

**EDUCATION FOR SOCIALISTS**

CHS  
x 88229 18

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY 14 CHARLES LANE NEW YORK, N.Y. 10014

# **Spartacist League:**

## **The Making of an American Sect**

**by Bob Pearlman**

August 1977

\$.65

## Contents

1. Why They Ran From the Black Struggle In Boston	3
What 'Labor/Black Defense' Meant in Practice	5
Spartacist Against Self-Defense	6
Was the Call for Federal Troops Unprincipled?	6
Spartacist and the Black Struggle	7
2. Abstention—or How to Leave the Opportunities to Others	9
The SL on the United Front	9
Fighting Feminism, Not Women's Oppression	10
What Full-Program Caucuses Meant in Practice	12
'Class Struggle Defense': The Partisan Defense	
Committee	13
The International Spartacist Tendency	15
Spartacist: An American Sect	15

## Introductory Note

The Spartacist League originated as a faction in the SWP opposed to the 1963 reunification of the Fourth International. After breaking with the SWP, this grouping sought to align itself with the rump "International Committee of the Fourth International" led by Gerry Healy of the Socialist Labour League (now Workers Revolutionary Party). Since breaking with Healy in 1967, the Spartacist League has been trying to create an international current around itself.

The following articles, dealing with the politics and orientation of this sect, appeared in the June 6, 1977, and June 13, 1977, issues of *Intercontinental Press*.

© 1977 by *Intercontinental Press*. Reprinted by permission.

# 1. Why They Ran From the Black Struggle in Boston

By Bob Pearlman

[Bob Pearlman was a leader of the Spartacist League in Boston, Massachusetts, for several years. In late 1974, when racists mobilized to oppose busing to desegregate the Boston schools, Pearlman was the organizer of the Boston local of the Spartacist League and an alternate to its Central Committee.

[After an unsuccessful attempt to change what he saw as the Spartacist League's "dismal abstention" from the struggle to defend busing, Pearlman quit the organization in August 1976.

[The following article is an account of his experiences in the Spartacist League and an analysis of the inner workings and method of this classic sectarian group. Shortly after completing this article, Pearlman joined the Socialist Workers party and is now a member of its Roxbury branch in Boston.

[We are publishing his account in two parts, of which this is the first.]

\* \* \*

The cold war and witch-hunt of the 1950s severely crippled the existing socialist and communist organizations in the United States. The massive diffusion of anticommunist ideology, plus the postwar "American prosperity" arising out of newly won world imperialist hegemony, helped to consolidate a labor bureaucracy that wiped out left-wing influence in the labor movement and buried the promise of the CIO and the postwar strike wave. By the late 1950s, the labor movement was a sleeping giant, and it remained passive in the wake of social struggles that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s.

How existing and new revolutionary organizations oriented to and intervened in these emerging struggles—the civil-rights movement, the defense of the Cuban revolution, the antiwar movement, and the women's movement—were acid tests of their theory and practice. Their response would either develop these organizations and prepare them for the tasks of the American socialist revolution or lead them toward ineffectiveness, irrelevancy, and eventually their demise.

One big test of this kind emerged in the fall of 1974 when racists in Boston launched a massive attack against school desegregation. The responsibility of revolutionists—Black and white—was to organize a mass mobilization of the Black community and its allies to defend the rights of the Black schoolchildren, to politically isolate the racists, and to put a stop to their attacks. Every revolutionary organization in the United States, save one, flunked this test miserably. Everyone either opposed busing as some sort of capitalist plot to divide the working class or supported busing but abstained from building a mass probing movement.<sup>1</sup>

Only one organization fully directed itself toward this task and

1. The Maoist Revolutionary Communist party (formerly the Revolutionary Union) opposed busing as a capitalist plot to divide the working class. The CPUSA—fearful of alienating Black liberal Democratic party politicians by advocating mass action in support of busing, reluctant to forthrightly raise the issue of Black rights in the labor movement, and desirous of isolating their members from contact with other radical political currents—consciously abstained from the desegregation struggle. The October League (Maoist), while supporting busing, confined itself to small demonstrations of its own supporters and did nothing to resolve the crisis of leadership of the Black community by working to organize a coalition of forces capable of building a mass mobilization of the Black community and its allies. Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF), the pro-Stalinist sect headed by Sam Marcy, after helping to initiate the first mass action on December 14

helped to lead the organized resistance to the racists. That was the Socialist Workers party. As a result, the SWP is widely recognized in the Boston Black community as the revolutionary organization that fights for the rights of Black people.

Some other organizations have attempted through their press to portray themselves as playing a significant role in this struggle. The Spartacist League, which dedicates itself to the "Rebirth of the Fourth International," is one of these. During the first year of the busing struggle, which started in the fall of 1974, I was the Boston local organizer for the SL and an alternate to its Central Committee. Because of the SL's dismal abstention from this struggle, I resigned in August 1976, after one and a half years of internal struggle had failed to change the course of this organization.

The Spartacist League was one of many socialist organizations that owed their growth to the tremendous radicalization accompanying the Vietnam War. From 1971 to 1973 the organization tripled from 80 to 250 members. By 1974, just prior to the outbreak of the desegregation struggle, the SL "was approaching 300 members" (according to reports to the SL Political Bureau), and it projected expansion from a biweekly to a weekly press sometime in the next year.

Spartacist theory on the Black question recognized the "extra-class" character of Black oppression, i.e., that Blacks are exploited not just in their role as workers under capitalism, but additionally because of their race. Because of this, "special demands and special struggles" are needed to fight Black oppression. While this theory did not elucidate the character or the dynamics of that "special struggle," it did set the SL substantially apart from other, anti-Black-nationalist currents such as the Workers League and the Revolutionary Communist party. These latter groups see only a narrowly defined "class struggle," and from this vantage point disregard the special characteristics of Black oppression in this country.

Spartacist's recognition of "special oppression" enabled it to respond to the desegregation struggle at an early stage. This was related to Spartacist League history as well. James Robertson, SL founder and national chairman, always claimed that a call for active intervention into the Southern civil-rights movement in the early 1960s was one of the key planks of the Revolutionary Tendency (RT) in the SWP, the precursor of the SL.<sup>2</sup> Robertson claimed that the RT fought in the SWP for participation in the Freedom Rides, while the SWP abstained from this because "they

---

and doing some decent work in defense of Blacks in East Boston, abstained from any work in the Black community and any further serious involvement in mass actions. The Workers League (Healyites) totally abstained from the struggle (see "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective," by Tim Wohlforth and Nancy Fields, *Intercontinental Press*, vol. 13, no. 40, p. 1551).

Both Amiri Baraka's Congress of African People (CAP) and the African Liberation Support Committees-February First Movement (ALSC-FFM) opposed busing as harmful to Black students. Both these groups held a Maoist world view. Boston nationalist groups such as De Mau Mau adopted a similar perspective. Because of this position, none of these groups organized any *practical* work in support of students being bused. None of these groups possess any influence or support in the Boston Black community today.

2. The Revolutionary Tendency was expelled from the SWP in January 1964. After abortive negotiations with the American Committee for the Fourth International (ACFI) and the International Committee (IC), the Spartacist League was founded in September 1966.

lacked the forces."<sup>3</sup> Robertson's pretenses on this point and the promise of SL engagement in the Black struggle were major factors in SL recruitment of a small but important layer of Black members in the early 1970s.

Also, in anticipation of opportunities for the SL in what it termed the "black arena," the SL, at its summer 1974 conference, formed a "National Consultative Fraction on Black Work."

The Boston Black community, concentrated in the Roxbury and Dorchester sections of the city, expanded significantly from the middle 1960s on. After the post-World War II migrations began, it was one of the last major Northern cities to experience a developing Black population. Today Blacks are approximately 20 percent of the population; Black students, however, constitute 42 percent of the school population. (Counting Puerto Rican students, a majority of the school population is from the oppressed nationalities.) Prior to court-ordered busing, Black students were concentrated in the worst schools in the city.

Reaction to busing emerged from white working-class sections of the city—South Boston, Charlestown, East Boston, and Hyde Park. Boston's economy is built around light manufacturing, finance, commerce, and universities. No major union with a significant Black membership that could rally prodesegregation forces exists. Only the small Meat Cutters union publicly supported desegregation. The Fire Fighters and Teamsters, bastions of white workers under the sway of the racist forces, passed antibusing motions. There were no union-sponsored organizations formed to oppose busing, like Louisville, Kentucky's so-called Union Labor Against Busing. But every city union to one degree or another capitulated to the racist sentiment and pressure from racist organizations. This was clearly reflected when the Massachusetts state AFL-CIO passed an antibusing resolution at its fall 1975 convention. This was later overturned through the intervention of AFL-CIO President George Meany.

This was the concrete context in which revolutionary organizations had to mount a defense of the rights of the Black community.

The Spartacist League reacted to the first shocks of antibusing violence in a seemingly healthy manner. It issued, on September 22, 1974, an open "Letter to Boston Trade Unions, Black and Socialist Organizations" titled "Act Now! Defend Black School Children!"<sup>4</sup> The letter was a "proposal for a broad mobilization, initiated by the unions, black and socialist organizations, to build a mass popular demonstration around the common slogan, 'Stop the Racist Attacks Against Black School Children.' The Spartacist League, a labor-socialist organization, pledges to devote all available resources and energy to aid in the building of such a demonstration." This pledge was to be put to a severe test in practice two months later.

Spartacist also understood that no socialist organization had the authority to initiate such a demonstration. It wrote: "The unions and black organizations such as the NAACP, because of their influence and resources, must take the lead in immediately calling and mobilizing for a massive public rally of all those who oppose this campaign of racist violence and harassment." And later: "Our organizations may disagree on many social, economic and political issues, but we can all agree with the need for immediate united action in defense of the black school children under attack by anti-busing forces. In the framework of joint actions against these racist attacks, all participating groups would, of course, be free to raise their own particular points of view."

For an organization that had refused to endorse and build the mass demonstrations against the Vietnam War because of their presumed "popular front" character, the above seemed to represent a remarkable adjustment to concrete needs and realities.

3. At that time the SWP was situated in Northern cities where Black activism was on the rise. It had no members and little experience in the South, and according to members of the majority, no experienced cadres available to implant there.

4. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 53, September 27, 1974.

Hidden, however, in this orientation were two fundamental assumptions that were to lead to the SL's criminal abstention from the busing struggle and the early liquidation of its prodesegregation work in Boston.

The first assumption was that a significant popular mobilization against the racists could be built only *through the unions*. In the SL's view, a mobilization of "blacks for blacks"<sup>5</sup> without labor-union participation would be "hopeless."<sup>6</sup> And second, the freedom of all "participating groups" in the joint action "to raise their own particular points of view" was not, in the SL's opinion, to be satisfied through leaflets and banners. In the SL's view of the united front, this meant the "freedom" of tiny socialist organizations with no mass influence (like the Spartacist League) to insist on having a speaker at every rally, *as a matter of principle*, in order to criticize other participating organizations from the podium.

