



**Spartacist Letters**

**A Journal of Polemic and Exchange**



# **Letters on ICL's Reorientation**

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**International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)**



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## The LFI Chooses Sectarianism

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*The following exchange was published in Workers Vanguard No. 1180 (22 December 2023) and on iclfi.org.*

We publish below recent correspondence between the League for the Fourth International (LFI), known in the U.S. as the Internationalist Group, and the International Communist League, which was first published on their website.

In accordance with the mandate of our recent international conference, the ICL reached out to the LFI proposing to hold leadership discussions between our two organizations and to explore possibilities of common work in defense of basic interests of the workers movement (see “The ICL’s Post-Soviet Revisionism,” *Spartacist* [English edition] No. 68, September 2023).

Since it is the ICL that provoked the unprincipled and shallow split which led to the creation of the LFI, we consider it our responsibility to do everything we can to bring clarity to what has been a confusing and disorienting rivalry. We are determined to reduce organizational and personalist tensions between our two parties and to engage in thorough and clarifying debates. As the correspondence shows, the LFI showed no interest at all in this. The LFI responded to our extended hand with a series of denunciations and accusations. The one redeeming part of their response is their proposal to hold a debate, which we have gladly accepted. It is planned for January 13 in New York.

We are confident that the careful reader will see through the demagogic and false accusations made by comrade Norden in his responses to the ICL. That said, the character of these responses also makes it easy to lose track of the substance of the political questions in dispute. For the sake of clarity, we will elaborate on three key points.

### **Founding of the IG and Fights in the 1990s**

The correspondence touches on various fights that occurred in the mid to late 1990s in the ICL. In its letters, the LFI argues that our reassessment of these fights is not genuine and not complete. We have already conceded that these fights were unprincipled and have committed to investigating in more detail those that directly precipitated the split. But this dispute is secondary. With their accusations and request that we deepen our review, the LFI buries what has long been recognized by both organizations as the main difference: the question of revolutionary leadership.

The main argument in *Spartacist* No. 68 is that both the LFI and ICL have had a fundamentally wrong understanding of the tasks of communists following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Both denied the overwhelming dominance of U.S. imperialism in the post-Soviet world and the concomitant hold of liberalism in the workers movement. This made our respective proclamations for revolutionary leadership entirely hollow because they were not rooted in material reality and not defined in opposition to the dominant trends binding the workers movement to the ruling class.

Given that comrade Norden’s recent letters defend every inch of the LFI’s record, we think it is fair to assume that he also upholds the blatantly wrong tasks and perspectives both parties shared following the collapse of the USSR. These were codified in the 1992 ICL International Conference document, adopted four years before the IG’s founding cadre were expelled. This is not merely a historical question. It is impossible to provide revolutionary leadership today without understanding that the post-Soviet order was defined by the liberal triumphalism of U.S. imperialist hegemony and that the current period is defined by the breakdown of that order. Today the LFI has no coherent explanation of what is happening in the world (agitating about World War III doesn’t count) and even less of the task of communists. The LFI is navigating

without a compass, reacting to the erratic moods of the New York petty bourgeoisie, hailing the Communist Party of China's lockdowns one day and tailing BLM the next.

In contrast, the document "The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power," also published in *Spartacist* No. 68, provides a clear materialist explanation of the world situation and a critique of the Marxist left since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, in a world increasingly defined by sharp polarization between political forces representing the liberal status quo and those seeking to upend it, the ICL is fighting to provide a working-class path that cuts against all dead ends on offer. It is the inability of the LFI to put forward such an independent working-class perspective that runs through all our differences, whether over the Ukraine war, China, the black question, social democracy or the national question. It is these questions that we are eager to discuss and debate with the LFI.

### **On United Fronts, Blocs and Boiling Water**

In response to our proposal for a private leadership discussion and "to engage as much as possible in common work when appropriate," the LFI essentially accuses us of wanting to form an unprincipled bloc with them. They rejected the former, basically arguing that the simple fact of sitting down for discussion with us would be unprincipled. This is absurd and says much more about the LFI's defensiveness than about our supposed opportunism.

They also refuse our proposal to explore common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement. To justify this, comrade Norden makes a hair-splitting distinction between a bloc and a united front, totally abstracted from any specific proposal. What matters fundamentally is not whether an agreement for common action is for a single event or a sustained campaign; what matters is that the terms of the agreement are principled. The truth is that the LFI has shown it does not want to engage in any kind of common action with us—whether in the form of a "bloc" or a united front.

- In Germany, the ICL called for a united front to throw NATO supporters out of the workers movement, a basic measure of sanitation as well as a tactic to expose the bankruptcy of pacifism. The IG denounced this while proposing nothing else to build a revolutionary pole amid the crisis shaking the left over the Ukraine war.
- In Australia, the ICL together with the Bolshevik-Leninist group applied a similar tactic toward the Labor Party, calling to throw the pro-AUKUS wing out of the party. We also advocate pursuing this fight within the Labor Party to exacerbate the conflict between its working-class base and its leadership. The LFI once again denounced our call while proposing nothing to channel the deep polarization over AUKUS in a revolutionary direction.
- In the ICL's 11 October letter to the LFI, we stated that "we think that we can possibly find a principled basis to work with you on defense work against political repression." With brutal repression against the left everywhere and much more on the horizon, there is a real need for common action in the workers movement. But the LFI simply ignored our proposal, probably dismissing it as some kind of ploy to talk to them.
- In the U.S., the fight against police brutality and black oppression is at an obvious impasse and there is widespread demoralization among activists. In this context we are building a campaign to "open police archives" to revitalize the struggle and drive a wedge between militant opponents of police brutality and the liberal leadership of that struggle. Once more the IG denounces us but are themselves unable to chart any path forward beyond proclaiming that socialist revolution will bring justice.

The worst example is the most recent one. In the context of the intense repression against pro-Palestine demonstrations and organizations in Germany, we appealed to the Internationalistische

Gruppe (IG) and the rest of the left to take a stand in the form of a united-front forum built on the following three points:

1. Defend Gaza!
2. Down with anti-Palestinian state repression in Germany!
3. Hands off Samidoun [Palestinian prisoner defense group]! Down with the banning of all Palestinian organizations!

The IG declared *agreement with our demands*, stated they would attend our forum *but refused* to support it and join us in any way *to fight* for these demands. While our comrades have faced police harassment, with two venues being canceled and a wall of hostility from German social democracy, the LFI did like the rest of the German left, proclaiming solidarity with the Palestinians but in practice doing nothing to confront the social democratic-led witchhunt. Meanwhile, even a small bloc of our two organizations could have put pressure on the rest of the left to *do something* in defense of the repressed Palestinian groups. This latest example shows the utter bankruptcy of the LFI. For them, drawing a hard organizational line against us is more important than taking up a struggle which is of the utmost urgency and *which they claim to agree with*. Comrade Norden is justified in still being outraged by the actions of the ICL in Brazil in 1996, but what about now? Who is pulling their hands out of the boiling water of the class struggle today?

These examples all point in the same direction. While the ICL is seeking to exploit the growing contradictions within the left and labor movement by fusing the defense of basic working-class interests and the building of a revolutionary pole, the LFI stands to the side and proclaims the need for socialism and a revolutionary party totally disconnected from the living reality of the class struggle.

Despite their response so far, we are still committed to pursuing common action with the LFI on the urgent questions facing the workers movement and urge them to shake off their subjectivity and sectarianism.

### **On Nationalism and Permanent Revolution**

The main programmatic criticism the LFI raises against the ICL's new trajectory is that it is "driven centrally by the embrace of bourgeois nationalism." This is a serious claim, but it is not argued seriously. Anyone who reads our recent *Spartacist* will see that our entire approach to permanent revolution is based on *breaking the hold of nationalism* on the struggle for national liberation. Our central criticism of the ICL's past approach is precisely that it abandoned the struggle for national liberation to the nationalists. It is certainly possible that we have made mistakes in our arguments. But the LFI simply ignores any argument we make and just repeats as a mantra that we are motivated by nationalism. Comrade Norden does nonetheless make a few arguments of his own which are worth responding to.

#### **1) The Anti-Imperialist United Front**

To "prove" the ICL's class collaborationism, the LFI argues:

"You now embrace the 'Anti-Imperialist United Front' which in practice means political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the formula used to subordinate the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, leading to the 1927 Shanghai Massacre."

That the Stalinists and countless other opportunists have used the anti-imperialist united front to justify subordination to nationalism is an undisputed fact. But to conclude from this that the anti-imperialist united front *necessarily* means subordination to the bourgeoisie is just a cheap syllogism. According to this logic, one would have to reject everything Lenin and Trotsky have ever written because it has been used to justify class collaboration.

The point is simple. It is perfectly principled to take common action with nationalist forces against imperialism provided it does not lead to abandoning the fight for communist leadership. It is the latter that Stalin rejected in China and beyond by liquidating the communist vanguard into bourgeois nationalism. This betrayal did *not* lead Trotsky to repudiate common struggle with nationalist forces. In fact, even after the massacre of the communist vanguard in China, he argued: “While maintaining its political independence, the proletarian vanguard must be ready always to assure united action with revolutionary democracy” (“Peasant War in China and the Proletariat,” September 1932).

The anti-imperialist united front is not only principled, it is essential. In confrontations between imperialism and oppressed countries, it is imperative to take a stand with the oppressed. In fact, the LFI itself has often raised the need for a military side with bourgeois-nationalist forces against imperialism. What is this if not an anti-imperialist united front? The same logic applies to any other concrete action against imperialism.

The point of the united front is not only to take a stand against imperialism but to show in struggle how nationalism is an obstacle to liberation from imperialism. The importance of this tactic was clearly illustrated in the 2015 Greek referendum, which Syriza called over the EU austerity package to squirm out from between the imperialists on one side and the Greek masses on the other. To anyone but sectarian muddleheads—such as the LFI and the Greek Communist Party (KKE)—it was obvious that rejection of the austerity package would be a blow to the EU. A common front with Syriza to vote “No” was crucial precisely *because* of their inevitable capitulation. Their betrayal of the people’s massive rejection of austerity was a golden opportunity for the workers movement to pick up the ball where bourgeois populism had dropped it and escalate the struggle against imperialism and Greek capitalism. The rejection of the united front against imperialism in this context by the KKE (echoed by the LFI) did not advance class independence but in fact did the opposite. In the name of “class independence” from the Greek bourgeoisie, it left the mantle of “anti-imperialism” to Syriza, guaranteeing their continued hold on the masses.

## 2) The Democratic Dictatorship and Permanent Revolution

To support his claim that the ICL is ever more revisionist, comrade Norden argues:

“Your claim that Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution put forward in 1905 was essentially identical with Lenin’s formula at that time of a ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’ directly contradicts Trotsky’s own presentation in ‘Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution’ (August 1939) which contrasts them.”

In fact, we do not argue that there was no difference between Lenin and Trotsky’s positions but that there was an “*essential identity* between Trotsky’s permanent revolution and Lenin’s strategic line.” We argue that they had different prognoses for the course of the revolution in Russia but agreed on the fundamental strategic tasks. Is this a revision of Trotskyism wielded to justify bourgeois nationalism? Hardly. Here is what Trotsky himself wrote in *My Life*:

“Many ‘old Bolsheviks’ said to me after I arrived in Russia: ‘Now the celebration is on *your street*.’ I had to argue that *Lenin had not come over to my point of view*, but had developed his own, and that the course of events, by substituting arithmetic for algebra, *had revealed the essential identity of our views*. And that is what really happened.” [our emphases in bold italics]

So why does the LFI—as our own previous propaganda did—insist on the fact that Trotsky was right and Lenin was a proto-Menshevik until 1917, and crucially, why does it matter today? Just as when the epigones raised a hue and cry over Trotsky’s permanent revolution in the 1920s, the differences we have with the LFI on this question are not historical but relate to the strategic



perspectives for the revolution in neocolonial countries. Stalinists revived the Menshevik program for a democratic stage historically distinct from the dictatorship of the proletariat to justify support for the national bourgeoisie. The LFI, as we did, inverts this in the name of class independence by rejecting the decisive role democratic questions play for revolutions in neocolonial countries. Both views are metaphysical rejections of Leninism.

The entire point of permanent revolution, confirmed in living reality by the Russian Revolution, is that there is a dialectical interrelation between the democratic and socialist tasks. In countries of belated capitalist development, democratic questions such as emancipation from imperialism, the agrarian question and formal democracy will play a disproportionate role in the initial stages (yes, stages) of the revolution. What is key is that the proletariat must play the *leading role* in this struggle, competing for leadership against radical bourgeois forces. This is the essence of permanent revolution. Anyone who doubts it should read Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution*—a book almost entirely dedicated to exposing the formal logic used by the Stalinists to conjure a fundamental difference between Lenin and Trotsky over permanent revolution.

### 3) Quebec and Language Laws

For the LFI and our other detractors, the smoking gun for the ICL's supposed nationalism is our defense of laws in Quebec that make French the official language. This can sound like a strong argument for those unfamiliar with the national question in Quebec—after all, wasn't Lenin against privileges for any language? However, the argument falls apart as soon as it is put in context.

Quebec is an oppressed nation whose entire history since 1759 is defined by a struggle to maintain its national existence. The British and then English Canadian bourgeoisies both had the conscious policy of forcibly assimilating Quebec through anglophone immigration. It is not a revision of Lenin to uphold the right of an oppressed nation to fight its national and linguistic oppression. Lenin's fight was first and foremost against the imposition of Russian—the *dominant language*—on the oppressed minorities of the tsarist empire. The LFI turns Lenin on his head by invoking his authority to oppose measures defending French—the *oppressed language*—against the dominant English language.

To oppose languages being given official status *in all cases* is simply reactionary. In fact, this position had previously led the ICL to oppose indigenous languages in Mexico being given preferential status under the guise of opposing privileges to any language! Or what about Haiti? The dominant language is French whereas the overwhelming majority of the population speaks Creole. Would measures favoring Creole at the expense of French be opposed by the LFI?

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All in all, the sentences from comrade Norden's letters that most clearly reveal the political method and program of the LFI are probably the following:

“In Mexico, you essentially prettify the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as anti-imperialist. A question: do you advocate that the ‘anti-imperialist united front’ in Mexico include AMLO's party, MORENA? Of course, everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui* imperialism.”[!]

To Norden's question, our answer is yes. Trotsky wrote that in the struggle against Hitler he was ready to make a united front with the devil and his grandmother (“The United Front for Defense,” February 1933, printed in *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*). So clearly, if it were posed, we would make a united front with AMLO or even the right-wing PAN in struggle against U.S. imperialism. The LFI wouldn't...?

But more importantly, these few sentences reveal just how disconnected the LFI is from the actual tasks of revolutionaries. AMLO is one of the most popular heads of state in the world,

precisely because he is considered a break from previous presidents who *were* simply yes-men for U.S. imperialism. Half a million people attended his rally celebrating the 1938 nationalization of Mexican oil. To simply brush off the anti-imperialist illusions he generates is not only delusional but profoundly disarming. After all, if “everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui* imperialism,” then there are no illusions to break. The result is simply to leave the hold of populist anti-imperialism totally unchallenged.

A similar methodology can be seen throughout the LFI press. Bombastic statements and orthodox jingles are used as talismans against capitulation while the misleadership of the working class is criticized from the left but not challenged fundamentally. There is a lot of huffing and puffing from the LFI, but you will not get an answer to the simple question: what is to be done? The ICL is a very small organization, but we believe we can provide answers for many of the key questions facing the international proletariat. We encourage our readers and supporters to attend the upcoming debate, where we will do our best to lay out our perspective to reforge the Fourth International in today’s world.

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## Letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International

by Perrault for the International Secretariat of the ICL

2 September 2023

Dear comrades,

The recent international conference of the ICL has reoriented our party on fundamental questions (see link to *Spartacist* [<https://icl-fi.org/english/esp/68/spartacist-en-68.pdf>]). This includes a review of our differences with the IG/LFI. As a result, the conference tasked the ICL to conduct “serious political clarification and debate with the IG” and to engage “as much as possible in common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement.” In line with this, we propose opening formal discussion between our organizations.

On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct. The fights that led to the expulsions of the IG’s founding members from the ICL were characterized as unprincipled, as was the break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil. We are currently investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time. The conference also described the central critique of the ICL made by the IG at its founding as “essentially correct”—that is, that the ICL had reduced the task of Marxists in the post-Soviet period to “keeping the flame alive against attempts to squelch it.”

However, when it comes to the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period, we believe that overall they were qualitatively similar. When it came to orienting the working class, neither organization had a correct perspective because neither had as its central objective to break the hold of liberalism on the workers movement—the dominant ideology of the period and the main ideological brake on the struggles of workers and the oppressed.

Our proposal to open discussion is not to paper over our differences. Rather, it is intended to raise the level of political discussion between our organizations, starting from the central questions of revolutionary strategy for the current period. We are hopeful that engaging in such discussions can bring our organizations closer. The split provoked by the expulsion of your founding members from our party has been detrimental to the workers movement. The relations between our two organizations have been extremely hostile, while on most questions the political differences have been shallow at best. We believe there has always been—and remains—a significant overlap in the views of our memberships. If we are to stay divided in two rival

organizations, it is our respective duty to ensure that this division is based on crystal-clear differences over the most important questions facing the workers movement today.

The world is rapidly changing and the fight to reforge the Fourth International is posed with burning urgency. Events are shaking the left. Theoretical and political debates among the most advanced layers of the workers movement are crucial to reforging the Fourth International. But fundamentally it is fighting to provide revolutionary leadership in great world events that will be decisive. Doctrinal differences within the left can and will be overcome through common struggle.

In this sense, it is essential to engage as much as possible in common work when appropriate. The capitalists are keenly aware of the precariousness of their current situation; their response is to crack down on dissent and target minorities. There can be no excuse for disunity in the face of such attacks. Common fronts in defense work would be a modest but important contribution to advancing the interests of the workers movement and would put pressure on the rest of the left to do the same.

We expect that this letter will be met with a certain amount of skepticism on your part. As a first step, we simply propose to hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations. The purpose would be to have an initial exchange of views and to consider options for further discussion. We place no preconditions on this meeting. On our part, we commit to seeking the utmost political clarity as opposed to the demagoguery and slander that have characterized our relations thus far.

We look forward to your answer.

Communist greetings,  
Perrault  
For the International Secretariat of the ICL

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## Letter to the International Communist League

by Jan Norden for the Executive Committee of the  
League for the Fourth International

27 September 2023

Dear comrade Perrault,

We have received your 2 September letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International and analyzed it in conjunction with the issue of *Spartacist* (No. 68, September 2023) that you refer to, containing documents from the ICL's eighth international conference. Most fundamental for us as Trotskyists are the programmatic issues. It is these that guide our response to your proposal for "opening formal discussion between our organizations," which we will address below.

In your letter, you write: "On several important counts, the International Conference recognized that the criticisms made by the IG of the ICL were correct." Several passages in the recent *Spartacist* make similar statements. In the interest of basic political housekeeping, we must pose some necessary questions.

- 1) You state that "the fights that led to the expulsions of the IG's founding members from the ICL" were "unprincipled." Yes they were. The question is, what specifically about them does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled?
- 2) You state that you are "investigating the disciplinary measures taken at the time." Does this investigation include the travesty of a "trial" of a comrade centered on outright fabrications, and

the preparation of a second frame-up trial shortly thereafter?<sup>1</sup> Does it include the flagrantly chauvinist campaign against North African comrades who opposed the ICL leaders' abandoning the commitment to publish an exile publication?<sup>2</sup> Or coming clean about the unspeakable witch hunt by the ICL in 1999 against the leaders of its Italian section?<sup>3</sup>

3) Your letter now also characterizes as unprincipled the ICL's June 1996 "break in relations with Luta Metalúrgica/Liga Quarta-Internacionalista do Brasil," and *Spartacist* calls for the ICL to carry out "a reckoning" on this unilateral break. But, again, what exactly about its actions does the ICL now characterize as unprincipled? The fact that, at the height of the heated struggle the Brazilian comrades were waging to oust *guardas* (police) from the municipal workers union in the steel city of Volta Redonda, the ICL stabbed the struggle in the back? It called to "pull our hands out of that boiling water" and demanded that the comrades resign their union positions, quit the union and leave town, and then, when they refused this shameful demand, the ICL broke relations. To cover its tracks, it launched a smear campaign which went so far as to brand the black Trotskyist steel workers as "dangerous hustlers," and sought to sabotage their international defense campaign, calling it a "cynical sham" after the courts ordered the "search and seizure" of all copies of a leaflet their Comitê de Luta Classista issued, based on a suit demanding a list of all CLC members.<sup>4</sup>

The recent *Spartacist* claims that the ICL and IG engaged in "almost three decades" of "mutual slander." For the record, the IG/LFI *never* slandered the ICL. Our critiques have been scrupulously political and always based on fact. In contrast, the ICL unleashed a decades-long torrent of slanders against us, seeking to brand the IG as "anti-American" at the height of post-9/11 hysteria for our call to defeat U.S. imperialism in Afghanistan,<sup>5</sup> "provocateur"-baiting,<sup>6</sup> and much more. You mention in passing (in a parenthesis) the "2010 Haiti betrayal," without saying what that was—the ICL's scandalous support for U.S. occupation troops—and its refusal to fight for independence for Puerto Rico, but not that it denounced the LFI for our principled opposition to imperialist domination. And as for the latter-day ICL's chauvinist line on refugees,<sup>7</sup> the word does not even appear in the latest issue of *Spartacist*.

Proceeding to the proposal put forward in your 2 September letter, you call for "opening formal discussion between our organizations," to "engage as much as possible in common work," and, "as a first step," to "hold a private meeting between leadership delegations of both our organizations," in order to "have an initial exchange of views and consider options for further discussions." There is *no principled programmatic basis* for such formal discussions, private leadership meetings or common work. This is, of course, distinct from united-front actions (as opposed to the political bloc you are effectively proposing) when the class struggle calls for it, which we have participated in (and often initiated) with a range of political tendencies, including the ICL.

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<sup>1</sup> See our July 1996 pamphlet [From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle](#).

<sup>2</sup> See "['Chauvinist Hydra' Devours SL/ICL: Some History Ex-Trotskyists Would Like to Keep Hidden](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 59, March-April 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See [Back to Trotskyism!](#) (May 2016).

<sup>4</sup> See "ICL Seeks to Sabotage Defense of Brazilian Trotskyist Workers." reproduced in [Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists](#) (2010) and [Class Struggle and Repression in Volta Redonda, Brazil](#) (1997). Also, "[Army Death Squad Targeted Brazilian Worker Militants](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 8, June 2000.

<sup>5</sup> See "[ICL Refuses to Call for Defeat of U.S. Imperialism, 'Anti-American' Baits the Internationalist Group](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

<sup>6</sup> See the denunciation of this smear by Esteban Volkov, Trotsky's grandson, in "Poisonous 'Provocateur' Baiting from the SL," [The Internationalist No. 16](#), May-June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See "[Strange Encounters with the ICL](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 44 (Summer 1016 [sic]); "[Spartacist League vs. Refugees](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 47, March-April 2017; "[The ICL vs. Asylum for Refugees in Quebec](#)," *The Internationalist* No. 56, May-June 2019.

Such discussions, common work, etc. are the kind of steps that left organizations undertake when there is some process of political convergence. Some might think that since the LFI upholds the programmatic heritage of the Spartacist tendency when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism, and you still call your international organ *Spartacist* (for how long?), that might indicate a degree of commonality. But under its new leadership, and for years before then, the ICL has turned its back on and increasingly formally renounced one fundamental Spartacist position after another. You claim that “the courses taken by our two organizations in the post-Soviet period...were qualitatively similar.” In reality, the political differences have continued to grow since the 1996-98 expulsions, and are rapidly accelerating.

You state in the current issue of *Spartacist* that the Spartacist tendency was supposedly “Deformed at Birth” on the question of permanent revolution—a central issue for Trotskyists. To advance this claim, the ICL (new epoch) performs a sleight-of-hand, seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a *stagist* program, in which the first stage is national liberation, even under capitalism, and even in the imperialist countries. On the contrary, Trotsky emphasized that in the present epoch, the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry.<sup>8</sup>

In the same vein, you now embrace the “Anti-Imperialist United Front” which in practice means political blocs with the bourgeoisie in colonial and semi-colonial countries, the formula used to subordinate the Chinese Communist Party to Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang, leading to the 1927 Shanghai Massacre. In line with that you vilify the Spartacist tendency’s record on Iran, when we warned against the catastrophic consequences of tailing the mullah-led “Islamic Revolution” as some kind of anti-imperialist movement, which led to the jailing and execution of thousands of leftists. In Mexico, you essentially prettify the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as anti-imperialist. A question: do you advocate that the “anti-imperialist united front” in Mexico include AMLO’s party, MORENA? Of course, everyone in Mexico knows that AMLO is acting as a border guard for *yanqui* imperialism.

“Nation-building” bourgeois nationalism is the political motor force of the ICL’s escalation of its abandonment of the Spartacist programmatic heritage, publicly announced with the 2017 [“Hydra” document](#). A key aspect of “Hydra” was its embrace of anti-democratic language laws in Quebec and Catalonia, which means repudiating Lenin’s crucial position against compulsory official languages.<sup>9</sup> The ICL’s new, blatantly anti-Leninist line on the national question paved the way for a blizzard of further revisions, predictably now leading to repudiating the Spartacist tendency’s crucial position that in the case of interpenetrated peoples (such as in Palestine), a just and equitable solution to competing national rights is only possible through establishing workers rule.<sup>10</sup> This is essential to the struggle to defend the Palestinian people and overthrow the Zionist regime, for example. Today the ICL’s embrace of nationalism is extended, both retrospectively (on the USSR, Poland and the other East European deformed workers states) and currently on China.

The basic disagreements between us not only concern what you call “abstract doctrine” but also burning issues of the present day. Thus on the war of the U.S./NATO imperialists and their proxy

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<sup>8</sup> Your claim that Trotsky’s program of permanent revolution put forward in 1905 was essentially identical with Lenin’s formula at that time of a “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” directly contradicts Trotsky’s own presentation in [“Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution”](#) (August 1939) which contrasts them.

<sup>9</sup> See Lenin’s [“Liberals and Democrats on the Language Question”](#) (September 1913), his seminal [“Critical Remarks on the National Question”](#) (October-December 1913) and related works.

<sup>10</sup> This was not some Spartacist invention, as you portray it, but was directly based on the Bolshevik experience in areas of mixed populations in Ukraine and the Caucasus.

regime in Ukraine against Russia, a way station toward imperialist war against China, the policy of the LFI is directly counterposed to that of the ICL. While the ICL admits that capitalist Russia is not an imperialist power, you denounce the LFI for upholding military defense of Russia against the imperialists. And while claiming in the latest *Spartacist* that “the ICL and IG are relatively close” on issues like China, in your previous issue (August 2022) you denounce us for characterizing the “Wuhan lab leak theory” as what it is: imperialist war propaganda against the Chinese deformed workers state.

As for the imaginary scenario of “common work,” again there is no principled basis. From your blanket “Down with lockdowns” line (including in China, where they were very effective) to your recent articles and leaflets, each is more opportunist than the last. This includes calling to join the Australian Labor Party, the governing party that enforces racist immigration laws; the SL/U.S. statement on the ILWU and UPS (19 August) declaring that the “real battle” is “workers vs. the Establishment”; and the openly class-collaborationist “Proposal to Rebuild the Movement” (28 August), calling to “unite the broadest possible forces” to “bring pressure down on all the liberal and progressive politicians who claim to stand for workers and for black rights” to fulfill the “doable” call to “open the police archives,” which, it states, “can be done by any politician in office that is really on the side of black people.” And then there is your abhorrent leaflet on the subway murder of Jordan Neely.

Having declared that the Spartacist tendency was deformed at birth, you deride Jim Robertson as a revisionist and have undertaken the wholesale junking of the programmatic arsenal crucial to revolutionary struggle today. We of the LFI, having fought over the course of decades to defend this legacy and carry it into the living class struggle, will not join you in your endeavor. With the ICL’s consolidation of its break with the “old” Spartacism, you are now junking just about every distinctly Spartacist position from the days when it stood for revolutionary Trotskyism. This underscores an undeniable political reality: it is the League for the Fourth International that upholds the revolutionary continuity of the communist program of Lenin and Trotsky.

Having explained why there is no principled programmatic basis for the LFI to hold private “discussions” with you, we instead challenge the ICL to a public debate. We propose that the two organizations work out the date and other details for such a debate, and that it be held in New York City, where both have their largest concentration of members.

Communist greetings,  
Jan Norden

for the Executive Committee of the League for the Fourth International

## **Letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International**

by Perrault

11 October 2023

Dear Comrade Norden,

We regret that you have turned down our proposal for a formal meeting. In our opinion holding a frank discussion with another organization claiming the mantle of Trotskyism does not require any prior political agreement. In fact, we believe that such discussions can play an important role in clarifying differences and eventually forging political agreement.

In my September 2 letter I proposed “common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement” and “common work when it is appropriate.” You reject this arguing that this is a proposal for a political bloc as opposed to united-front actions. We think this is a false distinction. Whether it is to “stop the fascists,” “free political prisoners” or the 1921 UKPD

“open letter,” every united front requires some form of political agreement or bloc at least on a limited set of objectives. We think that we can possibly find a principled basis to work with you on defense work against political repression. Of course, we cannot have a united front on something we don't agree with. For example, it seems you do not agree on the desirability of throwing the AUKUS hawks out of the ALP or the fight to open police archives. If you did—and we certainly hope you change your mind—it would be entirely possible to work together on these limited objectives while still defending our respective strategies toward the ALP and black liberation in the U.S.

Now in response to your questions.

- 1) We believe that everything about the fight which led to your expulsion was unprincipled. Back in 1996 you agreed with the ICL's overall orientation. However, the fights with you and your comrades, whether over Germany, Brazil or Mexico, were all based on trying to show that you were in opposition to the rest of the ICL leadership. Since this was not the case, existing differences had to be exaggerated or simply manufactured through demagogy and distortions.
- 2) Yes, our investigation does include the trials. There is a very long list of fights that were had in the last 30 years which we know to be wrong and damaging. We have prioritized the 1996 expulsion because of its political significance as well as the precedents it set. We are not currently reviewing the 1997 fight in the LTF. That being said, it was unquestionably a despicable fight, including its blanket rejection of an “iskrist perspective” for Algeria. As you know, the 1999 witchhunt of comrades Giulia and Carlo was reviewed in a 2004 ICC investigation. We have not re-examined the question but can certainly state that it was inexcusable to not communicate the result of the investigation to them.
- 3) On Brazil it is clear to us based on our own published account of events that we had no legitimate political grounds to break off relations when we did. That said, as you note there is much more to the question. We are currently investigating the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil and are determined to account for the full truth, no matter how bitter.

In addition to the questions addressed above, your response raises several substantial political differences over the content of *Spartacist* No. 68 and our recent work. I will not respond to all of these in the present letter. On most points we believe that you either distort or caricature the actual arguments we make and/or present our position as somehow being self-evidently opportunist without providing any serious motivation or explanation.

To give only one example, you claim that we seek to “turn Trotsky's perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program” and supposedly repudiate that “the tasks of the bourgeois revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries can only be achieved through the dictatorship of the proletariat, leaning on the peasantry.” However, even a superficial glance at our article “In Defense of Permanent Revolution” will show that this isn't true. Far from endorsing a “stagist program,” we reaffirm that “only the proletariat, rallying behind it the peasant masses and the urban petty bourgeoisie, is capable of breaking the yoke of foreign capital, finishing the agrarian revolution and establishing full democracy for the toilers in the form of a workers and peasants government.”

Finally, we will gladly accept the challenge to a debate. We agree to hold it in New York City. In terms of the time, we are relatively flexible. Our tentative proposal is to hold it in December. Would Saturday, December 9 work for you?

In our opinion, the best way to have a productive and clarifying debate would be to hold a full-day event where we can divide some of the various questions in dispute. We think this can be justified by the fact that this debate is almost 30 years in the making and numerous comrades from outside New York will surely want to attend.

Our proposal is as follows:

- Main theme: The Fight for the Fourth International Today
- Point 1: Revolutionary Leadership from 1990 to 2023
- Point 2: Permanent Revolution
- Point 3: The Task of Communists in the U.S.

We propose that the first point be longer than the two others given the breadth of the question and the fact that revolutionary leadership is at the heart of our differences. It is in this point that we propose to take up the question of China and the war in Ukraine. Permanent Revolution seems to us an obvious theme. As for the point on the United States, we think it makes sense given that the event will take place in New York and we both have most members in the U.S. We are of course open to a counterproposal on your part if you have a problem with any of the above proposals. Once we have agreed on a date and questions to debate, we should proceed rapidly in arranging the other details such as a venue, a chair, the format, etc.

Communist greetings,

Perrault

For the International Secretariat of the ICL

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## Letter to the International Communist League

by Jan Norden

15 October 2023

Dear comrade Perrault:

We have received your 11 October letter. First, regarding the response to our queries about the ICL's investigation of its actions in the period that gave rise to our organization:

Your initial letter (2 September) noted that the ICL now characterizes as “unprincipled” the “fights” that led to the expulsions of the founding members of the Internationalist Group. As our 27 September reply highlighted, that statement, while true, is strikingly general. A much more specific accounting from the ICL is required if the intent is not merely to make do with a quick “confession” but to seriously evaluate the *meaning* and lessons of events that both you and we describe as highly relevant for would-be Trotskyists.

Your 11 October answer, that “everything” about the 1996 “fight” against us was unprincipled, is based on the claim that both sides shared the same mistaken political outlook. In reality, the ICL purged us for fighting to implement the Trotskyist program, which it was abandoning—as shown dramatically when, after (and closely connected with) our expulsions, it stabbed in the back the struggle to expel police from the municipal workers union in Brazil’s “Steel City.” It was far from just a matter of “distortions,” exaggerations or specious arguments.

