

# Revolutionary Regroupment



No. 1

Second Quarter 2010

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## *Leon Trotsky on* **Optimism & Pessimism (1901)**

*The following short excerpt by a young Leon Trotsky is being reprinted as the introduction for this journal's first issue. It is symbolic of the journal's determination to succeed in its endeavor and its underlying confidence in the capacity of the working class to break the chains of oppression and inaugurate a new chapter in human history.*

*Samuel Trachtenberg  
May 1, 2010*

Dum spiro spero! [While there is life, there's hope!] ... If I were one of the celestial bodies, I would look with complete detachment upon this miserable ball of dust and dirt ... I would shine upon the good and the evil alike ... But I am a man. World history which to you, dispassionate gobbler of science, to you, book-keeper of eternity, seems only a negligible moment in the balance of time, is to me everything! As long as I breathe, I shall fight for the future, that radiant future in which man, strong and beautiful, will become master of the drifting stream of his history and will direct it towards the boundless horizon of beauty, joy, and happiness! ...

The nineteenth century has in many ways satisfied and has in even more ways deceived the hopes of the optimist ... It has compelled him to transfer most of his hopes to twentieth century. Whenever the optimist was confronted by an atrocious fact, he exclaimed: What, and this can happen on the threshold of the twentieth century! When he drew wonderful pictures of the harmonious future, he placed them in the twentieth century.

And now that century has come! What has it brought with it from the outset?

In France – the poisonous foam of racial hatred [1]; in Austria – nationalist strife ...; in South Africa – the agony of a tiny people, which is being murdered by a colossus [2]; on the 'free' island itself – triumphant hymns to the victorious greed of jingoist jobbers; dramatic 'complications' in the east; rebellions of starving popular masses in Italy, Bulgaria, Romania ... Hatred and murder, famine and blood ...

It seems as if the new century, this gigantic newcomer, were bent at the very moment of its appearance to drive the optimist into absolute pessimism and civic nirvana.

– Death to Utopia! Death to faith! Death to love! Death to hope! thunders the twentieth century in salvos of fire and in the rumbling of guns.

– Surrender, you pathetic dreamer. Here I am, your long awaited twentieth century, your 'future.'

– No, replies the unhumbled optimist: You, you are only the present.

### **Notes**

1. The Dreyfus Affair.
2. The Boer War



Front cover of Russian language edition of *Communist International*.

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## *Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency*

# *The Road Out of Rileyville*

*The following resignation letter was sent on 9/25/08. It has been slightly edited for spelling and grammar.*

Comrades,

This resignation letter should not come as a surprise for you. While I have had problems with and criticisms of the IBT leadership in past years, for well over a year now I have been constantly butting heads with it over the past and future development of the IBT, and it's unending streak of cliquism, intriguing, maneuvering and overall disloyal methods through which the Troika (Tom Riley, Bill Logan, and Adaire Hannah) have kept their control of the group for all these years.

I still remain convinced of the necessity and possibility of overthrowing capitalist society, but that possibility can only be achieved through regrouping the subjective revolutionaries around the world on a sound programmatic basis to rebuild the Fourth International. However formally correct it's paper program may be for the moment, history has shown that the sort of organization which the IBT has developed into, a static, stagnating group dominated by a Machiavellian deeply entrenched *permanent leadership*, can never have younger comrades grow, develop, and therefore play little role in that process. We lost the Argentine comrades primarily for those reasons, and it is only a matter of time before the group's current Latin American sympathizers will discover this for themselves. Daniel De Leon was also quite "orthodox" in his day, but he led a rigid hyper-centralized authoritarian sect whose contribution was mainly a literary one. It was not an accident that very few with an SLP history participated in founding the CPUSA.

In that light, perhaps the situation of the New Zealand section is most instructive. From being the largest ostensibly Trotskyist group in the country, it has dwindled down to 4 semi-active geriatrics. I suspect the reason for this being that its reputation is such that most NZ activists would not want to touch it with a ten foot pole. Logan's and Hannah's past reputation as Spartacist League leaders, combined with their apparent failure to fully break from their past practices (as expressed by the atrocious Comcrit sessions and Peter De Waal purge (see appendixes 1 and 2)), are widely known in NZ left circles and discussed in various internet discussion groups. But while there was initially some protest amongst the ranks when these incidents occurred, they were able to get away with them and the leadership's ability to get away their subsequent atrocious treatment of other critics, whether one agrees with their criticisms or not, set a bad pattern which the group still lives with today. I strongly urge comrades to read the documents on the purge of the Bay Area local (see appendix 3). One did not need to be a fan of Gerald Smith or Fred Ferguson to be disturbed by the Zinovievite manner in which the leadership dealt with them. Trotsky dealt with such differences radically differently as anyone who reads *Crisis in the French Section*, where similar issues of a "popular" press combined within discipline were in controversy, can see.

But while some of these developments happened even before I was a member, I can still say that the IBT today is a radically different group than the one I joined in 1994. Until 1998, when it's last factional struggle occurred, the IBT was still a group brimming with debates and line-ups. At the North American conference I attended after joining Riley and Logan were even in a minority on many questions. But it has now been 10 years since the IBT's last factional struggle with Jim Creegan's followers and Ian Donovan.

This is how the group in the past viewed the issue when it happened to the SL:

"In the shadow world which increasingly constitutes the real internal life of the SL/US the leadership occasionally feels it necessary to reply to doubts, questions and criticisms which have never been explicitly articulated by anyone but which are thought to lurk in the minds of many. In the aftermath of the Gordon affair, Seymour churned out an internal article entitled "Comrade Robertson and the Spartacist tendency" in which he took up the thorny question of why the last faction fight in the SL occurred in 1968. Seymour asserts that "In a homogeneous organization factional struggle almost always occurs only when changed objective circumstances require a fundamental change in political line or organizational perspectives." (SL IDB No. 30, page 44). He uses the example of the Bolshevik party which was "demonstrably not a cult nor personalist organization. At every major turn Lenin encountered resistance or outright opposition from among the leading cadre." The fact that this has not been the case in the SL/US for ten (now fourteen) years asserts Seymour:"

"is conditioned by the absence of objective circumstances which required major changes or breakthroughs in political line or unanticipated organizational turns...."

"Our tendency has existed in an organizational framework which has limited it to propagating the Trotskyist program and worldview... [the SL/US] has never seriously challenged, even episodically, the bureaucratic leadership of the working class...."

"Very neat....all factional struggles in the iSt await the day when the organization wins a mass base in the working class."

*Declaration of the External Tendency (1982)*

Yet when I raised this issue (along with many other similar ones), comrades gave the same response Seymour did combined with a gross campaign to convince me that my criticisms stemmed from "mental illness". While I do have a history of depression, I am not insane and am perfectly capable of recognizing reality and the leadership's attempts to use the same devices with me it's used with other critics. Ian Donovan, who raised unsupportable criticisms on the issue of the popular front, was treated to a similar ploy. After leaving our group when the leadership undemocratically announced his views would not be discussed for 2-4 years until our next conference, the IBT responded with snide insinuations externally (and explicit ones internally) that his report of what happened was a product of "mental illness". Yet, his report *was* accurate. While Ian had a history of anger management problems, he also was *not* insane.

One of the leadership's corrupt hatchet men, Jason Wright, has himself had a history of his previous organization, the Revolutionary Workers League, campaigning to convince him his correct criticisms of them were also a product of "mental illness" (see appendix 3). How he can look at himself in the mirror today being complicit in a similar campaign I do not know. The term for such practices is "gaslighting" and I'd urge comrades to do a Google search on it. The fact that Bill Logan, a mental health "professional", has used his credentials for such disgusting factional purposes magnifies the corruption involved.

The incident that finally forced me to confront the issue head on happened two weeks ago. I received an e-mail from Tom Riley telling me he wanted to talk to me. Since I was quite angry over the iec's [International Executive Committee's] last provocation in their attempt to bring me to heel, I told him to send me an e-mail and that I would respond, that I was overwhelmingly stressed at the moment and didn't want to deal with more of it needlessly. Tom's response was to inform me that I did not make the rules, *he did*, and that I was under discipline to call him. I responded that I assumed this involved some security issue or something similar that could not be discussed via e-mail, since otherwise the demand did not amount to any sort of legitimate *operational discipline* but an exercise in establishing *psychological obedience* of the sort the SL engaged in, and that otherwise it would be smart for him to e-mail me, since it's never a good idea for those who have lost all moral authority to engage in threats. He responded by continuing to demand I call. When I did he informed me that if he, Mr. Big Shot "Leader", told me to call, I better call, and proceeded to arrogantly inform me that I "shouldn't be too surprised if in the not too distant future" I should see myself "forced to leave the group" followed by one of his snide "heh heh"s. Whether the intent was to provoke me to quit, engage in bureaucratic intimidation, or most likely a statement of future intent made in a moment of uncontrolled bureaucratic arrogance, it forced me to personally confront the fact that if such an abusive piece of garbage could be the main undisputed and unquestioned leader of a group, it meant it had no revolutionary future. In the end the issue he had to discuss could have been e-mailed. His response was that he "didn't feel like it."

I deeply value the past historical contributions of the IBT and would seek to continue its work. But a continuation is not a repetition and the group that I (and others) will be forming will be careful to not repeat its mistakes. Comrades can read more on the web site [www.regroupment.org](http://www.regroupment.org) which will be online shortly.

I call on others in the IBT to join me since I do not believe that the IBT leadership is reformable at this stage, nor do I believe that the deeply necessary *rank and file insurrection* the group needs is likely in historical junctures like ours. These occur usually as a reflection of rising class struggle in the broader society, just like the pacification of the IBT ranks reflect that difficult period through which the IBT has suffered in its 27 years of inability to break out of its hyper-marginalized existence. But for those who disagree I invite you to attempt one. If you succeed before the rot reaches its formal program, I and others who join with me will be quite happy to fuse our forces. More likely the leadership will marginalize you through its incessant behind the scenes maneuvers and whispering campaigns, combined with organizational repression, until you leave demoralized and broken, which Jim Robertson [who mentored them in their techniques] used to explicitly say was the way to deal with oppositionists.

Those who try and, like me, remain determined to be revolutionaries are invited to contact the new group I will participate in forming. I am confident of its future.

Samuel Trachtenberg

P.S. While the new group will have a polemical focus, it will not be a narrowly IBT centered one. I will not be forming an "external tendency." While such an orientation made sense towards a mass party involved in day to day combat like the Communist International, it doesn't for a purely literary group with fewer than 40 people worldwide. That orientation did not make sense towards a group like SL either and the IBT has never been able to break from that narrow focus. That is a lesson I have learned. But I will write polemics with the IBT when the need arises and certainly respond to any accusations. A larger historical analysis than the one presented in this letter will be forthcoming.

The following appendixes can be read online at [http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_resignation\\_letter.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_resignation_letter.html)

Appendix 1: Posting on alt.politics.socialism.trotsky  
[http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_appendix\\_1.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_appendix_1.html)

Appendix 2: Exchange between the International Communist League and the International Bolshevik Tendency  
[http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_appendix\\_2.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_appendix_2.html)

Appendix 3: Bureaucratic Centralism in the International Bolshevik Tendency  
<http://www.archive.org/download/BureaucraticCentralismInTheInternationalBolshevikTendency/Rileyville.pdf>.PDF

Appendix 4: letter circa (1998) by the IBT's Jason Wright documenting his leaving the Revolutionary Workers League  
[http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_appendix\\_3.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_appendix_3.html)

## Introduction to the *Marxist Polemic* Series

*We are posting the first number of the **Marxist Polemic** series titled "State & Counterrevolution: Trotskyist Polemics on the fall of the USSR" in installments online. We are reprinting "LRP's Revisions of Basic Theory", one of the documents in the collection, on page 8. The entire series can be read at [www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_mp1.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_mp1.html)*

At the 1938 founding conference of the Socialist Workers Party, on the heels of successfully winning a large section of the reformist Socialist Party's membership, and a majority of its youth, to revolutionary Trotskyism, James P. Cannon explained that:

"ALL THE EXPERIENCE of the class struggle on a world scale, and especially the experience of the past twenty years, teaches one lesson above all others, a lesson summed up in a single proposition: The most important problem of the working class is the problem of the party. Success or failure in this domain spells the difference between victory or defeat every time. The struggle for the party, the unceasing effort to construct the new political organization of the vanguard on the ruins of the old one, concentrates within itself the most vital and progressive elements of the class struggle as a whole...."

"The reconstruction of the revolutionary labor movement in the form of a political party is not a simple process. In the midst of unprecedented difficulties, complications and contradictions the work goes ahead, like all social movements, in zig-zag fashion. The new movement takes shape through a series of splits and fusions which must appear like a Chinese puzzle to the superficial observer. But how could it be otherwise? The frightful disintegration of the old movements, on a background of world-wide social upheaval, disoriented and scattered the revolutionary militants in all directions. They could not find their way together, and draw the same basic conclusions, in a day."