This latter position, despite its prominence as an excuse for the SL's abstention from the antiwar demonstrations, was not at all clear to the SL's national leadership during this period prior to the first mass national demonstration in Boston on December 14, 1974. From late September through late November the Boston branch of the SL, reinforced by Black members from other cities, threw itself into the work of bringing about a mass demonstration. Every possible trade union, Black organization, tenant group, and student organization was contacted. A small local demonstration of Boston Blacks on October 12 accidentally catapulted Spartacist into the international press when an Associated Press photo featuring Spartacist banners was published throughout the world, including in the major European CP dailies. So the media reward those who know how to make signs and banners; other talents, however, are needed to win authority in the real mass movement.

Not much came of this early work, as the SL had little authority to earn the cooperation of these other organizations. Meanwhile, however, under the sponsorship of Black Democratic State Senator-elect William Owens, Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF) had quietly put together some 300 endorsements calling for a December 14 "National March and Rally Against Racism" (later titled the "Freedom March for Human Dignity"). For many of us in the Boston SL, this development seemed to be a crystallization of much that we had been working for.

Several days prior to the initial organizing meeting of the "Emergency Mobilization Committee" for December 14, which took place in Boston, I contacted Helene Brosius, the national organization secretary of the SL, to discuss the attitude of the party leadership toward this development. I raised in particular, as I had several times during the previous month, whether we could be part of a united front without having an SL speaker. She responded that in her opinion this was possible. But in the next few days she transmitted nothing to our local concerning the attitude of the national leadership toward the December 14 march.

A month earlier, in the mild euphoria of our work with an emerging coalition of Black student unions, Robertson himself had instructed me to advocate a mass rally in the Boston Garden with Coretta Scott King and the entertainer James Brown. But when the Boston Local executive committee phoned Robertson after attending the initial meeting of the Emergency Committee and advocated endorsement of the December 14 demonstration and participation in the committee, Robertson blasted, "Betray-er!" and hung up. He then dispatched the two deputy national chairmen, George Foster and Reuben Samuels,<sup>7</sup> to Boston to set

5. A phrase of SL Black oppositionist A. Lumumba to describe the independent movement of Blacks for Black rights.

6. James Robertson, March 1975 meeting of the SL Political Bureau. (Notes of author.)

7. Reuben Samuels is a former national secretary of the Revolutionary Communist Youth (RCY), former name of the Spartacus Youth League (SYL), youth section of the SL. Samuels is the author of the RCY's "National Bureau Document on the United Front," RCY Internal Discussion Bulletin, no. 9, July 1973.

matters straight.

(In contrast, the SWP and the Young Socialist Alliance went to the meeting of the Emergency Committee and offered to build the student component of the demonstration. This student committee then began to organize a National Teach-in Against Racism for the night prior to December 14. This initiative laid the foundation for the National Student Coalition Against Racism [NSCAR], which up to the present has been the most consistent organizer of the prodesegregation forces.)

In Boston, Foster and Samuels likened the attitude of the local SL leadership in regard to December 14 to that of Stalin's famous "critical support insofar as," extended to the Russian provisional government in March 1917. That was prior to Lenin's return and his April Theses, which reoriented Bolshevik strategy. Their key criticism was that the local leadership had "refused to get us a guarantee in writing for a speaker." "Comrades should want to guard the SL," Foster said. "You wanted to sell our name away. It would have been healthier if comrades had said, 'This [December 14] is shit!'" According to Samuels, "If we don't get a speaker, it's not a united front!" (Notes of author.)

What really motivated the SL national leadership at the time was the factional work they were organizing in the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), the French section of the Fourth International, and their efforts to woo the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI). In both cases it was crucial for the SL to muddy the name and work of the Socialist Workers party. Critical to this effort was distortion of the SWP's call for "Federal Troops to Boston" to protect the Black schoolchildren from the racist mobs, an issue I will return to later.

In this way the SL reneged on its pledge to "devote all available resources and energy to aid in the building of such a demonstration." The SL marched in its own contingent in the demonstration but did nothing to build it or any of the subsequent mass demonstrations.

A Black comrade, A. Lumumba, who quit the SL six months later, challenging the entire Spartacist theory and record on the Black question, characterized the SL activity in this period as "raising demands, but having no program," i.e., no real program of activity to mobilize the Black community and its allies. (Author's notes.)

Edmund Samarakkody,<sup>8</sup> leader of the Ceylonese Revolutionary Workers party, who held discussions with the SL in October 1974, at the time when the busing struggle was heating up, criticized the SL for "empty propagandism." (Author's notes.) This criticism, although based on a mere reading of *Workers Vanguard*, hit the mark. Samarakkody saw in the SL's self-characterization and self-conception as a "propaganda group" not the Leninist conception, indicating the SL's limited weight in the working class, but rather a group engaged in "empty propagandism" and revolutionary "phrasemongering," devoid of any real activity.

Rather than seeking to participate in and develop social struggles, the SL saw in mass activity only "popular frontism." For them this was a signal to abstain, and to use a favorite SL quote from Trotsky, "to say what is."

But the SL reserved its version of "what is" to its own Political Bureau meetings. It did not appear in its public press. In March 1975, a meeting of the Political Bureau was held, including Central Committee members and organizers from outside the New York national center, who were convened to decide organizational priorities for the coming period. I gave the report on Boston and advocated an upgrading of our intervention into the busing struggle. This viewpoint turned out to be a minority of one among the national leadership of the party. The view of everyone else was articulated by James Robertson: "Black/Labor Defense is a meaningless slogan in Boston." (This and subsequent quotes from this meeting are from notes of the author.) Robertson said that

Boston had no labor movement; the situation for Blacks was therefore hopeless. Robertson characterized Boston as "America's Eritrea," a statement further elaborated by Reuben Samuels: "Boston is the Israel of America." (Ireland, Israel, and Eritrea are places where the SL has been unable to formulate its program or make its position comprehensible to its membership. Thus these are considered "hopeless" situations by the SL.)

The SL could not conceive of the Black community along with allies, with little or no union support to begin with, organizing to defend itself and carry out desegregation. Robertson's conclusion was that the task of the SL was to organize "the Red Army in Detroit" and come back and "smash the Boston racists." This slogan became the watchword of this Political Bureau meeting, which formalized the liquidation of the SL's Black work in Boston.<sup>9</sup> "No more Black comrades to Boston," Reuben Samuels stated. He added that the Black comrades would develop better in Los Angeles under a better local leadership and in a city where at that time the strains of the busing struggle did not exist!

And Robertson, forgetting his professed battle in the SWP in the early 1960s to intervene in the Southern civil-rights struggle, concluded, "Let Boston [the Boston local and its Black work] turn slowly in the wind while the ravens pick at its eyes. We have no base there."

This private summation did not appear in *Workers Vanguard*. Instead, the SL struggled, in print, for a "Labor/Black Defense." It attended NSCAR conferences and screamed about the betrayals of the SWP, whose tremendous commitment to the desegregation struggle included the demand for federal troops to protect the lives and rights of the beleaguered Black schoolchildren.

#### What 'Labor/Black Defense' Meant in Practice

Just as their insistence on the "right" to have a speaker at every rally was used to justify abstention from probusing actions, the Spartacist slogan of "Labor/Black Defense" became a cover for refusal to participate in the *actual* struggle that was going on in Boston.

The SL publicly asserted, in contrast to their private assessment, that the key issue revolutionists had to raise before the labor movement was the need for union-organized defense forces to protect Black children.

But the real issue, and the real debate in the labor movement, was elsewhere. This debate never reached the level of discussing *how* to defend Black schoolchildren: whether by federal troops, labor/Black defense, or Black self-defense. The issue was whether the labor movement ought to support or oppose busing. The issue was for or against desegregation, for or against the rights of Black schoolchildren. Aside from the Meat Cutters, no other union took a public stand in favor of desegregation in Boston. At no time was the call for labor defense squads for Black students anything more than empty sloganeering.

This concrete reality necessarily conditioned a revolutionary program and tactical approach, and by that I mean a program of action. Revolutionary propaganda consists not of sloganeering for a "hopeless" reality, but rather of indicating to the working class and the oppressed the tasks to be carried out. The burning task of the moment was to assemble a coalition of forces capable of building a mass mobilization in support of desegregation and the rights of the Black students. Only the development of such a solidarity movement, in Boston and nationwide, could provide the *basis* for the emergence of significant Black self-defense forces. Only winning the labor movement to *support* the rights of Black schoolchildren could provide the *basis* for labor support to Black self-defense.

This reality was not at all understood by the leaders of the SL. While they admitted privately that "Black/Labor Defense is a

8. Samarakkody, a former member of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, split with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (Revolutionary), the Ceylonese section of the FI, in 1968.

9. No formal motion was passed at this meeting which liquidated the work. But the liquidation was implicit in motions transferring some comrades out of Boston. After March 1975, the SL was out of the Black community for good.

meaningless slogan in Boston," this understanding in no way conditioned their tactical approach other than to cause them to abandon the struggle. They did not ask themselves how a "meaningless" slogan could be a slogan of action. In fact, like other Spartacist slogans, it was a cover for *inaction* and opposition to those forces that were in motion around the busing fight.

In the labor movement the SWP fought to get unions on record demanding federal troops to defend the Black schoolchildren.<sup>10</sup> This was counterposed not to union-initiated defense guards, but rather to the union bureaucracy's refusal to call for *any* defense at all of the Black community.

Thus even Spartacist's call to activate the labor movement in defense of Blacks was empty. The struggle first of all had to be a fight to win the labor movement to support desegregation, which, despite the AFL-CIO's formal policy, was the position of no significant local union in Boston. And secondly, the struggle had to be to win the labor unions to the position that Black schoolchildren should be defended. Had the government refused to act in response to demands by labor that the schoolchildren be protected, the basis would then have been laid for a labor component in a Black-built defense.

"Super-Marxists" often recall only Engels and Lenin's dictum that the state, in the last resort, is "special bodies of armed men" and that therefore the police and army are the "arms of the ruling class." They forget that under bourgeois democracy the state also "mediates" and maneuvers between classes and does not massacre Blacks and workers in every circumstance. They also forget that there are tactical differences between sections of the bourgeoisie that revolutionists must exploit. To expose the real essence of "special bodies" and demonstrate the necessity for self-defense by the exploited requires concrete experiences out of which such forces could come into being.

