding that the Russian bourgeoisie would not be leading a revolution, that it was tied to the tsarist autocracy and the landlords, and depended on investments from dominant capitalist countries (France, Britain, etc.). Trotsky also strongly agreed with Lenin that giving political support to the liberal bourgeoisie, or tying the workers to it, would be a terrible mistake for the Russian proletariat.

But Trotsky asked the question: what will happen when the proletariat undertakes a revolutionary struggle to carry out tasks, unfilled in backward Russia, that were historically associated with the bourgeois revolutions? Could the workers stop there? No, he said: they would necessarily make what he called increasingly despotic incursions on capitalist property. In a position of power, the proletariat would find itself pitted

⁷⁷ At that time "social democracy" was still the standard term for the Marxist movement.



Spartacist pamphlet on Trotsky's permanent revolution.

against the capitalist class and pushed by the whole situation to expropriate it. It needed to win the peasantry, the poor peasants in particular, over to its side. This relates to the question someone asked about the peasantry. It could not generate its own independent policy; the peasantry would follow either bourgeois politics or the politics of the proletarian revolution. And Trotsky was right.

In 1917, Lenin abandoned his "algebraic" formulation, which would have stood in the way of the struggle for soviet power. As Jan referred to at the debate, Trotsky has a whole chapter in his *History of the Russian Revolution* on this subject, called "Rearming the Party." Question for the SL, which is not here tonight: "rearm" *why*, from what to what? From the old slogan of democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. And as that crucial part of Trotsky's *History* explains, rearming the party meant Lenin carrying out a major political struggle in March, April and

later in 1917 against those like Stalin and Kamenev who called themselves "Old Bolsheviks" and wanted the party to keep that formula as opposed to the dictatorship of the proletariat. And as Jan emphasized, if Lenin had not won that struggle, ***there would have been no October Revolution.***

And to reiterate, when the Stalinists justified their 1925-27 policy in China by reviving that formula, it contributed to the ensuing disaster; and when they revived it in Spain in 1931, Trotsky said they were making a noose for the proletariat. So when the Spartacist League tries to revive that today, we say: beware. This is consequential in a way that I'll get back to at the end.

Imperialist War and Civil War

There was a question on the connection between the war on Gaza and the Ukraine war of the NATO imperialists against Russia, an intermediate capitalist state. It's a big subject; let me just say for now that some who were drinking the Kool-Aid of imperialist propaganda over Ukraine – that the U.S. imperialists sought to "support democracy," national rights, etc. – may be asking questions now. In other words, starting to grasp that the forces arming and backing the horrific genocide in Gaza are scarcely likely to be doing something laudable or defensible in Ukraine. Actually, some in the audience here began by questioning that, and through study and discussion came over to the Marxist view.

A question about Lenin's World War I call to "turn the imperialist war into a civil war" asked whether modern-day civil wars aren't detrimental to the workers movement. The reference point for the question seems to have been religious or ethnic "communal" conflicts in India, Nigeria, Lebanon and elsewhere. Certainly those are detrimental. But what Lenin

was talking about was *class* war, of the exploited and oppressed against the ruling classes – that kind of civil war. What he called for during the inter-imperialist world war that broke out in 1914 was to transform the war between imperialist nations into a class war of the workers against their “own” bourgeoisies.

The social-democratic leaders had led the working class into the slaughter: instead of “Workers of the World, Unite,” they helped their “own” ruling classes, working to lead the French workers into the trenches to kill the German workers; the German workers to kill to the French and Russian workers; the American workers to kill the German workers... Turning it into a class war is what happened in Russia in 1917, which under the Bolsheviks’ leadership led to the victory of the October Revolution.

It’s very different from wars between different nationalities in a multinational state – like when the different peoples of Yugoslavia were slaughtering each other on a nationalist basis – or between the peoples of two semicolonial countries like Bolivia versus Paraguay in the 1930s, for example, or India versus Pakistan, or many other cases. Only through uniting in a class war against the possessing classes has it been possible to overcome that.

It was also asked whether in situations of different peoples in the same state “there has to be a split in the dominant group.” That depends on the particular society. In what used to be called Rhodesia, and is now Zimbabwe, there was a white minority dictatorship based on (in the late 1960s), about a quarter million whites – 5% of the population – lording it over a black population of about 5 million people. You weren’t going to significantly split the white minority. But if the dominant national or ethnic group is a large part of the population, you have to split it along class lines. Unless capitalism is not what it is, they can’t in any enduring way have a decent and stable life; there is a class struggle and it’s possible and necessary to split that population.

In the case of Israel, the majority of the Hebrew-speaking working people is aligned with Zionism. That is a bitter reality. But unless revolutionaries seek and find the ways to split that population, or if the policy they put forward means you *can’t*



split that population, how can Zionism be defeated? Keep in mind that the Zionists have hundreds of atomic bombs. But the whole region is a powder keg. An *internationalist revolutionary policy* for defending the Palestinians, connecting this with class struggle by the exploited and oppressed throughout the region, is essential. *The Internationalist* No. 9 [January-February 2001] is crucial reading on this.

Born-Again ICL

“Why did the Spartacist League come out for bourgeois nationalism [in 2017]?” was another question. The short answer: it was in the process of being politically redirected by a group of activists it had recruited in Quebec, who made a push for this. They made an alliance with the then “central leader” (*sic*) of the SL/ICL on the basis of a bourgeois-nationalist program and then took over leadership of the organization themselves. The nationalism had become, and remains, central to its program.

This brings us back to the question of reforging the Fourth International – on what program. We are informed by the present-day ICL, which in *Spartacist* 68 declares itself “reforged,” that there is a new program for the

Fourth International, which is ... *Spartacist* 68! We talked about this at the debate, but I wanted to reiterate here that we have a program: it’s called the “Transitional Program,” *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*. That program corresponds to the *historical epoch* that we’re in: the imperialist epoch.

We don’t just “stand on” this program, we fight to bring it into the class struggle. We gave some examples: you comrades are fighting for workers strikes against the genocidal war on the people of Gaza; the need for workers defense guards against fascist provocations; for a revolutionary workers party, for a workers government and international socialist revolution.

At the debate we talked about the example of how the Brazilian comrades sparked the first workers strike for the freedom of former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal, in 1999, which sparked the ILWU shutdown held the next day.⁷⁸ [*Shows newspaper.*] This

⁷⁸ See “Brazil Education Workers Stop Work Demanding: Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!” (May 1999) and “Brazilian Workers Mobilize for Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal,” *The Internationalist* No. 8, June 2000.

is the Rio de Janeiro state teachers union paper, publicizing the strikes for Mumia's freedom. Regarding permanent revolution, the LFI fights in Brazil and in Mexico to put into practice that program which must be fought for from North Africa to South Africa, Iran, Turkey, the Indian subcontinent, etc.

So the revelation by the reborn ICL that they have a new program for the Fourth International, consisting of their magazine, may be astonishing but it's not necessarily surprising, given their all-round "born-again-ness" together with their unending belief that everything revolves around them. What's in that magazine/program might be surprising to some, since it so sweepingly junks the old Spartacism. But people might be even more surprised by what *isn't* in it. The question of black liberation, for example – the central particularity or key specific strategic question of proletarian revolution in what for over a century has been the citadel of world imperialism. The struggle against black oppression is the Achilles heel of American imperialism and we intend to not just talk about anti-imperialism but to *defeat* U.S. imperialism.

But if the struggle for black liberation through socialist revolution is (like many other key issues) not in their new program, what is? More than anything else, an eye-crossing number of ritual references to liberalism.

Endlessly Denouncing "Liberalism" While Echoing It

Spartacist 68 [September 2023], their new program, is not a program for action by the world proletariat at all. It's a revisionist jumble interspersed with all kinds of charts, quotations, holding forth on intellectual fads of bourgeois propaganda, Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of the "end of history" after the destruction of the Soviet Union, plus lots of self-denunciation leading not in a leftward direction but even further away from Trotskyism.

Back in 1937 Mao Zedong put out a pamphlet called *Combat Liberalism*, and for the ICL the essence of Marxism today is evidently to wage a rhetorical, universal, eternal "combat" against liberalism conceived of as an ideological abstraction. The idea that it's the dominant ideology everywhere might be a surprise if you were talking to, say, miners in West Virginia. Or Eastern Europe, maybe Poland today – is that liberalism? A different kind of example: South Africa, where much of the black proletariat follows the CP – can they be understood as "liberals"? Maybe "all cats are gray in the dark," but are Stalinism, rightist Catholic nationalism, evangelical Protestantism all just liberalism – and how would declaring them such orient you for struggle?

What's striking is that *Spartacist* 68's description of the period since the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union could in many ways have come from ideologues of liberalism, including Francis Fukuyama. According to today's ICL, the post-Soviet period was one of "relative peace" and prosperity, "exceptional stability" and development of the productive forces. This they attribute to U.S. hegemony having established "ultra-imperialism" (using Second International leader Karl Kautsky's ultra-revisionist term that Lenin denounced in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* [1916]). Much of this could come right from a smorgasbord

of anti-Trotskyists like the Workers Power group in Britain, or Tony Cliff, the Cold War anti-communist ideologue of "state capitalism." Cliff was the political godfather of the late, unlamented International Socialist Organization in the U.S. His group in Britain put out a special pamphlet denouncing Trotskyists for upholding the Transitional Program.

As for *Spartacist*'s business about relative peace – seriously? As comrades have pointed out, for our young members and actually most of our members, period, at no point in their life has there not been a war. In the '90s the Persian Gulf War, the wars in Yugoslavia, Somalia, Rwanda, later the "war on terror," Afghanistan, Iraq, multiple refugee crises – the list goes on.

Let's move on to *Spartacist* 68's business about how supposedly China is the vanguard of globalization. On China's enormous economic progress, lifting 800 million people out of poverty over the past decades, they attribute this not to the basis provided by gains of the 1949 revolution but to what they call "the condition that made its rise possible – economic globalization under U.S. hegemony." (Presumably this also makes China a vanguard of some variant of liberalism.) As for the stuff on China in recent ICL documents, let's just say it straight: it's anti-communist. We had a series of polemics 20-plus years ago showing how the ICL was oscillating between Trotskyism and Max Shachtman, when they said the bureaucracy was supposedly leading capitalist counter-revolution. With this material they seem, in key ways, to have gone over to the "ghost of Max" (as an old satirical song about Shachtmanites used to put it).

A lot of what they've put out repeats the litany of imperialist liberals' (and rightists') talking points, reminiscent of what Cold Warriors used to say about what they called the "captive nations." Raising high the banner of Tibet, denouncing China for offending the national sensibilities of everyone else in the region by building islands as a defensive measure against the very real threat of an imperialist Third World War. China's call for reunification with Taiwan is denounced as a "lose-lose" proposal." Meanwhile the previous issue of *Spartacist* [No. 67, August 2022] luridly ranted about "workers chained to their machines" in China. All of this can only discredit the genuine program of Trotskyism, which defends China not just abstractly but in reality against imperialism and counterrevolution, and shows how proletarian political revolution is essential to the fight to defeat imperialist aggression.⁷⁹

How about the following statement from the debate – does it represent Trotsky's standpoint on the Russian Question? The main ICL speaker said – this is a verbatim quotation: "we *never* support policies of the Communist Party of China" [*emphasis in the original*]. Now recall that this is the same group that calls for making an "anti-imperialist united front" with the

⁷⁹ As a deformed workers state, China's ability to defend its population in the COVID pandemic, saving millions of lives, provided a stark contrast to the mass deaths in major capitalist countries from the U.S. to Europe. See "In the Time of Coronavirus, A Tale of Two Cities: Wuhan – New York," "Coronavirus and Capitalism" and related articles in *The Internationalist* No. 59, March-April 2020, as well as "U.S. Big Lie Over Wuhan Is War Propaganda," *The Internationalist* No. 65, October-December 2021.

bourgeois governments in Mexico and Greece, for example, to support some of their policies. They said that you had to make an “anti-imperialist united front” with Mexican president Andrés Manuel López Obrador to back his energy reform and mobilize the workers to support his policies on this. They say you had to make a common front with the SYRIZA government in Greece to support its 2015 “bailout referendum.”

So, to supporting policies of bourgeois-nationalist governments they say “yes,” but “we *never* support policies” of the government of the Chinese deformed workers state, says the ICL. Trotskyism this is not – it’s the kind of thing Shachtman said on the Russian Question during his fight against Trotsky and Cannon in the 1939–40 fight. But in one article after another, Trotsky explained the “dual nature” of the Stalinist bureaucracy and that while opposing its betrayals, we obviously don’t oppose everything the government of the workers state does. And how about Mao’s China unbinding the feet of women, providing them with education and healthcare, not to mention expropriating the landlords and capitalists and sending troops against the U.S. imperialists’ mass murder of the people of Korea? Or the USSR liberating East Europe from the fascists in 1945?

The ICL wants to talk about anti-imperialism? How about supporting Cuba’s defeat of the Yankee imperialists at the Bay of Pigs and of apartheid South Africa when it invaded Angola? How about the literacy campaign launched by the Cuban government in 1961? Do we not support that? We don’t support the overall policy of the Stalinists – we’re for proletarian political revolution. But this stuff from the ICL is imbued with the spirit of Shachtmanism.

“Anti-Imperialist United Front”

There isn’t time to go through the ICL’s latest gimmicks, but let’s end by briefly going back to them resuscitating the call for an “anti-imperialist united front.” We have some acquaintance with this topic. Not only in Bolivia, where, under this policy the heroic Bolivian miners and peasants were led to defeat after 1952 and then again in 1971. In Argentina, a man named Jorge Abelardo Ramos, who claimed to be a Trotskyist, became famous as an ideologue of “national liberation” through an “anti-imperialist” front with the bourgeois nationalists. He did his best to help cement the subjugation of the Argentine working class to the government of General Perón. In 1989, still claiming the same ideology, he was made ambassador to Mexico by President Carlos Menem, the Peronist politician who led the charge for neoliberal economics.

And it turns out that *Nahuel Moreno* too had come out for the “anti-imperialist united front,” after initially opposing it. When specifically did Moreno receive this revelation from on high? The Third World Congress of the FI, which sancti-



Nahuel Moreno on his way to the Third World Congress of the Fourth International, 1951.

fied Pabloism, and where Moreno’s group thanked Pablo’s International Secretariat for winning them over to the “anti-imperialist united front.”⁸⁰

Lastly, on Mexico. The ICL proudly proclaims that it changed the name of its Mexican paper from *Espartaco* to *El Antiimperialista*. Their paper is not called *El Comunista*, or “Socialist Revolution,” “Permanent Revolution,” “World Revolution,” “Workers Cause,” “Proletarian Struggle,” even “Workers’ Voice” or anything based on the class standpoint of the proletariat. It’s “The Anti-Imperialist,” which signals that you’re fashioning the name, and your program, for what’s compatible with an “anti-imperialist front” *with sectors of the bourgeoisie*.

Are we for the struggle against imperialism? We most certainly are – and always have been. It’s not some novelty to us. Unlike the ICL, we did *not* give up the struggle for Puerto Rican independence, or, after 9/11, the call for defeat of U.S. imperialism in its Afghanistan war, or the fight to “hot-cargo” war matériel in the Iraq War, nor did we support the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 2010 or capitulate to the anti-China war drive. But if you name your paper “The Anti-Imperialist,” the message is that you’re tailoring your politics to what fits into “anti-imperialism” as a general category, seeking a bloc of class collaboration with the bourgeoisie. We’re for agrarian revolution in countries with a poor peasantry, but what if you called your newspaper *El Agrarista*, or, say, “The Anti-Fascist” or “The Fighter for Democratic Rights”? We are militantly for Puerto Rican independence, but if you called your paper there *El Independentista* it would mean appealing for a political bloc with bourgeois forces.

It’s important to see the political logic of such things, just like the political reasons for their distortions and revisions of the history of the Russian Revolution. They don’t like it when we quote Trotsky (though they routinely slice and dice quotations from him), but a comrade found this from *The Permanent Revolution* (1929) and it’s pertinent here: “Juggling with old quotations is in general practiced by the whole school of epigones on a quite special plane which nowhere intersects the real historical process.” The reason for – let’s use an impolite word – them lying about permanent revolution is to seek something opposed to it: class collaboration.

