

# *BT/LTT Conference Success* **Trotskyists Fuse!**

In a major step forward for revolutionaries in North America, the Bolshevik Tendency (BT) and the Left Trotskyist Tendency (LTT) fused at a joint national conference held in Oakland, California last November. The comrades of the LTT, who split from the Internationalist Workers Party (IWP) last June, include three former central committee members of that organization. The fusion substantially augments both the BT's ability to intervene in the workers movement and its political authority in the left. It also represents tangible progress toward stabilizing the Bolshevik Tendency as a fighting propaganda organization.

The BT-LTT fusion stands as a powerful confirmation of the strategy of revolutionary regroupment. This perspective is counterposed to the primitive, gradualist notion that a proletarian vanguard party can be created by simple linear recruitment of raw individuals. It is also sharply at odds with those who seek to create revolutionary organizations by amalgamating existing formations on a lowest common denominator basis and an agreement not to disagree—pending the next split.

The regroupment strategy is predicated on the fact that centrist and even reformist organizations are internally contradictory. They are not homogenous groupings of conscious class traitors. People generally do not join small supposedly-revolutionary organizations with the deliberate intention of betraying and misleading the working class, but rather out of a sense of identification with the ideals of socialism. Consequently, even thoroughly rotten pseudo-socialist formations periodically develop internal oppositions composed of people whose subjective impulses conflict with the real politics of the outfits they belong to. Political regroupment is the process of sorting out such contradictions by recomposing the preexisting formations along clear programmatic lines and uniting the revolutionists in a single organization.

## **A Programmatically Based Fusion**

The BT-LTT fusion is solidly based in a common struggle for a correct programmatic understanding of the tasks facing Trotskyists in this period. The key positions which the LTT developed in the course of its fight against the centrist leadership of the IWP (represented in the excerpts reprinted from their documents) closely paralleled those of the BT and provided a starting point for the discussions which laid the foundations for the fusion.

One of the issues taken up in the pre-fusion discussions was the Trotskyist attitude toward the Polish Solidarnosc movement, particularly in reference to the counterrevolutionary threat it posed. The contemporary application of the Permanent Revolution, particularly in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, was another major question considered. Other topics included the history of the Fourth International and revolutionary con-

tinuity, the national question, workers democracy, the black question in America and special oppression in general, and the tactics and strategy of revolutionary trade-union work. The discussions were intensive, with comrades from both organizations assigned to do research and make presentations. In the course of this political process, it became clear that there were no substantive programmatic differences between the two groups. The firm political basis of the fusion is contained in the documents and motions adopted at the conference, several of which are published in this issue.

The LTT split represented a serious blow to the fake-mass pretensions of the IWP. The LTT was the second factional opposition within the IWP in as many years. The first, the Collective Leadership Faction (CLF), originated in Los Angeles in 1985 as a rank-and-file revolt against the IWP's horrendously bureaucratic internal regime and the frantic treadmill of endless paper sales and phony "mass work" demanded by the leadership. The CLF, currently known as the International Socialist League (ISL), was eventually recognized by the International Workers League (IWL—the IWP's international leadership headquartered in Argentina) as a sympathizing section. So for over a year, the IWL has had two affiliates in the U.S., with no known programmatic differences, each swearing allegiance to the same international while assiduously ignoring each other.

## **The Organizational Question in the IWP**

The fight of the Left Tendency (LT—which changed its name to the Left Trotskyist Tendency when it left the IWP in June, 1986) did not center on the bureaucratic regime, but went to the root of the gangrene: the IWP's congenital centrism. Nonetheless, the organizational question did play a role in the fight, as the leadership desperately attempted to counter the LT's political criticisms by restricting internal discussion. Brad Anderson, a leadership hack, leveled the following accusation at an LT comrade:

"In the C.C. [Central Committee] meeting of June 6th, 1986 comrade Christine proposed an amendment to a proposed 'Declaration of the C.C. on Unity of the Party and the restoration of Full Democratic Centralism' which revealed this comrade's true hostility to this traditional Leninist method of organization. The comrade proposed that during the preconvention discussion period members of leadership bodies could discuss their differences in any body of the party, or, quote, '...during the preconvention period, there shouldn't be any limitations on bringing differences to the rank and file...'—as if the party were a trade union!"