The police siege of the Black housing project at Columbia Point in the fall of 1974, and the random attacks on Blacks in March-April 1976, proved to be such experiences. These led to embryonic, but episodic, Black self-defense formations. These sporadic efforts were focused on defending Black residential areas, at Columbia Point and in parts of Mattapan. They did not focus on the problem of defending the buses carrying Black schoolchildren into the white racist strongholds. The most developed mode of self-defense in this regard came from the organized Black parent volunteers who rode the buses in the hope that their presence would deter the racist attacks.

Despite the SL's claim that the SWP counterposed the demand for federal troops to Black self-defense, the SWP encouraged and supported these steps toward organized self-defense by the Black community against the racist mobs.

### Spartacist Against Self-Defense

The Spartacist attitude to the expansion of these developments was that they were "hopeless." The summer 1975 Central Committee plenum of the SL took place the week of the "Black community picnic" at Carson Beach, an action to open up that South Boston public beach to Black citizens. This was one of the tensest periods of the entire busing struggle, just prior to the commencement of the second year of school desegregation. At the plenum I moved that the SL change its central slogan from "Labor/Black Defense" to "Black Self-Defense."

Joseph Seymour, one of the SL's leading theoreticians, spoke of the "adventurism of Black self-defense." (Notes of author.) Seymour could imagine Black self-defense only in the context of "punitive expeditions into white neighborhoods," as an article in *Workers Vanguard* put it two weeks later.<sup>11</sup> Seymour's formulations that "Blacks alone cannot do it" inspired WV's conclusion in

the same article that "only the social power of the trade unions and the presence of significant numbers of whites among the defenders provide a means for unlocking the intensifying racial polarization confronting Boston's black people."<sup>12</sup>

The spirit of "only through the labor movement" and hostility to struggle by "Blacks for Blacks" was reflected in the same issue of WV through headlines such as "Black Youths Riot Against Detroit Cops" (my emphasis—B.P.) and "Boston on the Brink of Race War" (my emphasis—B.P.).<sup>13</sup> Also notable was *Young Spartacus's* characterization of the white racist assault on Blacks during the Carson Beach demonstration as a "race riot" (*Young Spartacus*, no. 35, September 1975.) The protests of Blacks against their oppression and against white *pogromist* activity were transformed by the SL into "race riots."

### Was the Call for Federal Troops Unprincipled?

Disappointed by the labor movement's failure to answer its call to lead the desegregation movement and the defense of the Black schoolchildren, the SL packed its bags and left the "hopeless" struggle, content that it still had a role to play, denouncing, in print, the demand for federal troops raised by Black community leaders and supported by the SWP. But was the call for federal troops unprincipled? And was it counterposed, in reality, to the emergence of Black self-defense forces?

First, the demand for federal troops was a demand that the troops go into the *racist strongholds* to protect the buses carrying Black schoolchildren. Thus it was a demand on the federal government to *enforce* its own laws against school segregation, a law revolutionists support. Is it not inconsistent to support a law and its enforcement by the courts and the politicians and then not support its enforcement by the capitalist state's armed power when local elements of the bourgeoisie refuse to implement the law and allow the racists to resist it? Sectarians argue that enforcement by "the armed bodies" of the state is unprincipled and builds illusions. They are thus seen by the oppressed as radical dilettantes.

But does it not build illusions? In fact, the same argument can be applied to the democratic rights embodied in certain laws themselves, which surely do develop illusions. But that is no reason not to support such laws and their enforcement. Breaking the masses' illusions requires the experience by millions that the capitalist class will not grant their rights, and the dialectical development of independent action by the masses. The Spartacist League misses both these elements, refusing to go through that experience with the masses and refusing to build the mass solidarity movement for the rights of Blacks. Because of this, when motion toward self-defense did arise temporarily in March-April 1976, the SL was long gone from the Black community and the desegregation struggle.

In practice, during the entire period of the desegregation struggle, the call for federal troops was never counterposed to self-defense efforts. But the call for federal troops was counterposed, effectively in practice, to government inaction in stopping the

12. Contrast Spartacist's conception of labor leading the Black struggle to SWP leader Jack Barnes's "Political Report to the February 1970 Plenum of the National Committee of the SWP" (*Towards an American Socialist Revolution* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971], p. 197.) Commenting on the ruling class's attempt to slow down a radicalization of the masses, Barnes said: "... something quite different results from the ruling class's attempt to use racism to reverse the radicalization. The example of struggle of those who are racially discriminated against tends to reverse the racist attitudes that exist in other sectors of the mass movement. The original racism can be turned around into an attitude of cautious respect, and then emulation."

13. These headlines were immediately condemned by the executive committee of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) for their "race-neutral" quality. The SL/US leadership, which comprises the iSt executive committee, first educated the SL/US comrades in the "race-neutral" spirit of the "hopelessness" of Black self-defense, then condemned their students for learning their lessons too well.

10. See, for instance, the account of the 1976 American Federation of Teachers convention in the *Militant*, September 10, 1976.

11. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 75, August 29, 1975.

racists. In the labor movement it was counterposed to total labor inaction and failure to support the defense of the Black schoolchildren, by even the government. The demand was thus an effective instrument for building a mass solidarity movement in support of desegregation. In practice, the two slogans were complementary.

### Spartacist and the Black Struggle

According to the main political document of the SL's 1974 National Conference, the SL "has been able to carry out most of the tasks set out in the 1971 'Transformation Memorandum,'"<sup>14</sup> but "our most singular exception over the past period has been our inability to acquire a black cadre." The document theorized that "the coming period promises to provide much more favorable conditions for the struggle of the SL to acquire a black cadre."

With the desegregation struggle, such conditions were riper than even the writers of the document hoped for. But these opportunities led not to the furtherance of SL Black work, but to its liquidation. Work in the Boston busing struggle was abandoned and vital Black cadres resigned or became demoralized. The leadership admitted that the National Consultative Fraction on Black Work was essentially dormant. Additionally, over the past period Spartacist has been unable to complete and publish Marxist Bulletin no. 5 (Revised), the long-promised revision of its fundamental theory on the Black question.

A. Lumumba, the leading Black SL cadre in Boston, who waged a political battle against Spartacist theory on the Black question,<sup>15</sup> characterized the SL's Black work as "you fight nationalism, not racism." According to a *Young Spartacus* article, "Black nationalism is largely a negative response to the failure of the organized workers movement with its immense social power, to intervene in behalf of the black masses."<sup>16</sup> But why negative? The struggle of "Blacks for Blacks" had profound material roots: the expulsion of the Southern Black peasantry, urban migration North and South, the rapid growth of the Black working class, and a large measure of labor movement passivity toward the struggle for Black rights. How could revolutionists characterize this Black radicalization as anything but a positive development?

From the rise of the civil-rights movement to the present, the central problem for revolutionists has been how to promote the struggle for Black rights given the fact that the labor bureaucracy has defaulted not only vis-à-vis that struggle but also vis-à-vis its own membership.

This was not always the case. In the 1940s there were notable instances of labor support to the Black struggle, such as the struggle for the Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit in 1943. Nevertheless, the central question was the same: "What is the relationship of the independent Negro mass movement to the organized labor movement?"<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the SWP, Spartacist developed a "laborist" notion of the Black struggle. In theory, the SL recognizes the special oppression of Blacks; but in practice it doesn't.

During the rise of the Southern struggle for civil rights in 1966, Blacks in Lowndes County, Alabama, formed an independent

Black party, called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, and adopted the symbol of the Black Panther. Spartacist, despite noting that this was a "step forward," insisted that "the perspective of the Black Panther Party for a federation of county-wide parties must be replaced by a perspective for a South-wide Freedom Labor Party. . . . Only by the development of a working-class program and by explicitly opening the door to support by white workers can real political independence be maintained, real gains won and the basis laid for eventual working-class political unity."<sup>18</sup>

Southern labor at this time was totally uninterested in such an idea; in large measure it was in the other camp. Spartacist's real intention in this proposal was to oppose the development of independent Black political action. To this *real* trend they counterposed an orientation that had no practical potential, a method typical of sectarians.

In the summer of 1974, in response to the murder by Boston police of two Black men, James Wilds and Walter Robey, the Spartacist League wrote: "It is only racially united labor action that can put an end to police terror because it is only the labor movement that can uncompromisingly defend the democratic rights of working people and all the oppressed, including the right to bear arms."<sup>19</sup>

The SL proposed to the People's Coalition Against Police Brutality in Roxbury, an all-Black Boston group formed to politically fight the wave of cop terror, that the "main active orientation of the committee be toward the mobilizing of active union support" around two demands. The two proposed demands were "The Murderers of Wilds and Robey Be Arrested and Tried" and "Disarm the Cops."<sup>20</sup>

That such an orientation seems bizarre to the activists of the Black movement who have yet to receive a single offer of organized labor support for their struggle is a secondary point. The crux of the Spartacist method was abstract propaganda for something that could only be hoped for in the future, i.e. a "Red Army in Detroit," not propaganda for a program of action *today*, based on a serious appraisal of the forces at hand.

For the Spartacist League, despite theoretical posturing, there is no *relationship* between the "independent Negro mass movement" and the "organized labor movement," to use J. Meyer's terms. There is only the dissolving of "black" struggle into "class struggle," the transcendence of the specific course of development of the American social revolution by the theoretical beauty of "racially united labor action."

Spartacist's precursor, the Revolutionary Tendency of the SWP, charged in 1963 that the SWP majority's support for Black nationalism constituted a radical departure from previous party resolutions. In particular the RT claimed to stand on the 1948 party resolution.

But J. Meyer (C.L.R. James), the reporter at the SWP's thirteenth national convention in 1948, differentiated the SWP's attitude from that of the current SL:

The proletariat, as we know, must lead the struggles of all the oppressed and all those who are persecuted by capitalism. But this has been interpreted in the past—and by some very good socialists too—in the following sense: The independent struggles of the Negro people have not got much more than an episodic value, and as a matter of fact, can constitute a great danger not only to the Negroes themselves, but to the organized labor movement. The real leadership of the Negro struggle must rest in the hands of organized labor and of the Marxist party. Without that the Negro struggle is not only weak, but is likely to cause difficulties for the Negroes and dangers to organized labor.<sup>21</sup>

The SWP, a party that was immersed in the Black struggle of the 1940's and that had recruited hundreds of Blacks in the

14. Memorandum to the Central Committee on the Transformation of the SL by the PB, August 23, 1971, in SL Internal Bulletin, no. 15, August 1972.

15. Lumumba, who was slated to head the national Black fraction, based his opposition on Trotsky's writings on Black nationalism. As part of its liquidation of Boston work, the SL wanted to transfer Lumumba out of work in the Boston Black community into trade-union work in the maritime industry. Lumumba maintained that "Boston is a principled question for me." He resigned from the SL in June 1975. He is now a leader of the Dorchester Black Panthers in Boston.

16. *Young Spartacus*, no. 32, May 1975.

17. J. Meyer (C.L.R. James), "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in U.S.," July 1948, printed in *Fourth International*, December 1948.