"The New Party is Founded" (1938)

In the same speech Cannon, a historic leader of US Trotskyism, also commented on the "anti-sectarian" sectarians of his day. As today, the small Trotskyist movement was mocked for its focus on the struggle for ideological and programmatic clarity within the far left of the labor movement. Counterposed to this was a fake Potemkin village "orientation to the

masses." The "anti-sectarians" who denounced Trotskyists as "primarily a circle of isolated theorists and hairsplitters" Cannon characterized as "centrists who manoeuvre all the time with non-existent 'mass movements' in a vacuum..." While revolutionaries rely on a politically conscious working class, allied with all the exploited and oppressed masses, as the only force capable of capitalism's overthrow on a world scale and cannot seek to act as a substitute, as Cannon explained "The road to the masses lies through the vanguard and not over its head." (*The History of American Trotskyism*)

On the contrary, the real sectarians (and generally, opportunists as well) are those tendencies which try to fool their audience by stringently refusing to ever mention or recognize the existence of all other left groups in their publications, or by putting bureaucratic pressure on their ranks and periphery to prevent them from freely engaging with militants in other organizations and investigating their literature. But the victory of correct politics versus incorrect ones can only triumph under circumstances of open and honest debate by everyone. Those organizations which abstain from, or try to pressure their ranks and periphery against participating in, such exchanges are proclaiming their lack of confidence in their politics and well as their ranks and peripheries. In turn those organizations deserve no confidence, by either their ranks and peripheries, or the working class as a whole.

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The *Marxist Polemic* series is produced by Revolutionary Regroupment and each number will be devoted to a specific political theme. The target audience for this series are the subjectively revolutionary groups and militants around the world that "due to the disintegration of the old movements" are at the present "disoriented and scattered" in "all directions."

It is also hoped that these documents succeed in helping to illuminate and introduce key questions for those who are newly interested in revolutionary politics. A serious investigation of the currently existing organizations is crucial in deciding which group to help build, or for that matter, remain in. As has been frequently stated by many, one can waste many years of one's life without doing so.

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The different political tendencies that will be critiqued will not be limited to or always focused on the largest currently in existence. Many smaller groups internationally are younger and therefore less bureaucratized and stuck to the revisionist traditions and orthodoxies of the older groups they split from. Smaller socialist tendencies today frequently have a more committed and theoretically developed rank and file (and in circumstances, depending on their histories, leadership as well) than larger organizations. They will therefore likely play a highly important role in the initial stages of building a revolutionary party.

In response to those who argued that the German Trotskyists paid insufficient attention to the Communist Party with a mass membership relative to a smaller group, Leon Trotsky responded:

"It might perhaps appear strange that we should devote comparatively so large a labor to such a small organization. But the gist of the matter lies in the fact that the question revolving around the SAP is much greater than the SAP itself. Involved here, in the last analysis, is the question of correct policy towards the centrist tendencies that now play with all the colors of the rainbow within the field of the working-class movement. The conservative centrist apparatuses inherited from the past must be prevented from checking the revolutionary development of the proletarian vanguard; that is the task!"

"Centrist Alchemy or Marxism" (1935)

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Pabloites and other objectivist opportunists usually rely on the organic development of the historical process to solve the problem of revolutionary regroupment (and for that matter the crisis of revolutionary leadership itself). For them any existence of a popular mass movement, whatever its leadership and politics may be, in itself expresses the solution to that problem. All those who do not participate in their uncritical tailing and cheerleading but seek to expose the misleaders are denounced for being ultra-left and "hopeless sectarians".

While frequently bemoaning the scattering of ostensibly revolutionary forces, the underlying problem of political confusion and disorientation does not interest them. They expect the non-revolutionary leaderships of the mass movement of the moment to be forced by the pressure of events to develop into a "blunted instrument" for socialism,

whatever their initial and/or real intentions, much less any political confusion or disorientation on the part of others. The history of working class defeats (which include many potentially revolutionary situations) that inevitably ensued under such misleaderships, from Spain to Chile to the Soviet Bloc are usually formally acknowledged, but their lessons are repeatedly ignored for the struggles of the day. This lays the groundwork for those defeats repetition.

Today that attitude is best expressed by the deep illusions of many claiming to be Marxists in the capacity of Hugo Chavez to lead Venezuela in a socialist direction. Such a position is not only in conflict with Marxism's understanding of the need for revolutionary leadership and program, but also its understandings on the impossibility of reforming the capitalist state, and opposition to class collaboration. It also presupposes, explicitly or implicitly, a similar reformist strategy internationally.

Other tendencies either explicitly have no interest in revolutionary regroupment or unconsciously sabotage all such opportunities. The numerically significant recruitment of experienced comrades with strong wills poses a potential challenge to the authoritarian leader's ability to control of their sects. Their sectarian attitude is not a reflection of any kind of sincere youthful or rigid ultra-leftism but bureaucratic fear. The existence of their organization becomes transformed into an end in itself and for themselves rather than a vehicle for building a revolutionary leadership of the masses. The leaderships of such groups have usually long ceased believing in the formal politics and aims they profess, them playing essentially the same role as the "Sunday Socialism" of the Second International, masking the reality of their true roles and positions. They prefer their groups stay small, making them easier to control.

In contrast Trotsky's attitude was neither objectivist nor sectarian:

"The crisis of the proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely humdrum process. But not of a purely "historical" process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organizational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened – in a word: to restore to the proletariat, under new and highly difficult and onerous conditions, his historical leadership."

"Rosa Luxemburg and the Fourth International" (1935)

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The 1961 international resolution of the British Socialist Labour League, which was leading the International Committee at the time, argued that:

"The Fourth International as a world organization founded by Trotsky in 1938 no longer exists. It has been destroyed by Pabloism."

"The World Prospect for Socialism"  
*Labour Review* (Winter 1961), page 127

While the IC subsequently changed and dishonestly whitewashed this position in the course of its political degeneration, the SLL's document played an important role in the formation of the Revolutionary Tendency inside the Socialist Workers Party in the US.

In a key factional document against the SWP's turn to Pabloism, the RT stated:

"For the past fifteen years the movement founded by Leon Trotsky has been rent by a profound theoretical, political, and organizational crisis. The surface manifestation of this crisis has been the disappearance of the Fourth International as a meaningful structure. The movement has consequently been reduced to a large number of grouplets, nominally arrayed into three tendencies: the "International Committee," "International Secretariat (Pablo)," and "International Secretariat (Posadas). Superficial politicians hope to conjure the crisis away through an organizational formula—"unity" of all those grouplets willing to unite around a common-denominator program. This proposal obscures, and indeed aggravates, the fundamental political and theoretical causes of the crisis."

"Toward Rebirth of the Fourth International" (1963)



If the "the disintegration of the old movements" which "disoriented and scattered the revolutionary militants in all directions" made the tasks of Trotskyists difficult and complex in 1938, the disintegration of the Fourth International into 3 international tendencies, in a situation of the continuation of the pre-existing scattering and confusion, made it substantially more difficult and complex in 1963. Today there exist not only 3 international organizations claiming to be Trotskyist, but *many*. Therefore the organizational conclusions drawn by the RT retain their validity today:

"The task of the international revolutionary-Marxist movement today is to re-establish its own real existence. To speak of the "conquest of the masses" as a general guideline internationally is a qualitative overstatement. The tasks before most Trotskyist sections and groups today flow from the need for political clarification in the struggle against revisionism, in the context of a level of work of a generally propagandistic and preparatory nature."

To many activists the more narrow activity imposed by the situation does not, understandably, seem attractive. Nonetheless this crucial preparatory work today is a precondition for successfully leading mass struggles tomorrow. In such periods, Trotsky argued:

"A revolutionary tendency cannot score stormy victories at a time when the proletariat as a whole is suffering the greatest defeats."

"It is Necessary to Build Communist Parties and an International Anew" (1933)

.....

Revolutionary Regroupment is determined to neither bow down before the difficulty of the situation, nor make a permanent virtue of it as others before have. As previously stated, we:

"remain convinced of the necessity and possibility of overthrowing capitalist society, but that possibility can only be achieved through regrouping the subjective revolutionaries around the world on a sound programmatic basis to rebuild the Fourth International."

"Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency" (2008)

December 2008

## LRP's "Revisions of Basic Theory"

*[The following is a slightly updated edit of a previously unpublished draft by Samuel Trachtenberg. Originally meant to be distributed as an IBT statement at the League for the Revolutionary Party's public debate with the Spartacist League on May 10, 2003 in New York, it was written as a response to "Theories of Stalinism's Collapse" printed in the Fall 2002 issue of **Proletarian Revolution**. Unless otherwise noted, quoted LRP citations are from that article].*

In the course of the polemical exchanges leading up to their public debate with the LRP, the SL had responded to many of the LRP's polemical challenges on a wide variety of questions. One LRP article they did not respond to though was a polemic on the Russian question, traditionally a central question for the SL and a key issue separating the two groups. In looking at the SL's analysis of the victory of capitalist counterrevolution in the USSR, the article observes:

"In the USSR, Yeltsin's counter-coup was the key event in the Communist Party's ouster from power. In that conflict between wings of the bureaucratic capitalist ruling class, the Stalinist "hard-liners" led by Vice-President Gennady Yanaev attempted to seize sole power and end Gorbachev's delicate balance of power between them and the more rapid privatizers..."

"When the hard-liner's revolt fizzled out, Gorbachev's balancing act collapsed and Yeltsin emerged on top. His triumph ushered in a period of undisguised capitalist looting that enriched a handful and impoverished millions. Even though the Yanaev team was also dedicated to 'free-market' reforms, its expected course was slower. Thus

any deformed workers-statists should have defended the Yanaev side, despite its immediate threat to crush the workers -- as a matter of principle, not just tactics. Yet few did. Most backed Yeltsin on dubious democratic grounds, proving one more time that their workers' state theory is empty phrase mongering. ....”

"The Spartacists had a particularly hard time deciding when the Soviet 'workers' state' had been lost. They announced retroactively in late 1992 that counterrevolution had won some time before, exactly when remained unclear. (See 'Spartacists Terminate Russian Workers' State Not with a Bang but a Whimper' PR 43) A 'theory' that allows its proponents to overlook the downfall of a 'workers' state' -- the land of the Bolshevik Revolution, no less -- when the decisive events occur in plain view of all the world, is useless for the working class..."

"They should have had no trouble supporting the Yanaev coup against Gorbachev in 1991. But this time they took no sides. They went through theoretical contortions to avoid doing so for one reason, because that would have meant admitting that their arch-rivals, the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT), was 'right' when they were wrong. For all their trumpeting of their supposed Bolshevik allegiance to program, the Spartacists are often motivated by petty organizational needs."

"Theories of Stalinism's Collapse"  
*Proletarian Revolution* #65, Fall 2002

Arguing from a very different perspective than the IBT (1), the LRP is echoing its correct assertion that the only consistent Soviet Defensist position was one of militarily siding with the Stalinists against Yeltsin, and in demonstrating the reformist logic of the SL's theory of "piecemeal" counterrevolution in the USSR. These are all points the SL has consistently failed to address when raised by anyone.

The LRP's position of strength reflects the fact that while the SL claims to uphold Soviet Defensism in theory, it in its most crucial moment it renounced it in practice. In contrast the LRP has been allowed more theoretical consistency (relative to the SL) by renouncing both.

### **Predictions on Stalinism's Stability**

Since the IBT's initial polemic with the LRP over the Russian question (*1917* #6), the world has witnessed the collapse of Stalinism in the USSR and the Eastern Bloc. The LRP claims that on the left, only their state capitalist theory allowed them to uniquely predict Stalinism's downfall all along. This is false as the IBT (as well as other's on the left) agreed with Trotsky's prediction that:

"either the bureaucracy, becoming ever more the organ of the world bourgeoisie in the workers state, will overthrow the new forms of property and plunge the country back to capitalism; or the working class will crush the bureaucracy and open the way to socialism."

*Transitional Program* (1938)

In response to the unexpected expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe in the post-war period, and the victories of Stalinist lead peasant guerrilla struggles in Asia, both resulting in the liquidation of capitalist property relations, Michel Pablo, then leader of the Fourth International (as well as writers such as Isaac Deutscher) impressionistically predicted that Stalinism was the wave of the future. The corollary was that the program of political revolution against the Stalinists as advocated by Trotsky was outdated, that the Stalinist parties would act as sufficient, if "blunted", instruments for socialism, and that the role of Trotskyists should be to liquidate themselves into their organizations to "sharpen" the blunted instruments. Pablo's rosy predictions for the Stalinists, described as "centuries of deformed workers states" by his opponents at the time, have indeed been discredited. As the LRP should know, the IBT as well as its political predecessors who opposed Pablo's revisionist destruction of the Fourth International, have always upheld Trotsky's view on the *transient* and *unstable* character of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

### **"Those who cannot defend past gains"**

During Trotsky's lifetime there existed tendencies in his organization that, like the LRP, believed that the USSR had already ceased being a workers state. While he recognized that the theoretical difference in the course of events could (and inevitably did) have programmatic consequences, Trotsky believed the key issues for political collaboration on the

question was agreement on the need to overthrow the Stalinists combined with the need to defend the USSR against capitalist restoration, on whatever theoretical basis.

The LRP has sought a theoretical middle ground between traditional state capitalist theories and Trotsky's theory, while in practice usually drawing the same conclusions as the former. According to the LRP's rather unique view (2) the USSR was a capitalist state presiding over nationalized property forms. They recognized nationalized property as an important gain still left over from the October Revolution which must be defended. The Stalinists in the interrum were seen as acting as a "regent" bourgeoisie, turning the state property against the working class and exploiting them with it, while secretly waiting (for over 80 years) for the right opportunity to restore the more conventional market capitalism. Despite the rather tortured theory the LRP was still able to correctly predict the time of the Stalinists crisis that:

"However, if the economic power of the bureaucracy and its new reformist and Western bourgeois allies is not broken, the workers of East Europe will see their revolutions turned against them, and they will become victims of even deeper exploitation than before."