—"The True Nature of the Tendency"

Not only was the communist minority supposed to keep its differences from the ranks (a measure designed to make sure that it stayed a minority), but the leadership asserted that the LT could not meet without first inviting representatives of the majority! In a bizarre bit of dou-

blethink, Anderson accused the LT of “bureaucratism” for daring to argue for the right to hold its own internal meetings:

“...there is already enough evidence to enable us to draw the outlines of an emerging bureaucratism, beginning, once again, with the birth of the Tendency, when comrade Dov voted against the C.C. resolution regulating the Tendency, on the grounds that he wanted to have some ‘closed’ Tendency meetings.”

### The LT’s Fight for Trotskyism

One of the overriding themes of the fusion discussions between the LTT and the BT was the centrality of the struggle to create (and regroup) Trotskyist cadres. In centrist organizations like the IWP, this task is ignored in order to get on with the “more urgent” business of pursuing this month’s get-rich-quick scheme. The frantic search for short-term gate receipts inevitably leads to programmatic adaptation to the backward consciousness of those being pursued, as the pervasive liquidationism of the IWP illustrates.

The LT originated as a political opposition to the IWP’s programmatic adaptation to the petty-bourgeois Peace and Freedom Party (P&FP) milieu. From this, it broadened its critique to attack the IWP’s parallel capitulation to the reformist illusions prevalent in the campus-based anti-apartheid/divestment movement. The IWP initially labelled the divestment strategy “utopian” but when it saw masses of students in motion, it quickly adopted “Full Divestment Now” as its slogan. This political opportunism was complemented by organizational sectarianism. At Berkeley, where the student movement was centered, the IWP chose not to participate in the existing non-exclusionist anti-apartheid student group and instead launched its own reformist front group, the stillborn “International Solidarity Committee.” The LT argued that the duty of communists was to expose the “divestment strategy” for what it was—a demoralizing dead end which would divert the movement into Democratic Party pressure politics.

The cynics of the IWP leadership adopted a similar centrist approach to the so-called peace movement. In this arena they raised the pacifist/utopian slogan of “Unilateral Disarmament of the U.S.” As the LT pointed out, Marxists stand for the disarmament of the bourgeoisie by the armed working class and ruthlessly combat pacifist illusions about getting the imperialists to disarm themselves. In attacking the IWP’s unilateral disarmament slogan, the LT posed the question of what attitude revolutionists should adopt toward the peace movements that flank every war drive. They cited Lenin’s and Trotsky’s denunciations of such movements as a model. The IWP majority countered by triumphantly hauling out a resolution adopted by the IWP’s Argentine mentors in 1983 which argued that the Leninist position on pacifism was outdated!

“Today however, there is a qualitative difference we must establish between the petty bourgeois and reactionary peace movements that existed before 1945 and the ones that exist today....In [today’s] circumstances the peace movement in the imperialist countries plays a progressive role because it is oriented towards stopping the imperialist war efforts.

“The IWL(FI) should participate in or support these peace

movements. Moreover, every peace movement that raises slogans about limiting or freezing nuclear arms should have our support because it is always imperialism which is pushing for an escalation in the arms race.”

—Resolution of the International Executive Committee of the International Workers League (FI)

This explicitly revisionist capitulation to bourgeois pacifism puts the IWL in bed with the Democrats who want to “freeze” nuclear spending in order to allocate more for conventional armament. There is no “progressive dynamic” here—merely a tactical difference within the U.S. ruling class over how to get the most bang for the buck.

The LT also criticized the leadership’s anti-Leninist conception of the “revolutionary united front.” For the IWP, a “united front” is a propaganda bloc with reformists in which criticism is suspended and banners are mixed. The model for these opportunist maneuvers is Argentina, where the IWL’s flagship section has spent the past year in a minimum-program “Peoples Front” with the Communist Party. In neighboring Chile, the IWL “warmly” supports the Civilian Assembly—a replication of the multi-class Unidad Popular which led to the bloody defeat of 1973. When the LT tried to raise this anti-Trotskyist betrayal, the IWP leadership simply refused to discuss it!