18. "Black and Red—Class Struggle Road to Negro Freedom," *Spartacist*, May-June 1967.

19. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 50, August 2, 1974.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Meyer, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in U.S."

preceding period, had, according to Meyer, an entirely different estimate of the "Negro struggle":

We say, number 1, that the Negro struggle, the independent Negro struggle, has a vitality and a validity of its own; that it has deep historic roots in the past of America and in present struggles; it has an organic political perspective, along which it is traveling, to one degree or another, and everything shows that at the present time it is traveling with great speed and vigor.

We say, number 2, that this independent Negro movement is able to intervene with terrific force upon the general social and political life of the nation, despite the fact that it is waged under the banner of democratic rights, and is not led necessarily either by the organized labor movement or the Marxist party.

We say, number 3, and this is the most important, that it is able to exercise a powerful influence upon the revolutionary proletariat, that it has got a great contribution to make to the development of the proletariat in the United States, and that it is *in itself a constituent part* [my emphasis—B.P.] of the struggle for socialism.

In this way we challenge directly any attempt to subordinate or to push to the rear the social and political significance of the independent Negro struggle for democratic rights.<sup>22</sup>

The SL is typical of the socialists referred to by Meyer as those seeing in the "independent Negro mass movement" a danger "to the Negroes themselves" and "to the organized labor movement." Not that the SL is the ideological heir of these earlier socialists but rather that the SL has been forged in the context of a labor-movement default in respect to the Black struggle and SL isolation from the mass struggles of Blacks. From this isolation arose their disparagement of the growth of nationalist consciousness among Blacks in the early 1960s.

Their only document relating to the SWP discussion on the Black struggle in 1963, "For Black Trotskyism," written by James Robertson and Shirley Stoute, states that "Negro Nationalism in ideology and origins is somewhat akin to Zionism as it was from the turn of the century until the Second World War. The large Negro ghettos of the Northern cities are the breeding grounds for this ideology among a layer of petit-bourgeois or declassed elements who vicariously imagine that segregated residential areas can be the germ sources for a new state in which they will exploit ('give jobs to') Black workers."<sup>23</sup>

As its fundamental document on the Black question, the early SL published R.S. Fraser's (Kirk) "For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question" (August 1955).<sup>24</sup> While appreciating the independent thrust of the "Negro movement" much more than the SL ever did later, it ends up equating self-determination with segregation:

To propose to the mass workers and Negroes the idea of self-determination would be wrong. For the decisive fact in the acceptance of white supremacy is the acceptance of segregation. *The slogan of self-determination requires the desire for segregation as its foundation.* [Emphasis in original, p. 22.]

Given this formula, Spartacist could hardly understand any of the developments in the Black struggle that appeared in the 1960s and 1970s in which Black nationalists spurred a struggle for equality. The SL leadership privately characterizes the struggle for "community control" as a "Bantustan" policy. However, the latter is the program of the oppressor South African state to deprive Blacks of democratic rights in their townships (ghettos), while the former represents a struggle for democracy by Blacks where they are.

The SWP appraised this motion differently. Its orientation, as explained in the 1963 resolution, "Freedom Now,"<sup>25</sup> written by

George Breitman, armed the party for work in the independent Black movement, particularly in the struggles to organize prodesegregation forces in the Black community and in the unions starting in 1974. The resolution stated:

... the intensification of separatist moods among Negroes in the Northern cities expresses a rejection of American class society from top to bottom and a strong desire to break free from the evils of that society. It is their verdict that the present "American Way of Life" has nothing worthwhile to offer Negroes. In the absence of a *revolutionary labor movement or powerful socialist vanguard* [my emphasis—B.P.], the radicalism of the Northern ghetto masses flows through channels of race-consciousness, repudiating U.S. society as the white man's world.

The task of the "Negro struggle" is the following:

... the mobilization and unification of the Negro masses in an independent movement to fight for their equality—an indispensable condition for an eventual revolutionary alliance of the working class and the Negro people. Negro nationalism is progressive because it contributes to the creation of such an independent Negro movement. It will remain progressive as long as it fulfills that function, whether the struggle be fought along integrationist or separatist lines.

And finally, concerning the relationship with the labor movement:

Correctly appraised, the independent course of the Negro movement, and even its essentially nationalist aspects, does not signify a permanent and principled repudiation of a labor-Negro alliance. What militant Negroes object to is any alliance based on subordination or gradualism in which Negroes are merely a junior partner supplying manpower but having little to say about the policies and tempo pursued by the team. What they want is an alliance that will include *Freedom Now* as one of its main demands and in which the Negroes will have an equal voice in setting policy.

The key test of any theory is its practical application. Despite the SL's commitment to wage a struggle against the "special oppression" of Blacks, its insistence that the struggle could only be waged by "racially united labor action" has meant, in the civil-rights movement and in the desegregation struggle, a complete abstention from practical struggle by the Black community for equality. Spartacist propaganda (injunctions) to form "Labor-/Black Defense," a "Freedom-Labor Party," or "racially united labor action to stop cop terror" has been little more than ink on a printed page, not representing a program of action but merely dreams of how socialist intellectuals would like the class struggle to be.

But one cannot dream up the march of the class struggle; it must be organized, as it arises in real life, taking into account the specific history, conditions, and forces of a given society. The real class struggle is a severe examiner; it punishes those who engage only in play-acting and empty propagandism. Spartacist admits it has failed to accumulate and train a Black cadre. After two and a half years of the desegregation struggle, its "Black work" lies in shambles, its key Black cadres have either quit or become inactive, its National Consultative Fraction on Black Work has ceased to function, and the Spartacist League and the Spartacist Youth League have failed to grow and have even lost membership over this period. Thus the class struggle condemns those sects that are unable to recognize and organize the real forces set in motion against capitalist society.

A fledgling socialist organization may be founded on theoretical principles with sectarian implications. This was the case with the Spartacist League on both the Black question and the issue of the defense of the Cuban revolution. Spartacist has existed as an organized American tendency for more than a decade, and has recently become an international tendency. By examining its activity over that period, a balance sheet can be drawn. Its conduct in the desegregation struggle was no exception or accident. For a long time the Spartacist League has been characterized by systematic abstention from all important political motion in the United States, as we propose to show.

[Next: *Abstention—or How to Leave the Opportunities to Others.*]

22. Ibid.

23. SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol. 24, no. 30, July 1963.

24. Originally published as SWP Discussion Bulletin A-30, August 1955.

25. *International Socialist Review*, vol. 24, no. 4, Fall 1963.

# 2. Abstention—or How to Leave the Opportunities to Others

By Bob Pearlman

[*Second of two parts*]

The busing struggle developed just after the Spartacist League's fourth national conference in the summer of 1974 declared that the SL was "no longer a nationally-isolated, sub-propaganda group insulated from the American proletariat."<sup>26</sup> The self-characterization as a sub-propaganda group and the SL's small size had long been the leadership's explanation for its scant involvement in mass work. But with the onset of the busing struggle and under the pressure of criticism by Edmund Samarakkody, the SL internally rechristened itself a "fighting propaganda group." It then went on to decide that the fight was not in Boston and liquidated its work there, presumably to "organize the Red Army in Detroit" to come back and "smash the Boston racists."

This behavior had its roots in a decade of abstention in relation to the social struggles taking place in the United States. A. Lumumba's characterization of SL Black work—"you fight nationalism, not racism"—fits the entire corpus of SL activity. Spartacist fought the antiwar movement, not the war; it fought feminism, not women's oppression; it centered its fire on the leadership of the Cuban revolution and the NLF in Vietnam, not American imperialism. In its brand of "solidarity" work, it aims its blows at the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and African nationalists and not U.S. and South African imperialism.

### The SL on the United Front

The antiwar movement had a profound impact on American politics. It touched millions of people and organized hundreds of thousands in mass actions against the war. It exposed the deceits of American imperialism and demanded the United States get out of Vietnam. When even 500,000 American troops were stalled by the tremendous resistance of the Vietnamese people, it was the power and success of the antiwar movement in turning the American people against the war that cautioned the ruling class against any further escalation and forced it to retreat. The antiwar movement played a decisive role in making possible the victory of the Vietnamese people over American imperialism. The central role the SWP played in this movement was the deepest expression of proletarian internationalism.

Just as in the desegregation struggle, Spartacist was absent from this process. It neither endorsed nor built a single mass antiwar action. Its only activity on the question, just as in the desegregation struggle, was to go to conferences of those doing the real organizing activity against the war and accuse them of "class betrayal."

The linchpin of Spartacist abstention from building mass civil-rights, antiwar, prodesegregation, pro-ERA, proabortion-rights, and other demonstrations has been its concept of the "united front." In all these developments, the SL has seen nothing but "popular frontism." Noting the participation of certain bourgeois elements or individuals in these actions, the SL concludes that they represent blocs with the bourgeoisie around the program of the bourgeoisie.

In the antiwar movement and the women's movement, the cardinal tactic of the SL was to advocate the exclusion of bourgeois individuals from the podium of rallies organized to build these movements. In the antiwar movement, Spartacist wanted "class action against the war." The lack of large-scale participation of unions in the antiwar movement was ascribed not to the default of the labor movement's bureaucratic misleadership, but to the SWP's inveterate "popular frontism." "To the extent that sections of the working class do remain imbued with the ideology of the bourgeoisie, groups like the SWP have only themselves to blame. Workers see their most sophisticated enemies (McCarthy, Lindsay, Hartke) lauded by the supposed 'Marxists,' cheered on by the labor parasites who serve the bourgeoisie within the workers' own organizations."<sup>27</sup>

Political reality in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s has been characterized by the absence of reformist parties, mass Stalinist or Socialist parties, and by a union movement that has defaulted on every serious social struggle by oppressed minorities and women, defaulted in its own right, and remained completely tied to the Democratic party. Given these concrete realities, the problem for revolutionary socialists becomes how to advance social struggles by the oppressed and the working class against capitalism. The antiwar movement invited all those opposed to the war to join its ranks.

To sectarians the problem lies elsewhere. To struggle against capitalism, nothing less than "class action" is needed. These actions may take the form of a *united front*. Knowing communist history, the sectarian discovers that the united-front tactic was developed by the Comintern in 1922 and involved agreements between mass parties of the working class for specific actions. The guiding principle of these actions was "freedom of criticism, unity of action." Gerry Healy of the Socialist Labour League (now Workers Revolutionary party) of Britain concluded in 1967 that the SLL could not involve itself in united fronts against the war because it was not a mass party.<sup>28</sup> The Spartacist League of the U.S. has concluded that a demonstration without an SL speaker is not a united front and therefore the SL cannot endorse or build such actions. Freedom of slogans and distribution of literature is not sufficient for the SL at this stage.

