

International Trotskyist Regroupment **We Go Forward!**

The recent fusion of three Trotskyist organizations from North America, New Zealand and Germany to form the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) is a breakthrough in the necessary process of international revolutionary regroupment. A communist propaganda nucleus, no matter how correct its program, must either grow or die; this regroupment has shown the determination and capacity of Trotskyism to grow. It is a small but crucial step toward the rebirth of the Fourth International.

In May, the North American-based Bolshevik Tendency fused with the Permanent Revolution Group (PRG) of New Zealand at a joint conference in Oakland, California. This unified tendency then joined forces in August with the comrades of the former Gruppe IV. Internationale based in West Berlin, following extensive consultations in that city.

With this regroupment, each of the three organizations broke out of its geographical isolation to become subordinate sections of a genuine international current, the International Bolshevik Tendency, which is unique in upholding the Trotskyist program of workers revolution internationally in this period of global reaction. *1917* will from now on be the international organ of the tendency.

Although our organization is small and confined wholly to advanced capitalist countries, the forces that shape its program and preserve its revolutionary integrity are international. A democratic-centralist international provides important checks and counterbalances to the deforming pressures of specific national environments. The North American, New Zealand and German sections of the IBT have real, if modest, roots in three different parts of the world; none has a preponderance of either membership or leadership.

The basis of our fusions—and the strength of our tendency—is our common understanding of the program of socialist revolution. If our three groups had been unrelated phenomena, products of merely local processes or of chance, it is highly unlikely that we could have achieved this unity through a few months of intense political discussions. But the three organizations were always closely related. The program and many of the central cadres of each of the components of the fusion were shaped by a common international political history. There is a sense in which this regroupment merely gives organizational expression to a pre-existing programmatic reality.

The Struggle for Revolutionary Continuity

All three groups have a common origin in the international Spartacist tendency (iSt—which recently renamed itself the International Communist League, ICL). Revolutionary organizations, both great and small, have almost always issued from the disintegration and de-

generation of pre-existing formations. The Third International was built by adherents of the Second International who revolted against the latter's infamous betrayal in World War I. Most of the early adherents of the movement for the Fourth International were communists who had opposed the Stalinization of the Comintern from within.

In the period following the Second World War, the Trotskyist movement was undermined by Pabloism, a new form of revisionism, which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the Fourth International. But the revolutionary traditions upon which the Fourth International stood were not obliterated. Revolutionary currents emerged from the remnants of the Trotskyist movement which struggled to reverse the process of degeneration. Those struggles against revisionism were often partial and sometimes badly flawed, but they nonetheless represented vital links in the chain of revolutionary continuity. The American Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the initiator of the International Committee of the Fourth International (an ephemeral anti-revisionist international center), played a leading role in the struggle to defend the historical necessity for Trotskyist parties against the Pabloist liquidators.

In the early 1960s the qualitative degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) of the United States produced a factional opposition committed to the defense of a revolutionary perspective, out of which emerged the Spartacist League (SL). In the 1970s the SL won over enough subjectively revolutionary groups and individuals to launch the international Spartacist tendency. From the 1960s until the late 1970s the Spartacists, led by James Robertson, were the sole grouping with a consistently revolutionary program.

Each of the three founding groups of the International Bolshevik Tendency is a product of this history of struggle for anti-revisionist Marxist politics, and most immediately of the Spartacist tendency. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Spartacists themselves underwent a process of political degeneration. Each of the components of the IBT was founded by former Spartacist cadres who were victims of one or another of the bureaucratic purges that disfigured the iSt's internal life during this period.

Each group was committed to the revolutionary communist program promulgated by Marx and Engels, elaborated and put into practice by Lenin and Trotsky, codified by the first four Congresses of the Communist International, further developed by Trotsky's Fourth International and defended by the Spartacist tendency prior to its descent into political banditry. Each was determined to uphold that program against pretenders to the Trotskyist heritage, from the impressionistic tailism of Ernest Mandel's United Secretariat (USec), to the classical centrism of the League for a Revolutionary

Communist International (LRCI, the international tendency associated with the British Workers Power grouping) to the leader-cultism of the U.S. Spartacist League and its foreign subsidiaries.

Despite common political backgrounds, a protracted process of discussion was necessary to sort out political differences and ensure that unity was achieved on a principled basis. The small size and limited finances of the organizations made international contact difficult; preliminary discussions were therefore more prolonged than they would have been with greater resources or closer geographical proximity. Yet all three parties to the fusion embraced the iSt's early fight for revolutionary Marxism and renounced its later betrayals. Bringing together all comrades who share this understanding is an important first step to the reforging of the Fourth International.

