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# **Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League**

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—a bulletin series of opponent material

**NUMBER 10**

Defectors, Renegades and Political Pirates

**More on the Norden Group—  
from the Bolshevik Tendency and the  
Workers League/Socialist Equality Party**

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# Introduction

In this edition of "Hate Trotskyism, Hate the Spartacist League" we reproduce articles by the Bolshevik Tendency and David North's Workers League (which now goes under the name of the "Socialist Equality Party") on the matter of the defection of several longtime members from our international tendency, the International Communist League. This bulletin is supplementary to our *International Bulletin* (No. 38, June 1996) titled "Norden's 'Group': Shamefaced Defectors From Trotskyism," and also to "Hate Trotskyism" No. 9 (August 1996) titled "The Norden 'Group': Polymorphous Opportunism."

The Bolshevik Tendency is overwhelmingly made up of people who coalesced in the early 1980s after individually quitting our organization with the onset of the imperialist anti-Soviet Cold War II. To alibi their cowardly retreat from the revolutionary Trotskyist position of unconditional military defense of the former Soviet Union, the BT charged that our Soviet defensism was evidence of "Stalinophilia" and otherwise portrayed themselves as the victims of a bureaucratic regime worthy of a Stalinist gulag.

The article "Healyites of the Second Mobilization—Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized," from the BT's journal *1917* (closing date, 15 July 1996) presents Norden et al. as fellow victims of the ICL "regime." This poses a rather exquisite contradiction for the Bolshevik Tendency. If anyone could be said to have eventually become truly guilty of the charge of "Stalinophilia" it is Norden. As part of his trajectory out of the ICL, Norden adamantly fought for a "regroupment" orientation to the geriatric remnants of the former ruling East German Stalinist bureaucracy. That the idea of engaging these former hard-line Stalinists in a necrophilic embrace doesn't give the BT pause is hardly surprising. The defining character of this outfit is not its incidental opportunist political program but rather has been predominantly its visceral hostility to our organization.

The article, "Spartacist expels leading members—A demoralized response to the breakup of Stalinism," reproduced here, is taken from the 7 October 1996 issue of the *International Workers Bulletin*, newspaper of the Workers League/Socialist Equality Party. As is evident, the Spartacist League is the all-purpose surrogate object for the raving anti-

Sovietism which animated the Workers League's solidarity with every imperialist-inspired "movement" aimed at destroying the remaining gains of the 1917 October Revolution. In the tradition of Stalin's "History of the CPSU (Short Course)," the Northites' article is a condensation of every lunatic charge they have been making against our organization for more than two decades, and then some.

In a period conditioned by the further disorientation of the proletariat following the capitalist counterrevolution in the former Soviet Union and across Eastern Europe, internal political struggle is inevitable and necessary to preserve the program of revolutionary Marxism and the party that embodies it from the pressures of bourgeois reaction. As we noted in our article on the Norden group ("A Shamefaced Defection from Trotskyism," *WV* No. 648, 5 July 1996):

"Our small revolutionary international is hardly immune to the disintegrative pressures of this period of post-Soviet reaction. But unlike our centrist and reformist opponents, who wallow in their opportunism while glibly denying any internal problems, we strive to be candid in assessing the tasks and difficulties facing us and are unique in bringing this before the international working class and the left."

Such a conception is foreign to both the BT and the Northites. That they can only see internal political struggle as self-serving purges designed to maintain bureaucratic authority is simply a reflection of their own only too sordid internal life.

—28 January 1997

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Note: "Spartacist expels leading members—A demoralized response to the breakup of Stalinism" is our own typescript of the article as it appeared in the 7 October issue of the Workers League/Socialist Equality Party's paper, *International Workers Bulletin*.

"Healyites of the Second Mobilization—Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized" is a direct photocopy of the article as it appeared in the Bolshevik Tendency's journal *1917* including its photographs and ads. Any typographical or other errors are the BT's, not ours. The BT bulletin advertised with its article on the Norden group is a response to the ICL pamphlet titled "The International Bolshevik Tendency—What Is It?" The latter can be purchased for US \$1, make checks payable to/mail to: Spartacist Publishing Co., Box 1377 GPO, New York, NY 10116, USA.