In the course of the cynical 1996 purge, the ICL ripped up one basic Leninist norm and party statute after another, launched a chain of willful fabrications, threatened to disaffiliate the Mexican section if it did not vote for statements the members knew to be false, publicly defamed our comrades, and much more, as we laid out at the time (beginning with [From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle](#)). For going on 30 years, the ICL sought to ignore and silence the facts. Those serious about revolutionary politics have a right to expect concrete and specific answers, after decades of snow jobs and smears from the ICL.

Your 11 October response to us states that the ICL's investigation does include the 1996 “trials” (sic) as well as “the claims you have made about the actions of our tendency in Brazil.” This was



not just “claims,” but facts laid out in detail at the time in materials collected in the dossier [\*Responses to ICL Smear Campaign Against Brazilian Trotskyists\*](#) as well as *From a Drift...*

We also asked about the 1997 campaign against oppositionists in the ICL’s French section, who after their expulsion joined in founding the League for the Fourth International.<sup>1</sup> You write that this “was unquestionably a despicable fight”—but that the ICL is “not currently reviewing” it. Why is that? Nor, to our knowledge, has the ICL made any public accounting regarding this blatantly chauvinist and colonialist campaign whose proclaimed goal was to “humiliate” these North African comrades and “demoralize” them, for opposing the disgraceful line the ICL put forward regarding both Algeria and France.

Your response to our 27 September letter notes that it “raises several substantial political differences” with the ICL’s current line and work, but does not seek to respond to them all. So we will make brief comments on some of what you do address.

No, the difference between united-front actions and a political bloc is not “a false distinction.” As explained in the fundamental Spartacist pamphlet *On the United Front* (1976): “In contrast to a united front, a bloc is an open-ended agreement to collaborate for broadly defined aims”—which describes rather well the perspective you laid out, for which, as we noted, there is no principled programmatic basis. A united front, however, is a joint action for concrete, limited objectives, and as noted in our letter we have initiated many such actions, inviting a range of tendencies, including the ICL.

You reject our statement that the ICL is seeking to turn Trotsky’s perspective of permanent revolution into a stagist program, and cite a phrase from the current issue of *Spartacist* as supposed evidence to the contrary. With bourgeois nationalism as the driving force for a group (as is the case with the present-day ICL) that still—for now—claims to be Trotskyist, an accurate presentation of permanent revolution can only be an impediment. For left groups undertaking wholesale revisionism, it is standard operating procedure to include a few “orthodox”-sounding phrases.

Turning permanent revolution into a stagist program is what it means to embrace, as you do, the “anti-imperialist united front,” which is the long-standing pretext for such a program and “theoretical” justification for political blocs with bourgeois-nationalist forces. That is also what it means to identify, as *Spartacist* now does, Trotsky’s permanent revolution with Lenin’s pre-1917 formula of “democratic dictatorship” of the proletariat and peasantry, and with the formulation that Marx put forward in 1850. When Lenin stood on that formula, he explicitly stated that it meant a “democratic, not a socialist” regime (*Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution* [1905]); in April 1917, against those who sought to cling to that slogan, he wrote that “things have worked out differently,” and called instead for “all power to the soviet of workers deputies” (*Letters on Tactics* [1917]). With regard to the formulation by Marx decades before the imperialist era, Trotsky noted: “Marx at that time expected the independent stage of the democratic revolution in Germany.... That, however, is just what did not happen” (*The Permanent Revolution* [1930]).

These kinds of revelations now proclaimed by *Spartacist* have been made many times in the past by erstwhile Trotskyist tendencies seeking theoretical cover for their rightward motion. They are part of a package including the idea that democratic demands *rather than* class struggle are the “fundamental lever for socialist revolution.” From China 1927 to Indonesia 1965, Chile 1973 to the Philippines now—and so many other countries—the real-world consequences of a stagist program, tying the proletariat to the “democratic”/“anti-imperialist” bourgeoisie, have been fatal.

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Internationalist* No. 5, April-May 1998.

Your letter states that we have presented various of the ICL's positions as being self-evidently opportunist. Yes, that would indeed seem self-evident when faced with statements like that of the SL/U.S. (quoted in our 27 September letter) that the "real battle" is "workers vs. the Establishment" (a standard term that liberals use instead of class). This *openly* contradicts the ABCs of Marxism—based on the struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie—and blatantly echoes bourgeois populism of both "left" and right. Then there's the SL's appeal to "unite the broadest possible forces" in a pressure campaign aimed at "any politician in office that is really on the side of black people" which is straight out of the handbook of popular frontism. Etcetera.

Lastly, we are glad that you have accepted our challenge to a debate. Given current events, December 9 would not be practical for us; we propose January 13 instead. We want to have the standard debate format (with presentations, discussion and summaries, extending to two rounds if needed) rather than diluting it into a day-long quasi-conference. We have no objection to the title you propose, "The Fight for the Fourth International Today," and, as you state, details such as venue, chair, etc., can and should be arranged soon.

Communist greetings,

Jan Norden

for the Executive Committee of the League for the Fourth International

# Exchange on Chauvinism and Moralism

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## More Blast from the Past

by Jane S

17 September 2023

Dear Comrades,

I would describe myself as a long term supporter of the Spartacist tendency, one who follows the new ICL with renewed interest.

Some things in the past may best be left in the past, but as you know we sometimes have to reckon with them.

Reviewing serious past errors on the national question, you should probably look again at the “Marxist appreciation” of James Connolly, presented at a Spartacist day school in Ireland in 2006 and published in Workers Hammer <https://old.iclfi.org/english/wh/195/connolly>.

We read, outrageously in my view, that “calling for a military victory to the anti-Treatyites in the civil war would have been a betrayal of the working class”. In other words, lip service was paid to James Connolly and the Easter Rising, only to repudiate the war against the Treaty state imposed by British imperialism and the young Irish Communists who fought!

I have received from the same source (please don't ask as I have promised not to) the attached draft transcript (scanned in two docs) of a never published Spartacist League history by Jim R and others in Britain in 1985. One observation: Parodi said he didn't like it at the time, but “jokes” (?) that he was in something he grossly called the “w--- committee”.

The TLC wrote the “pickle jars” slur, Jim R “joked” about “goat-f---” in Albania while this “w--- committee” was running around Britain.

The new ICL has nailed the first.

Please now finish the job.

Comradely,  
JS

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## Reply to Jane S

by Perrault

4 November 2024

Dear comrade,

First, apologies once more for the delay in answering your letter. We have certainly been very busy in the last year. That said, as you have no doubt understood, this does not fully explain the delay in our answer. Rather, it is the subject matter itself that has caused us some difficulty.

Regarding Ireland, you are right to stress the importance of the question and our duty to provide answers. You are also right in pointing to serious problems (to say the least) in our previous approach. We have started to do some initial work on the question, but it will still take us a few more months. I hope the work we have done in re-evaluating various other fundamental questions of the international workers movement shows our commitment to laying solid political foundations for our work. Ireland will be no exception.

Now to the thornier question. You point to a number of chauvinist incidents in our past and ask us to “finish the job.”

The first thing I will note is that you seem to misunderstand the nature of our re-orientation. Our accomplishment over the past three years has not been to purge ourselves of chauvinism by denouncing individual instances of chauvinism or backwardness in our nearly 60 years as a tendency. Rather, the point has been to draw the lessons from our, and the entire left’s, failure in the post-Soviet period and put forward a program to advance the fight for communism in today’s conditions. One aspect of this is that we have had to revise the historic approach of the Spartacist tendency to the national question.

Here again the point is not that we were backward as a tendency and wrote some nasty things, but rather that we scorned the struggle for national emancipation. Of course, the result was a capitulation to social-chauvinism. But to address this in a way that will bring our movement forward is just as important as identifying the problem. Radical organizations are often destroyed by liberal and moralistic reactions to what are real problems.

In your letter you mention that “Jim R ‘joked’ about ‘goat-f---’ in Albania” and that the term “w---committee” was used at the time of the London station (no one in the ICL today knows anything about this). You ask us to deal with these the same way we dealt with the “pickle jars” slur in the TLQC in 2016-17. But that fight was not at all a model to follow; quite the opposite, in fact. It was precisely the type of moralistic fight that destroys but does not build.

We were certainly correct in 2016 to object to the way *Spartacist Canada* had written about the national question in Quebec and the “pickle jars” statement in particular. However, the problem with our internal fight was that it was entirely divorced from how to advance the struggle against national liberation and for socialism today. Because of this, the outrage against what we wrote in the past had nowhere to go but toward moralism. In the midst of a few correct and fundamental programmatic points, much of the party’s energy was directed at “fighting chauvinism” and finding the guilty people, i.e., Seymour and Co. Not only did this not help us in any way in intervening into the world, but it was also destructive.

This is typical of moralism; it seeks to blame ideas and individuals for backwardness. The solution it provides is to denounce, shame and purge. Generally, as in the example above, it is in reaction to insensitivity or chauvinism toward an oppressed group. The problem with this method is that it does nothing to actually overcome social backwardness while demoralizing and disorganizing the struggle against capitalism, which is responsible for backwardness and oppression. It also eventually fosters a backlash against the oppressed—as we can see happening toward liberal anti-racism in the U.S. today.

So, what is the Marxist way to deal with acts of social backwardness? First, we understand that social backwardness, whether in the form of nationalism, sexism or religious obscurantism, is a product of capitalist society. We understand that these will only disappear through eliminating the material conditions that engender them. This does *not* mean conciliating backwardness. It must be fought, but in a way that will strengthen the fighting unity of the proletariat. That is, not through shaming or preaching but by showing in action how nationalism, chauvinism, religion, etc. are obstacles to advancing the interests of the entire working class. Moreover, we must show concretely how the emancipation of the proletariat as a whole is inseparable from the fight to liberate specially oppressed groups in capitalist society.

Now let’s apply this to Jim Robertson’s comment on Albania. It was a backward joke, and we certainly do not defend it. But the manner in which we distance ourselves from it is important. A moralist response—and there have been many—would be to denounce Jim as racist and to paint the ICL as an organization that tolerated racism. The practical conclusion would be to repudiate our legacy and start fresh on a new, “non-chauvinist” basis. This would be totally wrong. This

“blank slate” would be illusory and only in our own heads, because we would still be under the very same pressures. Also, it would break us from all that is good and needs to be defended in Jim and the ICL’s contributions.

More important than denouncing those comments made decades ago is understanding where they came from politically. In this way lessons can be drawn and put into practice today. Jim’s comment was a product of our general approach to the national question. That is, instead of championing the cause of oppressed nations and putting their struggle at the heart of our revolutionary perspective, we scorned the nationalists and tried to show how backward and reactionary they were. Sometimes offending national sensibilities was considered a way to be sharp against nationalism, or in this case Stalinism. This not only led to certain egregious comments, like the one you mention, but more importantly it was totally counterproductive. This approach alienates the oppressed and heightens nationalism.

Coming back to your request to “finish the job,” I say that we will finish the job, but not in the way you propose. We will continue to do exactly what we have been doing. We will put forward a program today that can overcome racial, national, sexual and religious divisions and forge the fighting unity of the proletariat. In this regard there is much to do, starting with the question of Ireland that you mention. To the extent that this work requires us to look back at the mistakes of our own tradition, we will not shy away from going to the root of the problem. But the root is programmatic, not a lack of moral righteousness or liberal sensitivity.

It is precisely this point that the LFI, BT and IBT muddy in their evaluation of the ICL. They are all in their own way blinded by subjective bitterness over past crimes (real or perceived) and are unable to address the substance of the political disagreements today in an honest and fundamental way. Actually, this is how the ICL acted toward the BT. We could not engage them without the mandatory attack that they were morally tarnished by their association with Logan and that they were chauvinist, or by raising other more nefarious insinuations. This was a moralistic and demagogic critique, which did not show how the BT’s politics were contrary to the interests of the proletariat.

Your comments on our debate with the LFI indicate that you are still holding on to this method. You write that you found it “quite bewildering at times and I do not understand how someone like Logan was there.” Again, you are missing the bigger picture. If you put to the side LFI antics and the presence of Logan, you will see that we focused our interventions on the great programmatic questions of our epoch and provided some key answers. Not only is this the Marxist way to advance the fight against social backwardness, but it is also the only way to advance the struggle of the proletariat for its emancipation. It is in this way that we intend to “finish the job.”

Comradely,  
Perrault

# Exchange on Lockdowns and Vaccines

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## Anti-Lockdowners “On a Misunderstanding”

by Thomas Smith

27 September 2023

To Vernon Davis, Editor

In response to your recent article, “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony...” 9/1/23<sup>1</sup>.

Dear Mr. Davis,

Your article in general is excellent. I felt dismayed upon reading the section concerning the liberal response to Covid-19, however. I was encouraged by your group’s recent statement of opposition to the lockdowns, and of support for the truckers’ convoys opposing the vaccine mandates.<sup>2</sup> Even here, in this same section, you state that the problem with most of the rest of the (“Lockdown”) Left, when they echo the bourgeoisie’s own slogan of “following the science”, is that they lack “The basic understanding that science in capitalist society is not neutral but is wielded to serve the interest of the bourgeoisie ....”

Yet here, you also promote these Covid-19 vaccines as “life-saving”. Hunh?!

The solution to this seeming contradiction is clear. You still fail to comprehend the difference between the following two, diametrically opposed praxes:

\* Genuine science, which demands that the scientific method be observed by scientists/doctors: that the products of science and technology be adequately tested for safety.

\* Scientism, which turns science into a religion, and scientists, into its priests: as the mathematician Alexandre Grothendieck wrote in his 1971 essay, *The New Universal Church*.<sup>3</sup> Thus for us ordinary mortals to demand actual proof of adequate safety-testing is sacrilegious. “When you question me,” Anthony Fauci has said publicly, “you question the science!”<sup>4</sup> (Horrors!)

Yes, you’re right: the products of science may be “wielded” in an abusive manner by the bourgeoisie to serve their interest. But you fetishize these products, since they come from “Science”. You’ve thus blinded yourself to the fact that the medical establishment, more often than not, is guided by such bourgeois corruption in their very production, and promotion of these products as safe and effective. Thus you skip over the key question: Have they been tested?

Is this fetishism the basis for your assertion that these Covid 19 vaccines save lives? Where is the proof for such assertions? That’s the question that at least tens if not hundreds of thousands of formerly pro-vaxx scientists are asking. Pfizer, Moderna, et al. only took six months to “test” these products.<sup>5</sup> That is simply not enough time. The Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting

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<sup>1</sup> The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony and the Struggle for Workers Power | A Program for the Fourth International (icl-fi.org) <https://www.icl-fi.org/english/esp/68/breakdown/>

<sup>2</sup> Down With the Lockdowns! - The Working Class Must Defend Itself (icl-fi.org) <https://www.icl-fi.org/english/esp/2021-04-lockdown.html>

<sup>3</sup> univ.pdf (uwo.ca) <https://publish.uwo.ca/~jbell/univ.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Fauci: When People Criticize Me, They Are Really Criticizing Science | Video | RealClearPolitics <https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2021/11/28/>

<sup>5</sup> Covid-19 vaccines: In the rush for regulatory approval, do we need more data? | The BMJ <https://www.bmj.com/content/373/bmj.n1244>

System's reports are off the charts, with more injuries and deaths reported after taking these vaccines than ever reported in the prior thirty years combined.<sup>6</sup>

Consider the possibility that it just might be you, and not the truckers and other vaxxresistant workers, who harbor illusions about whether these vaccines are indeed safe, let alone "life saving". Don't patronize: Listen to these workers, and to the parents of children damaged by the one or more of the mandated 72 shots, none of which have been adequately safety-tested, as revealed by the Aaron Siri's Informed Consent Action Network lawsuit,<sup>7</sup> and by the book, *Turtles All the Way Down*<sup>8</sup>

"All theory is gray, my friend, but forever green is the tree of life,"—Lenin (quoting Goethe).

Thomas Smith, Ph.D.

## Reply to Thomas Smith

by Vincent David

7 October 2023

Dear Thomas Smith,

Thank you for your letters. Just as a point of precision, I (Vincent David, not Vernon Davis) am not the sole author of the content of *Spartacist*. While the main article on the breakdown of U.S. hegemony is the work of comrade G. Perrault, all the articles in *Spartacist* are the work of a collective of leading comrades, which is why they are usually not signed.

We found your letter to the Workers League interesting and are happy you are circulating our article to them. I have not had the chance to study their material but from what you are saying, you seem to be right against them. We would be interested in seeing their response.

We obviously have a disagreement regarding the pandemic and vaccines. You argue that our position is contradictory because we opposed the lockdowns while at the same time supporting the Covid-19 vaccines. You say that this is due to our illusions in the vaccines produced by big pharma and our failure to distinguish between "genuine science" and "scientism." First, our opposition to the lockdowns and the vaccine mandates which threatened mass firing of workers was not based on the lack of scientific evidence to support such measures. Most scientific studies show that lockdowns slowed the spread of Covid-19. We have no illusions in the benevolence of big pharma, but the overwhelming evidence shows that the vaccines developed by these vultures did reduce the risk of complications from the disease.

<sup>6</sup> Safety Signals for COVID Vaccines Are Loud and Clear. Why Is Nobody Listening? • Children's Health Defense (childrenshealthdefense.org) <https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/safety-signals-covid-vaccines-full-transparency-cdc-fda/>

<sup>7</sup> Kennedy on Vaccine Skepticism: "We Don't Have A Priesthood Here," "Americans Are In Charge Of Our Own Lives" | Video | RealClearPolitics [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2023/06/29/kennedy\\_on\\_vaccine\\_skepticism\\_we\\_dont\\_have\\_a\\_priesthood\\_here\\_were\\_in\\_charge\\_of\\_our\\_own\\_lives.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2023/06/29/kennedy_on_vaccine_skepticism_we_dont_have_a_priesthood_here_were_in_charge_of_our_own_lives.html): KENNEDY: No. Let me just say something. Dr. Fauci and many other people for many years said this, "Bobby Kennedy, what he says is wrong." I met with Dr. Fauci in 2016, when I agreed to go on Trump's vaccine safety commission. I was with Aaron Siri and Lynn Redwood and a number of other people and we said to him, "Can you show us one test from any vaccine?" Pre-licensing safety test. And he said, "I'll send it to you, I can't find one now." He never did, so we sued him. Aaron Siri and I sued HHS and after a year of litigation and stonewalling, they said they could not provide a single safety study for any vaccine that is on the childhood schedule. Pre-licensing safety study.

<sup>8</sup> *Turtles All The Way Down*, Anonymous (medical scientists), ed. Zoey O'Toole and Mary Holland. 2022.

The main question for communists during the pandemic was not “scientism” versus “genuine science” but whether the capitalist class or the workers will call the shots as to what is safe and what is not. We opposed the lockdowns and vaccine mandates threatening mass firing because they were attacks against the working class, preventing it from uniting in struggle against the capitalists, which is the only way for workers to really defend their health and safety. However, you should know that we did support mandatory vaccination, i.e., being forced to get a jab. It is not a democratic right to jam hospital wards with diseases that are preventable through vaccination. Forcing people to get a vaccine does not undermine workers’ capacity to struggle. What we opposed was the implementation of such mandates through mass firing of workers. Such positions seem contradictory only if you have a classless approach to “science” as opposed to what advances the struggle of the proletariat for its liberation.

It seems clear that you are falling into one of the two main reactionary poles during the pandemic. This is precisely what the sentence you criticize captures: “Given that science was used to justify one reactionary policy after another, millions of people turned against ‘science’ and refused lifesaving vaccines.” The challenge for revolutionaries during the pandemic was to mount an opposition to the bourgeoisie and government *even though* some of their measures did save lives. But in the absence of such a working-class and revolutionary opposition to the government, society became divided between two reactionary camps. On one side, the liberals supported anything done by the government in the name of “science,” including devastating anti-worker attacks. Most of the “socialist” left supported this. On the other side, and in reaction to this, many rightly revolted, but under all sorts of reactionary programs. Some rejected all vaccines and science. Others (like you) resorted to deny reality: vaccines murdered children and were a giant plot by big pharma, brandishing obscure studies by discredited doctors as the ultimate proof of this.

The latter (and more generally the spread of what the liberals call “conspiracy theories”) is a sign of the inability to resolve what appeared to many as an insoluble contradiction: on one hand, the capitalist class response to the pandemic was a disaster for working people and big pharmaceutical companies are vultures making gigantic profits. On the other hand, billions of people received their vaccines with no problem, hospitalization rates actually fell, and Covid-19 is now similar to the flu.

This is an impossible dilemma only if you reject the *science of Marxism*. The exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie requires the latter to keep the workers alive. Nevertheless, the domination of the bourgeoisie over society is a fundamental obstacle to the development of productive forces and to the progress of humanity, which makes its response to any catastrophe reactionary. Only on this basis is it possible to oppose the government and big pharma without denying reality through conspiracies.

Comradely,  
Vincent David

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## Scientism vs. Science

by Thomas Smith

9 October 2023

Dear Vincent,

Upon re-examining your last email, I insist that your view is indeed based on scientism vs genuine science. You have what the Spartacist League used to accuse Labor Militant of: “a touching faith in the benevolence of the bourgeois state”. Well, you’re not that bad. You only



promote such faith, when it comes to “Progressive” scientific government agencies. Somehow, the Ph.Ds that the staff of these agencies possess, makes them ineligible for suspicion that they might be corrupted by a bourgeois agenda—despite your statement that at least the USE of science is INEVITABLY so corrupted under a capitalist regime! And despite the fact that, as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. has shown convincingly in his book, *The Real Anthony Fauci*, that all these agencies have been captured by the industries they supposedly regulate.

This explains to me why you have accepted the bourgeois establishment’s “finding” vis a vis the effectivity of lockdowns and mRNA vaccines: and why you so calmly, one might say, cavalierly, dismiss my view as merely “reactionary”.

As I said in my letter, for the governmental propaganda that the vaccines were effective, there was not enough time to verify this scientifically. The only evidence for effectivity is that infections started decreasing right around the time these vaccines were introduced. But that conclusion has been disputed. For this decline in infections to have declined that quickly—before a majority of the population had been inoculated—is a sheer impossibility. The basis of this decline, therefore, was not the vaccines, but instead, the rise of natural immunity. As a recent study by the Cleveland Clinic shows, the more so-called “booster” shots you take, the MORE vulnerable you are to catching Covid! See <https://thehighwire.com/editorial/cleveland-clinic-more-boosters-more-likelyto-get-covid-19>.

There was no time to measure whether these vaccines were safe, either. I provided you evidence of this: the fact that there have been more deaths and injuries resulting from these vaccines over the past few years, than the earlier thirty years in the VAERS existence.

But I notice you didn’t even mention this in your reply. Where is your evidence that these vaccines are safe?

As for lockdowns, Dr. John Iannidis, who even according to the mainstream Washington Post, is a top scientist (though of course they then proceeded to try to spin it against him, found no benefit to lockdowns whatsoever. See the following. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2020/12/16/john-ioannidis-coronavirus-lockdowns-fox-news/>

And without the spin: <https://www.ihmc.us/stemtalk/episode-151/>

What evidence do you have to contradict these findings? As you and I are both Marxists, you will have to do a lot better than to tell me that government agencies reported such effectivity. You must be familiar with the critique of Progressivism, as a petite bourgeois attempt at an alternative to socialism, by such authors as Kolko and Weinstein.

The Progressives believed that they could merely rein in the abuses of robber baron capitalism, by an expansion of the state with these same regulatory agencies, staffed by scientific experts.

Do YOU believe in this utopian, petite bourgeois myth, Vincent?

This is scientism, Vincent. This is not science. Science, and Marxism, dictate that you present your evidence. If that is to be the evidence presented by the governmental agencies, that’s fine. But it is NOT sufficient that you just use such phrases “as the overwhelming evidence is that”, etc. This smothers over the actual social/power relations, involved with capitalist society, and its tendency toward corruption. That doesn’t provide us with a basis by which we can meaningfully debate these issues.

I’d appreciate a much more careful, nuanced reply, with actual evidence, that we can talk about, as critical thinkers, and not blind followers.

Yours respectfully,  
Professor Thomas Smith

## Reply to Thomas Smith

by Vincent David

4 November 2023

Dear Thomas,

Thank you for sending the polemic from The Medical Freedom Socialists of New York.

Your article highlights what you consider to be a longstanding connection between Kautskyism and Trotskyism, going all the way up to Jim Robertson and us, which is our illusion in “scientism” expressed in the following formulations of the document “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony...”:

“Millions died of the virus, millions lost their jobs, families were locked up in their homes at the expense of women, children and sanity. Given that science was used to justify one reactionary policy after another, millions of people turned against ‘science’ and refused lifesaving vaccines.”

If we are to believe the Medical Freedom Socialists, we have yet to break from Kautskyism and the Second International as long as we think that the Covid-19 vaccines were “lifesaving.”

I am far from being a specialist on vaccination. Nevertheless, I could probably find 10 or 20 studies which show that Covid-19 vaccines were effective in diminishing the risks of complications due to Covid-19 (which is what I claimed in my previous letter, and what remains the broad consensus among scientists). Then, in response, I assume the Medical Freedom Socialists will come up with 10 or 20 studies that show the opposite (from rather dubious sources like the “Children’s Health Defense”, but this observation probably makes me a Kautskyist “scientist” to your eyes). But while we would be having a long and complicated exchange over vaccines, the world historic movement for the emancipation of the working class would have not advanced one iota.

And this is really where our fundamental difference lies, not over vaccines. The entire approach to the pandemic of the Medical Freedom Socialists is limited to evaluating the effectiveness of vaccines and public health guidance based on this or that study while ours is to guide the struggles of the working class to defend its health and safety against the capitalist class. And for this arduous task, the proletariat can expect no help from the Medical Freedom Socialists.

In your whole polemic against Perrault and our conference document, as well as your multiple letters, there is not a single hint as to what the workers movement should have done differently with the crucial information you claim to possess (apart from not getting vaccinated). This is precisely what Marxism entails. That is what my previous letter to you tried to argue (to no avail) and that is why you found it so disappointing.

The problem with your approach is easy to see: what would happen if lockdowns or vaccines were suddenly proven to be effective by 100% of scientific studies? Would the Medical Freedom Socialists change their position then? I said in my previous letter that most studies did show that lockdowns slowed the spread of Covid-19, and the reason why this is true is because locking the entire population in their homes does stop the spread of diseases, as it stops many other things. The only solid basis to oppose the Covid-19 lockdowns is to be found in the necessities of the class struggle, not in the pages of scientific studies.

But let’s turn the question the other way, for the sake of argument. Let’s say the Medical Freedom Socialists are right about these vaccines, that their testing was inadequate or that they did cause harm. Again, we arrive at the same place. How does this help us to do anything? How does this help to combat the many illusions in the bourgeois state, or in capitalist politicians

(liberal or rightwing), illusions which were widespread during the pandemic, and which are still prevalent on almost all other social issues? It does not.

Even worse, the one concrete thing the Medical Freedom Socialists recommends to the ICL, apart from poring over your selection of medical studies, is to “listen to these workers” who were part of the truckers convoy and anti-vaxx demonstrations. Surely, I am all for listening. But workers who took part in these protests, despite legitimate anger against the liberal establishment, had all sorts of bizarre and reactionary things in their minds, something the Medical Freedom Socialists seem not to be bothered by. There is a reason why our leaflet defending the truckers in Canada also had the slogan “For a Communist Opposition to the Government” in its headline complex.

If we are to speak of “listening to workers,” the Medical Freedom Socialists should consider the fact that hundreds of millions of workers did receive vaccines from wretched pharma companies and are doing just fine. And the vast majority of working-class people, over a year since the end of the pandemic, think that those who rant about vaccines killing children are kind of creepy. I am not trying to be insulting. There is a real social truth in this that you should reckon with.

Lastly, your dismissal of Trotsky’s excellent 1925 speech on Dialectical Materialism and Science tells me a lot about how you conceive of Marxism as well as science. The entirety of Trotsky’s speech, which you dismissed as being closer to Feuerbach than Marx, is dedicated to explaining the relation between scientific thoughts and social regimes, and how the 1917 October Revolution—the greatest revolution witnessed by mankind, and of which Trotsky was a central architect—unleashed a new and higher potential for human knowledge. Your dismissal of this speech shows that you have understood neither Trotsky’s speech, nor Marx, nor Feuerbach. Here is another quote from it:

“Even today, the more far-sighted students of Mendelejev have begun to see clearly the vast possibilities for the development of scientific and technico-scientific thought thanks to the fact that this thought is, so to speak, nationalized, emancipated from the internecine wars of private property, no longer required to lend itself to bribery of individual proprietors but intended to serve the economic development of the nation as a whole. The network of technico-scientific institutes now being established by the State is only a tiny and so-to-speak material symptom of the limitless possibilities that have been disclosed.”

You see, the whole purpose of Marxism is to fight for new October Revolutions and build parties which can accomplish this task. And the struggle against Kautskyism and for the independence of the working class makes sense only for this purpose.

Marx exposed Feuerbach through his famous theses, which concluded with: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” The Medical Freedom Socialists’ polemic against us shows that you are neither capable of offering an alternative road of struggle for the working class, nor are you capable of explaining how your battle for “genuine science vs scientism” is in any way relevant to the fight for socialist revolution, nor are you capable of showing how the quote against which you object (and which opened this letter) is in any way an obstacle to fight for socialist revolution. You are condemned to interpret through the lens of your selection of “scientific” studies the world-historic event that was the pandemic, incapable of changing it.

Therefore, all of this for me is sufficient proof (according to the scientific method and not, God forbid, scientism) to safely conclude that the words “socialist” and even “freedom” in “Medical Freedom Socialist” are not worth a penny.

Nevertheless, we welcome this opportunity to have a frank exchange of views and we hope you will reconsider your course.

Communist greetings,  
Vincent David

## Exchange on *Spartacist* No. 68: On the Malvinas/Falklands War and Permanent Revolution

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*The following exchange was previously published on iclfi.org.*

### On the Anti Imperialist United Front, and Other Questions From a Scratch to—the Need for a Bandaid?

by J. Horowitz

5 October 2023

Dear comrades,

First I'd like to say that the turn away from the abstentionism of the last period is something I very much welcome. I have been unhappy about that ever since the late '90s, when the party essentially retreated from the campaign for Mumia Abu-Jamal while it was still a powerful campaign, a campaign that had become my own main activity as a trade unionist. Leaving it in the hands of the reformists without a fight, with the Spartacist role mainly reduced to comrade Wolkenstein's role as one of Mumia's lawyers. The result was the reformists promptly running it into the ground. Comrade Wolkenstein's attempt as SL chairman to jump back in after the campaign was dead was a case of closing the barn door after the horse was stolen, and the opportunist errors involved were opportunism as sectarianism standing in fear of itself.

And then of course there was the initial party position to completely **boycott** the Seattle anti globalization demo. As one previous Spartacist public statement remarked, the history of the SL lately has been sectarian abstentionism alternating with lunges into opportunism. The failure to take any kind of agitational approach to the worldwide 2008 recession, clearly blameable on capitalism, I found particularly troubling. Opportunism and passive propagandism reached their height in 2020, leading to collapse when the pandemic hit.

The thorough years long review of all Spartacist politics was desperately necessary, and IMHO carried out successfully. On the anti imperialist united front question, a badly needed change was half a century overdue. Speaking as a former member who has been a supporter since December 1970, and who often had doubts on this question, I am very happy about that too. What's more, that the party now recognizes that the concept that the post-Soviet era would be marked by US hegemony not inter-imperialist rivalries, something I figured out quite a while back, I like very much, loved Perrault's Germany article, and I like even more that the party did what I **did not** do, draw appropriate political conclusions from that. But whenever an important change in political line takes place, there is always the danger to overshoot, and on a couple of subsidiary questions I believe that may be what happened here.

But first, I want to broaden the historical perspective on this longstanding Spartacist deviation from Communist and Trotskyist tradition explained in the central conference document, concretizing it on Spartacist origins. As a result of various unfortunate developments, such as the sabotage of the RT by Healy and Wohlforth, by the time I joined the RMC the SL was down to a very small membership and had lost almost all personal continuity with the SWP in its days as a revolutionary organization and the Trotskyist movement in general as well. Except for comrade Robertson, most of whose previous experience was in the Shachtman organization in the 1950s. I think what is remarkable is not that the SL represented perfect continuity with revolutionary Trotskyism but how close it came to that.

IMHO, Robertson tended to see the post Soviet collapse period as parallel to the 1950s, when revolutionaries in the USA indeed, like it or not, largely had to take on an attitude of “standing fast,” as in that Howard Fast book, and wait for better times, better times arriving with the Cuban Revolution and the mass civil rights movement around about when the RT was born. And his and the organization’s weakness on national and colonial questions is hard to separate from his training in the Shachtman organization.

But it needs to be remembered that the SL was beginning to **break out of** such weaknesses in the 1970s. Notably, with the assistance of the brief Spartacist section in Israel, the SL abandoned the traditional Shachtmanite position that Israel should have been supported against the Palestinians in 1948. I think the encounter with Samarakkody may have prevented further progress.

For the first fifteen years or so of existence of the Spartacist tendency, it did not see itself, alone, as being a nucleus for a reborn Fourth International. The Spartacists checked out Healy’s IC, the Posadistas, Lutte Ouvriere, the Lambertistes, one by one, hoping to find fellow revolutionaries to merge with but not finding any. Robertson himself quipped that his ambition was to become a footnote in revolutionary history. And during the negotiations with Samarakkody, the concept was that he would become the leader of the world movement. Negotiations did not break down over his positions on national/colonial questions, but over his capitulation to popular frontism, repudiation of his heroic vote that brought down an SLFP government, and over his bad role in the Logan trial. An unavoidable breakdown, which I think led the party to believe that they were by now the only possible nucleus for a world revolutionary party, and therefore to double down on American-centric Spartacist weaknesses on national/colonial questions.