In the struggle to reforge the Fourth International, we will encounter many types of opportunism, many distortions and revisions and obstacles. But we will continue to fight for the genuine program of communism, what Trotsky put forward in the Transitional Program. It’s what he fought for with the foundation in 1938 of the Fourth International, which we are determined to reforge. I hope many of you will be part of that struggle. ■

⁸⁰ Declaration of the Argentine POR to the Latin American Commission, in Rodolphe Prager (ed.), *Les congrès de la Quatrième Internationale*, vol. 4 (1989).

Correspondence Between the International Communist League and the League for the Fourth International

Reprinted below, from The Internationalist No. 71 (June-October 2023), is an exchange of correspondence leading up to the 13 January 2024 debate between the International Communist League (ICL, represented in the U.S. by the Spartacist League) and the League for the Fourth International (LFI).

Letter from the ICL to the IG/League for the Fourth International

2 September 2023

Dear comrades,

The recent international conference of the ICL has reoriented our party on fundamental questions (see link to *Spartacist* [<https://icl-fi.org/english/esp/68/spartacist-en-68.pdf>]). This includes a review of our differences with the IG/LFI. As a result, the conference tasked the ICL to conduct “serious political clarification and debate with the IG” and to engage “as much as possible in common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement.” In line with this, we propose opening formal discussion between our organizations.

On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct. The fights that led to the expulsions of the IG’s founding members from the ICL were characterized as unprincipled, as was the break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil. We are currently investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time. The conference also described the central critique of the ICL made by the IG at its founding as “essentially correct” – that is, that the ICL had reduced the task of Marxists in the post-Soviet period to “keeping the flame alive against attempts to squelch it.”

However, when it comes to the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period, we believe that overall they were qualitatively similar. When it came to orienting the working class, neither organization had a correct perspective because neither had as its central objective to break the hold of liberalism on the workers movement – the dominant ideology of the period and the main ideological brake on the struggles of workers and the oppressed.

Our proposal to open discussion is not to paper over our differences. Rather, it is intended to raise the level of political discussion between our organizations, starting from the central questions of revolutionary strategy for the current period. We are hopeful that engaging in such discussions can bring our organizations closer. The split provoked by the expulsion of your founding members from our party has been detrimental to the workers movement. The relations between our two organizations have been extremely hostile, while on most questions the political differences have been shallow at best. We believe there has always been – and remains – a significant overlap in the views of our memberships. If we are to stay divided

in two rival organizations, it is our respective duty to ensure that this division is based on crystal-clear differences over the most important questions facing the workers movement today.

The world is rapidly changing and the fight to reforge the Fourth International is posed with burning urgency. Events are shaking the left. Theoretical and political debates among the most advanced layers of the workers movement are crucial to reforging the Fourth International. But fundamentally it is fighting to provide revolutionary leadership in great world events that will be decisive. Doctrinal differences within the left can and will be overcome through common struggle.

In this sense, it is essential to engage as much as possible in common work when appropriate. The capitalists are keenly aware of the precariousness of their current situation; their response is to crack down on dissent and target minorities. There can be no excuse for disunity in the face of such attacks. Common fronts in defense work would be a modest but important contribution to advancing the interests of the workers movement and would put pressure on the rest of the left to do the same.

We expect that this letter will be met with a certain amount of skepticism on your part. As a first step, we simply propose to hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations. The purpose would be to have an initial exchange of views and to consider options for further discussion. We place no preconditions on this meeting. On our part, we commit to seeking the utmost political clarity as opposed to the demagoguery and slander that have characterized our relations thus far.

We look forward to your answer.

Communist greetings,

Perrault

For the International Secretariat of the ICL

* * *

Letter from the League for the Fourth International to the International Communist League

27 September 2023

Dear comrade Perrault,

We have received your 2 September letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International and analyzed it in conjunction with the issue of *Spartacist* (No. 68, September 2023) that you refer to, containing documents from the ICL’s eighth international conference. Most fundamental for us as Trotskyists are the programmatic issues. It is these that guide our response to your proposal for “opening formal discussion between our organizations,” which we will address below.

In your letter, you write: “On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct.” Several passages in the recent

Spartacist make similar statements. In the interest of basic political housekeeping, we must pose some necessary questions.

1) You state that “the fights that led to the expulsions of the IG’s founding members from the ICL” were “unprincipled.” Yes they were. The question is, what specifically about them does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled?

2) You state that you are “investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time.” Does this investigation include the travesty of a “trial” of a comrade centered on outright fabrications, and the preparation of a second frame-up trial shortly thereafter?¹ Does it include the flagrantly chauvinist campaign against North African comrades who opposed the ICL leaders’ abandoning the commitment to publish an exile publication?² Or coming clean about the unspeakable witch hunt by the ICL in 1999 against the leaders of its Italian section?³

3) Your letter now also characterizes as unprincipled the ICL’s June 1996 “break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil,” and *Spartacist* calls for the ICL to carry out “a reckoning” on this unilateral break. But, again, what exactly about its actions does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled? The fact that, at the height of the heated struggle the Brazilian comrades were waging to oust *guardas* (police) from the municipal workers union in the steel city of Volta Redonda, the ICL stabbed the struggle in the back? It called to “pull our hands out of that boiling water” and demanded that the comrades resign their union positions, quit the union and leave town, and then, when they refused this shameful demand, the ICL broke relations. To cover its tracks, it launched a smear campaign which went so far as to brand the black Trotskyist steel workers as “dangerous hustlers,” and sought to sabotage their international defense campaign, calling it a “cynical sham” after the courts ordered the “search and seizure” of all copies of a leaflet their Comitê de Luta Classista issued, based on a suit demanding a list of all CLC members.⁴

The recent *Spartacist* claims that the ICL and IG engaged in “almost three decades” of “mutual slander.” For the record, the IG/LFI *never* slandered the ICL. Our critiques have been scrupulously political and always based on fact. In contrast, the ICL unleashed a decades-long torrent of slanders against us, seeking to brand the IG as “anti-American” at the height of post-9/11 hysteria for our call to defeat U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan,⁵ “provocateur”-baiting,⁶ and much more. You

mention in passing (in a parenthesis) the “2010 Haiti betrayal,” without saying what that was – the ICL’s scandalous support for U.S. occupation troops – and its refusal to fight for independence for Puerto Rico, but not that it denounced the LFI for our principled opposition to imperialist domination. And as for the latter-day ICL’s chauvinist line on refugees,⁷ the word does not even appear in the latest issue of *Spartacist*.

Proceeding to the proposal put forward in your 2 September letter, you call for “opening formal discussion between our organizations,” to “engage as much as possible in common work,” and, “as a first step,” to “hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations,” in order to “have an initial exchange of views and consider options for further discussions.” There is *no principled programmatic basis* for such formal discussions, private leadership meetings or common work. This is, of course, distinct from united-front actions (as opposed to the political bloc you are effectively proposing) when the class struggle calls for it, which we have participated in (and often initiated) with a range of political tendencies, including the ICL.

Such discussions, common work, etc., are the kind of steps that left organizations undertake when there is some process of political convergence. Some might think that since the LFI upholds the programmatic heritage of the Spartacist tendency when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, and you still call your international organ *Spartacist* (for how long?), that might indicate a degree of commonality. But under its new leadership, and for years before then, the ICL has turned its back on and increasingly formally renounced one fundamental Spartacist position after another. You claim that “the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period ... were qualitatively similar.” In reality, the political differences have continued to grow since the 1996-98 expulsions, and are rapidly accelerating.

You state in the current issue of *Spartacist* that the Spartacist tendency was supposedly “Deformed at Birth” on the question of permanent revolution – a central issue for Trotskyists. To advance this claim, the ICL (new epoch) performs a sleight-of-hand, seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a *stagist* program, in which the first stage is national liberation, even under capitalism, and even in the imperialist countries. On the contrary, Trotsky emphasized that in the present epoch, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry.⁸

In the same vein, you now embrace the “Anti-Imperialist United Front” which in practice means political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the

¹ See our July 1996 pamphlet *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*.

² See “‘Chauvinist Hydra’ Devours SL/ICL: Some History Ex-Trotskyists Would Like to Keep Hidden,” *The Internationalist* No. 59, March-April 2020.

³ See *Back to Trotskyism!* (May 2016).

⁴ See “ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Brazilian Trotskyist Workers,” reproduced in *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* (2010) and *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil* (1997). Also, “Army Death List Targeted Brazilian Worker Militants,” *The Internationalist* No. 8, June 2000.

⁵ See “ICL Refuses to Call for Defeat of U.S. Imperialism, ‘Anti-American’ Bait the Internationalist Group,” *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

⁶ See the denunciation of this smear by Esteban Volkov, Trotsky’s grandson, in “Poisonous ‘Provocateur’ Baiting from the SL,” *The Internationalist* No. 16, May-June 2003.

⁷ See “Strange Encounters with the ICL,” *The Internationalist* No. 44 (Summer 2016); “Spartacist League vs. Refugees,” *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017; “The ICL vs. Asylum for Refugees in Quebec,” *The Internationalist* No. 56, May-June 2019.

⁸ Your claim that Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution put forward in 1905 was essentially identical with Lenin’s formula at that time of a “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” directly contradicts Trotsky’s own presentation in “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution” (August 1939), which contrasts them.

formula used to subordinate the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, leading to the 1927 Shanghai Massacre. In line with that you vilify the Spartacist tendency's record on Iran, when we warned against the catastrophic consequences of tailing the mullah-led "Islamic Revolution" as some kind of anti-imperialist movement, which led to the jailing and execution of thousands of leftists. In Mexico, you essentially prettify the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as anti-imperialist. A question: do you advocate that the "anti-imperialist united front" in Mexico include AMLO's party, MORENA? Of course, everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui* imperialism.

"Nation-building" bourgeois nationalism is the political motor force of the ICL's escalation of its abandonment of the Spartacist programmatic heritage, publicly announced with the 2017 "Hydra" document.⁹ A key aspect of "Hydra" was its embrace of anti-democratic language laws in Quebec and Catalonia, which means repudiating Lenin's crucial position against compulsory official languages.¹⁰ The ICL's new, blatantly anti-Leninist line on the national question paved the way for a blizzard of further revisions, predictably now leading to repudiating the Spartacist tendency's crucial position that in the case of interpenetrated peoples (such as in Palestine), a just and equitable solution to competing national rights is only possible through establishing workers rule.¹¹ This is essential to the struggle to defend the Palestinian people and overthrow the Zionist regime, for example. Today the ICL's embrace of nationalism is extended, both retrospectively (on the USSR, Poland and the other East European deformed workers states) and currently on China.

The basic disagreements between us not only concern what you call "abstract doctrine" but also burning issues of the present day. Thus on the war of the U.S./NATO imperialists and their proxy regime in Ukraine against Russia, a way station toward imperialist war against China, the policy of the LFI is directly counterposed to that of the ICL. While the ICL admits that capitalist Russia is not an imperialist power, you denounce the LFI for upholding military defense of Russia against the imperialists. And while claiming in the latest *Spartacist* that "the ICL and IG are relatively close" on issues like China, in your previous issue (August 2022) you denounce us for characterizing the "Wuhan lab leak theory" as what it is: imperialist war propaganda against the Chinese deformed workers state.

As for the imaginary scenario of "common work," again there is no principled basis. From your blanket "Down with lockdowns" line (including in China, where they were very effective) to your recent articles and leaflets, each is more opportunist than the last. This includes calling to join the Australian Labor Party, the governing party that enforces rac-

⁹ Editor's note: This refers to "The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra," central document of the ICL's previous international conference, published in *Spartacist*, Summer 2017.

¹⁰ See Lenin's "Liberals and Democrats on the Language Question" (September 1913), his seminal "Critical Remarks on the National Question" (October-December 1913) and related works.

¹¹ This was not some Spartacist invention, as you portray it, but was directly based on the Bolshevik experience in areas of mixed populations in Ukraine and the Caucasus.

ist immigration laws; the SL/U.S. statement on the ILWU and UPS (19 August) declaring that the "real battle" is "workers vs. the Establishment"; and the openly class-collaborationist "Proposal to Rebuild the Movement" (28 August), calling to "unite the broadest possible forces" to "bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights" to fulfill the "doable" call to "open the police archives," which, it states, "can be done by any politician in office that is really on the side of black people." And then there is your abhorrent leaflet on the subway murder of Jordan Neely.

Having declared that the Spartacist tendency was deformed at birth, you deride Jim Robertson¹² as a revisionist and have undertaken the wholesale junking of the programmatic arsenal crucial to revolutionary struggle today. We of the LFI, having fought over the course of decades to defend this legacy and carry it into the living class struggle, will not join you in your endeavor. With the ICL's consolidation of its break with the "old" Spartacism, you are now junking just about every distinctly Spartacist position from the days when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism. This underscores an undeniable political reality: it is the League for the Fourth International that upholds the revolutionary continuity of the communist program of Lenin and Trotsky.

Having explained why there is no principled programmatic basis for the LFI to hold private "discussions" with you, we instead challenge the ICL to a public debate. We propose that the two organizations work out the date and other details for such a debate, and that it be held in New York City, where both have their largest concentration of members.

Communist greetings,

Jan Norden

for the Executive Committee of the League for the Fourth International

* * *

Letter from the International Communist League to the LFI

11 October 2023

Dear Comrade Norden,

We regret that you have turned down our proposal for a formal meeting. In our opinion holding a frank discussion with another organization claiming the mantle of Trotskyism does not require any prior political agreement. In fact, we believe that such discussions can play an important role in clarifying differences and eventually forging political agreement.

In my September 2 letter I proposed "common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement" and "common work when it is appropriate." You reject this arguing that this is a proposal for a political bloc as opposed to united-front actions. We think this is a false distinction. Whether it is to "stop the fascists," "free political prisoners" or the 1921 UKPD "open letter," every united front requires some form of political agreement or bloc at least on a limited set of objec-

¹² Editor's note: James Robertson (1928-2019) was the founding leader of the SL.

tives. We think that we can possibly find a principled basis to work with you on defense work against political repression. Of course, we cannot have a united front on something we don't agree with. For example, it seems you do not agree on the desirability of throwing the AUKUS hawks out of the ALP or the fight to open police archives. If you did—and we certainly hope you change your mind—it would be entirely possible to work together on these limited objectives while still defending our respective strategies toward the ALP and black liberation in the U.S.

Now in response to your questions.

1) We believe that everything about the fight which led to your expulsion was unprincipled. Back in 1996 you agreed with the ICL's overall orientation. However, the fights with you and your comrades, whether over Germany, Brazil or Mexico, were all based on trying to show that you were in opposition to the rest of the ICL leadership. Since this was not the case, existing differences had to be exaggerated or simply manufactured through demagoguery and distortions.

2) Yes, our investigation does include the trials. There is a very long list of fights that were had in the last 30 years which we know to be wrong and damaging. We have prioritized the 1996 expulsion because of its political significance as well as the precedents it set. We are not currently reviewing the 1997 fight in the LTF.¹³ That being said, it was unquestionably a despicable fight, including its blanket rejection of an "iskrist perspective" for Algeria. As you know, the 1999 witchhunt of comrades Giulia and Carlo was reviewed in a 2004 ICC investigation.¹⁴ We have not re-examined the question but can certainly state that it was inexcusable to not communicate the result of the investigation to them.

3) On Brazil it is clear to us based on our own published account of events that we had no legitimate political grounds to break off relations when we did. That said, as you note there is much more to the question. We are currently investigating the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil and are determined to account for the full truth, no matter how bitter.

In addition to the questions addressed above, your response raises several substantial political differences over the content of *Spartacist* No. 68 and our recent work. I will not respond to all of these in the present letter. On most points we believe that you either distort or caricature the actual arguments we make and/or present our position as somehow being self-evidently opportunist without providing any serious motivation or explanation.

To give only one example, you claim that we seek to "turn Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program" and supposedly repudiate that "the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry." However, even a superficial glance at our article "In Defense of Permanent Revolution" will show that this isn't true. Far from endorsing a "stagist program," we reaffirm that "only the proletariat, rallying behind it the peasant

masses and the urban petty bourgeoisie, is capable of breaking the yoke of foreign capital, finishing the agrarian revolution and establishing full democracy for the toilers in the form of a workers and peasants government."

Finally, we will gladly accept the challenge to a debate. We agree to hold it in New York City. In terms of the time, we are relatively flexible. Our tentative proposal is to hold it in December. Would Saturday, December 9 work for you?

