

‘I Liked Gerry Healy...’ The Robertson School of Party Building

The dust is just beginning to settle after the biggest (and dirtiest) explosion in recent memory among the international pretenders to Trotskyism: the spectacular rupture of the British Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). Gerry Healy, “founder-leader” of the WRP, and Michael Banda, his long-time majordomo, had a rather nasty public falling out late last October. Banda got the bulk of the membership, the real estate and the printing plant; Healy kept the Redgraves (movie stars Vanessa and brother Corin) and with them what’s left of the WRP’s main “industrial” fraction—in Actor’s Equity. They even split the satellites; the Americans opted for the mutineers, while the Greeks and Spaniards stayed on with the infallible leader.

The whole business began last July when Banda and Aileen Jennings, Healy’s personal secretary and “close personal companion,” initiated a palace coup with allegations that Healy’s sexual activities with 26 female party members represented a potential security risk for the organization. (This in itself is richly ironic as Healy has been for years one of the world’s foremost practitioners of a bogus “security” fetishism as a means for smearing his political opponents.) Healy reportedly acquiesced and proffered his resignation from the group’s active leadership, officially on the grounds of his long service and failing health.

He spent the first few weeks of his “retirement” lining up a majority of the WRP’s Political Committee for a counterattack. Banda appealed to the Central Committee (where he apparently still had a secure majority) and immediately expelled Healy. He followed this up by publishing a lurid account of Healy’s allegedly abusive sexual exploits, and other bureaucratic misdeeds, in *Newsline*, the WRP’s ex-daily. Healy’s supporters regrouped and soon came out with their own *Newsline* which announced Banda’s expulsion from Healy’s WRP. As the polemic heated up both sides accused the other of “revisionism” and traded accusations of “subjective idealism,” “pragmatism” and various other epithets from the lexicon of obscurantist pseudo-dialectics which have long been a WRP speciality. But there was really only one issue: who was to rule the roost at the WRP’s Clapham headquarters.

Banda’s spectacular revelations of Healy’s sexual malfeasance received considerable play from Fleet Street and seems to have sparked interest in the goings-on in the WRP among many who don’t normally pay much attention to such things. Sales of *Newsline* are reported to have tripled during the height of the mud-slinging. More surprisingly, a WRP candidate for president of the powerful Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers polled a whopping 15,000 votes during the

week the scandal broke. Brian Behan, brother of the Irish author Brendan, and a former leading member of Healy’s outfit who left in the early 1960s, wryly asked “What healthy Englishman would not want to join Healy’s party, given its open attitude to promiscuity? I have been trying to contact him all week” (*Sunday Times*, 10 November 1985).

The WRP split can only be a good thing for the revolutionary movement in Britain and everywhere else the Healyites operate. Banda’s widely-publicized admission of that organization’s long-standing practice of physical attacks on its critics, both internal and external, and its prostitution on behalf of Libya’s Muammar el Qaddafi and various other reactionary Middle East bonapartists can only hasten the necessary and long-overdue disappearance of both wings of this foul and repulsive gang of cynics.

SL: Healyism Sui Generis

The deep split in the Healyites has naturally been commented on by most of the world’s ostensible Trotskyist tendencies. But none have paid so much attention as the American-based Spartacist League (SL) which rushed out a special 64-page issue of their English-language theoretical journal devoted to the subject. There are several reasons for this attention. The Spartacist grouping originated in the early 1960s as the left opposition within the rightward-moving Socialist Workers Party in the U.S., and looked to Healy’s Socialist Labour League (SLL—forerunner of the WRP) as its international leadership. Healy early on (in 1962) gave his American supporters a taste of his “hard” organizational tactics when he split the tendency over the majority’s refusal to perjure themselves at his command. Four years later, at the infamous “London Conference,” the SL and the Healyites finally parted ways when SL leader James Robertson refused once again to submit to Healy’s outrageously bureaucratic notions of “discipline” in his international.