"Revolution Sweeps Europe"  
PR #36, (Winter 1990)

In the most recent article they correctly criticize Tony Cliff:

"In 1998 Cliff published an article titled 'The Test of Time' to assert that his theory of state capitalism had been vindicated. In it he repeated the 'step sideways' analysis. It is remotely conceivable that in 1990 observers could have overlooked the threat to all workers' rights and living standards that were entailed in the privatization and looting of state property. But not by the end of the decade. Cliff & Co. never accepted that any working class gains had survived under Stalinism and thus looked on complacently as they went down the drain."

make the correct observations that:

"the 'revolutions' in the name of freedom devastated the working classes and drove them into a period of comparative passivity."

and (in a previously quoted section):

"his [Yeltsin's] triumph ushered in a period of undisguised capitalist looting that enriched a handful and impoverished millions"

For a group that seemed to recognize the value and necessity of defending the nationalized property forms, one might assume that the logical political corollary may be Soviet Defencism, even if on the basis of a confusionist and inaccurate theory. Yet like most other organizations which claimed to be Trotskyist, those with "orthodox" as well as "Third Camp" theories, the LRP supported all the pro-capitalist "popular revolutions" from Solidarnosc's in Poland 1981 and on, that, by chance, overthrew the nationalized property forms along with the Stalinists. This experience should force one to come to the conclusion, at least in hindsight, that one could not defend the valued nationalized property without at the same time defending those states that based themselves on that property against political forces seeking privatization. Yet, the LRP still argues:

"In the USSR, Yeltsin's counter-coup was the key event in the Communist Party's ouster from power. In that conflict between wings of the bureaucratic capitalist ruling class, the Stalinist 'hard-liners' led by Vice-President Gennady Yanaev attempted to seize sole power and end Gorbachev's delicate balancing of power between them and the more rapid privatizers. The coup posed an acute danger to the working class, since its leaders announced an immediate ban on strikes and a retraction of the limited democratic gains yielded by Gorbachev in the 'glasnost' (openness) campaign of the previous half-decade. So revolutionary workers would have opposed the coup and would have tactically lined up in a military bloc with Yeltsin to defeat the immediate threat to workers interests."

(In a section of their article we previously quoted the LRP chastised groups who "backed Yeltsin on dubious democratic grounds.")

In contrast Trotsky correctly asserted:

"We must not lose sight for a single moment of the fact that the question of overthrowing the Soviet bureaucracy is for us subordinate to the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR; that the question of preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR is subordinate for us to the question of the world proletarian revolution."

*In Defense of Marxism* (1942)

For the LRP the question of defending state property in the means of production is subordinate to overthrowing the Stalinists. Subordinating the class line to petty-bourgeois democratism appears to be the substrate to the LRP's substitution of moralism for Marxist analysis in many of their erroneous positions, from the Russian Question to the National Question.

### **Nationalized Property**

The LRP seeks to create what, in this case, is a false and artificial distinction by arguing that their defense was limited to the nationalized property, but not the state. In a similar manner they claim they would defend social democratic and liberal welfare state reforms, or nationalizations carried out by third world bourgeois regimes for the purpose of economic development etc. Of course many sections of the ruling class recognize that public postal service, public mass transportation, public education and other state sectors are not only gains won by the working class but also the minimal requirements for the proper functioning of a capitalist economy. State interventions into the capitalist economy are particularly important in periods of economic crisis and war. But to claim that the nationalized property relations existing in the Soviet Union and other bureaucratized workers states were of a similar character requires willful blindness.

The LRP sometimes seems to recognize this, writing:

"Trotsky didn't think that the traditional bourgeoisie in practice could fully nationalize an economy. He was right: it required the proletarian revolution, later usurped by the Stalinist bureaucracy." (3)

The difference between a capitalist society with various "social" features and the USSR is the same as the difference between Lenin's NEP and capitalism.

### **State and Counterrevolution**

The LRP rightly makes light of the SL's (and others) inability to say *when* the counterrevolution triumphed in the USSR. Having been neutral in the struggle between Yeltsin and the Stalinist bureaucrats in August 1991, it is understandable why the SL would seek to deny the significance of Yeltsin's victory.

The LRP is correct in asserting that this is a very serious theoretical question that Marxists need to address. In arguing that Yeltsin gradually in the course of some undetermined time successfully carried out a "piecemeal" counterrevolution, the SL, as it previously argued when still a revolutionary organization, carried out a:

"departure from the Leninist theory of the state in favor of a linear, bourgeois conception as of a thermometer which simply and gradually passes from 'bourgeois state' to workers state' by small increments without a qualitative change. Such a methodology is a cornerstone of Pabloism"

"Letter to the OCRFI and the OCI"  
*Spartacist* #22, Winter 1973-74

Such a reformist theoretical understanding, as Lenin pointed out in works such as *State & Revolution* and *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, played an important role in the Social Democracy's subsequent crossing of the class line after 1914. This theoretical departure was also evident, as the LRP rightly notes, in the Fourth International's understanding in the 1940's of the creation of deformed workers states in Eastern Europe and China.

The IBT had previously made this point in relation to the SL (see "Getting Russia Right" by S. Trachtenberg, *1917* #16, 1995) as well as other groups such as the New Zealand Communist Left (now Communist Workers Group/NZ):

"It is notable that every major wave of revisionism of Marxism has struck at the Marxist conception of the state. From Bernstein, to Kautsky, to Stalin - all have sought to undermine the conception of the state as armed force

in defence of a predominant form of class property. Thus revisionism replaces Marxism with 'two-class' states, 'no-class' states, 'intermediary' states, and 'transitional' states....”

"A 'two-class state is inevitably a bourgeois state, just as a 'two-class' popular front is inevitably a bourgeois front. Ultimately the communist programmer in respect of a two-class state and a two-class popular front reduce themselves to the question of the class line. The Communist Left's difficulties on the two questions drive from a single source; it's inability to draw the class line."

*Against Centrism* (1993)

The point was also made with the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (today the League for the Fifth International):

“Harvey thinks the ‘class character of the state’ in the case of such oscillations can be determined by the activity of such a regime at any given instant---when it acts for the capitalists, it is a capitalist state, but, if it takes some action that favors working people, it becomes a workers’ state. The kind of ‘Marxism’ that ‘understands’ such notions is called Kautskyism.”

“Lenin attacked the idea that a bourgeois state can be transformed into an instrument to serve the interests of the oppressed:

““That the state is an organ of the rule of a definite class which cannot be reconciled with its antipode (the class opposite to it), is something the petty-bourgeois democrats will never be able to understand.”  
---*State and Revolution*

“Lenin categorically rejected the idea that an oscillating petty-bourgeois regime (or anything else) can turn a capitalist state into an instrument for social revolution:

“Revolution consists not in the new class commanding, governing with the aid of the old state machine, but in this class *smashing* this machine and commanding, governing with the aid of a new machine. Kautsky slurs over this basic idea of Marxism, or he had utterly failed to understand it.”

“Cuba, the LRCI & Marxist Theory”  
1917 #13, 1994

The LRP has made what seems like a similar argument numerous times:

"The governmental changes today [in relation to post-war Eastern Europe] go in the reverse direction: the Stalinists are being replaced by would-be bourgeois types. ('Bourgeois' refers to the traditional capitalism of the West, as distinct from the statified version of the East.) Both transformations took place without forcible confrontations between the two ruling elements. To call them social revolutions amounts to reformism, the notion that power can be transferred from one class to another peacefully and gradually. This contradicts the central teaching of Marxist theory that a state is the instrument of a particular ruling class and defends the rule and economic forms of that class with its armed power.”

“Death Agony of a Deformed Theory”  
PR #38, Winter 1991

and in the more recent article:

"Marxists who believe that the USSR and allied states were non-capitalist before 1989 but are capitalist now have to ask the question for each country: when did the counterrevolution occur? We have already mentioned that the orthodox Trotskyists in the 1940's had considerable trouble with the 'date question' of that time: when did the countries of East Europe, China, etc. become workers states? The reverse problem after 1989 was equally troublesome" (4)

The LRP solution is to argue that the counterrevolution triumphed in the 1930's, as a consequence of the Purge Trials. The LRP argues the purges represented a "preventive civil war" and that therefore their analysis rescues the Marxist theory of the necessity of a violent counterrevolution:

"The degeneration accelerated in the 1930's. During the Great Purges in the latter half of the decade, the Stalinists wiped out the surviving revolutionary elements in the party and destroyed the officers corps of the Red Army. The essential core of the state power -- its military, police and judicial arms were purged and repurged until all vestiges of Bolshevism were erased. Thus the state apparatus was smashed and reconstituted into a tool of the top bureaucracy -- a new capitalist class, a regent ruling in place of the destroyed bourgeoisie. That signified the completion of the counterrevolution: the workers state was destroyed."

While there was a violent counterrevolution in the USSR in August 1991, it is true that in much of Eastern Europe such a confrontation did not occur, rather the Stalinists and a politically disoriented working class abdicated power. As Trotsky noted:

"If an army capitulates to the enemy in a critical situation without a battle, then this capitulation completely takes the place of a 'decisive battle,' in politics as in war."

*Third International after Lenin* (1928)

As a historical precedent from the other direction, the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919 came to power when the bourgeois government and state similarly abdicated power to it without a struggle. Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky all recognized the *theoretical possibility*, if not *likelihood*, of a peaceful (as opposed to a *piecemeal*) coming to state power (5). In their writings such as *The Civil War in France* and *State and Revolution* the main issue involved for them in the question was not the degree of force and violence used for a successful revolution and, by implication, counterrevolution, but rather that the "working class cannot simply lay hold of the readymade state machinery and wield it for its own purposes".

Yet, this is precisely what the LRP's theory (like the SL's) implies; that the Stalinists/capitalists in the 1930's (or Yeltsin in 1991-92) laid hold of the "readymade state machinery" and then proceeded to use it to restore capitalist rule by killing off or purging element committed to socialist property forms. To use an analogy, using this methodology one can then theoretically argue that the road to socialism lies through secretly infiltrating the Democratic and Republican Parties and once attaining positions of power, use it to gradually purge those committed to capitalism from *within* the state apparatus.

Though used in a different context, James Cannon's assertion (frequently cited by the LRP) is very much on the mark in this regard:

"I don't think you can change the class character of the state by manipulations at the top. It can only be done by a revolution which is followed by a fundamental change in property relations... If you once begin to play with the idea that the class nature of the state can be changed from manipulations in top circles; you open the door to all kinds of revisions of basic theory."

*SWP Internal Bulletin*, October 1949 (quoted in LRP article) (6)

### **Leninism vs. Economism**

A main argument put forward by the LRP is that if the USSR was a workers state, then the working class would have risen up to defend it. Since there were no working class insurrections against the Stalinists in the 1930's, the period when the LRP claims capitalist counterrevolution triumphed, the LRP should logically come to the conclusion that the USSR was *never* a workers state.

The root of this easily disproved theory is the LRP's rejection of Lenin's understanding that socialist consciousness is not an *automatic* reflection of working class material interests but must be fought for within the working class from without through the intervention of a vanguard party. If workers were spontaneously socialist then the revolution would have triumphed long ago, workers would never support popular fronts, imperialist wars, racist ideologies etc. Just as the working class was infused with bourgeois false consciousness by the trade union bureaucrats and reformist social democrats, they were also so by the decades of Stalinist misrule, lies and repression.

The LRP argues in its article that:

"Trotsky often said of the Soviet Union that those who could not defend the past gains of the working class could not possibly achieve new ones. The same is true of those who cannot understand them."

Using this correct criterion, both the LRP and its debate partners have shown incapacity to defend or understand.

## Footnotes

(1) In the 1940's, Max Shachtman, in a similar manner, was also able to make astute observations about the FI's theoretical somersault's on the post-war Stalinist extensions, while holding on to an incorrect analysis himself.

(2) The LRP has developed a State Capitalist theory that is highly unique to them, and do not seem to see the irony of one the one hand making an amalgam of all those claiming to be "orthodox" Trotskyists, gloating:

"After the fall, despite their common theory, they could not agree on whether or when the ex-Stalinists states had become capitalist. The 'theory' turned out to be no basis for analysis but simply a name for societies that once had seemed free of capitalism's crisis."

While noting of the state capitalist "fraternity" some would argue they belong to:

"Other faults aside, none of these currents dealt adequately with the historical dimension of the 'regime change' in the USSR: how and when had the Soviet workers' state been done away with? They all said or implied that the Stalinists had ended the workers states the moment they consolidated power in the 1920's or early 1930's."

(3) This view does not account for the creation of fully nationalized economies in Stalinist-run states outside the USSR.

(4) The FI's confusion at that time was partly a reflection of looking at the prevailing property forms, which were changed gradually, rather than the armed power, the core of the state, which was the Soviet Army occupying these countries. The "Peoples" governments which included bourgeois figures had no real power, effective power being in the hands of the Soviet occupying armies which installed and disposed of these governments as they saw fit. In most countries the capitalists were expropriated, in others, such as Austria they were not, the result in the end being the product of Soviet decisions (decisions forced on them by imperialist military pressure.). In the interrum period what existed was a military force not yet committed to either capitalist or collectivized property. That is, there was *no state in the Marxist sense of the term*.