In our opinion, the best way to have a productive and clarifying debate would be to hold a full-day event where we can divide some of the various questions in dispute. We think this can be justified by the fact that this debate is almost 30 years in the making and numerous comrades from outside New York will surely want to attend.

Our proposal is as follows:

Main theme: The Fight for the Fourth International Today

Point 1: Revolutionary Leadership from 1990 to 2023

Point 2: Permanent Revolution

Point 3: The Task of Communists in the U.S.

We propose that the first point be longer than the two others given the breadth of the question and the fact that revolutionary leadership is at the heart of our differences. It is in this point that we propose to take up the question of China and the war in Ukraine. Permanent Revolution seems to us an obvious theme. As for the point on the United States, we think it makes sense given that the event will take place in New York and we both have most members in the U.S. We are of course open to a counterproposal on your part if you have a problem with any of the above proposals. Once we have agreed on a date and questions to debate, we should proceed rapidly in arranging the other details such as a venue, a chair, the format, etc.

Communist greetings,

Perrault

For the International Secretariat of the ICL

* * *

Letter from the League for the Fourth International to the ICL

15 October 2023

Dear comrade Perrault:

We have received your 11 October letter. First, regarding the response to our queries about the ICL's investigation of its actions in the period that gave rise to our organization:

Your initial letter (2 September) noted that the ICL now characterizes as "unprincipled" the "fights" that led to the expulsions of the founding members of the Internationalist Group. As our 27 September reply highlighted, that statement, while true, is strikingly general. A much more specific accounting from the ICL is required if the intent is not merely to make do with a quick "confession" but to seriously evaluate the *meaning* and lessons of events that both you and we describe as highly relevant for would-be Trotskyists.

Your 11 October answer, that "everything" about the 1996 "fight" against us was unprincipled, is based on the claim that both sides shared the same mistaken political outlook. In reality, the ICL purged us for fighting to implement the Trotskyist pro-

¹³ Editor's note: Ligue Trotskyste de France, the ICL's French section.

¹⁴ Editor's note: ICL International Control Commission.

gram, which it was abandoning – as shown dramatically when, after (and closely connected with) our expulsions, it stabbed in the back the struggle to expel police from the municipal workers union in Brazil’s “Steel City.” It was far from just a matter of “distortions,” exaggerations or specious arguments.

In the course of the cynical 1996 purge, the ICL ripped up one basic Leninist norm and party statute after another, launched a chain of willful fabrications, threatened to disaffiliate the Mexican section if it did not vote for statements the members knew to be false, publicly defamed our comrades, and much more, as we laid out at the time (beginning with *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*). For going on 30 years, the ICL sought to ignore and silence the facts. Those serious about revolutionary politics have a right to expect concrete and specific answers, after decades of snow jobs and smears from the ICL.

Your 11 October response to us states that the ICL’s investigation does include the 1996 “trials” (sic) as well as “the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil.” This was not just “claims,” but facts laid out in detail at the time in materials collected in the dossier *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists* as well as *From a Drift...*

We also asked about the 1997 campaign against oppositionists in the ICL’s French section, who after their expulsion joined in founding the League for the Fourth International.¹⁵ You write that this “was unquestionably a despicable fight” – but that the ICL is “not currently reviewing” it. Why is that? Nor, to our knowledge, has the ICL made any public accounting regarding this blatantly chauvinist and colonialist campaign whose proclaimed goal was to “humiliate” these North African comrades and “demoralize” them, for opposing the disgraceful line the ICL put forward regarding both Algeria and France.

Your response to our 27 September letter notes that it “raises several substantial political differences” with the ICL’s current line and work, but does not seek to respond to them all. So we will make brief comments on some of what you do address.

No, the difference between united-front actions and a political bloc is not “a false distinction.” As explained in the fundamental Spartacist pamphlet *On the United Front* (1976): “In contrast to a united front, a bloc is an open-ended agreement to collaborate for broadly defined aims” – which describes rather well the perspective you laid out, for which, as we noted, there is no principled programmatic basis. A united front, however, is a joint action for concrete, limited objectives, and as noted in our letter we have initiated many such actions, inviting a range of tendencies, including the ICL.

You reject our statement that the ICL is seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program, and cite a phrase from the current issue of *Spartacist* as supposed evidence to the contrary. With bourgeois nationalism as the driving force for a group (as is the case with the present-day ICL) that still – for now – claims to be Trotskyist, an accurate presentation of permanent revolution can only be an impediment. For left groups undertaking wholesale revisionism, it is standard operating procedure to include a few

“orthodox”-sounding phrases.

Turning permanent revolution into a stagist program is what it means to embrace, as you do, the “anti-imperialist united front,” which is the long-standing pretext for such a program and “theoretical” justification for political blocs with bourgeois-nationalist forces. That is also what it means to identify, as *Spartacist* now does, Trotsky’s permanent revolution with Lenin’s pre-1917 formula of “democratic dictatorship” of the proletariat and the peasantry, and with the formulation that Marx put forward in 1850. When Lenin stood on that formula, he explicitly stated that it meant a “democratic, not a socialist” regime (*Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* [1905]); in April 1917, against those who sought to cling to that slogan, he wrote that “things have worked out differently,” and called instead for “all power to the soviet of workers deputies” (*Letters on Tactics* [1917]). With regard to the formulation by Marx decades before the imperialist era, Trotsky noted: “Marx at that time expected the independent stage of the democratic revolution in Germany.... That, however, is just what did not happen” (*The Permanent Revolution* [1930]).

These kinds of revelations now proclaimed by *Spartacist* have been made many times in the past by erstwhile Trotskyist tendencies seeking theoretical cover for their rightward motion. They are part of a package including the idea that democratic demands *rather than* class struggle are the “fundamental lever for socialist revolution.” From China 1927 to Indonesia 1965, Chile 1973 to the Philippines now – and so many other countries – the real-world consequences of a stagist program, tying the proletariat to the “democratic”/“anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie, have been fatal.

Your letter states that we have presented various of the ICL’s positions as being self-evidently opportunist. Yes, that would indeed seem self-evident when faced with statements like that of the SL/U.S. (quoted in our 27 September letter) that the “real battle” is “workers vs. the Establishment” (a standard term that liberals use instead of class). This *openly* contradicts the ABCs of Marxism – based on the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie – and blatantly echoes bourgeois populism of both “left” and right. Then there’s the SL’s appeal to “unite the broadest possible forces” in a pressure campaign aimed at “any politician in office that is really on the side of black people” which is straight out of the handbook of popular frontism. Etcetera.

Lastly, we are glad that you have accepted our challenge to a debate. Given current events, December 9 would not be practical for us; we propose January 13 instead. We want to have the standard debate format (with presentations, discussion and summaries, extending to two rounds if needed) rather than diluting it into a day-long quasi-conference. We have no objection to the title you propose, “The Fight for the Fourth International Today,” and, as you state, details such as venue, chair, etc., can and should be arranged soon.

Communist greetings,

Jan Norden

for the Executive Committee of the League for the Fourth International

¹⁵ See *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.

Revolutionary Internationalist Youth at SL forum

“Just asking...”

On 4 November 2023, the Spartacist League/U.S. held a forum in New York City based on documents of a recent conference of the International Communist League published in the ICL's journal Spartacist No. 68 (September 2023). Among supporters of the League for the Fourth International who attended were activists from the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth (youth section of the Internationalist Group, U.S. section of the LFI), whose comments in the discussion period are reprinted below from a Revolution leaflet distributed at the January 2024 ICL-LFI debate.

Hello, my name is Grace. I am a member of the Internationalist Clubs at CUNY [the City University of New York] and the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth.

I started getting involved in revolutionary politics in 2020, during the mass protests against the racist police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and I have been reading your material since that time.

Having read the most recent literature your group has come out with, I have a few questions. According to the new *Spartacist*, your organization got everything wrong for the past three decades. But now your organization claims to be holding the mantle of Trotskyism. In *Spartacist* 68 you say that the fights against the people who were expelled [in 1996] and formed the Internationalist Group were unprincipled. You say this and I want to know exactly why they were unprincipled. You also say that your break with Luta Metalúrgica in Brazil was unprincipled. I would like to know why both things were unprincipled.

Exactly what unprincipled actions were taken? Who carried out these actions? Why did this happen? What was going on in the real world, in the real class struggle, and what was going on in your organization? When you state in your journal that the fights were unprincipled, you offer no explanation as to why.

Having grown up Catholic, I recall having to go to confession. I would state my sins and then say five Hail Mary's and be forgiven. I can't help thinking that this "confession" about the unprincipled fights is similar.

It also reminds me of what you did regarding Haiti in 2010. When your organization supported the U.S./UN intervention in Haiti, you repeatedly criticized the IG for denouncing that.¹ Then when you said you were wrong, you didn't explain *how* or *why* that happened. The ICL admitted that this was a betrayal, but to this day provides no real explanation as to how such a betrayal occurred.

Yet, you continued to claim that you were a genuinely revolutionary party that would lead the working class. In

¹ See, for example, "Haiti: IG Conjures Up Revolution Amid the Rubble," *Workers Vanguard* No. 952, 9 February 2010.

the IG's open letter to the ICL (May 2010),² they asked how and why that betrayal came about, and what this support for U.S. imperialism in Haiti meant for the ICL's claims to be the embodiment of revolutionary continuity. They stated that in any genuinely revolutionary party, a betrayal of this magnitude would result in a faction fight or a split.

Now, by your own account, your organization was wrong on many fundamental questions up until five weeks ago. You denounce yourselves repeatedly, and state that the expulsions of 1996 were unprincipled. In correspondence, the LFI asked you for specifics about this and received none. As a young person who is serious about revolutionary politics, I would like an answer to these questions. I think that anyone – inside or outside your organization – who is serious about revolutionary politics and wants to learn from these events deserves answers and an explanation.

I'll close with one final question: Do you think that you are the first genuine Trotskyists since Trotsky?

* * *

My name is Amalia, I'm a member of the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth. I first got involved with the CUNY Internationalist Clubs in the Fall of 2021.

I want to talk about the Spartacist League's August 28 "Open All Police Archives" leaflet.³ To begin with, everyone knows that the Spartacist League by all measures completely disappeared in 2020, during the largest protest movement this country has ever seen. You started publishing *Workers Vanguard* again in March 2023. We read it carefully and try to figure out what you're trying to say.

Everyone here will also recall that when your organization finally showed its face after this complete desertion, it relentlessly accused the Internationalist Group of "marching under the banner of liberalism" for even participating in these protests – for seeking to be the revolutionary pole putting forward a real program for black liberation. You criticized both your own organization and ours for supposedly seeking to be a left counsel for Black Lives Matter. What is your police archives leaflet actually calling for? First, it is subtitled "A Proposal to Rebuild the Movement." Exactly what movement are you talking about?

This leaflet is a blatant call for class collaboration. It calls to "unite the broadest possible forces" to "bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights." This is the type of language

² After months of railing against the IG/LFI for opposing the U.S. occupation of Haiti, the SL/ICL issued a statement admitting that the IG/LFI had been correct to characterize its position as "social-imperialist" ... then resumed its standard litany of rants and distortions. (See "Open Letter from the Internationalist Group to the Spartacist League and ICL," *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2010.)

³ SL/U.S., "Open All Police Archives!" (28 August 2022), online at icl-fi.org.



Revolutionary Internationalist Youth at NYC demonstration for second anniversary of start of genocidal U.S./Israel war on Gaza, 4 October 2025.

that popular-frontist groups use over and over. I'm not sure if it sounds more like the DSA or the PSL [Party for Socialism and Liberation] or Socialist Alternative.

So, what is the actual content of the campaign you're calling for? "Opening the police archives is doable and in fact can be done by any politician in office who is really on the side of black people." So, after criticizing the liberalism of Black Lives Matter leaders and delusions in the Democrats, you then call to revive the movement on the basis of a sub-reformist demand and spread illusions about any politicians in office who are on the side of black people. Let me just also mention that last December a huge fire here in Brooklyn destroyed decades of NYPD archives. Where in New York would you find the archives that you're referring to?

Just asking.

There's also a pattern here, that we keep seeing in one leaflet after another. This leaflet doesn't call for socialism, for revolution, for socialist revolution, for black liberation through socialist revolution, for a workers party, for a revolutionary party, or anything of the kind. What it calls for is a class-collaborationist campaign to achieve a so-called "doable" demand.

It's reformist and it's class-collaborationist. And I think that's the direction you're going in.

* * *

Below we print excerpted comments by Revolutionary Internationalist Youth comrade Leticia during the discussion period at a 6 May 2023 New York SL forum.

This event is purported to be a return to Trotskyism for the Spartacist League. The chair today encouraged people to study the contents of *Workers Vanguard*, and I have to say one should really do that – because when you do, it becomes clear that the politics of the Spartacist League now are a promotion and embrace of bourgeois nationalism. Now with your new orientation towards AMLO [Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador], we're supposed to believe that you're anti-imperialist?

Yet you justified the U.S. invasion and occupation of Haiti in 2010, as "humanitarian aid," and criticized the Internationalist Group for upholding Trotskyism by calling for U.S. and UN forces out of Haiti. What was it that you said? Oh yes, that we were engaged in "Third World cheerleading" and "conjuring up fantasies of proletarian revolution in Haiti."⁴ But

⁴ See footnote 1.

now you've pretty much disappeared that betrayal. You also abandoned the call for the independence of Puerto Rico, a colony of the United States, one of the most basic principles of any communist organization. The SL even went so far as to say you would support annexation – if that were "the will of the population."⁵

In 2001, in one of the most powerful imperialist countries in the world, you abandoned the call to defeat U.S. imperialism, after you cracked under the pressure of your own national ruling class following 9/11. It's actually not enough to say that you abandoned this call: you attacked it and attacked those who were determined to maintain and

uphold that position after 9/11 and during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. In a particularly vile smear, *Workers Vanguard* accused the Internationalist Group of "Playing the Counterfeit Card of Anti-Americanism" for upholding this basic Leninist position. It went further, grotesquely claiming that we were playing to an audience of "'Third World' nationalists for whom the 'only good American is a dead American'"!⁶ This monstrous lie was printed by you in the hysterical atmosphere following the 9/11 attacks....

And now, with the war between Ukraine and Russia, which has long since become a proxy war of the U.S. and NATO against Russia, you still use pitiful excuses to refuse to call for the military defense of Russia and the defeat of U.S. imperialism. Meanwhile, someone brought up the defense of workers states? You even alibi the Wuhan lab theory,⁷ which is imperialist propaganda. All of this is unsurprising because it's just yet another capitulation to your own national bourgeoisie.

Talk about bowing to the bourgeoisie. Despite correction after correction after correction after correction; after trashing time and again the programmatic record that the once-revolutionary Spartacist tendency built up from its inception in the early 1960s, and denouncing the Internationalist Group for upholding that revolutionary program – after all this, we're supposed to believe, that now, today, the Spartacist League is officially anti-imperialist? Let alone a revolutionary Trotskyist organization?

I don't think so. ■

⁵ On Puerto Rico, the SL had since its inception called for the colony's independence, but in 1998 declared, "We do not currently advocate independence for Puerto Rico" (see "ICL Renounces Fight for Puerto Rican Independence," *The Internationalist* No. 6, November-December 1998). Then in 2017, while again switching gears and claiming to espouse independence, it went so far as to declare that it would support statehood, i.e., the colonial annexation of Puerto Rico, if that reflected "the will of the population" (see "SL/ICL on Puerto Rico: Annexationist 'Socialists,'" *The Internationalist* No. 50, Winter 2017). Now *Spartacist* No. 68 (September 2023) includes a brief piece titled "Puerto Rico: For Independence and Socialism!" that evades the question of statehood entirely.

⁶ See "The Internationalist Group: Centrist Pathology," *Workers Vanguard* No. 767, 26 October 2001.

⁷ See "Pandemic in China: Trotskyism vs. Stalinism," *Spartacist* No. 67, August 2022.



Section of the mural *Man In Control of the Universe* (1934 by Diego Rivera) depicting Lenin, Trotsky and Marx. From the Museo de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

From the ICL-LFI Debate

In Defense of the Trotskyist Program

Reprinted from The Internationalist No. 72, January-May 2024.