For the sectarian, "finding no replica of the past in present day reality he washes his hands of the whole mess and takes refuge in the limbo of infantile leftism there to await the day when history finally catches up with doctrinaire prescription."<sup>29</sup> Thus the SL proposed as the way to bring about class action against the war, the slogans "No Liberal Bourgeois Speakers at Anti-War Rallies!" and "Labor Political Strikes Against the War!" This orientation simply meant that there would be no such speakers at tiny SL-initiated rallies (if there were to be such) and that a few union locals would allow an SL trade unionist to stand up at union meetings and "make the record" by proposing labor strikes

27. *Spartacist Supplement*, July 1971.

28. See "Some Comments on Party Policy and Tactics in the Antiwar Movement," by Tom Kerry (from SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol. 26, no. 12, October 1967) in *United Front vs. People's Front* (enlarged edition), Education for Socialists bulletin, December 1972.

29. *Ibid.*

26. "Perspectives and Tasks of the Spartacist League of the U.S. (Political Bureau Draft)," Spartacist League Internal Discussion Bulletin, whole no. 22, August 1974.

against the war to unions that had not even been won to oppose the war.

The Spartacist formula of the exclusion of bourgeois speakers from antiwar rallies was not at all a formula for independent working-class action against the war. Instead, such a formula would have led only to a few, tiny "red rallies"—"independent" of the working class and the millions of Americans mobilizing to oppose the war. Independent working-class action against the war was achieved, however, by those activists, including the SWP, who organized millions around the principled working-class demand, "Out Now!"

In 1973 Spartacist organized a rally in New York City in support of the British miners' strike. It sought and achieved the endorsement of Democratic party politician Paul O'Dwyer. Confusion developed in the SL ranks. "As a result of polemical simplification, particularly in combatting the SWP, many comrades have adopted the definition of a 'popular front' as a 'united front with the bourgeoisie,'" Joseph Seymour wrote.<sup>30</sup> Seymour then went on to articulate the new "complex and subtle" line in which he admitted that "the definitive expulsion of the bourgeoisie from the workers movement will be the result of a lengthy and complex struggle in which united fronts with bourgeois politicians and groups are a necessary part." Thus the ultradefenders of sectarian abstention from the antiwar movement came full circle to advocate in this case what they termed a united front with bourgeois politicians!

Since Seymour's aim was to justify rather than polemicize against Spartacist work, he concluded that the problem with the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC), was that it "was a bloc (not a united front) between the SWP and certain bourgeois politicians on a program and tactics congruent with bourgeois liberalism in the 1969-71 period."<sup>31</sup> The contention that immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Vietnam and mass demonstrations around this demand were the program of bourgeois liberalism in the 1969-71 period requires little comment here.

Even the matter of SL speakers in united fronts, a hallmark of Spartacist method in the desegregation struggle, came into question when the Spartacus Youth League, in the course of attempting a polemic against the SWP on antifascist work, published Murry Weiss's excellent 1945 "Report on the Los Angeles Anti-Fascist Campaign." The united-front work the SWP carried out, despite its exclusion from a podium made up of CPers and bourgeois politicians, elicited this comment from Bill Logan, chairman of the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand (SLANZ):

The futile search for the Ten Commandments of Temporary Alliances, Blocs and United Fronts has recently been dealt a heavy blow by the arrival of the SYL's bulletin including material on the SWP's anti-Fascist work. In the small united fronts with which we've been involved we have made democratic platforms at all meetings, demonstrations, etc, a condition of our participation. The challenge to the eternal verity of this principle posed by the SWP's obviously sensible support for a closed-platform united front meeting in other circumstances has had a salutary effect.<sup>32</sup>

As yet, this salutary effect has been unnoticed in the work of the SL/US.

### Fighting Feminism, Not Women's Oppression

While the Spartacist League's misconception of the united front is the basis of its abstentionist policy, refusal to build each particular struggle has its own unique dogmatic foundation. In

30. Joseph Seymour, "On the United Front Question," Spartacist League Internal Discussion Bulletin, whole no. 23, August 1974.

31. Ibid.

32. Bill Logan, SLANZ chairman, Letter to John Sharpe, 1st secretary, September 25, 1975.

the battle for Black rights it is the SL's hostility to an independent Black struggle movement. The Spartacist League has taken a similar attitude toward the struggle for women's rights.

For the SL to begin any work on the "women question," a major struggle had to be fought against Joseph Seymour, the SL's leading theorist. In his "Theses on the Women's Liberation Movement,"<sup>33</sup> Seymour belittled the rising women's liberation movement as "transitory" and "fleeting":

2. Significant political movements directed at women's oppression have been exceptional. Those that existed were either fleeting movements directed against particularly apparent forms of women's inequality (e.g. the right to vote) or have been produced by transitional organizations established by mass left-wing parties. . . .

6. The existing women's liberation movement is transitory because it is isolated as a current within the petty-bourgeois left-liberal milieu, having a foundation neither in the sympathy of the female population nor in concrete struggles against the ruling class.

At the SL's third national conference, in the winter of 1972, leading women comrades of the SL demolished Seymour's theses. These comrades unearthed the work of the Bolshevik party among women and showed how that mass party of the working class strove to mobilize the masses of worker and peasant women against their special oppression as women. But what these comrades failed to do, despite their victory, was to study and analyze the rising women's liberation movement in the United States and put forward a program of action against women's oppression.

In fact, the spirit of Seymour won out. Spartacist work in the women's arena has been confined to the publishing of *Women and Revolution* (Journal of Spartacist League Central Committee Commission for Work Among Women) and to a few interventions into organized women's struggles based on "barring the class enemy from the platform."<sup>34</sup> *W&R* has published article after article on Bolshevik and German SPD (Social Democratic party of Germany) work among women to indicate how earlier mass parties of the proletariat sponsored special work among women. Their cumulative impact, however, underscores the enormous disdain the Spartacist League holds for what it calls the "petty-bourgeois women's movement," which arose independently of the nonexistent mass parties of the American proletariat. Such a view is apparent in the SL theses on the women's liberation movement:

In our experience in the women's arena we were forced pragmatically to rediscover the position of the Communist International, which strongly opposed the initiation of women's organizations not organizationally linked to the proletarian vanguard, not only when the revolutionary organization is a mass party—in which case "independence" would in fact constitute counterposition to the revolutionary party—but also when the vanguard is weak and struggling to increase its contact with and influence among the masses. Our strategic perspective should be the development of a *women's section* of the SL.<sup>35</sup>

Spartacist's attempts to construct a women's section of the SL, or women's organizations linked to the party, or even to carry out practical work in the women's movement, have all failed miserably. Most of the women comrades who led the fight against Seymour had been recruited out of the women's movement prior to 1972. They were the last of their kind.

Spartacist's disorientation is typical of how historical analogy is utilized by the SL in an ahistorical manner on all questions. In

33. Joseph Seymour, "Theses on the Women's Liberation Movement," September 3, 1971, in Spartacist League Internal Discussion Bulletin, whole no. 15, August 1972.

34. See "WONAAC Sponsors Bourgeoisie, Ousts Communists," *Workers Vanguard*, no. 6, March 1972.

35. "The SL and the Woman Question," by Liz Gordon, October 28, 1972; with endorsing motion by Political Bureau #58, October 28-29, 1972, in Spartacist League Internal Discussion Bulletin, whole no. 17, October 1972.

maintaining that the "Communist International . . . strongly opposed the initiation of women's organizations not organizationally linked to the proletarian vanguard," it forgets that mass parties, and also mass parties having state power, can sponsor special methods of work on a mass scale. Today it is a problem of communists organizing a movement that has arisen independently of the labor movement and the organized left, a movement with its own vitality whose roots in the character of advanced capitalist society propel it in the direction of anticapitalist struggle.

In publishing the documents of the period of the Communist International and quoting often from Clara Zetkin's "Reminiscences of Lenin," Spartacist got fixated only on the question of how communists organize themselves (sections, transitional organizations). The SL failed to understand how Lenin and Zetkin approached the problems of winning the masses of women on a world scale in their discussions prior to the Third World Congress of the Comintern:

Zetkin proposed that the communist women from various countries should take the initiative in calling and organizing an international congress of women to help promote the tremendous new ferment and radicalization of women of all classes and sections of society in the post-World War I period. She suggested that they contact ". . . the leaders of the organized female workers in each country, the proletarian political women's movement, bourgeois women's organisations of every trend and description, and finally the prominent female physicians, teachers, writers, etc., and to form national nonpartisan preparatory committees. . . ."

Lenin's reaction was one of wholehearted approval. But he questioned whether the Communist fraction at such a congress on an international scale would be strong enough to win the leadership of the delegates, whether the bourgeois and reformist women might not be stronger. Zetkin responded that she thought it was not a great danger because the communist women would have the best program and proposals for action. And even if they did lose, it would be no disaster. Lenin agreed. "Even defeat after a stubborn struggle would be a gain," he commented.

On further reflection, Lenin pointed out that this congress of women "would foment and increase unrest, uncertainty, contradictions and conflicts in the camp of the bourgeoisie and its reformist friends. . . . The congress would add to the division and thereby weaken the forces of the counter-revolution. Every weakening of the enemy is tantamount to a strengthening of our forces."

With Lenin's backing for the proposal, Zetkin set out to convince the sections of the International of its value, but due to the sectarian opposition of the German and Bulgarian parties, the two parties with the largest women's organizations, the whole project fell through.

—"Feminism and the Marxist Movement," Mary-Alice Waters, October, 1972, *International Socialist Review*. Lenin and Zetkin quotes from Zetkin's *Recollection of Lenin* reprinted in *Lenin on the Emancipation of Women* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1968).

With their sectarian opposition to the feminist movement, the Spartacist League was ill-prepared to participate in the mass activity of the women's movement. Unlike Lenin, they fought at the February 11-13, 1972, Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) Conference to bar "the class enemy from the platform." They fought against and later completely abstained from a mass campaign to "repeal all anti-abortion laws." To this they *counterposed* the fight for "free abortion on demand," a good proposition that simply was not the issue at the time. SL preferred a pure propaganda campaign for free abortion on demand, rather than participation in the real motion and confrontation over legalizing abortion. In a country such as the United States, since the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, this has meant that abortion costs are covered by government social insurance and welfare programs and by many of the private medical plans that most U.S. workers and their families possess. This is not exactly free and there are currently reactionary attempts to eliminate abortions from Medicaid coverage, but legalization was a tremendous gain, nonetheless.

The fight for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was stalled by defeats of state ERAs in New York and New Jersey in 1975. *W&R*, Spring 1976, notes this in the article, "Reactionary Backlash Targets Women's Rights." What are women and their allies to do to fight this backlash? *W&R* counsels that armed with

the transitional program "of Trotsky and the Spartacist League" masses of women "will take up positions in the front lines of the class struggle." Meanwhile, what about actual struggles for the ERA and abortion rights, which revolutionists must participate in to win women to class-struggle politics? Spartacist neither participated nor called on women to march in the national demonstration in support of the ERA called by the National Organization for Women on May 16, 1976. Spartacist advocated no practical action by women to win the passage of state ERAs, such as in Massachusetts in November 1976.