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# **Spartacist expels leading members**

# **A demoralized response to**

# **the breakup of Stalinism**

By Bill Vann

WORKERS Vanguard, the biweekly newspaper of the Spartacist League, announced in its July 5 issue that Jan Norden, the newspaper's editor for the last 23 years, was expelled from the organization. The grounds for his expulsion were given as "willful violation of the most fundamental condition of membership...that the party has a monopoly over the public political activity of its members."

Expelled on the same charges was Marjorie Stamborg, a longtime member and public spokesperson of Spartacist, who ran as the party's candidate in the 1985 New York mayoral election.

The paper went on to report the expulsion of the leaders of an affiliated group in Mexico and to report the breaking off of fraternal relations which Spartacist had maintained for two years with a syndicalist group in Brazil. Taken together these expulsions and splits indicate a thorough going political and organizational crisis within the Spartacist League.

The principal charge leveled against Norden was rather astonishing. His crime, it seems, was failure to turn in his phone bills for reimbursement by the group's national office!

Spartacist claimed that Norden was holding back the bills to conceal that he was phoning the group's enemies, while Norden countered that the group's sole motive for demanding his phone records was to stage an internal witch hunt against its own members. Whatever the truth of the matter, this type of accusation typifies a group which has turned inward and become deeply demoralized.

In attempting to provide a political rationale for the expulsions, Spartacist makes the following charges: "Norden had always had strong tendencies toward impressionism and vicarious adventurism, animated by an often-fatuous optimism about the capacity of forces very different from Trotskyism, or from the proletariat for that matter, to 'struggle' in some successful measure against the depredations of the imperialist bourgeoisie...."

"Norden always stood at the extreme end of a tendency to impressionistically overdraw (and often fantastically so) the military factor. Correspondingly, this meant conjuring up an anticipated flood of anti-

imperialist struggle while seriously downplaying the crucial and related factors of political consciousness and material economic reality...."

These lines read like a political indictment of Spartacist itself. Indeed, it is hardly credible to attribute chronic impressionism, adventurism and fatuous optimism to the individual chiefly responsible for formulating the political line in Workers Vanguard over the past 23 years without making a thorough reexamination of the group's perspective over the whole period.

Often in politics it takes years and even decades for the full implications of the positions adopted by different organizations to make themselves clear. This is the significance of the latest crisis within the Spartacist League. It is the working out of the class orientation upon which the organization was founded more than 30 years ago.

The group originated in the 1960s. Its founding members came out of the Socialist Workers Party, which was at the time abandoning the revolutionary perspective and proletarian orientation upon which it had been founded in 1938 and adapting itself to middle class protest movement in the United States. Initially, Spartacist emerged as part of the opposition to this move to the right by the SWP. Quite rapidly, however, the limitations of its opposition became clear.

Like other groups which sprang up during this period, Spartacist was characterized by a deep skepticism toward the American and international working class. Typically, these groups proclaimed themselves to be Marxist and socialist, while rejecting the essential Marxist conception that the working class constitutes the sole consistently revolutionary class in modern society. Rather than base the building of the revolutionary party on an intransigent fight for the political independence of the working class, they all sought substitutes within the heterogeneous and highly contradictory middle class protest movement. Student power, black nationalism, feminism, the gay rights movement, etc. were all treated as new forms of opposition to the capitalist order.

Within the middle class radical milieu, Spartacist became known for its superheated rhetoric, bordering on hysteria, and the sick humor frequently employed by *Workers Vanguard*. Significantly, it never developed an independent perspective. It had no need for a Marx-

ist analysis of economic and political developments and the essential experiences of the working class. Rather its politics consisted largely of commentary, often of a subjective character, on the positions adopted by other political organizations.

This left Spartacist unable to prepare for or even comprehend the inevitable waning of the protest movement. Unwilling and unable to carry out a struggle in the working class, it sought to create a new base for its political line by turning sharply in another direction—towards the Stalinist bureaucracy.

### **“Hail Red Army”**

For those familiar with the Spartacist League, there are a number of well-known incidents associated with this turn. First there was the response to the Kremlin’s invasion of Afghanistan. *Workers Vanguard* greeted this military adventure with the headline: “Hail Red Army.” Perhaps an even more bizarre manifestation came in 1984, when the paper’s front page carried a black-bordered death notice for Soviet party chief Yuri Andropov.