(5) Marx and Engels on occasion argued for the possibility, under different past historical circumstances of a peaceful transition in the United States and England. In the immediate period preceding the Russian Revolution Lenin discussed the remote possibility of it also occurring in Russia:

"Before 4 July... to transfer power to the then existing Soviets... could have been done peacefully, without Civil War. Because there had been no systematic acts of violence against the masses, against the people"

"Now, and only now, **perhaps during only a few days** or a week or two, such a government could be set up and consolidated in a perfectly peaceful way. In all probability it could secure the peaceful **advance** of the whole Russian Revolution...." (Emphasis in original)

Cited in "Lenin in 1917" by Victor Serge  
*Revolutionary History*, Vol 5. No.3

(6) Despite the LRP's best intentions on avoiding the pitfalls of "revisions of basic theory" by postulating changing the class character of the state through "manipulations at the top", it appears that the logic of trying to assert, against the actual historical reality, the restoration of capitalism in the 1930's has forced the LRP into precisely this trap when seeking to address the "date question":

"The formal culmination of the counterrevolution came at the 18th Party Congress in March 1939. Here the triumphant CP sanctified the new social relations and openly dedicated itself to the bureaucratic intelligentsia. Beyond this point it was impossible to say that the state was ruled in the interests of the working class, in however distorted a form..."

"Whereas the 1936 Constitution had symbolically deposed the proletariat in favor of the 'whole people,' now the Party Congress handed power to the new bureaucracy..."

“addressing the Congress, Stalin's henchman Zhdanov declared that the preference hitherto given to working class party entrants was over: “The existing system, as prescribed in the Party Rules, of admitting new members into the Party in accordance with four different categories, depending on the social status [i.e. class] of the applicant, is obviously incompatible with the changes in the class structure of Soviet society resulting from the victory of socialism in the USSR.”

*The Life and Death of Stalinism*, by Walter Daum  
Pages 183-184

Many will recognize this arbitrary schema as having much in common with Maoist claims that the USSR became capitalist in 1956, right after Khrushchev gave his famous “Secret Speech” acknowledging many of Stalin's crimes.

Posted online on 29, April 2009

## *Disintegration in the “Post-Soviet Period”* **Spartacist League Supports US Troops in Haiti!**

The devastation wrought by the recent earthquake in Haiti has riveted the attention of the world, with the plight of the Haitian masses gaining mass sympathy amongst broad strata of the population. The immediate urgency of the situation and the illusions of many American's in Obama's goodwill have given the US government an opportunity to justify its military occupation of that country in the name of ostensibly helping its people.

While in the past similar immediately urgent situations have lead many on the left to also lose their bearings and support imperialist military interventions, from the Cliffites' support for the presence of British troops in Northern Ireland in the late 60's, the US Socialist Workers Party's calling for sending US troops into Boston in the mid-70's, or the widespread support for imperialist intervention in the Bosnian civil war in the mid-90's, this time around it appears almost everyone on the far left has recognized the US government's imperialist rationale for Haiti's occupation for what it is and come out in opposition. Almost everyone on the far left except for one surprising, if not completely shocking, exception.

In the current issue of their newspaper, the Spartacist League/ U.S. has declared:

“The U.S. military is the only force on the ground with the capacity—e.g., trucks, planes, ships—to organize the transport of what food, water, medical and other supplies are getting to Haiti's population. And they're doing it in the typical piggish U.S. imperialist manner. We have always opposed U.S. and UN occupations in Haiti and everywhere—and it may become necessary to call for U.S./UN out of Haiti in the near future—but we are not going to call for an end to such aid as the desperate Haitian masses can get their hands on.”

“Haiti Earthquake Horror: Imperialism, Racism and Starvation”  
*Worker Vanguard* #951 29, January 2009

No one proclaiming a Marxist understanding of imperialism, or for that matter just some knowledge of recent history, would have any doubt as to the ultimately predatory ambitions behind any imperialist intervention abroad. The situation in Haiti poses no new questions that differ from previous “humanitarian” interventions (where the SL has at least opposed the presence of imperialist troops, if not always calling for their military defeat) that could possibly justifiably be the cause of legitimate disorientation. The SL's article even acknowledges:

“While reformist “socialists” like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) and Workers World Party (WWP) call for the U.S. to provide aid without the exercise of American military might, we have no such illusions. Indeed, American forces in Haiti have made “security” a higher priority than providing aid. While many planes carrying aid have landed at the Port-au-Prince airport, which is now controlled by U.S. forces, others were criminally diverted as the U.S. gave landing priority to planes carrying military personnel.”

The US military's widely noted obstruction of desperately needed aid and repression against Haiti's people should only make the situation all the more obvious even to those guided by a purely immediate empirical understanding.



## Program Generates Theory, Generates Program

Still, the SL's claim to Marxism has forced them to attempt a theoretical explanation/ rationale for what is, at bottom, an opportunist "impulse." Arguing against their opportunist impulse through quotations of Lenin's *State & Revolution* or Rosa Luxemburg's *Opportunism and the art of the possible* etc. in the circumstances are therefore beside the point. Nonetheless, even on their own terms, the arguments raised have a political logic, going far beyond the immediate situation in Haiti, which *should* be sending shock waves to anyone with even remotely socialist aspirations within the SL's demoralized milieu.

In the course of denouncing Jan Norden's Internationalist Group who came out with a statement on Haiti before they did, the SL argues:

"The stark reality that the IG would deny is that a) even before the earthquake, there was virtually no working class in Haiti; b) in the aftermath of the earthquake, not only is the state "largely reduced to rubble," but so is the society as a whole, including the desperate and dispossessed population; and c) there is a military power in Haiti that is far from "reduced to rubble," and it's U.S. Imperialism."

"The IG demands that "all U.S./U.N. forces get out," painting the U.S. military presence in Haiti today as aimed at suppressing a popular uprising.... The IG is cynically toying with rhetoric, blithely unconcerned with the fact that, in the real world, if the policies they advocate were implemented, they would result in mass death through starvation." (Emphasis in original)

The claim that, *even before the earthquake*, there was virtually no working class in Haiti has many parallels with Stalinist arguments on China in 1927, where, proportionally speaking, it is doubtful the working class was more developed than in Haiti, Bolivia or the many other countries the SL has recently written off for revolutionary purposes. But even if hypothetically true and Trotsky's views on Permanent Revolution needs to be re-adjusted or narrowed as the SL is implicitly arguing, Marx (in his correspondence with Russian revolutionaries) and Lenin's Third International still at least attempted to map out possible revolutionary strategy for such scenarios, understanding their ultimate fate did rest on the victory of revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries. In the manner of Second International "Marxists" the SL in contrast argues:

"The bitter truth is that the desperate conditions of Haiti today cannot be resolved *within* Haiti. The key to the liberation of Haiti lies in proletarian revolution throughout the hemisphere, in which the mobilization of the sizable Haitian proletariat *in the diaspora* can play a key role."

That leaves Haitian revolutionaries with little option but to either passively wait to be rescued by revolutionary struggles in other countries, or to emigrate. Either way this would leave the Haitian masses as a whole and their struggles in somewhat of a lurch, if the SL has any interest in the matter. How should revolutionaries have, for instance, oriented to past (and future) struggles such as the "massive discontent that drove "Baby Doc" Duvalier out of power"? Does it, according to the SL, even matter in the bigger scheme of things?

Pointing to the truism that the ultimate fate of Haiti (or any other country for that matter, however economically developed) ultimately rests on the victory of world revolution thus acts as a mechanism for abandoning Trotsky's Permanent Revolution (or any other proposed alternative revolutionary) strategy for possibly most of the Third World. Of course, the SL is not attempting a serious theoretical re-evaluation, with all the political consequences consistently thought through, but giving a rationalization for their current mood of despair and resignation.

If, once again hypothetically speaking, there really is not much of a working class in Haiti, industrial, rural or otherwise, then that means there was also no sufficiently developed capitalist class, indigenous or foreign. This raises some questions about the nature of Haiti's economy. Also, exactly whose class interests was the Haitian state defending? Denouncing other leftists for opportunistically tailing Aristide, the SL lets the cat out of the bag by quoting a previous statement that he would "play the role of groveling instrument of the Haitian bourgeoisie." ("Haiti: Election Avalanche for Radical Priest," WV No. 517, 4 January 1991)

Leaving aside the question of Haiti's class structure for the moment, who does the SL propose the Haitian masses support if not bourgeois populist figures like Aristide with their current stance? They're obviously not calling for forming a Trotskyist party, with whatever proposed strategy, in Haiti as an alternative. The Stalinists would offer the Haitian masses their two stage strategy, of course. What would be the SL's response?

The SL points out that in 2004 “We pointed out that the U.S. occupation of Haiti also represented a danger to the Cuban deformed workers state, as well as to the militant proletariat of the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti (see “Haiti: U.S./UN Troops Out!” WV No. 821, 5 March 2004).” Have those dangers suddenly disappeared? Doesn't *defence of the Cuban revolution* begin at Port-au-Prince (to paraphrase an earlier SL slogan)?

The SL further writes:

“For liberals disappointed with the Obama administration’s policies in Afghanistan and Iraq, the earthquake in Haiti was seen as an opportunity for the U.S. to show a benign face. This was echoed by Obama’s somewhat disillusioned reformist boosters, such as the ISO and WWP. The ISO demands that “Obama immediately stop the military occupation of Haiti,” while calling for the U.S. to “flood the country with doctors, nurses, food, water and construction machinery” (*Socialist Worker online*, 19 January). Likewise, a January 14 statement on Workers World’s Web site demands “the removal of all U.N. combat troops,” while calling for “all bonuses from executives of financial institutions that received bailout money to be donated to Haiti.”

“The notion that U.S. imperialism can be pressured into serving the needs of the oppressed, rather than its own class interests, shows boundless illusions in the good offices of the rapacious American ruling class. Reformists like the ISO and WWP perennially raised calls at demonstrations against the U.S. war in Iraq demanding a shift of U.S. government spending priorities from war to social services like education. But neocolonial domination and aggrandizement are inherent to imperialism and no amount of pressure and pleading can change that. “

But if “the notion that imperialism can be pressured to serve the needs of the oppressed” shows “boundless illusions” then why is the SL not opposing the US military occupation of Haiti? Obviously the SL does not believe it is an illusion since they favor the troops remaining precisely because they claim they **are** serving the immediate needs of the oppressed. What other parts of the world can US imperialism help out in? More narrowly those the SL claims is without a sizable indigenous working class, such as say Afghanistan? Or perhaps even more broadly throughout history? The Cliffites argument on Northern Ireland in 1969 seems highly similar to the SL's today:

“The breathing space provided by the presence of British troops is short but vital. Those who call for the immediate withdrawal of the troops before the men behind the barricades can defend themselves are inviting a pogrom which will hit first and hardest at socialists”

*Socialist Worker*, 11 September 1969)

Finally what attitude would the SL take in the circumstance of a military struggle by Haitians to drive US troops out of their country? Would the SL simply refrain from calling for the defeat of US imperialism as they did in Afghanistan in 2001, call for saving the lives of those troops as they did in Lebanon in 1983, ***or potentially even worse***, especially in light of the beneficial role the SL claims they are playing at the moment?

In a report on the SL's thirteenth national conference, designed to prepare its readership for a potential future purge of Rachel Wolkenstein and her base of supporters in the Partisan Defence Committee, the SL claims:

“The pressures of the period have helped to generate attempts to find a way to “get rich quick,” i.e., liquidating our revolutionary, internationalist and proletarian program in order to latch on to larger forces, hostile to the working class and to our revolutionary purpose “

“Dog Days of the Post-Soviet Period”  
WV #948, 4 December 2009

It seems somewhat perverse to denounce ones internal critics for “latching” on to “larger forces hostile to the working class” (the rather small and sincere, if on many occasions politically wrong, group of Mumia Abu-Jamal activists, most of whom still no doubt have a better position on Haiti than the SL) when the “larger forces” one is latching on to is *one's own bourgeoisie*.

## Why?

Questions have been raised by many as to the potential motives behind the SL most recent position. Some have claimed that it is an attempt by the SL leadership to find a way to artificially differentiate themselves from the rest of the left.

Complaints from the SL's quarter about the difficulties differentiating themselves from other left groups since the fall of the USSR have indeed been frequent in their literature. Others believe that, in the context of their recent internal turmoil, the SL leadership is using the issue organizationally as a loyalty test. Those who succeed in passing the SL's test show their true loyalty is to the diseased cult organizationally, rather than any pretenses it makes about socialist revolution. Lastly the IG has implied the SL has taken a dive in the face of a chauvinist hysteria. While the SL certainly has taken such dives in the past, such as their frightened reaction to 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan in 2001, no such similar atmosphere exists in relation to Haiti at the moment.

As more fully elaborated in a previous polemic ("IG: Trotsky's Transitional Program or Robertson's Political Compass", 6 May, 2009, posted online at [http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_compass.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_compass.html)) the SL based practically its entire existence during the 1980's on the issue of defending the USSR. In the wake of its fall, they have constructed a worldview in which, just as previously all questions were seen through the narrow prism of the Soviet Union's defence, today all questions are viewed through the narrow prism of the Soviet Union's demise. It is no longer just the subjective crisis of leadership that holds back working class struggles but a new objective circumstance where the question of taking state power is off the historical agenda for one reason or another.