Despite protestations, Spartacist throws the Transitional Program and the method of Lenin out the window. "Women's Liberation through Proletarian Revolution," says the Spartacist League. True, but general declarations such as this are not programs of action for women and their allies fighting for women's rights. In the United States these words have served as nothing other than the Spartacist excuse for abstention from the ongoing mass struggle for women's rights.

While Spartacist justifies most of its practice by a dogmatic rendering of previous practice in the communist movement, nowhere is its departure from previous practice so striking, or its policy so childish, as in its trade-union work. Based on its growth in the 1971-73 period, Spartacist "colonized" its comrades into a number of basic U.S. industries. There, over a period of time, these comrades established caucuses based on nothing less than the Transitional Program in full.

The construction of such "political caucuses" represents a complete break with the work of the SWP of the 1930s and 1940s, which the SL considers to have been revolutionary at that time. The SWP fractions in the unions sometimes made blocs with tendencies led by "progressive" bureaucrats. The goal of the SWP trade unionists was to create a broad class-struggle wing in the unions.

To explain this departure, SL Trade-Union Secretary Chris Knox in 1973 wrote a four-part series on "Trotskyist Work in the Trade Unions" (*Workers Vanguard*, nos. 25-28). Knox saw Cannon's position on trade-union work as insufficient. The SWP "called for principled united fronts and blocs around the immediate burning issues, together with vigorous party-building and maintenance of the party as an independent force, free to criticize its bloc partners, and always striving to play a leading role."<sup>36</sup> But, according to Knox, Cannon lacked any "conception of an organized pole for the recruitment of militants to the full party program for the trade unions, i.e., what the TUEL [Trade Union Educational League] had been during its period of greatest success (and before the Stalinist degeneration of the Communist International set in). It is not surprising, then, that the Trotskyists [including Trotsky—B. P.] never attempted to create anything like the TUEL, such as caucuses based on the Trotskyist Transitional Program, in the course of their trade-union work. What caucuses they did create had the character of temporary blocs, usually based on immediate, trade-union issues. This meant that the party itself, able to function openly only outside the unions, was the only organized pole for recruitment to the full program."

Thus Knox implies that Trotskyist recruitment was forestalled by not having a "political caucus" based on the complete Transitional Program operating in the unions. More serious, though, he argues that the sharp political questions of war and elections in the late 1930s could have been solved by full program caucuses! "When Tobin [head of the Teamsters] began to line up behind the war effort," says Knox, "the Trotskyists in Minneapolis opposed the war and won over the Central Labor Union, but they lacked the basis for a factional struggle in the union as a whole that a *political caucus orientation might have provided.*"<sup>37</sup> (My emphasis—B.P.)

36. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 25, July 20, 1973.

37. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 27, August 31, 1973.

One must remember in reading these words that they are written by the leader of trade-union work for a group that began to colonize its members in the unions only two years before! These childish suppositions of what might have been done by the gimmick of full-program caucuses have no basis in real work. (To see how real revolutionists carried on their union activity in good times and bad, read the four volumes on Teamster history by Farrell Dobbs. [Available from Pathfinder Press.]

#### What Full-Program Caucuses Have Meant in Practice

Knox presented his conceptions of how to implement the SL's modest trade-union work as follows: "Especially in the initial phases of struggle when the revolutionary forces are weak, it is necessary to make an independent pole as politically distinct as possible, so that the basis for future growth is clear. To this end, the SL calls for the building of caucuses based on the revolutionary transitional program."<sup>38</sup>

So "distinct" were these caucuses over the past five years that the SL managed to recruit—nationwide—three people into these caucuses, one of them being a former member of the SL. This was easily matched by the loss of colonized cadres who became demoralized over the isolated nature of SL activity.

Despite bureaucratic domination of the trade unions, the American labor movement is still democratic enough to allow isolated leftists to get up in union meetings and "make the record" on their favorite issues, so long as these declarations represent no real motion or threat to the officialdom. So the SL trade unionists have specialized in sterile "denunciations" of the bureaucrats and "making the record" by advocating "general strikes," and "Oust the bureaucrats—Build a workers party based on the trade unions," and other slogans.

Thus through tactics of denunciation, the SL avoids all the problems, of activating the rank-and-file workers in struggle against the employers. After a quarter-century of bureaucratic domination in the unions, few rank-and-filers have any experience of struggle, strike activity, and labor solidarity. SL proposals for action, as with their "third period" version of the labor party slogan, often demand that the rank and file oppose the union's official leadership as a precondition of action against the employers. As a result, SL proposals go nowhere. For internal consumption, the SL explains its difficulties by saying, "This is a bad period." But to serious militants, this is the best period in twenty-five years for activating the ranks of U.S. labor.

Sensible tactics, however, take the real problems of the labor movement into account. Revolutionists do not enter the unions to "make the record." The purpose of union activity is to educate the working class and organize it around its real tasks. Sterile denunciation of labor bureaucrats, when the forces for a head-on confrontation have not yet matured, do not aid this process.

While they are increasingly prepared to engage in struggle against the employers, most U.S. workers do not yet see the real role of the labor fakers. Making denunciation of or removal of the labor fakers a condition for struggle, as Spartacist does ("Oust the Bureaucrats—Build a Workers Party Based on the Trade Unions"), is nothing but a formula for self-isolation. In the process of real struggle against the employers, however, the pro-capitalist policies of the labor bureaucrats will be revealed—reliance on the promises of the Democratic party "friends of labor," willingness to sacrifice the needs of minorities, women, and youth, etc.

Sectarians like Spartacist do not understand this simple dialectic of real struggle and the way in which a new class-struggle leadership of the unions can be formed. The SL believes in the mystical power of denunciation. They raise demands in such a way that they are effectively isolated from the ranks and relegated to the status of mindless slogan-mongers.

Typical of SL slogan-mongering is its attitude toward the

challenge of Steelworkers Fight Back candidate Ed Sadlowski for president of the United Steelworkers of America (USWA). Sadlowski's challenge to the I. W. Abel regime reflects the radicalization of the ranks against the no-strike Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA) and the union's present "ratification" procedure, which deprives the membership of the right to reject a contract.

Sadlowski opposed the ENA, demanded the right of members to ratify all contracts, called for a shorter workweek, and denounced the bureaucracy's attempts to blame unemployment on imports and "illegal aliens." Yet with fine disregard for reality, the February 4, 1977, issue of *Workers Vanguard* said: "On not one single issue does Sadlowski break from the class collaborationism of the mainstream labor bureaucracy." (Emphasis in original.)

Previously, *Workers Vanguard* wrote approvingly of a leaflet distributed at a Sadlowski campaign meeting in Chicago by several Local 1014 "rank-and-file militants."<sup>39</sup> This leaflet charged that Sadlowski's program of union democracy was "borrowed chapter and verse from I. W. Abel's 1965 campaign against then-president McDonald!" *WV* then reported that instead of supporting the Steelworkers Fight Back challenge to the Abel regime, "these militants called for a class-struggle union leadership which would fight for a workers government."

The Spartacist League sees Sadlowski only as an individual and roundly denounces him as a faker. The SL fails, in grand "third period" style, to see the movement of workers that Sadlowski reflects and to develop an orientation toward these workers. For the SL, strident denunciation and the "fight for a workers government" are enough.

The SL ostensibly called for a boycott of the steel election: "Neither Sadlowski Nor McBride!" But as the campaign progressed, the SL position more and more dovetailed with that of the Meany-Abel-McBride bureaucracy. Like McBride, they attacked Sadlowski as the tool of "outsiders," "employers," and "establishment liberal warhorses." Like McBride, they shamelessly distorted Sadlowski's call for using technological advances to benefit the workers and charged him with seeking to eliminate jobs. Like McBride, the SL vehemently opposed Sadlowski's use of the courts to wrest democratic concessions from the bureaucracy as "undermining . . . the class independence of the trade unions."

It must have been a source of embarrassment to at least some SL trade unionists when the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* came out with a virtually identical stand—"neutral" for McBride by attacking Sadlowski's acceptance of outside contributions.

While some decent SL work in mobilizing the rank and file for action has been done in a hard-hit West Coast union, mainly owing to the unique capacities of the comrades involved, the balance sheet of five years of SL trade-union work is deplorable. The "caucuses" remain nothing but party fractions composed of the handful of comrades in a given plant. *Workers Vanguard* is filled with stories of fired and harassed union militants who most often have to wage a defensive campaign against the company without official union backing. Since the work of these militants too often confronted the bureaucracy headlong when the forces necessary for a head-on confrontation had not yet matured, SL trade-union comrades have become demoralized by years of sectarian posturing and have drifted toward committing, according to the SL leadership, "serious opportunist errors."

The balance of these five years of implantation was drawn by a special "Laterally Expanded West Coast CC Group" meeting in July 1976, which included the key national and international leadership of the SL. Under a report by James Robertson, titled "Drifting/Driving to Disaster in North America," the following motions were passed:

*Motion:* Noting the incapacity of the North American and Mid-Atlantic II<sup>40</sup> fractions and the retrograde character of the Midwest II Fraction, that

38. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 28, September 14, 1973.

39. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 132, November 5, 1976.

40. Intermediate Industry. Refers to SL fraction in a particular industry.

these comrades are absolutely banned from issuing written material over the next period on local issues and that their friends will only issue written propaganda on general questions that has originated elsewhere and passed through the TUC [Trade Union Commission]. . . . that given the weaknesses of our fractions only general passive propagandism be exhibited by us from inside the industry.

*Motion:* Given the failure and/or indiscipline of some of the recent operational leadership of our II fractions we not only hope the above motion embarrasses and damages them in their intended plant work but that it does in fact give them the necessary setback in their personal connections such that they may re-emerge at some date as better communists, and so that perhaps within the fractions a new and more stable, principled and balanced leadership will be facilitated in emerging.

Typical of bureaucrats, the SL leaders blamed their own failures on those who carried out the work, and initiated no evaluation of the policy the ranks were to carry out. Foremost among these are Knox's "full program" caucuses and the SL's tactic of "straight-out denunciation and completely independent struggle."<sup>41</sup>

This same meeting reduced the SL's Los Angeles local to the status of an organizing committee (OC), which means that all its activities must first be cleared through the national office. The same action had been taken against the Detroit local at the previous Political Bureau meeting. These actions were the first of their kind for the SL/US. More clearly than anything else they point up the balance sheet of the SL's "transformation" inaugurated in 1971.