I do not recall whether it was at that time or before or after that the party formally and publicly rejected the “anti imperialist united front” slogan, which a decade or two later after studying the Comintern documents I came to see as an error. I had inchoate doubts about the general attitude when I was a member, doubts expressed in the document I wrote on the Irish question for a green colored internal bulletin under the name “J. Holbroucke.” The seeming brilliance of the “interpenetrated peoples” document persuaded me that I was wrong. I am, by the way, glad that the party has not rejected the worthwhile kernel of that document, namely that the phenomenon of interpenetrated peoples needs to be taken into account in national questions, and that the Irish Protestants of Northern Ireland could become a nation, but that their fate has not yet been decided by history.

My conclusion through study that the anti imperialist united front was a correct slogan I again did not connect with actual political positions on colonial or national questions, seeing it as an abstract historical question. With one exception, on the Ukrainian question. As my Ph.D. dissertation required extensive familiarization with the Stalinist Soviet Union in the 1930s in general and Ukraine in particular, I always regarded the slogan for an independent Soviet Ukraine in the late 1930s as correct. But only because I felt I was more familiar with Soviet Ukrainian political realities back then than the party was, not on the grounds of political principle. That did mean that I instantly accepted the position changes in 2017 as all making sense, as well as almost all of the latest position changes. (Similarly, I also had some doubts on a few of the articles on the woman question, and the new position matches in what direction I was speculating...)

What are the exceptions? Firstly, on the Malvinas war. I am unpersuaded. It seems to me that Argentina is a US neocolony, not a British as it used to be before WWII. That the Falklands British naval base was not simply turned over to the US during WWII in return for aid against Germany was because of it becoming militarily, socially and politically irrelevant after Latin America in general and Argentina in particular was basically ceded to US imperialism by the British.

That the population is non Argentine isn’t even the point. The Galtieri dictatorship was a tool of US imperialism not British, to the point that initially many of Reagan’s advisers thought that the US should support Argentina against the UK, with Reagan overruling them because he saw the British poodle as more useful for US imperialism than the Galtieri dictatorship. For the junta to

launch a war over the Falklands was a conscious **diversion** from the Argentine and Latin American struggle against US imperialism.

The Argentine people would not have benefited in any way from Argentina seizing those islands, nor would that have weakened the grip of US imperialism on Argentina. It is true that this strengthened Thatcher domestically, but on the other hand the fiasco weakened the junta to the point that it fell. Certainly a good thing from the perspective of the people of Argentina. I am not by the way asserting that the articles on the question in WV back then were not problematic. They probably were problematic, but the position was correct. I doubt that Spartacist articles back in the 1970s on Argentina had a fully correct position on Peronism and the Perons, who unlike the Galtieri junta were not simply just tools of US imperialism.

Also, on the Palestinian question. Most of what is said in the document is correct and necessary. Especially where it is pointed out that the old positions on Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine were essentially declarations of political bankruptcy. But the facile analogy between these two quite different questions is wrong. The fate of the Protestant population of Northern Ireland is not yet decided by history. It is not impossible that it could be simply assimilated into the Irish nation, as could have happened in the 1790s. This is not the case with Israel/Palestine, where there are two consolidated interpenetrated nations. Yes, the struggle for national liberation and the struggle for socialism must be fused. But when the document says: “The only way a revolution will happen in Israel/Palestine...is through an uprising for the national liberation of Palestinians,” this almost seems to contradict that. Fact is, that Hebrew speakers are the majority population of Israel/Palestine, and more importantly, are the great majority of the proletariat. And the Hebrew speaking workers are **not** like white workers in South Africa, they do not benefit materially from Palestinian oppression.

Yes, there can be no revolution in Israel/Palestine without Palestinian liberation at its center. A revolution in Palestine/Israel would for all practical purposes need to be a Palestinian/Israeli revolution by now, not just a “Palestinian revolution.” Ironically, that may well not yet have been true in the 1970s when the Spartacist position was formulated, but due to the major transformations that have happened in the last half century, it is true now. The old Spartacist concept that a revolution there was impossible without outside stimulus needs to be more completely broken from. The Israeli proletariat has a material interest in breaking from the ideological chains of Zionism, and a Palestinian revolution without the support of the Israeli proletariat is hard to imagine, because the West Bank and Gaza are essentially unviable overgrown Bantustans. Perhaps this was only a sloppy formulation that needed correcting, I hope so.

Finally, on the Constituent Assembly question. This should be seen as an unrelated question, as after all this is a return to the “old” Spartacist position of only about a decade ago. Here is where there could perhaps in my opinion be a noteworthy political danger.

Simply saying that the Constituent Assembly is “a democratic demand” is inadequate. Granted that one could critically support calling a constituent assembly in a referendum in Tunisia or Chile or any other semicolonial country, just as advocated in that article on the French Constitution of 1946 published in Spartacist #66, at that inappropriate time, in spring 2020. But the Comintern never raised the demand, it is not to be found in the theses on national and colonial questions adopted, or in anything Lenin wrote after 1917 on colonial questions. What did the Comintern raise instead? The call for worker/peasant soviets which is being mocked. That the Stalinists continued to raise this demand after the **defeat** of the Second Chinese Revolution does not mean that Chinese Trotskyists who opposed raising the Constituent Assembly demand instead were wrong. In the aftermath of defeat, it was time to consolidate forces defensively in the cities and perhaps concentrate on agitation among the peasantry, as proletarian revolution had been bloodily crushed. And the peasantry in China, like the peasantry in Russia, was interested in the land not a new constitution.

The contention that for immediate tactical purposes there was little difference between Trotsky's "permanent revolution" theory and Lenin's "bourgeois-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" from 1905 until 1917 is true but not the point. The problem with Lenin's theory was not that it posed a "two class dictatorship," but that it was a call for a two stage revolution. Lenin clearly stated that if there were no proletarian revolution in Germany, enabling a transition in Russia to socialist revolution, then inevitably, after this "Jacobin" dictatorship as he called it carried the bourgeois revolution as far as possible within bourgeois confines, then the bourgeoisie would come to power, and the land question would be resolved in the "American" way, with peasants becoming farmers with the kind of relatively free access to the land that American farmers had after Indians were driven out. So, quite logically, when the Tsar was overthrown, Bolsheviks in Petrograd thought that the bourgeois revolution was well underway. So as Stalin put it Kerensky, an SR or even a Trudovik, the peasant party that Lenin hoped to see created, should be supported "insofar as" he carried out revolutionary measures.

What was the concrete result of Bolshevik agitation for calling a constituent assembly? Might have been useful among the fairly small urban petty bourgeoisie, but the peasants, who were seizing the land and forming peasant soviets, had more important matters on their mind. The main result was to hand a slogan that the Bolsheviks had supported over to the Whites, as a political banner for counterrevolution, allowing them to say that the Bolsheviks had called for a Constituent Assembly and when they didn't like the results, undemocratically dispersed it by force.

That Lenin did not recognize retrospectively that using the slogan had been erroneous, well, nobody's perfect. What is much more important is that he renounced it for the future. It was only reintroduced by Trotsky after Lenin died, and it is doubtful that Lenin would have agreed. The notion that Trotsky ever extended the theory of permanent revolution beyond Russia before the Chinese Revolution is asserted with no evidence. And there is evidence to the contrary. Until 1926 there was very little difference between Trotsky's perspectives for China and the Comintern's, certainly not publicly and not even really privately. The factually useful Alexander Pantsov book reveals that Trotsky did not even oppose entry into the KMT until 1926, regarding it as a worthwhile short term entry to recruit. And if the Comintern had accepted Trotsky's permanent revolution theory, why did Joffe even have to ask Lenin about it? As Joffe became a major **implementer** of the false KMT orientation, this was a question much on his mind.

On a personal note, I recall that when I was the education director for the Boston local in the late 1970s, I assigned a "comrade" just recruited from a particularly bizarre Maoist group to teach an internal class on Lenin's "Two Tactics." In it, he simply expounded what Lenin had to say in the book as our politics. This certainly troubled me and everyone else. I heard a decade later, from an ex member of the Boston local who had left both Boston and the party after I did, Mark Kr., that he turned out to be a police agent.

So yes, where there is democratic agitation for a Constituent Assembly, if it reaches ballot boxes, give it critical support. But our slogan is worker and peasant councils. In Tunisia and Chile, you actually got constituent assemblies, and they smothered genuine revolutionary situations.

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## Reply to J. Horowitz

by Vincent David

12 March 2024

Dear J. Horowitz,

Thank you for your thoughtful and interesting letter. Please excuse us for the delay in responding. The pace of international events and interventions in them has been quite intense, making the writing of responses to the many letters we have received very challenging.

We are happy that you find the review of the past decades of Spartacist politics to have been carried out successfully. I do find that you overemphasize the question of abstentionism vs. interventionism when you lay out the problems of the last decades and our correction of them. In fact, the ICL's trajectory of the last 30 years until the pandemic included periods of frantic interventionism followed by periods of sterile abstention, but all characterized by an incapacity to forge a Marxist pole against liberalism. Nevertheless, many of the elements you describe are correct.

In this letter, I will try to address some of the concerns and disagreements you raise on the question of the Malvinas/Falklands War, interpenetrated peoples and the constituent assembly. On these questions and others, it is perfectly possible that we have committed over-corrections, mistakes or imprecisions. But I believe that on the fundamental questions you raised, our corrections were both necessary and correct.

### **The Malvinas/Falklands War**

Let's dive right into your disagreement over the Malvinas/Falklands War. You are correct to argue that Argentina was at the time (and still is) a neocolony of the U.S., not of Britain. And you are also correct to note that the war started by the junta was a "conscious diversion" from the struggle against imperialism. Our new position does not dispute this. We also agree with you that Argentina seizing the Falkland Islands would not "have weakened the grip of US imperialism on Argentina."

If one looks at the Falklands/Malvinas war strictly from isolated criteria, like who should own these islands, the reactionary nature of the Galtieri regime, or the relation of Argentina exclusively with the U.S. separated from the broader national and international context, then a position of revolutionary defeatism might appear correct. However, this completely disappears the crucial element behind our new position: the dynamic of the revolutionary process in Argentina. This is the key element you fail to understand.

Argentina has been, since its founding and up to this day, defined first and foremost by the domination of foreign capital, first British and then American. Without this starting point, it is impossible to understand the history of this country, the popular appeal of Peronism, the succession of military dictatorships, the militant struggles of the Argentine masses, the crisis in which the country has been for decades or the recent elections of Javier Milei. The Argentine bourgeoisie is a weak class, balancing between imperialism and the proletariat, two forces which have exerted tremendous contradictory pressure, giving to the history of the successive political regimes of this country a tumultuous character. Similar to the rest of Latin America, a revolution in Argentina can only come about as a mighty upheaval against imperialist domination, shaking off in this process the yoke of the venal national bourgeoisie.

It is impossible to understand the Falklands/Malvinas War in a Marxist way without a materialist understanding of the role of the national bourgeoisie. The junta's invasion of the Falkland Islands happened at a time of heightened class struggle against their rule. Their military adventure was indeed a diversion (or a maneuver) to try to derail these struggles by unleashing a huge wave of nationalism. And the junta attacked Britain precisely because they still hoped to maintain their alliance with the U.S. (the real master of Argentina). But merely to recognize these facts does not close the matter.

By attacking British imperialism, a historic oppressor of Argentina, the junta was seeking to exploit a deep-seated desire of the Argentine masses: liberation from foreign domination. That is why the military adventure of the junta enjoyed so much support. Under pressure from mass struggle, the junta was forced to lean on the anti-imperialist sentiment of the masses and, in doing so, succeeded in temporarily refurbishing its credentials. However, it was also playing with fire. Once unleashed, the masses' desire for liberation is hard to contain. And that is precisely where the intervention of revolutionaries is key.



What was needed from a revolutionary vanguard was to lean on the powerful sentiment of the masses unleashed by the junta to turn it against them. What the Marxists should have said to the Argentine workers is the following: “We are for the victory of Argentina against the British because we are for the liberation of oppressed nations from imperialism. But the hated junta will make this victory a thousand times more difficult. They will prevent the implementation of every necessary measure because they fear the masses much more than the British Army. If we are to win against imperialism, the masses must take the struggle into their own hands. And if we are to strike where it hurts the most, it is not thousands of miles out in the Atlantic Ocean, but right here, against the imperialists’ interests in this country. And the Peronists? Since they are tied to the property owners, they too fear the masses and will do everything to temper, limit and sabotage the liberation struggle. A real anti-imperialist uprising of the masses will quickly push the junta *and* the Peronists leaders into the arms of the imperialists. That is why the best and surest way for a victory against the British and for the liberation of Argentina is for the proletariat to struggle under the communist banner.”

Only in this way would it have been possible to break the masses from the national bourgeoisie and advance the struggle for revolution. In contrast, our former position of revolutionary defeatism was centrally driven by an utter incapacity to deal with the social and political dynamics of oppressed nations, and by an incapacity to defeat the nationalism of the oppressed. And in this case we were facing a huge nationalist wave unleashed by a reactionary dictatorship. Deprived of a correct approach to the national question, we were incapable of understanding the dynamics which could lead advanced workers to fight the junta one day, and then the next day support the junta’s war. We thus resorted to placing ourselves in opposition to the national sentiment of the entire nation; that is, favoring the defeat of Argentina at the hands of an imperialist power. Such a position only discredited communism in the eyes of the masses, further pushing them into the arms of the junta or the Peronists, who could then accuse the communists of capitulating to imperialism (and rightly so). In this sense, this position was not only a capitulation to imperialism, but also to the Argentine nationalists. It amounted to rejecting the struggle for Argentina’s liberation in favor of an abstract “socialism,” disconnected from the living struggles and aspirations of the masses. That is why this position has always represented an insurmountable obstacle for our tendency to establish even a small foothold in this country, where self-described Trotskyists number in the hundreds of thousands.

The junta’s war was a classic example of a Bonapartist government of a neocolony leaning on the masses in order to channel its powerful anti-imperialist sentiment in a direction that favors its own class interests, and to gain more room against foreign capital in the process. The approach of Marxists in such circumstances cannot be to dismiss in its entirety the sentiment of the masses, even if manipulated by a reactionary regime. What is needed is to lean on this very same sentiment in order to free it from the straitjacket of the national bourgeoisie. Despite the fact that the U.S. were (and are) the masters of Latin America, a victory of Argentina against the much-hated British imperialists would have given a mighty boost to the national liberation struggles throughout the continent. A defeat for Britain would have most likely led to the fall of Thatcher and pushed Britain to the brink of a deep crisis with tremendous revolutionary potential. This would have greatly weakened the U.S.-led anti-Soviet alliance, in which Britain played the number two role.

Trotsky already dealt with such a scenario, surely in a hypothetical form, but nevertheless it is worth quoting in full:

“In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally—in this case I will be on the side of ‘fascist’ Brazil against ‘democratic’ Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict

between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat. Truly, one must have an empty head to reduce world antagonisms and military conflicts to the struggle between fascism and democracy. Under all masks one must know how to distinguish exploiters, slave-owners, and robbers!”

—“Anti-Imperialist Struggle Is Key to Liberation” (September 1938)

Of course, other organizations quoted exactly this against us. Our response was that Trotsky’s point did not apply since the war was over remote and irrelevant islands, and not on the Argentine mainland. This is certainly an important element, but only a secondary one. The Falklands/Malvinas War was a military conflict between British imperialism and a neocolony. Thatcher waged it not so much out of care for the Falklands (although these islands do present some strategic importance, contrary to what you say), but to reassert the strength of British imperialism in a time of crisis and decline, so as to send a clear message to anyone threatening British interests abroad. The thunder of the guns of the Task Force were saying to the world: “Beware, we are still a force to be reckoned with.”

Both your letter and our press at the time pointed to the fall of the junta shortly after the war as a vindication of our position. In fact, this does not vindicate anything. In general, Marxists favor bourgeois democracy against a military dictatorship, but we must first and foremost approach this question from the standpoint of the position of the proletariat, i.e., was it strengthened or weakened? The re-establishment of democracy in Argentina happened as a result of the country having been smashed by the imperialists, thus being forced into a position of increased subservience. It also followed the shift in U.S. policy in the mid 1980s, which moved away from supporting brutal military regimes in order to promote liberal democratization as a more effective tool to win the Cold War. Thus, the successive Argentine regimes of the late 1980s and 1990s were each more subservient than the other, selling off the country, taking massive loans and leading to one disaster after another.

So, of course Marxists should have welcomed the fall of the junta, but to point to this as some sort of “vindication” that the defeat of Argentina at the hands of imperialism was something progressive amounts to concealing the fundamental consequence of this war. The reality is that the defeat of Argentina did not contribute to strengthening the position of the proletariat, but only strengthened imperialism and weakened the Argentine nation.

### **Interpenetrated Peoples**

I will not go in depth on this question. Regarding Israel and Palestine, you wrote your letter before the current bloody war against Gaza, and I am sure you are familiar with the propaganda we have put out since. (See “A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation,” *Spartacist* supplement, 10 October 2023, as well as various articles produced by our national sections.) I hope that these articles have dispelled the doubts you might have with what we wrote in *Spartacist*.

I would just note one thing on the formulation you quote, which you think might be sloppy. You only quoted the formulation partially. The full sentence reads:

“The only way a revolution will happen in Israel/Palestine or in Northern Ireland is through an uprising for the national liberation of Palestinians and Irish Catholics,

which would not impinge on the national rights of the Protestants and Israelis but emancipate the workers from their ruling class and its imperialist backers.”

This is a rather algebraic formulation which our recent propaganda has developed, at least regarding Israel and Palestine. But I believe your doubts over it are the result of a misunderstanding. The essence of the above quote is that of permanent revolution; that is, fusing the national liberation of the oppressed nation with the social liberation of all workers, not least from the oppressor group. I have no reason to think you disagree with that since you yourself write that “there can be no revolution in Israel/Palestine without Palestinian liberation at its center.” Absolutely, and this is what our old propaganda has always rejected, either openly in its early days or, from the 1980s onward, by opposing Palestinian national oppression while refusing to place this struggle at the center of our revolutionary strategy.

I would only disagree with you when you say: “Ironically, that [the need to place Palestinian liberation at the center] may well not yet have been true in the 1970s when the Spartacist position was formulated, but due to the major transformations that have happened in the last half century, it is true now.” The state of Israel was established on the dispossession of the Palestinian people, right from the 1948 war. From the minute Israel was created, the statement that Israeli workers would never be free without Palestinian freedom became the overarching task of this entire region.

### **The Constituent Assembly and Permanent Revolution**

I found your entire argumentation on the constituent assembly confused, rigid and factually wrong on many counts. The fact that you see this as a “return to the ‘old’ Spartacist position of only about a decade ago” speaks to this. One cannot separate our attitude to this demand from our general attitude to the task of revolutionaries in the neocolonial world. I cannot respond to every single argument you make so I would highly suggest that you read (or re-read) Trotsky’s writings on China as well as *The Permanent Revolution* to understand not only his approach to the constituent assembly, but his broader method.

First, you seem to think that our position is that if the idea of a constituent assembly, pushed by some bourgeois forces, reaches the ballot box, then we could critically support it. No. What we advocate is that in countries without formal democracy, in which the masses have illusions in bourgeois democracy, and see the resolution of their most burning needs through such outlets, we believe communist parties should be *for* the creation of a constituent assembly, and *actively campaign for it*, while linking this demand with a program resolving the agrarian and national questions. Refusing to do this amounts to leaving the democratic struggles in the hands of bourgeois forces. The reason why the masses in Chile or Tunisia were led astray is not because of some parliamentary body or demand, but because they were under bourgeois and anti-revolutionary leaderships.

Secondly, your argumentation is rigid and undialectical. You pose the constituent assembly on one side, and soviet power on the other, weighting both and pondering why are we not simply for soviets. The whole point is that in many countries, at certain stages of their development, the slogan for a constituent assembly is the *essential tool* to clear the way *for* soviet power. I would refer you to how Trotsky describes this dynamic in the Transitional Program (see the chapter “Backward Countries and the Program of Transitional Demands”). You think that we are “mocking” the call for soviets. We are not. What we do mock is the sectarian muddleheadedness of our former position, which advocated abstract calls for soviets in order to reject the democratic program and ignore the necessary political stages the masses must go through in order to reach soviet power.

Thirdly, I believe almost everything you argue regarding Trotsky and the call for a constituent assembly in China is incorrect, both politically and factually. To expose all these points would take me multiple pages. So, for now, I will only refer you to Trotsky’s writings on China, in

particular the text “The Chinese Question After the Sixth Congress” (4 October 1928), which I think responds to many of your points.

Fourthly, a lot of your argumentation is based on your own speculation that Lenin implicitly repudiated the call for a constituent assembly after the October Revolution, or that if he didn’t, he should have. Again, I believe this is wrong both politically and factually. Lenin defended this call in his “Theses on the Constituent Assembly” written in December 1917. All Comintern documents on the national and colonial questions, including those written by Lenin, constantly hammer on the need for Communist parties to put themselves at the forefront of democratic struggles in order to win the leadership of the masses and show the need for soviet power.

I will let Lenin himself respond to you over how crucial the call for a constituent assembly was in the Russian Revolution. He is here speaking from the floor in response to Bordiga during the debate on parliamentarism at the 1920 Second Comintern Congress:

“That is why you forget that to destroy the bourgeois parliament in Russia we were first obliged to convene the Constituent Assembly, even after our victory. [...] We went through a period of bourgeois democracy. We went through it rapidly when we had to agitate for elections to the Constituent Assembly. Later, when the working class had already succeeded in seizing power, the peasants still believed in the necessity of a bourgeois parliament.

“Taking account of these backward elements, we had to proclaim the elections and show the masses, by examples and by facts, that the Constituent Assembly, which was elected at a time of dire and universal need, did not express the aspirations and demands of the exploited classes. In this way the conflict between soviet and bourgeois power became quite clear, not only to us, the vanguard of the working class, but also to the vast majority of the peasantry, to the petty office employees, the petty bourgeoisie, and so forth.”

—“Session 10, Parliamentarism (Part 2)” in *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite! Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, Vol. 1, John Riddell, ed. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991)

So, no, Lenin did not repudiate the call for a constituent assembly after the October Revolution. And the constituent assembly was not “undemocratically” dispersed as you say. This is probably the most repeated slander used by liberals and Kautskyites against the October Revolution. It was dispersed after the constituent assembly refused to recognize soviet power—that is, when the choice between proletarian and bourgeois democracy was clearly posed in front of the masses and as the culmination of the entire revolutionary process.

### **On the Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry**

Lastly, on the question of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry.” You write: “The problem with Lenin’s theory was not that it posed a ‘two class dictatorship,’ but that it was a call for a two-stage revolution.” In a sense, yes, it was. But the algebraic formula of Lenin proved to be problematic and outdated only *after the first stage* of the Russian Revolution (February). I would recommend you look at Appendix II of the first volume of the *History of the Russian Revolution* (“To the Chapter ‘Rearming the Party’”).

Trotsky and Lenin, at least from 1905 up to 1917, had a fundamental agreement on the central programmatic elements for the course of the revolution—on the need for the complete independence of the proletarian party, on the need to struggle against the liberal bourgeoisie, on the need for an alliance of workers with the peasantry and on the need for the international extension of the revolution. Lenin and Trotsky’s different *prognostics* were both based on these core programmatic elements. The real disagreement between Lenin and Trotsky lay in the fact

that Trotsky tried, for years, to reconcile the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks until he was won to Lenin's point of view in 1917.

If you look carefully, you will realize that all the above programmatic elements are what constitute the core of the permanent revolution. This is why it is wrong and abstract to speak of the extension of the permanent revolution only after 1927. The whole purpose of the early Comintern was to extend the experience of October to the entire world. So the view that Trotsky extended his theory outside of Russia only after 1927 necessarily implies that the first four Comintern Congresses were at odds with the theory of the permanent revolution!

Our former propaganda used the fact that Lenin's formula became outdated at a certain historical stage to essentially brand Lenin as a semi-Menshevik from 1905 to 1917. Our critics, like the League for the Fourth International or both Bolshevik Tendencies, have made a big deal out of our correction on this question. They are outraged that we defend Lenin before 1917, and that we say that there was an essential identity between him and Trotsky. The reason for that is simply that they have understood nothing of what the permanent revolution really is.

One should reflect on the fact that, apart from the party question, the idea that there was a fundamental distinction in the program of Lenin and Trotsky before 1917 is a **Stalinist creation**, a complete fabrication which was wielded to attack the Left Opposition. The whole purpose of Trotsky's book, *The Permanent Revolution*, was precisely to show the fundamental identity between his view and Lenin's **against** those of the Stalinist epigones.

There are multiple other points from your letter to which I did not respond and which would surely be worth addressing. But this letter is already very long, and I will limit myself to this for now. I hope I made a convincing case and was able to make you re-think some of these doubts you had.

Comradely,  
Vincent David  
For the International Communist League

## **Debates on the National Question with the Korean Bolshevik Group**

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*The following introduction and exchanges were previously published on iclfi.org.*

After first holding discussions with the ICL five years ago, the Korean Bolshevik Group (BG) late last year wrote to us with extensive critical comments on our Eighth International Conference. This led to a new series of written and verbal exchanges, which are described in the letters printed below.

These exchanges made clear that our fundamental differences centered on the question of revolutionary leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. The discussions reached an impasse when the BG persisted in its view that workers in the imperialist centers or in imperialist-aligned countries must suffer “retribution” from the oppressed before they could be broken from social-chauvinism. As our second letter stresses, this is a totally reactionary position that can only strengthen imperialism by dividing the world proletariat and undermining any political struggle to split workers from their social-chauvinist leaders.

The letters have not been edited except to correct obvious typographical mistakes and to add bracketed insertions.

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### **Letter to the International Communist League**

by Korean Bolshevik Group

28 November 2023

We Bolshevik Group decided to split after a bitter factional struggle within the IBT [International Bolshevik Tendency] in 2018 (see “Our split from the IBT and the Continuation of Revolutionary Ideology”). A year earlier, your organization had released a lengthy document of International Conference called “The Struggle Against the Chauvinist Hydra,” which helped us understand how “Anglo-chauvinism” systematically affected the ICL and the IBT and IG [Internationalist Group], which broke away from it.

Of course, that document has the limit that it focuses on national questions mostly within imperialist countries, centered on Canada, and does not adequately address the conflict between imperialism and colony in general. However, the ICL’s self-criticism in 2017 was significant in that it marked a return to Leninism. This shift in position caught the attention of us who had been taking serious issues with the IBT’s “Anglo-American chauvinism” and tracing its roots.

Therefore, in March 2019, we held a discussion in Seoul with ICL comrades who responded to our request. The discussion was conducted in mutual respect, but the ICL comrades still adhered to their previous neutral stance mainly on imperialism vs colony question, such as Iran from 1979 to 1983, and we parted ways without being able to narrow mutual distance on these issues.

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Then, in December 2019, we asked the following questions on Facebook about the article from Workers Vanguard #1167. But we never heard back.

Our Questions on ICL’s position on Syria: reading 13 December 2019

“These warring sides have received support from foreign imperialist or regional powers. For example, Russia and Iran have backed Assad, while the Pentagon and CIA have armed and financed various Sunni forces fighting the regime.”

—Workers Vanguard No. 1167, 13 December 2019, On the Syrian Civil War

The ICL raises the support of imperialist or regional powers by both sides who took part in the so-called “civil war” as a basis for neutrality.

So,

- 1) Can “regional powers” be equated with imperialism?
- 2) Is Russian and Iranian intervention imperialistic?
- 3) Is “Syrian civil war” a competition or proxy war between imperialist rivals?

Marxists should not only present the phenomena as they are, but also explain the real foundation, or nature. But the ICL does not explain why the conflict, which it describes as a “civil war or communal war” (that does not express an imperialistic character at all), and why the imperialist U.S. and regional powers Russia and Iran are involved.

- 4) What is the background of imperialism and local powers’ involvement in this conflict, which is nothing but a “civil war”?

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“Though it has intervened in Syria, the U.S. has not decisively entered the civil war with its own armed forces to remove Assad. If Washington were to launch a direct attack or invasion of the country, Marxists would take a military side with Assad’s forces against imperialist assault while maintaining our political opposition to his rule.”

—ibid

During the past eight years of war, behind the “civil or communal war”, the United States has not only provided financial, military, and PR support to the anti-Assad rebels, but has also staged various military operations, staying within Syrian territory. Nevertheless, the ICL says, “If Washington was to run a direct attack or an investment of the country. Marxists would take a military side with Assad’s forces against imperialist assault while maintaining our political opposition to his rule.”

So. 5) what does the “direct attack or involvement” mean to ICL? How do you define it?

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Fortunately, your organization woke up after a long period of silence.

In September 2023, you published the 68th Spartacist, covering the Eighth International Congress. This issue contains a number of self-critical articles on the abstentionist and Anglo-American chauvinist attitudes on the national question that the so-called “Spartacist Family” starting with ICL has expressed as a proud revolutionary tradition. We read those documents with great attention, and we were interested to see the change of positions, especially on Iran, which were stubbornly maintained at the last meeting in 2019.

We, Bolshevik Group, read and discussed the following articles:

소련 붕괴 후 ICL의 수정주의 (The ICL’s Post-Soviet Revisionism)

ICL은 왜 붕괴했고, 어떻게 재건할 것인가? (Why the ICL Collapsed & How We Reforged It)

코민테른 제2.4차 대회를 옹호하며 (In Defense of the Second and Fourth Comintern Congresses)

연속혁명과 여성해방 (Permanent Revolution & Women’s Liberation)

말비나스 전쟁 : 주적은 제국주의였다 (Malvinas/Falklands War: The Main Enemy Was Imperialism)

연속혁명을 옹호하며 : 반제투쟁의 공산주의 지도부를 위하여 (In Defense of Permanent Revolution: For Communist Leadership of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle!)

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Today, we will focus only on the articles related to the theme of “Imperialism, National Liberation Struggles and Socialist Revolution” to share our impressions.

First, “The ICL’s Post-Soviet Revisionism” is one of the documents adopted by the ICL’s 8th International Congress. It is summarized as follows:

The ICL’s understanding of the post-Soviet epoch was wrong. We thought the end of the Cold War would lead to intensifying imperialist rivalries, but in fact it created a period of relative geopolitical stability in which the imperialist powers jointly plundered the world under the umbrella of American hegemony. It also dismisses liberal influence as insignificant and portrays liberal demands as revolutionary. In the IG’s split from ICL, we were unprincipled and sectarian, and some of IG’s criticisms of ICL are valid. Nonetheless, the IG shares the bulk of the ICL’s totally wrong analysis of the world. Like the ICL in the past, the IG expresses sectarian hostility to national liberation movements of oppressed peoples. The ICL is committed to conducting serious political clarification and debate with the IG and engaging as much as possible in common action to defend the basic interests of the workers movement. The destruction of the Soviet Union posed a major turn for the ICL. The party’s historic cadre proved incapable of correcting our trajectory. Yet the ICL was not dead. We still managed to recruit a few handfuls of cadres internationally attracted to the ICL by its revolutionary past.

This article is encouraging in that it recognizes that abstentionism on the national question is wrong.

Next, “In Defense of the Second and Fourth Comintern Congresses” defends the theory of national liberation adopted by the second and fourth congresses of Comintern, refuting the revision of Leninism that had been carried over from the iSt [international Spartacist tendency] years.

ICL has always claimed adherence to the first four Congresses of the Comintern, but we took exception to the Second and Fourth Congresses in regard to the colonial revolution. For the ICL, Stalin and Bukharin’s betrayal was there in embryo at the Fourth Congress. The ICL viewed communist participation in the democratic struggle, a deflection from “the class question”, as a “Menshevik deviation”. The 1922 Theses polemicize directly against the program and methodology of the ICL: “Any refusal of Communists in the colonies to take part in the struggle against imperialist tyranny, on the excuse of supposed ‘defence’ of independent class interests, is opportunism of the worst sort that can only discredit the proletarian revolution in the East.” The anti-imperialist united front was essential then and still is today in all countries where the national liberation struggle is in the hands of the bourgeoisie. To break the bourgeoisie’s influence on the struggle, communists must not remain suspended in the air as immaculate critics on the margins of the struggle, but place themselves in the midst of the melee.

“Malvinas/Falklands War: The Main Enemy Was Imperialism” reverses the ICL’s 1982 neutral stance on the Malvinas War, arguing that the ICL should have defended the neo-colonial Argentina.

For the British imperialists, the war was intended to defend their colonial possession. But Argentina’s victory would have been in the interests of the working class. It would have been a step in the direction of national emancipation in Argentina and an insurrection of the working



class in Britain against British imperialism. At this Congress we rejected the past position of dual defeatism. We should have competed with the bourgeois nationalists for the leadership of the national liberation struggle. Communist leadership is essential to defeat imperialism. The only way to overthrow British imperialism was through an alliance of workers in both countries. Nationalism is an obstacle to the struggle.

“In Defense of Permanent Revolution: For Communist Leadership of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle!” can roughly be summarized as follows:

Revolutionary parties in the oppressed nations, in leading the struggle against imperialist oppression, must educate the toiling masses in the spirit of revolutionary unity with the proletariat of the oppressor nations. SL rightly opposed the argument that the “objective process” would force bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships toward socialism, but it moved toward a rejection of Permanent Revolution. The ICL saw the national question as something that to be “removed” from the agenda and rejected Palestinian/Irish national liberation by creating an “interpenetrated peoples” theory. It ignored the progressive nature of the anti-Shah struggle in Iran in 1979. The ICL also says “the main enemy is at home” for workers of oppressed nations, which is wrong. In a colony, the main enemy is imperialism. National development of subjugated nations is a historically progressive. The ICL took wrong position in opposing Trotsky’s call for the independent Soviet Ukraine. Edmund Samarakkody correctly identified our failure to distinguish between oppressed and oppressor nations, our “one-sided identity of interests between the imperialists and the native bourgeoisie”.