The Necessity of Revolutionary Regroupment

The Spartacist tendency has a special significance for us because its history and programmatic development are a crucial part of our political capital. This is a tradition we unreservedly, although not uncritically, embrace. But we do not live in the past. Our job today is to build the core of an international revolutionary party, and that requires programmatic struggle with those centrist or revisionist organizations which, by claiming to be revolutionary, divert subjective revolutionaries from authentic Marxist politics.

While opponent organizations such as the LRCI or the Spartacists will not come over as a whole to revolutionary politics, they remain contradictory phenomena. It is important to win sections of the experienced cadres of our centrist opponents, in part, to facilitate more decisive splits among the centrists, and also to accelerate the necessary process of political realignment in the international left. Experienced cadre of other organizations will also form an invaluable component of the IBT in the future. The capacity to offer revolutionary leadership does not come from nowhere; it is only acquired through the experience of collective practical and theoretical work.

For fifteen years prior to its degeneration, the Spartacist tendency was the only revolutionary Trotskyist organization in the world. But by the late 1970s, James Robertson, the Spartacist founder/leader began to substitute his personal authority for democratic-centralist norms. This process eventually led to a series of debilitating purges directed primarily against Spartacist cadres who were perceived by Robertson as potential internal opponents, i.e., anyone capable of independent political thought or organizational initiative. The purges were designed to abort any potential internal opposition. But they were also intended to destroy the personal and political reputations of the individuals targeted, and to drive them out of revolutionary politics altogether.

These early purges became prototypes for a host of similar heretic burnings that followed with increasing regularity in subsequent years, turning the iSt into a lifeless obedience cult. The erratic political zigzags and bizarre stunts that have marked Spartacist public activ-

ity over the past decade are the direct result of the subordination of the iSt/ICL to the whims of a single, megalomaniacal leader. But the existence of the International Bolshevik Tendency in three parts of the world confirms James P. Cannon's observation that:

"The ideas of Marxism, which create revolutionary parties, are stronger than the parties they create, and never fail to survive their downfall. They never fail to find representatives in the old organizations to lead the work of reconstruction."

—*First Ten Years of American Communism*

The "Logan Question" in the Spartacist Tendency

The founders of the New Zealand Permanent Revolution Group, Bill Logan and Adaire Hannah, were the victims of the most hysterical witchhunt and sordid frame-up in the history of the iSt. Logan was the National Chairman of the Spartacist League of Australia and New Zealand (SL/ANZ) from 1972 to 1977. Hannah, then his companion, was the National Secretary. Under their leadership, the SL/ANZ grew from a handful of relatively inexperienced youth into the strongest Spartacist section outside the U.S. In 1977 the couple was transferred to London at the behest of the Spartacist international leadership, where they were instrumental in winning an important layer of cadres from opponent organizations, and launching the Spartacist League/Britain (SL/B).

But Logan and Hannah were scarcely in London a year before they became targets of a mounting campaign of petty criticism by Robertson & Co. These attacks eventually led to their ouster from the leadership of the British section. Logan and Hannah were then transferred to New York under a cloud of suspicion. While performing routine organizational tasks in the group's New York headquarters, the Robertson leadership began the process of "reevaluating" their record in Britain and particularly in Australia. This led to an emotional explosion at the January 1979 Australian summer camp, where the ranks were encouraged to "speak bitterness" about their experiences under their former leadership. Logan and Hannah were accused of a host of "betrayals," "abuses" and "crimes" during their tenure as leaders of the SL/ANZ, which had ended two years earlier.

The process culminated in the "trial" of Bill Logan at the Spartacists' first and only international conference at Colchester, England, in August 1979. A hysterical atmosphere was created, as delegates were subjected to endless anti-Logan diatribes by the Spartacist leadership and "disabused" former comrades primed for the occasion. The whole procedure was full of irregularities: Logan was denied counsel in presenting his case, and the organization refused to provide Hannah, his only witness, with any financial assistance to attend. Needless to say there was plenty of money available to fly in hostile witnesses. Everyone in the organization knew that the results of the trial were a foregone conclusion.

In expelling him from the Spartacist tendency, the trial body declared that:

"Bill Logan is a proven, massive liar and a sexual sociopath who manipulated the private lives of comrades

for reasons of power politics and his own aberrant appetites and compulsions in the guise of Marxism. His crimes are against communist morality and its substrate elementary human decency... he cannot be and should never have been a member of a working-class organization..."