So that is part of the reason that the SL has shown such intense interest in the wreck of the Healyites. But there is another, more compelling, reason for Robertson to treat the split in the WRP leadership so extensively. And that is to try to establish as much distance as possible between his style of political leadership and that of his one-time mentor. A wide spectrum of former cadres of Robertson’s group have remarked that the template of the abominable organizational practices attributed to the WRP in the pages of *Spartacist* fits the SL itself rather closely.

The Healy organization has long been infamous for

its maintenance of “discipline” internally by means of beating up critics and opponents. This is something which the SL is not guilty of to our knowledge. We do note however that inside that organization intimations of such appetites are increasingly common. In a letter written after his resignation a former member of Robertson’s British satellite noted the tendency to view opponents as class enemies:

“According to your National Treasurer [two former members] have ‘gone over to the bourgeoisie.’ Is this the position of the organisation? It would seem so. I believe your latest paranoid delusion consists of a ‘quitters clique’ hell-bent on the destruction of the SL/B [Spartacist League/Britain]. The idea that people disillusioned with the SL/B treadmill are active enemies of the organisation and therefore, by sleight-of-hand sectarian logic, agents of the bourgeoisie is both ludicrous and dangerous. Perhaps you could explain why Len told [a former member] to remember what the Provos do to ‘people like him.’ Or why Ed felt moved to tell [another member] that ‘if we were in [another country] we would beat you up.’ Off-the-cuff remarks in the heat of the moment? Maybe. But then all measures are in principle permissible against the class enemy, are they not? And what is meant concretely by ‘going over to the bourgeoisie’?”

If the members, ex-members or leftist opponents of the SL are in fact “racists,” “fascists,” “Nazi-lovers,” “scabs” and/or “COINTELPRO [FBI]-type” provocateurs (slanders which the SL has been hurling with increasing frequency against its perceived enemies, including ourselves, in recent years) then the question of what measures are permissible in doing battle with them is indeed only a “tactical question.”

The SL came into existence as a separate and distinct grouping from the Healyites largely in *opposition* to the corrupt tactics of the SLL leadership. It has subsequently undergone a long evolution back to many of the very techniques which it once abjured. Today the SL stands as a qualitatively identical formation to the SLL of the late 1960s. It is worth noting that the iSt’s “discovery” that its ranks were riddled with racists, fascists and individuals with sinister connections to the police has been made only fairly recently. This is one of the decisive proofs of the SL leadership’s final descent into political gangsterism.

Internal Life in the SL and WRP

One of the superficial distinctions which can be made between the SL and the Healyites is the function of the *lider maximo*. Whereas Healy has been prominently featured in the literature and public activity of the WRP for years, Robertson’s status as the SL’s idiosyncratic guru is mostly for internal consumption. Nonetheless the fundamentals of the “party question” have been the same in both groups for years. In both organizations all authority derives from the paramount leader, and devotion to the caliph is the most important political question.

Robertson refined and improved on Healy’s techniques for suppressing internal dissent. In the SL it has been 18 years since the last faction fight. Joseph Seymour, Robertson’s “above-the-battle intellectual,” undertook in 1978 to offer a “Marxist” explanation for this

peculiar phenomenon. According to Seymour, the arid factional life inside the SL “is conditioned by the absence of objective circumstances which required major changes or breakthroughs in political line or unanticipated organizational turns...” It is now almost eight years since this was written and still nothing in the real world has had enough impact to produce any internal dissent in the SL. Just as Healy attempted to break Robertson in London in 1966, anyone who is thought capable of developing into a factional opponent in the SL is broken and/or otherwise disposed of long *before* they come up with any differences.