This article is a self-critique of the ICL’s slide from criticizing Pabloite right-wing opportunism to a sectarian position. In particular, the revision of position on the Iranian revolution is completely in line with what we have been advocating all along.

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The ability to reflect on past missteps and return to the right position is an important measure of an organization’s vitality. In this respect, the result of the ICL’s 8th Congress is very encouraging. In our judgment, the ICL has not yet fully departed from the revolutionary continuity and, therefore, has not yet exhausted its organizational life.

However, despite these significant changes, the ICL does not appear to have fully liberated itself from its previous inertia. While it has changed its previously criticized positions on Iran and Malvinas, it still seems to be on the same page on current events. In particular, on the war in Ukraine, they still insist on the defeat of both sides thus denying national self-determination and right to self-defense of Russia and people of Donbass. On the Syrian civil war, it does not say whether it remains “neutral unless the U.S. directly intervenes militarily,” or whether it has reversed its neutral position. We wonder if we will ever hear a response to the questions we sent in December 2019.

We would also like to point out that the ICL’s October 10 statement, “Only Death and Defeat with Hamas; A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation” bears the legacy of ultra-leftist abstentionism from the past that the ICL has yet to clean up. In this statement, the ICL calls for the “defense of Gaza” in the abstract manner, but refuses to provide military support to Hamas, the only meaningful defense force in Gaza, rendering “defense of Gaza” and “liberation of Palestine” meaningless.

A key reason ICL rejects military support for Hamas is that it is “targeting Israeli civilian.” We addressed this issue on our article (“On the war in Palestine”) published on October 14.

From a military perspective, the prevailing view is that the Hamas-led raid was reckless. As it can be seen now, Hamas is militarily overwhelmed by Israel which is

backed by the superpower, the US. But just as even earthworms squirm when stepped on, this counterattack is a reaction and a struggle of the Palestinian people who are on the brink of death. The British-US imperialism and Israel have been strangling the Palestinian people for a long time, and a strangled opponent can only resist in any way possible. We recognize that resistance as a just self-defense for life and honor.

The imperialist media accuses Palestinian militants of indiscriminately attacking civilians, but the Palestinian Arab people do not have the sophisticated and powerful weapons which the US and Israel have. They do not have the capacity to attack while distinguishing soldiers and civilians and still win. Meanwhile, imperialists have carried out massive massacres and detentions of civilians in Palestine and elsewhere in the world with impunity, but the imperialist media has shamelessly turned a blind eye to the innocent deaths of colonized peoples around the world, even now.

And the Israeli “settlers” who have been closing in on Palestinian Arab neighborhoods are the direct beneficiaries of Palestinian expulsions and settlement expansion. Not only that, but they are also active agents of Israel’s ethnic oppression.

Here’s what we said on this question in 2021.

“Being a tribune to all oppressed people, the socialist-oriented world working class will never tolerate the sacrifice of innocent people. However, if the people who serve as supporters of imperialism confront the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle, we recognize that the retribution against them is justified. Only the working people in oppressing countries, actively fighting for the liberation of the oppressed people against their own invader government, would be considered on the same side. We consider them the only innocent citizens who have nothing to do with imperialism. Only they can be granted the right to live in peace and safety.”

—Palestinian Liberation and “Social Patriotism”

Nowhere is the need for an “anti-imperialist united-front” more urgent than in Palestine. We hope that ICL comrades join this “anti-imperialist united-front” in time. Syria and Ukraine as well.

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## **Letter to the Korean Bolshevik Group**

by Perrault

23 December 2023

Dear comrades of the Bolshevik Group,

We were glad to receive your letter reviewing our 8th International Conference. In light of our current understanding of permanent revolution it is clear that previous exchanges between our two organizations were fundamentally flawed. We are happy to renew discussions with your group and possibly meet in person again.

### **The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony and Korea**

According to your letter, you have not yet reviewed our main conference document, “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power.” In this document we show how globalization and the dominance of liberalism in the post-Soviet period are rooted in the hegemony of U.S. imperialism. From this we argue that the task of Marxists following 1991 was to fight to break the international working class from its liberal leadership whose politics reflected the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie. However, instead of doing this the Marxist left made a purely liberal critique of imperialism, denouncing its worst excesses based on the moral principles peddled by the bourgeoisie itself, and not on the material interests of the proletariat. In no way did the ICL, IBT or any other organization show how and why advancing

the immediate interests of the working class and oppressed required a class break with bourgeois liberalism. It is this failure that explains the crisis plaguing the left in the last 30 years.

We have very limited knowledge of Korea. However, our document does develop a basic insight which we believe is important. Countries such as South Korea have seen substantial economic development and, since the 1980s, an undeniable democratization while at the same time witnessing a retreat in the political strength of the working class. This is a big contradiction, which we expect has fueled important illusions in bourgeois democracy among the working class. A Marxist party in Korea must be built on a materialist refutation of such reformist illusions. In Part III of our conference document under the subhead “The Countries Oppressed by Imperialism,” we provide the following general explanation for the political developments of the ‘80s and ‘90s in countries such as South Korea:

“On the political level, the international convergence toward liberal democracy was partly the result of U.S. foreign policy, which increasingly saw democratic reforms as an optimal way to stem social upheaval. But the internal regimes of neocolonial countries were also greatly affected by the weakening of the workers movement internationally. The elites were more confident in their position, allowing them room for concessions, while the oppressed had a weaker hand, increasing the pressure on them to give up on radical change. This reduced the sharpness of domestic contradictions, allowing countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil and South Africa to replace quasi-totalitarian dictatorships with a measure of bourgeois democracy.”

More generally, we believe that the entire post-WWII history of South Korea can only be understood when seeing it as a frontline state of the U.S. world order. First, mainly as an anti-communist bastion against the North. Then, as the Cold War was coming to an end and it became possible to loosen the chokehold on the South Korean masses without endangering private property, its role started to take on a new dimension. In the post-Soviet period, South Korea was fully integrated into the liberal world order, adopting a democratic facade and becoming one of the most important beneficiaries of increased international trade and liberalized capital flow. All this while remaining dependent on and oppressed by imperialism (as shown by the 1997 crisis). As the U.S. world order crumbles, this process will inevitably reverse and bring about extremely sharp class conflict, both within South Korea and with the North.

These observations are of course very broad, general and conditioned by our lack of knowledge of Korea. That said, we believe that our outline of the post-Soviet period is not only applicable to the Korean context but essential to orienting a Marxist vanguard. We would be very interested in knowing what you think of our document and how you understand the post-WWII history of Korea, its relation to U.S. imperialism and the central obstacles to advancing working-class revolution in the peninsula.

### **Revolutionary Leadership**

Based on an initial look at your recent propaganda and the factional documents published after your split with the IBT, we think that the central difference between our two tendencies lies in the question of revolutionary leadership.

This question has been central to our whole reorientation. We could not have rearmed without being guided by the purpose of revolutionary intervention into events. Marxism is first and foremost a guide to action and Marxist analysis has a revolutionary character only when it is wielded against the obstacle holding back the march of socialism—the current leadership of the working class. The ICL’s rejection of this ABC of Marxism was at the root of its disorientation in the post-Soviet period.

Our initial impression is that your propaganda shares a similar non-revolutionary, rigid formalism which we ourselves had to break from. Your organization takes clear positions on specific

questions, but we notice an absence of any concrete course of action for the proletariat, whether it is in broad strategic terms or in the more short-term immediate sense. Based on the articles we have consulted thus far, we do not think you provide an answer to the question: “what is to be done?”

While you accurately relate many of the points in our new issue of *Spartacist*, the question of revolutionary leadership—the backbone of the whole issue—is singularly absent. For example, you do not mention that at the heart of our correction on permanent revolution is the question of **communist leadership** of the anti-imperialist struggle. To reject previous capitulations to western social democracy was only the first step in reasserting the revolutionary Trotskyist strategy for the neocolonial world. The fight against imperialism must be at the center of this strategy, but to be victorious it is necessary to **break the hold** of the national bourgeoisie which holds back national and social emancipation. This is the key strategic problem for revolution in countries oppressed by imperialism.

This is all to say that in discussing the various points of disagreements between our two organizations, our starting point is always to advance today the fight for a revolutionary leadership of the working class against their current misleaders, whether they are social-democratic, Stalinist or Islamist.

### Iran

In our previous exchanges we were wrong to uncritically defend the iSt’s intervention in Iran in the late ‘70s. That said, we do not agree that our re-evaluation of the question is “completely in line” with what you have been advocating all along.

Our recent International Conference criticized our previous approach because the “entire framework denied the fact that the struggle of the Persian masses to free themselves from the imperialist chokehold was a progressive struggle.” The struggle against imperialist oppression was central to the upheavals of the time, but the iSt simply dismissed this fact and characterized the upsurge in the petty bourgeoisie as simply reactionary. This is similar to the criticism you have made.

However, this is where our agreement ends. You state in your 2018 document that:

“It [the Iranian revolution] was not destined to but was morphed into Islam revolution after a series of power game in a couple of years of time with Mujahedin, fedayeen and Tudeh which Khomeini faction won, in the situation of war with Iraq, the hostility policies of the US against it, passive and defensive policy of the Soviet and popular front position of the Tudeh. The Khomeini’s taking power was not resulted from their political ability but from domestic and international situation and the inability of the leadership of the working class, as like Kerensky took the power.”  
—“Summary of Our Thought on ‘Islam Revolution’ in 1979 in Iran”

True enough, but you say nothing about what the tasks of communists were at the time. What should communists have done in Iran and internationally to prevent the Iranian revolution from leading to the triumph of Islamist reaction? This is the whole question. Since you provide no answer to this, you are left with choosing the lesser evil between the Shah and the Mullahs.

You write that:

“Even though it failed to go further to socialism and degenerated into and set in Islam revolution, it brought meaningful reforms to Iranian people and gave serious blow to imperialists especially the USA. The US lost one of their reliable bridgeheads and Iran became an opponent in that strategic region. So Iran revolution in 1979 was positive one for world working class which we should have sided with against Shah and imperialist.”  
—ibid.

It is true that the ousting of the Shah was a major blow to U.S. imperialism. But the starting point for Marxists is not simply to inflict blows against imperialism, but to *defeat imperialism* through socialist revolution. If we evaluate the events as Marxists, we must ask not whether or not imperialism was dealt a blow, but whether or not the position of the international working class was strengthened. According to this criterion, it is clear that the answer is no. Working class organizations were crushed, Islamic law imposed, and women and minorities to this day suffer brutal oppression. In fact, by decapitating the powerful Iranian proletariat, the Khomeini regime inflicted a major blow to the fight against imperialism in the entire region.

This method is not our invention. In the admittedly very different context of the intervention by the USSR in Poland in 1939, Trotsky warned against looking solely at the question of property relations abstracted from the general advance of class struggle.

“The primary political criterion for us is not the transformation of property relations in this or another area, however important these may be in themselves, but rather the change in the consciousness and organization of the world proletariat, the raising of their capacity for defending former conquests and accomplishing new ones. From this one, and the only decisive standpoint, the politics of Moscow, taken as a whole, completely retains its reactionary character.”

—“The USSR in War” (September 1939)

You only need to substitute “transformation of property relations” with “blows to imperialism” and “Moscow” for the “Mullahs” for this reasoning to apply to the so-called Iranian revolution.

While our correction on Iran remains partial and falls short of a full evaluation, we do outline a basic approach for what was needed at the time:

“Our task was to explain that as long as it [the anti-imperialist struggle] remained in the grip of the mullahs, it would necessarily be directed against national and other minorities, leading to their persecution and at the same time undermining the liberation of the Persian majority itself. The only way to break the hold of the mullahs was to show concretely how their leadership was an obstacle to the legitimate and progressive aspirations of the masses to be free from the Shah and imperialism.”

—“In Defense of Permanent Revolution” (September 2023)

It is because you lack this crucial element—an independent path for the working class—that you must downplay the disastrous effects of Khomeini’s triumph in the name of “fighting imperialism.” As we shall see, this is a constant problem in your propaganda.

### **Russia-Ukraine War**

You argue that when it comes to current events we are “still on the same page,” i.e., we maintain our previous revisionist program. To support this, you state that our position on the Ukraine war insists “on the defeat of both sides thus denying national self-determination and right to self-defence of Russia and people of Donbass.”

First, it is not true that we deny the right of self-determination of the Russian people of Donbass. Since 2014 the population of Donbass has been moving towards wanting integration into the Russian federation. If the current war was simply about the self-determination of Donbass, we would have no problem in having a military side with Russia. The problem is that in the current context the national conflict between Russians and Ukrainians cannot simply be resolved through the victory of one side. Whichever side wins, the result will be the national oppression of the other side.

While there was an armed uprising in support in Donetsk and Luhansk following the Maidan coup, this was not the case in the other regions which Russia now claims. At the very least, the sentiment in these regions is contradictory. Even if one is to believe that there was no

manipulation of the 2022 annexation referendum results—which would indicate blind faith in the Kremlin—it is impossible to deny that these referendums only took place in the Russian-occupied parts of these territories—in which much of the population has been displaced—and cannot be considered a clear representation of popular sentiment. Even if Russia does not occupy all of Ukraine, it aims to occupy large portions of territory whose prewar population did not want to be part of Russia. Let’s be clear, comrades: Russia’s considerations are first and foremost strategic; it is not elaborating its military plans according to the democratic aspirations in Ukraine.

This brings us to the nature of the conflict, which is not fundamentally a national war for the liberation of Russian minorities, but first and foremost a proxy war between NATO and Russia over whose influence will predominate in Ukraine. The expansion of NATO influence to Ukraine, a country Russia considers to be in its sphere of influence, has been at the root of the conflict from 2014 and beyond. From February 2022, the war aim of Russia has not been to simply support the Donbass republics but to “denazify” and “demilitarize” Ukraine. This clearly implies installing some kind of pro-Russian regime in Kiev. It is not a democratic right of Russia to change the regime of a foreign country, even if this regime is backed by imperialism. How does the march of the war not fall in line with what you yourselves warned against at the outset of the conflict?

“In this regard, if the Russian army tries to continue its military occupation to establish a pro-Russian regime, it would be a dangerous gamble and would not be beneficial to the working class. It would be an infringement of the Ukrainian right to self-determination. It is likely to stimulate the right-wing nationalist sentiment among the working people in western Ukraine, thus intensifying national hostility between two countries.

—“Russia’s attack is just retribution for the bombardment provocations of the Kiev regime, a servant of imperialism,” 26 February 2022

In your article “Ukraine war, Opportunism and the Working Class,” you simply dismiss the ICL’s position by saying that it is a “bizarre sophistry that says, ‘Russia is not fighting imperialism, but Ukraine’.” This is not sophistry. One must totally deny reality to think that there is not a qualitative difference between NATO launching a direct war against Russia—which would pose its national survival—and a proxy conflict with Ukraine, which does not. There is no denying the predatory ambitions of the U.S. and its appetites to weaken and subordinate Russia. But there is a difference between what it wants to do and what is happening currently in Ukraine.

What you totally disappear from our position is our main slogan, “Turn the guns around.” This is not a call to be “neutral” as you claim, but a call to unite the Ukrainian and Russian workers in revolutionary struggle against their own governments and imperialism. Only then can the national question be resolved in a just manner. Only then can imperialism be dealt a fundamental blow. It is not an abstract call, but one that offers a road forward for Ukrainian workers who are sent to the slaughter in the name of Wall Street, and Russian workers who must risk their lives for Putin’s great Russian *chauvinism*, which explicitly denies that Ukraine (and other minorities) have the right to self-determination.

Your article and letter also say nothing about the work the ICL has done internationally to fight to break the hold of the pro-imperialist leaders of the working class (see for example “Throw the EU/NATO Supporters Out of the Left!” in *Spartacist* English edition No. 67 and “Stop Arms Shipments to Ukraine!”, 8 September). It is one thing to have a paper position for defeatism or for defense of Russia, but the crucial test is to actually fight against social-chauvinism in the workers movement on one’s national terrain. This is what we have sought to fight for to the extent of our ability. However, this does not seem to factor in your evaluation of our position or of that of other left groups.

Once more, the fundamental problem with your position is that you do not indicate in any way how it serves to advance the struggle for social revolution in Ukraine, in Russia, in Korea or anywhere else. Any serious revolutionary organization must be able to answer the following questions in the context of the current war:

- 1) How to forge unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers?
- 2) How to advance international socialist revolution in the context of this conflict?
- 3) How to break the working class from its social-chauvinist leadership, in Ukraine, Russia and the rest of the world?

We believe that you do not provide an adequate response to any of these questions.

### **Israel/Palestine**

On the question of Israel and Palestine, we would like to start by stating that we agree with many of the criticisms made of the Spartacist tendency in your article “Palestinian Liberation and ‘Social Patriotism’.” We thought it was prescient on your part to point to the 1973 exchange with Samarakkody. Our international would certainly have gained from considering your arguments on the question more seriously in our previous discussions.

In your recent letter you state that the position laid out in our *Spartacist* statement “Only Death and Defeat with Hamas: A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation” is essentially the same as previous articles written by our tendency on the question. This is based on the claim that we supposedly refuse to take a military side against the Israeli onslaught in Gaza. It is true that we do not use the specific formulation you raise in your letter. This is because it would only serve to make us targets of state repression while having zero practical implications *in our current situation*. That said, our statement cannot be considered neutral in any sense. From the second sentence we state that Palestinians have “every right to defend themselves, including through force” and later in the article we state that “on the military level, it is necessary to exert the maximum pressure on the IDF to show Israeli society that Palestinian oppression comes at an unbearable cost.”

The true nature of our disagreement lies not in taking a military side against Israel in general but rather on the specific targeting of civilians in the 7 October offensive of Hamas. You correctly identify the targeting of civilians as a difference, but then wrongly present this as the grounds for our supposed refusal to take a military side in general. This distorts our position. Let us focus on the actual difference: the targeting of Israeli civilians.

The basis for your position is clearly explained in your 2021 document:

“However, if the people who serve as supporters of imperialism confront the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle, we recognize that the retribution against them is justified. Only the working people in oppressing countries, actively fighting for the liberation of the oppressed people against their own invader government, would be considered on the same side. We consider them the only innocent citizens who have nothing to do with imperialism. Only they can be granted the right to live in peace and safety.”

—“Palestinian Liberation and ‘Social Patriotism’”

We believe this position to be extremely wrong. It is imbued with bourgeois moralism, holding the entire Israeli population responsible for the chauvinist program promoted by the capitalist class and its labor agents. It is particularly false if applied to Korea. According to your position the working class of South Korea would be legitimate targets in a war with North Korea in the name of fighting for national liberation from imperialist subjugation. What about a nuclear strike on Seoul? Would this be justified retribution for South Korea’s support to imperialism? Clearly you can never win the support of the Korean proletariat to this position. Moreover, in blindly

targeting civilians, how would one distinguish between those who have “nothing to do with imperialism” and those who do? For example, the Israeli leftist Hayim Katsman was killed in the 7 October Hamas attack. He may not have been a revolutionary, but he was an opponent of Palestinian oppression. Was his killing justified simply because he lived near Gaza? (See “Hayim Katsman, an Israeli Murdered by Hamas, Envisioned a Democratic Israel/Palestine,” *Jacobin*, 9 November.)

Whether it be Israel, Korea or 1944 Nazi Germany, we oppose the specific targeting of civilian populations irrespective of how imbued they are with chauvinism at a particular time. This position is not rooted in liberal bourgeois morality but in our aim to advance the class struggle as outlined by Trotsky:

“Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoes, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that not all means are permissible. When we say that the end justifies the means, then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organization, replacing it by worship for the ‘leaders’.”  
—*Their Morals and Ours*, 1938

In no way do Hamas’ methods correspond to the above principles.

The targeting of Israeli civilians by Hamas does *not* advance the liberation of Palestine. It serves only to further consolidate the support of the Israeli population to the oppression of Palestinians. The strong popular support for the current bombing of Gaza in Israel—as opposed to the 1982 intervention in Lebanon, for example—shows this clearly. So long as Israel is united internally, it cannot be defeated militarily. Any serious strategy for Palestinian liberation must seek to exploit and deepen polarizations within Israel. The Israeli working class may be deeply imbued with chauvinism, but its own condition is undermined by the oppression of Palestine. It has an objective interest in joining together with the Arab masses *against* the Zionist ruling class and imperialism. This is the only road. But it has no chance of success if the so-called Marxists do not fight for this perspective and leave the leadership of the Palestinian struggle in the hand of Islamists who paint all of Israel with one brush.

Did Hamas’ offensive advance the cause of the Palestinians on a military level? Clearly not. As you state yourselves: “Hamas is militarily overwhelmed by Israel which is backed by the superpower, the US.” It is certainly true that the Hamas attack was a reaction to the inhumane oppression that Palestinians suffer under the Zionist and imperialist boot. But it is a reaction which sets their liberation *backwards*.

To justify your support for the actions taken by Hamas, you make a rather pathetic attempt at arguing that they have no other choice given the inaccuracy of the military technology at their disposal. A machine gun at point-blank range in a crowded festival is very accurate. But why do you even raise this argument? According to your position, it would be justified to target any number of Israeli citizens no matter the weapons available.

In a similar vein, you raise that Hamas does “not have the capacity to attack while distinguishing soldiers and civilians and still win.” A Hamas fighter can certainly win an encounter with an unarmed civilian in a kibbutz, but how does this advance Palestinian liberation and the fight for socialism? This brings us once more to the crux of the question: how to win? In your writings on Palestine, you offer no perspective on how to concretely advance the struggle for national



liberation. If you were to engage on this road, you would quickly see that the strategy followed by Hamas is the main political obstacle holding it back. If the ICL focuses its fire against the strategy of Hamas, it is not because we are bending to imperialist propaganda (as we are often accused) but because we are desperately seeking to guide the struggle for Palestinian liberation on a victorious path. What is criminal is to see the current impasse of the movement and do nothing to redirect it onto a different, revolutionary road.

It is striking that you do not say a word about the class struggle strategy for Palestinian liberation outlined in our *Spartacist* article. It is precisely this aspect which is fundamentally different from anything our tendency has written on the question before. We do not advocate a unity of Jews and Palestinians on the basis of rejecting the legitimate national aspirations of the oppressed, but rather put the question of Palestinian liberation at the center of our strategy. We do not promise that all will be well in a socialist future but put forward a strategy for today which can actually lead to defeating the Zionist state and imperialism.

For all your strong words in defense of Palestine, we must ask once more, comrades: “what is to be done?”

## Syria

We have not yet had the chance to review our position on Syria. That said, we have no doubt that it shares all the faults of our previous approach, both regarding permanent revolution and in providing communist leadership. We are more than happy to engage in further correspondence and discussion with you on this matter. However, as with other questions, we must agree on the fundamental starting point. A correct approach to the conflict in Syria must necessarily start from the perspective of advancing the struggle for international revolution, not simply choosing the lesser evil. I want to be clear that I am not denying the importance of taking a side in this or any given conflict, but only that such a side must be informed by a revolutionary strategy.

For example, in the Spanish Civil War Trotsky certainly took a side with the Republicans. But this was subordinate to his overall aim of advancing and guiding the *Spanish revolution*. To discuss what side to take in the civil war divorced from this consideration inevitably brings you to the position of the popular front, which in the end decapitated the revolution and lost the civil war.

## Conclusion

There are numerous other questions from your propaganda and ours which are well worth discussing. However, this letter is long enough as it is and should offer plenty of material to start off with. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I will once more urge comrades to look at our propaganda with an eye to the question of revolutionary leadership. For a condensed elaboration of our views on this question you should consult our article “What Is Revolutionary Leadership?” in *Spartacist* No. 68.

In our previous exchange, we insisted on class independence and you on the struggle against imperialism. This led to a circular discussion in which neither side made headway. In our recent propaganda, the ICL has combined anti-imperialism *with* class independence. This dialectical synthesis can be achieved only by seeking to guide the struggles of the working class in a revolutionary direction starting from current conditions. Without this starting point, one is condemned to one of two pitfalls: abstract class purity that renounces the centrality of the anti-imperialist struggle, or capitulation to the current nationalist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. We believe that previously we fell into the former and you the latter. These trends are two sides of the same coin and have plagued the Trotskyist movement since the death of its founder. A revolutionary answer to both is essential to reforging the Fourth International.

We look forward to engaging in further discussions with your organization.

Communist greetings,  
Perrault  
For the International Communist League

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## Letter to the International Communist League

by Korean Bolshevik Group

12 January 2024

Dear comrades of the ICL,

We are serious about building an international revolutionary leadership. We believe that leadership building begins with the Program. We admire the seriousness of the ICL comrades' response.

### “The Struggle Against Liberalism”

“According to your letter, you have not yet reviewed our main conference document ‘The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power’. In this document we show how globalisation and the dominance of liberalism in the post-Soviet period are rooted in the hegemony of U.S. imperialism. From this we argue that the task of Marxists following 1991 was to fight to break the international working class from its liberal leadership whose politics reflected the interests of the imperialist bourgeoisie.”

—ICL, KBT letter, 23 December 2023. Minor typo corrections, underscores and symbols [in quotes] are BG's

Our main interest was the change in ICL's perspective on ‘Imperialism-National question-Anglo chauvinism’. So, as a comrade pointed out, “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony & the Struggle for Workers Power” were not examined. We read it again this time. It is a fairly extensive article that analyzes the situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union from various angles.

However, we still don't understand the concept and use of the word “liberalism”, which is repeated about 100 times in the paper. In our view, the substance of this word is unclear.

Soviet Union, the international labor-capital relationship of force changed dramatically, which led to a major change in the ‘facial expression’ of the ruling class, i.e., in the way it governed and its attitude. In the absence of a powerful opponent, it felt like it had the world at its feet and became more belligerent in its colonization of the world. Meanwhile, within the imperialist bloc, including the U.S., the labor aristocracy that surrendered to capital grew even larger.

But we don't think it's anything more than a change in the attitudes of the ruling class as a result of a change in power relations, and yet, for the 100th time, the paper describes it as if a new ideology or ruling class has emerged. We are not sure ‘liberalism’ is the right word. We think it would be closer to the truth to describe it as a struggle against ‘the tendency of the labor aristocracy to support its own imperialism within imperialism’.

### Class-versus-class Politics and the Bolshevik Group (BG)

“This is a big contradiction which we expect has fueled important illusions in bourgeois democracy among the working class. A Marxist party in Korea must be built on a materialist refutation of such reformist illusions.”

‘Class-versus-class Politics’ is one of iSt’s most cherished traditions. It has also been one of the central themes of our propaganda over the past two decades. Here is one of them.

*‘Cups and Balls’ of the Capitalist Rule & ‘Friends of Capitalism’ within the Working Class*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&document\\_srl=14964](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&document_srl=14964)

### **Situation on the Korean Peninsula**

“We would be very interested in knowing what you think of our document and how you understand the post-WWII history of Korea, its relation to U.S. imperialism, and the central obstacles to advancing working class revolution in the peninsula.”

We introduce two papers that present our analysis and position on this issue.

*The Essence of Conflict on the Korean Peninsula and the Response of the Working Class*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document\\_srl=9380&mid=board\\_ArAZ48](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document_srl=9380&mid=board_ArAZ48)

*Our Position on 17th presidential election of South Korea*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&page=3&document\\_srl=6758](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&page=3&document_srl=6758)

### **Groundless and Unreasonable Criticism**

“Our initial impression is that your propaganda shares a similar non-revolutionary, rigid, formalism which we ourselves had to break from. Your organisation takes clear positions on specific questions, but we notice an absence of any concrete course of action for the proletariat, whether it is in broad strategic terms, or in the more short-term immediate sense. Based on the articles we have consulted thus far, we do not think you provide an answer to the question: ‘what is to be done?’

While you accurately relate many of the points in our new issue of Spartacist, the question of revolutionary leadership—the backbone of the whole issue—is singularly absent. For example, you do not mention that at the heart of our correction on permanent revolution is the question of communist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle.”

These are abstract criticisms without any basis. Since then, this kind of illogical and reckless criticism has been repeated several times. This type of illogic was also used by the two factions in the IBT before 2018 and the RR [Revolutionary Regroupment], when they were arguing against us. We judge it to be illogical because it could not find any significant logic to defend itself. If not, please provide reasons. Meanwhile, throughout this reply, we will refute the comrades’ criticism by providing evidences.

“To reject previous capitulations to western social democracy was only the first step in reasserting the revolutionary Trotskyist strategy for the neo-colonial world. The fight against imperialism must be at the centre of this strategy, but to be victorious it is necessary to break the hold of the national bourgeoisie which holds back national and social emancipation.

This is the key strategic problem for revolution in countries oppressed by imperialism. This is all to say that in discussing the various points of disagreements between our two organisations, our starting point is always to advance today the fight for a revolutionary leadership of the working class against their current misleaders, whether they are social democratic, Stalinist, or Islamist.”

Presumably, with this reference, the ICL wants to paint us as having a ‘tendency to support local bourgeois forces politically as long as it is a national liberation struggle against imperialism’. This is repeated over and over again in subsequent letters.

The politics of class versus class is central to the victory of the working class revolution. That is why, where necessary, we have placed this issue at the forefront of our propaganda. This point is not missing from our propaganda not only in South Korea, but also in Palestine, Iran, Niger, Myanmar, Hong Kong, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, etc.

### **Palestine**

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### **Kazakhstan**

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### **Ukraine and Russia**

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### **Iran**

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### **Niger**

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### **Myanmar**

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### **Hong Kong**

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document\\_srl=7467&mid=board\\_ArAZ48](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document_srl=7467&mid=board_ArAZ48)

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document\\_srl=8155&mid=board\\_ArAZ48](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document_srl=8155&mid=board_ArAZ48)

### **Belarus**

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document\\_srl=11046&mid=board\\_ArAZ48](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document_srl=11046&mid=board_ArAZ48)

### **Venezuela**

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document\\_srl=7117&mid=board\\_FKwQ53](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?document_srl=7117&mid=board_FKwQ53)

### **Iran**

“You say nothing about what the tasks of communists were at the time. What should communists have done in Iran and internationally to prevent the Iranian revolution from leading to the triumph of Islamist reaction? This is the whole question. Since you provide no answer to this, you are left with choosing the lesser evil between the Shah and the Mullahs.”

It’s a ridiculous slander. The rebuttal and answer to this are contained in our article introduced above. Quotation is a bit long.

“Our position on the invasion, aimed at regime change in Iran, is almost the same as the situation in Venezuela: ‘Regardless of who leads that resistance, Iran and the world’s working class fight for the defeat of the U.S. imperialism and the victory of Iran. But the Iranian people’s will to oppose imperialism and to defend Iran can only be maximized in the socialist prospect. At the same time, the people of Iran and the oppressed nations can realize the dream of fundamental liberation from imperialistic barbarism only in the prospect of socialism. In this regard, the working class cannot have any political expectations or illusions on the present Islamic regime, the gatekeeper of capitalism.’

The role of the pro-imperialist colonial system is to keep the excess exploitation and looting of imperial financial capital safe. As it is a parasitic and dependent regime from the very start, it is exceptionally corrupt and anti-democratic. Excess exploitation and tyranny inevitably produce resistance. Social discontent that had been accumulating exploded in the people's uprising in 1978-79, which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty.

The victory gave the Iranian people a strong chance to move on to socialism. The Iranian working class was not a spectator in the uprising. The general strike of Iranian key industrial workers, led by the oil industry, has become a decisive lever in the overthrow of the dynasty. Shuras, a national strike committee established in the course of the revolution, was a bud of the worker's Soviet. If there had been a leadership providing revolutionary guidance like Russia in 1917, Iran could have moved on to the socialist revolution following the overthrow of the pro-imperialist dynasty.

...It was necessary for the Iranian working class to get rid of its illusion on Khomeini and to clearly recognize the fact that he was the enemy of the class. It had to be politically prepared for the forthcoming class rift and struggle. It was a goal that could only be achieved by building a revolutionary vanguard like Russia's Bolsheviks in 1917.

### **The reactionary nature of the Islamic regime**

Iran's Islamic regime emerged in the wake of the national liberation struggle of the colonial working class [and] the oppressed people, it is a Bonapartist capitalist government that seeks to block the socialist revolution and compromise with imperialism. It is a tyrannical regime that oppresses the working class and brutally suppresses political freedom. It is a theocratic state that enforces feudal lifestyle to women, as symbolized by hijab coercion. We do not have any political expectation that this Islamic regime could do anything for the interest of the working class. Though it is now slightly hidden in the face of imperialist aggression, but a more fundamental adversary lies between classes. As history shows in the 1970s and '80s, Iran's Islamic regime is engaged in an anti-imperialist struggle today, like Venezuela's Maduro regime, but the very fact that it is the head of the capitalist order will soon erode or interrupt the struggle. That is why Iran's working class must launch an organizational and political armament for the future overthrow of the bourgeois system, along with engaging in a joint military front today.

To realize that prospect, the condition of the Leninist-Trotskyist revolutionary leadership formed by the program of the permanent revolution, which uncompromisingly maintains the principle of 'class-to-class' and guides the energy of the anti-imperialist liberation struggle to the socialist revolution, must be met."  
—Defend Iran against imperialist colonial aggression! Promote the victory of the anti-imperialist liberation struggle to the socialist revolution!