On January 13, a debate titled “The Fight for the Fourth International Today” was held in New York City between the League for the Fourth International and the International Communist League. (The LFI’s U.S. section is the Internationalist Group; the ICL’s is the Spartacist League.) The background to the debate was the ICL’s publication, in *Spartacist* No. 68 (September 2023), of “A Program for the Fourth International” based on a sweeping renunciation of the historic program and revolutionary continuity of the Spartacist tendency, which the “new” SL/ICL now dismisses as “Deformed at Birth.”

While explicitly admitting the unprincipled nature of the 1996 purge of longtime ICL cadres that led to the formation of the LFI, *Spartacist* 68 further deepened and widened the programmatic differences between the two organizations. The burning importance today of the programmatic issues involved was highlighted in correspondence with the ICL reproduced in our previous issue,¹ and by our speakers at the January 13 debate.

As for the born-again ICL, it seeks to “theorize” an increasingly explicit break from Trotskyism by rewriting the history of the Russian Revolution in order to gut its programmatic lessons, as we addressed during a section of the January 13 debate titled “Permanent Revolution.” In fighting in defense of the revolutionary program of Trotskyism that was upheld by the Spartacist tendency for three decades beginning with its inception in the early 1960s,² the LFI fights for new October

¹ See “Recent Correspondence Between the International Communist League and the League for the Fourth International,” *The Internationalist* No. 71, June-October 2023.

² See “In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective” (1962), founding document of the Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party, republished in *Marxist Bulletin* No. 1 (1965) by the Spartacist group, established by RT members after their expulsion from the SWP.



Internationalist photo

Partial view of audience and speakers at the debate between the International Communist League and the League for the Fourth International held in New York City on 13 January 2024.

revolutions to open a socialist future for the workers and oppressed throughout the world.

Chaired by radical labor historian Bryan Palmer, widely acclaimed for his ongoing series of books on the life of U.S.

Trotskyism’s founder James P. Cannon, the debate began (after a coin toss) with a presentation by ICL international secretary Perrault, followed by Abram Negrete for the LFI.

This was followed by brief rebuttals by the two presenters; a discussion period alternating supporters of the ICL, of the LFI, and of other organizations; and then summary remarks. A similar format was then followed in the “Permanent Revolution” section, in which Ana Milei, a member of the International Executive Committee of the ICL, spoke first, followed by Jan Norden for the LFI.

Below we print the remarks by comrades Negrete and Norden, slightly condensed for publication, with subheads and notes added by *The Internationalist*. A full video of



Flier for ICL-LFI debate.

the debate is available at <https://youtu.be/GgQEvNwidBY>.

Presentation by Abram Negrete

I wanted to thank Bryan for chairing today's debate and also all of the people from both organizations who worked really hard on the technical and other arrangements.

I also wanted to thank comrade Perrault for helping to make my job up here somewhat easier – actually, a lot easier.

So the title of today's debate, as you're aware, is "The Fight for the Fourth International Today," in other words, the World Party of Socialist Revolution, which was founded by Leon Trotsky and his co-thinkers in 1938 and was destroyed in 1951-53 by the revisionist current within the Fourth International that came to be known as "Pabloism," after the then-International Secretary of the Fourth International, Michel Pablo.

The central thesis of the founding program of the Fourth International, *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*, known as the Transitional Program, is that the crisis of humanity is reduced to the crisis of revolutionary leadership. Interestingly, that thesis, and defending it or attacking it – or dismissing it, saying it was obsolete – was one of the early political disputes between us and the old ICL. Well, let's call it the "middle-old" ICL or something like that, before the current "born-again" ICL. After our expulsion in 1996, early on, we had to defend, against a revisionist attack by the ICL, that concept at the heart of the Transitional Program. You can read about it in *The Internationalist* No. 5, in an article called "In Defense of the Transitional Program."³

I think that if we look at the world today, we can certainly see

³ See *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.



that this thesis is as urgent as ever, and I would argue even more urgent. We have the war on Gaza, a genocidal war against the Palestinian people. And this is a U.S. war, a U.S./Israel genocidal war on Gaza, and it is proceeding every day. The fact that it is a U.S. war is of enormous importance and it's something that the LFI emphasizes. The ICL? I'm not sure if they've ever even said that.

But in any case: our line is to defend Gaza and to defeat the U.S./Israel genocidal war and to bring out the power of the international working class. From here to Portland to Italy to Sydney and Melbourne and elsewhere, LFI comrades are part of the fight to defend the Palestinian

people, to defeat the witch hunts against defenders of the Palestinian people and to stop the flow of arms to this genocidal war. We have been part of those mobilizations and out in the hallway, you can see a poster about the motions that our comrades in Portland, Oregon have initiated and that were passed for the stopping of arms shipments by construction workers unions on the basis of comrades' struggle in the Painters union and elsewhere; for a break with the Democratic Party and the forging of a class-struggle workers party, a motion that was passed in the Painters union some years ago and has been the basis for much of their work.⁴

On the Ukraine war, as explained in



The League for the Fourth International defends Russia and China against the imperialist war drive. The born-again ICL refuses to defend the targets of the united imperialist onslaught.

⁴ See "Portland-Area Unions Call for Workers Action Against U.S./Israel War on Gaza" (December 2023) and "Portland, Oregon Painters Union Says: To Hell with the Bosses' Parties – For a Class-Struggle Workers Party" (August 2016), internationalist.org.

The Internationalist, this went from the original nationalist war between two non-imperialist, capitalist states to a full-on U.S./NATO proxy war against Russia, which is a way station – as the imperialist military and political chiefs say – towards war against China. That war is aimed in large part against China, something that we also rarely, if ever, hear from the ICL. And this is part of a drive by U.S. imperialism, heading towards World War III. Only socialist revolution can stop that world war.⁵

Now, our position with regard to the Ukraine war: revolutionaries stand for the defeat of the imperialists and for the military defense of those targeted by them, Russia and the Chinese deformed workers state. You will have noticed that comrade Perrault said that the war in Ukraine is a proxy war between NATO and Russia. The ICL states correctly that Russia is not an imperialist country. It states correctly, obviously, that NATO is a military alliance of imperialist countries headed by the U.S. Not only that, it's headed by a liberal party, the Democratic Party.

Despite this, the ICL refuses to defend the *targets* of that imperialist war. It takes a neutralist position, saying it's a war between two "gangs of thugs." A lot of liberals say that, in fact I think I hear that from liberals pretty much every day: just a gang of thugs on one side and just a gang of thugs on the other side. So apparently the defeat of Russia by the imperialists would be a matter of indifference.

Now we hear about this "unipolar world." Well, in fact, after the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union there was considerable *disunity* amongst the imperialists. Perhaps not as much as foreseen in the prognosis of a memorandum from 1994 or a document from 1992,⁶ but there was something called the Yugoslavia War, you may have heard of it. There was the Iraq War – where there was not unity amongst the imperialists – and a whole bunch of other stuff.

But where you *do* get something approximating that picture is right now with the U.S./NATO imperialist war against Russia, in which the ICL refuses to defend the targets of the imperialist onslaught – and uses liberal verbiage to promote that position. All right, let's move on, there's a lot to say and not much time. We give no political support, obviously, to the bourgeois government of Putin, but we call for bringing out the power of the working class to stop the arms shipments to the imperialists' proxies, the Ukraine government.

Now, on the basis of what program, based on historical experience, can the Fourth International be reformed? Com-

⁵ See "U.S. Imperialism Hurtling Toward World War III," *The Internationalist* No. 69-70, January-May 2023, and "Only Socialist Revolution Can Defeat U.S. Imperialism's Drive to WWII," in *Revolution* No. 20, September 2023.

⁶ This refers to *Spartacist* No. 68's claims regarding "exceptional stability of the post-Soviet period" under "ultra-imperialism [sic], made in the USA"; that perspectives documents from 1992, 1994 and 1996 were the source of "every opportunist mistake or sectarian stupidity of the ICL in the last 30 years"; and that while we were "correct in denouncing some of the ICL's most egregious betrayals," the Internationalist Group/LFI was essentially the same as the ICL since supposedly "neither the IG nor the ICL had an answer to liberalism, the dominant ideology internationally and the main political obstacle they confronted in the workers movement."

rade Perrault said, and I think correctly, that the question of which program is of great importance. So let me just say, and I said this at an SL forum: when I was recruited to the SL youth group in 1972-73, at that time the Socialist Workers Party claimed to be Trotskyist, and they called us – guess what?

Three guesses, starts with an "s." "Sectarians." But they tooth and nail denied that they were abandoning Trotskyism. They had some very intelligent people, with writers – [SWP theorist] Joseph Hansen was very competent, and a bunch of others – who would contest it every time that we said, "You're abandoning the Trotskyist program."

Until in the early '80s, after a study of the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry" and after polemics on this by Doug Jenness and polemics on this by other leaders of the SWP, they came out in 1982 with a speech by Jack Barnes called "Their Trotsky and Ours," where they said: You know what? We're *not* Trotskyists. Trotskyism is ultra-left sectarianism. And that permanent revolution thing? No good. And guess what? We've discovered the importance of supporting the Freedom Charter in South Africa and the ANC.⁷ That was an important thing.

Now, with the Spartacist League and the ICL: we were expelled in 1996 on frame-up charges, right? [*Turning to Perrault:*] They were frame-up charges, right? Comrade Perrault says "Right, they were." Thank you. Listen to that. In other words, what's been said about us for 28 years was a lie. You understand that? But let's move on from that. We said – year after year – and we documented the abandonment of one key position after another by the ICL. But they denied that they were abandoning the historic program of Spartacism.

⁷ The Freedom Charter has been the bourgeois-democratic keystone for South Africa's African National Congress since its adoption in 1955. After rightly refusing to spread illusions in the ANC's program since the inception of Spartacist work in South Africa and years before, the ICL now states that "revolutionaries" must "fight for the working class to lead a struggle for the Freedom Charter's implementation." This was the program of pseudo-Trotskyist groupings orbiting around or embedded in the ANC, and it is the stated program of Stalinist reformists today. Tailing the governing party of South Africa's neo-apartheid regime is part of the "new ICL's" ever-extending embrace of bourgeois nationalism, publicly launched in 2017 with a bizarre self-denunciation titled "The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra," *Spartacist*, Summer 2017.





Internationalists at Cuba solidarity demonstration, 15 July 2021, denouncing counterrevolutionary riots instigated by gusanos and U.S. imperialism.

Born-Again ICL vs. Historic Spartacist Program

But now we have a new revelation. Does everybody have their *Spartacist* 68? [*Holds it up.*] I very much agree with comrade Perrault that it should be studied carefully – actually, very carefully. And here, what it says is: You know what? The Spartacist tendency was deformed from birth; we were wrong on just about everything, they say. As for your paper, the paper of one section or another [of the ICL], we renounce that paper back to the beginning, they say. They have junked and they're in the process of junking, in a kaleidoscopic, dizzying way, one part of that program after another.

It's far from over. I said at one of one of the ICL's forums, in May: the members of the Spartacist League and the ICL do not know what their politics will be next week or next month or next year, because they're changing so rapidly.

But in any event, *that* debate is over. The historic program of Spartacism is *ours*. They have renounced it, they say that it was a betrayal, they say it was a betrayal on one thing after another, they throw it into the garbage. But we maintain that the historic program of Spartacism is crucial and vital to reforging the Fourth International.

So *that's* what the debate is about. Is the historic program of Spartacism – which was not the invention of some person in a fever dream, it was the distillation of decades of bloody struggles of the oppressed and the lessons of the past history of the Fourth International and the communist movement. Is the historic program of Spartacism fundamental to reforging the Fourth International? We say *yes* – and they say *no*. They say *no*.

Well, at least that's out of the way.

So, what was the foundation of the Spartacist tendency? It came out of the Socialist Workers Party and something called the Revolutionary Tendency (RT), as most of the people here know. It was a group of young revolutionaries; some had been Shachtmanites,⁸ but the experience of the Hungarian Revolution [of 1956] taught them a thing or two. For example, on the “Russian Question.” And they came over to the Socialist Workers Party. So when the challenge of the Cuban Revolution arose, they were pretty well armed to have a revolutionary Marxist position, of militant defense of Cuba, but understanding that it was in the process of consolidating as a deformed workers state. And that a political revolution by the proletariat was necessary to open the road

to socialism, to establish workers democracy based on workers soviets and a policy of revolutionary internationalism to expand the revolution. They rejected the suicidal strategy of guerrilla warfare.

And the Russian Question became key for the Spartacist tendency throughout its history. The Russian Question in the Soviet Union, the Russian Question in Vietnam, the Russian Question in Cuba, the Russian Question in *Poland* – which the ICL is now renouncing, what the Spartacist tendency had to say about Poland at the crucial moment of 1981 [when the U.S.-backed clerical-nationalist Solidarność movement was making a bid for power]. Openly.

Two: the black question in the United States, key to proletarian revolution – the specific nature of U.S. society, a society in which black oppression lies at the *root* of the origins of this society and at the heart of almost every political question in this society, every social question. The program of revolutionary integrationism, in opposition to false roads like black nationalism or following the liberal leadership, of the liberal pro-Democratic Party leaders of the official civil rights movement. The RT fought inside the Socialist Workers

⁸ Max Shachtman (1904-72) was a leading member of the U.S. Trotskyist movement from 1928 until 1940, when he split from it in opposition to the Fourth International's position on the “Russian Question” (unconditional military defense of the USSR against imperialism and counterrevolution; proletarian political revolution against the conservative Stalinist bureaucracy). Moving further rightwards over subsequent years, Shachtman's decision to merge the remaining “Shachtmanites” into the Cold War Socialist Party of Norman Thomas was the last straw for activists such as James Robertson, Tim Wohlforth and Shane Mage, who were won over by the SWP, founding the *Young Socialist* newspaper in 1957 and then the SWP's youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance.



Internationalist photos



Bringing the revolutionary program of Trotskyism into the living class struggle. Labor militants in Class Struggle Workers – Portland (CSWP), politically supported by the Internationalist Group, brought hundreds of trade-unionists and their supporters into the streets on 4 June 2017 (above) against a fascist mobilization protected by local, state and federal police. They also fight in the unions to break with the Democratic Party and for a class-struggle workers party. Since October 2023, they have won five Portland-area unions to pass motions calling for workers action against the U.S./Israel genocidal war on Gaza.

Party, to get the activists from the SWP down there [i.e., into the South] into the movement, to get them on the buses, get them into the streets with the program that we now synthesize as “black liberation through socialist revolution.”

This was enormously important for arming the Spartacist tendency in the future, not only on the black question and in the extremely important and historic mobilizations to stop the Ku Klux Klan, for example, in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere. But also on other questions of special oppression, like the woman question, the fight for women’s liberation through socialist revolution. And this led to one of the most important Marxist journals, in my opinion, of the postwar period, *Women and Revolution*.⁹ What’s your position on that journal? I’d like to hear. Do you renounce that as well? Somebody answer that question today, please. Because we consider *W&R*, until pretty close to the end of it, ours in the sense of part of our political legacy. What’s your line on that? It also was key to other questions of understanding the Leninist party as the “tribune of the people,” the tribune of the oppressed. This was key, for example, to the historic fusion with the former Lavender and Red Union, which changed its name to Red Flag Union, a gay revolutionary Marxist group.¹⁰

⁹ Initiated by the Spartacist League in 1971, *Women and Revolution* was published until 1996. An archive of its 44 issues is available online at marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/w&r.

¹⁰ See *Red Flag* “Special Fusion Supplement” in *Workers Vanguard* No. 172, 8 September 1977.

And then the struggle against Pabloism was the third, if you like, “whale” of the RT;¹¹ the struggle against Pabloism, the struggle against the liquidation of the independent revolutionary Marxist party as the essential instrument for leading the proletariat and the oppressed to victory, and [against] the tailism of the existing leaderships by the liquidationist leaders of the [post-WWII] Fourth International.

Can people get their reading for today out, please? *Spartacist* 68 and “The LFI Chooses Sectarianism” (*Spartacist* supplement, 3 November 2023). [Shows cover of *Spartacist* No. 68.] So we read here, “A Program for the Fourth International,” and I’m like, wow! I kind of thought there was one already, the Transitional Program, but this ought to be interesting. I’d like to see what it has to say about the black question in the United States, for example, the citadel of world imperialism; about the struggle in the United States for black liberation, which was one of the pillars of the RT. Guess how much it has to say about that? *Nothing*. Please explain why. Why does the “Program for the Fourth International,” according to you, not mention the struggle for black liberation in the United States one time? Not once. Please explain.