Unlike the Spartacist League, Healy’s group has had a continuing series of political oppositions, some of which have at least been allowed to go through the motions of submitting documents and offering counterposed reports at party conferences. In 1971 the Blick-Jenkins grouping exited into the Labour Party when their international co-thinkers—Healy’s erstwhile partners in the Organisation Communiste Internationale—broke relations with the SLL. (In the 6 December 1985 issue of the *New Statesman* Robin Blick recounted how he “was punched and had his head banged against a wall” on that occasion.) In 1974 Allan Thornett led more than a hundred people out of the WRP to found the centrist Workers Socialist League. Five years later a small factional opposition, led by Royston Bull, a former staff writer for *Newsline*, left the WRP. Bull, by his own account, had managed to survive for some four years as an occasional oppositionist before finally deciding to jump ship.

Bull’s description of the internal regime of the WRP bears a striking resemblance to the SL today:

“a marked failing of the WRP is its inability to build up a stable and growing cadre of workers or youth to lead any section of the mass movement.

“The endless categorical instructionalism from the leadership creates inflexible doctrinaires who are unable to sense or react to changes in the mass movement. Since the mainspring of a WRP cadre’s existence is his reliance on the centre for instructions, the very impulse that gives a revolutionary cadre life, his dialectical party practice in the workers movement, involving making decisions on his own, correcting mistakes, leading struggles etc., is totally absent. This lifeless bureaucratic relationship between the party and its cadres strangles any chance of real growth and recruitment among workers and youth.”

—“The Workers Party and the struggle to re-establish Bolshevik traditions,” October 1981

A former Spartacist, not presently associated with the Bolshevik Tendency, made some remarkably similar observations about life in Robertson’s group:

“It is not accidental that the whole...membership is permeated by fear (of the leadership) and exhibits massive political confusion. The state of the membership reflects the rampant paranoia of the leadership. Unable to lay down any concrete perspective...the leadership increasingly turns its energies towards the ‘internal sorting out process’...

“The membership is kept in a state of forcible ignorance. Deprived of education, formal or informal, run off its feet on an overloaded schedule (in large part servicing the cumbersome administration of the organization) the members are exhorted to accept the paper program of the

SL (whether they understand it or not) or face denunciation. Do you realize....that virtually nobody discusses politics outside the formal meetings? Are you aware that much of the membership don't even read a daily paper let alone the [ostensibly revolutionary opponent] press?"

In a speech reprinted in the November 1985 issue of *Young Spartacus*, SL spokesman Ed Clarkson chastises the members of the Spartacus Youth League (the SL's youth group) for "insecurity based on ignorance." Clarkson marvels at the fact that "what we tend to get in struggles in the youth are confessionals and denunciations, as opposed to clarifying fights." Well, as they say in the computer biz: "garbage in, garbage out."

Clarkson proceeds to lecture the youth that:

"If you're to develop in the way Lenin proposes, it requires on the level of the individual some capacity for self-assertion, which used to be the hallmark of youth, but which seems to have strangely disappeared in the past decade or so. That means you're supposed to act like you think you know what you're doing. In fact to be even rather arrogant in that regard, and maybe we'll have some good fights then."

But the youth have seen too many "good fights" SL-style to want to be on the receiving end of one. The reason that the internal life of the Spartacus Youth League is one of "confessionals and denunciations" is because that is all they have learned. These days "fights" in Robertson's group are conducted along the lines of Chinese Red Guard "criticism/self-criticism" sessions—leadership initiated denunciations followed by confessions.

'Servile Hacks Devoid of Revolutionary Capacity'

The *Spartacist* account of the internal life of the WRP notes that it too consists chiefly of "confessionals and denunciations":

"There was the systematic destruction of cadres: abusing them and then holding them up to scorn as weaklings, breaking down their self-respect by extorting false confessions, using their loyalty to the professed ideals of socialism to make them complicit in crimes against their comrades and the comrades of other groups."