#### 'Class Struggle Defense': The PDC

Despite its years of sectarian practice, when the Spartacist League launched the Partisan Defense Committee in 1975, it asserted that the work of the PDC would be *non-sectarian*: "We champion *all* causes and defend *all* cases whose victorious outcome is in the interest of working people, irrespective of particular political views."<sup>42</sup> And "we are for the solidarity of all workers and their allies around defense issues." The PDC stood, it said, on the "heritage" of the "International Labor Defense under its founder and first Secretary, James P. Cannon (1925-28)."

"Partisan" in the name of the PDC was intended to mean partisan "on the side of working people and their allies in their struggle against their exploiters and oppressors." But "Partisan" also had a different meaning. The PDC initially described itself as "the legal defense arm of the Spartacist League," then later corrected the formulation to read "The Partisan Defense Committee, in accordance with the political aims of the Spartacist League." For internal consumption the message was even clearer: "We want the PDC increasingly to behave like a party section in presenting an independent organizational face in the framework of complete solidarity with the SL."<sup>43</sup>

In fact what the SL created in the PDC was an arm of the party in the defense arena, in the same spirit in which it creates trade-union caucuses. The PDC, in its brief history, has carried out that task par excellence. In its first major work, the Philip Allen defense case,<sup>44</sup> the PDC made the profound sectarian error, later acknowledged by the SL and PDC leadership, of tying support to Philip Allen with defense of the Spartacus Youth League, which

was being victimized by the Los Angeles Community College (LACC) administration for its defense work on the Allen case. Next the SL's PDC fraction intervened in the National Lawyers Guild convention, February 13-16, 1976, in Houston. The purpose of the intervention was not to seek collaborative activities but rather to recruit to the PDC. WV writes: "Surely it is time for some members of the National Lawyers Guild to stop being the 'legal arm' of some class-collaborationist 'movement' and enter the struggle unequivocally on the side of the working class. Build the PDC, anti-sectarian class-struggle defense organization!"<sup>45</sup>

In its self-characterization as a "class-struggle defense organization" the PDC objected to the slogan, "Free All Political Prisoners." To this it counterposed the slogan, "Free All Class War Prisoners." Because of the confusion this created, during the campaign to free Chilean revolutionist Mario Muñoz, it was altered to "Free All Victims of Right-Wing Repression." Still, the new formula has its problems. Does the SL defend the victims of Stalinist repression? Some, the SL would answer. We wish them luck in encapsulating that distinction into their slogan.

When the SL launched the Mario Muñoz Defense Campaign, it violated its pledge to be "for the solidarity of all workers and their allies around defense issues." Instead of constituting a united-front defense committee of all those concerned with the rightist repression in Argentina, groups and individuals were merely asked to endorse the activities of the defense committee. This committee was a bloc between the PDC and the Europe-based Committee to Defend the Worker and Sailor Prisoners in Chile, a group of Chileans who were mainly supporters of the international Spartacist tendency (iSt). Since the PDC defined itself as a committee "whose policies are in accordance with the political views of the Spartacist League," there was no way to endorse the Muñoz campaign without supporting the SL. When challenged internally as to why they did not initiate a united-front campaign involving all opponents of political repression in Latin America, Spartacist leaders argued that "Mario Muñoz may be one of our own, and we aren't going to trust decisions over his life to USLA or anyone else."<sup>46</sup>

(Because the United States Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners (USLA) was founded in 1966 on what the SL characterized as the "class-neutral" demand, "Free All Political Prisoners," the SL refused to join USLA, even though in the ten years of its existence USLA never seemed to get confused about which side of the class line it was on in defending the victims of repression in Latin America.)

While the campaign to save Mario Muñoz is commendable, the sectarian posture of the SL and the PDC has inhibited its development into a broad united-front campaign for all the victims of the Argentine repression—Chileans, Uruguayans, Bolivians, Brazilians, and Argentinians. The PDC-sponsored demonstrations for Muñoz were sectarian flops. A key rally at the Argentine Mission to the United Nations in New York on June 19, 1976, drew seventy supporters, most of them members of the Spartacist League and tiny radical groups in New York smaller than the SL. These "red rallies," which often ended with the singing of the "Internationale" and speeches by SL representatives on the need for Trotskyist parties in Chile and Argentina, were hardly conducive to the construction of a broad, nonsectarian defense.

In an article on "lessons of the campaign," published after Muñoz won his freedom, and subtitled "USLA Redbaiting: Sectarian Sabotage Fails," the SL charged that USLA "adamantly opposes militant protests because of its exclusive reliance on

41. This is how James P. Cannon characterized the CP's third-period trade union work in "The Communists and the Progressives," the *Militant*, March 1, 1929.

42. Statement of PDC, July 15, 1975. Published in *Workers Vanguard*, no 74, August 1975.

43. "PDC and Local Defense and Legal Work," by Samuels, for the PDC, Party Builder, no. 1, published by the Central Office of the SL/US, August 1975.

44. Philip Allen is a Black youth who was framed up for killing a cop in Los Angeles in 1975.

45. "Identity Crisis in the Lawyers Guild," *Workers Vanguard*, no. 96, February 13, 1976.

46. George Foster, deputy national chairman, Boston local meeting. Notes of author.

47. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 123, September 3, 1976.

different' channels."<sup>47</sup> In fact, the PDC in the Muñoz campaign had to rely on "different" channels, such as the UN High Commission on Refugees and the European Social Democracy. This was far from its cherished vision of "militant" protest. What USLA opposes is not protest, but tiny sectarian rallies that do not lead in the direction of broadening the defense effort. USLA and others were unable to collaborate with the Committee to Save Mario Muñoz because the SL wanted not collaboration through a united-front committee, but a blank-check endorsement for the SL/PDC activity.

Spartacist's claim that the PDC stands on the heritage of the International Labor Defense and James P. Cannon is completely belied by the activities and statements of those in the Trotskyist movement who carried out the party defense work of the 1930s and 1940s under Cannon's direction. George Novack summed up the lessons of that work in his lecture, "Traditions and Guiding Ideas of the Socialist Workers Party in Defense Activity":

6. It is crippling and self-defeating for a defense case, committee and campaign to be conducted in a sectarian or exclusive manner. Appeals for support should be based, not upon agreement with the ideas or approval of the real or alleged acts of the defendants, but upon general civil liberties grounds. Care should be taken to point out how the issues at stake concern and affect the rights of others. Support should be solicited and welcomed from anyone willing to aid the defense on such a broad basis, regardless of their positions on other matters. The defense committee should stand ready to collaborate with other groups which have similar purposes in opposing violations of legal or human rights.

Spartacist originated as the Revolutionary Tendency in the SWP in 1961 "as a left opposition to the SWP Majority's uncritical line toward the course of the Cuban Revolution."<sup>48</sup> The RT saw as the central task of the SWP that "the Trotskyists should urge the workers [the Cuban workers—B.P.] to consciously struggle for democratic control over the government apparatus. . . ." <sup>49</sup> In its conception of the tasks of revolutionists in "defense" of the Cuban revolution, the RT made a bloc with the British SLL of Gerry Healy, which believes to this day that Cuba is a capitalist state. In a statement dated November 30, 1962,<sup>50</sup> the RT endorsed the line of "Defend the Cuban Revolution," a statement by the International Committee. This statement opposed "the setting up of Soviet missile bases [in Cuba—B.P.] as a substitute for international working-class struggle. . . ." Defense of the Cuban revolution means, according to the IC statement, "determined opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy and its methods."<sup>51</sup>

How were revolutionists in the United States and in other imperialist countries to defend the Cuban revolution? The RT indicates that the IC statement "should be the starting point of a campaign for international working-class solidarity with the Cuban revolution based on the establishment of workers' democracy in Cuba and full, open collaboration of the Cuban revolution with the international working-class movement in all phases, military as well as political, of revolutionary defense."

In other words, while the Cuban revolution was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against U.S. imperialism's attempts to overthrow it, the focus of solidarity work in the United States was to be not only a campaign to win the American people to the side of the Cuban revolution, it was to be a campaign to agitate for workers democracy in Cuba as well. What the RT would have liked is not just revolutionary criticism transmitted through the

publications and activity of a revolutionary international, an essential task, but the incorporation of this criticism into the program and activity of the Fair Play for Cuba Committees that were set up throughout the United States.

Lenin saw the tasks of revolutionists in the "oppressor" countries much differently than the RT:

Every party which wishes to join the Communist International is obliged to expose the tricks and dodges of "its" imperialists in the colonies, to support every colonial liberation movement not merely in words but in deeds, to demand the expulsion of their own imperialists from these colonies, to inculcate among the workers of their country a genuinely fraternal attitude to the working people of the colonies and the oppressed nations, and to carry on systematic agitation among the troops of their country against any oppression of the colonial peoples.<sup>52</sup>

The tasks that Lenin cited are those aimed against the "imperialist" nation; Lenin cited no obligation of the revolutionists in imperialist countries to "expose" the national movement and its leadership in the colonial countries. The tasks of revolutionists in the oppressor country and revolutionists in the oppressed country are different:

Is the position of the proletariat with regard to national oppression the same in oppressing and oppressed nations? No, it is not the same, not the same *economically, politically, ideologically, spiritually, etc.*<sup>53</sup>

Spartacist thinks otherwise. The SL raises the slogan of "Military Victory to the NLF (MPLA, ANC, etc.)" as the correct basis for solidarity movements in the United States in support of national-democratic movements struggling against imperialism. The formulation of "military victory to . . .," which the Trotskyist movement has never used historically, is intended by the SL to indicate some support to, but predominantly political criticism of, the leadership of the national liberation movements. Thus the SL wishes to merge the struggle against imperialism in the oppressor country with the struggle for the independence of the proletariat vis-à-vis bourgeois-nationalist and Stalinist leaderships in the oppressed nation. For Trotskyists, however, "military victory to . . ." is a *policy*, not a slogan of action, by revolutionists fighting alongside national movements against imperialism regardless of their leaderships. Of course, a world party would orient its section in the "oppressed" country toward correct methods of struggle, while demanding that its section in the "oppressor" country "expose the tricks and dodges of 'its' imperialists."

Spartacist, on Cuba, Vietnam, Angola, and now South Africa, tries to merge these distinct tasks in the work of a tiny "sub-propaganda" group in the United States. In practice, it forgets about the tasks the Communist International considered obligatory and focuses exclusively on criticism of the "national movement" struggling against U.S. imperialism.

The struggle by the MPLA in Angola against the imperialist-backed forces of the FNLA, UNITA, and South Africa opened up tremendous opportunities for solidarity work in the United States. African revolutionists, students, and workers resident in the United States were anxious to launch a solidarity campaign educating Americans about the maneuvers of U.S. imperialism in southern Africa. The American Maoist movement, which has traditionally collaborated with some of the African students and workers in the United States, defaulted completely, opening the way for solidarity work by Trotskyists. The Spartacist League approached these forces with proposals for united-front actions around the slogan, "Military Victory to the MPLA." Having seen

48. Preface to Marxist Bulletin no. 1, "In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective" by the Revolutionary Tendency. Originally published in SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol. 23, no.4, July 1962.