Ten days after Logan's expulsion, when Adaire Hannah attempted to resign from the organization in protest, she was told that the Colchester conference had terminated her membership. Yet the Spartacist leadership had previously told her that there was no reason for her to attend the conference, as she was *not* on trial. Not only was she denied the opportunity to defend herself, she was not even told why she was expelled.

While both the North American BT and the PRG had always held that the Logan trial was a frame-up on the whole, ambiguities remained. During the trial and the process leading up to it, the accused couple's undiminished loyalty to the Spartacist tendency prevented them from grasping the enormity of the fraud perpetrated against them, and hence from defending themselves as forcefully as they could. Robertson took great pains to involve the maximum number of members in the purge to make the guilt of Logan and Hannah an article of faith among his followers. A number of current members of the IBT, then iSt members, believed the substance of the charges against Logan, and joined in the chorus of condemnation at Colchester. Others had private misgivings, but viewed the whole affair as a falling out among bureaucrats.

Robertson's Star Pupils

The matter was complicated by the fact that charges against Logan contained certain distorted and exaggerated elements of truth. One major item in pre-fusion discussions was to separate the truth from the lies. This was necessary to clear the record and prevent the repetition of similar mistakes.

We arrived at the following conclusions: the Logan regime in the SL/ANZ was in fact bureaucratic. A commandist leadership style, a punishing work schedule and lack of consideration for members' individual needs seriously marred the group's internal life. But these methods were neither peculiar to, nor invented by, Bill Logan and Adaire Hannah. They were similar in quality to practices that were current in a number of Spartacist locals during those years, and that rapidly became the norm for the organization as a whole. Experienced SL cadres from the U.S. took up residence in Australia during Logan's tenure, and participated fully in the leadership of the section without noticing anything amiss. Other top leaders, including Robertson himself, had visited the section and talked to the membership. Not only did they approve of what they saw, but they held up the Logan regime as a model for the rest of the organization. The leaders of fledgling national sections were frequently advised to "do it like Bill and Adaire." Logan and Hannah's role in undermining democratic centralism in the Spartacist tendency was inextricably connected to their self-conception, fulsomely endorsed by the New York leadership, that they were the star pupils and most able practitioners of the Robertson

school of party building.

The SL/ANZ regime, for all its problems, was run solely in the interests of furthering the political goals of the Spartacist tendency. The allegations made at the 1979 trial, that Logan was an evil genius who routinely interfered in the sexual lives of members to gratify his bizarre sadistic urges, were never anything more than malicious invention on the part of Robertson and his acolytes. In fact, nearly all the incidents cited as proof of Logan's "moral turpitude" were well known to the Spartacist leadership years before the anathema was pronounced at Colchester. Not an eyebrow was raised in New York at the time. Only later, when Robertson decided to get rid of Logan, were certain events seized upon and embellished to depict the former leader of the SL/ANZ as a Svengali. This is the only conclusion that an impartial examination of the documentary record can sustain.

Why, then, did the iSt engineer a frame-up of two of its most capable leaders? The answer is that Logan and Hannah were far *too* capable for Robertson's liking. They had assumed the leadership of the SL/ANZ in 1972 with a mimeograph machine and a membership that could be counted on one hand; when they departed for London five years later, they left behind them an organization five times its original size, with a stable core of leading cadres, a regular monthly press, promising trade-union work and a solid reputation on the Australasian left.

During their brief tenure as leaders of the Spartacist League/Britain, Logan and Hannah once again demonstrated their aptitude for party building. Within a year, under their leadership, the Spartacist operation in Britain had quadrupled in size, and had recruited some extremely talented and capable cadres from the centrist left. Had this rate of growth continued, it was possible that the SL/B would have become larger than its parent organization in the U.S.

Even though there were no significant political differences between them, Robertson began to regard Logan as a potentially formidable internal opponent, one who might be able to carry a sizeable minority, or perhaps even a majority, of the tendency with him in the event of a dispute. Adaire Hannah was Logan's closest political and personal associate. It was not their failures, but their successes, that made Logan and Hannah suspect in Robertson's eyes, and caused them to become two of the earliest victims of the pre-emptive strikes that were to claim many of the Spartacists' best and brightest in the ensuing years.

The purge of Logan and Hannah was followed by a series of traumatizing and largely apolitical authority fights which all but destroyed the SL/B (see "Whither Britain?" *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* No. 1, August 1983). The SL/B is, to this day, a shadow of its former self.