The Healyites have no monopoly on such techniques for destroying the moral fibre of cadres. Here is an eye-witness account of a typical bit of "party-building" in Robertson's British affiliate in the fall of 1982:

"...the SL/B, according to the international leadership, 'was in pretty good shape.' This characterisation held good right up to the August 1982 national educational. Then a few weeks later all hell let loose. The SL/B leadership it turned out was guilty of racism. From a healthy section to racism in a few weeks—this should make even the most dull-witted observer a little suspicious!

"...An enormous international delegation was flown in to 'find out' what was going on in Britain.... The power structure is to be broken, a new and very different CC is to be elected. Except that the old leadership is left intact with the addition of a few of the more abusive elements from the lower ranks. And David [the former leader] is reduced to an emotional wreck. I don't think I will ever forget the IEC [International Executive Committee] meeting that preceded the plenum. David got up to speak on the round. He stood at the front a pathetic figure, his movements

strangely mechanical as he desperately tried to get a few words out of his mouth. The eerie silence was only broken by the sound of several leading IEC members swapping jokes and guffawing. When the laughter had subsided and all attention was focused on David, unable to speak he burst into tears and ran back towards his seat. As he passed down the aisle someone shouted out 'write us a letter.' 'David...is in very poor emotional shape' pronounced Jim Robertson. No doubt indifference to such events is the hallmark of a real SL/B 'Bolshevik'.... Preservation of cadre, don't make me laugh."

The international leadership has conducted similar "fights" in most of the rest of the nominally independent sections of the international organization. This doesn't prevent *Spartacist* from waxing indignant over the bureaucratic centralism which prevailed in Healy's "international," nor from drawing the abstractly correct lessons from the history of the Comintern:

"The importance of the right of national sections, within the framework of a unitary international program, to make their own tactical decisions and select their own leaderships is demonstrated by the degeneration of the Communist International under Stalin, reducing national leaderships to incompetent, Kremlin-servile hacks devoid of revolutionary capacity."

The validity of this observation is demonstrated in the case of the iSt by the New York-centric activity of the dozen or so stagnating foreign locals of the SL/US (aka the "international Spartacist tendency"). Perhaps the most striking example of this occurred in Britain during the weeks of the Falklands/Malvinas conflict with Argentina in 1983, when the SL/B busied itself building a forum to discuss the situation in the New York transit union! When a former member suggested that the forum should be postponed in favor of one dealing with the imperialist military adventure going on in the South Atlantic, he was told that to do so would be "parochial"!

Zig zags and Lurches

One distinguishing feature of the Healyite political bandits is their capacity for abrupt and disjointed political lurches. This pattern has become characteristic of the SL as well. In 1981, for example, after launching a recruitment drive on three bottom-line programmatic points (one of which was that "picket lines mean don't cross"), the SL leadership announced that the group's "internal" position on the life-and-death struggle between the American air traffic controllers (PATCO) and the Reagan administration was "fly, fly, fly." Those who objected to this policy were hounded out of the group in short order. Flying during the strike became a means of demonstrating "loyalty to the party" and many comrades even booked flights for trips which they would ordinarily have made by car.

In July 1984 the SL's "uniquely correct" leadership announced the danger of an imminent fascist/Reaganite coup d'etat aimed at the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco—and volunteered to send a dozen defense guards to prevent it! Ten months later, after winning an out-of-court settlement on the FBI's description of the Spartacist League, *Workers Vanguard* announced that all SL members would forthwith be issued with signed membership cards indicating the date they

joined. Hardly an appropriate policy for a period in which the suppression of bourgeois democracy is an immediate danger.

A few months later Robertson had his cadres dress up in witches' hats, pigs' faces and Nazi regalia and run around a San Francisco campus as "Xandra's Red Avengers" to block a supposed plot by campus student council bureaucrats (and the FBI). All such turns are inevitably greeted in the Spartacist organization with a show of unanimous enthusiasm by those who wish to remain in the group. The membership has come to accept that social reality is whatever Robertson says it is.