The class issues involved in Spartacist’s turn to Stalinism emerged most clearly in response to the upsurge of the Solidarity movement in Poland. When working class opposition to the economic austerity measures of the Gierk regime led to mass strikes and the formation of independent unions, Spartacist publicly appealed for the bureaucracy to crack down on the Polish workers.

In September 1981, *Workers Vanguard* announced its support—in advance—for any military intervention ordered by the Soviet Stalinists against the Polish workers, declaring, “whatever the idiocies and atrocities they will commit, we do not flinch from defending the crushing of Solidarity.” When Gen. Jaruzelski imposed martial law and ordered the mass roundup of workers, Spartacist applauded the measures. The Polish events demonstrated that this group’s attraction to Stalinism was bound up with its organic hostility to the working class.

Each of these developments—Afghanistan, Poland and the short reign of Andropov—represented milestones in the crisis of Stalinism. Yet for Spartacist they demonstrated the bureaucracy’s “dual nature,” which supposedly compelled it to defend the gains of the October 1917 Revolution, as it suppressed the workers.

By 1985, with the advent of Gorbachev, the bureaucracy began openly to state its intention to sell off state property. Nonetheless, Spartacist insisted that sections of the old Stalinist apparatus retained a revolutionary potential. In 1989 they wrote: “In the USSR the appearance of capitalist-restorationist forces can lead to an open clash between them and the proletariat, which will inevitably split the bureaucracy into its polar components. Soviet politics thrown into turmoil by glasnost demonstrate anew Trotsky’s observation that ‘all shades of political thought are to be found among the bureaucracy: from genuine Bolshevism (Ignace Reiss) to complete fascism (F. Butenko).”

In the passage immediately following the one quoted by Spartacist, Trotsky stressed the sharply disproportio-

tionate weight of the “shades of political thought” existing in the bureaucracy. He wrote: “The revolutionary elements within the bureaucracy, only a small minority, reflect, passively it is true, the socialist interests of the proletariat. The fascist, counterrevolutionary elements, growing uninterruptedly, express with even greater consistency the interests of world imperialism.”

These lines from the *Transitional Program* were written by Trotsky as the Stalinist bureaucracy was carrying out the wholesale extermination of the representatives of “genuine Bolshevism.” Hundreds of thousands of communists were put to death, including virtually all those who were in any way identified with the October Revolution.

This act of political genocide effectively stamped out the last remnants of revolutionary Marxism within the state and ruling party of the USSR. To base oneself on the supposed existence of a revolutionary faction within the bureaucracy in 1989 was to ignore nearly six decades of history and the river of blood separating Stalinism from Bolshevism.

The illusions which Spartacist had promoted in Stalinism over the previous 15 years left its membership unprepared for the collapse of the bureaucracies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The organization’s response combined political demoralization with adventurist attempts to forge relations with hard-line Stalinist factions spun off by the disintegrating bureaucracies.

Spartacist’s main charges against Norden stem from this period. *Workers Vanguard* accuses him of a “Stalinoid bent.” As we have seen, this can hardly be described as a unique personal trait.

### **Spartacist and the DDR**

*Workers Vanguard* declares: “With the capitalist reunification of Germany in 1990, quantity turned into quality.” The newspaper cites Norden’s “fascination with the East German deformed workers state of Erich Honecker.” It states: “When the DDR went down, presaging the subsequent collapse of the Soviet degenerated workers state, Norden began to become politically unhinged.” Once again, this describes not just Norden, but Spartacist itself. The entire organization was beset by this fascination with moribund Stalinism in the DDR and Spartacist as a whole became quite unhinged.

In any case, it is impossible to separate Norden’s perspective from that of Spartacist, as he was given principal responsibility for the organization’s political activities in Germany.

According to Spartacist’s documents, the group sent more than one-third of its membership into Germany at the end of 1989 and in the beginning of 1990. The bulk of these elements spoke no German. Their aim was not to win the German workers to a revolutionary perspective. Rather they made their main appeal to sections of the Stalinist apparatus, most particularly the military and security forces.

The high point of this political adventure, according to the documents published by Spartacist, was the

appearance of a speaker from their organization on the platform at an East Berlin rally organized by the then ruling Stalinist party, the SED, just as the latter was preparing to turn over East Germany to the West German bourgeoisie. Other highlights of this campaign were the leafleting of army and police barracks and lectures delivered by Spartacist speakers to groups of military and police officers.