The Permanent Revolution Group

The most cogent refutation of the Spartacist slanders against Logan and Hannah, however, is their political record since their expulsion. Despite their bitter experience, and unlike so many members of the '68 generation who have drifted into the social-democratic camp or out

of politics, Logan and Hannah have spent the past decade establishing a foothold for revolutionary Trotskyism in New Zealand. They recruited three talented people from the orbit of the Socialist Action League (now called the Communist League, New Zealand affiliate of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party, led by the American ex-Trotskyist and idiosyncratic reformist, Jack Barnes). Then, through an entry into the Socialist Alliance, a politically diffuse leftist umbrella group, they succeeded in winning a few young radicals to a caucus based on the Trotskyist program.

The Permanent Revolution Group (PRG) has since intervened in New Zealand's feminist, gay and unemployment movements on the basis of Marxist class-struggle politics. It has also established a fraction on the university campus in Wellington. It recently made national headlines in New Zealand with its expulsion from the New Labour Party, a left-reformist split-off from the extremely right-wing social-democratic Labour Party (see article elsewhere in this issue).

Prior to the fusion, a founding member of the Bolshevik Tendency made an extended visit to Wellington, where he was able to participate fully in the political and social life of the PRG. He found an organization with politics identical in all important respects to those of the North American BT. He also discovered an organization with a thoroughly democratic internal regime, free of the deformations characteristic of the Spartacist tendency, yesterday and today.

The 1981 Purge of the TLD

After the PRG/BT fusion in Oakland in May, representatives of the new group went to Europe for discussions with the Gruppe IV. Internationale of West Germany, an organization which was an indirect product of a 1981 purge of the iSt's German section, the *Trotzkistische Liga Deutschlands* (TLD). The history of the TLD recapitulated the pattern set by the expulsion of Logan and Hannah: early successes in recruiting overseas cadres to the Spartacist tendency, followed by a New York-engineered housecleaning when an international affiliate began to develop a political life of its own. Unlike Robertson's pre-emptive strike against Logan in the SL/B, the TLD purge at least had a political pretext: the application of the Trotskyist position on the "Russian Question" to the rapidly developing situation in Poland in the autumn of 1981.

When Solidarnosc first led a series of strikes against the Polish government in 1980, its political character was not yet determined. The iSt provisionally supported the original strike at the Gdansk shipyard, which created Solidarnosc. But when Solidarnosc definitively passed over to the side of counterrevolution at its September 1981 congress, the iSt withdrew its support and correctly called for spiking Solidarnosc's counterrevolution. This occasion was also used as a cover for destroying the last remnants of political independence within the TLD, and its subordination to the bureaucratic-commandist Robertson regime.

A select team of Robertson loyalists, dispatched to Germany for the TLD's September 1981 conference, de-

manded that the TLD pass a motion pledging to "take responsibility in advance for whatever idiocies and atrocities they [the Soviet army] may commit" in the course of a possible intervention. A future leader of Gruppe IV. Internationale put forward a counter-motion, which stated that, while the TLD would indeed side militarily with the Soviet Stalinists in a confrontation with Solidarnosc, it would take "no responsibility for acts of an anti-proletarian character" on the part of the Russian army.

The counter-motion was fully consistent in its thrust with the historic Trotskyist position on the defense of deformed and degenerated workers states; the Spartacist International Executive Committee resolution, which the leadership was successful in forcing on the German section, represented a serious Stalinophilic deviation. As the External Tendency of the iSt (forerunner of the BT) wrote in 1983:

"Trotskyists give unconditional *military* support to Stalinist regimes battling internal counterrevolution (i.e., Solidarnosc) or external capitalist forces... This is quite a different matter than extending *political* support to the Stalinists. We take *no* responsibility for the crimes of the Stalinists against the working people—whether in the course of the military defense of proletarian property forms or otherwise. Military support is extended *despite* such crimes."

—*Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* No. 1

An article on Poland published during the same month in the Spartacist's main press organ, *Workers Vanguard*, implicitly backed away from the position that had been forced down the throats of the TLD:

"Solidarity's counterrevolutionary course must be stopped! *If the Kremlin Stalinists, in their necessarily brutal, stupid way, intervene militarily to stop it, we will support this.* And we take responsibility in advance for this; whatever the idiocies and atrocities they will commit, we do not flinch from defending the crushing of Solidarity's counterrevolution."

—*Workers Vanguard*, 25 September 1981, emphasis in original

Despite the ambiguity of this passage, it suggests that the Spartacists proposed to take responsibility for siding with the Soviet army *in spite of* its crimes, rather than for the crimes themselves. Thus the Spartacist leadership cynically enunciated two different lines on a possible Soviet intervention in Poland: an orthodox-sounding line for public consumption, and a Stalinophilic internal line, designed exclusively to rid the TLD of comrades reluctant to snap to attention at Robertson's command. Despite the fact that the Spartacist leaders knew that the internal resolution was publicly indefensible, it served its purpose as a loyalty test to purge the section.