Arbitrary and erratic pronouncements are characteristic of charismatic cults, including political ones. In an article in the 17 June 1983 issue of the *Times Higher Education Supplement* several years ago, Roy Wallis observed that in an attempt to forestall threats "to their free and untrammelled authority" *lideres maximos* of various sorts frequently introduce:

"unpredictable changes and demands [on their followers]. These may take various forms—frequent change of environment, removing ties to stable external sources of support; undermining stable ties between pairs and groups within the movement, for example by breaking down exclusive sexual ties between members; undermining relationships of authority (*other* than those directly with the charismatic leader) which might compete for the loyalty of followers; introduction of new beliefs and practices which provide an opportunity for followers to display their commitment, or lack of it, to whatever issues from the leader's mouth....

"The 'half-hearted' can be provoked into declaring themselves by constantly imposing new demands leading either to protest and exclusion for disloyalty, or to defection. Such periodic disruptions of routine produce among members who survive the change a sense of liberation, of new freedom, a sense of excitement and thus often of renewed enthusiasm and zeal, and, most important, of enhanced commitment to the leader....

"The process thus tends to become self-reinforcing, leading towards and opening up ever darker recesses of the leader's *id*, releasing ever deeper primal desires, as the constraints upon their indulgence are removed. Undermining institutional structures and patterns not only constitutes change and eliminates the constraints upon further change, it also creates ambiguities and conflicts of policy and practice which leave the members without clear guidelines to action. Only by constantly watching the leader, subordinating themselves totally to his inspiration of the moment and being willing to humble themselves for their failure to follow that inspiration closely enough, can they remain among the favoured."

Sexual Abuse and Sexual Manipulation

Sex is always a good way to sell papers and the British gutter press has had a field day with the "Reds in bed" angle to the WRP split. "Randy Red Supremo Grabbed My Wife" and "Our Sex Nightmares By Red Gerry Girls" were typical of the headlines in the tabloid press. The fact that 73-year-old Healy had sex with 26 (or for that matter 260) female WRPs would in itself be no crime, Banda's prurient caterwauling about "revolutionary morality" notwithstanding. One British journalist pointed out that even if Healy had twice as many partners as Banda asserts, this would have been "little more

than two a year, which for Casanova would be a quiet night in," *Sunday Times*, 10 November 1985). Banda's decision to go to the bourgeois press with his salacious tales of Healy's sex-life, which the *Times* characterized as "a highly unusual breach of Trotskyist etiquette" (2 November 1985) suggests that the "new" WRP stands firmly in the squalid tradition of the old. More importantly the Banda WRP seems to have kept its charges deliberately vague—combining revolting puritanical denunciation of Healy's alleged marital infidelities ("systematic debauchery") with allegations of coercion and "sexual assault." Banda's claim that "he had known Mr. Healy for 35 years but had only recently found out about the alleged misconduct" (*Times*, 30 October 1985) has to be taken with a rather large grain of salt.

The question of the consensual sexual activities of members of any organization is not *per se* a political question, but a private matter between the individuals involved. Nonetheless, as Sean Matgamna pointed out in his piece on the WRP split in *Socialist Organiser* (reprinted in *Workers Vanguard*, 15 November 1985), "It is as certain as anything is that in that organisation [the WRP] sexual exploitation, and where necessary harassment, intimidation, or worse, would be part of the great leader's way of life."

For those who live in a micro-social milieu in which it is impossible to disagree with the infallible leader without risking excommunication, where reality can only be interpreted by reference to his "uniquely correct" pronouncements, the question of consensuality is at least open to abuse. Women who capture the leader's fancy, but don't reciprocate his attentions, are liable to be subjected to considerable pressure, subtle and not-so-subtle. In the SL the leadership has on occasion "politically" characterized such individuals as "cold bitches." In the bourgeois workplace this kind of thing is called "sexual harassment." It is a disgusting, but hardly surprising, aspect of life in political obedience cults.