¹¹ The reference is to the Bolsheviks’ formulation, from 1905 to early 1917, of central programmatic demands in the form of “three militant slogans: Democratic Republic, Confiscation of the Landed Estates, Eight-Hour Working Day – colloquially called the three whales of Bolshevism, by analogy with those whales upon which according to an old popular fable the earth reposes” (Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* [1930], “Rearming the Party”).

Second question: the struggle against Pabloism. If you have to reforge the Fourth International, why is that? It took us a while to settle on that word, didn't it, comrades who remember, and who want to remember. We had "rebirth of the Fourth International," "reconstruct the Fourth International," that didn't work – I don't have time to explain why – we came up with the somewhat exotic term "reforge." But in any case, why? Not a word about it.

What about the Cuban Revolution and its lessons? Cuba is mentioned in a few lists of countries. The Cuban Revolution is mentioned in a photo caption, on page 42. Please open to page 42. You can do it too, you know, it's yours. We've studied it. This is the only place that the Cuban Revolution is mentioned, in a photo caption, to make fun of the Spartacist tendency, [the photo and caption are placed next to the subhead] "Deformed at Birth." Get it? You know, like a deformed workers state – isn't that funny? That is the only time the Cuban Revolution is mentioned.

The Cuban Revolution is under threat right now. What's your line? What is your line on the riots in Cuba in July 2021, in which counterrevolutionary instigators took advantage of economic crisis.¹² Do you consider the question of defense of the Cuban Revolution in the here and now – not in "doctrinal abstractions" of orthodox "sectarians," but now – do you consider it worthy of inclusion in what you call the "Program for the Fourth International"? If so, why is it not here? If not, please explain.

¹² See "The Truth About Cuba Protests – Defend the Revolution Against U.S. Imperialism and Its Frontmen" and related articles, *The Internationalist* No. 64, July-September 2021.

Bringing the Revolutionary Program Into the Class Struggle

So I was having some trouble, quite a bit of trouble, actually, preparing for this debate for one reason, in one aspect. It was fun in a lot of ways. But how would one explain this to young people who want to figure out what is this all about?

When I was being recruited away from Guevarism, from Stalinism, in high school, me and my best friend, we used to get all the leftist papers and try to figure out what they were talking about – like, what the hell is this, I don't understand this stuff. We had to read [Lenin's] *Two Tactics* at an SL study group. The person who gave it might be here. There was a group in *Two Tactics* called Osvobozhdeniye – "what the hell is that?" What is the "revolutionary dictatorship," etc. We read a little red [Spartacist] pamphlet called "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution" by Leon Trotsky, which contrasts the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship [of the proletariat and peasantry]" formula of Lenin to the permanent revolution and to the Mensheviks. That was our main reading for one of the study groups of the SL/RCY. [*The Revolutionary Communist Youth was the Spartacist League's youth section at that time.*] But why, we wondered, were people arguing about such things? What did it mean in politics today? A lot of people probably wonder about that today.

So I was trying to think of some kind of analogy and I wasn't doing so well. First I thought: this *Spartacist* 68, the

new revelation and the new evangel, I guess, has a bunch of things to say, but they're mainly about the ICL and how it screwed up in a whole lot of ways. And I was wondering, how would one explain this?

And a funny thing happened on the way to the forum – I mean, the debate. A guy came up to me, kind of a little guy, and he said, "Are you going to the debate?" I said, "I am." And he said, "I don't understand what is happening between your group and their group. Could you please explain?" And I thought I should try to boil it down somehow, so I came up with an analogy of a company that builds bridges and when asked, "Well, what's your experience building bridges? Like, what's your record, say for the past 30 years?" "Oh, all our bridges fell down, but now we're very good at building bridges – we hope." And I thought, no, that's not such a good one, maybe you should use one with doctors, no, that's not so good. So I thought: why not make it real?

Comrade Perrault is right and Bryan is right, they both said it or



The LFI sparked the first workers strike action calling for freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal, by education workers union (SEPE) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (upper left photo in one of displays at the debate) on 23 April 1999, in coordination with ILWU shutdown of all U.S. West Coast ports the next day (upper right). Dock workers chanted, "An injury to one is an injury to all, Free Mumia Abu-Jamal." The Internationalist Group/U.S. also played a key role in bringing about May Day 2008 West Coast port shutdown (lower right) against U.S. imperialist war on Afghanistan and Iraq.



The Grupo Internacionalista called on the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) to form union guards when the army threatened to intervene to smash student strike to keep free education at the National University (UNAM), July 1999. The union did, with around-the-clock defense guard (above) and threat to “throw the switch” and black out Mexico City if military came in. This held off suppression of the strike for months and was key to stopping imposition of tuition.

implied it: that this is going to be – it is already, but it will increasingly be – a turbulent period. There’s going to be a lot of struggles. So I thought: why not imagine that this audience consists of workers involved in a really hot struggle, who are getting fed up with their reformist leaders and looking for something like revolutionary leadership, and they are comparing the two organizations. And they say: Listen, we want some kind of radical leadership, but we want to know who is who and what is your experience, in the sense of not how old you are and how many years you’ve lived, but what is your record?

We would say: The LFI has fought seriously, consistently and systematically; we have written and we have fought in the class struggle to bring the revolutionary program of Trotskyism into the living class struggle.

They might say to us: Someone told us you lead some workers out in Portland. Is anybody from Portland here? Could you stand up? *[A comrade from Portland stands up.]* Thank you. You can talk to her and ask – we would say to these workers – she can tell you about the struggle to stop the fascists, Portland Labor Against the Fascists, and the role of class-struggle militants. *[These workers might ask:]* How was that connected to fighting against the union bureaucracy tying the Painters union and other unions to the bosses’ Democratic Party? What about the motions that were just passed in the Ironworkers and the Painters, not just saying that they stand for stopping the arms shipments, but calling on the labor movement to stop the arms shipments – how did that happen? What about the struggle to free Mumia Abu-Jamal, are there some lessons out there? Weren’t you guys (in the Painter’s union it’s mainly guys) in a pre-strike situation recently – what did you do about that? How is it connected to the struggle against the Democratic Party mayor? And what about when Portland was

occupied by the feds, pretty much, and by “Teargas Ted” Wheeler, the Democratic Party mayor, during the mass upheaval against racist police terror after the racist murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others?

There’s a poster display out there [in the hall], I invite you to see it.

How about in Mexico, like in the Oaxaca struggles, the struggles over Ayotzinapa, and there’s a strike right now in Mexico City. How about that huge UNAM [National Autonomous University of Mexico] strike in 1999 to 2000? Bringing the Trotskyist program, the Transitional Program, into the class struggle – did you from the LFI have anything like that, in that huge strike at the largest university in Latin America, when the World Bank, a pillar of the liberal order indeed, ordered the Mexican government to impose tuition?

Is anybody here from Mexico? Can you stand up, please? *[ICL member in audience laughs.]* It’s real funny – because bringing the Transitional Program into that struggle meant sparking workers defense guards. Look it up in your Transitional Program, that’s the old program for the Fourth International, not this one. They [our comrades in Mexico] sparked, they caused to be organized workers defense guards, which defended the strike 24 hours a day when the army, in July of 1999, threatened to invade the largest university in Latin America. And as a result of that, UNAM is still free... You know, a very “sectarian” action.

Speaking of university strikes, how about the one here in New York, there was a big university strike about two years ago. Was anybody here in that strike? Stand up if you were. I’m serious, let’s see the “sectarians.” *[More than a dozen supporters of the IG and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth stand up.]* What did you fight for? Picket lines mean don’t cross. Is that part of the program? It’s very “abstract,” it’s an “abstract orthodox dogma.”¹³ Fighting for that against the DSA, your [the ICL’s] new friends, or hoped-for friends. “Revolutionaries in the DSA” – give me a break.¹⁴ It’s a faction of the imperialist

¹³ Adhering to supposed abstract sectarian dogmas has been one of the present-day ICL’s central accusations against the LFI, including at the debate. The strike referred to here, in which CUNY Internationalist Clubs activists played an important role, is discussed in “Columbia Strike Wins, More Struggles Ahead” (*Revolution* No. 19, September 2022) and an Internationalist video at youtube.com/watch?v=E-DVQ5HISwU.

¹⁴ The SL’s *Workers Vanguard* (22 December 2023) launched an appeal to “revolutionaries inside the DSA” (Democratic Socialists of America). Referring to this in his presentation at the debate, ICL speaker Perreault remarked, “You don’t need to be a genius to know what [the LFI] will say: they’ll no doubt denounce us as opportunists....”



The Internationalist Group and Trabajadores Internacionales Clasistas (TIC – Class Struggle International Workers) have fought to defend immigrants, mobilizing against anti-immigrant “war purge” (upper left) at the City University of New York (2001), in organizing union at Hot and Crusty bakery-restaurant (upper right) in 2012, over the 2014 kidnapping of 43 teacher college students in Ayotzinapa, Mexico (lower left), and forging immigrant worker communist cadres, like our comrade Fernando López (center top), who died in 1999. Lower right: TIC pamphlets on taxi workers and immigrants in the epicenter of the coronavirus epidemic (2020).

government party, the war criminal party. Don’t tell me about revolutionaries in the party of *genocide*, the party of the Vietnam War and napalm and Hiroshima. If they had an ounce of revolutionary in them, they would not be in that organization. Opportunism – yes, we call it that.

But fighting against the DSA and the Democratic Party in that strike, which led to “Shut It Down” on December 8 [2021], where the picket line – the SL was there, the only thing they were doing, even when people were crashing through the picket line, literally, was trying to get people to take their nutty (that’s a polite word for it) lockdown leaflet. That was the only thing they did there. But as a result of [the “Shut It Down” picket line] that strike won. This is connected to the program.

What about the McCarthyite witch hunts right now against defenders of the Palestinian people? Anybody here been involved in the struggle against that? I’m going to ask you to stand up again. *[Again, more than a dozen supporters of the IG and RIY stand up.]* What about organizing immigrant workers, one of the most exploited and oppressed sectors of the proletariat in this city? What about Hot and Crusty, is the former vice president of the union here? Would you stand up? *[Comrade stands up.]* He was fired and he’s been fired many times for organizing unions, and he was part of the struggle at the Hot and Crusty [bakery/restaurant] to put into

effect the slogan “Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants,” and to fight against the union bureaucracy which turns its back on them. Hot and Crusty, Bröd Kitchen, B&H, Cabricanecos, Liberato restaurant: in each of these, the youth organization and the IG have brought the comrades into it, to fight for the revolutionary program.¹⁵

ICL: Again and Again, We Betrayed – Now Follow Us!

By the way, when our comrades were arrested in Mexico [in February 2000] in the UNAM strike, there was only one organization that had no one arrested. Three guesses. Yes, the ICL. Why? Three guesses. When the cops arrived on the campus to arrest 1,000 students, the ICL wasn’t there. What a surprise. Isn’t that a big surprise?

So these workers then want to know: What about the mass upsurge against the racist police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor? *Well, we collapsed*, says the ICL. You mean you weren’t there at all? Did you publish something? *No*. Did you post something? *No*. Did you put out a leaflet? *No*. Why?

Well, we’ll get to that in a second. One could go on. What about 9/11? We’ll talk about that later.

Then they say, well, what were you doing for the past 30 years? *Well, it’s all in Spartacist: we were betraying*. Wait a minute, you betrayed for 30 years? *Yes*, according to you. Seriously? What were you doing in your organization? *Well, we were having a whole lot of turmoil and a lot of fights, lots and lots of fights, for 30 years, OK?* What did those fights consist of? *Oh, it doesn’t matter, it’s not very interesting. (I could go through them all, said comrade Perrault in a report which is published here, but they’re not very interesting.)*¹⁶ *They’re all basically meaningless*. So what you’re talking about, you devoured yourselves for 30 years. *Yes – now we’re back, OK?* – they say. They were very busy.

After two years, they came out with *Workers Vanguard*. This is the first issue that came out, No. 1177 [17 March

¹⁵ See, for example, “NYC: Immigrant Workers Rebel,” *Revolution* No. 12, March 2016; and “Cabricanecos: Indigenous Immigrant Workers Fight Deadly Conditions in NYC,” *The Internationalist* No. 67-68, May-October 2022.

¹⁶ “I could spend a lot of time going over all the different fights and party regimes between 1992 and 2017. But not only would this take forever, it would not be interesting or useful” (“Why the ICL Collapsed & How We Reforged It,” *Spartacist* No. 68, September 2023).



Display board shows how, after a Brazilian court issued a “search and seizure” order for leaflets amidst struggle to remove cops from municipal workers union in Volta Redonda, threatening use of “police force,” SL criminally tried to stop international defense campaign, calling it a “cynical sham” and labeling black Trotskyist steel workers “dangerous hustlers.”

2023].¹⁷ And in that issue, what did they do? They were very productive. They listed their betrayals: eight betrayals. Eight. On what? According to them, on the black question; according to them, on the trade-union question; according to them, on six other questions. And then they came out with another issue, which listed more betrayals. On what questions? On the woman question, for example, and other questions.

So if these workers then asked: You’re saying that you betrayed over and over and over again. How about on Haiti, when you supported the U.S. imperialist occupation? Why did that happen? *Oh, we don’t really want to talk about that very much. We were wrong, the IG was right.*¹⁸ But why did it happen? *Hmm, maybe because of a memorandum that people voted for 25 years before that, the memorandum made us do it.* And the reason why you betrayed on these other questions? *Well, we were really like the IG, you know; both of us supported the same memorandum and the same tasks and perspectives document.*

Now sometimes, tasks and perspectives documents and memorandums can have some good aspects of their prognoses

¹⁷ The previous issue, WV No. 1176, was dated 29 May 2020 (four days after the murder of George Floyd); thus it was actually almost three years until issue 1177 appeared. See “As U.S. Convulsed Over Racist Police Murder: SL Silence = Capitulation to the Democrats.” *The Internationalist* No. 61, September-October 2020.

¹⁸ See “Haiti Earthquake: Capitalism, Occupation and Revolution.” *The Internationalist* No. 31, Summer 2019.

and some not so accurate aspects. But the argument that this is the essential question and if you get your prognoses wrong, everything is garbage and your program is garbage, this is the argument that was used after World War II when Trotsky’s prognoses of the post-World War II period were largely not confirmed. In reality it was used by whom? It was used by the Goldman-Morrow faction in the Socialist Workers Party. And what was their program? “Democracy.” They said: “The Trotskyists must be the best fighters for democracy” – democracy – oh! – in general. In Spanish, the expression is that democracy “*tiene nombre y apellido*,” it has a first and last name: there’s bourgeois democracy, there’s proletarian democracy. But the Goldman-Morrow faction said democracy in general. The Cochran-Clarke [faction in 1952-53], during the Pablo fight, they also said that the prognoses of the SWP and Trotsky did not come true in some considerable part and therefore the program was

off. Where was the program, the fundamental programmatic questions, determined by this?

The Truth About the ICL’s Brazil Betrayal

But back to the workers asking these questions: Your organization, they would say [to the ICL], gave rise to another organization. How did that happen? *Well, we expelled them back in 1996.* Why did you do that? You also organized some trials and stuff? *Yeah, we did that; we’re investigating that.* Well, what do you think about it? *Well, it was unprincipled. The fight against them was unprincipled.* Really? Why? *Oh, because both they and us voted for the same memorandum.* The memorandum made you do it? Why did it happen? *I don’t know – maybe you could ask some of the people in this room who did it. Because they’re here.*

What about the stuff in Brazil: is it true that what you did in Brazil was unprincipled? *Yeah, it’s true.* It’s true, isn’t it? [Turning to Perrault:] Is it true? Comrade Perrault is saying “yes,” and he’s written it. Well, why did it happen? Why did that happen? *We’re not sure yet, but it was unprincipled.* Why? *Because both sides voted for the same document.* Oh, did the comrades in Brazil vote for that document? *No, they weren’t around at that time.* They were busy organizing illegal strikes – well, they weren’t illegal anymore, but against the military and [in the early ’90s] they were in a centrist organization called Causa Operária.