Those who give up on the working class are forced to look to other social forces for salvation. During the 1980's, in a symmetrical disorientation to today's, the SL's wildly exaggerated notions and fears about the "dangers of the Reagan years" combined with their dismantling of their trade union fractions, lead them to look to the Soviet Stalinists and their military and economic might to protect them from the ravages of imperialism. Today the USSR no longer exists and Cuba cannot act as a sufficient substitute in the region. The recent crisis in Haiti and the SL's reaction are, at bottom, an expression of giving up on the working class and, for that matter, giving up on themselves.

### **Wohlforth and Robertson**

At least in some ways it appears that Spartacist leader Jim Robertson has arrived at the same places, though with different tempos, as his former arch-nemesis Tim Wohlforth. Besides the fact that both started out as oppositionists to the Socialist Workers Party turn to Pabloite revisionism in the early 60's and both tragically ended up leading bureaucratized anti-Trotskyist cults, it appears that Jim Robertson is now finally coming over to Wohlforth's views on "humanitarian" imperialism.

A 1995 SL article provocatively titled (and without humorous intent) "Wohlforth: Who Is This Road Kill?" (*Spartacist* #52, Autumn 1995) stated "Young people surfing the internet might wonder who is that maniac out in cyberspace cheering "Good Going!" to the Nato forces bombing the Bosnian Serbs..." Wohlforth also extended his support for "humanitarian" imperialist intervention into other countries at the time such as Somalia (which by current SL standards also had no working class and perhaps in hindsight deserving of imperialist goodwill) and, coincidentally, Haiti. Robertson is not yet quite as openly grotesque, he's been following his arch-nemesis's footsteps at a slower pace. Being quite old he is likely to die before he fully catches up. But perhaps today people surfing the internet should be asking the question (with the proper Seinfeldesque inflections and shoulder shrugs) "Jim Robertson, who *IS* this roadkill? And *WHY* does he support sending US troops to occupy Haiti?"

### **A Sinking Ship**

The SL's thirteenth national conference report at points reads almost as a self-obituary. After acknowledging that "We may not have an immediate 'perspective.'" the SL proclaims that their "central task" is "to arm the party programmatically and theoretically, from *Spartacist* to the maintenance of our Central Committee archive, the Prometheus Research Library, and education of all kinds in the course of our work." In other words preserve Jim Robertson's legacy for future archivists.

This is the logical outcome of abandoning, implicitly or explicitly, socialist revolution as the realistic perspective of our epoch. A leader then sets one sights lower on the "realistic" goal of using the organization for attaining and preserving one's personal legacy and "footnote in history".

This evident demoralization, drastic cut in membership size, the recent internal turmoil with Rachel Wolkenstein and the most recent dive on a key international issue of the day all indicate the SL is a sinking ship and there is great awareness of the fact internally from all indications.

In its transformation from a revolutionary propaganda group into a sectarian leader cult, the SL has not only destroyed many potential revolutionaries but also managed to recruit people on the basis of their former heritage, a small minority of who have not yet subjectively abandoned their revolutionary aspirations. The Internationalist Group's leadership has never given an honest political accounting of the SL's history and the role they played in it. Neither, in other ways, has the International Bolshevik Tendency's leadership (particularly in relation to issues surrounding Bill Logan, but also no doubt their current top bureaucrat Tom Riley) and, after a promising start, has been with increasing speed driving down its own bureaucratic "Road to Rileyville" for more than a decade now (see "Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency" by Samuel Trachtenberg, 25 September 2008). None of these groups deserves any political confidence.

As the mothership is sinking, and its offshoots stagnate under their own permanent geriatric leaderships, we appeal to all those genuinely interested in advancing (as opposed to what is in reality narrowly "preserving") all that was revolutionary in the Spartacist League's heritage to discuss with us.

15, February 2010

## *LRP/ISL on the Revolution in Palestine/Israel*

# **Worshippers of the Accomplished Fact**

*The following remarks which were reconstructed from notes, were made from the floor of a League for the Revolutionary Party meeting on August 18, 2009 in New York titled "The Crisis of Zionism and the Prospects for Revolution in the Middle East" attended by over 40 people. The speaker for the meeting was Yossi Schwartz of the Internationalist Socialist League (Israel/Occupied Palestine) with whom the LRP at this time appears to have reached common political agreement. The remarks and commentary primarily deal with the two groups writing off the prospect of winning the majority of Israeli Jewish workers to a common struggle with the Palestinian masses against the Israeli Zionist state. We hope to post subsequent polemics that deal more broadly with other aspects of the LRP's and its co-thinkers position on the issue of Zionism and the Palestinian struggle in the future.*

*[Subsequent to us posting this piece online the Internationalist Socialist League has posted a response on their web site at <http://www.the-isleague.com/reply-to-trachtenberg-english.php> . We hope to respond to their critique in the future]*

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Revolutionaries defend the Palestinians and of course opposed the founding of the state of Israel, but six decades later one has to be blind not to recognize that an indigenous Israeli Jewish nation [who at this stage can no longer reasonably be classified simply as colonial settlers] has come into existence and whose workers we must win the allegiance of for the Palestinians to be able to wage any successful struggle to overthrow the Zionist state. This can only be done by appealing to Jewish workers to transcend their national consciousness in favor of their common class interests with Palestinian workers, not by denying them their national rights. The LRP and ISL it seems implicitly recognize this on many levels, but, proceeding from their insistence on denying Israeli workers those rights, are forced to draw completely defeatist conclusions.

In the 1960's, under circumstances where the white US working class appeared to be permanently conservatized, and when much of the time a majority of it seemed to oppose the civil rights, anti-war and women's liberation movements, the New Left wrote it [and most of the working class in the economically developed countries as a whole] off as permanently bought off. They called on a minority to "abandon" their "white skin privilege" and projected the allegiance of the majority to reaction. And today things seem similarly bleak no doubt with regards to the Israeli working class to the LRP and ISL. The New Leftists at the time therefore abandoned any perspective of an indigenous socialist revolution and took up the utopian Maoist view that US imperialism would be overthrown externally by Third World struggles.

In terms of the LRP they write in their most recent statement ["After the Gaza Massacre: The Future of Palestine" July 2, 2009] that "most likely, unfortunately, a minority" of the Israeli Jewish workers can be won to the revolution since "many Israeli Jews would prefer to fight in defense of their temporary privileges", acknowledge that "Palestinians alone have not been and will not be able to defeat Israel" and conclude that "We cannot predict exactly what form revolutionary struggles in the Middle East will take." On other occasions and contexts [perhaps previous to winning over Israeli co-

thinkers whose existence they'd need to justify] the LRP has been less ambiguous in stating that the Zionist state will be overthrown externally by a victorious regional socialist revolution/revolutions, most likely led by the Egyptian working class.

While an indigenous socialist revolution made by Israeli and Palestinian workers would be preferable, it should be conceded that it is indeed a possibility that a socialist revolution that overthrows the Zionist state may in the end have to be imposed externally without the support of the majority of Jewish workers. That should not be opposed if in the end it comes to that.

But in conceding that as a possibility, at the same time it does not tell Palestinian and Israeli revolutionaries what they should do in the meanwhile except perhaps passively wait for Arab workers in other countries (and the LRP/ISL call for "Arab Workers Revolution" leaves out not only Israeli Jews but also Kurds, Persians, Berbers, Armenians and many other non-Arab groups in the region) to come to their rescue. Any active revolutionary strategy is missing from such a schema.

## Afterword

Despair over the revolutionary capacities of the working class in the more economically developed capitalist countries has been the political basis of not only the New Left, but also the Stalinists abandonment of world revolution in favor of building "socialism in one country" and all their ensuing betrayals. This has also been the implicit political basis of Pabloism, which at times also wrote off the working class in Third World countries in the process, based on similar notions. At times the rationale was made more explicit such as in a May-July 1962 *Fourth International* article by Michel Pablo which approvingly quoted Frantz Fanon that the Third World proletariat:

"... is among the most protected stratum of the colonial regime. The embryonic proletariat of the towns is relatively privileged. It represents that fraction of the colonized people, necessary and irreplaceable for the efficient working of the colonial apparatus – tramway conductors, taxi-drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, hospital staffs, etc. These are the elements which constitute the most loyal stratum of the nationalist parties and who from the privileged place they occupy in the colonial system constitute the 'bourgeois' fraction of the colonized people"

commenting:

"The analysis which Fanon makes of the role of the urban proletariat can appear exaggerated to a European Marxist; however with qualifications it 'fits' well enough those countries with a weak industrial development."

Of course the LRP and ISL would argue that they oppose Stalinism, New Leftism and Pabloism. They would argue that they don't write off the US working class or the working class of the advanced capitalist countries, and that their analysis is specific to the Israeli working class. But they also tend to reduce what is, ultimately, a self-destructive Jewish support to Zionism to questions of economic privilege (in the process being somewhat blind to other involved factors such as historical traumatization due to past oppression and the horrors of the Holocaust, fears of Arab national retribution, despair over internationalist solidarity arising out of the history of Stalinist betrayals etc.). But while it is true that the Israeli working class is significantly privileged relative to the Palestinians, the US working class in turn is significantly privileged relative to the Israeli working class and most of the rest of the world for that matter.

In an article written in one of his many earlier political incarnations, Comrade Schwartz correctly noted:

"It is possible of course to blame the Jewish working class, to maintain that it was in the interests of the workers to serve Zionism. But we maintain that the Jewish working class, as with all other parts of the world working class, has but one interest: proletarian revolution."

"On the First Arab-Israel War"  
*Workers Vanguard* #35 4, January 1974

Rather than reducing Jewish support to Zionism due to privilege (which of course is indeed one, but only one, of the factors), his article echoed Trotsky's assertion in the *Transitional Program* that in the final analysis "The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership."

“The explanation for the Zionist control does not lie in the interests of the Jewish working class but in its organizational position-its lack of any weapons or independent struggles. And the responsibility for this situation rests with the Communist Party.

A rejection, of course from a somewhat very different pov and in different degrees, of Lenin and Trotsky's stress on the centrality of revolutionary leadership (the “party question”), is indeed one of the elements the LRP and ISL share with the Pabloites. The LRP and ISL both reject explicitly Lenin's arguments in *What Is To Be Done* that revolutionary/Marxist consciousness must struggle for within the working class against the multitude of existing false/bourgeois consciousness through the medium of a vanguard party. The contemporary neo-economists/ workerists prefer to sugarcoat reality in favor of an admittedly more consoling image of a spontaneously revolutionary working class chomping at the bit.

Sugarcoating the tragic reality of the Israeli Jewish workers present backwards consciousness is of course significantly harder to accomplish (not to mention getting in the way of opportunistically adapting to what is currently a certainly more receptive but still nationalist and non-Marxist Arab consciousness). But one of the factors behind the necessity of a revolutionary party arises precisely from the fact that the struggles of various strata of the oppressed masses tend to be sectional (whether going on strike against your particular employer, organizing against racist police brutality in your community, in general engaging in struggles against your own immediate groups oppression etc.) and their political consciousness and understanding therefore also tends to be sectional, reflecting their most immediate, as opposed to historic, internationalist, political-class interests.

Uniting the struggles of the varied sections of the working class (nationally and internationally) and oppressed is the job of a revolutionary party, instilling the understanding of their common interests in striking at the capitalist root of all their oppression. This necessary theoretical understanding of the workings of capitalist society and the necessary means of overthrowing it (the central theme of *What Is To Be Done* is that there can be no revolutionary movement without revolutionary (that is *Marxist*), theory) does not indeed arise spontaneously.

But if the working class cannot engage in a successful struggle for power spontaneously, it can provided a revolutionary leadership exists. Rejection of this understanding can only lead to objectivist fatalism, usually pessimistic, though sometimes of the tailist “optimistic” variety. Both attitudes preclude the possibility of a successful working class struggle for power.

In the *Revolution Betrayed* Trotsky described those with such fatalist attitudes as “worshippers of the accomplished fact” noting that “Whoever worships the accomplished fact is incapable of preparing the future.” Despairing at the present backwards consciousness of the Israeli Jewish workers, the LRP and ISL forget Marx's motto that “the point is to change it”.

Effectively writing off the possibility of leading Palestinian and Jewish workers in a struggle for state power poses deep contradictions for the ISL in relation to its ostensible purpose for existence. James P. Cannon described the ISL's dilemma well in *The First Ten Years of American Communism*:

“The Stalinization of the Party was rather the end result of a process of degeneration which began during the long boom of the Twenties. The protracted prosperity of that period, which came to be taken for permanence by the great mass of American people of all classes, did not fail to affect the Communist Party itself. It softened up the leading cadres of that party, and undermined their original confidence in the perspectives of a revolution in this country. This prepared them, eventually, for an easy acceptance of the Stalinist theory of ‘socialism in one country.’”

“For those who accepted this theory, Russia, as the ‘one country’ of the victorious revolution, became a substitute for the American Revolution.”

...

“What happened to the Communist Party would happen without fail to any other party, including our own, if it should abandon its struggle for a social revolution in this country, as the realistic perspective of our epoch, and degrade itself to the role of sympathizer of revolutions in other countries.”

The logic of such a perspective can lead the ISL down the road to becoming an Israeli version of the recently defunct and unlamented Maoist Internationalist Movement (though no doubt significantly more intelligent and less psychotic), if not the more garden variety reformist solidarity activist or trade union economist like in the CPs.