Like so much else in the diseased SL the question of "consensuality" is subject to interpretation depending on who is doing what to whom. A few years ago a visiting leader of Robertson's British franchise who was touring the States had the bad judgement to make advances to several female companions of the SL leadership, including Robertson's wife. This "crime" was breathlessly retailed as evidence of his complete degeneracy in the ensuing campaign to get rid of him. In the SL there is no greater crime than *lese majeste*, consensual or not.

The Susanna Martin Choir

Banda's claim to have known nothing of Healy's extra-marital activities is obviously as hypocritical as his declamations about "socialist morality." Would-be Bandas in the SL Political Bureau won't be able to make such claims. The existence of Robertson's clique of female sexual groupies is no secret. They even have a name: "the Susanna Martin Choir." (Susanna Martin was an early American witch.) Dressed in black, and carrying candles, they performed before the delegates at the SL's 1983 National Conference. *Workers Vanguard* mentioned

the performance of this “informal interest association” in its report on the conference (18 November 1983). Besides being weird and cultish such activities are reminiscent of the goings-on at bourgeois political conventions where the delegates, having little influence on the political direction of their party, amuse themselves with hoopla. In the SL such “informal interest associations” are the exclusive prerogative of the charismatic leader. Other members have been excoriated as “cliquists” for having people over to dinner, or socializing informally without inviting the leadership, or even for talking to each other on the phone “behind the back of the party.”

The flip side of Robertson’s “Susanna Martin Choir” is that second-level (male) leaders in the group have periodically been charged with “sexually manipulating” female members. Typically this involves “discovering” that the individual in question, who has invariably been unwise enough to have fallen into the “bad books,” had been sleeping with some woman in the group to whom he was not married. In one case we know of, “sexual manipulation” was alleged without any evidence that the Seventh Commandment had even been transgressed. When the accused inquired how this charge could be made when he denied it, and all his purported victims denied it, he was informed that this was the *worst* kind of manipulation—it had been done so skillfully that, even under considerable party pressure, the victims themselves couldn’t see what had happened! Such is the Alice-in-Wonderland quality of the “richly democratic” internal life of the Spartacist tendency. Sexual manipulation, like everything else in the SL, means exactly what the leadership wants it to mean.

The Money Question

One of the questions touched on in the dispute in the WRP was money. In the case of the Healyites it centrally involves the totally corrupt practice of “hiring on” as publicists for various Middle East dictators, a practice which took the WRP out of the workers movement years ago. Matgamna cites reports in the bourgeois press “that militants from Iraq who came to the WRP school were later turned over to the Iraqi regime, which killed them. Banda is quoted as saying that the motive was to get ‘bags of money.’”

There is another angle to the financial question as it relates to the Healy regime besides where the money came from. That is, who spent how much for what and to whom they were accountable. The London *Times* reported on 30 October 1985 that “Mr. Banda’s supporters...were yesterday said to be guilty of precipitating a financial crisis in the party by fabricating the accounts.” Banda is alleged to have charged that Healy kept a 20,000 pound slush fund and to have purchased a 15,000 pound BMW for himself out of WRP money. The *Spartacist* article observes that “Our own experience also demonstrates that Healy has always been fixated on money.” Et tu, J.R.?

The money question in a highly bureaucratized organization is inevitably a particularly sensitive one. The leadership jealously guards its monopoly on the purse strings and is usually extremely adverse to any sugges-

tion that it render an accounting to the ranks. Anyone naive or impertinent enough to ask either Healy or Robertson to see the books would quickly learn that a) it is impossible for reasons of “security,” and b) such a question implies a lack of trust in the leadership, i.e., an “anti-party attitude” (which is usually terminal).