What was going on when that struggle [in 1996] happened?¹⁹ *Oh, that's the past. We don't want to talk about the past. We're all about the "now."* What did you do when those comrades were attacked by the bourgeois state, which put out an order for the "search and seizure" of their documents, of their bulletin, of their union leaflet? What did you do? Did you defend them, or did you side with the other side? There is an answer to that.

One of the people involved in the ICL's actions, that the ICL now says that we are correct to still be "outraged" about their actions in 1996 – Let me repeat that: that we are correct to still be outraged by their actions in Brazil.²⁰ In other words, what they were saying for 28 years was a lie, what we were saying was true. "Oh, but that's old history and besides, you're a bunch of hidebound doctrinaires." Oh really? Were there no consequences?

I'm going to do this now. Can you please bring me that poster? [*Holds up poster with headline "Brazil: ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Trotskyist Workers," with photos and documents on the campaign to remove police from the Volta Redonda Municipal Workers Union and quotations from Workers Vanguard (2 January 1998) denouncing the Brazilian comrades' defense campaign – see photo.*]

The bourgeois state, you've heard of it? It sent one of its agents to the offices of the comrades of the Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil, and they had a "search and seizure" order for every copy of their leaflet. This came from a suit which was demanding the names of all of the members of the trade-union committee, or caucus, and the order threatened, was associated with the threat to seize all of the belongings of the caucus and of the union president. And we organized an international defense

¹⁹ The reference is to the struggle to expel police from the municipal workers union in Volta Redonda, Brazil's "Steel City." See *Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil*, Internationalist pamphlet, 1997.

²⁰ "Comrade Norden is justified in still being outraged by the actions of the ICL in Brazil in 1996," the ICL states in "The LFI Chooses Sectarianism," 3 November 2023.

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campaign to try to get unions to support them. We're talking about real people, we're not talking about words on paper. Real people with names like Jorge Oliveira, the target of this suit, a black worker who worked 25 years as a railway man at the largest steel company in Latin America, which is not a doctrinal invention written on paper. It's not about words on paper.

And what did the ICL say?

[This was an] "*ação de busca e apreensão*," an "action for search and seizure," right? Unions around the world were signing up to defend them [the Brazilian comrades], in South Africa, in El Salvador and elsewhere, on the basis of our work. The ICL tried to *stop* people from defending them. Is that statement true? Yes, it is true. They called the defense campaign a "cynical sham." And they called the comrades – taking words virtually verbatim from the pro-cop grouping in Volta Redonda headed by Artur Fernandes – they called them "dangerous hustlers." You want to defend a "dangerous hustler" in a campaign which is a "cynical sham"?²¹ What's your line on this? [*Turning to Perrault.*] What's your line on this? Please respond.

Now these workers in this room [in the scenario of a group of workers posing questions], when confronted by the ICL, might very well say: Well, what do you have to say about that? And the ICL would probably say: *That was a long time ago, we're all about the "now." You ready to follow us now? We betrayed, we betrayed this way, and this way, and this way, and this way, and this way, and this way – now follow us! Because since the first of September 2023, when this [Spartacist No. 68] was published, now it's all OK. You ready to follow us?* I don't think so. *Well, we're investigating it.* One certainly hopes so; one looks forward to seeing the results of those investigations.

They're going to say, "But what about the program?" We've been talking about program. Program is real – when you fight for it.

Pushing the "Anti-Imperialist United Front"

But what about the revelations in here [*Spartacist* No. 68]? Why, according to them, was the Spartacist tendency "deformed" since birth? Jim Robertson, they say, did not understand the permanent revolution or the national question, and the "revisionist" and reactionary positions, etcetera, meant that the Spartacist tendency was deformed from birth. So, a kind suggestion: why don't you change the name of your journal? Change it.

How is that? We're going to hear about some of this in the second part of the debate. What is this all

²¹ See "ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Brazilian Trotskyist Workers" (30 January 1998), reproduced in *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists*, Internationalist pamphlet, 2010. When asked, during an intermission in the debate, to explain the ICL's actions in Brazil, Perrault publicly stated that "your bulletin does a pretty good job of explaining" this. In his summary during the debate, he said: "Brazil: You know what? What we did was despicable, I'm ashamed of it," while making the ludicrously false claim that on Brazil the LFI evades the questions of black liberation, the popular front and the role of imperialism.



The League for the Fourth International has fought since the very first days of the U.S./Israel genocidal war on Gaza in October 2023 for workers action against the slaughter and to “hot cargo” arms to Israel. Clockwise from upper left: Mexico City, Portland, Berlin, New York City, Los Angeles.

about? What does it come down to, as a pompous SLer used to like to say to me, “when the rubber hits the road”? It comes down to the “anti-imperialist united front.”

They have resuscitated something which even most Trotskyists are not particularly aware of, or would-be Trotskyists: the “anti-imperialist united front” from the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. And they’re determined to “defend” the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. We always used to say that we stand on the first four Congresses of the Communist International, with reservations on the fourth. The discussion on the workers government [slogan] was very confused, Zinoviev was all over the map.

And what about the “Theses on the Eastern Question” [from the Comintern’s Fourth Congress]? I used to hear about that a lot, from Guillermo Lora, head of the Bolivian POR. Why? Because he’s got a pamphlet (I can give it to you as a present) called “The Anti-Imperialist Front”: because he dug those theses up to justify his class-collaborationist Frente Revolucionario Antimperialista with the president – former president – of Bolivia.²²

Because in the Trotskyist movement, the “Theses on the Orient” or “Eastern Question” (originally it was called by that term, “Theses on the Orient”) had not been mentioned at the First Congress [1938] of the Fourth International nor in its documents nor at the Second Congress [1946] nor in

²² After the bloody August 1971 military coup led by right-wing general Hugo Banzer, Lora’s centrist Partido Obrero Revolucionario (Revolutionary Workers Party) put together the FRA, an “anti-imperialist” political bloc with the Bolivian Stalinists and a range of nationalist forces, including the deposed president, General Juan José Torres, whose regime had paved the way for the Banzer coup.

the documents of the SWP. But they were mentioned at the Third Congress, by a man called Michel Pablo. Why? In order to justify a political bloc with the nationalist party [in Bolivia].²³

Well, we would never do something like that, might say the ICL, mightn’t they? Well, they might – *but they don’t*. To the contrary, they want an anti-imperialist front – and they say this, we asked it as a rhetorical question: Would the “anti-imperialist united front” include the president of Mexico? And they said: Why, yes, using a hypothetical – if in the future Mexico were attacked by the U.S., wouldn’t you be for a military bloc with AMLO [Mexico’s president Andrés Manuel López Obrador]?²⁴

We would defend Mexico militarily against U.S. imperialism – of course we would. But what’s happening right now is that he [AMLO]

is serving as the border guard for Yankee imperialism. And they rush to his *political* defense. And one of their main arguments, I found it quite comical. They said, well, he had half a million people at this rally. When I moved to Mexico in the spring of 1988, the president of Mexico, Miguel de la Madrid from the government party, the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], had 1.3 million people at his May Day rally. He must have been an “anti-imperialist” – let’s make an “anti-imperialist united front” with him, now.

How about, is there anywhere in the world where the ICL calls for an anti-imperialist united front now? It would be nice if comrade Perrault would answer that, but I can give you at least part of an answer. They say that it was necessary to form an anti-imperialist united front with the government of Greece in 2015. They say that voting for the maneuver by SYRIZA, the bourgeois populist-nationalist government party of Greece, was necessary. We said no, this is a maneuver, we’re not going to participate in tricking the

²³ At the Fourth International’s Third Congress (1951), which was key in the emergence of the revisionist current that came to be known as Pabloism, the resolution on Latin America stated, regarding Bolivia’s Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), which the following year became the country’s ruling bourgeois party: “in the event of the mobilization of the masses under the preponderant impulsion or influence of the MNR, our section should support the movement with all its strength, should not abstain but on the contrary intervene energetically in it with the aim of pushing it as far as possible up to the seizure of power by the MNR on the basis of a progressive program of anti-imperialist united front” (*Fourth International* [New York], November-December 1951).

²⁴ See “The LFI Chooses Sectarianism.”



“Anti-imperialist united front” of Chinese Communist Party with nationalist Guomindang (GMD) led to April 1927 Shanghai Massacre, which devastated CP and decapitated militant workers movement. Above: Workers militias mobilized before entry of GMD troops into Shanghai, 27 March 1927. Below: communist beheaded in white terror ordered by GMD leader, Chiang Kai-shek, April 1927.

workers.²⁵ They [SYRIZA] are going to capitulate immediately to the bankers and this is preparation for that. They [the ICL] said no, you’ve got to vote for it. Now retroactively they say, yeah and guess what: that was an anti-imperialist united front. And it was necessary to make “a common front” – with the government. *With the government.* So, more will be coming on that.

But what if they say, “Wait a minute,” some not yet up-to-speed SLer or ICLer might get up and say, “No, we’re talking about the *original* discussion at the Fourth Congress [of the Comintern, 1922]. We’re not talking about *now*.” Really? Trotsky said the real historical process invests terms with meaning, historically.

But let’s look back at it. This was the Fourth Congress, comrade Perrault. Safarov, leader of Comintern work among the peoples of the East, said in the discussion on the Theses on the Eastern Question (you can find it in John Riddell’s very valuable collection):²⁶ he said, since “the

²⁵ This refers to the SYRIZA government’s July 2015 referendum ploy, calling to vote “no” to the European bankers’ blackmail in order to use this as a bargaining chip to slightly improve the terms of surrender and then capitulate to the Eurobankers’ austerity *diktat* a few days later. See articles in *The Internationalist* No. 41, September-October 2015.

²⁶ John Riddell (ed.), *Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922* (2012).



colonial and national revolution is a bourgeois-democratic revolution,” a “bourgeois-democratic government in the backward countries provides support and great reassurance for our proletarian movement.” Now is that Stalin? Is that Stalinism? No, the whole struggle in real life in the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27, in which the Stalinists used the formula of the anti-imperialist united front, yielded a bloody result through which, indeed, despite your [the present-day ICL’s] denials, Leon Trotsky extended the theory of permanent revolution internationally.

This is why they [the ICL today] are doing all this stuff about the “revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” All the theoretical revisionism and rewriting of the history of the Russian Revolution that they’re doing: it’s got a political purpose. Program does generate theory, you know. What you want guides what you do.

So how about the representative for Iran at the Fourth Congress discussion of those theses? He said – his name was Nikbin: “The Party,” in Iran, “is trying to create a general anti-imperialist alliance.... It has made an extensive proposal for a democratic” – that beloved word, *democratic*,

the ICL is very much in love with that word *democracy, democratic*. And yes, we fight for democratic rights and in the countries of belated capitalist development, the bourgeois-democratic tasks can only be carried through by the dictatorship of the proletariat supported by and resting on the peasants. But he [Nikbin] says the party has a “proposal for a democratic bloc that is to include representatives of all the national and democratic groups.... [T]he bourgeois parties themselves are seeking a bloc with us,” said the representative for Iran.

But what about China? The representative of the Chinese CP – this is at the Fourth Congress, and I’ll finish up with this. “Starting from the principle that an anti-imperialist front should be established to drive imperialism out of China,” said the representative of the Chinese Communist Party at the Fourth Comintern Congress discussion on the Theses that they [the ICL] uphold, “our party decided to achieve a united front with the national-revolutionary Guomindang party. This united front took the form that we joined this party.” And we know, don’t

we, where that led.²⁷

So let's follow them! I don't think so. Thank you.

Rebuttal by Negrete

After comrade Negrete's presentation, ICL speaker Perrault had a rebuttal, which was followed by Negrete's:

On liberalism, I would like to ask comrade Perrault to please define what the ICL means by the word. Please, because it's used many, many times in their analysis. They use the term *liberalism* 51 times in *Spartacist* [No. 68]. They use *liberal* 87 times. A very large part of their program consists, apparently, of saying "liberal," or saying the word "liberalism" many times, and telling people to break from it. Liberalism has a very strong power, almost mystical magical power to make people do stuff, according to them. It's liberal idealism.

The picture that they present of the world in the post-Soviet period is remarkably similar to that of the "death of communism" triumphalists. Supposedly, apparently, after the destruction of the Soviet Union there was considerable peace, prosperity and the growth of productive forces. Hmm, OK.

Now there's a bunch of stuff to say about this, but I would like to talk a bit about what they're doing now – because they say "we're tired of talking about the past and the self-referential stuff," which is pretty interesting for an organization whose Program for the Fourth International, quote unquote, consists overwhelmingly of denouncing itself. *Vote for us, we were deformed since birth!* Jim Robertson, revisionist shmuck, according to them; it actually pisses me off.

But what about what they're doing now? What about Palestine? Compare their leaflet to ours – compare "Only Death and Defeat with Hamas: A Revolutionary Road" – quote unquote – "for Palestine Liberation": that's the headline. It genuflects to the bourgeoisie and what it demands. Right at the beginning and repeatedly, just like after 9/11. And what ours has to say: "Defend the Palestinians Against U.S./Israel Genocidal War on Gaza! Drive the Zionists Out of the West Bank and Gaza! For International Workers Action Against the Attack on Gaza!" So please tell me how, here in the United States or in Europe or in most places, the key task is to dispel illusions in – Hamas?

Now what about Palestine, where, as the pompous SLer

²⁷ The Chinese Communist Party's entry into the bourgeois-nationalist Guomindang led to the April 1927 Shanghai Massacre that devastated the party and crushed China's militant workers movement. See *What Is Trotskyism? The Stalin School of Falsification Revisited*, Internationalist pamphlet, 2012.



The Internationalist Group and Revolutionary Internationalist Youth mobilized in the streets, combating illusions in the Democratic Party during mass protests against racist police terror in the summer of 2020. Top line of banner reads: "Democrats Are The Bosses of the Racist Killer Cops." The SL did nothing.

(who's in the room here) used to say all the time, "the rubber hits the road." They've got a very interesting statement from [the ICL's] British paper, *Workers Hammer*. It says: "Trade unions must take concrete action to stop arms shipments to Israel" – yeah. That was on October 20, 2023. The next day, *Workers Vanguard* has a supplement on the strike of the auto workers. I remember – some of you do too, I'm sure – that in 1973, 2,000 Arab American auto workers walked out in a protest against Zionism. Dearborn, Michigan is a largely Arab American city – auto. What [does the WV supplement] say?

It says:

"Lots of workers are watching the horrors in Gaza and wondering what they can do. The main thing that workers can do to fight for Palestinian liberation is to *win this strike!*"

["UAW: Let's Win This for Real!" (21 October 2023), emphasis in original]

Nothing about stopping arms shipments, nothing about fighting to stop arms shipments, nothing about convincing others to fight to stop arms shipments, nothing about calling for it – but win your strike, don't be distracted by the genocide in Gaza, pursue your strike. Yes, they should win their strike, but to separate this in this way, and to tell the workers to do nothing, nothing, *nothing* – this is worse than economism.

And lastly, what they're doing now. A "revolutionary" program for black liberation, unlike BLM, which had *liberal* demands. True, and we exposed those demands systematically in our press, in our leaflets, in our speeches, in our signs, on the streets, in the meetings, in the unions. We did not collapse ignominiously, which is a capitulation to your own bourgeoisie. I don't give a damn about how messed up you were in your



On May Day 2008, the ILWU shut down all U.S. and Canadian West Coast ports to demand an end to the U.S. war on Afghanistan and Iraq.

organization, you couldn't bring yourselves to put out one leaflet? *Nobody* should follow you. Your credit is zero.

But what do they call for in their campaign? "What's necessary is a fight that will unite the broadest possible forces" – popular-front language. Take motions for opening the police archives, bring them "to your political officials who claim to represent you. We need to mobilize to bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights.... Opening the police archives is doable" – it's a "doable" demand – "and, in fact, can be done by any politician in office that is really on the side of black people."²⁸

Want some liberalism? It's right here. And what would happen if those archives were opened? Who's going to choose the "hundred most heinous cases"? The cops? And you believe what's in the cops' archives? Don't you know anything about what cops put in archives?

That's what you're doing today. You're trying to spread liberal illusions. And you say that it's "exposing them." I heard that from the SWP, pretty much every day of the year. And all the other opportunists.