49. Ibid, p. 13.

50. "Declaration on the Cuban Crisis," by Robertson, Mage, & Others, SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol. 24, no. 18, May 1963.

51. "Defend the Cuban Revolution," Statement by the International Committee of the Fourth International, *Newsletter*, November 3, 1962. Reprinted in SWP Discussion Bulletin, vol. 24, no. 18, May 1963.

52. Excerpt from conditions of admission to the Communist International, which Lenin drafted and the second congress of the Comintern approved in August 1920. Printed in *The Communist International, 1919-1943*, Jane Degras, ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1956), p. 170.

53. Lenin, "The Nascent Trend of Imperialist Economy," August-September 1916, *Collected Works*, vol. 23 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964), p. 19.

the SL in action at conferences, they knew exactly what this meant: a solidarity campaign with an objective not of educating the American people about the imperialist designs of their own government, but rather a public forum criticizing the MPLA and other African national movements. The Africans approached by the SL rejected this approach and then carried on, after the SL excluded themselves.

With the upsurge in South Africa and the obvious tremendous impact that struggle will have on the Black population in the United States, the sectarianism of the SL becomes even more criminal. At a conference of the National Student Coalition Against Racism (NSCAR) in Boston, November 19-21, 1976, the Spartacist League was the only organization present to vote *against* the calling of international demonstrations against apartheid. When Tsietzi Mashinini, a leader of the student struggle in Soweto, received a standing ovation, Spartacists remained conspicuously seated and refrained from clapping, demonstrating in action that their criticism of the national-democratic movement drives them to abstain from the struggle against their own imperialist ruling class.

Why does the SL refuse to participate in and build these international demonstrations against apartheid? According to *Young Spartacus* (November 1976), they do not like the slogan, "No to apartheid, Black majority rule now." They want the solidarity movement in the United States to organize around "the necessity for the construction of a Trotskyist party in South Africa and for proletarian revolution." They do not like the call to "Boycott South Africa," because they "do not advocate an *unlimited* and total boycott of South Africa," which "would tend to increase black unemployment and consequently retribalization, thereby further crippling the capacity of black people to struggle." And finally, they do not like the demand to "Free all South African political prisoners." The SL counterposed to this the call for "freedom of all victims of apartheid repression," since there are "undoubtedly fascist political prisoners in Vorster's prisons," whom the SL would not like to see set free as a result of an international campaign to "free all political prisoners."

These are not just the arguments of a tendency disoriented about its tasks; these are the arguments of a sect consciously seeking justifications to keep itself out of participation in any real struggle against imperialism.

### The International Spartacist Tendency

Spartacist's recent transformation into the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) was based on an international transplant of its fundamental methodology: an inability to comprehend the difference between the general *revolutionary perspective* and the political program and slogans for action today.

For its inaugural venture in Europe, Spartacist adopted the position of never, as a matter of *principle*, calling for a vote for mass reformist parties if they are engaged in electoral blocs with capitalist or petty-bourgeois parties:

Normally, reformist workers' parties, such as the Socialist and Communist Party, have a dual character. Namely, on the one hand, they function as the political representatives of the working class, while on the other, they represent the political interests of the bourgeoisie. . . . However, when the CP or SP enter into an electoral bloc with a section of the bourgeoisie, this duality is suppressed formally and in practice, because the reformist parties then campaign and promise to govern on a common platform within the purely capitalist limits set by their overtly liberal-bourgeois allies. Thus in this situation there is no basis for the Leninist tactic of critical support to social-democratic and Stalinist parties.<sup>54</sup>

Why is this contradiction between the policy of the reformist party and the interests of its working-class base "suppressed"? Because Spartacist says so, that's all. In fact, an electoral victory of reformist parties pursuing a popular-front line can heighten these contradictions to the extreme and make possible the growth

of a revolutionary party through the struggle to break the reformist parties from their alliance with a section of the bourgeoisie. Spartacist admits such a development in the same article: "Thus the electoral victory of the Popular Front [France, 1936—B.P.] set off a tremendous expansion of the trade unions and an unprecedented wave of strikes, culminating in the general strike of May-June 1936." This was precisely why Trotsky recommended as a program for the working class in such a period, "Ask everything of your leaders."

When Lenin advised the British Communists to use the tactic of critical support to the Labour party, he did not bother to add the SL's qualifications, even though the British Labour party had been in and out of coalition governments with the bourgeoisie the entire previous decade. When the Groupe Bolchevik-Léniniste, one of several Trotskyist groups in France that merged in 1936 to form the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste (POI), called for a vote to the CP and the SP in the May 1936 elections, Trotsky, who was in France at the time, did not condemn this tactic, or write a polemic later against it. Spartacist thus throws away a vital tactic in the arsenal of Marxism. The only thing Spartacist learned from Trotsky was that popular fronts are roadblocks to the proletarian revolution; how they are to be removed, by what tactics and strategy, are hardly considered by the SL, which believes in the magical power of the tactic of "denunciation."

The pages of *Workers Vanguard* are filled with horror stories about the United Secretariat of the Fourth International. WV speaks of "scotch-tape unity," "rotten-bloc-ism," "federalism." Spartacist's call for the "Rebirth of the Fourth International" seems to imply that the only problem is birth. The SL does not expect the creature to grow up, to have growing pains, and to have problems of maturation. Despite its keen interest in the history of the Fourth International, Spartacist approaches the problem of the Fourth International ahistorically, as if all the Trotskyists had to do was read the SL's version of Trotsky's writings to figure everything out. In fact, the tremendous developments taking place in Europe and elsewhere raise not only all the old problems, many of which were not worked out *in life* by Trotskyist parties in the 1930s (none of which developed into mass parties), but new problems as well. It is only in the Fourth International that a serious worldwide discussion of the problems of revolutionary strategy and tactics is being carried out today.

And the fledgling iSt? Despite its historic "birth" in July 1974, this international formation had as of late 1976 not yet held either an international discussion or a delegated international conference. The iSt remains a *bloc* of the Central Committees of the Spartacist League of the U.S., the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand, and the Trotskyist League of Germany (TLD), with small groups in Canada, France, and Austria holding sympathizing status. The International Secretariat is made up of three Americans. Surely the iSt is learning some of the problems of constructing an international party. Its criticisms of the structure and problems of the Fourth International, however, are nothing but the remarks of a tiny international sect able to retain a superficial homogeneity because nowhere do its small national groups suffer the strains and endure the tests of real activity in the class struggle.

### Spartacist: An American Sect

But the difference must be clearly understood between the general *revolutionary perspective* which we must tirelessly develop in articles and in theoretical and propaganda speeches and the *current political slogan* under which we can, beginning today, mobilize the masses by actually organizing them in opposition to the regime of the military dictatorship. Such a *central political slogan* is the slogan of the *constituent assembly*.

—Trotsky, "A Reply to the Chinese Oppositionists," December 22, 1929<sup>55</sup>

"People accuse us of being sectarians," James Robertson reported proudly to a London audience in October 1976. "It is

54. "New Pop Frontism in France," *Workers Vanguard*, no. 17, March 1973.

55. *Leon Trotsky on China*, (New York: Monad Press, 1976), p. 427.

because we are committed to what we believe are the necessary, decisive principles of Trotskyism. . . .<sup>56</sup> Spartacist's commitment to a dogmatic rendering of Trotskyist principles goes so far that the SL, contrary to Trotsky, sloganized these principles into its program of action today. The result is that Spartacist, in its twelve years of existence, has maintained a consistent record of abstention from all mass activity in the United States.

Sectarianism can take many forms and can derive from different roots. There was the sectarianism of "third period" Stalinism with its opposition to united fronts and its policies of dual unionism. There was the sectarianism of some Trotskyists in the 1930s who opposed the policy of entry into mass Socialist parties with developing left wings.

The sectarianism of the Spartacist League has different roots. Spartacist emerged in the early 1960s when the Cuban revolution and the civil-rights struggle brought growing opportunities for political intervention by Marxists in the United States for the first time since the 1940s. Spartacist's founder, James Robertson, is a

product of this earlier period. Most of the rest of the SL's leading cadre are products of the radicalization of the Vietnam War-period after 1965. But all are people who were won to the SL's position of abstention from the antiwar movement because of its presumed "popular front" character. Thus Spartacist not only lacks continuity with those Trotskyists who engaged in mass activity in the 1930s and 1940s. Its leading members themselves have no practical experience whatsoever, and its membership was recruited to policies of abstention and revolutionary phrasemongering.

The construction of mass Trotskyist parties in the United States and around the world requires, as Trotsky explained, a practice that is shaped to "mobilize the masses by *actually* [my emphasis—B.P.] organizing them in opposition to the regime," and not a policy of sectarian abstention that sees in all mass activity only the specter of "popular frontism." Fortunately for revolutionists, the Socialist Workers party in the United States and the parties of the Fourth International around the world have begun that work. The transformation of these sections into mass revolutionary parties is the major task ahead.

56. *Workers Vanguard*, no. 133, November 12, 1976.

February 6, 1977

# How to Defeat Racist and Right-wing Attacks

## FROM MISSISSIPPI TO BOSTON

### The Demand for Troops to Enforce Civil Rights

Compilation. Should fighters for equal rights demand that the federal government enforce its own civil rights and desegregation laws in Boston? How has this demand aided the Black liberation movement in the past? How can this demand help build a mass movement that can defeat the racists? These are among the questions discussed. 32 pages, \$.75

## COUNTER-MOBILIZATION

### A Strategy to Fight Racist and Fascist Attacks

A discussion with Farrell Dobbs, long-time leader of the Socialist Workers Party and author of *Teamster Rebellion*, *Teamster Power*, and *Teamster Politics*. A review of the tactics of building a mass movement against racist and reactionary offensives. 24 pages \$.75

## THE FIGHT AGAINST FASCISM IN THE U.S.A.

### Forty Years of Struggle Described by Participants

By James P. Cannon, Farrell Dobbs, Vincent R. Dunne, Joseph Hansen, Malik Miah, and others. How should workers and oppressed nationalities defend their rights against racist and terrorist attacks? Why is a mass movement necessary for defense and how can such a movement be organized? Can workers rely on the government to protect their democratic rights? Should the opponents of racism and fascism call for denying free speech and other democratic rights to fascists or racists? 56 pages, \$1.35

These publications are part of the *Education for Socialists* series published in 8½x11 format by the National Education Department of the Socialist Workers Party.

Send all mail orders to Pathfinder Press, 410 West Street, New York, New York 10014. Complete, free catalog available on request.