In the special interview with Robertson on the 1966 London Conference one of his toady interlocutors asks “When did you develop the slogan, ‘However Healy does it, do the opposite?’” This is indeed a bitter joke for those who have experienced first hand “anti-Healyism” SL-style. Robertson responds with a fulsome advertisement for his wonderfully compassionate regime. He contrasts the Healyite technique of doubling the workload on exhausted comrades with his own approach in such a situation: “Well, comrades, take some vacations now. Go and skin dive, or go to Portugal, or do something. Pay as much of your own way as you can, and perhaps the party treasury can assist you.”

With the SL’s extortionate pledge schedule most SL members can barely afford to run a car and keep clothes on their backs, let alone go on vacations. For those who, in the eyes of the leadership, are “doing well,” it is a different matter. They may indeed get a holiday in Portugal courtesy of the party treasury. Robertson at last report kept a personal five-figure slush fund for just such contingencies. He has occasionally been known to dip into the party treasury to purchase expensive presents for his female friends.

Those who are “doing well” often get taken out to dinner. Some top leaders (like Robertson) even get expensive Manhattan lofts built for them with party funds and party labor. Comrades who can’t afford to attend party functions or mobilizations are sometimes encouraged to take out loans. Those who are smiled on by the leadership can later have these written off. Others pay cash.

The SL’s financial structure is designed to reduce the entire membership to penury. This generates substantial revenues for the party treasury and also tends to reinforce the membership’s desire to ingratiate themselves with the leadership with a system of petty material rewards. Those on the party payroll are doubly dependent on remaining in the good graces of the leadership; punishment for running afoul of “the party” (i.e., J.R.) can range from a cut in their already paltry salary to being fired on the spot.

SL/WRP: The Regime Question as a Political Question

One of the new political points introduced in the *Spartacist* special on the WRP is an attempt to account for the fact that the degeneration of the SLL from “orthodox Trotskyism” to political banditry was first evidenced in its bureaucratic internal practices. This is a point of considerable importance to the SL leadership which has maintained as an article of faith the following neat syllogistic “defense” of its own internally bureaucratic practices: a) the superstructure or regime of a political organization is derived from its political program, and therefore b) a group with a revolutionary program can-

not by definition be bureaucratic. According to the SL tops the regime question is not an independent “political” question and anyone who raises organizational criticisms without having a fully counterposed “political” program is an unprincipled Abernite wrecker.

Yet there was always a disparity between this position and the conclusions which the SL drew from its experience with Healy at the 1966 London Conference: “the Healy-Banda machine subordinates real political issues of agreement and disagreement to the exigencies of organizational issues and personal prestige politics. That organizational tendency is itself a political issue of the first order” (*Spartacist*, June-July 1966).

The SL leadership attempts to resolve this contradiction in its special issue on the Healyites with the brazen assertion that the Healy organization was *never* a revolutionary grouping—although for ten years it was the foremost international exponent of authentic Trotskyism.

Robertson announces rather flippantly in his interview in *Spartacist*: “insofar as I encountered the Healy organization, there was nothing top to bottom that I found appetizing, in accordance with my understanding of a communist organization. And the Healyites did indeed march to a different drummer.” Later Robertson offers his personal assessment of the SLL’s *lider maximo*: “Let’s be clear: I *liked* Gerry Healy, I got on very well with him, we saw eye to eye on all kinds of questions, gossip, nuances, tactics, like a couple of fairly hard-bitten communists who’d been through some mills.”

Apparently Robertson *still* likes Gerry Healy. In his 17 November 1985 letter of condolence to “Gerry,” Robertson asserts: “I find no pleasure in your present pass....I am sorry for you, if you didn’t help kill those 21 Iraqi Communists. And if you didn’t, I wish you well.” Robertson’s affection for Healy is rooted in the professional identification of one caudillo with another—after all they were both in the same business, even if “Gerry” did overdo it a bit now and again. Unlike Robertson we certainly don’t wish Healy well whether or not the murder of the Iraqi leftists should also be “credited” to his account. It’s hard to imagine that the victims of what the *Spartacist* article refers to elsewhere as “hideous physical violence against members and of concrete, bloody crimes against the international working class” do so either.