Summary

First of all, I wanted to just mention that among the things that the ICL says that it's going to investigate, and that we are waiting to hear the results of, are the [1996] trials; the trial of comrade Socorro. and the trial that was going to be held of comrades Jan and Marjorie.²⁹

I want to send greetings to comrade Socorro of the Internationalist Group, a founder of our organization, and to protest here yet again against the filthy trial which you staged against her. Some of you are here in this room. We want to know *what* was unprincipled about that trial. And if you say "everything," that's true, but you don't get away with just that. And if it's maybe ancient history to you, and not so important, perhaps that's because you were on the dishing out end and not the receiving end.

²⁸ "Open All Police Archives! A Proposal to Rebuild the Movement," SL statement, 28 August 2023.

²⁹ See *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*, July 1996.

Similarly, when comrade Vincent [an ICL leader who spoke during the discussion period] says that the ICL at least admits its mistakes. I call this the Boy Scout defense: *Hey, everybody makes mistakes, but we admit it. You get merit badges for it. No. What I will say about that is, you've had a lot of practice, haven't you? In terms of your so-called "mistakes."* But there's one little problem. According to us, and according to you, they were not mistakes, they were betrayals. They were betrayals. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a betrayal – I mean, a political, social one in the class struggle. The comrade from Brazil just talked about what that was about. That was a real struggle. It was a struggle to bring the program of Trotskyism into practice.

Now, unbelievably, we heard here today that the so-called "real crime" was not that sort of thing, but failing to understand the documents – the power of the documents from 1992 and so on and so forth. This is the memorandum theory of history yet again. Well, the very powerful documents magically made *you* do one thing – and *us* do the other. You say, well they both voted for the documents and they're both the same, the [ICL] and the IG/LFI are both the same. The IG fought and the LQB fought to *throw the police out of the union – and you fought to stop it.* You told them to stop. Why? "The memo made us do it." Funny that this powerful memo made us do the opposite.

How about 9/11? [*"How about it?" yells an ICL member from the audience.*] We called to defeat U.S. imperialism.³⁰ We marched in the streets with that slogan. We called for workers strikes against the war. Was that an abstract slogan? According to you it had no "resonance." We took it onto the docks. We took it onto the docks as the Iraq War was ramping up. This is not an abstract, hidebound, theoretical orthodoxy. This is called the class struggle – and you said that our call for hot-cargoing was wrong.³¹ Yes, you did, look it up. And we've documented it. You want to talk about the bureaucracy? That was the line of Jim Spinoso, [who was] the head of the ILWU: Don't stop the war matériel, it might cause problems for the union.

And we called for workers strikes against the war, and you and the rest of the opportunist left said that would never happen. But guess what? It did. On May Day 2008, all 29 ports were shut down on the West Coast. And you sneered at it, and, talk about "deformed," you deformed and you fabricated, same damn thing that you did about the Mumia shutdown [of the ports] in 1999 – then you had to apologize and retract it, kind of, sort of.

³⁰ In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, as the U.S. ramped up for war, the IG/LFI called to "Defeat U.S. Imperialism! Defend Afghanistan and Iraq!" while the SL/ICL ditched this elementary Leninist call and denounced us for upholding it. See *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

³¹ On the Internationalist Group's fight for longshore workers to refuse to handle war matériel, and the SL's line echoing the union bureaucracy's opposition to this, see *Why We Call for Workers Strikes Against the War (And the Opportunists Don't)*, Internationalist pamphlet, 2007.

But what about the one in Brazil that started it?³² The first workers action for Mumia's freedom, the first labor shutdown for Mumia's freedom. It's not a page of paper, it's a real action in the class struggle and it's part of the program of revolutionary Marxism. That happened in Brazil. You have not written a single word about it since that time. Not one time, why do you think that is? Oh, because the "sectarians" carried it out. And the "anti-sectarians," anti-sectarianly, don't mention it. Because those are unmentionable, disposable people – disposable people on the receiving end, not of your "mistakes." Everyone makes mistakes – trivial Boy Scout talking, I don't mean the person, I mean the phrase. It was not a "mistake," it was a betrayal.

And yes, when we called to defeat U.S. imperialism and we criticized you for dropping it, what did you say? A comrade referred to this. [*Shows poster with quotations from Workers Vanguard, 26 October 2001.*] No, we're not going to let you forget it. You want to talk about "now"? *Now* is a product of history. *You* are a product of that history. You said that we were "playing the counterfeit card of anti-Americanism." You said this in the weeks after 9/11, when "anti-Americanism" could land [people] in prison. And there were roundups of immigrants all over the place and we went to the demonstrations to free them, which you did not, of course. (Well, you did go there, to denounce us, one time.)

And you said something else: "But the IG's purpose is otherwise; it is playing to a different audience, one of 'Third World' nationalists for whom the 'only good American is a dead American'." That's what you wrote about us. So you can say, well, we all make mistakes. This was not a "mistake," and you're doing the same kind of obeisance and genuflection to your own ruling class today, including over your leaflet on Palestine.

Why did this powerful memo make the two sides do opposite things? Because you ceased to be revolutionaries, through a process of degeneration, which has now culminated in you openly saying that the founding program of the tendency you still pretend to have some continuity with, somehow, was what? The old-timers are supposed to chew this up and swallow it. "The historic position of Spartacism turned the world upside down."³³ Interesting. Look at your *Spartacist* 68. The hammer's upside down and backwards – they get a lot of things upside down and backwards – in their new logo. "Shaped by the delusion that the historic leader of our tendency, Jim Robertson, had a correct approach," blah blah, "therefore it upheld many positions counterposed to permanent revolution." It's a "perversion of permanent revolution," they say.

The old-timers are supposed to eat it, swallow it and regurgitate it. *You have sold your birthright for a mess of pottage.* The revisions are far from finished. The reason for this stuff about the "anti-imperialist united front" and supporting

³² See "May Day Strike Against the War Shuts Down All U.S. West Coast Ports," *The Internationalist* No. 27, May-June 2008, "Brazil Education Workers Stop Work Demanding: Free Mumia Abu-Jamal!" (May 1999) and "Brazilian Workers Mobilize for Freedom for Mumia Abu-Jamal," *The Internationalist* No. 8, June 2000.

³³ See *Spartacist* No. 68, passages under subhead "For the Anti-Imperialist United Front!" claiming that from its inception "the Spartacist tendency turned permanent revolution into its opposite."

the language laws in Quebec and Catalonia and embracing the Freedom Charter and the rest of it is to take what remains of this organization very, very far, qualitatively far – who knows how far? – but it will be enormously far from what it set out to do.

And I'm very glad, let me just say, that the [SL's] grotesque Neely leaflet³⁴ was attacked, and quite horrified by the [SL supporter's] response.

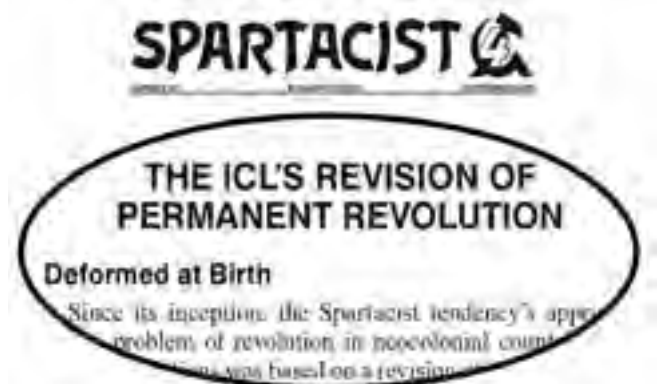
Forward to a real Fourth International – not a collection of rotten opportunist gimmicks.

Hands Off Trotsky's Permanent Revolution! Presentation by Jan Norden

So what we are discussing here today is how what we have called the born-again International Communist League and the Spartacist League in the United States have abandoned, renounced, denounced and vilified one key plank after another in the revolutionary Trotskyist program that the Spartacist tendency upheld against all manner of opportunists for three decades. We have explained before how the degeneration of the ICL reflected the wave of demoralization of the left set off by the counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union, undermined by decades of Stalinist bureaucratic misrule, and of the bureaucratically deformed workers states of the East European Soviet bloc. With its new leadership, the ICL has now reached terminal degeneration, so that it renounces the very program on which it was founded.

As the ICL sank into passive propagandism, abstentionism and ultimately betrayal in the class struggle, capitulating to the bourgeoisie's "death of communism" lie, those long-time cadres who it expelled in 1996 went on to found the Internationalist Group and two years later joined with comrades in Brazil, France and Mexico to form the League for the Fourth International. While the IG and LFI continue to fight for the revolutionary program the Spartacist tendency stood for, the latter-day ICL, for its part, went into a prolonged crisis, which continues to this day, repeatedly

³⁴ WV supplement (8 June 2023): "New York City Subway Killing: Neely No Angel, Penny No Hero." The reference is to the denunciation of this leaflet by a speaker during the discussion period and an SL supporter's reply heatedly defending it.



Declaring Spartacist tendency "deformed at birth," the born-again ICL in *Spartacist* No. 68 junked the historic Trotskyist program of permanent revolution that was upheld by the SL/ICL going back to its origins in the early 1960s as the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP.

changing leaderships and programmatically gyrating like a top.

Beginning almost immediately after our expulsions, this latter-day ICL began revising and gutting its former program. We've already talked about the string of betrayals: abandoning Brazilian Trotskyist workers' historic 1996 struggle to oust the police from the unions, abandoning the call for Puerto Rican independence, "anti-American" baiting the LFI for calling for the defeat of U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan, supporting the U.S. invasion of Haiti, and that's only a small part of them. There is a common thread to all these betrayals, and it's not disorientation because of the 1992 [ICL] conference document. It's capitulation to U.S. imperialism, which continues today as they refuse to defend Russia in the face of the united imperialist proxy war over Ukraine. You claim that there has always been a unipolar imperialist world. Well, there has been at the present time, and what do you do? You refuse to defend the countries that are being attacked by that united imperialist offensive.

I want to reiterate that, because in discussing the question of *permanent revolution*, which is the topic of this debate, we are not having an academic discussion. What we have here are counterposed class programs, proletarian internationalist in the case of the LFI vs. bourgeois nationalist for the ICL. So *Spartacist* No. 68 came out at the beginning of September [2023], where the leaders of the ICL declare that the political organization they have taken over was "deformed at birth" on the central question of permanent revolution, supposedly because of "denial of revolutionary leadership of the national liberation struggle." According to the new ICL, the Spartacist tendency was some kind of thalidomide baby, a caricature of Trotskyism that betrayed at every turn.

So what is Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution? This is not just a phrase about the revolution continuing indefinitely, but a theory based on his evaluation of the class forces in the first Russian Revolution of 1905, which then became the program of the Russian October Revolution of 1917, and which Trotsky later generalized to colonial, semicolonial and other

countries of belated capitalist development under imperialist domination. In a nutshell, and I'm quoting here, "The theory of the Permanent Revolution, which is basic to our movement, declares that in the modern world the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be completed except through the victory and extension of the proletarian revolution." I quote this summary because it comes from the 1963 document "Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International," the founding document of the Spartacist tendency,³⁵ which we in the LFI uphold and the reborn ICL will surely renounce, sooner or later, as it is incompatible with their present distortion and negation of permanent revolution.

The Spartacist tendency was founded on the authentic program of permanent revolution and upheld it against all the pseudo-Trotskyists like Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel starting in the early 1950s, and a decade later joined by the leaders of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party who abandoned the fight for workers revolution led by a Bolshevik-Leninist vanguard, and instead tailed after non-proletarian forces. Today the ICL under new management – which pulled off what in the business world would be called a hostile takeover with the acquiescence of a demoralized Spartacist old guard – draws its arguments from the various pseudo-Trotskyists, but with an important difference: whereas the Pabloites, Mandelites and so on capitulated to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists and populists, this new crop of revisionists actually are "nation-building" nationalists masquerading in Trotskyist garb.

To carry out their cynical operation they have to resort to blatantly falsifying history. We saw this already in their 2017 "Hydra" document where in the name of defending oppressed nations they tried to present their advocacy of discriminatory, anti-democratic language laws as Leninism on the national question, when Lenin emphatically said the opposite, opposing official privileging of any language, including of the oppressed.

On permanent revolution *Spartacist* 68 claims that "From 1905 to 1917, there was an essential identity between Trotsky's permanent revolution and Lenin's strategic line expressed

in the formula of the 'democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry'." It claims that the different formulas were only "prognoses" and a "nuance," and that by 1917 Lenin's "algebraic" slogan was "outlived" and had to be substituted by the more "arithmetic" program of "all power to the Soviets." In other words, no big deal.

The attempt to pass this off as authentic Trotskyism is rank cynicism. Those of us who were won to Trotskyism away from the "revolutionary democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry," which we called in shorthand the "RDDPP," anyone who went through that experience

³⁵ Published in *Spartacist* No. 1, February-March 1964.



Internationalist photo



Lenin delivering his “April Theses” in the Tauride Palace, 17 April 1917. If the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” had prevailed, there would have been no socialist October Revolution.

instantly spotted this ploy. In the correspondence leading up to this debate the LFI pointed out that in his 1905 pamphlet *Two Tactics of the Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* Lenin stated that his call was explicitly for a “democratic, not a socialist” regime, and how Trotsky in his 1939 essay on “Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution” contrasted his call for permanent revolution both to Lenin’s formula and that of the Mensheviks. So I suggest you can consult those sources.

As for the reborn ICL’s claim that Lenin’s coming over to the programmatic conclusion of Trotsky’s permanent revolution – namely to fight for workers revolution, for the dictatorship of the proletariat – was just a matter of replacing an outdated prognosis, Trotsky wrote at length in his 1930 *History of the Russian Revolution*, in Chapter 16 on “Rearming the Party” about the tremendous struggle that took place after Lenin issued his 1917 “April Theses” calling for “all power to the soviets.” This was ferociously resisted by Kamenev, Stalin and the other “Old Bolsheviks” who clung to the old formula, which called for completing “the first stage of a bourgeois revolution.” The point is, *had the program of a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” not been defeated, there would have been no October Revolution!* And that’s what you claim was essentially the same.

So the ICL under new management is lying about differences between Lenin’s program and Trotsky’s leading up to the 1917 Russian Revolution, and when people lie about big issues, it’s for a purpose. The purpose in this case is quite clear, underlined by their embrace of the call for an “anti-imperialist united front” – namely that they want to make political blocs with bourgeois nationalists, from the populist government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico – which they pretend is somehow anti-imperialist, when in fact AMLO is acting as a border guard for the U.S., both under Trump and now Biden – to the African National Congress which presides over the neo-apartheid regime on behalf of international capital. And

they also want to make a political bloc, in the name of such a so-called “united front,” with [Greek prime minister Alexis] Tsipras and SYRIZA in Greece.³⁶

The new crew at the helm of the ICL try to pretend that they are presenting the real deal even when they are transparently negating Trotsky’s program. *Spartacist* [68] talks, repeatedly, of “the core of permanent revolution: placing the struggle for national liberation at the center of revolutionary strategy for the neocolonial world.” In another place it says that “the experience of 1917, speaks to the *fundamental core of permanent revolution*, which is nothing other than the need for *communist leadership of the democratic struggle*, first and foremost national liberation.” So

the essence of the 1917 Russian October Revolution was a democratic struggle for national liberation? What garbage! For what nation? The Russian nation, the Polish nation, the Finnish nation? And the experience of 1917 was essentially a “democratic struggle”? Whatever happened to the proletariat taking power?

The most striking case of a tendency that “revised” permanent revolution was that of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. In late 1981, Doug Jenness, the editor of the SWP’s newspaper *The Militant*, published an article, “How Lenin Saw the Russian Revolution” essentially equating permanent revolution with Lenin’s RDDPP, the same sleight-of-hand the ICL is carrying out today. Ernest Mandel replied with a long article stressing the difference between Lenin’s formula from 1905, which foresaw the workers and peasants leading a bourgeois revolution, and Trotsky’s program pointing to workers revolution. Jenness responded with an even longer article in mid-1982 claiming that the October 1917 revolution was actually the RDDPP, not a workers revolution but a democratic revolution. And a few months later SWP leader Jack Barnes came out against permanent revolution altogether in his speech on “Their Trotsky and Ours.”

What was driving the SWP’s evolution was the desire to join with Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress in South Africa as the anti-apartheid movement was heating up. And we see the same with the ICL today. Like the SWP, the new ICL wants to push to implement the ANC’s Freedom Charter, which was a program for a bourgeois-democratic revolution, although with some fairly radical social measures.³⁷ Incidentally, the Charter was written by supporters of the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP) whose watchword

³⁶ See note 25 above.