### LTT Investigates the ‘Left Trotskyist’ Spectrum

After exiting the IWP, LTTers began reading the documents of a variety of self-proclaimed Trotskyist tendencies and held preliminary discussions with several. The most substantive exchanges occurred in September with the British centrists of the Workers Power grouping. Over the course of these meetings, it became clear that there was a process of internal differentiation occurring within the LTT.

Several LTTers gradually moved closer to Workers Power, particularly to its position on the national question. (Workers Power believes that it is necessary to support petty-bourgeois nationalist movements like the IRA even when they carry out anti-working class attacks on civilian targets.) The LTT majority characterized this position as guilty liberalism and came out firmly for an anti-sectarian, class-struggle solution in situations where two or more peoples are interspersed throughout the same piece of territory (e.g., Ireland, Cyprus or Lebanon). The question was thoroughly discussed both within the LTT and in joint meetings with the BT in the following weeks. In the end, it was not possible to politically resolve the difference and the comrades of the LTT minority concluded that they could not be a party to the fusion.

### We Go Forward!

A central task of the fusion conference was to organize the work for the coming year. To this end an editorial board was elected to oversee production of *1917*. The report of the out-going board noted with satisfaction that the first two issues of our journal had been widely circulated and generally favorably received. The conference reaffirmed the decision taken in 1985 to produce an

intelligent, polemical Trotskyist press demarcating our programmatic positions from the rest of the international “far left.” We do not intend to publish another of the fake-agitational organs cranked out by our centrist competitors.

The conference also elected a commission to direct our trade-union activity. In the years to come, one of the key strategic tasks for the BT will be to construct communist nuclei in key sectors of the proletariat. The draft Tasks and Perspectives document prepared for the conference noted that at the present juncture:

“There is a burning need for some kind of alternative in the labor movement. Thousands of working people fear for their jobs and have absolutely no confidence in the willingness or ability of the union leaderships to deliver anything or to even protect what has been won in the past. The ideological obstacles to some good, hard, old-fashioned class struggle—the belief that moderation and ‘pragmatic’ tuxedo unionism would deliver the bacon—are all but gone. The stage is set for a radical-led resurgence of North American labor. All that is missing is the radicals.”

With our small forces we are unable to pose a quantitatively significant opposition to the current pro-imperialist misleaders of the union movement in North America. We are fortunate, however, to have a few small toeholds in the working class and several comrades with decades of experience as communist trade unionists. In the past years BT supporters have played central roles in a number of significant trade-union struggles, most notably the anti-apartheid actions on the San Francisco waterfront. We are determined to maintain and pursue exemplary communist trade-union work in accordance with our modest capacities and to seek, where possible, to intervene directly in the class struggle.

### **For International Trotskyist Regroupment!**

The newly fused organization also discussed perspectives for international work. In recent years there

has been considerable upheaval in many of the world’s larger ostensibly Trotskyist currents. The most spectacular was the fissuring of the British Workers Revolutionary Party and the ouster of its former *lider maximo*, Gerry Healy. The United Secretariat (Usec) has suffered significant reverses in the past few years. Its sizeable Australian section renounced Trotskyism in favor of Third World Stalinism in 1984 and its American affiliate, the Socialist Workers Party, is charting a similar trajectory today. The turn of the Usec in Europe to the social democracies has been accompanied by splits and defections in a number of its sections. The French Parti Communiste Internationaliste, a deeply social-democratic formation, has had several splits in the past period and the workerist/economists of Lutte Ouvriere have also been experiencing internal difficulties.

An authentically Leninist international tendency can only be forged through a series of programmatically-based splits and fusions. We intend to be part of such a process. To this end we want to actively pursue political discussions, polemics and debates with other currents in the left; in the first instance with the ostensibly Trotskyist groupings, to achieve the political clarification necessary to push forward the process of revolutionary regroupment.

Revolutionary organizations, like their cadres, are created through the struggle for the Marxist program in political combat with revisionist tendencies in the workers movement. The LTT’s fight against centrism in the IWP was just such a struggle. As Trotsky noted in “Centrism and the Fourth International”: “The new International can develop principally at the expense of the now prevailing tendencies and organizations. At the same time, the revolutionary International cannot form itself otherwise than in a consistent struggle against centrism.” The Bolshevik Tendency is dedicated to this struggle and through it to the rebirth of the Fourth International. ■