Spartacist begs the question of how the Healyites went from a group which could produce the 1961 “World Prospect for Socialism” (a document which Robertson in his interview describes as “the clearest and most pristine expression of the program of international Trotskyism that we’ve seen in a long time” to a political bandit cult. The explanation which is offered is hardly convincing:

“We were put off track by their literary side for several years because of Healy’s success in winning over significant sections of the trade-union and educational apparatus of the British CP to an ostensibly Trotskyist position. They wrote very powerfully. And it took a little while for Gerry to work through that and use it up, and to create some kind of nasty, shabby, deepening and evolving cult.”

How was it that Healy was able to win over several hundred sophisticated Communist Party cadres to “os-

tensible” Trotskyism? And how were these “ostensible” Trotskyists able to produce “perhaps the best restatement of the Trotskyist purpose in English since the death of Trotsky” (SL preface to the second edition of “What is Revolutionary Leadership?”, 1970)? If it was all a fraud and a facade from the beginning then why did it take a while to “work through” them and “create” a cult?

The answer is that the program of a revolutionary organization is the *totality* of its practice in the world—not just its formal written propaganda. This necessarily includes the internal organizational mechanism which shapes the group’s response to developments in the class struggle, i.e., the “regime question.”

The characterization of the Spartacist League circa 1982 which we made in our founding declaration could be applied with equal validity to the Healyites of the mid-1960s. It too was “an organization with a deep contradiction between a coherent, rational, Marxist world-view and program and an increasingly abusive (and irrational) internal regime. And the process through which this contradiction [would] be resolved [was] incomplete.” In neither the SL of the early 1980s nor the Healyites two decades earlier was the group’s internal regime an automatic product of its formally correct program. In both cases it was in *contradiction* to the organization’s declared politics.

As we noted in “The Road to Jimstown” in the final issue of the *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt* (No. 4): “Bureaucratism is *ultimately* counterposed to the revolutionary program and must eventually express itself politically. But formal programmatic departures need not necessarily *precede* bureaucratic degeneration.” Today the SL has departed systematically and repeatedly from the Trotskyist orthodoxy which it once upheld, just as Healy did in the late 1960s. “Hailing” the pro-Vietnamese Cambodian Stalinists as “Real Communists”; “fly, fly, fly”-ing throughout the PATCO strike; slandering opponents and critics as “Nazi-lovers” and police agents; calling for saving the colonial gendarmes of U.S. imperialism—these and other departures from Trotskyism, all of which occurred without significant internal resistance, were first prepared by the atrophy of internal democracy in the group and the consequent loss of capacity for correction through internal political struggle.

What Robertson et al seek to deny with their assertion that Healy’s was *never* a revolutionary group is the living connection between the “regime question” and the paper program which an organization purports to represent. But the history of the SL—just as that of the SLL/WRP before it—proves just the opposite.

Like the WRP, the SL’s:

“...posture of ‘Trotskyism,’ utterly fraudulent though it is, is not without meaning for many members. And [Robertson]’s organization has frequently done a competent job in exposing the reformist scum and centrist confusionists who people the [international] left; hence, the [SL] is widely seen as the ‘hard Trotskyists,’ the alternative to class-collaborationist betrayal.”

—*Spartacist*, Winter 1985-86

But the Spartacist tendency today is only the latest in a long line of once-revolutionary organizations which,

under the pressures of isolation and failure, were transformed into something entirely different than what they originated as. Like the Healy group from which it broke some twenty years ago, the SL stands as an example that the degeneration of small revolutionary propaganda groups can sometimes take a strange and unpredictable course. Just as the SL carried forward the struggle to

reforge the Fourth International, despite Healy's attempted wrecking job at the 1966 London Conference, so today the Bolshevik Tendency intends to ensure that the continuity of authentic Trotskyism, including the contributions of the Robertson group, survives that organization's transformation into a political bandit obedience cult. ■