³⁷ In a [statement on the May 29 \[2024\] South African elections](#), the ICL has now come out for voting for an outright bourgeois formation, the populist-nationalist Economic Freedom Fighters.



Trotsky speaking in Copenhagen, November 1932, “In Defense of October.” The Bolshevik leader summed up the program of permanent revolution: “the victorious proletariat will not stop at the program of bourgeois democracy: it will go on to the program of socialism.” It was not, as the born-again ICL now pretends, a stagist program of first national liberation, then socialism.

of a “national democratic revolution,” like Lenin’s RDDPP, did not go beyond the bounds of capitalism. And when the reborn ICL calls to implement the Freedom Charter, as their new South African paper does, that is in fact the position of the SACP and the ANC, whose maintenance of superexploitation of black labor was symbolized in the 2012 Marikana massacre [of mine workers]. But where Lenin, with his formula, was fighting for revolution against the bourgeoisie, the South African CP, which you are tailing, is essentially fighting to administer that neo-apartheid capitalist exploitation.

There is much more to be said about the ICL’s new “anti-imperialist” clothes in Mexico. Its call for a “united front” with the government of AMLO [Andrés Manuel López Obrador] and his MORENA party would stand in the way of the necessary struggle to break workers away from this nationalist, but in no way anti-imperialist, government, which is now trying to force the so-called “independent” unions back into the straitjacket of corporatist state control of labor. Once again, as in equating the RDDPP with permanent revolution, the ICL leaders justify this with a subterfuge, conflating Trotsky’s call for independent proletarian support for the expropriation of imperialist-owned oil companies with making a political bloc with the government of Lázaro Cárdenas [president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940], which Trotsky never called for. With its vague talk of national liberation and nation-building, the newborn ICL’s program would be a roadblock to revolution if it had any impact, which luckily it doesn’t. If anyone agreed with the line of *El [Antiimperialista]*, the bourgeois name of their new paper, they would join AMLO’s MORENA party and push from within.

So here, there and just about everywhere, the line of the new ICL – which now repudiates just about everything the Spartacist tendency represented when it fought for the revolutionary

program of Trotskyism – would have terrible consequences if carried out in the class struggle. Nowhere is this clearer than over Iran where they denounce the Spartacist tendency’s warnings against leftist support for the 1979 so-called “Islamic revolution.” They take a quotation out of context to pretend that we equated Khomeini with Hitler when its point was that there can be reactionary mass movements. There were some problems with the initial formulations on Iran before we settled on the call for “Down with the shah, no to the mullahs.” But we told the truth about the mullah regime, whereas *Spartacist* 68 pretends they were leading an anti-imperialist struggle.³⁸

That was in fact the line of almost the entire opportunist left, from “Islamic Marxists” to Stalinists to pseudo-Trotskyists. And many acted on this as leftists streamed back to Tehran after

spending years in exile to escape the dreaded SAVAK, the secret police of the U.S.-backed dictatorship of Shah Pahlevi. But almost immediately there were extensive arrests of leftists, following by a wave of tens of thousands jailed in 1981, of whom hundreds, perhaps several thousand, were executed in 1988. The Stalinist Tudeh party, which had led striking oil workers into the arms of Khomeini, was rewarded by having its offices closed and its paper banned in 1979, with mass arrests of over 1,000 Tudeh members in 1982-83, with 45 of them executed as supposed Soviet spies.

Because the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency was not taken in by the fool’s gold of bourgeois “anti-imperialism” and fought for workers revolution, we were able to warn against the impending slaughter, while the opportunists, as we wrote at the time, “bowed before their executioners.” And from the beginning, while politically opposing the “Islamic republic” we defended Iran against imperialist and Zionist attacks, threats and sanctions, including calling, as we do today, for Iran’s right to have nuclear weapons to deter and defend against the nuclear-armed U.S. and Israeli warmongers.

A couple of final comments: First, the new ICL leaders never knew the Spartacist tendency when it stood for genuine revolutionary Trotskyism – not that this would make a difference, as they are deeply wedded to their nationalist politics. The latter-day ICL they came to know had plenty of imperialist chauvinist aspects to their line – like declaring in Mexico, a U.S. semi-colony, that “the main enemy is at home.” This was

³⁸ See “Iran and the Left: Why They Supported Islamic Reaction,” *Workers Vanguard* No. 229, 13 April 1979; and “Iran and Permanent Revolution,” *Spartacist* No. 33, Spring 1981 for further information on the deadly illusions in the mullah regime pushed by various pseudo-Trotskyists and other opportunist leftists.

never the position of the revolutionary ICL, and in fact that line was cooked up to go after the Internationalist Group in the U.S. and the Grupo Internacionalista in Mexico.

Secondly, the Spartacist tendency and ICL, when they stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, told the truth to the masses and fought for proletarian revolution, while the born-again ICL tries to hoodwink them with vague talk of national liberation, copied from the Stalinists who were past masters in pushing this line in order to disguise their refusal to fight for socialist revolution. This was true from Latin America to South [Africa] and Vietnam, where almost the entire left called for national liberation while the SL called for “All Indochina Must Go Communist.” Perhaps you will want to reject that slogan as well, as being “sectarian.”³⁹

Leninists and Trotskyists have always been sticklers for programmatic clarity. Seemingly small differences in political formulas can have enormous consequences in the class struggle. As we said earlier, the reborn ICL has done us, and the workers movement, a favor by making clear that they are not, in fact, the heirs of the Spartacist tendency that fought for revolutionary Trotskyism. They are its antithesis. The League for the Fourth International and its national sections today represent the revolutionary political continuity of authentic Trotskyism and Leninism. We have consistently put forward programs for revolutionary internationalist struggle, from picket lines mean don’t cross, to workers strikes against imperialist wars, to calling for defense of Gaza and the Palestinian Arab people coupled with the fight for an Arab/Hebrew Palestinian workers state in a socialist federation of the Middle East.

The new ICL, in contrast, is putting forward one gimmick after another, many a transparent call for class collaboration while others are just nonsensical. So when you see *Spartacist* on their publications, we counsel *caveat emptor* – buyer beware.

And in conclusion, let me say: *Hands off Trotsky’s permanent revolution!*

Summary

There’s a lot to say and I don’t have enough time. I do want to answer on the question of Greece. The struggle in Greece is not for national liberation, it’s for international socialist revolution together with all the countries in Europe. The Greek Civil War was fought on the program of national liberation by the Stalinists – when it should have been a struggle for international communist revolution – and that program, together with the Stalinists, prevented the struggle for a Balkan socialist federation at the time. There is no separate national bourgeoisie or comprador bourgeoisie in Greece. Greece is a sub-imperialist power. It controls much of the world’s shipping, it is a banking presence in Eastern Europe, and Alex Tsipras proved that there is no separation between the national bourgeoisie and the other bourgeoisies of the imperialist European Union.

On the referendum, this was known beforehand, it was perfectly obvious that this was a maneuver by Tsipras to get a “no”

³⁹ Presenting the social revolution in Vietnam as if it were simply a bourgeois-democratic struggle for national liberation was characteristic of reformist groups like the SWP, to facilitate its alliances with Democratic liberals in the antiwar movement (while for groups like the Shachtmanite International Socialists it reflected virulent anticommunism).

vote to bargain with the bankers, after which he would capitulate to them. We called for abstention because this was a ploy, this was a fraud, and you participated in that fraud. We did not just call for abstention, we called for workers action, for occupying the ports, for occupying the hospitals, for shutting down the railroads. That is workers action against the imperialist oppression of the Greek working people and all Greek people through their austerity program. What you did, is you tailed after the bourgeois nationalists.

Secondly, someone asked about communist leadership in the national liberation movement. We call for socialist revolution to resolve national oppression and the imperialist stranglehold. To pretend that you can have national liberation without socialist revolution is a fraud and a lie that you are hoodwinking people with. The speaker from the British section of the ICL said how can you expose the bourgeois nationalists if you don’t engage in united fronts. We intervene in the struggles against imperialist domination to expose the nationalists.

On the IBT’s [referring to the “International Bolshevik Tendency”] proposal for some kind of a conference, I would say simply, there is no family of Spartacism any more than there is a family of Trotskyism or a family of the left, and you’re not going to build a revolutionary party by a Spartacist family reunion but only by the intransigent struggle for the program that the Spartacist tendency was founded on, which the ICL has now renounced and which the two branches of the BT and IBT fled from at the start of the anti-Soviet Cold War. In terms of the comparison of the trial of Socorro with the trial of Bill Logan: Bill Logan was guilty as charged, Socorro was persecuted.

And on Malvinas, the support of the Argentine nationalist left to the military adventure of the generals is what sank the possibility of workers revolution in Argentina.⁴⁰ There was a burgeoning workers movement at that time. The generals called their adventure in order to head it off. The left bought it. And then when it was defeated, a wave of defeatism seized Argentina. And it was because the left supported that war that it was the bourgeoisie that profited from the fall of the junta. ■

⁴⁰ In April 1982, the Argentine military dictatorship under General Leopoldo Galtieri, hoping to divert radicalizing workers’ struggles, launched a military adventure invading the Falkland/Malvinas islands in the South Atlantic. The sparsely populated islands, whose English inhabitants (there was virtually no Argentine population there) mainly lived off sheepherding, had been under British rule since 1833, while “recovering the Malvinas” has been a mainstay of Argentine nationalism for decades. Amid jingoistic hysteria in London and nationalist fervor in Buenos Aires, the two militaries fought a naval war in which the British overpowered the Argentine forces. In the conflict between imperialist Britain and Argentina, an intermediate capitalist power, which did not affect the latter’s right to self-determination, the international Spartacist tendency called for a policy of revolutionary defeatism on both sides. See “Sink Thatcher! Sink the Junta!” *Workers Vanguard* No. 306, 28 May 1982. The support by the nationalist Argentine left for the junta’s ill-fated invasion meant that instead of the generals being overthrown by a workers uprising, popular outrage over the senseless slaughter and military corruption was capitalized on by the conservative bourgeois opposition led by the Radical Civic Union of Raúl Alfonsín, which came to office in the 1983 elections.

A Brief Postscript

(July 2025)

In “Just Asking...,” reprinted above, comrades from the Revolutionary Internationalist Youth posed a series of pointed and specific questions to the ICL regarding its 1996 purge of long-time cadres who went on to found the Internationalist Group, and its break with Luta Metalúrgica (now Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil [LQB], section of the LFI) amidst the struggle to oust police from the municipal workers union in Brazil’s “Steel City,” Volta Redonda. Those events were among the many political issues raised at the January 2024 LFI-ICL debate, at which the ICL’s leader Perrault reiterated that it was carrying out an internal investigation on this subject.

Last month (June 2025), the ICL came out with a public bulletin on the results of that investigation. It is a damning document, in which the ICL today declares, unequivocally, that everything we said about the purge and the ICL’s betrayal of the LQB comrades and the struggle in Brazil was true, and everything the ICL said about it was a lie. The mountain of accusations spewed out against us and hurled hysterically by the ICL’s press and members for almost 30 years were *exactly what we said they were from the beginning: willful falsehoods designed to cover up the bureaucratic purge and ignominious betrayal carried out by the ICL in 1996.*

Here we will comment on the ICL bulletin only briefly, as we intend to respond further in the LFI press.

The ICL bulletin is titled *Report on the Bureaucratic Purge of IG Founders and the Break in Relations with Luta Metalúrgica*. The report itself (dated 28 March 2025), by the ICL’s International Control Commission (ICC), takes up a little over 7 of the bulletin’s 71 pages. Preceded by a short editorial note, it is followed by 57 pages of appended documents. Striking is the fact that all but a half page of these were already published, almost three decades ago.¹ Nor do the report and editorial note provide any new information. The bulletin leaves unanswered many of the factual questions posed in “Just Asking...” and in the LFI letters from September-October 2023 reprinted in this Internationalist pamphlet.

What the ICL’s June 2025 bulletin does do is state:

“The ICC investigation concluded that the comrades who went on to found the LFI were driven out of our organization through frame-up internal trials, demagogic fights and multiple breaches of the party’s internal democratic norms. The investigation also concluded that the break in fraternal relations with LM/LQB was completely unprincipled and destructive.”

The report of the ICL’s internal investigation declares, “From beginning to end, the 1996 fight against Norden, Negrete, Stamberg and Socorro was an exercise in bureaucratic abuse”; it recommends that the ICL “renounce” the “corrosive” and “bureaucratic” maneuver it carried out by breaking, on false pretenses, with LM/LQB in 1996; and calls for “the repudia-

tion of the slander of LM/LQB as union-suers.”

The report also repeatedly “concurs” with characterizations of the ICL’s actions that we made in our July 1996 pamphlet on the purge. It admits, for example, that we “correctly accused the ICL of ‘pulling its hands out of the boiling water’” of the struggle to expel cops from the municipal workers union, and it characterizes the ICL’s “abandonment of LM/LQB” as “ignominious” – “the very antithesis of revolutionary leadership.”² The bulletin notes that the report’s recommendations were adopted by the ICL’s international executive committee.

So yes, it is a good thing that the ICL now admits these facts, as circumscribed as these admissions are. But what, then, do the facts they now admit to say about an organization that with apparent unanimity persisted in these lies and slanders for three decades? Meanwhile, the ICL bulletin repeats the self-justifying mantra that the ICL and LFI were supposedly political twins (“two satellites orbiting around American liberalism”) for decades after the 1996 purge.

No, there was a fight, on issue after issue, over the continuity of the program of Lenin and Trotsky, which the ICL abandoned and the LFI upheld. The born-again ICL’s “plague on both your houses” position is aimed at justifying the new management’s throwing overboard just about everything the SL/ICL stood for when it was the champion of revolutionary Trotskyism.

Meanwhile, the *programmatic* counterposition between the two organizations kept growing wider over the years, and has become an even bigger gulf with *the ICL’s explicit disavowal of the Spartacist political tradition.*

The damage the ICL’s actions did to the struggle for revolutionary Trotskyism cannot be undone by proclamations reminiscent of a “truth and reconciliation commission” that admits what is already known in a quest to “let bygones be bygones.” Meanwhile, key individuals who carried out these deeply unprincipled actions continue to speak authoritatively for the ICL. Entirely left out from the ICL bulletin is their deliberate and declared drive to “humiliate” the North African comrades of the Permanent Revolution Faction in the French section of the ICL, repeated attempts at physical intimidation of our comrades and so much more.

Yet the ICL’s cynical attempt to break revolutionary cadres failed. What it did “achieve” was the irreparable squandering of its political capital and the politically terminal demoralization of its own membership. ■

¹ The ICL bulletin reprints four documents from our July 1996 pamphlet *After Spartacist League Purges Leading Cadres, ICL Flees from Class Battle in Brazil: From a Drift to Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*, two articles from *Workers Vanguard* No. 648, 5 July 1996, and one item from Spartacist League *Internal Bulletin* No. 59, September 1996.

² The report notes that “despite pledging to ‘continue to defend LM and its supporters against attacks by the bourgeois state and pro-capitalist labor bureaucracy,’ the ICL for all intents and purposes dropped any such defense” after its break with the Brazilian comrades amidst the struggle to expel police from the municipal workers union. However, the ICL’s June 2025 bulletin makes no mention of the fact that it actively sought to *stop* others in the left and labor movement from supporting the international campaign to defend the Brazilian comrades against bourgeois state repression (see “After Courts Order ‘Search and Seizure’ of Militants’ Leaflets: ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Brazilian Trotskyist Workers,” reprinted in the May 2010 Internationalist pamphlet *Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists*).

League for the Fourth International



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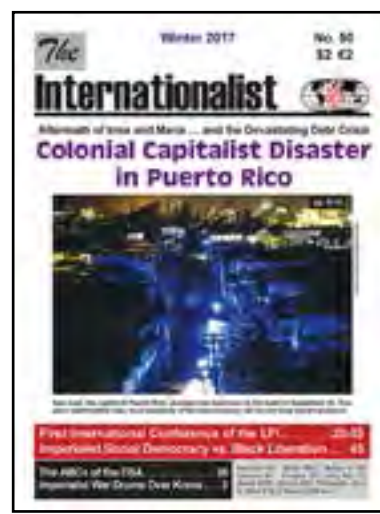
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