The Gruppe IV. Internationale, founded in February 1983, was led by former TLD comrades who had proved insufficiently malleable. An early public statement by this group is sufficient to counter the Spartacist charges that it was motivated by anti-Sovietism:

"The Russian Question is the pivot of revolutionary policy at the present time.

"Without the *unconditional military* defense of the deformed workers' states against imperialism and internal counterrevolution, you cannot raise the fight to over-

throw your own bourgeoisie. We have to extend Karl Liebknecht's slogan that the main enemy is at home by taking sides unambiguously for the deformed workers' states in case of a military showdown. These positions depend on each other, because the historic interests of the working class to fight against the bourgeoisie and to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat imply the duty to defend the social foundations built up by the successful October Revolution in the USSR, as a historic gain of the international working class. The overthrow of one's own bourgeoisie is the best defense of the Soviet Union as well as the defense of the USSR is an unalterable precondition to overthrow the bourgeoisie."

—*Where is the iSt Going?*, emphasis in original

A subsequent pamphlet, *Program First!*, reaffirmed the principled Trotskyist positions on the major international questions that faced the left during the 1980s, including Poland, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. These programmatic statements contain a clear line of demarcation from reformist and centrist pseudo-Trotskyist groups, while avoiding the Stalinophilic tilt evident in SL propaganda. Gruppe IV. Internationale intervened in the West German peace movement, the women's movement, the anti-fascist movement and in major struggles of the trade unions. The organization sought to confront various ostensibly Trotskyist groups in order to regroup subjective revolutionaries among them. It also intervened energetically in the crisis of the German Democratic Republic in the winter of 1989-90.

While in the past there have been differences on certain questions of historical analysis and methodology, we have always been extremely close in our understanding of the main programmatic positions necessary to advance the interests of the working class. For the past seven years the Bolshevik Tendency and the Gruppe IV. Internationale pursued political discussions, while maintaining comradely relations and undertaking some limited practical work together.

Resolution of an Anomaly

It was anomalous that two organizations so close politically should remain organizationally separate; the anomaly was sharpened with the transfer of comrades from the North American BT to Germany. The intervention of both groups in German political life at a time of historic social and political crisis required that both sides give urgent attention to resolving this contradiction.

One of the most significant differences was over the assessment of the Spartacists. The BT, viewing the activity of the SL on its North American home turf, characterized it as an increasingly bizarre and cultist organization, whose political gyrations defied standard political categories. The Gruppe IV. Internationale considered the iSt badly flawed and highly bureaucratized, but still formally revolutionary.

Important political crises frequently expose the underlying character of political formations. The ICL's activity in the crisis of the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in late 1989 and early 1990 sharply revealed the fundamental nature of the Spartacist operation. With prodigious infusions of members and cash, the Spartacists founded a new German section, the Spartakist-*Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands*, which briefly made significant gains. These were soon squandered as a result of heavy-handed interventions from New York. Moreover, the Spartacist intervention was badly flawed by political adaptation to sections of the Stalinist bureaucracy, and by the absurd claim that the DDR was in the midst of a "workers political revolution."

The character of the Spartacist intervention in this crisis made it obvious that the ICL could not be considered a revolutionary organization, but rather an obstacle to revolution. While the characterization of the ICL is not a principled question, and was never seen by either side as an insurmountable obstacle to unity, it was a difference that was important for international tactical perspectives. With its resolution, it was possible to move to a close agreement on the tasks of revolutionaries, and thence to fusion.

We Go Forward!

The regroupment was consolidated when the former North American BT comrades joined with the former Gruppe IV. Internationale members to found the Gruppe Spartakus, the German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency. The name is drawn from the finest revolutionary internationalist traditions of the German working class, the traditions of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

The formation of the Gruppe Spartakus, as the German section of an international Trotskyist propaganda nucleus, is of great significance at this historical juncture. Germany today is an immense industrialized country, standing on the brink of enormous social conflicts. It is also the world's fastest-rising imperialist power, and occupies a central political/economic position in a chaotic Europe.

The International Bolshevik Tendency is conscious of its responsibility as a bearer of the historic lessons of the workers movement, codified in the early years of the Communist International and the subsequent struggle of the Left Opposition under Trotsky, to preserve and carry forward the Bolshevik tradition. We are proud of the preparatory work undertaken by each of the components of the IBT over the last few years. The launching of the IBT is, in an important sense, both a new beginning, and a continuation, of the struggles of revolutionaries who have preceded us. ■