At the forum LRP and ISL supporters responded that they were not advocates of building “socialism in one country”. Indeed, one cannot build socialism in one country whether it be Israel/Palestine or anywhere else, the victory of revolutionary struggles worldwide being a prerequisite for that. But that is confusing the question of building “socialism in one country” with the necessity of leading the working class in a struggle to take state power, in the context of a struggle for world revolution.

Trotsky summed up the ISL dilemma well in his summing up the perspective of the “worshippers of the accomplished fact” in *The Revolution Betrayed*:

“In reality, our dispute with the Webb’s is not as to the necessity of building factories in the Soviet Union and employing mineral fertilizers on the collective farms, but as to whether it is necessary to prepare a revolution in Great Britain and how it shall be done. Upon that question the learned sociologues answer: ‘We do not know.’”

26, August 2009

## On Feminism & “Feminism”

In the course of adding material dealing with female oppression to the Historic Documents section of our web site ([http://www.regroupment.org/main/page\\_historic\\_documents.html](http://www.regroupment.org/main/page_historic_documents.html)) this month, we have found it necessary to write an introduction to clarify the confusion many readers of these documents have historically come away with due to their attacks on “feminism.” These documents were produced not by us but by the Spartacist League and the International Bolshevik Tendency at a time when these organizations, while not without faults, were still capable of helping advance the Marxist program. While overall the documents put forward a revolutionary analysis of women's oppression, we would write them differently today at least in that respect.

The documents (and the groups that produced them) sought to champion the cause of women's liberation, yet much confusion was and still is unnecessarily caused by their rigid insistence on defining “feminism” in a manner that is different from a majority of their audience. While a majority of their audience defined feminism as a simple affirmation of female equality without necessarily attaching the term to a more elaborated program or analysis of *how* to achieve it (“the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes” as described the Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary), they rigidly insisted the term necessarily meant a much more specific program and analysis that was counterposed to the struggle for socialism. A document produced by an IBT supporter in 1997 which clumsily tried to address the issue thus explained:

“Feminism and socialism are different things. Feminism cannot simply be equated with the fight for women’s rights. It puts forward the damaging ideology that women of different classes can fight oppression on the same basis – thereby automatically confining the fight within the boundaries of capitalism.”

"Sex, Censorship & Women's Rights"  
*Marxist Bulletin* #4, October 1997

### Marxist Tradition

The historical development of the Marxist movement's use of a sometimes highly specialized terminology when addressing itself has not always been in sync with the general development of the rest of society and its understanding of these words. But while seeking to advance (and develop) the political conceptions and understanding of those who came before, each generation of revolutionaries have of necessity frequently been forced to adjust their terminological conventions (while maintaining the original underlying thrust) when addressing a broader contemporary audience for the purpose of keeping up to date with the popular understanding behind these terms.

In the U.S., Marxists frequently run up against confusion over the difference between the terms “socialist” and “communist” when talking to many people. While Trotskyists generally tend to use the terms interchangeably, the confusion usually arises from the fact that there is a vague understanding amongst our audience that in some contexts a

“Socialist” (particularly with a capitalized S) implies a social democratic reformist while a “Communist” (particularly with a capitalized C) implies a Stalinist.

A similar dilemma also confronted Marx and Engels, even before the rise of contemporary Social-Democratic reformism and Stalinism. In his 1890 introduction to the German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels commented:

“Yet by 1887 continental socialism was almost exclusively the theory heralded in the Manifesto. Thus, to a certain extent, the history of the Manifesto reflects the history of the modern working-class movement since 1848. At present, it is doubtless the most widely circulated the most international product of all socialist literature, the common programme of many millions of workers of all countries from Siberia to California.”

“Nevertheless, when it appeared, we could not have called it a *socialist* manifesto. In 1847, two kinds of people were considered socialists. On the one hand were the adherents of the various utopian systems, notably the Owenites in England and the Fourierists in France, both of whom, at that date, had already dwindled to mere sects gradually dying out. On the other, the manifold types of social quacks who wanted to eliminate social abuses through their various universal panaceas and all kinds of patch-work, without hurting capital and profit in the least. In both cases, people who stood outside the labor movement and who looked for support rather to the “educated” classes. The section of the working class, however, which demanded a radical reconstruction of society, convinced that mere political revolutions were not enough, then called itself *Communist*. It was still a rough-hewn, only instinctive and frequently somewhat crude communism. Yet, it was powerful enough to bring into being two systems of utopian communism — in France, the “Icarian” communists of Cabet, and in Germany that of Weitling. Socialism in 1847 signified a bourgeois movement, communism a working-class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, quite respectable, whereas communism was the very opposite. And since we were very decidedly of the opinion as early as then that “the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the working class itself,” [from the General Rules of the International] we could have no hesitation as to which of the two names we should choose. Nor has it ever occurred to us to repudiate it.”

In the 1922 footnotes to what is seen by many as the definitive edition of the Communist Manifesto, D. Ryazanoff also discussed the historical evolution of much of the other terminology used in Marx's and Engels' writings, for example:

”Proletarian' now means one whose only means of livelihood is the sale of his labour power. Its original significance, in the Latin form *proletarius* signified one whose sole wealth consisted of his descendants, his offspring (*proles*)... There is little in common between these Roman proletarians and the landless and homeless European proletarians of our own day, save only the name.... The word proletariat to describe the class of wage workers did not come into general use until the first half of the nineteenth century...”

It is clear that Marx and Engels main concern was to have their ideas properly understood by others. Understanding that they could not arbitrarily dictate the changing popular understanding of words, they were not prone (outside sometimes their more narrowly theoretical and scientific writings, where exact precision was necessary for clarity) to stubbornly engage in fruitless arguments over definitions or original dictionary meaning if it wasn't necessary to convey their ideas.

In a somewhat different vein, when black members of the of the Socialist Workers Party during the 1940's protested the use of the word “niggardly” in party literature, rather than stubbornly pointing to the dictionary and insist that formally the word had no relation to the racial epithet, the Trotskyist movement dropped the use of the word in order to stop causing any unnecessary misunderstanding or confusion.

### **The Origins and Consequences of anti-”Feminism”**

An early Spartacist text we have previously posted argues:

“The existing women’s liberation movement, both liberal and radical, seems to see sex as the basic “class division” in society. This low level of theoretical development means an opportunity for Marxists to intervene with a working-class line. However, we will render our intervention useless if we cling to an oversimplified analysis that the only form of oppression is class oppression and confine our interest to the economic superexploitation of women workers.”

“The class question is the decisive issue in class society. However, other additional types of oppression do exist as well —e.g., racial oppression, national oppression, women’s oppression. To deny that Marxist revolutionaries



must concern themselves with these issues is sectarian and blatantly anti-Leninist. It is vital that revolutionaries participate in these struggles. The basis of such participation must be the realization that the class question is decisive and thus any movement which fails to identify itself with the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class is doomed to be beset by utopianism, crackpotism, liberal illusions and—ultimately—irrelevance”

*The Fight for Women's Liberation* (1969)

While advancing this correct political understanding the piece carries no attacks against or even makes mention of “feminism.” An explanation for the subsequent change in policy on this is given in an early issue of *Women and Revolution*:

“The SWP -YSA [Socialist Workers Party - Young Socialist Alliance] defense against the feminist's attempts to kick them out has been poor. They try to minimize their political differences with the feminists by claiming to be both feminists and socialists. Feminist was once the term socialists used to describe women's liberationists. But over a period of 50 years the term has come to mean one who believes the fundamental division in society is between men and women, and who strive for the supremacy of women...”

“The socialist and feminist views are clearly counterposed. Just as Lenin, who had once proudly called himself a Social-Democrat, would have recoiled from the being called that after the betrayals of “Social-Democracy,” so Clara Zetkin would not call herself a feminist today.”

“SWP-YSA MOVE IN, same tricks, new territory”  
*Women and Revolution* #2, September/October 1971

Spartacist leader Jim Robertson affirmed this explanation a few years later at an August 27, 1974 speech given on James P. Cannon:

“By the way, Rose [Karsner, Cannon's partner] was a militant socialist feminist of the 1910's and 1920s. 'Feminist' meant something else then – among other things was that marriage was an abomination: it was bowing down and putting on chains before a man and before the state.”

“James P. Cannon”  
Reprinted in *Spartacist*, Summer 1986

If, theoretically, at that time the popular meaning of “feminism” really did evolve in the direction it was argued (and we are at the moment not convinced it did), then the changed attitude was one that made sense. Leaving aside this question of historical appreciation though, it is quite apparent that *today* what amounts to shouting “Down with Feminism!” is obviously a poor approach, given that the Spartacist League and the International Bolshevik Tendency are using one definition of “feminism”, and most of the left and the general population see the word as having a different (more general and vague) meaning. Rather than making any clear point, such an approach just creates noise and leaves those groups open to unnecessary suspicions that they may be hostile or indifferent to women's liberation (in some ways similar to many black SWP members reaction to the use of “niggardly”), rather than that they are arguing that it can only be achieved in a socialist society.

It was also sometimes disorienting to those groups themselves, both in their historical understanding as well as their take on contemporary reality. Thus, an (otherwise fine) early Bolshevik Tendency leaflet we have previously posted argues:

“Whether it goes by the name of feminism or “socialist-feminism” the logic of this analysis is sex war just as surely as the logic of Marxism is class war.

*No More Wire Hangers!* (undated, late 1980's)

Outside a minority on the fringe, most people who would refer to themselves as “feminists” (much less most who'd refer to themselves as “socialist-feminists”) clearly did not then and do not now advocate “sex war”.

An early *Women and Revolution* historical article noted that:

“Contrary to an opinion still subscribed to in certain circles, modern feminism did not emerge full-grown from the fertile womb of the New Left, but is in fact an ideological offspring of the utopian egalitarianism of the early twentieth century, which was in turn a product of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

“Feminism vs. Marxism: Origins of the Conflict”  
WR #5, Spring 1974

True, but Marxists do not renounce some of the still progressive ideals of the Enlightenment, but rather argue their realization for the majority of the human race can only be achieved through ending class society. Therefore, while generally not referring to ourselves as democrats, humanists, or feminists, we do not denounce democracy, humanism or “feminism” *as such*. Rather we oppose bourgeois democracy, liberal humanism, liberal feminism and all cross-class, separatist and sectoralist ideologies in general.

In the same vein Leon Trotsky was quite angry that his book *Terrorism and Communism* was given the confusing title *Dictatorship versus Democracy* in its English translation, since it could only lead to confusion amongst many readers and distorted the relationship between socialism and democracy.

### **Sectarian Indifference**

Such developing indifference to being clearly understood is usually a mark that a group is being transformed into a depoliticized sect, dominated by a geriatric leadership and increasingly out of touch with contemporary social and political reality. Being mostly office/computer desk bound in their political lives for too many years, engaging in primarily internal administrative and literary political work, such permanent “leaders” have little qualms sending off their ranks to make fools of themselves at public political events by defending stupid formulations. Rank and file passivity to such things can reflect insecurity, fear, political indifference, and, for those engaged in leader worship, a genuine unthinking agreement with such sclerotic thinking.

In contrast to such practices, writing on the need to differentiate the Marxist from the Stalinist position on defending the USSR, Trotsky commented:

“In order that these two varieties of “Defense of the USSR” do not become confused in the consciousness of the masses it is necessary to know clearly and precisely how to formulate slogans which correspond to the concrete situation.”

*In Defence of Marxism* (1942)

In their better periods, the SL and IBT showed a similar attitude, at least in relation to other questions. In a discussion of “Sectarian Formalism”, an IBT publication noted:

“For example, we believe the slogan “Free All Political Prisoners!” to be a very bad formulation. We don't want fascist thugs or concentration-camp mass murderers to be freed. But it would often be silly to exclude ourselves from a campaign fought ostensibly to “Free All Political Prisoners!” It often turns out that the real content of the campaign is in fact to free the victims of capitalism. We would wish to join such a campaign, while making our criticism of the inadequacy of this slogan clear. We would split, of course, if the campaign actually did try to mobilise support for freeing Rudolph Hess. It is a matter of what the real content of the bloc is.

*Building the Revolutionary Party and United-front Tactics* (1992)

A similar appreciation of the “real content” of “feminism” for most people would seem to be called for. The IBT's position, which it unthinkingly inherited from the SL, very neatly fits the definition of “sectarian formalism”.

In a speech given on Nov. 11, 1972, Spartacist leader Jim Robertson explained part of the motivation behind calling for a “Workers Government” as a popular slogan:

“We are for a workers government, in the unions, in the plants and in our general education and approaching students with the conception of proletarian power. The dictatorship of the proletariat is a formulation which suffers certain problems. A popular understanding of the dictatorship of the proletariat is that the workers are going to be put into concentration camps, you know, like in Russia. If you talk of some kind of socialism, you get an image of happy Sweden maintaining its high alcoholism and suicide rates through victoriously staying out

of two world wars. [Laughter] But what should be clear in *every* way, over every kind of issue, is that the working people need their own government....”

“A Talk on the Labor Party Question”  
*Young Communist Bulletin* #3

Similarly, commenting in the same speech on the reasoning behind reformulating the traditional Trotskyist advocacy of a “Labor Party” in the US to one of a “Workers Party”:

“If one says a labor movement or a Labor Party right now—there is very good reason to see it right now in the most encrusted, aristocratic, racist, chauvinist George Meany-like fashion. It’s extremely important, and one of the reasons for the formulation “Dump the bureaucrats! For a Workers’ Party.” There’s no difference in conception between a “Workers’ Party based on the trade unions” and a “Labor Party based on the trade unions”, except that the terminology projects a somewhat different conception.”