In the bulletin circulated by Spartacist, one of the charges made against Norden is that he failed to have translated into German two documents which would have supposedly served as an antidote to his impressionism and overestimation of the "military factor."

### Appeal to repressive forces

A reading of this material, published in the Winter 1990-91 edition of *Spartacist*, only demonstrates that these tendencies were the essence of Spartacist's policy.

The first by Joseph Seymour is entitled "On the Collapse of Stalinist Rule in East Europe." It includes the following: "Throughout East Europe, the old Stalinist military and police cadre have passively acquiesced to the new right-wing governments. It does not however follow that the army and police will defend these governments and their programs in the face of mass opposition. The counterrevolution now taking place in East Europe can still be defeated and reversed." The key question for Spartacist was not the political consciousness of the working class, but rather the attitude of the repressive forces of the old Stalinist regimes.

The second article, by Albert St. John, is entitled (with unintended irony) "For Marxist Clarity and a Forward Perspective." It deals primarily with the events in East Germany in 1989-90. St. John focuses on the fate of the Betriebskampfgruppen, which he himself describes as "a party militia organized after the 1953 uprising to put down any future revolt before it could coalesce."

He continues: "With components in every factory in the country.... It not only had access to small arms, but also artillery and armor, including tanks."

According to St. John, the bureaucracy's decision to dissolve this force at the end of 1989 was the turning point in the downfall of the old DDR: "This national internal structure of a factory-based militia had the very real potential to become the organized political/military locus of the political revolution.... The disarming of the proletariat was a decisive blow from the standpoint of organizing the force necessary to seize control of the state in order to defend the planned economy and state property from liquidation."

Nothing could spell out more clearly Spartacist's conception of political revolution in East Germany. It was not a matter of a revolutionary party mobilizing the masses of workers for the overthrow of the bureaucracy. Rather, it was the mobilization of the armed enforcers of the bureaucracy—a militia founded to crush workers' revolts—to "defend the planned economy and state property" ... by ruthlessly repressing the working class.

The dashing of the illusions which Spartacist had

promoted in Stalinism had its tragic consequences. Noah Wolkenstein, who played a leading role in setting up the Spartacist's German operation, committed suicide in April 1990, barely a month after the victory of the right in the East German elections. He left behind a suicide note expressing despondency over the breakup of the Stalinist regime and the ensuing capitalist reunification.

The organization as a whole was plunged into demoralization. Both *Workers Vanguard* and its former editor Norden allude to these moods in their attempt to explain the source of the recent split.

In an August 24 document which Norden posted on the Internet, announcing his establishment of yet another splinter from Spartacist—the Internationalist Group, he declares: "The counterrevolutionary destruction of the Soviet Union was a major defeat for the world proletariat. Yet the defeatist conclusions the ICL [International Communist League, the name under which Spartacist conducts its international activities] leadership has drawn from this are an echo of the bourgeoisie's 'death of communism' campaign. These erroneous conclusions are in line with the tendency...to retreat from the class struggle and adopt a policy of passive propagandism."

Attempting to explain its action against Norden, Spartacist places his alleged apostasy within the context of "profound changes and historic defeats for the working class internationally as capitalist counterrevolution destroyed the bureaucratically deformed workers states of East Europe and the Soviet Union."

It continues, "Buying into the imperialist triumphalism over the 'death of communism,' the left generally is rapidly repudiating even any pretense of Leninism, seeking 'regroupment' in larger reformist formations together with social democrats and ex-Stalinists. Our small revolutionary international is hardly immune to the disintegrative pressures of this period of post-Soviet reaction."

In expelling Norden, the Spartacist leadership is attempting to make the *Workers Vanguard* editor the scapegoat for the failed political line of the entire organization. Whatever the immediate internal tensions and squabbles which have produced this blowup, this is its fundamental significance.

With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe, Spartacist has found itself adrift without a compass. This found graphic expression in its 1994 perspectives document, drafted for the first national conference which the group had convened in seven years. The content was utterly pessimistic:

"Our ninth national conference takes place in the grim aftermath of capitalist counterrevolution in East Europe and the USSR. This world-historic defeat for the proletariat has led to heightened and rekindled interimperialist rivalry, nationalist bloodbaths, all-sided attacks on the working class, a resurgence of fascist political movements, anti-immigrant frenzy, assaults on the rights of women and a sharp rise in reactionary obscurantism."