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&page=3&document\\_srl=7351](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&page=3&document_srl=7351)

"It is true that the ousting of the Shah was a major blow to U.S. imperialism. But the starting point for Marxists is not simply to inflict blows against imperialism, but to defeat imperialism through socialist revolution. a) If we evaluate the events as Marxists, we must ask not whether or not imperialism was dealt a blow, but whether or not the position of the international working class was strengthened. b) According to this criterion, it is clear that the answer is no. Working class organisations were crushed, Islamic law imposed, and women and minorities to this day suffer brutal oppression. In fact, by decapitating the powerful Iranian proletariat, the Khomeini regime inflicted a major blow to the fight against imperialism in the entire region."

“It is because you lack this crucial element—an independent path for the working class—that you must downplay the disastrous effects of Khomeini’s triumph in the name of “fighting imperialism”. As we shall see, this is a constant problem in your propaganda.”

Although they say they have reflected on their past mistakes, ICL still thinks with wrong inertia. The pressure of the past has weakened, but the pressure of the present is strong. In the critical situation of 1979, the ICL chose a neutral/abstentionist stance on the Iran issue, ultimately siding with imperialism. Today, the ICL still defends itself with a seemingly plausible ultra-leftist position and tries to attack ours, that is, the tactics of Lenin and Trotsky.

In Russia, the February Revolution created a situation that could lead to the October Revolution. However, without the right tactics for the July period, the Kornilov coup in August, and the October uprising, the working class’s seizure of power was impossible.

In Iran, the overthrow of the Shah’s dynasty in 1979 and the collapse of the military on February 11 raised the question of which class would take power in Iran. However, class collaborationism handed power over to the capitalist class, that is, Islamists, in the subsequent power struggle.

The Pinochet coup in Chile in 1973 and the coup in Egypt in 2013 were events that occurred in a similar relationship of forces as in August 1917 in Russia.

Although it faced a favorable situation created by the radical advance of the working class, it subsequently lost the power struggle due to the absence or incompetence of the working class leadership. Russia was the only exception. As a result, the working class that advanced suffered a severe blow and retreated.

So what is the cause? We look to the working class leadership who lost the class struggle. The capitalist class, which came to power due to the incompetence of the working class leadership, cannot be held responsible for counterrevolutionary policies. This is because it is quite natural for counter-revolutionary forces to pursue counter-revolutionary policies. This is the ABC of Marxism.

Nevertheless, ICL and others still use this absurd logic. This is because there is no other way to hide one’s opportunism in important political situations by equating the oppressor and the oppressed camps and abstaining.

## **Ukraine**

“First, it is not true that we deny a) the right of self-determination of the Russian people of Donbass. Since 2014 the population of Donbass b) has been moving towards wanting integration into the Russian federation. If the current war was simply about the self-determination of Donbass, we would have no problem in having a military side with Russia...

It is impossible to deny that these referendums only took place in the Russian-occupied parts of these territories—in which much of the population has been displaced—and cannot be considered a clear representation of popular sentiment.”

The ICL seems to imply that self-determination in Ukraine’s Donbas region is the result of Russian oppression. Therefore, ICL seems to argue that a) and b) are different.

Just as Lenin compared the ‘right of national self-determination’ to the right to divorce, self-determination is also the ‘right to self-defense’ to escape from unhappy and violent situation. Would the ICL support the 2008 South Ossetia’s right to secede from Georgia, the 2014 decision to annex Crimea to Russia, and the 2014 secession of the Donbass regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, when Russian military did not occupy, from Ukraine? And whose side will the ICL

stand when the Georgian or Ukrainian governments in Kiev violate their national self-determination?

“The problem is that in the current context the national conflict between Russians and Ukrainians cannot simply be resolved through the victory of one side. Whichever side wins, the result will be the national oppression of the other side.”

By concealing the imperialist rule hidden behind the ethnic conflict, the oppressed and the oppressor forces are mixed together. This logic is a typical way to hide opportunism, especially Anglo-chauvinism, that is subservient to one’s own imperialism. That logic is being repeated again.

“What you totally disappear from our position is our main slogan “turn the guns around”. This is a not a call to be “neutral” as you claim, but a call to unite the Ukrainian and Russian workers in revolutionary struggle against their own governments and imperialism. Only then can the national question be resolved in a just manner.”

It’s not that we don’t know. We are well aware that the iSt tradition frequently refers to Lenin’s dual defeatist policy. We know very well that the revolutionary line applied in the fight between ‘imperialism and imperialism’ was applied to the conflict between ‘imperialist and colony’ and that the iSt tendencies often took the side of imperialism.

The following introductory article is a document containing criticism of it.

*“Worst Enemy of the Working Class” Capitulation to Imperialism, Neutrality and ‘BT’*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&page=2&document\\_srl=11718](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&page=2&document_srl=11718)

In addition, you should also refer to “Ultralefts in General and Incurable Ultralefts in Particular” and “On the Sino-Japanese War” introduced in this document.

“Once more, the fundamental problem with your position is that you do not indicate in any way how it serves to advance the struggle for social revolution in Ukraine, in Russia, in Korea, or anywhere else. Any serious revolutionary organisation must be able to answer the following questions in the context of the current war: 1) How to forge unity of Russian and Ukrainian workers? 2) How to advance international socialist revolution in the context of this conflict? 3) How to break the working class from its social-chauvinist leadership, in Ukraine, Russia and the rest of the world?”

“We believe that you do not provide an adequate response to any of these questions.”

Let’s point out two things. First, the unreasonable generalizations and childish logic that are almost rude. Second, we wonder if these comrades have actually read our writings on Ukraine.

We hope that many ICL comrades will read our article, find our actual errors, and criticize us based on evidence.

*Ukraine war, Opportunism and the Working Class: Disruption of the Imperialist order and the Reorganization of the International Proletarian Leadership*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&document\\_srl=14582](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&document_srl=14582)

## **Palestine**

“On the question of Israel and Palestine we would like to start by stating that we agree with many of the criticisms made of the Spartacist tendency in your article “Palestinian Liberation and ‘Social Patriotism’”. We thought it was prescient on your part to point to the 1973 exchange with Samarakkody. Our international would certainly have gained from considering your arguments on the question more seriously in our previous discussions.”

We have conducted considerable research since 2013 to find the roots of the IBT opportunism. And the results of the research, lots of documents were written. It is good to hear the approval and praise of you comrades. We think it is a bit of compensation for the arduous, even painful research.

“The true nature of our disagreement lies not in taking a military side against Israel in general, but rather on the specific targeting of civilians in the 7 October offensive of Hamas. You correctly identify the targeting of civilians as a difference, but then wrongly present this as the grounds for our supposed refusal to take a military side in general. This distorts our position. Let us focus on the actual difference: the targeting of Israeli civilians.”

When the colonial people resist imperialist invasion, we stand on the side of victory for the colonial people, regardless of who leads the resistance. This is a tactic learned from Lenin and Trotsky, and consistent with the historical and international cause of the working class.

However, the title of ICL’s document on the Palestine war on October 10, 2023 is “Only death and defeat with Hamas!”

In any case, Hamas is leading the local people’s resistance against imperialism, just like the Ethiopian Selassie (1936), the Chinese Chiang Kai-shek (1937), and the Brazilian quasi-fascist Vargas (1938, Trotsky). And the number of Israeli citizens targeted by Hamas is very limited in number and lethality.

In our view, Palestinian Hamas appears no more harmful or evil to its “citizens” than Selassie, Chiang Kai-shek or Vargas.

And suddenly, the comrade asks, “What about a nuclear strike on Seoul?” In what context would such a nuclear strike be likely?

In 2017, North Korea, cornered by U.S. imperialist pressure, mentioned nuclear weapons as a means of defense. There is virtually no reason for North Korea to use nuclear weapons preemptively. However, if the U.S. imperialists are really strangling North Korea to kill it completely, North Korea, in a life-or-death crisis, could send nuclear weapons to Washington, New York, or Seoul (although Pyeongtaek, home to the world’s largest U.S. military base, seems like a better target). If you fall into the water, grab at straws. Any creature on the verge of death uses any means possible. It is not a matter of reason or morality. By what justification can it be prevented?

“Whether it be Israel, Korea, or 1944 Nazi Germany, we oppose the specific targeting of civilian populations irrespective of how imbued they are with chauvinism at a particular time.”

And who is innocent? The Israeli people, who are proud of the first-class citizen status they gained through the US and their own invasion of Palestine, and who support a government that plunders the lives, land, and resources of Palestinian Arabs? What about the Israeli settlers who arm themselves and take over the land after when the military evicts the local population? Those who cheer while watching the shelling of Gaza from a hill? Those who enjoyed festivals while mocking the local residents who originally lived on land acquired through invasion?

Which citizen are you talking about? Can you say that you know and sympathize with imperialist invasion, over-exploitation, and massacre, that you base your life on the kingdom built by imperialist invasion, that you are satisfied with it, and that you support your country’s victory, and that the invaders are not exploiters just because you are the working class? Are the European social democrats and the working class of 1914 and the American Shachtmanites and the working class who sympathized with them in the late 1930s innocent?

Through whose eyes do you comrades view the conflicts?



If you were the leader of the Palestinian resistance, what tactics would you choose?

“The targeting of Israeli civilians by Hamas does not advance the liberation of Palestine. It serves only to further consolidate the support of the Israeli population to the oppression of Palestinians. The strong popular support for the current bombing of Gaza in Israel—as opposed to the 1982 intervention in Lebanon for example—shows this clearly. a) So long as Israel is united internally, it cannot be defeated militarily. Any serious strategy for Palestinian liberation must seek to exploit and deepen polarisations within Israel. b) The Israeli working class may be deeply imbued with chauvinism, but its own condition is undermined by the oppression of Palestine. c) It has an objective interest in joining together with the Arab masses against the Zionist ruling class and imperialism. This is the only road.”

Once again, you interpenetrate the oppressor and the oppressed through superficially radical rhetoric.

a) It is not true. Israel could be defeated. The U.S. military was powerful, but it lost wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan (2021). If imperialist support is cut off, Israel will soon become isolated and the possibility of defeat will rapidly increase. The same goes for Ukraine.

b) Explain how its own condition is undermined. And when a war is tilted toward defeat, like the Vietnam War or the Algerian War, we will finally realize the “objective interests” mentioned in c).

The awakening of American workers finally became a reality when 50,000 soldiers returned from the Vietnam War dead. The awakening of the French working class was finally heightened when France was losing its colonies after being defeated in the Algerian War.

Comrades shout, “Only death and defeat with Hamas!” But we shout, “Palestine Arab’s victory against imperialist and Israeli aggression!” A military victory for Palestine, currently led by Hamas, would accelerate the awakening of the Israeli working class and unite the two working classes. It will encourage the anti-imperialist resistance of the oppressed people and promote the global socialist struggle.

“In our recent propaganda, the ICL has combined anti-imperialism with class independence.... Without this starting point, one is condemned to one of two pitfalls: abstract class purity that renounces the centrality of the anti-imperialist struggle, or capitulation to the current nationalist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle. We believe that previously we fell into the former and you the latter.”

As explained before, this is unreasonable logic. Comrades are baseless. Because it can’t be found. To attack us, you would have to deny both Lenin and Trotsky at the same time. And in fact, on the ‘issues of imperialism—national liberation—permanent revolution’, the iSt tradition has denied the Lenin and Trotsky traditions for decades. It has succumbed to the sentiments and pressure of the labor aristocracy within imperialism and has consequently adopted a policy of surrender to imperialism.

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We believe that ICL’s 2017 and 2023 conferences provide clues to reflection on past mistakes. And we believe that self-criticism provides the possibility for Marxists in the imperialist opportunism to return to the revolutionary camp. That is why we are serious about our debate with the ICL.

Lastly, we introduce *The Exchanges with Revolutionary Regroupment: Imperialism, National Liberation and Permanent Revolution*

[https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board\\_ArAZ48&page=2&document\\_srl=9417](https://bolky.jinbo.net/index.php?mid=board_ArAZ48&page=2&document_srl=9417)

The article contains our analysis of the theme of ‘imperialism, national liberation and permanent revolution’ and our refutation of the core logic of the iSt tradition. We think it also will be meaningful in the debate with IG on the 13th.

If possible, we hope that this document we are sending today will enable us to participate in the discussion 13th Jan.

Communist greetings,  
Bolshevik Group

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## Letter to the Korean Bolshevik Group

by Perrault

11 March 2024

Dear comrades,

Following our initial exchange of letters, we have had three lengthy discussions which focused on the questions of Ukraine and Palestine. At the end of our last discussion, we both agreed that we are at an impasse. The following are our views on the nature of our disagreements and the obstacles to further discussions.

Our many differences with the Bolshevik Group of Korea (BG) all stem from our different approach to revolutionary leadership. We both agree that the fight against imperialism must be at the center of our perspective. But for us the main impediment in neocolonial and other nationally oppressed countries to advancing the struggle for national liberation is the bourgeois nationalist leadership of these movements. Their nationalist program holds back and betrays the struggle for national emancipation, from Palestine, Kurdistan and the Donbass to Korea. That is why we direct most of our efforts towards *breaking* the influence of nationalism on the working class, to *unchain* the struggle for national liberation. This is the task of revolutionary leadership in the neocolonial world according to us.

While we focus on providing a revolutionary path for national liberation, you focus solely on the objective process. For you, dealing blows to imperialism stands above the methods and principles of the class struggle. Whether it is in Palestine, Ukraine, Iran or anywhere else, you can state that the nationalist leaderships are reactionary but cannot show how their program restrains and betrays the anti-imperialist struggle. Your fundamental mistake is that you do not see how the principles of the class struggle are essential not only for the ultimate defeat of world imperialism but for dealing the harshest blows to its ambitions in the here and now.

This different starting point does not per se preclude holding further discussions; indeed it is the same difference we have with most parties and groups in the neocolonial world. For us the impediment to pursuing discussions is rather your explicitly anti-proletarian and nationalist position most clearly expressed in the following statement:

“Being a tribune to all oppressed people, the socialist-oriented world working class will never tolerate the sacrifice of innocent people. However, if *the people* who serve as supporters of imperialism confront the anti-imperialist national liberation struggle, *we recognize that the retribution against them is justified*. Only the working people in oppressing countries, actively fighting for the liberation of the oppressed people against their own invader government, would be considered on the same side. *We consider them the only innocent citizens who have nothing to do with imperialism. Only they can be granted the right to live in peace and safety.*”

—”Palestinian Liberation and ‘Social Patriotism’,” 31 May 2021 [highlighted by us]

In your letter of 12 January and in our discussions, comrades of the BG asserted that our charges of bourgeois nationalism were baseless and demanded we provide proof to substantiate our claim. The above quote is all the proof we need: you cannot defend it and be a Marxist. By justifying “retribution” against the entire “people” of imperialist and imperialist-aligned countries, you explicitly repudiate the most basic principle of internationalism: “workers of the world unite.” Your position makes the entire working class of the West (and all their allies) responsible for the crimes of their social-chauvinist leaders and bourgeois rulers.

The Marxist position seeks to *break* the working class *politically* from its social-chauvinist leaders. In contrast, you argued in our calls that social-chauvinism can only be defeated by inflicting “retribution” or “blows” on the people of imperialist countries. This is entirely consistent with the above quote. Your comrade T put it most crudely when he stated that “they [workers of oppressor countries] must face the consequences.” This utterly reactionary position can only *strengthen* social-chauvinism, *divide* the proletariat and *benefit* the imperialists! For us, a rejection of the above position is a precondition for further discussions.

For Leninists, it is ABC that the world proletariat can only unite if the proletariat of an oppressor nation stands for the full national liberation of the people under the boot of its “own” ruling class. But there is another side to the question: the proletariat of the oppressed countries must strive for *full unity* with the proletariat of oppressor countries. This is how Lenin explained the question:

“The Socialists of the oppressed nations, on the other hand, must particularly fight for and maintain complete, absolute unity (also organizational) between the workers of the oppressed nation and the workers of the oppressing nation. Without such unity it will be impossible to maintain an independent proletarian policy and class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in the face of all the subterfuge, treachery and trickery of the bourgeoisie; for the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations always converts the slogan of national liberation into a means for deceiving the workers; in internal politics it utilizes these slogans as a means for concluding reactionary agreements with the bourgeoisie of the ruling nation (for instance, the Poles in Austria and Russia, who entered into pacts with reaction in order to oppress the Jews and the Ukrainians); in the realm of foreign politics it strives to enter into pacts with one of the rival imperialist powers for the purpose of achieving its own predatory aims (the policies of the small states in the Balkans, etc.).”

—“The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination”  
(January-February 1916)

There is not the slightest shadow of this perspective in your propaganda. And how could there be? How could you talk of unity with the proletariat of oppressor countries if you think that “blows” against *the working class* of an oppressor nation are the only way to break the hold of social-chauvinism?

As in all questions, your approach is objectivist and doctrinaire. You observe that the working class in imperialist countries supports social-chauvinist leaders (in fact, this is the case in all countries!) and that this support has a material basis in the superprofits drawn from imperialist exploitation. From this you conclude that only a change in objective circumstances (“blows”) can break the chains of social-chauvinism. From a correct observation you draw sweeping conclusions which disappear that there *remains an irreconcilable conflict* between the working class and the bourgeoisie *despite* the imperialist superprofits given to the labor aristocracy. In fact, the world situation makes clearer every day that the working class in the West (including its upper layers) is itself suffering economically and facing disaster from the actions of its imperialist rulers.

The task of revolutionaries in imperialist countries is to exploit the contradiction between the fundamental interest of the working class—which is to overthrow imperialism—and the program

of the social-chauvinist leaders of the working class—which through the short-term corruption of certain segments of the workers movement subordinates the entire proletariat to imperialism. Since you do not think that *political struggle* is the decisive factor in breaking the proletariat of the West from social-chauvinism, you put all your eggs in the basket of the nationalist bourgeoisies of oppressed countries dealing “blows” to imperialism. That is why you have no strategic differences with the Kremlin or Hamas in the conduct of their respective wars.

At bottom, you reject the fundamental conclusions Lenin drew from the betrayal of the Second International. When most working-class parties of Europe lined up behind their own bourgeoisies in the carnage of World War I, Lenin did *not* conclude that the workers of imperialist countries needed to suffer “retribution” but that the workers movement needed to *split from social-chauvinism* politically and organizationally. It is to effectuate this split that he founded the Third International, *to unite the proletariat of the world in struggle against imperialism*. It is this perspective that the ICL follows.

We sincerely hope that you will reconsider your views. If you reject your reactionary anti-internationalist stance, we would be happy to renew and broaden our discussions. But until then we see no point in pursuing discussions with a group that in the name of anti-imperialism justifies indiscriminate “retribution” against the entire people of imperialist and imperialist-allied countries.

Comradely,  
Perrault

## **Exchange on Class and Ideological Divisions in China Today**

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*The following article, received by the ICL in December 2023, and our reply, were previously published on iclfi.org.*

### **From Boycotting Christmas, Observing the Rift in Chinese Society**

About a week prior to me writing this article, while the Western world was celebrating the joyous Christmas holiday, in China - a holiday not typically overly emphasized in the overseas world - some significant social conflicts erupted.

Those who do not frequently browse the Chinese internet might be unaware that from a couple of days before Christmas Eve, a mass movement regarding ‘boycotting Christmas’ had erupted on the Chinese internet. People were divided into two camps, engaging in extensive debates both online and offline about the dissemination and celebration of Christmas in China. At least one to two hundred million people, more or less, were involved in this movement. While this wasn’t the first time there had been a boycott of Christmas, it was an immensely large, unorganized mass movement, far surpassing previous occurrences. This movement was undoubtedly led by Chinese nationalists and conservatives, and it’s discernible that nationalism permeated every corner of this movement. The primary participants in this unconventional Chinese Christmas carnival were middle-aged and elderly individuals, although there were also glimpses of younger people. Many Chinese celebrities chose to remain silent or expressed support for boycotting Christmas. Supporters of this movement flooded popular Chinese video-sharing platforms like Kuaishou, Douyin (TikTok), Bilibili, and various forums, uploading countless short and long videos and leaving numerous angry articles, comments, etc., conveying the viewpoint that ‘Christmas is a Western ‘cultural invasion,’ an infringement upon Chinese traditional culture, and an insult to Chinese revolutionary martyrs. Therefore, conscientious and patriotic Chinese people must cease celebrating Christmas.’ On the other hand, those who wished to preserve Chinese Christmas believed, ‘Christmas is just a holiday, and those who wish to celebrate it should not be condemned.’ Both sides attacked each other verbally online, often escalating from the boycott of Christmas to issues of loyalty to the nation and respect for Chinese communist revolutionary martyrs. Moreover, deliberate destruction of Christmas-related items and violent clashes between nationalists and ordinary people celebrating Christmas occurred in the real world.

Some may consider this just a typical clash between traditional and foreign cultures, but in reality, it symbolizes and represents an almost irreversible rift that has occurred in Chinese society, increasingly widening the conflicts between different social groups. Given the vast scale of this conflict and its paramount importance to China’s social progress, I feel compelled to delve into this entire issue in detail in this article.

In this article, I aim to elucidate the contradictions present in the current mainstream ideologies within Chinese society, the extent to which they have silently evolved, the class forces behind them, and explicitly propose what interventions need to be made to influence the current course of events.

Since the ‘Reform and Opening Up’ initiated by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, which is well known for betraying the socialist revolution in China, the Chinese government has accelerated down the path of embracing and adopting Western capitalist systems. It has consistently dismantled the planned economy and state-owned enterprises constructed in the early Mao Zedong era following the Stalin model. This process has fattened the wallets of corrupt bureaucrats and the bourgeoisie, enhancing the social power of both.

The 'Reform' in the 'Reform and Opening Up' signifies the aforementioned privatization process, while the 'Opening Up' represents peaceful diplomacy with Western nations and efforts to dismantle China's closed-off nature regarding foreign markets. This also implies reducing the hostility of the Chinese populace towards the Western world since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Overall, it's akin to Western liberalization and globalization reforms. Before Xi Jinping came to power, these processes were predominantly tinged with liberalism. However, after Xi Jinping's rise, there was a shift in the narrative. Xi Jinping, much like his predecessors Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, betrayed the Chinese revolution as an advocate for the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy. Yet, he transcends merely being a conservative to become an absolute nationalist. He shamelessly and unscrupulously exploits national hatred to consolidate his rule and attempts to ensure this sordid method remains one of the cornerstones of his lifelong leadership in China. After assuming office, he emphasized the 'traditional culture' of the Chinese nation - primarily referring to Confucian culture that enslaved the Chinese people for thousands of years. He also stressed 'forgetting history means betrayal' - mainly the history of Japanese aggression against China and the Korean War (although he conveniently forgets the history of Confucian culture's subjugation of China and the class struggles during the Mao Zedong era). He emphasizes 'cultural confidence' - essentially disdain for foreign cultures. In other words, if China's previous leaders were akin to the 'Democratic Party' in the United States, Xi Jinping can be likened to China's Trump (though, in terms of timing, Trump could be seen as an imitator of Xi Jinping). Such a shift has undeniably caused turmoil in Chinese ideologies, resulting in the emergence of certain contours. Chinese mass consciousness has been divided into three major categories.

1. **Liberals:** Their ideologies mainly originate from the pre-Reform and Opening Up era in China. Their overall thoughts lean toward capitalism, believing that China's way forward lies in further capitalist liberalization reforms or social democratic reforms, considering communism as an outdated, entirely flawed concept. A portion of these individuals may believe China is beyond redemption and see migration to developed capitalist countries like Europe, Japan, or the United States as their escape route. These individuals represent a segment of the Chinese petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, or those deeply disappointed or even despairing about society. They have a marginal position in political struggles, being quite weak in actuality. Liberals are more inclined to preserve their own well-being than to bring about societal change. They hope that someday the Chinese government will spontaneously reform. Those fiercely critical of the Chinese government are generally those advocating emigration, but their stance limits their influence on the progress of political struggles. However, through appropriate means, some among them could still be persuaded to support the revolution. Yet, when the revolution arrives, most of them are inevitably prone to splintering. Some will turn to us spontaneously, while others will spontaneously turn to them, just like all petite bourgeois tendencies during a revolution.

2. **Nationalists:** Their thoughts align closely with what Xi Jinping vigorously advocates. They believe China remains a great socialist country, devoid of problems or only with extremely negligible ones. They also believe their interests are intrinsically linked with the glory or disgrace of the nation. Though on the surface, they support communism, in reality, they only support every word of their government - irrespective of its ideology. Ignorantly, they think China currently stands tall above the world and confronts evil entities like the United States, Japan, and Europe as heroic figures from fairytales. They often fail to distinguish between the 'state' and the 'people.' In the eyes of a considerable number among them, individuals from developed capitalist nations are some kind of indescribable monsters - white people are foolish and arrogant, black people are impoverished and violent, and only the yellow race, particularly the Chinese (to them, the Japanese are nauseating perverts, Koreans are shameless waste, and Southeast Asians are all ungrateful), are capable of developing integrity and virtues as normal human beings. For them,

class conflict is an unknown entity or an outright lie. In no exaggeration, the thoughts of a substantial portion among them resemble a mirrored version of German Nazism. They also believe that the Chinese people should work hard, oppose any form and scale of workers' struggles, and consider the state as unconditionally standing with the proletariat while seeing foreign forces as enemies. This group encompasses the big bourgeoisie, figures such as Jack Ma, Wang Jianlin, Pony Ma, etc., the top echelons of the bourgeoisie and senior bureaucrats. Certainly, the vast majority of these big bourgeoisie and senior bureaucrats aren't foolish enough to believe in this extreme patriotism, but they are willing to propagate and amplify this ideology for their benefit. They represent about 35% of China's current population, with some being extremely radical and others merely driven by blind patriotism. However, most of these individuals, although part of the populace, will inevitably stand on the other side of the barricades in an imminent revolution. The only possibility of reconciliation with some of them lies in their voluntary abandonment of this ideology for various reasons, embracing the ideologies of liberals or the left-wing.

**3. Leftists:** This is a broad category that encompasses adherents of Mao Zedong, Stalin, Trotsky, and even advocates of economic left-wing anarchists. Like liberals, they also believe China has immense problems, some even considering it beyond redemption. Most have realized that the current Chinese government is the betrayer of the revolution and the greatest enemy. However, their solutions differ based on different ideological details. For instance, some Mao Zedong and Stalinists might believe forcing the government into reform through intense mass movements is still viable. However, another faction of these Mao Zedong, Stalinist supporters, including Trotsky supporters and anarchists, believes the Chinese government is beyond redemption and must be overthrown through revolution. There are varying degrees of understanding regarding communism among them - some are entirely ignorant of communism and support it only because of their aversion to the current government, while others are dedicated and reliable warriors advocating communist ideology. Although some among them may undergo betrayal and ideological shifts, most undeniably stand on the side of the Chinese communist revolution, on the side of the barricades. Currently, they constitute about 15% to 20% of China's population. It's noteworthy that due to China's revolutionary history, most still identify with Mao Zedong. Given the urgent situation of the revolution, comrades from the Fourth International must cooperate with Maoists, rejecting meaningless internal fights over history and detailed agendas. Discussions are permissible, but it's best to avoid escalating into mutual attacks and divisions.

However, despite Xi Jinping's efforts to spread nationalist ideologies, history does not easily bend to the will of individuals. The rampant spread of this nationalism, much like a virus, has deeper societal roots. This lies in the shifting balance of power among different social classes. Nationalism burning among the 'combustible material' of the Chinese populace signifies the current zenith of its primary supporters – the petite bourgeoisie.

China's higher education entrance examination system and the employment practices based on educational qualifications have caused a significant detachment of most students from the proletariat masses. They are solely focused on studying classics and lack practical production experience. The fierce, zero-sum competition of the college entrance examination has nurtured a selfish mindset among these intellectuals, exhibiting extreme selfishness and self-centeredness, manifesting as both personal selfishness and, at a macro level, as nationalism and even Nazism. Once these students become adults, their entrenched selfish tendencies render them China's so-called 'middle class,' essentially a group of worker-traitors, urban white-collars. They exemplify the term 'labor aristocrats,' hoping for wage reductions in exchange for some benefits, completely believing that their interests should be established at the expense of others. They find any unified worker movement utterly baffling. Unfortunately, this particular class is becoming a significant component of China's economy and population, signifying the severity of the current situation for the Chinese revolution. Moreover, this reflects the continual strengthening of the forces behind the

big bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy, with the petite bourgeoisie and white-collars serving as their primary power sources.

However, the grassroots workers, various blue-collar workers, progressive students, radicalized white-collar workers, and a small number of party members still holding pure thoughts are evidently aware that something is amiss. Most of them currently limit themselves to complaints and hostility toward the current state and government, while a minority among them might be more advanced in varying degrees. These individuals are the main force of the future revolution, but lacking proper theoretical guidance, they are currently in a state of confusion. If they are correctly exposed to living Marxism, they will eagerly accept and apply it. Their numbers are not less than the worker-traitors mentioned earlier; on the contrary, they outnumber and are increasing daily. It is imperative to guide and ensure they tread the correct path, relying firmly on them to achieve the victory of the revolution.

Nevertheless, regardless of the approaches, the current ideological conflict based on class contradictions in China is irreconcilable. Considering the severe economic problems surfacing in China after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the bankruptcy of Xu Jiayin's Evergrande Group, accumulating debts of 2.4 trillion, a continuous downturn in the stock market, decreasing consumption levels, worsening corruption issues, sluggish real estate and manufacturing markets, it's evident that China is likely to face a severe economic crisis within 1 to 3 years. In the imminent crisis, China's long-accumulated class contradictions could erupt anytime, leading to an anticipated state of chaos amidst the struggles of the three mentioned ideological currents. The government, along with the big bourgeoisie, will undoubtedly seize this opportunity to deepen China's autocratic system for better exploitation of the people. Correspondingly, the left-wing and liberal factions will be considerably dissatisfied. The question remains, how extensive will the conflict be, and when will it erupt?

So, what stance should we, as communists, take on this matter? Should we remain passive and observe? Should we attempt to mitigate the conflict, striving for stability? No. These methods belong to social democrats, to the bourgeois liberals, not to Marxism. Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky have already informed us about what to do. In the impending economic crisis, we must seize the opportunity to launch a revolution; there's no time for hesitation. Otherwise, interest groups represented by Xi Jinping will exploit the opportunity to strengthen their rule over China, further enhancing the power of the world bourgeoisie. However, the revolution won't be easy. Firstly, the state apparatus and the military are in the hands of the reactionary Chinese Communist Party. The current Chinese party and government are beyond redemption, contrary to what some Chinese and foreign comrades hope; they will undoubtedly use force to suppress the masses. Additionally, the patriots will also align themselves with the government, which is beyond doubt. Therefore, considering the balance of power, it's challenging for Marxist forces to secure victory.

The current situation for Chinese Marxists is likely to remain as such if there's no change. It's either death or a dead end. To avoid this tragedy, we must strive to garner more social support. There's hope in this regard. Despite the severe surveillance and oppression under the Xi Jinping government since the COVID-19 pandemic, social struggles have intensified. The previous resistance against isolation measures proved this, and there is growing discontent, both in strikes and in reality. However, revolutionaries are almost impossible to confront the Chinese government head-on under the current circumstances. Therefore, in the present Chinese context, there is an immediate need to start real political propaganda and organize revolutionary groups. The liberals seem approachable currently, and the politically indifferent and confused masses involved in workers' struggles also need guidance. The struggle for Marxist revolution in China must begin by forming genuine labor unions and underground parties, starting strikes and protests step by step, preparing to take over the government in the upcoming economic crisis.



The current revolutionary strength in China is still in its infancy and must be nurtured into a robust entity within one to two years; otherwise, regrets will follow too late.

The movement to boycott Christmas is a symbol, but it won't be the last. In fact, similar events might occur in less than two months. The key issue now lies in China's societal development, no longer proceeding smoothly but transitioning into radical transformation, possibly paving the way for a revolution. This signifies the scarcity of time. I urge Marxist comrades worldwide to pay more attention to the situation in China. International communist organizations must guide the currently fragmented Chinese Marxists to establish a disciplined underground organization. Chinese Marxist comrades must begin taking action, propagating our propositions in reality. China's new Marxist revolution is about to enter its most crucial period. To seize the initiative and achieve victory, the spread and organization of genuine Marxism in China must be fostered with the utmost enthusiasm and energy. Today's issue of the Chinese Communist revolution, just as Lenin said a century ago, is a matter of 'now or never.' We must soon make a choice that will determine China's fate and the global situation. In short, it's a matter of life and death.

## ICL Reply

8 February 2024

We found your article "From boycotting Christmas, observing the rift in Chinese society" both interesting and insightful. Clearly you approach the fight for communism with much seriousness. We could not agree more with your call for Marxists internationally to pay more attention to the situation in China and work towards the crystallization of a genuine communist trend. In this spirit we offer some critical remarks on your analysis of the ideological and class divisions in Chinese society.

You describe three fundamental camps—nationalist, liberal and leftist—and determine the balance of class forces in China today based on the popularity of each ideological grouping. We think this analysis is idealist and needs to be turned on its head. As Marxists we must start not from the ideas which dominate society but from the conflict of objective class interests. In his 1883 Eulogy to Marx, Engels explained how:

"Just as Darwin discovered the law of development of organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of development of human history: the simple fact, hitherto concealed by an overgrowth of ideology, that mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc.; that therefore the production of the immediate material means, and consequently the degree of economic development attained by a given people or during a given epoch, form the foundation upon which the state institutions, the legal conceptions, art, and even the ideas on religion, of the people concerned have been evolved, and in the light of which they must, therefore, be explained, instead of vice versa, as had hitherto been the case."