If revolutionaries rightly do not want to confuse people by incorrectly projecting ourselves as advocates for creating Britain’s Labour Party for US workers, we are also concerned not to confuse people by incorrectly projecting ourselves as Archie Bunker socialists who are hostile to women’s liberation.

Revolutionary Regroupment still stands on the political content of the documents we posted and will be posting on this question in the Historic Documents section of our site. We have distanced ourselves from a flawed policy, we are not changing the fundamental program or principles on women’s oppression. This is a necessary change in policy nonetheless. We will henceforth criticize specific feminist political currents, as opposed to denouncing the term as such.

More broadly, as we note in our introduction to Historic Documents as a whole:

“While we seek to continue the work and build on the contributions of those who came before us, we do not dogmatically defend past mistakes that may inevitably have been committed. Therefore our posting these documents reflects broad agreement, not an uncritical adherence to every secondary argument and formulation.”

30, March 2009

## James P. Cannon’s “Swivel Chair” Revelation

*This is a letter sent (May 27, 1959) to Theodore Draper, a historian of the American communist movement. The entire series of letters sent from Cannon to Draper has been published under the title "The first ten years of American communism" by Lyle Stuart Inc, in 1962.*

*It was later reprinted by Pathfinder Press.*

*Copied from the [Marxist Internet Archive](http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1959djtc.htm) at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/cannon/works/1959djtc.htm>*

It seems to me that I have already written myself out on "The Birth of American Trotskyism"-in which I played the central role because I just happened to be standing there at the time and there was no one else to do it. I couldn't add much to what I have already written in the *History of American Trotskyism*, in my letters to you, and in the big article - "The Degeneration of the Communist Party-and the New Beginning" in the Fall 1954 issue of *Fourth International*. That's my case. If I were to write about it again I could only repeat what I have already said.

You'll find a better and fuller exposition there than I could write again today. I have the faculty, which for me is a happy one, of pushing things to the back of my mind once I have written them out. In order to write a fresh report on the origin of American Trotskyism, I would have to force myself back into a semi-coma, recalling and reliving the struggle of 31 years ago. That is too much for me to undertake again.

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The only thing I left out of my extensive writing about that period, which I try to leave out of all my writing, was the special element of personal motivation for my action-which cynics would never believe and research workers never find in the files and cross-indexes. That is the compulsion of *conscience* when one is confronted by an obligation which, in given circumstances, is his alone to accept or to evade.

In the summer of 1928 in Moscow, in addition to the theoretical and political revelation that came to me when I read Trotsky's *Criticism of the Draft Program of the Comintern*, there was another consideration that hit me where I live. That was the fact that Trotsky had been expelled and deported to far-away Alma Ata; that his friends and supporters had been slandered and expelled and imprisoned; and that the whole damned thing was a *frame-up!*

Had I set out as a boy to fight for justice for Moyer and Haywood in order to betray the cause of justice when it was put squarely up to me in a case of transcendent importance to the whole future of the human race? A copy-book moralist could easily answer that question by saying: "Of course not. The rule is plain. You do what you have to do, even if it costs you your head." But it wasn't so simple for me in the summer of 1928. I was not a copybook moralist. I was a party politician and factionalist who had learned how to cut corners. I knew that at the time, and the self-knowledge made me uneasy.

I had been gradually settling down into an assured position as a party official with an office and staff, a position that I could easily maintain-as long as I kept within definite limits and rules which I knew all about, and conducted myself with the facility and skill which had become almost second nature to me in the long drawn-out factional fights.

I knew that. And I knew something else that I never told anybody about, but which I had to tell myself for the first time in Moscow in the summer of 1928. The foot-loose Wobbly rebel that I used to be had imperceptibly begun to fit comfortably into a swivel chair, protecting himself in his seat by small maneuvers and evasions, and even permitting himself a certain conceit about his adroit accommodation to this shabby game. I saw myself for the first time then as another person, as a revolutionist who was on the road to becoming a *bureaucrat*. The image was hideous, and I turned away from it in disgust.

I never deceived myself for a moment about the most probable consequences of my decision to support Trotsky in the summer of 1928. I knew it was going to cost me my head and also my swivel chair, but I thought: What the hell-better men than I have risked their heads and their swivel chairs for truth and justice. Trotsky and his associates were doing it at that very moment in the exile camps and prisons of the Soviet Union. It was no more than right that one man, however limited his qualifications, should remember what he started out in his youth to fight for, and speak out for their cause and try to make the world hear, or at least to let the exiled and imprisoned Russian Oppositionists know that they had found a new friend and supporter.

In the *History of American Trotskyism*, p.61 I wrote:

*"The movement which then began in America brought repercussions throughout the entire world; overnight the whole picture, the whole perspective of the struggle changed. Trotskyism, officially pronounced dead, was resurrected on the international arena and inspired with new hope, new enthusiasm, new energy. Denunciations against us were carried in the American press of the party and reprinted throughout the whole world, including the Moscow Pravda. Russian Oppositionists in prison and exile, where sooner or later copies of Pravda reached them, were notified of our action, our revolt in America. In the darkest hour of the Opposition's struggle, they learned that fresh reinforcements had taken the field across the ocean in the United States, which by virtue of the power and weight of the country itself, gave importance and weight to the things done by the American communists.*

*"Leon Trotsky, as I remarked, was isolated in the little Asiatic village of Alma Ata. The world movement outside Russia] was in decline, leaderless, suppressed, isolated, practically non-existent. With this inspiring news of a new detachment in far-away America, the little papers and bulletins of the Opposition groups flared into life again. Most inspiring of all to us was the assurance that our hard-pressed Russian comrades had heard our voice. I have always thought of this as one of the most gratifying aspects of the historic fight we undertook in 1928-that the news of our fight reached the Russian comrades in all corners of the prisons and exile camps, inspiring them with new hope and new energy to persevere in the struggle."*

In Moscow, in the summer of 1928, I foresaw such a possible consequence of my decision and action. And I thought that that alone would justify it, regardless of what else might follow. Many things have changed since then, but that conviction has never changed.

*Désintégration dans la « période post-soviétique »*

## **La Spartacist League soutient les troupes américaines à Haïti !**

La dévastation causée par le récent tremblement de terre à Haïti a fixé l'attention du monde sur la situation critique des masses haïtiennes, leur gagnant une sympathie de masse parmi de larges couches de la population . L'urgence immédiate de la situation et les illusions de nombreux Américains dans la bonne volonté d'Obama ont fourni au gouvernement américain une occasion de justifier son occupation militaire de ce pays sous le prétexte officiel d'aider ce peuple.

Alors que dans le passé, des situations urgentes similaires ont conduit beaucoup, dans la gauche, à abandonner leurs positions et à soutenir des interventions militaires impérialistes, depuis le soutien des cliffistes à la présence de troupes britanniques en Irlande du Nord à la fin des années 60, l'appel du Socialist Workers Party américain à l'envoi de troupes à Boston au milieu des années 70 ou le soutien très répandu à l'intervention impérialiste dans la guerre civile bosniaque au milieu des années 90 , cette fois-ci il semble que presque tout le monde à l'extrême gauche a reconnu les raisons impérialistes du gouvernement américain d'occuper Haïti pour ce qu'elles sont et s'y est opposé. Presque tout le monde à l'extrême-gauche, excepté une exception surprenante, si ce n'est complètement choquante.

La Spartacist League des États-Unis (section dirigeante de la Ligue communiste internationale) dans l'actuel numéro de son journal a proclamé :

*« Les militaires étasuniens sont la seule force sur terre avec la capacité – camions, avions, bateaux – d'organiser le transport de la nourriture, de l'eau, des médicaments et des autres approvisionnements pour la population d'Haïti. Et ils le font de la façon typiquement désagréable de l'impérialisme US. Nous nous sommes toujours opposés aux occupations américaines ou de l'ONU en Haïti et partout – et il pourrait devenir nécessaire d'appeler à un retrait étasunien ou de l'ONU d'Haïti dans un futur proche – mais nous n'allons pas appeler à arrêter une telle aide dont les masses haïtiennes désespérées peuvent se saisir. » (« L'horreur du tremblement de terre d'Haïti : impérialisme, racisme et famine », *Workers Vanguard* n° 951, 26 janvier 2010)*

Personne proclamant une compréhension marxiste de l'impérialisme ou, en cette matière, ne serait-ce que quelque connaissance de l'histoire récente, n'aurait le moindre doute sur les ambitions en définitive prédatrices derrière toute intervention impérialiste à l'étranger. La situation en Haïti ne pose pas de nouvelles questions qui diffèrent de précédentes interventions « humanitaires » (pour lesquelles la SL s'était au moins opposée à la présence de troupes impérialistes, tout n'appelant pas toujours à leur défaite militaire) qui pourraient justifier ou être la cause possible d'une légitime désorientation. L'article de la SL reconnaît même :

*« Alors que des « socialistes » réformistes comme l'International Socialist Organization (ISO) et le Workers World Party (WWP) appellent les États-Unis à fournir de l'aide sans exercer leur pouvoir militaire, nous n'avons pas de telles illusions. En effet, les forces américaines en Haïti ont fait passer la « sécurité » avant les secours. Tandis que beaucoup d'avions apportant de l'aide ont atterri à l'aéroport de Port au Prince qui est maintenant contrôlé par les forces américain, d'autres furent détournés criminellement pendant que la priorité d'atterrissage était donnée à des avions transportant du personnel militaire. »*

L'obstruction des militaires américains, largement observée, à une aide désespérément nécessaire et la répression contre le peuple d'Haïti devrait pour le moins rendre la situation évidente même à ceux guidés par une compréhension purement immédiate et empirique.

### **Le programme génère la théorie et génère le programme**

Cependant, la prétention de la SL au marxisme les a forcés à tenter une légitimation théorique à ce qui est, à la base, une « impulsion » opportuniste. Critiquer leur impulsion opportuniste au moyen de citations de *L'Etat et la révolution* de Lénine ou *L'Opportunisme et l'art du possible* de Rosa Luxembourg dans ces circonstances est par conséquent à côté du sujet. Néanmoins, même dans leurs propres termes, les arguments invoqués ont une logique politique, allant bien au-delà de la situation immédiate à Haïti, ce qui devrait provoquer des secousses à quiconque garde de confuses aspirations socialistes dans le milieu démoralisé de la SL.

Dans le cours de sa dénonciation de l'Internationalist Group de Jan Norden qui publia une déclaration sur Haïti avant qu'ils ne le fissent, la SL soutient que :

*« la forte réalité que l'IG voudrait nier est que a) même avant le tremblement de terre il n'y avait virtuellement plus de classe ouvrière à Haïti ; b) qu'à la suite du tremblement de terre, non seulement l'Etat est « largement réduit à des décombres » mais également la société dans son ensemble, y compris la population désespérée et dépossédée, et c) il y a un pouvoir militaire à Haïti qui est loin d'être en ruines et c'est l'impérialisme étasunien. »*

*« L'IG exige que « toutes les forces américaines et de l'ONU s'en aillent », dépeignant la présence militaire étasunienne d'aujourd'hui comme visant à supprimer un soulèvement populaire en Haïti ... L'IG joue cyniquement de rhétorique, allègrement indifférent au fait que, dans le monde réel, si on appliquait la politique qu'ils préconisent, cela aboutirait à une mort massive par la famine. » (souligné dans l'original)*

L'affirmation que , même avant le tremblement de terre, il n'y avait virtuellement plus de classe ouvrière à Haïti a de nombreux parallèles avec les arguments staliniens sur la Chine de 1927, où proportionnellement parlant, on puisse douter que la classe ouvrière était plus développée qu'à Haïti, en Bolivie ou dans bien d'autres pays que la SL a déclaré inapte à la révolution. Mais même si c'était vrai et si les vues de Trotsky sur la révolution permanente ont besoin d'être réajustées ou limitées comme la SL l'argumente implicitement, Marx (dans sa correspondance avec des révolutionnaires russes) et la Troisième internationale de Lénine ont au moins essayé de tracer une stratégie révolutionnaire possible pour de tels scénarios, comprenant que leur destin ultime reposait sur la victoire de révolutions dans les pays capitalistes avancés. Tout au contraire, à la manière des « marxistes » de la Deuxième internationale, la SL, prétend que :

*« L'amère vérité est que les conditions désespérées d'Haïti aujourd'hui ne peuvent être résolues à l'intérieur d'Haïti. La clé de la libération d'Haïti se trouve dans la révolution prolétarienne dans tout l'hémisphère dans laquelle la mobilisation du prolétariat haïtien important dans la diaspora peut jouer un rôle clé. »*

Que cela laisse les révolutionnaires haïtiens avec le choix soit d'attendre passivement d'être sauvés par les luttes révolutionnaires dans d'autres pays ou d'émigrer. De toute façon, cela laisserait en plan les masses haïtiennes en bloc et leurs luttes, du moins si cela intéressait la SL. Comment des révolutionnaires auraient-ils dû s'orienter dans des luttes passées (et futures) telle que « le mécontentement massif qui chassa Baby doc Duvalier du pouvoir ? » Cela a-t-il même de la moindre importance pour la SL ?