The document cited a loss of one-third of Spar-

tacist's membership, while reporting that the groups which it had attempted to set up outside the US were either stillborn or breaking up. It explained that its French group had largely disintegrated after its leadership refused to join an "international brigade" which Spartacist proposed to send to Afghanistan. In the end, the regime in Kabul declined Spartacist's offer.

### **A failed adaptation to Stalinism**

The organization has been forced to acknowledge the failure of its political work in the former Soviet Union, where it mounted a similar effort to the one which it carried out in East Germany. Once again this intervention had its tragic results, the murder of the leading Spartacist member in Moscow, Martha Phillips.

In a March 1996 document Spartacist writes: "Moscow station [this term, drawn not from the lexicon of Marxism, but rather the terminology of the CIA and John LeCarre, reveals much about the way Spartacist sees its overseas operations] is a prime example of an ICL outpost with no prospects for growth any time soon.... Capitalist counterrevolution has demobilized the proletariat...the murder of our comrade Martha Phillips—and the indifference and obstructionism by the state authorities concerning investigating this crime—certainly put a chill on recruitment."

What is one to say of a purportedly revolutionary organization which concludes that work is no longer possible in a country because the police there refuse to vigorously investigate the murder of one of their members?

If the murder of Martha Phillips put a "chill on recruitment," as Spartacist puts it, this was a function not simply of the "obstructionism" of the Moscow police, but of Spartacist's own response.

The organization opposed carrying out its own investigation to uncover and make public the full circumstances of the killing. It feared that such an initiative would bring it into conflict with the reactionary remnants of Stalinism to which Spartacist had oriented in the former USSR. Any investigation into the murder would logically begin in this milieu, with its long history of anti-Trotskyism and its virulent strains of Russian nationalism and anti-Semitism.

### **Despair over events in US**

The document then turns to the US, where the bulk of the Spartacist membership resides: "The US has been politically stagnant and is increasingly racially polarized.... Although the objective situation could change very quickly in the US, there are no external indices to point to anything moving our way at this time."

These lines are written under conditions of the greatest class polarization in American history. The Clinton administration has abolished welfare and is dismantling what remains of the social programs upon which masses of working people depend. Millions see no difference between the Democratic and Republican parties and workers are profoundly alienated from their old trade union organizations. These are the conditions

under which the working class begins to search for a socialist alternative.

Yet Spartacist sees nothing "moving its way," precisely because it is not oriented—and has not been since its very origins—to the working class. Its constituency is to be found in the demoralized ranks of middle class ex-radicals who are either rallying behind Clinton or giving up politics altogether.

What does the document propose? It calls for exploiting "geographically far-flung opportunities" through "a qualitative and painful cutback in other areas of work." In particular it advances the notion that Brazil and South Africa are seen as ripe for Spartacist's intervention.

No sooner was this document written than Spartacist was forced to announce the breakup of its unprincipled relations with a Brazilian syndicalist group. It can be predicted with certainty that any opportunist relation which Spartacist attempts to cement in South Africa will end in a similar fashion.

### **Wither Spartacist?**

Where then is Spartacist headed? For all of its glib enthusiasm for "far-flung opportunities," this is an organization firmly based on a nationalist perspective and rooted in the remnants of American middle class protest movement. Unable to forge any enduring international links through its strategy of "splits and fusions" within the diminishing ranks of world Pabloism, Spartacist's point of departure is what it refers to as "the strong and often strange political pressures that bear down on us in this country."

Thus, in the period following the Soviet Union's collapse, Spartacist has followed an increasingly erratic and reactionary political course. Its pursuits have ranged from the lionization of the Mafia hoodlum John Gotti to a campaign in support of Quebec nationalism.

Yet the most consistent orientation of Spartacist, like much of the middle class left in America, is toward the trade union officialdom. Spartacist's adaptation to narrow trade unionism finds a curious expression in its most recent polemic against Norden. In its first sentence, the article denounces an opposition document issued by the former *Workers Vanguard* editor because it was "published without a union 'bug'."

In the AFL-CIO Spartacist is attracted to a bureaucracy which is every bit as reactionary, corrupt and parasitic as the Kremlin gangsters which *Workers Vanguard* promoted in an earlier period. One thing is certain, the first sign of a movement of the working class in the United States toward revolutionary struggle will send this disoriented middle class sect scurrying to the right.