To base your analysis of China on the relative strength of ideas can only be disorienting. The different ideological groupings you describe are full of contradictions and in no way represent homogeneous class interests. This has crucial implications for the course of action for communists. You can change the world only through the extent that you understand it. It is for example impossible to break the hold of Chinese nationalism on the working class if you do not understand how it expresses deeply contradictory and conflicting interests. Overall, the result of your analysis is to downplay the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, exaggerate the strength of the CPC bureaucracy and diminish the threat of the imperialist capitalist class. The end result is to disappear the role of the revolutionary party as the *conscious expression of the historic*

*interests of the proletariat.* The problem lies not in your intentions but in your method. In the following remarks we will try to provide elements of a materialist explanation for the sharp ideological polarizations vividly described in your article.

A Marxist understanding for developments in China must start with the international situation. The last thirty years of stability and high economic growth in China were possible due to the favorable international environment after the Cold War. The uncontested hegemony of the U.S. created conditions for an explosion in international trade and a low level of conflict both between countries and within national borders. Regarding China, the consensus among imperialists was that its integration into the world economic system would lead to its rapid evolution towards capitalism. However, this is not what happened. The CPC engaged in economic liberalization without fundamentally giving up state control of the economy or its monopoly of political power. The stated goal of the CPC was to keep the Chinese working class subdued through the combination of a high level of economic growth and intense political repression. The stability of international conditions made this model successful for over two decades.

The initial opening up of China offered a golden opportunity for imperialist exploitation. However, with time foreign monopolies grew increasingly frustrated by the market restrictions maintained by the CPC as well as the increased competition from domestic capitalist firms. The steep worsening of relations between China and the U.S. is fundamentally caused by the inherent limits China's social regime imposes on imperialist finance capital. It is this international contradiction, and the incapacity of the Stalinist regime to solve it, which is at the root of increased polarizations in China today.

Inside China itself, the domestic capitalist class has grown enormously. This class is under CPC political control, but it is in its interest to break this stranglehold. More than that, the capitalist class in China ultimately seeks to overthrow the entire social regime and establish its own dominance through the final liquidation of the 1949 Revolution. The Chinese working class for its part has also grown enormously in strength. However, the economic and social gains it has made are threatened by counterrevolution and the aggressive moves of imperialist finance capital. Its objective interest is to sweep away the CPC dictatorship in order to strengthen the hold of the state over the economy and reorient the PRC towards the struggle for international socialist revolution.

The two fundamental poles in Chinese society are the working class and foreign imperialism. Balancing between these two poles we find the Stalinist bureaucracy, which plays a bonapartist role based on maintaining an iron grip on society through the state apparatus. The imperialists are exerting more and more economic, military and political pressure, in turn exacerbating the gigantic contradictions within China which have grown to extreme levels. In response to this increased pressure, the CPC regime has further increased the centralization of power and has turned towards heightened nationalism.

It is from this objective class basis that we must examine the rise of Xi as well as the different ideological groupings in China today. Your article notes the strong rise of nationalism, but it fails to explain the materialist roots of this rise. Moreover, Chinese nationalism has certain specific characteristics and contradictions which must be accounted for if it is to be defeated. Nationalism is a reactionary ideology in all its forms because it divides workers along national lines as opposed to uniting them internationally. That said, nationalism is not the same in imperialist countries, in nationally oppressed countries—such as Mexico—and in deformed worker states—such as China. In the first case, it represents the interests of the bourgeoisie in exploiting foreign countries; in the other two it partly represents a reaction against foreign domination. Moreover, in China it is essential to understand that nationalism partly draws its strength from the deep sentiment in the masses to defend what is left of the 1949 Revolution, not least national unification against imperialism.

The example of the USSR is most instructive. It would be totally false to equate German and Russian nationalism in the context of World War II. German nationalism expressed in Nazism was pure imperialist reaction. Russian nationalism had a fundamentally different basis. Stalin fully leaned on Russian nationalism to foster resistance to the Nazi invasion. The strength of this appeal was rooted in the deep sentiment of the workers and peasants to defend the gains of the October Revolution. To win the Russian masses to a revolutionary internationalist program, it was not enough to simply denounce nationalism. It was necessary to show through the course of the war itself that nationalism undermined the defense of the very things impelling the masses into action. The facts clearly show that the Russian chauvinism behind which the Red Army was led not only stiffened the resistance of Germany, but most fundamentally it betrayed the European revolution, the only definitive way to secure the gains of the October Revolution. The final vindication of this analysis is that in the end, Russian nationalism fostered the forces of counterrevolution that brought down the USSR in 1991.

Today Chinese nationalism is employed in much the same way as it was by Stalin. The CPC uses the fact that the 1949 Revolution put an end to the “century of humiliation” to justify its nationalist policies. In this way the CPC can rally great forces against foreign aggression but can ultimately only undermine the gains of the 1949 Revolution. To defeat Chinese nationalism, it cannot be simply equated with pure imperialist reaction as your article does (even if certain of its expressions can be similar). Chinese nationalism can be defeated only by showing how it undermines the interests of the working class, *including* the defense of China against imperialist reaction. We have developed some basic arguments to show this in [English Spartacist No. 68 \(sections of which are now available in Chinese\)](#).

Your article interestingly notes the weak appeal of liberalism—hitherto the main vehicle for imperialist counterrevolutionary ploys. We can probably expect that this will continue as an expression of both the global decline of liberalism and the incompatibility between liberalism and the current Chinese regime. This should not be mistaken as a diminishing threat of counterrevolution. On the contrary, the CPC has bet so heavily on the continued existence of the liberal world order that its break-up will lead to huge internal convulsions, and no doubt pose the question of counterrevolution or political revolution. You explain that the representatives of the Chinese big bourgeoisie stand currently in the camp of nationalism. This surely represents to some degree the decline of liberalism as well as a sign of deference to the diktats of the CPC. But it is also an indication that nationalism fundamentally represents the interests of the Chinese capitalist class and—as in the USSR—is the most likely banner around which capitalist restoration will be organized.

According to you, between 15 and 20 percent of the Chinese population can be categorized as leftist. This is an amorphous category which can only lead to confusion. As Marxists, we must rely first and foremost on the working class. This is not because it currently holds progressive *beliefs*, but because its *objective class interests* are historically progressive. The task of communist intellectuals and the working-class vanguard is to organize themselves in a party which can give a *conscious expression* to the *objective needs* of the international working class.

The idealist analysis you make of Chinese society leads you to downplay the revolutionary potential of the proletariat and exaggerate that of those you categorize as leftists. This is clear from your conclusion that “given the urgent situation of the revolution, comrades from the Fourth International must cooperate with Maoists, rejecting meaningless internal fights over history and detailed agendas.” This is incorrect. If one approaches the task of communists based on the objective interests of the proletariat, we must conclude that Maoism does *not* further these interests—this was true in the 1940s just as it is true today. Mao just like Xi today sought to solve the problems facing China within its own national borders, entirely separated from the task of international socialist revolution. This nationalist approach must not be conciliated but politically defeated if the forces of communism are to advance in China today.

The ICL has only a very limited understanding of political and economic developments in China today. For this reason, the points outlined in this letter have a necessarily general character. In contrast, your article clearly indicates you have a pulse on essential aspects of the political life in the country. What you lack is a Marxist method through which to organize these insights. Towards this there is no better guide than Trotsky's writings on the USSR, in particular *The Revolution Betrayed* and *In Defense of Marxism*. We strongly encourage you and your comrades to study the method and content of these works. It is from this standpoint that we have sought to approach our recent articles on China and the current letter.

We very much look forward to future correspondence.

# Babies, Bathwater, and the International Bolshevik Tendency

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## The Baby & the Bathwater—Reforge the international Spartacist tendency!

by Josh Decker for the IEC of the IBT

1 January 2024

### Open letter from the International Bolshevik Tendency (IBT) to:

- \* International Communist League (ICL/SL)
- \* League for the Fourth International (LFI/IG)
- \* Bolshevik Tendency (BT)
- \* Bolshevik-Leninist (BLA/Australia)
- \* Revolutionary Regroupment (RR/Brazil)
- \* Other individuals in the Spartacist tradition

Dear comrades,

We have entered a new period of global turbulence and potentially convulsive class struggle. Imperialism is dragging humanity down into the abyss, but the working class is showing signs it is finally starting to get back on its feet. We are all aware that the trade-union bureaucracy and the reformists will destroy every opportunity that presents itself if they are not politically defeated. A new Leninist-Trotskyist organization is desperately needed to provide leadership and serve as a pole of attraction for the politically advanced layers of workers and youth who could form the nucleus of a Bolshevik-type party. *That organization will not simply spring into existence through the frenetic groundwork of an existing group; nor will it emerge from an amalgamation of tendencies in a mutually amnestying merger.* Rather, it will be built through the hard work of dedicated communists in different organizations—with a central role played by the anti-Pabloite forces of the revolutionary Spartacist tradition—seeking to effect “splits and fusions” in the course of real-world interventions in the class struggle and, most importantly, the defense, development and application of the Marxist program.

James Robertson and his comrades in the Revolutionary Tendency were expelled from the SWP 60 years ago. A decade later, the international Spartacist tendency (iSt) was initiated. The goal was the reforging of Trotsky’s Fourth International. But by the mid-1970s—despite important opportunities, advances and the dedication of hardworking comrades—the general political climate in the US and elsewhere had shifted to the right, and the coming years were marked by Reaganite reaction, Thatcherism and their equivalents, culminating in the downfall of the USSR in 1991. The downturn in the class struggle internationally was expressed inside the iSt, which lost its revolutionary way despite the continued commitment of its self-sacrificing and talented members. This in turn led to a process of fragmentation resulting in multiple organizations claiming the Spartacist tradition—the renamed ICL, ourselves in the IBT, the LFI, BT, BLA and RR, plus many individuals who are not current members of a cadre organization but apply aspects of their Spartacist education as sympathizers, activists, writers and trade unionists.

### Common Heritage

Despite the common heritage, these organizations have important differences in the understanding and application of the Bolshevik program (both historical and contemporary) as well as differing empirical assessments of national and global situations, developed over decades of independent existence and often hostile interactions with one another. It is neither desirable

nor possible to gloss over those differences, yet we agree at least formally on some central programmatic points:

1. Working-class independence and opposition to popular-frontism;
2. Opposition to imperialism and the advocacy of military defeat of our “own” imperialist governments in war (and for the military victory of neocolonies attacked by the imperialists);
3. Unconditional defense of the remaining deformed workers’ states (most significantly, China) and the call for proletarian political revolution to oust the Stalinist bureaucracy;
4. Defense of the right to national self-determination and other democratic rights (including for those suffering from special oppression) combined with opposition to petty-bourgeois or bourgeois ideologies;
5. Permanent revolution, i.e., the recognition of the total bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie everywhere and the need to struggle for proletarian revolution even in those countries of “belated” economic development; and
6. The centrality of revolutionary leadership (i.e., the fight for a Leninist vanguard party).

These points grow out of the shared history and programmatic heritage of the iSt, rooted in the Bolshevik Party of Lenin and Trotsky, the first four congresses of the Comintern, James P. Cannon’s SWP, Trotsky’s Fourth International, the RT’s struggle against the SWP’s degeneration and a (critical) identification with the anti-Pabloite IC.

### **A Joint International Conference and Discussion**

The ICL has recently made a new political turn and is in the process of re-evaluating much of its past, unfortunately in a direction away from our shared tradition. However, a side effect of this self-examination is a new openness and willingness to discuss politics, as illustrated by the debate with the BT in London in October, the debate with the LFI in New York City this month and the ICL’s recent acceptance of our proposal to debate in Australasia in the near future. We can only welcome these opportunities to further the process of programmatic clarification between claimants of the iSt tradition, but the gravity of the current world situation demands much more.

We propose that the organizations identifying with the iSt tradition hold, within the course of this year, *a joint international conference at which key elements of the Trotskyist program and their application be debated*. We furthermore propose *a pre-conference discussion period* during which formal documents are exchanged between the organizations in a transparent manner and published online. Alongside the formal, public exchange of documents, a secure online server could be established to allow interaction not only between the leaderships of the different groups but between the memberships as well, aiming to break down some of the non-political barriers that exist between us. All these exchanges should also be open to individual former members and current sympathizers loyal to the iSt tradition. Where possible in individual locations, the different organizations could also collaborate in principled united-front work in areas of agreement around specific demands, with the natural process of discussion that accompanies such work.

This would not be a series of privileged leadership-to-leadership talks, for which there is insufficient programmatic agreement. The conference we propose would bind none of the participants to anything, but would instead allow us to explore our differences and promote our ideas in a fraternal yet serious manner. It is clear that regroupment of all the iSt’s descendants around a program of genuine Bolshevism is most unlikely. We are under no illusions that the reforging of the international Spartacist tendency is possible through papering over differences or

liquidating into a lowest-common-denominator lash-up. But *clarification of differences and of areas of agreement* would facilitate the process of splits and fusions that will frame the consolidation of the forces of genuine Trotskyism into a sizable fighting formation, with roots in the working class and a geographic spread around the world. Failure to seize opportunities to advance that process is an admission of political bankruptcy—the promotion of cliquism, ego or political cowardice over the needs of the working class.

### Major Obstacles

There are major obstacles to regroupment. The new ICL leadership has moved away from the programmatic heritage of the revolutionary Spartacist tradition towards a kind of neo-Pabloism, though they reject this characterization. In our view, the ICL is throwing out the baby with the bathwater, seeking to liberate itself not only from its self-isolating sectarianism and more obvious political errors but also from those elements of Bolshevism it had managed to retain from its early, revolutionary phase. For the new ICL, it turns out that Jim Robertson was always a “sectarian” and even a “social democrat,” unable to grasp the central role of national-liberation struggles within the “anti-imperialist united front” as the “lever” for world socialist revolution. From the 1980s onward, Robertson’s organization did indeed engage in sectarianism (e.g., its deliberate sabotage of the 11-day anti-apartheid ILWU labor action initiated by ET supporter Howard Keylor in 1984) and social-democratic cravenness (e.g., its call to save the lives of those US Marines who survived the Islamic Jihad attack in Lebanon in 1983). However, these and the many subsequent deviations were departures from, not applications of, the revolutionary program that the iSt had embodied at its foundation. A thorough accounting of Spartacist history and its applicability for the tasks of today is long overdue, but a wholesale break from their revolutionary origins will leave the ICL floundering with no political compass, indistinguishable from many other false claimants to Trotskyism.

The leaders of the IG were wrongly kicked out of the SL in the mid 1990s, i.e., a full decade-and-a-half into what we consider to be the ICL’s period of degeneration, to which the LFI leadership were perhaps conflicted but nonetheless important contributors. Declining to debate or seriously engage with the IBT, the LFI have worked furiously to build their forces while refusing to acknowledge the parallels between their own expulsion from the ICL and previous bureaucratic handling of dissidents (or potential dissidents)—whether the Clone Purge of 1978, the show trial of Bill Logan in 1979 or the purge of the Australian section in 1981. Defending every error committed by the ICL until it was their turn on the chopping block, the leaders of the LFI have barreled ahead with blinders on, creating a more energetic, less bureaucratic version of the ICL circa 1996—one which has been less inclined towards political vacillation or major error but which inherited many of the political weaknesses of its parent organization. If the ICL is throwing the baby out with the bathwater, the LFI wants to keep the poor kid sitting in dirty water.

The BT split from the IBT five years ago over what was then a *theoretical* dispute over the nature of Russia in the 21st century. Their sectarian departure—capped off with a farcical appropriation of our name and the mysterious claim to have “dissolved” a 28-year-old fusion the way kings of yore sometimes had tiresome marriages “annulled”—reflected an unserious attitude toward Leninism and the question of the revolutionary party. Yet the actual outbreak of the proxy war in Ukraine created a genuine *programmatic* difference: the BT took the side of Russia (as did the LFI, eventually), while the IBT adopted a dual-defeatist position between Russia and the NATO aggressors acting through their Ukrainian pawn (as did the ICL, for different reasons). Only the IBT considers Russia to have become an imperialist power. While program trumps theory, the two are obviously closely related. Among the groups coming out of the iSt tradition, there are both theoretical and programmatic differences on one of the key questions of global politics today.

## Urgent Necessity

The volatile world situation will no doubt be reflected in a shake-up of the “Spartacist milieu,” accelerated by the SL’s recent turn. Some comrades have moved to the right and more may follow, others may spin out of politics, but those who remain committed to building a Bolshevik nucleus need to let go of past petty grievances (real or perceived) and get on with the hard work of forging a revolutionary fighting force based on the Leninist-Trotskyist program.

We have no illusions that this will be an easy path. In fighting for the rebirth of the revolutionary iSt, we do not seek a clone of the old, but to reforge an iSt that transcends the flaws of the original—flaws that made it susceptible to degeneration in the way a weak immune system imperils the health of the body. We seek to rebuild an iSt that not only defends its revolutionary origins from the 1970s but extends and applies the Bolshevik program to address the state of the world as it is today, an organization that can become a factor in history, rooting itself in workers’ struggles and building the forces of a much larger Trotskyist international through a broader process of splits and fusions around the Bolshevik program.

We wish to begin undertaking the necessary practical measures to prepare the international conference. We await your response.

Communist Greetings,  
Josh Decker,  
for the International Executive Committee of the IBT

## Response of the ICL to IBT Open Letter

by Vincent David

11 January 2024

*The ICL reply below was published on iclfi.org.*

Dear comrades,

We received your 1 January 2024 letter.

We are in favor of engaging in more discussions with the IBT and with the other tendencies claiming the mantle of Spartacism, as well as with any group in the international left, for the purpose of advancing the struggle to reforge the Fourth International. In this spirit, a joint international conference of various organizations is certainly something we could support.

That said, we found that your proposal was putting the cart before the horse. It is mainly focused on organizational matters (how to organize discussions and a conference) while not dealing seriously with the political questions at stake. Let me explain.

The main document of our *Spartacist* No. 68, “The Breakdown of U.S. Hegemony and the Struggle for Workers Power,” explains the crisis of the left in the post-Soviet period and responds to the main problems confronting the international workers movement today. It is a proposal to cohere the forces of Trotskyism, which is why it is also titled “A Program for the Fourth International.” Furthermore, the various documents on permanent revolution in this same issue of *Spartacist* develop a perspective for socialist revolution in the neocolonial world, while demonstrating in depth how the Spartacist tendency’s founding program on this question stood in contradiction to Lenin, to the early Comintern and to Trotsky himself. This entire issue of *Spartacist* represents the ICL’s contribution to reforging the Fourth International today.



But we have yet to see a serious attempt by the IBT (or any other group) to seriously criticize these documents. The IBT published on October 3 a small diatribe titled “Spartacism Junked,” which consists of a succession of unproven and demagogic assertions about how the ICL is now led by a bunch of cynical Pabloites and bourgeois nationalists. Your January 1 letter is similar, calling us neo-Pabloites who are throwing out the “baby and the bathwater” (the main title of your letter) without bothering to seriously explain what this “baby” consists of and, crucially, why it matters for the struggle to reforge the Fourth International today. Reprinting a series of decade-old articles does not constitute a serious response, and a list of abstract Marxist truisms does not constitute a program.

The first step toward opening a fruitful and clarifying discussion is for the IBT (or any other group) to seriously put forward a fundamental criticism of our new program, and counterpose your own. But because you fail to do this, your proposal amounts to a call for a bloc against the new course of the ICL based solely on a vague and somewhat nostalgic attachment to the “old” Spartacist program. In other words, an unprincipled bloc.

Lastly, your proposal to organize discussions from the base up as opposed to “privileged” leadership-to leadership talks is a species of Menshevism. To seriously engage with us or any other group, you must engage with the elected leadership of the party. That is how we engage with the IBT or any other left organizations. We are in favor of more informal discussions between our respective memberships. We are also open to the possibilities of opening joint internal discussions, provided that serious political exchanges take place. But you cannot achieve political clarity or build Leninist parties by liquidating democratic centralism into informal chatting between members (or ex-members who have quit active political life).

So, to paraphrase Trotsky: program first! Online servers for discussions? Joint conference? Practical measures? Very well, very well. But program first! Your political passports, please, gentlemen! And not false ones, if you please—real ones!

We are looking forward to a serious response to the program put forward in *Spartacist* No. 68 and a clarifying discussion with the IBT and all the other groups listed in your open letter.

Communist greetings,

Vincent David

for the International Secretariat of the International Communist League

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## **Open letter: Reforge the international Spartacist tendency**

by Josh Decker

25 January 2024

Dear comrades,

Thank you for your 11 January response to our open letter. We appreciate your willingness to engage in a process of discussion.

To first address an apparent misunderstanding—discussion between the organizations that have emerged from the Spartacist tradition should of course be led by their elected leaderships, which represent the most crystalized form of the various political currents. It goes without saying that we propose no diminution of democratic centralism. However, given the number of organizations that may potentially be involved, the time that has passed, the bad blood and sub-political debates that have occurred (where discussion has occurred at all), we believe that it would be most

beneficial to include those with a declared loyalty to the same tradition who are not currently organized as well as those who are under discipline of one or another organization. Details can and should be determined by the leaderships of the participating organizations.

The need for leadership is precisely why our proposal for a framework for programmatic discussion is in no way counterposed to “program first.” You have spent the past few years overthrowing many elements of your historical program and you indicate that this process is not yet complete. Of course we plan to respond in more detail—there is a lot to critique. Yet the basic lines are clear. You believe that “the Spartacist tendency’s founding program on this question [permanent revolution] stood in contradiction to Lenin, to the early Comintern and to Trotsky himself.” We believe that founding program is the “baby” you are throwing out in an attempt to rid yourselves of the jagged zigzags and sectarianism that have characterized your organization for over 40 years.

Permanent revolution is a key theme of Spartacist #68, and the topic we proposed to your comrades in Australia as the basis for a debate. They accepted the debate, but suggested that it be held in New Zealand rather than Melbourne (a city with a much greater Trotskyist culture and history than is found in NZ). We replied in late November to say that we preferred Melbourne but would be happy to debate in both locations, and we have heard nothing since. We hope a debate or debates can occur as soon as possible, as a key part of the “serious response to the program put forward in Spartacist No. 68” that you are eager to see.

Our approach is not nostalgia, comrades. This “baby” is the fundamental root of our political practice. We refer you to the following key documents that represent our contributions in the past few years to applying the program of the Third and Fourth Internationals and the revolutionary international Spartacist tendency to the world we face today. Some mention your organization and some do not, but they all contribute to clarifying our differences on the role of a revolutionary organization in relation to the national question, the popular front, imperialist war, deformed and degenerated workers’ states, liberalism and social democracy. As we say, we will be replying specifically to your latest program, but already these documents provide more developed discussion of these questions than you have produced in the same time period.

Inching towards WWII: US imperialism targets Russia & China [8]  
 Ukraine & the Left: Revolutionary defeatism & workers’ internationalism [9]  
 Imperialist Rivalries Escalate: Russia—capital export & global power [10]  
 The Revolution Overthrown: How the Soviet Union was destroyed [11]  
 Stop the Gaza Genocide! Marxism & the struggle for Palestinian liberation [12]  
 Marxism & Indigenous Peoples: The Canadian struggle [13]  
 Nationalism & Nagorno-Karabakh [14]  
 Pink Tides & Popular Fronts: Revolutionary strategy in Latin America [15]  
 Democrats in Power: ‘Woke’ Liberalism in the Service of Imperialism [16]  
 Whither America? Class, Crisis & Imperial Decay [17]  
 School Closures, Class Struggle & Covid-19 [18]  
 The Corbyn Project: A case study in social democracy [19]  
 Marxism & Bourgeois Elections [20]

Communist greetings

Josh Decker

for the IEC of the International Bolshevik Tendency

## **Bolshevik-Leninists fuse, Revolutionary Regroupment splits**

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*The following introduction and letter were previously published in Red Battler No.1, the newspaper of the Spartacist League of Australia.*

On 1 February 2024, Bolshevik-Leninist sent the following letter to its fraternal organisations, the Brazilian Revolutionary Regroupment (RR) and the Indonesian Angkatan Bolshevik Revolusioner Internasionalis (ABRI). This letter aimed to clarify key positions in the fight for revolutionary regroupment. In response RR broke relations, doubling down on their current trajectory. The letter is slightly edited for publication. The full exchange can be read at [bolshevik-leninist.org](http://bolshevik-leninist.org) and [rr4i.noblogs.org](http://rr4i.noblogs.org).

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Dear Comrades,

This letter aims to outline what our key political differences are, and to pursue further discussion and struggle towards resolving them. BL [Bolshevik-Leninist] has undergone a lot of political development over the past few months, and it is clear there is also confusion amongst RR comrades on what exactly our positions currently are and why we have them. It is for this reason we think it is extremely important to have something detailed in writing for RR and ABRI comrades so that you can develop a deeper understanding of our reorientation.

Briefly on our account of the ICL [International Communist League]. RR has characterised the ICL as “highly degenerate political adversaries in terms of internal regime and program”. This is a charge that we completely disagree with. Since our invitation to their international conference, we have been given the opportunity to peer into their internal life both through documents and in person. We have found their internal life to be vibrant and healthy, not bureaucratic and certainly not the “depoliticized obedience cult” as described by I/BT. Far from having held onto wrong positions due to “prestige politics”, the ICL has investigated positions that they have held not just since the 90s but from the very start and even preceding the Spartacist tendency. *Spartacist* #68 is a testament to this. As for their program, BL stands with full agreement with the ICL’s reorientation, and regard their renewed program as our own.

On relations with the ICL, we want to be clear and upfront. During and after our recent united front actions with the SLA [Spartacist League of Australia] it has become clear that since SLA’s and BL’s reorientation we have been intervening on a common program, and as such are pursuing fusion with them. As said in RR’s programmatic manifesto “Organise an International Marxist Proletarian Nucleus!”, we believe that “if there is sufficient closeness between organizations in the context of a united front, Marxists would seek to direct the discussion towards a merger or regroupment, without this preventing the joint struggle in the front with other groups from continuing”. A BL-SLA fusion would be a gain for revolutionary regroupment in Australia and internationally. We understand that RR does not have this perspective of ICL fusion. That being said, we are still interested in pursuing discussions with RR and ABRI and seek to maintain fraternal relations with both groups after fusion. BL seeks to improve relations between all three groups, with this letter being a step towards that but further BL-RR-ABRI discussions being another—alongside our offer to fly to Brazil to discuss these burning political questions. To both improve relations with RR-ABRI as well as pursuing a fusion with SLA we are planning to have a joint BL-SLA fusion conference in Australia at the start of March and both ABRI and RR are invited to attend and participate. We sincerely hope you do so.

As for our political reorientation, it should be said that first and foremost the most significant and underlying change within BL politically is in our conception of the question of revolutionary

leadership. To explain this, it is necessary to start with an overview analysis of our history and development. When BL was formed, we were not really a group in the proper sense of the word, explicitly dubbing ourselves a “collection of individuals” in reflection of this fact. That is, we recognised that we were not functioning as the Marxist nucleus we strove to create. This was for a myriad of reasons, us being scattered geographically for example, but ultimately it centred around the point that we were not intervening as an active revolutionary factor in Australia. That fact has been true for the bulk of our existence. While at the time we thought this was mostly an organisational question to be organically resolved, as we approached forming a more geographically cohered group it became more and more clear that BL’s transition from a “collection of individuals” to a Marxist nucleus had to be much more than drafting some organisational guidelines and setting up a dues system.

A Marxist nucleus *cannot* mean simply rocking up to events and rallies with abstractly correct Marxist doctrine, growing like an amoeba until we one day become big enough to become an actual revolutionary factor. No, that is not being revolutionary; that is being a glorified discussion circle. That is what BL has been damned to for most of our existence, a fact that was consciously acknowledged but which the steps to break from were unclear, confused and seen as largely organisational in nature. This style of existence was reflected in our propaganda, which while containing plenty of abstractly correct points consistently failed to be a tool for revolutionary action—the central point of Marxism.

A clear example of this was our “Safety or Profit?” article. Documenting the tragic death of a young worker, this document was the epitome of radlib journalism. It detailed the complete negligence of the bosses, while making the correct point that capitalism is the root cause for his death. But what did we put forward concretely? In response to union misleadership we “counterpose a program of breaking with the ALP and building direct worker power by expanding union/worker control and oversight over production and safety processes”. That is all fine and dandy, but beyond abstract phrases how did anything written actually build and motivate a program of breaking with the ALP and fighting for revolution? In truth, it did not. Well wishes for a break with Laborism (and calling for revolution) are not the same as struggling to actually break workers from Laborism in the fight for revolutionary leadership. What the article amounted to was whingeing that the bureaucracy isn’t doing enough to take care of the working class. The entire article is a complete capitulation to left laborism, with some words against Labor thrown in at the end as if we could say some magic words and a spell would be cast transforming it into an instrument for revolutionary intervention. When it came down to it, in the here and now, we posed no revolutionary road on how to best advance the interests of the working class.

While this particular article is an obvious example, it is by no means the only one. BL was consistently in the framework of trying to be “not opportunist” rather than trying to *advance the struggle of the working class*, a path which necessarily means struggling for revolutionary leadership and smashing the fundamental roadblocks of the working class, most acutely the social-chauvinists and their opportunist left cover. Even at the time there was something deemed wrong with this article, although our attempts to determine what was wrong wound up completely confused.

A future article was planned to actually be used for revolutionary intervention, which we did not produce and could not have without realising what was wrong with the earlier one and our framework more broadly. The problem *wasn’t* that it lacked another sentence or two denouncing the Laborite bureaucracy more vehemently, it also wasn’t that what was said was not formally correct. The problem with the article and our framework as a whole was that it *was not driven by the question of struggling for revolutionary leadership*, to break workers from Laborism. This was seen as something that could be addressed with some additional words tacked on rather than it needing to be the guiding framework behind Marxist work and campaigns.

A similar case was repeated with one of our comrades' plans to intervene in a rally led by liberal activists in response to growing reaction against trans people. BL comrades recognised that there was a rotten polarisation, fostered by anti-trans rightists and the pro-trans liberals for their own interests. We recognised that we had to cut across such an axis and hoist a revolutionary pole, but we lacked the program for it. Our solutions for what to intervene with wavered from grand sounding declarations (calling for revolution/break with the liberal leadership); to accepting this leadership in the here and now with demands that were perfectly in line with what the liberals were calling for (free trans health care on demand, defeat the right wing reaction against trans people, etc); to sectarian denouncing of the protests as liberal while standing aside and refusing to intervene and actually break anyone from said liberalism. Our planned intervention could be little more than a "Marxist"/labour wing under liberal leadership of the protests. This was our political situation at the end of 2022 and start of 2023. A group entering the left with confusion compounding on confusion with unclear reasons for even existing let alone developing.

With us cohering as a group proper (establishing a small nucleus in Melbourne at the start of 2023) the question of our place in the left and the workers movement cropped up more and more. In the face of a weak, scattered and hostile left, we responded with sterile rigidity. The SLA rebounding and IG/LFI potentially popping up as a group in Australia meant our position on the left felt increasingly precarious and our potential to grow and develop in such an environment felt stunted. The political differences between BL and RR, already built on weak organisational bonds and a shallow and untested basis of programmatic agreement, accentuated and culminated in the first exchange of polemics. We say this here so we can be absolutely clear. ***We do not defend the original documents produced.*** They were confused, sterile, and above all not revolutionary. In our struggle to break from our non-revolutionary past, we must recognise its manifestations in all its forms. This also includes all of our previous articles which were all written in this framework, including the ones translated and approved by RR comrades. This is a serious break not just of the positions that you disapproved which had come to the fore at the start of this year, but of our shared positions in the years before that which were also written in such a framework. The political differences developed since then have centred around this question.

RR's failure to centre the question of revolutionary leadership manifested differently from BL's, but it is a political fault that was shared between BL and RR until recently. The question ***must*** be: at every step of the way, what is needed to advance the workers movement and how do we demonstrate that fighting for the proletariat as an independent force under revolutionary leadership is needed to do so? To understand why we have undergone such rapid political changes in the past few months it must be recognised that they were precipitated above all by breaking with the centrist politics of BL's history as a tendency—to transition from a discussion circle to a revolutionary organisation deserving of the name Bolshevik-Leninist. In this regard BL's joint work with the SLA has helped immensely, and has marked a qualitative break with our old framework.

### **1) A defence of BL's revolutionary interventions**

In stark contrast to our old program, BL in the past months has fought to be a revolutionary factor in Australia. Our two statements published in the past few months have been modest steps forwards to actually struggling to advance the workers movement today.

Our call to chuck AUKUS hawks out of Labor puts front and centre the struggle to clear the obstacles of the working class and to create a revolutionary pole in opposition to the ruling class' war drive. In Australia, the Labor Party has a stranglehold over the workers movement; every union, from the rightist SDA to the left-posing CFMEU are all programmatically Laborite to the core, and they can only betray. These are things that RR comrades are sure to recognise. Laborites have betrayed the working class again and again, and yet, the working class remains

almost completely wedded to this machine. In fact, any dissent to them is consistently funneled back to them via left talking bureaucrats and their cheerleaders on the left. It is clear as revolutionaries in Australia, our goal must be to smash Laborism as a political force, and to expose the left Laborites and their leftist hangers-on as the central obstacle for the working class to overcome.

This sounds simple enough, but how do we actually break workers from Laborism? Right now, backing AUKUS to Israel, the Australian ruling class and their ruling party in the ALP are marching us towards war and misery. This has created a wave of opposition and ruptures in the unions and the Labor Party. The Labor Party and the union leadership stand exposed, but all of this opposition to Labor's belligerency is being funneled into left Laborites and pacifists, who voice their opposition to certain machinations while never advancing more than token measures. We recognise that they do this because their program is subordinated to the interests of the ruling class, and that their allegiance is to their war hawk Laborite brothers far above any of their anti-AUKUS pretences. But it is one thing for us to recognise this and another to struggle to get the working class under their leadership to do the same.