Invoquer le truisme que le destin final d'Haïti (ou de tout autre pays, d'ailleurs, quelque soit son développement économique) repose en dernière instance sur la victoire de la révolution mondiale agit donc comme un mécanisme d'abandon de la stratégie de révolution permanente de Trotsky (ou de toute autre proposition révolutionnaire) pour la plus grande partie du Tiers monde. Bien sûr, la SL n'entreprend pas une réévaluation théorique sérieuse avec toutes les conséquences politiques qu'elle devrait en tirer, mais donne une rationalisation de son actuel état de désespoir et de résignation.

Si, en acceptant toujours leur hypothèse, il n'ya réellement pas de classe ouvrière à Haïti, industrielle, rurale ou autre, cela signifie alors qu'il n'y avait pas non plus de classe capitaliste suffisamment développée, indigène ou étrangère. Cela soulève quelques questions sur la nature de l'économie d'Haïti. Donc, quels étaient exactement les intérêts de classe que l'Etat haïtien défendait ? En dénonçant d'autres courants de gauche pour leur suivisme opportuniste envers Aristide, la SL vend la mèche en citant une déclaration précédente qu'Aristide « jouerait le rôle d'instrument rampant de la bourgeoisie haïtienne » ( « Haïti : avalanche électorale pour un prêtre radical » WV n° 517, 4 janvier 1991). En laissant de côté la question de la structure de classe d'Haïti, qui la SL propose-t-elle aux masses haïtiennes de soutenir, sinon des figures populistes bourgeoises comme Aristide, avec sa position actuelle ? Elle n'appelle apparemment pas à former un parti trotskyste avec quelque stratégie que ce soit en Haïti comme une alternative. Les staliniens offriraient aux masses haïtiennes leur stratégie à deux étapes, bien sûr. Quelle serait la réponse de la SL ?

La SL souligne qu'en 2004 « nous avons établi que l'occupation US d'Haïti représentait aussi un danger pour l'Etat ouvrier déformé cubain, de même que pour le prolétariat militant de la République dominicaine qui partage l'île d'Hispaniola avec Haïti. ( voir « Haïti : dehors les troupes US et de l'ONU ! », WV n° 821, 5 mars 2004). » Ces dangers ont-ils soudainement disparu ? La défense de la révolution cubaine ne commence-t-elle pas à Port au Prince (pour paraphraser un ancien slogan de la SL) ?

La SL écrit plus loin :

*« Pour des libéraux désappointés par la politique de l'administration Obama en Afghanistan et en Irak, le tremblement de terre en Haïti a été vu comme une occasion pour les Américains de montrer un visage bienveillant .Y ont fait écho ses soutiens réformistes quelque peu désillusionnés , tels que l'ISO et le WWP. L'ISO demande que «Obama arrête immédiatement l'occupation militaire d'Haïti » tout en appelant les Américains à « inonder le pays de docteurs, d'infirmières, de nourriture, d'eau et de matériel de construction », Socialist Worker on line, 19 janvier). De même, une déclaration du 14 janvier sur le site du Workers World demande « le retrait de toutes les troupes de combat de l'ONU » tout en appelant à « verser à Haïti tous les bonus des cadres des institutions financières qui ont reçu du soutien financier. »*

*« La notion que l'on puisse exercer une pression sur l'impérialisme étasunien pour servir les besoins des opprimés plutôt que ses propres intérêts de classe montre des illusions sans limite dans les bons offices de la classe dirigeante américaine. Des réformistes tels que l'ISO et le WWP lancent perpétuellement des appels à des manifestations contre la guerre américaine en Irak en demandant au gouvernement étasunien de changer ses priorités de dépenses de la guerre vers les services sociaux comme l'éducation. Mais la domination néocoloniale et l'expansion sont inhérents à l'impérialisme et aucune quantité de pression et de plaidoyer ne peut changer cela. »*

Mais si « la notion qu'on ne peut exercer de pression pour que l'impérialisme serve les besoins des opprimés » montre « des illusions illimitées », alors pourquoi la SL ne s'oppose-t-elle pas à l'occupation militaire étasunienne d'Haïti ? Visiblement, la SL ne croit pas que ce soit une illusion puisqu'elle préfère que les troupes restent précisément parce qu'ils proclament qu'ils servent les intérêts immédiats des opprimés. Dans quelle autre partie du monde l'impérialisme étasunien peut-il fournir une aide ? Evidemment ceux que la SL estime aujourd'hui dépourvus d'une classe ouvrière indigène conséquente, comme l'Afghanistan, sans parler d'une large application rétrospective à travers toute l'histoire. L'argument des cliffistes sur l'Irlande du Nord en 1969 semble hautement similaire à celui de la SL aujourd'hui.

*« Le moment de répit fourni par la présence des troupes britanniques est court mais vital. Ceux qui appellent au retrait immédiat des troupes avant que les hommes derrière les barricades puissent se défendre eux-mêmes invitent à un pogrome qui atteindra d'abord et le plus durement les socialistes. » (Socialist Worker, 11 septembre 1969)*

Enfin, quelle attitude prendrait la SL dans les circonstances d'une lutte militaire des Haïtiens pour chasser les troupes étasuniennes de leur pays ? La SL s'abstiendrait-elle d'appeler à la défaite de l'impérialisme étasunien comme ils le firent en Afghanistan en 2001 ? Ou appellerait-elle à sauver les vies de ces troupes comme elle le fit au Liban en 1983 ? Ou pire encore, ce qui est en germe à la lumière du rôle bénéfique que la SL leur attribue actuellement ?

Dans un rapport à la treizième conférence nationale de la SL, conçue pour préparer ses lecteurs à une future purge potentielle de Rachel Wolkenstein et de ses alliés dans le Partisan Defense Committee, la SL proclame :

*« Les pressions de la période ont aidé à créer des tentatives pour trouver un moyen de « devenir vite riche », c ; a ; d ; en liquidant notre programme révolutionnaire, internationaliste et prolétarien de façon à s'accrocher à des forces plus larges, hostiles à la classe ouvrière et à notre but révolutionnaire » (« Canicule de la période postsoviétique », WV n° 948, 4 décembre 2009)*

Il semble quelque peu pervers de dénoncer ses critiques internes comme « s'accrochant à de plus larges forces hostiles à la classe ouvrière » (le groupe plutôt petit et sincère des militants de la cause de Mumia Abu Jamal, même s'il a commis des erreurs politiques en de nombreuses occasions, dont la plupart a sans aucun doute une meilleure position sur Haïti que la SL) si les « forces plus larges » auxquelles s'accrocher sont sa propre bourgeoisie .

### **Pourquoi ?**

Beaucoup ont soulevé des questions sur les motifs derrière les récentes positions de la SL. Certains ont proclamé que c'est une tentative de la direction de la SL de trouver un moyen de se différencier artificiellement du reste de la gauche. Des plaintes de la part de la SL au sujet des difficultés à se différencier d'autres groupes de gauche depuis la chute de l'URSS ont cependant été fréquentes dans leur littérature. D'autres croient – dans le contexte de sa récente confusion interne - que la direction de la SL utilise la question de manière interne comme un test de loyauté. Ceux qui ont réussi à passer le test de la SL montreraient que leur vraie loyauté concerne le culte organisationnel malade plutôt que toute présence dans la révolution socialiste. Enfin, l'IG a laissé entendre que la SL a fait le plongeon devant l'hystérie chauvine. Quoique la SL a certainement fait de tels plongeurs, comme leur réaction effrayée le 9 septembre 2001 ou face à l'intervention en Afghanistan en 2001, il n'existe pas d'atmosphère similaire en relation avec Haïti en ce moment.

Comme nous l'avions pleinement élaboré dans une polémique précédente (« IG : le programme de transition de Trotsky ou la boussole politique de Robertson », 6 mai 2009), la SL fondait pratiquement son entière existence dans les années 1980 sur la question de la défense de l'URSS. Face à sa disparition, ils ont construit une vue du monde dans laquelle, de même que précédemment toutes les questions étaient vues à travers le prisme étroit de la défense de l'Union Soviétique, aujourd'hui toutes les questions sont vues à travers le prisme étroit de la disparition de l'Union Soviétique. Ce n'est pas simplement la crise subjective de direction qui contient les luttes de la classe ouvrière mais une nouvelle circonstance objective où la question de la prise du pouvoir d'Etat est supprimée de l'agenda historique pour une raison ou une autre.

Ceux qui abandonnent la classe ouvrière sont forcés de chercher d'autres forces sociales pour leur salut. durant les années 1980, dans une désorientation symétrique à celle d'aujourd'hui, la SL exagérait sauvagement des notions et des craintes sur les dangers des « années Reagan » combinées au démantèlement de leurs fractions syndicales, ce qui les amena à compter sur les staliniens soviétiques et leur pouvoir militaire et économique pour les protéger des ravages de l'impérialisme. Aujourd'hui, l'URSS n'existe plus et Cuba ne peut servir de remplaçant suffisant dans la région. La crise récente à Haïti et la réaction de la SL sont, à la base, une expression de leur abandon de la classe ouvrière et, dans ce cas, leur abandon d'eux-mêmes..

### **Wohlforth et Robertson**

Au moins, d'une certaine manière, il apparaît que le dirigeant spartaciste Jim Robertson est arrivé au même point, bien qu'à un rythme différent, que son ancien Némésis, Tim Wohlforth. En dehors du fait que tous deux commencèrent comme des opposants au tournant vers le révisionnisme pabliste du Socialist Workers Party au début des années 1960 et tous deux finirent tragiquement en dirigeant de cultes anti-trotskyistes bureaucratés, il apparaît que Jim Robertson en vient finalement maintenant aux vues de Wohlforth sur l'impérialisme « humanitaire ».

Un article de la SL de 1995, intitulé provocativement (et sans intention humoristique) « Wohlforth, qui est-ce ? » (*Spartacist* n° 52, automne 1995 ) énonce « *Des jeunes gens surfant sur Internet pourraient se demander quel est ce maniaque qui sur internet crie : « Bien joué ! » aux forces de l'OTAN bombardant les Serbes bosniaques...* ». Wohlforth élargit également son soutien pour des interventions impérialistes « humanitaires » à d'autres pays à l'époque tels que la Somalie (qui n'a pas non plus de classe ouvrière, selon les critères actuels de la SL et méritait peut-être aussi rétrospectivement la bonne volonté impérialiste) et, coïncidence, Haïti. Robertson n'est pas encore aussi ouvertement grotesque, il a suivi les traces de son Némésis à un rythme plus lent. Etant plutôt âgé, il est probable qu'il mourra avant de le rattraper complètement. Mais peut-être qu'aujourd'hui des gens naviguant sur Internet poseraient la question (avec le haussement d'épaules approprié) « *Jim Robertson, qui est-ce ? et pourquoi soutient-il l'envoi de troupes étasuniennes pour occuper Haïti ?* ».

### **Un navire qui sombre**

Le rapport de la treizième conférence nationale de la SL se lit presque comme une rubrique nécrologique. Après avoir reconnu que « *il se peut que nous n'ayons pas de perspective immédiate* », la SL proclame que sa « *tache centrale* » est « *d'armer le parti programmatiquement et théoriquement, de Spartacist jusqu'à l'entretien des archives de notre Comité central, la Prometheus Research Library, et l'éducation en tous genres dans le cours de notre travail* ». En d'autres mots, il s'agit de préserver l'héritage de Jim Robertson pour des futurs historiens. C'est l'issue logique de l'abandon, implicite ou explicite, de la révolution socialiste comme la perspective réaliste de notre époque. Un dirigeant abaisse alors son regard sur le but « réaliste » de se servir de l'organisation pour acquérir et préserver sa postérité et « *ses notes de bas de page dans l'histoire* ».

Cette démoralisation évidente, l'effectif en chute drastique, le récent conflit interne avec Rachel Wolkenstein et le plongeon plus récent sur une question internationale-clé d'aujourd'hui, tout cela indique que la SL est un bateau en perdition et tout indique qu'en interne, on est grandement conscient du fait.

Dans sa transformation d'un groupe révolutionnaire de propagande en un culte de chef sectaire, la SL a non seulement détruit beaucoup de révolutionnaires potentiels, mais a aussi réussi à recruter des gens sur la base de leur héritage antérieur, dont une petite minorité n'a pas encore abandonné ses aspirations révolutionnaires. La direction du Groupe internationaliste n'a jamais donné une comptabilité politique honnête de l'histoire de la SL et du rôle qu'elle y a joué. Pas davantage, d'une autre manière, la direction de l'International Bolshevik Tendency (particulièrement en rapport avec des questions autour de Bill Logan, mais sans aucun doute aussi de son bureaucrate dirigeant Tom Riley) qui, après un début prometteur, a descendu avec une vitesse grandissante sa propre « route vers Rileyville » depuis plus d'une décennie maintenant (voir « *Démission de la tendance Bolchevique Internationale* » par Samuel Trachtenberg, 25 septembre 2008). Aucun de ces groupes ne mérite la moindre confiance politique.



Comme le vaisseau amiral est en train de sombrer et que ses ramifications stagnent sous leurs propres directions gériatriques permanentes, nous appelons tous ceux sincèrement intéressés en avançant tout ce qui fut révolutionnaire dans l'héritage de la Spartacist League (comme opposé à ce qui la « préserve » étroitement en réalité) à discuter avec nous.

15 février 2010