In combating such tendencies as Spartacist, the Socialist Equality Party seeks to provide workers, students and others who are searching for a socialist political alternative with an understanding of the fundamentally opposed class interests that separate Marxism from the middle class radicalism which this group epitomizes. This task is essential in establishing the political independence of the working class. ■

## Healyites of the Second Mobilization

# Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized

Reprinted below is the 1 July statement of the International Bolshevik Tendency on recent developments in the Spartacist League/U.S.:

The Spartacist League is currently retailing an "internal" bulletin on the recent purge of several members of their top leadership. SL founder/leader James Robertson opines that had they:

"gone on just a little bit more, I think we'd have found a roaring fire gutting our version of the theoretical edifice that Marx and Lenin and Trotsky built."

The hero of the piece is Al Nelson, who, Robertson "jocularly" suggests, deserves to be honored by a "motion that all party comrades shall hang in their homes a picture of Al, not less than one foot square." Al is credited with discovering that Jan Norden, editor of *Workers Vanguard* (WV) for the past 23 years, was a "revisionist," a "cliquist," an "impressionist" and an assortment of other bad things. Possessed of phenomenal energy, Norden was the SL's best linguist, their most prolific writer, and quite possibly their best administrator. We predict that this purge will soon be apparent in the journalistic quality, and perhaps also the frequency, of the SL's press.

The political issues ostensibly posed in Norden's removal chiefly concern events in the International Communist League's (ICL) German section, the Spartakist-*Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (SpAD). The dispute involves various documents not included in the SL's recent bulletin. One of the key issues appears to be differences on the evaluation of the ICL's failed intervention in the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in 1989-90 (for our assessment see "Robertsonites in Wonderland," 1917 No. 10). For much of this period Norden was one of the senior ICL cadres on the spot, and was responsible for the production of the group's daily German newsheet. Nelson's attack on Norden hinges on the claim that in his January 1995 public speech on the collapse of the DDR at Humboldt University in Berlin, Norden capitulated politically to the Communist Platform (the left wing of the social-democratic Party of Democratic Socialism—successor to the former ruling party in the DDR).

Apart from the laudatory treatment of the ICL's activities, Norden's remarks at Humboldt seem unobjectionable enough. Nelson focuses on Norden's observation that given the tiny size of the ICL's German group, and its lack of connections to the working class, it could not have posed itself as an immediate contender for power. Nelson quotes Norden as saying:

"Look at the reality: we came in from the outside to the DDR, and at times at the height of our intervention at the end of 1989 and beginning of 1990 we only had eight comrades in Berlin who spoke German."

The fact is that the SpAD was never able to mobilize

even 100 people in its own name. Nelson displayed his political acumen during his sojourn in Berlin with the prediction that the SpAD would get hundreds of thousands of votes in the 1990 election. In fact it only got a couple of thousand. His insistence that only a "revisionist" would deny that the SpAD stood ready "to take the power, just as Lenin said in 1917," demonstrates that even hindsight is not 20/20 for everyone.

Once he knew where to look, Len Meyers, the facile cynic who has succeeded Norden as WV editor, soon came up with more shocking evidence of revisionism. Toward the end of his speech Norden attempted to explain how the policy of seeking to make deals with imperialism at the expense of workers' revolution (i.e., "peaceful coexistence") did not originate with Khrushchev, as some hard Stalinists in the Communist Platform imagine, but can rather be traced directly to Stalin himself. To illustrate this, Norden used an example that his audience would be familiar with:

"Stalin's policy of 'peaceful coexistence' also led to enormous concessions to imperialism. That was why the Soviet Union sent only limited amounts of munitions during the Spanish Civil War, because it didn't want to directly go against the blockade decreed by the imperialist 'democracies.'"

Meyers deliberately wrests Norden's example out of its context and treats it as if it had been put forward as an alternative analysis of the Kremlin's betrayal of the Spanish Revolution. He claims to have been "struck" by the "left-Stalinist or left-democratic critique of the Soviet bureaucracy on the Spanish Revolution" contained in the above passage and claims that:

U.S. \$5



TROTSKYIST BULLETIN No. 3

**ICL  
vs.  
IBT**

*Polemics with the Spartacist League*  
Order from: BT, PO Box 332, Adelaide St. Stn.  
Toronto, Canada M5C 1J0

"this statement, which it is hard to imagine coming from anyone even remotely sympathetic to the Trotskyist analysis of the betrayal of the Spanish Revolution, well politically epitomizes the conciliationism which permeates the Humboldt presentation."