Our call to chuck AUKUS hawks out of Labor struggles to do exactly that. Firstly, it is the most elementary step workers must do to advance the struggle against AUKUS —a bloc with war hawks of course stifles any struggle against a drive to war. It also puts the question point blank to the left Laborites and pacifists: "Do you actually oppose AUKUS or do you value much more your unity with the AUKUS hawks?", exposing the left Laborites' opposition to AUKUS as skin deep. Ultimately, even if political pressures forced such a split it would put such left Laborites in a position where their program could be put to the test and exposed as completely impotent. The only road against AUKUS is a revolutionary one, that much is clear. It is our duty to demonstrate it to the working class. This demand doesn't give an ounce of credence to Laborites, left or right. In fact, it completely exposes them as obstacles for the working class and is above all a call to ferment rank and file rebellion within Labor and the unions against its leadership.

As for entering Labor to follow through with this demand, we see it as purely tactical. It certainly would be the best tactic if one could actually push this through in the belly of the beast, but it has just as much potency if not more when pushed in the unions against the bureaucrats who lead them. To reject this campaign out of some faux principled opposition to the tactics deriving from such a demand would be completely sterile, it would abdicate the struggle to actually fight for revolutionary leadership in the labour movement. We want to smash Laborism, especially when Labor is in power, and especially when they are championing the ugliest social-chauvinist program. We will not be waiting for their program to get more palatable before we struggle to break workers from their misleadership.

Ultimately, RR's opposition to us entering the Labor Party, "especially when they are in government" is a rejection of the 2nd congress of the Comintern where Lenin argued in favour for communists to not just enter but to outright affiliate with the BLP [British Labour Party]. He did so not on some crude accounting the BLP's program to be sufficiently left posing enough, or whether they are in government or not, but rather argued in favour of it based on how to best intervene in the working class who were tied to the BLP. To have a criteria to enter Labor whether they are in government or not has much more similarities to BL's old framework of being "not opportunist" rather than anything to do with Lenin.

Our Anti-Albanese Yes Campaign is cut from the same cloth. The Labor government had created a reactionary polarisation which pitted two forces with common interests against one another. The ALP posed as defenders of Aboriginal people, pitting Aboriginal people and those who supported the Voice against those who were disgusted with the government and the increasing attacks they were waging against the working class. The importance of the call wasn't to say we were voting yes for establishing an Aboriginal Voice in parliament. Rather it was that it

recognised that struggling for the smallest gains for the working class and oppressed requires revolutionary leadership, which in this case entails building a revolutionary pole to smash this liberal axis. An effective struggle cannot be waged with Albanese and his rotten Labor government but only against them. The Voice referendum ultimately suffered a humiliating loss, in large part due to it being seen as little more than a vote of confidence for the Labor government. In the aftermath of such a loss, the country has experienced a right wing shift with rightists on the offensive at the expense of working and Aboriginal people. To overcome the reactionary polarisation that was created and to use that hatred of the government for the service of Australia's oppressed would have thrown a wrench at both the ALP and the Coalition's reactionary No campaign. That is why we struggled for an independent, anti-Labor, Yes campaign.

## 2) Lockdowns

RR comrades have voiced opposition to our support of the "Down with Lockdowns" call and our break from "Workers lockdowns". Why was this call so important in the context of the pandemic? Why couldn't we just call for lockdowns in the same vein as any other safety measure, say vaccinations? To put it simply, the fight for the working class to advance itself as an independent force during the pandemic necessarily required to break the bourgeois "national unity" campaign which was the ideological core of the lockdowns. Unlike vaccinations, lockdowns were a measure of the capitalists *against* the proletariat. Under lockdowns, the capitalists forced the working class to stay indoors through the means of the police and army, completely stifling class struggle. It was not some neutral means of safety but a weapon held by the class enemy to bludgeon their opponents.

The bourgeois (to varying degrees) were indeed suppressing COVID-19, but they were doing it through enforcing *their* interests at the expense of the working class. The response for revolutionaries thus is not to egg the capitalists on to perfect their means of stopping COVID-19, against the proletariat. No, the response had to be to struggle for the working class to stand on its two feet, and thus to *fight against the ruling class, their rule and their methods of defending their rule*. The proletariat has their own means of defending themselves, fighting for their safety by struggling for their own interests, at the expense of the capitalists' rule and property; acting to take control of safety in workplaces, struggling for public works programs to alleviate conditions spreading the pandemic, seizing the spacious and unoccupied luxury buildings owned by real estate speculators and using that property for socially useful purposes such as COVID safe schools, etc.

To demonstrate this to the working class, our task as revolutionaries is to drive a wedge between this propaganda of "national unity," abstract concepts of "public health" based on a "de-classed" science, and shared trans-class interests in "saving lives". This cannot be achieved with the call for "workers lockdowns" or by treating lockdowns as another tool in the toolbox of defence against COVID-19. To take on the ruling class, their response and their propaganda head-on was the central task that had to be done to advance the struggle of the workers movement during the pandemic. Therein lies the complete vitality of the "Down with Lockdowns" call.

Not confronting this key question at the critical moment when it was strangling the workers movement avoided the necessary struggle for the working class to fight against the capitalists. And that is exactly what BL and RR did. The lockdowns did not exist as an abstract idea, they existed as a real measure by the ruling class (and in the deformed workers states, the ruling bureaucracy) against the workers. Anyone hearing BL's former line for "workers lockdowns" would be unlikely to understand it as anything more than the working class enforcing the same reactionary measures, or as a call for them to be implemented more humanely with additional welfare schemes. Instead of smashing this reactionary "national unity", we tried to patch it up with Marxist sounding flair.

As for RR, given the different manifestation of the pandemic in Brazil, with the lack of any serious attempt at a lockdown by Bolsonaro, the relevance of the call to smash lockdowns also manifested differently. Where it is relevant is in the positive program communists ought to have put forward in such a situation. What was needed was to pose the necessary independent tasks of the working class which go against the reactionary call for lockdowns. Instead, RR like BL treated the lockdowns like any other health measure joining in with the cry of liberals who were calling for the capitalists to dole out lockdowns against the working class.

This can also be seen in our defence of the CPC's (and other ruling bureaucracies') lockdowns against the working class, giving their reactionary and often brutal measures a complete whitewash as something to be replicated and spread. Instead of struggling to break the bureaucracy's hold in China, Cuba or Vietnam we instead accepted their gag order as a necessary and progressive measure.

### 3) Ukraine

On Ukraine, RR states that their "perspective is that of the proletarian revolution in Europe and Russia, the only one that can actually end the threats of war and begin to demolish the military alliance of the imperialist powers" ("O prolongado conflito na Ucrânia: guerra maquiada da OTAN contra a Rússia" via online translation). Those are fine words which we are the last to dispute in importance. But RR's position calling for military victory [to Russia] completely flies in the face of such a perspective. The only way to unite the working class of both Russia and Ukraine—to struggle for revolution and smash imperialism in the region (and beyond)—is ultimately for both Russian and Ukrainian workers to turn the guns around and overthrow their respective regimes. Calling for Russian military victory does absolutely none of that.

To justify this position, RR argues that "We defend Russian military victory at this moment as a concrete way to avoid a greater evil, which is NATO's victory" ("O prolongado conflito na Ucrânia: guerra maquiada da OTAN contra a Rússia" via online translation) and as a blow to US imperialism. This sounds logical enough; a proxy regime for imperialism against a non-imperialist power. A win for one would be a blow to the other, and blows against imperialism are a good thing. But every act which is a blow against imperialism does not necessarily advance the interests of the working class, and all Leninists understand that the only way to deliver imperialism a coup de grâce is ultimately through workers revolution. Any strategy to struggle against imperialism must centre this. We must ask ourselves, does this position strengthen the international working class, does it advance the class towards revolution? Asking these questions, the call for Russian military victory falls apart.

This war is currently being waged over who controls Ukraine, the Kremlin or the White House. Neither outcome is progressive in the least, and either side winning would not deal a progressive blow against imperialism. Of course in the case of a Ukrainian victory it would only strengthen the imperialist hold over the country. But in the case of a Russian victory, whatever short term blow to imperialism would be completely negated by the cost of Russia being the oppressor of Ukraine. Such a victory would only bolster Zelensky's proxy regime, which would continue to pose itself as "defenders against Russian aggression". It would push nations historically oppressed by Russia into the hands of the imperialists, strengthening their encirclement of the country. Ultimately, it would create a perennial thorn against Russia in the form of the nationally oppressed Ukrainians, which would help imperialists fuel conflict to strengthen their position. The only benefactors would be the imperialists.

Even if the conclusion of this war saw NATO broken up this would not necessarily be a gain for the working class. If it was smashed by proletarian revolution, then it would be absolutely a gain. But through Russian victory? Such a breakup would entail little more than a shake up of imperialist alliances. A breakup of NATO in this situation would likely happen in the form of



Germany breaking from NATO and entering a bloc with Russia. This would not be in the interests of the working class, in fact it would likely be the start of a new world war. This is no “lesser evil”!

While RR says that they have a perspective of proletarian revolution, in practice their position is a barrier to joint revolutionary struggle between Ukrainian and Russian workers. To call for Russian victory here would be calling for Russian workers to struggle to nationally oppress Ukrainians. It is a call for Ukrainians to support an invading force which promises little more than national oppression. For both Russian and Ukrainian workers, the call for a Russian victory does not rally them for revolution but pushes them into the hands of the regimes for the benefit of imperialism. While RR has some words in favour of revolution, they have surrendered the struggle for revolution in Russia and Ukraine today.

#### **4) Permanent Revolution**

RR has voiced opposition to the ICL’s correction on national liberation. But the fact is, in the semi and neo-colonies, to advance the workers movement and to demonstrate the necessity of the working class as an independent fighting force it is imperative to break the proletariat from the hold of the bourgeois nationalists. Without recognising the burning nature of the question of national liberation and championing it like how the ICL (and BL) has now done, there is no breaking the working class from their bourgeois misleaders, there is no revolution. ICL’s old program on national liberation, which RR falls into the same pitfalls as, is an obstacle to any serious struggle in these countries and damns the toiling masses to remain fully wedded to the national bourgeois.

Today, the world is divided into the hands of a small number of imperialists, who dominate every aspect of the political and economic lives of the semi and neo-colonies. It is by subjugating these countries that the imperialists maintain their rule. As such, many of the most basic tasks within these countries (national independence, democracy and modernisation; cancelling of imperialist debts, rolling back of austerity, etc) go against the very core of the imperialist system. It is because of this that achieving these tasks requires a front-on confrontation with imperialism, which the national bourgeois of the oppressed nations are unable and unwilling to wage as doing so would require a revolutionary upheaval of the masses that would threaten their own class interests. This makes the national bourgeois a damned class. They can’t fully repress the working class as they lean on this force to resist foreign capital but they can’t break with imperialism as that would require to rally forces that would threaten their very ability to exploit altogether. The national bourgeois of the colonies are forced to straddle a middle position between the imperialist bourgeois and the proletariat, leaning on either at any moment to defend their own narrow interests—weak in character, they are unable to be the ruling class of even their own nation. This perennially frustrated position of the national bourgeois means that they can never genuinely confront imperialist subjugation, it is a class doomed to betray the struggle of national liberation.

At the same time, imperialist subjugation has plunged the toiling masses into the depths of oppression, leaving their most basic demands unresolved. Since the condition of, and every measure doled out against, the proletariat is moulded by the imperialists, the struggle against imperialist oppression is a revolutionary powder keg and remains the most burning question in the neo-colonies. As things stand the masses remain wedded to the national bourgeois who also suffer from imperialist oppression. The working class look to the national bourgeois in the struggle against imperialism, but in defence of their own interests they can only betray. There is no path forward for national liberation but a proletarian one, under the leadership of a revolutionary party willing and able to take on the rotten imperialist order. At the same time, there is no revolution without wresting the proletariat away from the leadership of the bourgeois nationalists who currently have a stranglehold over the working class in the semi and neo-colonies.

There are two trends in the left which attempt to resolve this dilemma, both of them offer no way forward. Firstly there are those who surrender the necessity of the proletariat as an independent fighting force leading the struggle for national liberation, thus liquidating Marxism to tail the national bourgeois. The Pabloites are the classical example, their program keeps the masses under the chains of the national bourgeois, and therefore betrays the struggle for not just communism but national liberation itself. On the other hand there are those who, responding to the former's tailism, reject the struggle of national liberation, dismissing it as bourgeois and nationalist and a distraction from proletarian revolution. In this camp fell the historic Spartacist League, who lamented on many occasions that "many so-called Marxists believe that the struggle for the 'national liberation' of the Arab countries has merged with or even replaced the struggle for socialism in these countries" ("Turn the Guns the Other Way," 1968).

The latter trend uses plenty of loud denunciations of the national bourgeois as cheap substitution for the actual struggle to intervene against them and fight for revolutionary leadership. By juxtaposing national liberation with socialism, they only keep leadership of the national liberation struggle firmly in the hands of the national bourgeoisie. Abstract denunciations under this framework become little more than cheap attempts to keep oneself "pure" from opportunism, while in practice they keep the masses with anti-imperialist impulses well away, closing off would-be revolutionaries from any serious penetration into the masses and into the oppressed countries as a whole. For all its revolutionary rhetoric, the latter trend betrays the struggle for socialism and national liberation as much as the former. Ultimately both of these trends are obstacles since they abdicate the struggle to intervene and fight for revolutionary leadership, the only possible path for national liberation and socialism.

So what way forward? In competition with the nationalists for leadership of the masses in the struggle for national liberation the only path forwards is to...compete! We must unmask the inability of the nationalists to realise their own most basic demands (let alone complete and genuine national liberation) and demonstrate that the only way forward in the struggle for national liberation today is to march under revolutionary leadership. Only by being the best and most genuine champions of national liberation can we seek to merge that struggle with the struggle for socialism, the only way of wresting leadership from the national bourgeois and breaking the masses from nationalism. This can't be done with abstractly correct sounding words but only by getting our hands dirty and actually intervening, not as a glorified discussion group but as a revolutionary instrument. Only then can we utilise this powder keg and use the just national aspirations of the masses as the motor force for socialist revolution that it is.

This is the genuine meaning of permanent revolution. Trotsky's program means the steadfast struggle by Marxists to push forward, in the imperialised periphery, tasks of independence, democracy and development through national liberation to their ultimate achievement in the proletarian conquest of power; "a revolution whose every successive stage is rooted in the preceding one" (Trotsky). Trotsky recognised that in the imperialist epoch the tasks of national liberation can only be won through revolution. Instead of writing either off he fought to combine the two—success in doing so being the only way to achieve either. This is a task as important today as 100 years ago. This is the perspective that the ICL affirmed in *Spartacist* #68, which BL stands in full agreement with, and which RR has so far rejected outright.

Like much of the bourgeois "pink tide" in Latin America, the PT [Partido dos Trabalhadores] subsumes anti-imperialist sentiment. Through their rhetoric and professed political goals they present to their base as them "standing up" to the US. In Lula's first term in government he was part of blocking the offensive of the FTAA. Today Lula talks up a "multipolar" world, BRICS cooperation with Russia and China, calls for a new global currency and more. His betrayals hardly need mentioning, and certainly overshadow any gains won under his leadership. But his "anti-imperialist" postures signal to many that Lula/PT are something beyond comprador—not a

pawn of but a fighter against the imperialists. The mobilisation of large swaths of people behind the “pink tide” of bourgeois misleaders like Lula, who can only capitulate, is a reaction to the real conditions of imperialist subjugation which workers rightly view as a genuine barrier to social progress, and source of inequality and backwardness.

Even if Lula genuinely fought for “multipolarity”, this would still be no path to the actual defeat of the imperialist world system. The “struggle” of the “pink tide” against imperialist subjugation is in fact an attempt by national bourgeoisies to *avoid* confrontation with imperialism. The whole history of Brazil under the PT shows the bankruptcy and limits to this strategy. But when the imperialists have not forced Lula to push through brutal austerity programs, working Brazilians have experienced poverty reduction programs, economic growth, and an international position nominally beyond a US puppet. All this, again, appears to many workers to contrast with imperialist dependency. However, the PT remains a barrier to the struggle against imperialism and to achieving basic gains for the Brazilian working class. Every minimal victory won under their leadership is predicated on avoiding struggle and is therefore ready to break at the slightest pressure. This is evidenced by the drop in the value of the [Brazilian] real following an unhappy response by international capital markets to Lula’s “re-industrialisation plan”.

RR recognises as much as BL the inevitability of the PT to betray, and that to break workers from them is one of the central tasks for revolutionaries in Brazil. But the question is, how do we do it? In this regard RR falls well within the trend of the historic Spartacists and poses no way forward. RR pens plenty of words against the treachery of PT and the need for revolution, correctly stating many times throughout their articles how “there is no room, both from the point of view of the social structure of a country on the periphery of the capitalist system, and from the point of view of the current global economic situation, for significant improvements in the living conditions of the Brazilian working class without break with capitalism” (“Un debate con el PSOL y otros simpatizantes de Lula” via online translation). But this treatment of imperialism is completely divorced from the day-to-day struggle of the working class in Brazil—as just a question to be settled after revolution. In the meantime, RR argues that to break workers from PT and to struggle for revolution “the only possible path is for us to act to convince the people of the need and viability of the socialist revolution, while we build instruments on the front line of struggle” (“Un debate con el PSOL y otros simpatizantes de Lula” via online translation).

But how do we convince people for the need for revolution? Abstract calls for one do absolutely nothing to break the illusions the Brazilian masses have in Lula. The truth is that RR has posed no path forwards to break the masses from the PT, and thus have no path to winning the working class to the revolutionary road. As a replacement, RR offers little more than formally correct but abstract statements, as if the masses will be convinced of revolution by reading a strong enough denouncement of PT. Revolutionists need to actually intercept their bourgeois program beyond sterile and abstract denunciations of the fact that it is, indeed, bourgeois. We need to champion the struggle of national liberation, to centre and push for the confrontation with imperialism that the bourgeois PT program will never permit. The basic defence, and extension, of existing gains too is continually shown to require such a confrontation. Our task as communists is to show in struggle against the impotence and treachery of the bourgeois nationalists in even this task. Only in doing this can we expose the PT as the barrier to the struggle for national liberation that they are. Only then can we “convince the people of the need and viability of the socialist revolution,” not in words, but in deeds. To do so, and only through doing so, can the construction of an independent proletarian anti-imperialist leadership take place.

RR is absolutely correct in their opposition to PT and its left orbit, and correctly recognise them as roadblocks to the working class. We see this as a positive and correct impulse against the national bourgeois and its left tail. But that does not constitute a revolutionary road in itself. In fact empty denunciations of the national bourgeois fall into the exact same traps as the

opportunists who openly tail them. The imperialists maintain their stranglehold over all aspects of the political, economic and cultural life of oppressed countries such as Brazil. The anti-imperialist struggle is key to liberation. If you are not fighting for revolutionary leadership of it then how will you break the masses away from PT to the banner of revolution? If you say you are fighting for leadership of this struggle, then how are you doing it beyond publishing correct sounding but abstract words?

BL hopes that this letter has a clarifying effect. Our forces are small, and the coming period presents increasing crises. Today, regroupment based on a clear revolutionary program is imperative. This letter was written for this purpose. The task to reforge the Fourth International today is a vital one, we ask comrades to seriously think through the questions and criticisms that we have presented.

Comradely Regards,  
Bolshevik-Leninist

# Iran and the National Question

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## The Spartacist Reorientation 2023

by a former member

January 2024 [received May 2024]

Communist Greetings to comrades of ICL the Spartacists

Beginning with the contradictions, where and when to start? In appreciation of SP No. 68, as it has shed light on the contraindications that I have been grappling with too. SP No. 68 is politically motivating in a true revolutionary perspective; the reorientation as intruded in the SP. No.68 has the potential to have a real shot at rebuilding/rebirthing of the 4<sup>th</sup> international and extending it to North Africa and the Near East and build the world party of socialist revolution. With these in mind, I offer these notes as my contribution. For sure, my personal history with the ICL is relevant and is a clear example of ICL's contraindications; I have a better understanding. How did it all begin?

At the Mumia Rally in the Fall of 1999 in SF, I encountered WV comrades for the first time, soon after, I became a contact, until some six months later I was dropped out as a contact. The SF comrades dismissed me because during a post forum discussion with a comrade, in response to her interest in discussing politics with me (I have always appreciated talking politics with comrades), I replied something in effect that my interest in politics had peaked when we – Mario's youthful days back in the day – discussed politics openly and read Lenin during the "Iranian Revolution" of 1978-79 in Tehran and other cities. Soon after, I was somewhat denounced and then I was asked to explain what I meant by the Iranian Revolution. In reply I wrote a document, "Who are you? What vanguard?", I defended the workers' councils especially the oil workers strike that ultimately lead to Shah's demise albeit being led by the Tudeh party, combined with a general revolutionary anti-imperialist movement among the masses but was betrayed during the years of 1978-79 in Iran. I was flabbergasted, befuddled, puzzled, and could not comprehend why vanguards would throw away and disregard an anti-imperialist movement with potential revolutionary aspirations. I called the Spartacists, feckless vanguards who'd throw away the baby with the dirty bath water, for that reason. Afterwards I was cut off, adiós.

I was disoriented too; my eclectic approach to politics had led me to a confusing understanding of the post-Soviet world. State-capitalist conception of Soviet Union that the CPI had put forward was in total contradiction with the reality of post-Soviet world and contradicted my initial introduction to Marxism via Soviet Union, in the form of books and arts. What I had learned from the SL in what amounted to just about a year, I put in practice after I was dismissed.

I dove headfirst in the reformist swamp of the liberal West Coast Bay Area; soon I found it to be nauseating to say the least, getting sick of the stench of reformist swamp in the SF BA, I preferred the rigid Spartacists to the swamp, in my struggle to join the communists. I must have reasoned that maybe rigidity is necessary to push forward. About a year later I contacted the SF ICL office and asked to be considered as a contact again and I aimed at becoming a party cadre. Soon we spent many hours discussing the theory of permanent revolution. I denounced the 1978-79 revolution in Iran. Now I know I was schooled in a revisionist understanding of the permanent revolution, looking back, I don't recall having been introduced to this concept of Permanent Revolution as put forward in SP. No. 68.

Being more than willing to correct my disorientation to become equipped with a revolutionary theory, I vigorously engaged with the BA Spartacist comrades and through many discussions with comrades I was introduced to the theory of permanent revolution, yet national liberation of Kurdish people for example was not regarded as a revolutionary wedge to crack the nationalist

capitalist rulers of Turkey and I.R, nor was there any inclination toward expressing any revolutionary potential for national liberation struggle. I must have found myself in a strait jacket of omitting certain contradictions not to violate the theory in the abstract. By the straight jacket, I am not implying “freedom of criticism”, nor freedom of thought in abstract, but not being equipped to perform a concrete analysis of concrete situations. This method of being assimilated into the party didn’t really prepare me to explain contradictions. How?

“The main enemy is at home”, well this one seemed to be in complete accordance with the theory of permanent revolution, being miseducated with a revisionist version of the theory of Permanent Revolution, it was easy to dismiss contradictions of a military junta, cloaked with the rule of Shiite theocracy. What contradictions?

**Permanent Revolution, anti-imperialism, national liberation of “Persian Masses”, Persian chauvinism, national oppression and contradictions:**

Fighting for working class Internationalism is true anti-imperialism, defending the national rights of the oppressed nations against Imperialist subjugation is internationalism in the belly of the beast. The WV No. 229, 13 April 1979, is an echo of the recent, “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement that emerged two years ago in Iran, a main character of this movement has been in expressing hostile views for the masses who made the revolution in Iran and brought the Mullahs to power. They are full of contempt for the plebeian masses; the class divide is sharp. The Iranian left too is a great example of tailing mass movements, wishes to conveniently forget their role in misleading the masses into the arms of Islamic reaction, they have not learned a single lesson from their disaster abdication of communist leadership during the 1978-79 revolution, and now they are engaged in the same the exact tailing of the masses as they did before. In 1979. This time by tailing the “Woman, Life, Freedom” the Iranian left proved to be a farce.

The “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement is blatantly pro imperialist, the entire left tailing this movement puts them all on the side of the main enemy, the US and the EU imperialists. Being anti-imperialist immediately puts us on a revolutionary path, our advantage in political fights for leadership. But our past orientation was the opposite of that. The ICL on the other hand, didn’t simply overlook anti-imperialism of the 1979 revolution in Iran, it was blind to it programmatically, the 1979 revolution in Iran was primarily anti-imperialist in the minds of the masses. Anti-imperialism in the belly of the beast failed because the international saw only reactionary masses, blaming masses for their own backwardness. The correct slogan back in 1979 would have been something like this, “Down with the US Imperialism”! Down the Shah the Yankee’s puppet! Down with the imperialist collaborators, the mullahs and the rest...!”

The contradictions of 1979 revolution in Iran surfaced on day one, after transfer of power to the bourgeois nationalist regime of the Movement for Liberation party with Bazarghan as the prime minister. On the night of Feb. 9, 1979, an armed uprising in Tehran overthrew rule of the monarchy, the mass revolt intertwined with an armed revolt within the Shah’s army in Tehran transferred the power to the national bourgeoisie who had already prepared for such transfer of power. This fact says a lot about the manifestation of the two-stage revolution program in action, the popular front of the left came to head on collision with the realization that they were ill prepared to deal with the backwardness of the masses and not knowing how to break them free of the false consciousness of political Islam, thus they too fell in the abyss of backwardness and took part in it. When real class war broke out in the aftermath of fall of Shah’s regime leading to Iranian National bourgeois taking power, the workers’ councils began exercising power, oppressed nations began taking control of their own territories, liberating cities and taking control, the Iranian left had the wrong program of two stage revolution and pop front, we didn’t have the theory of permanent revolution, nor a Bolshevik party. I witnessed firsthand when backwardness was accepted as a matter of fact, as if proving that the masses were so backwards

and not worthy of socialist revolution. Thus, the left abandoned the masses to go to the arms of the open-door mosques with schooled orators.

The Muslim Students Followers of Imam Khomeini storming of the American Embassy in Tehran was a direct response to the heightening class war, and ever escalating military confrontation in Kurdistan, the class contradictions were begging for a revolutionary program and the party to implement it; but none to be found. Instead, it became who is more “anti-imperialist”? Climbing the walls of the US Embassy and taking hostages was a dizzying experience for the left, followed by the most stupid war of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Iran-Iraq war. Who could have possibly guaranteed independence from the imperialists? And defend Iran against its enemies?

“Nor the West, Nor the East! Only the Islamic Republic! – Nor the East was a reference to the USSR – was the main slogan of political Islam. With this slogan the left was politically disarmed. No one understood this better than the Hezbolah, and Khomenei-ites with the plebeian masses in the tow, the Khomenei-ites proved to be more internationalist and class conscious than all the left combined. The contradictions are rooted in the false consciousness of the backward masses who are roped and chained by the Mosque to the theocratic rulers who are cloaking a military junta – the revolutionary guards – which emerged as a separate and autonomous military organization in the struggle to defeat the 1979 revolution and preserved the class rule of the big landowners and the capitalist class. The defeat cannot be blamed on the backwardness of the masses, blame goes to the Iranian left along with the international left. “The mullahs hijacked the revolution”, is a convenient explanation for the defeat of 1979 revolution in Iran offered by the Iranian left. Just to bury the memory of Tudeh party encouraging their members to register with the neighborhood committees controlled by the Islamists, followed up by registering with the State. Sending their members to the war front as regular soldiers or ‘fighters’ was not for the purpose of turning the stupid war into a civil war, but instead Tudeh party and those leftists only participated in the slaughter of Iraqi Arabs.

Practically for all the Iranian left the main lesson that they all have learned is that the defeat of 1979 revolution is because of the main enemy is the US imperialism which proved to lead the mullahs and the mosque to power which led to another capitalist state. Therefore, the main enemy is capitalism, with all the capitalist countries being equally the same, to the point of even going so far as dropping ‘imperialism’ from the verbiage. The main enemy is Imperialism, is an outrageous call and would certainly set us apart from the anarchists, the liberal left, the feminists, bourgeois nationalists, and those who are disoriented and end up not being that different than the liberal left.

### **Imperialism is the root cause of Backwardness a Materialist conception:**

Introducing you to the Fedaeeyn Khalgh Guerrillas (FKG) a far-left branch of the Fedayeen who were expelled from the main Fedayeen back in the 1980. Ashraf Dehghanie the public face of FKG proclaimed that the opportunists in the organization had expelled her and the others on the basis of pure opportunism. In her attempt to explain the defeat of 1979, she falsely asserted that nothing has changed in the imperialist relations with the bourgeois comprador in Iran and the state power was transferred from the Shah to the Mullahs in 1979 as simple as that.

The above resembles a Maoist simplification of contradictions of a bourgeois nationalist military junta. Simplifying the IRI as a bourgeois comprador dictatorship, chained by the imperialists, the mullahs are lackeys of the imperialists, more alike the late Shah of Iran. This position poses as anti-imperialist and at the same time assumes that the IRI is bourgeois comprador, dependent on foreign capital, it represents foreign capital therefore is the main enemy of the people. This position begs the nagging question of real and certain hostilities between the imperialists and the Islamists States in the Near east. How would they explain explicit hostility of the “Liberal West” in clear provocations for regime change in Iran?

FKG has an unconscious, revisionist understanding of theory of permanent revolution, no wonder ICL's revisionist miseducation appealed to me. My origin as a revolutionary youth goes back to the Fedayeen Khalegh in the 70s in Iran, and then followed Ashraf after her expulsion, for refusing to liquidate into the Tudeh party. We were pro-Soviet, anti-imperialist, and so disoriented, yet what has stuck with me since then is the fight against opportunism. The contradictions in arguing that the main enemy is at home and the same time arguing that the imperialism is the main enemy leads to dismissing the contradictory nature of national bourgeoisie in a dependent weak country such as Iran in its relations with the imperialists.

The main enemy is at home if applied to Mexico or Iran perfectly sits well with the revisionist analysis. Evading contradictions and simplifications are all for the sake of covering up for not having a revolutionary theory and program, as is the case with the Fedayeen, an incorrect, revisionist version of the theory is at play. Apparently, I had belonged to both. I came to a head on collision with contradictory belief in the "main enemy is at the home" but the "imperialists" are the main enemy, when I visited Iran after some 31 years in 2002.

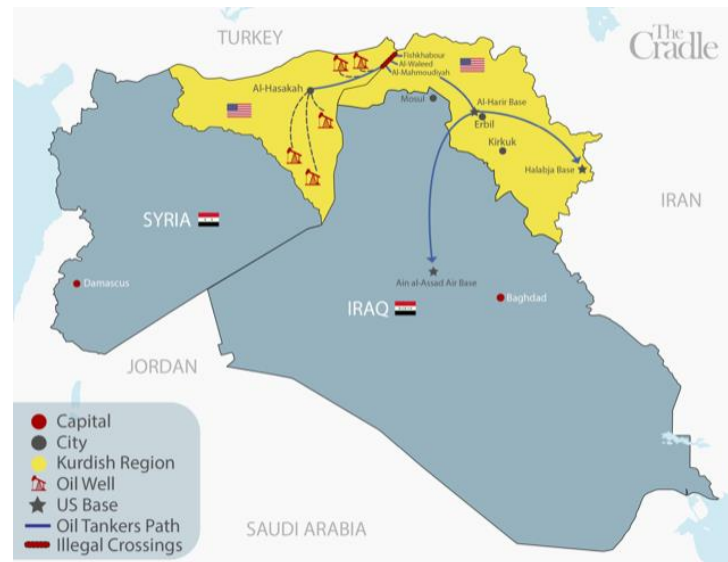
I used the "main enemy is at home", during some intense political discussions with my former mentors, I was opposing and denouncing their support of the so-called reformist Khatamie the reformist mullah. I took a strong position based on the main enemy is at home. Contradictions don't mean much to the opportunists but they sure are so keen on pointing out your contradictions. My arguments in defense of Trotskyism were flat, I ended up being as disoriented as they were. I gave up using the main enemy is at home after that visit. And yet the contradictions remained. What contradictions?

Fedayeen Khalegh's analysis of the class nature of IRI is more like a conspiracy view and doesn't explain the real animosity, hostility with the imperialists pursuing regime change and war. If the IRI is a puppet regime why would the US and other imperialists wish to overthrow it? And how IRI unlike the late Shah continues to defy the imperialists and assert some power over the region? Iran is a backward country with an uneven and combined infrastructure and is dependent on the foreign capital, the contradictory nature of Iranian Nationalism is the result of the 1979 uprising that brought to power national bourgeoisie, allied with landowning mullahs, and petty bourgeoisie. Fedayeen's simplifying the class nature of IRI is to avoid having to explain contradictions and arrives at a pacifist position of not taking a side in this conflict between the imperialists and the IRI. What is their message to the American workers? Don't take a side? Here in the belly of the beast, the US is the main enemy of the workers and toilers of the world, this is what we should say. On the contrary, the present leadership of Kurdish, Baluch and Arab peoples, along with the so-called opposition are pro "West", as such they are betraying unification of nations across borders. The semi-autonomous Kurdish regions in Iraq and Syria – in Iraq it is called Eghliem of Kurdistan – Fedayeen wouldn't tackle such questions.

**Iran is home to national liberations** – the IRI unleashed the most brutal attacks against the oppressed nations who came out in droves to protest the regime in the aftermath of murder of Jeina Amini in 2022. Thinking that the downfall of the regime is near, the Kurdish, Arab and Baluch national representatives raised the call for federalism in Iran. Federalism is in direct contradiction with Kurdish and other oppressed nations' interest in achieving any level of autonomy, their true liberation is in realization of unified Kurdistan and Baluchistan in Socialist Republics. This is a revolutionary call across the very borders that has caused national oppression of Kurdish, Baluch and Arab peoples. Yet Kurdish Democratic parties, representing feudal landlords, along with the Maoists Komolah are calling for federalism. Their federalism will be brought about by the "liberal west". The liberal west that has used Kurdish peoples as an imperialist cat's paw, the map below clearly shows the relationship of the so-called independent Kurdistan and US imperialists. The contradiction of being at the service of the imperialists is at



the expense of blood and slaughter of the same peoples in the hands of both imperialists, their lackeys or in the hands of the oppressor nations.



