

On SL/PDC 'Brigade' for Kabul

Fake-Trotskyists Make Fake Offer

Reprinted below is a letter from the Bolshevik Tendency to the Spartacist League regarding a proposal by the SL's Partisan Defense Committee to organize a combat brigade for Afghanistan:

16 March 1989

Comrades:

The rather bizarre letter from the Partisan Defense Committee (PDC) to Najibullah's Washington ambassador offering to organize an international brigade to Kabul (*Workers Vanguard* 17 February) is notable for the utter unreality of the proposal. We presume that the masterminds of the PDC/SL intended their offer to the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) as a spectacular (but cheap) method of sidling up to the "tankies" in the disintegrating West European Communist Parties. From a military standpoint there is no reason to imagine that even the combined might of both the Spartacist League and the Partisan Defense Committee could appreciably affect the balance of forces in Afghanistan. Apparently the PDPA reached the same conclusion.

The SL leadership's treatment of the Partisan Defense Committee as an all-purpose "mass" organization capable of taking significant initiatives in the international class struggle has a decidedly fictitious quality. It is hardly a secret that the PDC is essentially the SL/US in suit and tie. Yet some of your members seem genuinely disoriented by this ludicrous posturing. At your 24 February forum in Berkeley, SL supporters estimated that the PDC could mobilize between one and ten thousand (!) participants for such a venture. In Toronto on March 8, a Spartacist member announced at a public class that the PDC could probably have recruited a couple of thousand members for its brigade from Pakistan and India! The Spartacist League used to criticize the Healyites ruthlessly for creating illusory, self-contained Potemkin Villages. Today it is engaged in the same kind of fakery.

Even if we ignore for the moment the absurdity of the PDC's pretensions of playing a significant military role in Afghanistan, the whole orientation to the Afghan government is sharply at variance with any claim to Trotskyism. The proposal explicitly states that the PDC "Volunteers would of course operate under your [Republic of Afghanistan] control and direction." Quite apart from the dangers posed by the extremely unfavorable military and political situation created by Gorbachev's ignominious pull-out, it could have proved extremely physically hazardous for young militants (or guilt-ridden ex-members) identified with a "Trotskyist" organization to place themselves under the "control and direction" of the PDPA—a Stalinist organization with a history of bloody purges within its own ranks. *Workers Vanguard* compares the PDPA leadership with Kemal Ataturk: let us remind you of the fate of the Turkish

communists at his hands.

The proposed expedition to Kabul recalls the SL's offer of a dozen "defense guards" to protect the Democratic Party Convention in 1984. That too was a proposal which was meant to be rejected. There is a certain cynicism evident in such publicity stunts. The difference between the two situations is that the PDPA and the secular residents of Kabul are in genuine physical danger, whereas Mondale, Wallace et. al. were *not*, as we pointed out at the time (see *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*, No. 4).

You spent most of the last decade "hailing" the Soviet bureaucracy's Afghanistan policy. This same bureaucracy is now bitterly de-nounced for "cold-blooded betrayal." Yet *WV* (17 February) still ludicrously refers to Moscow's intervention as "the one unambiguously decent and progressive act" which the CPSU oligarchs carried out in the past twenty years. While Trotskyists sided militarily with the Soviet army against the mujahedeen, just as we today militarily support Naji-bullah's troops, by now the ambiguity of the Soviet intervention should be clear even to your most dim-witted member. The reason that it must still be praised as "unambiguously decent and progressive" is that James Robertson, your *lider maximo*, has put his imprimatur on the non-Trotskyist slogan of "Hail Red Army!," a slogan which, if nothing else, is unambiguous in its expression of confidence in the policies of the Soviet rulers.

In a nod to objective reality, the *WV* article reiterates this earlier (1980) comment:

"Of course, the conservative bureaucrats in the Kremlin did not send 100,000 troops into Afghanistan to effect a social revolution, but simply to make secure an unstable, strategically placed client state....It is possible the Kremlin could do a deal with the imperialists to withdraw..."

How are *WV* readers supposed to reconcile this with the assertion, on the same page, that the Soviet intervention went "against the grain of the reactionary Stalinist dogma of 'socialism in one country'"? As we remarked in our letter of 8 April, this is:

"...on its face, simply stupid. Was Stalin 'going against the grain' of Stalinism when he intervened in Finland in 1939? Or when he decided to expropriate the East European bourgeoisie after the war? Of course not. On another level though this formulation is perhaps not so accidental. Those who despair of the historic possibility of the working class, led by a conscious Trotskyist vanguard, intervening to change the world have often in the past looked to one or another alternative agency for social progress. This is the political significance of your inclination to 'hail' the Stalinist bureaucracy and identify yourselves with Andropov et al."

As you know, Brezhnev reportedly had to personally override very considerable opposition at the top of the CPSU to initiate what you consider to have been the "unambiguously decent and progressive act" of military intervention in Afghanistan. With this in mind, perhaps

you might have wanted to dub your hypothetical international expeditionary force the “Leonid Brezhnev Brigade.”

Those comrades in the international Spartacist tendency who are serious about the urgent necessity to struggle to establish Trotskyism as a mass current in the international proletariat must break from the cynical

posturing of the Robertson gang and join with the Bolshevik Tendency in the struggle for the Rebirth of the Fourth International—World Party of Socialist Revolution.

Fraternally,
Bolshevik Tendency