

In Robertson They Trust... All Others Pay Cash **Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous**

Over the last several years Spartacist League *lider maximo* James Robertson has acquired a substantial material stake in his control of the finances of his group. At about the same time as the recent witchhunt in the New York local (see accompanying article), the SL undertook an internal fund-raising drive. Members were asked to make a special one-time contribution (over and above the extortionate sustaining pledge) to replenish organizational funds expended to buy Robertson a well-appointed house on a marina in the Bay Area, where he has lately taken to spending his summers. Although the house is technically the property of the organization, it is clearly intended for the personal use of Robertson, his family and an entourage which, in addition to the female sex groupies normally in attendance, has recently expanded to include an iSt member (female) whose chief assignment is to act as a full-time nursemaid for the guru's infant son. The purchase price of the house is reported to run into six figures and there are plans to invest almost as much again on improvements to the property.

This is, to our knowledge, the SL's most lavish expenditure on the whims of its founder-leader—but it is not the first. Adjoining his private office in the group's New York headquarters is a plush-carpeted playroom specifically designed for the nocturnal escapades that occupy an ever-increasing share of the National Chairman's attention. Robertson has also had a hot tub installed in his extensive, two-storied Manhattan apartment. All of these items were paid for with organizational funds and built by organizational labor. No one in the SL, moreover, dares to question these emoluments. Those with any misgivings are well aware from the examples set by periodic purges that to do so would invite similar treatment for themselves. Robertson's tolerance for advocates of "petty-bourgeois egalitarianism" in his supposedly revolutionary organization is roughly the same as Stalin's in Soviet Russia in the 1930's.

Lenin vs. Robertson

Bolsheviks have never been puritans or primitive egalitarians. We recognize the need for a full-time staff of professional revolutionaries who have time for important political work, free from the daily struggle for survival. In a revolutionary organization such individuals should be paid a living wage—approximately that of an average worker—and on that money be expected to support themselves and assume the normal financial responsibilities of every other member of the movement. The perks which Robertson has awarded himself, however, can by no stretch of the imagination be considered operational necessities for a revolutionary organization.

They belong in the realm of luxury consumption, bought with the money and labor of a rank-and-file often too heavily taxed to take a vacation or even buy a book, and frequently too overworked to read any books they might manage to buy. One only has to think of Lenin at the helm of the Soviet state, profusely apologizing for borrowing a volume from the library after closing time, waiting his turn in line to be seated at the opera or feeling guilty about receiving a bouquet of flowers at the hospital, to appreciate the flagrant and cynical disregard for proletarian morality on the part of a leader whose contributions have been, to say the least, of a somewhat lower order.

The degeneration of the Spartacist League was not caused by the material privileges of its leaders. Fifteen years ago Robertson lived very modestly and had only contempt for those ostensibly revolutionary leaders who traded on their prestige to enjoy the good life (see box on Huey P. Newton). The attempt to substitute his own authority for the collective political life of the SL (while maintaining the formal framework of internal democracy) was originally conceived of as a means of short-circuiting the development of revisionism—and specifically of avoiding the kind of damaging split suffered by the American Trotskyist movement in 1939-40. Yet history cannot be cheated, and Robertson's technique of launching "pre-emptive strikes" against potential oppositionists before they even raised any differences, ultimately led to the destruction of the SL as a revolutionary organization.

The present grotesque corruption and cynicism of the Robertson regime is the logical outcome of the erosion of any real democracy within the SL. A leader who comes to view himself as the sole repository of the revolutionary program leaves no room for the political peers whose critical evaluations and frank judgments provide the only mirror in which he can take an objective look at himself. Absent also are the politically clarifying contrasts of opposing views and tendencies. In the party of Lenin, the lowest-ranking member felt free to address his leader as an equal. In "Jimstown" the leader's most highly placed subalterns must think twice about offending him before they speak. Surrounded by yea-sayers and sycophants, the leader's correct political judgments gradually become indistinguishable from his errors, and political questions as a whole begin to merge with subjective whims and appetites. Of he who must answer only to himself, all is permitted. Down this road lie the fancy summer retreats, plush-carpeted orgy rooms, hot tubs and—to protect these privileges—the organizational methods of a political bandit. ■