The imperialists time and again, with the Kurdish feudal parties at the helm, have corralled Kurdish masses into slaughter. The same goes for the Maoist Komala who has had its share of military and political defeats over four decades. The blatant pro-imperialist position of [Abdulah Mohtadi](#), SG of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan embracing full liberalism of western imperialists, is evolution of their Maoist program to collaborating with the Mossad in Kurdistan.

The “Woman, Life, Freedom”, proved that bourgeois gender politics had no solutions for the oppressed nations in Iran, but only exacerbated the intensity of struggle of oppressed nations to free themselves from the dictates of the central government in Tehran, or Istanbul or Karachi, or Damascus. Falsely, the regime in Tehran is assumed to be the main enemy and if the imperialists are willing to assist in overthrowing the IRI, then the “Woman, Life, Freedom”, the Maoists left, and with only a few exceptions, then they are all pro-imperialist.

Komala’s position in tailing the bourgeois feminists, “Woman, Life, Freedom”, mirrors the model of collaborating with the imperialists to defeat ISIS in Syria or Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Their position is based on the main enemy is the IRI, and with the military support of the liberal west, Kurdish autonomy will be achieved. This is an anti-revolutionary position in that it splits the working class in Iran, Turkey and Syria. It betrays the oil workers, a multinational work force, a sector of the working class in Iran, and Iraq, that is the primary target of the Imperialists. An anti-imperialist program calls for the unity of Persian, Arab, Azari, Kurdish workers against their main enemy the imperialists. Komala upholds federalism, that is the central demand of all Kurdish, Arab and Baloch nationalist parties. Federalism is an inherently bourgeois demand and is the central demand of these parties; replacing the IRI with a federalist state, another bourgeois state. It is one thing to remind them that federalism is an illusion, it will never happen. But the fact that federalism is a popular demand shows the absence of a revolutionary proletarian internationalist pole calling for a Unified Kurdish Socialist Republic.

**Conclusion:** The fight to break free of opportunism, and projecting this fight to split the workers movement from opportunism and social chauvinism is one sure way of reforging the 4<sup>th</sup> international. The opportunists are between a rock, reality – Zionist genocide and imperialist war to take over the globe – and a hard place of being where they are politically and practically, stuck in a sterile pacifist orientation; too bad for them. Adapting to bourgeois feminism, tailing nationalists, tailing the anti-working class so called environmental movement, openly call for

COVID lockdowns, tailing the “Woman, Life, Freedom”, appealing to the “West” for regime change, have put the opportunists in a tough political spot on the side of the imperialists, yet one more time. To break the working-class movement from opportunism is the same fight for breaking the working class from being politically chained to its class enemy, the imperialists, the main enemy of the international working class. To reforge the 4<sup>th</sup> international is to bring true internationalism to the working class, this struggle in the belly of the beast is to bring revolutionary defeatism in solidarity with the victims of Yankkkkee imperialists and Zionist genocide, is to politically smash the present bureaucratic leadership in the unions in the US and other continents, thereby educating the working class in the course of this political fight, all for preparing the working class to fulfill its historical mission. This is the only road for a socialist revolution. For this to happen begins with the political reorientation as laid out by SP. No. 68.

**This is the intervention that I had prepared for last year’s public forum to introduce SP 68.**

Reorienting the ICL as presented in the SP 68, has rearmed the vanguard, and has proven that the program is indeed a correct course in the context of the current worldwide crises and turmoil. I have always thought that the previous program was out of context, because it was so pure and yet rigid. This reorientation speaks also to the same contradictions that we have all had in bringing reality into the purity of the program, with the opportunist program you are not going anywhere; reality is changing, and you are clinging to purity, sectarianism is its fruit.

The first lesson is the old lesson, concrete analysis of the concrete situation. The back page of SP. 68, “In defense of permanent revolution, for communist leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle”, explains the complexities of the national development, national oppression, development of class relations and imperialism. These complexities can only be dealt with in a revolutionary sense with a program that speaks to and exposes the contradictions of movements such as “Woman, Life, freedom”, in Iran about two years ago for example. As opposed to the worldwide movement in defense of Palestinians that has morphed into the cease fire movement. In both cases what is glaring is a desperate need for communist leadership. But so many other groups proclaim the same thing.

Not so fast. Take the woman life freedom for example. This slogan was adopted from left to the right, no one dared to criticize anything about its inclination toward the imperialists in particular the Parliament in the EU, Macron of France, the US state department, the Brits and last but not the least the German parliament. Why? The main enemy is at home. No, it is not. That is what this new program is about in defense of the permanent revolution. The main enemy is the world imperialism shaped by the US imperialism hegemony at its head. Practically all the left went along with the liberal demands of woman life freedom, because the imperialists are not the main enemy. The main enemy is the regime in Iran that is keeping its peoples backwards and oppresses them. True enough. We need a program that explains the backwardness of the masses in the context of world imperialism dominating over weaker nations and retarding their development as an obstacle to the full development of these nations, a program that exposes liberal inclinations toward imperialism and puts forward a communist leadership that anti-imperialism demands. A program that in the belly of the beast can fight for the liberation of Palestinians in opposition to the liberal inclinations of the movement toward imperialists and the PLO, Hamas, the PA.

What has the PLO’s two state solution brought but buying more time for the Zionists to take more land and confine the Palestinians to segregated areas. All of the dealing of the PLO with the imperialists was based on accepting the terms set by the Zionists in terms of returning stolen lands to begin with, in return for stealing other lands from the Palestinians. PFLP too, abdicated this leadership in footsteps with the Stalinist bureaucracy and with the demise of USSR came head on in collision with the peaceful coexistence that proved deadly for both.

As Arab and Afghani immigrants in the US and other countries are rising in defense of Palestinians and Gaza, they are desperately looking for a broader understanding of their predicament in the belly of the beast. These movements are begging for revolutionary guidance.

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## Reply to M

by Perrault

28 October 2024

Dear comrade,

Thank you for your letter. We're sorry for the delay in answering you; the pace of work has been quite intense as always.

I appreciated the account of your experience with the party. It mirrors that of many other comrades who come from oppressed countries. Our program meant these comrades were torn between the cause of national liberation, which often brought them to political consciousness in the first place, and that of proletarian emancipation. Your account is a testimony to how stifling and disorienting this was for our cadre and supporters. Now we can start to reverse this process; the anti-imperialist struggle can fuel and focus our comrades' commitment to communism.

The first points I would like to raise are about the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. It was a real failure on our part not to have written about this movement as it was taking place. At the same time, I must say that if we had, it would probably not have been very good given where we were politically at the time.

Many of your observations on the movement are quite interesting. I am myself quite ignorant about the left in Iran, and I am ready to believe that much of it has turned toward pro-imperialist politics as a reaction against the Islamic regime—this certainly was the case in much of the diaspora. That said, I think your appreciation of the movement is too one-sided. It is not sufficient to note that it was dominated by "pro-imperialists"; it is necessary to take its contradictions into account and develop a Marxist orientation toward it.

The spark that ignited the movement was the death of Jina Amini in the custody of the morality police. You will certainly agree that the outrage over this was entirely righteous and showed how the fight against women's oppression in Iran will be a powerful motor force for the revolution. The problem is that the forces that stand opposed to the regime today and took the lead in this revolt are liberal and monarchist. You are certainly correct that the left has gone from tailing the mullahs in the name of anti-imperialism to tailing the imperialists in the name of democratic rights. But the real question is: how to cut against this polarization?

In the case of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, I believe it would have been necessary to actively participate and build the mass demonstrations against the regime, while at the same time seeking to break the movement from its pro-imperialist politics and leadership. I am sure many in Iran would be receptive to the argument that any association with the Shah, imperialism and Zionism rules out winning the mass of the Shia working class against the regime. The lesson we must seek to inculcate is that the movement was isolated and defeated because its politics could not pierce the nationalist consciousness of the working class.

This begs the question of how to win these more loyal layers against the regime. It is necessary, of course, to lean on the economic and democratic grievances of the masses, but this is not sufficient. It is crucial to undermine the regime's strongest argument: that it stands as a beacon of Muslim resistance against Western aggression. We must show how by alienating national and religious minorities, youth, women and workers, the regime undermines the unity of the masses

against imperialism. Furthermore, its clique of corrupt clerics and generals demoralizes resistance to imperialism as it is more interested in preserving its position than liberating the Middle East.

In other words, whether we seek to approach the layers in Iran motivated by democratic and national rights or those motivated by the struggle against the U.S., in both cases we must show how the cause they hold dear is undermined by the current leaderships. I think your letter misses this approach, including when you discuss the 1979 events.

You write that:

“The correct slogan back in 1979 would have been something like this, ‘Down with the US Imperialism’! Down the Shah the Yankee’s puppet! Down with the imperialist collaborators, the mullahs and the rest...!’”

Each of these slogans is perfectly principled, but they are not focused against the central obstacle. The key task for communists at the time was to break the hold of the mullahs on the anti-Shah movement, starting with the left. The main problem with the iSt’s intervention was that by denying that the struggle had any anti-imperialist character, it was impossible to exploit the contradictions of leftists who were motivated by the fight against imperialism and the Shah but thought that an alliance with Khomeini was the way to go. Only by placing ourselves within the struggle against the Shah and imperialism would it have been possible to show how an alliance with the mullahs was in fact an impediment to achieving the very things animating the masses.

I think the thrust of our intervention should have been along the lines of: “To defeat the Shah, to defeat imperialism, break with the mullahs!” Here the pressure is directed against the popular-front alliance. But to break this alliance, it points to how it undermines the very cause it claims to champion. It is the same method as that of the Bolsheviks during the period from February to October. They insisted on the democratic aspirations of the masses expressed in the slogan “Peace, Land, Bread” and at the same time directed their fire at the main obstacle holding back the achievement of these aspirations, the Provisional Government, raising, for example, the slogan “Down with the ten capitalist ministers!”

Of course, defenders of our old approach will be quick to point out that the Bolsheviks also raised “All power to the soviets.” Certainly true, but what they miss, and what we missed in 1979, was that the Bolsheviks would never have broken the hold of the SRs and Mensheviks had they turned their backs on the democratic aspirations of the masses. This is precisely what we did in Iran. We dismissed the fight against imperialism in the name of fighting for revolution, and as a result we were totally ineffective in breaking the left from its reliance on the mullahs.

We have barely started doing any work toward Iran since our reorientation. Our recent *Spartacist* statement, “Why Can’t Anyone Stop Netanyahu,” is a first step in outlining a very general approach. I’d be very interested in hearing your thoughts on it as well as on the present letter. Given our almost complete isolation from Iranian leftist circles, we greatly appreciate any contributions or insight you can provide about the reality on the ground in Iran as well as in the diaspora.

Looking forward to your response.

Communist greetings,  
Perrault

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PS: After sending my letter I heard from comrades in the Bay Area that you intervened in our forum alongside the IG. This is disappointing. But mostly it is puzzling considering the content of the letter I just responded to. I take it you were convinced that *Spartacist* no. 68 is revisionist, and you now once again believe that our intervention in 1979 was correct? I take it you are also

convinced that the historic iSt position on Palestine was correct?! I am certainly interested in the arguments they made to convince you.

Comradely,  
Perrault

# Polemics with Revolutionary Communist International Tendency on Israel/Palestine

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## Questions on your statement, “Why Can’t Anyone Stop Netanyahu?”

by Michael Pröbsting

7 October 2024

Dear comrades,

We have a few questions regarding your latest statement “Why Can’t Anyone Stop Netanyahu?” (<https://iclfi.org/spartacist/en/2024-zionist-carnage>). Surely, your document includes a number of correct statements which we share. Still there are some issues where we have important differences.

1) You criticize our comrades of the ISL for supposedly saying “that because Israel is a settler-colonial state, basically nothing can be done now to break the Israeli working class from Zionism. For them the task is simply to stand in liberal solidarity with the Palestinians without seeking to affect Israeli society.”

Now we are aware that we have differences on this issue. But leaving aside that you are not particularly concrete about what actually could be done to break the Israeli working class from Zionism in the current period, you do not deal with the strategic problem: the peculiar nature of the Israeli working class. We appreciate that you share now our thesis that Israel is a settler-colonial state (it would not have done harm to you to admit that we recognized this important fact a few decades before you did). But you ignore the consequences of this crucial thesis, i.e. that the Israeli working class has an aristocratic character as it is a /settler working class/ which only exists because of the expulsion and oppression of the Palestinian people. (See on this e.g. our theses Permanent Revolution in the Middle East and the Aristocratic Character of the Israeli Working Class” <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/aristocratic-character-of-israeli-working-class/>)

2) You call for the “recognition of full national rights, including self-determination for all nations” and, at the same time, you say that the Israeli Jews are a nation. Logically, this means that you support the right of national self-determination of the Israeli Jews, i.e. a Jewish state in Palestine. Does this not mean that you adapt to the logic of Zionism, i.e. the expulsion of the Palestinian people from at least parts of their land? (See on this e.g. the book by our comrade Yossi Schwartz: Palestine and Zionism, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/palestine-and-zionism/>, we did also bring you a hard copy when we met in London; see also the essay: On some Questions of the Zionist Oppression and the Permanent Revolution in Palestine, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/permanent-revolution-in-palestine/>)

3) Furthermore, you call for an “anti-imperialist front against Israel and the U.S.” But we are surprised that you only do so in the chapter about the BRICS but not when it comes to Hamas and Hezbollah! Surely, we have profound differences about the class character of China and Russia. But even if these would be non-imperialist states, it is absurd to only call for an anti-imperialist front against Israel and the U.S. when it comes to Russia and China (which have done nothing against Israel and the U.S. in this war since 7/10) but not when you talk about those very organisations which – despite their petty-bourgeois (or bourgeois) nationalist and Islamist character – are actually fighting the Zionists since one year (and with huge sacrifices)! Why is it

so difficult for you to call for an anti-imperialist front with Hamas and Hezbollah and even more so after one year of war?!

Revolutionary Greetings,  
Michael Pröbsting

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## **Reply to RCIT**

by Vincent David

19 October 2024

Dear comrades of the RCIT,

Thank you for your 7 October letter.

Before responding to your specific questions, we noted your recent article “Lebanon War: Some Lessons from the Setbacks of the Resistance” (1 October). For the last year, the RCIT’s interventions in the Palestinian movement have centrally been focused on declaring support for the Palestinian resistance and, in our opinion, simply cheering it on. Many of our disagreements have been focused on this. However, we found this piece to be a positive development in that it sought to expose how the program and class character of the various nationalist and Islamist forces of the resistance fundamentally hamper the Palestinian liberation struggle. We agree with much of it and see it as an important step in the right direction.

However, we do note that the thrust of this piece contradicts a lot of what the RCIT has been publishing, particularly from your section in Israel/Occupied Palestine, the ISL, especially its constant praising of the current armed struggle. We also note that the ISL has denounced our article “Why Can’t Anyone Stop Netanyahu?” as “Zionist,” “counterrevolutionary” and promoting a two-state solution (“On the program of the ICL,” 7 October, published on your website). That, we must say, is completely fallacious and demagogic. We think that the ISL’s polemic reflects badly on the RCIT. It is one thing to write a sharp political polemic. It is another to do a slanderous hit job.

### **On the Israeli Working Class**

But let’s look at the three points in your letter. First, you write:

“But leaving aside that you are not particularly concrete about what actually could be done to break the Israeli working class from Zionism in the current period, you do not deal with the strategic problem: the peculiar nature of the Israeli working class.”

According to you, we ignore the consequence of characterising Israel as a settler colonial state, which is that “the Israeli working class has an aristocratic character as it is a settler working class which only exists because of the expulsion and oppression of the Palestinian people.” While you do not state the programmatic implications of this, we understand that you believe it is impossible to break a section of the Israeli working class away from Zionism, and/or that efforts in this direction can only lead to adaptation to Zionism.

In your theses “Permanent Revolution in the Middle East and the Aristocratic Character of the Israeli Working Class,” you do assert the possibility of breaking a sector of Israeli workers from Zionism, but only as a result of external factors:

“Only a victory of the Arab revolution resulting in the overthrow of the pro-imperialist dictators and the creation of workers and fellahin republics or a strategic defeat of the Zionist state in wars with other countries in the Middle East will be able

to thoroughly shatter the Israeli class society. Only in such a scenario will it be possible to break a sector of the Israeli-Jewish working class away from Zionism (or at least to push them to take a neutral position).”

Yossi Schwartz’s 7 October piece repeats essentially a similar line. The problem with this perspective is that it negates the subjective factor and places all its hope entirely on external intervention. It is certainly correct that a deep social and political crisis will be necessary for large layers of Israeli workers to break from Zionism. However, it also requires a revolutionary party, rooted in the Israeli workers movement as well as in the army, that fights for such an outcome. Otherwise, the most likely reaction of the Israeli population confronted with an existential military threat would be a fight to the death under the banner of Zionism, or mass flight.

Your theses correctly criticize the Stalinists, Grantites and others who seek the unity of Arabs and Jews “via economic demands or with appeals to class unity.” We agree with you that such a strategy “can only result in political failure and opportunist adaption to Zionism.” As we have laid out in our recent *Spartacist*, the precondition for unity between Jews and Arab workers is opposition to imperialism, a rejection of all forms of Zionism and support to the national liberation of Palestine—which is rejected by the Grantites/Stalinists. But from the correct analysis that Israeli workers occupy a privileged position in the economy, and from correctly criticizing social-democratic capitulations to Zionism, the above theses essentially reject the need to build a revolutionary working-class party in Israel and, instead, put forward that the tasks of communists consist of waiting for the Arab revolution.

Despite being in a privileged position, Jewish Israeli workers endure harsh living conditions, rampant inequalities and forced military service in the name of a theocratic and corrupt regime which promises only war with the entire region as a pawn for U.S. imperialism. Despite the privileged position Israeli workers might enjoy in comparison to Palestinians, the material interests of Israeli workers point toward ending Palestinian oppression because, in the end, it drives down their living conditions, degrades every aspect of their lives and threatens their very survival in the region. Furthermore, the ongoing genocidal war, while fostering deep national unity, also puts tremendous strain on this tinder box, which is held together only by Zionist ideology.

Over seven million Jews are living in Israel. Whoever is serious about actually liberating Palestine and emancipating the entire Middle East *must* exploit whatever fractures, whatever conflict and whatever grievances of the Israeli workers, the poor and the soldiers to weaken the Zionist fortress and advance Palestinian freedom. Even if these revolts remain, at first, within the framework of Zionism (e.g., the mass movement against Netanyahu’s judicial reform and the recent general strike), communists must insert a wedge in any such conflicts. Otherwise, an economic analysis of the privileged position of Israeli workers—whatever its factual merit—becomes a justification for abstention.

Comrades of the RCIT, like in Yossi’s 7 October piece, often draw parallels between the Israelis and the *Pieds noirs* in colonial Algeria, the whites in apartheid South Africa and the Protestants in Ireland. There are indeed certain similarities, but invoking these examples does not argue against the need for an orientation toward the workers of the oppressor nation. Whether it is Israel, Ireland, South Africa or colonial Algeria, an important part of any revolutionary strategy was and is to win over the greatest possible numbers of workers from the oppressor nation to the liberation of the oppressed. Lenin and Trotsky always hammered on the need for communists to conduct systematic work in the proletariat as well as the army of the oppressor nation to fight for unity with the workers in oppressed nations, not in the manner of reformists or centrists adapting to social chauvinism, but as revolutionaries seeking to break workers from their pro-imperialist leaders. In fact, the failure of nationalists to do this is one way in which they undermine the liberation struggle.



Your theses quote Trotsky's "Letter to South African Revolutionaries," but only to refer to his characterization of the white settlers as a "privileged, arrogant caste of whites." But this is not all of what Trotsky said. Here is the full quote:

"The proletariat of the country consists of backward black pariahs and a privileged, arrogant caste of whites. In this lies the greatest difficulty of the whole situation. As the thesis correctly states, the economic convulsions of rotting capitalism must strongly shake the old barriers and facilitate the work of revolutionary coalescence.

"In any case, the worst crime on the part of the revolutionaries would be to give the smallest concessions to the privileges and prejudices of the whites. Whoever gives his little finger to the devil of chauvinism is lost.

"The revolutionary party must put before every white worker the following alternative: either with British imperialism and with the white bourgeoisie of South Africa, or with the black workers and peasants against the white feudalists and slave-owners and their agents in the ranks of the working class."

No doubt you have read these lines many times. But Trotsky's point is not to just dismiss the white caste because of its privileges but that the revolutionary party must put to them a clear alternative aiming at "revolutionary coalescence." This also applies to Israel, where communists, while frontally opposing all shades of Zionism, must put to the Israeli workers a similar sharp alternative: either with the Zionist rulers, imperialism and its agents in the working class, or with the Arab masses. But without a revolutionary party *in* Israel, this alternative **cannot and will not** be posed to Israeli workers. Objective factors "facilitate the work of revolutionary coalescence"—a revolutionary party is the essential tool for it to take place.

Having said all of this, what is actually striking is that the ISL/RCIT is not oblivious to these things. The platform of the ISL (undated) explains:

"A victorious struggle by the Palestinians can only be achieved by means of a mass, armed uprising, under revolutionary leadership that will know how to split the masses of Israelis from Zionism and draw as many Israelis as possible to the side of the revolution in which the essence and the tone will be set by the Palestinian working class."

Your theses explain the need to work inside the Israeli trade unions for the transitional program and even in the army. Point 10 explains:

"Revolutionary communists [in Israel] do not wait for a socialist revolution made by others. Therefore, we support and participate in all of the progressive struggles of the masses. This policy even includes support for the social movement struggle in Israel, where we disseminate the message that this movement can only be victorious if it links itself to the revolutionary struggle of the Palestinian people and the masses in the region. The tactic that led the petty-bourgeois leaders of the Palestinians, even in the name of the Red Flag, to adopt guerrilla warfare and acts of terror, has never proved itself as an efficient road to liberation, and only has helped Israel gain legitimization in world public opinion for the use of extensive state terror."

We agree with these statements. But do they not also fail, in your words, to "deal with the strategic problem: the peculiar nature of the Israeli working class"? How does the ISL reconcile the above statements with Yossi Schwartz's declaration that "the Israeli working class, that is, aristocratic workers, can break from Zionism in one of the two conditions or both—total defeat in the war or the victory of the Arab revolution"? And how is it that RCIT comrades legitimize Hamas's actions—particularly that of October 7—while at the same time claiming to oppose the guerrilla road? Of course, taking a military side against Israel is necessary. But the strategy of Hamas is exactly the one your platform opposes.

It is necessary to quote from the platform of the ISL precisely because its practice is in fact in contradiction with these fine words. It is true that our organization has yet to elaborate a more concrete program for Israel today. So far, we have sought to establish clear general principles for communist work in Israel/Palestine based on the lessons of the failure of the past. However, this is already much closer to a communist policy than the work conducted by the ISL (at least recently). From its web page, its work consists of near-daily exposures of crimes of the Israeli army, hailing attacks by Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis and Iran and stating that the ISL militarily supports them. The only concrete things about the ISL's work are short reports of small liberal Zionist demonstrations, where the RCIT sometimes raises abstract slogans against Zionism (such as "We will not kill nor die in the service of Zionism," as reported in "Protest in Haifa," 11 August).

The ISL page reads more like Schwartz's personal blog, with his daily (and often overblown) impressions, rather than a tool of working-class struggle seeking to exploit the contradictions of Israeli society (thus there is very little in Hebrew or Arabic). One shocking example is that, despite the almost daily articles, not a single one mentions the recent general strike. None, at least recently, have touched on any issues confronting workers in Israel, whether Jews, Palestinians or others. (We might have missed some things, and maybe all your work in the army and trade unions—if there is any—is carried out underground. In any case, we would be glad to be proven wrong on this.) All of this is, to say the least, quite in contradiction with the words of the ISL's platform.

Indeed, the RCIT's practice as well as your criticisms all point to the fact that you reject splitting Israeli society along class lines. That makes it impossible to cut through the two pitfalls of either tailing Palestinian nationalism or tailing left Zionism. Furthermore, and with all due respect, limiting one's activity in Israel to denouncing the Zionist government and stating military support to the Palestinian resistance also leads to capitulating to Zionist forces. While the Stalinists and Grantites directly adapt to the liberal Zionists and their agents in the working class, the ISL, while opposing Zionism, refuses to bring the struggle against these forces into the Israeli working class. In the end, both perspectives guarantee that Israeli workers will remain led by Zionists.

The logic of this liquidationist perspective is seen quite clearly in Yossi Schwartz's piece. Putting aside the various demagogic statements and insults, Schwartz is mainly angry at our criticisms of the leaders of the Palestinian resistance:

"But instead of understanding the nature of the Zionist settler colonialist, the ICL, in typical arrogance, says that the mass pro-Palestinian movement lacks the proper program that only the ICL has."

That we never claimed to be the only ones with the "proper program" is beside the point. More significant is the fact that this statement applies just as much to your own 1 October article, which is a critique of the pro-Palestinian forces who indeed lack a "proper program," and to the ISL's platform. Yossi Schwartz's article reveals the liquidationist conclusion of the ISL, for whom communism in Israel amounts to militarily supporting Hamas or Hezbollah while dismissing the entire Israeli proletariat.

But this is not a unique trend. Your letter contains a parenthesis in which, responding to our recognition that Israel is a settler-colonial state, you quip, "It would not have done harm to you to admit that we recognized this important fact a few decades before you did." We have no problem admitting that discussions with the RCIT have influenced us positively in some regard. However, this is not the case with this formulation. We are sure you are aware that this characterization is far from unique to the RCIT. Matzpen had already put it forward as early as the 1960s, and, today, it is used by countless liberals who all reject fighting inside the Israeli working class for a break with Zionism. (To mention only one example, take Daphna Thier and her article, "Not an Ally: The Israeli Working Class" in the book *Palestine: A Socialist Introduction*). Now, this in

itself is not an argument against your particular views. But it does raise the question: How do the RCIT's views regarding the tasks of socialists in Israel as well as its actual practice differ in any way from those liberals?

There is a clear contradiction in the RCIT. On the one hand, the ISL platform opposes the petty-bourgeois guerrilla road for Palestine's freedom and states the need to split the working class from Zionism as part of fighting for Palestinian freedom and revolution in the entire region. On the other hand, your theses on the Israeli working class, as well as your questions to us, point toward rejecting that course. The practice of the ISL/RCIT consists largely of cheering the Palestinian armed struggle while rejecting any orientation toward Israeli workers.

### **Self-Determination and Israeli Nation**

On self-determination for Jews, you write:

“You call for the ‘recognition of full national rights, including self-determination for all nations’ and, at the same time, you say that the Israeli Jews are a nation. Logically, this means that you support the right of national self-determination of the Israeli Jews, i.e. a Jewish state in Palestine. Does this not mean that you adapt to the logic of Zionism, i.e. the expulsion of the Palestinian people from at least parts of their land?”

No, it does not. This slogan is raised in the section related to the Arab and Muslim world and is directed against the Iranian, Turkish and Arab regimes that oppress other nations. Now, one can take this slogan in isolation from our broader perspective and brandish it as proof that we are closeted Zionists, as Yossi Schwartz did. But to do that, one must ignore the fact that the article in question contains a lengthy polemic against Zionism (and liberal Zionism in particular) and that we have laid out our views regarding self-determination for Israeli Jews quite clearly in *Spartacist* No. 69:

“The question of self-determination for Israel is a red herring. Israelis already have a state, and its purpose is to stop the Palestinians from having their own. Under current conditions, refusing to fight for Palestinian self-determination in the name of Israeli self-determination simply amounts to defending the Zionist status quo. The real question is for the Palestinians to exercise *their* right of self-determination in a way compatible with the continued existence of a Jewish nation in the Near East. This is possible only in the form of a unified, binational state based on resolving the historical injustice committed against the Palestinians and where both nations enjoy full democratic rights in regard to language, culture and religion. Such a state can only be established by shattering the Zionist state and through a revolutionary overturn of the entire region.”

This article also makes clear in several places our opposition to any two-state solution as a capitulation to Zionism.

The disagreement seems to be based on our recognition that Israeli Jews are a nation. It is quite obvious that a nation of Israeli Jews—with a common political economy, language, culture, etc., distinct from other Jews—has constituted itself on the land of Palestinians and through their brutal expulsion. As we explain above, talk of self-determination for Israeli Jews is blackmail aimed at maintaining the Zionist status quo. But you seem to believe that recognizing the existence of an Israeli Jewish nation means support for the Zionist state. This seems to be why the ISL platform characterizes Israelis as a “people”(?) and not a nation, despite your recognition of obvious national characteristics.

For us, there is no contradiction in recognizing the existence of an Israeli Jewish nation and fighting to shatter the Zionist state. The latter is the precondition to realizing Palestinian self-determination. But the former—recognition of an Israeli nation—is also necessary to win over Israeli workers to the perspective of a binational state. In a sense, you do recognize this

implicitly. The RCIT stands for a “multinational workers’ government” in Palestine. Apart from Palestinians, who would be the other nations making up such a workers government? Does this not include Israelis?

### **Anti-Imperialist United Front**

You write: “You call for an ‘anti-imperialist front against Israel and the U.S.’ But we are surprised that you only do so in the chapter about the BRICS but not when it comes to Hamas and Hezbollah!” You complain: “Why is it so difficult for you to call for an anti-imperialist front with Hamas and Hezbollah and even more so after one year of war?!” The first section of our article raises the slogan: “Defend Gaza, the West Bank, Yemen, Lebanon and Iran against Zionist and imperialist attacks!” What is this, if not a call for a united front with all forces fighting Israel and the imperialists?

You have often raised criticisms regarding particular formulations, like how our first statement on the war did not say, “We side with Hamas” or, in this case, “for a united front with Hezbollah/Hamas.” You have insinuated that we have not raised such slogans out of capitulation to social-chauvinism and/or because of cowardice in the face of repression. These criticisms are, for us, real literary fetishism, devoid of any serious considerations for actual Marxist interventions in the working class, as well as in the pro-Palestinian movement.

For example, most of our work is directed at the working class in the West, and particularly in the U.S. Given the nature of Hamas/Hezbollah, the social-chauvinism of the union bureaucracy and the current consciousness of workers, even advanced ones, a slogan such as “military support to Hamas/Hezbollah” would cut us off from workers, who would understand it as a form of support to Islamism and a provocation. Rather, we always seek to put up front the question of opposing imperialism and to show, through workers’ own struggle, how the support by the leaders of the workers movement to the imperialist system undermines the position of the proletariat. (For example, see how a supporter of our views fought at the recent ILWU convention to oppose arms shipments to Israel: <https://iclf.org/pubs/wv/1182/ilwu>, or how we tied the question of arms shipments to our intervention in the recent ILA strike: <https://iclf.org/pubs/wv/2024-ila2>).

We were glad to see the following statement in your declaration from 1 October:

“By its very nature, a struggle in solidarity with the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples must be not only Anti-Zionist but also anti-imperialist, i.e. against the ruling class in their own countries and their lackeys in the labour movement.”

However, we are still left wondering how you propose to carry out this struggle concretely. In our experience, there is no relation between how strongly groups claim to “have a military side with Hamas” and their actual work toward breaking the working class from social-chauvinism. In fact, the opposite tends to be the case. Groups such as the PSL have no problem cheerleading for the Palestinian leadership while at the same time capitulating to liberal forces in the U.S.

Even when it comes to interventions in the pro-Palestinian movement, in the Global South and particularly in the Arab and Muslim world, declaring military support to the resistance—while certainly correct—does not address the problems of the movement. Your own 1 October article is a testament to this. What the most advanced militants need to be convinced of is precisely the need for a Marxist strategy, as opposed to the current nationalist and Islamist dead ends. While this obviously requires taking a clear side with the Palestinian resistance against Israel and the U.S., that is only the beginning of the question.

Here is a telling anecdote from the work of our South African comrades during the recent united-front demonstrations with members of the EFF. (Here is the article about the first demonstration: <https://iclf.org/pubs/wv/1182/xolani-khoza>. A second one was held on 27 September.) Julius

Malema, the leader of the EFF, has declared that if in power, he would send arms to Hamas. Thus, generally, those around the EFF know very well who they side with. During the recent united-front action, one of the slogans that generated the most discussions among EFF members we worked with was: “Palestinian liberation needs communist leadership.” One EFF member insisted on carrying our sign with this slogan, precisely because he was looking for another road than the current one.

Drawing a class line does not mean raising the most provocative slogans. Rather, it means engaging workers where they are at, exploiting their contradictions and laying out a path of struggle which objectively advances the fight against imperialism while seeking to split them from their pro-imperialist and/or nationalist leaders and illusions. However, this is never the consideration behind the various criticisms you have made of our slogans.

We hope this letter can serve toward further constructive exchange of views.

Comradely,  
Vincent David  
for the ICL

P.S.: After finishing writing this letter, we saw your obituary “Yahya Sinwar – the Che Guevara of Our Times, Necrology for a martyr who has died for his people” (18 October). Needless to say, we found this to be quite groveling. Sinwar incarnated in many ways the contradiction of the Palestinian liberation struggle. On one side, he fought the Zionist war machine courageously all his life and until the very end. On the other, his strategy, Islamist politics and organisation could only bring this fight to defeat. This is the similarity with Che Guevara. But, again, you deal only with one side of the question...

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