It seems to us that Meyers' critique "well politically epitomizes" the logic-chopping that passes for political criticism among the Robertsonians these days.

### Norden's Group

What the SL bulletin refers to as "Norden's 'Group'" includes his companion, Marjorie Salzburg, a highly experienced and capable alternate member of the SL Central Committee. As well as being a prominent public spokesperson for the SL, Salzburg also functioned as WV's "de facto managing editor." She had also been the initiator of the ICL's South African work. The "Norden Group" also includes Negrete who, until he was recently purged, had been the leading figure in the Grupo Esparquista de México (GEM), the ICL's Mexican branch. As such he had worked closely with Norden, who ran the ICL's Latin American work. The fourth member of the "group" is Socorro, an 18-year ICL cadre, who had also been a leader in the GEM.

But it seems that this may not exhaust the list of supporters of the "Norden Group." The final pretext for kicking out Norden and Salzburg was their refusal to turn over their personal phone bills so the leadership could go after anyone unwise enough to have accepted a call from them recently. Norden/Salzburg characterized this as a "fishing expedition," and while insisting they had not engaged in any "public political activity" behind the back of the SL, refused to implicate comrades

whose only crime was having spoken to them on the phone. In his 7 June postscript, Robertson comments: "We are indeed left wondering *who* in fact he [Norden] has been in phone/fax contact with since the first of the year." Robertson may one day be able to make a pretty good guess.

Liz Gordon, apparently still a nominal member of the SL leadership, was a collateral target of the assault on Norden. Gordon and Norden, with Joseph Seymour, were the key Political Bureau members involved in the production of *Workers Vanguard* over the years. They were central to the "WV collective," which was denounced in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Spartacist* as "furiously defensive, turf-conscious, hypersensitive, arrogant, cliquist [and] anti-Leninist." In the recently released ICL document, Gordon, the former Secretary of the ICL's International Secretariat, is denounced for running "the would-be splitters as a cliquist operation out of New York behind the back of the party." Nelson quotes Robertson to the effect that, "Norden, Marjorie and Gordon stand revealed as the architects of an impressionistic opportunism, as shameful as it is dimwitted." Gordon, a highly political but introverted and emotionally fragile woman who has been periodically trashed by Robertson over the years, does not seem to have much of a future as a leader of the SL/ICL.

### Robertson's Midnight Ramblers

In their resignation statement, Norden and Salzburg denounce the charges against them as an "entire fantasy of groundless assumptions, wild conjectures and filthy smears," and protest that they were "framed up" for expulsion "on the basis of speculation based on suppo-

## Pabloist Appetite & the DDR 1989-90



Gregor Gysi

DER SPIEGEL



General B.V. Snetkov

DER SPIEGEL



Markus Wolf

METN YLM/AZENT

*Workers Vanguard* (5 July) denounced leaders of the SED (Stalinist ruling party in the DDR) for taking "conscious, active steps to prevent a workers insurrection" and attacked Jan Norden for displaying a Pabloist appetite toward elements among them. But in 1989-90 the SL/ICL sought "Unity With the SED" and James Robertson tried to arrange personal meetings with Gregor Gysi (party leader), Soviet General B.V. Snetkov and DDR master-spy Markus Wolf. The meetings never occurred because the Stalinists were not interested in Robertson's advice.

sitions based on lies." This seems fair enough, judging from the materials published in the SL bulletin. Salzburg and Norden have not entirely lost their sense of humor:

"In recent months, we have been called Stalinophilic, Castroite, Shachtmanite, Pabloite of the second mobilization, accused of running a Healyite regime, with a touch of Loganism, like the BT, like Hansen, and partly like Goldman-Morrow and Cochran-Clarke. Oh yes, and also believers in Saddam Hussein's war propaganda. To be all that at once is quite a feat."

This kind of overkill will be familiar to anyone who has had the pleasure of witnessing one of the ICL's purge campaigns up close. The Norden/Salzburg claim that the leadership's charges "abound in utterly false statements" sounds about par for the course, as does their account of how they were notified of their suspension: a "hefty repo squad" arrived at their apartment around midnight, notified them that they had been removed from the leadership and demanded that they turn over their keys, computer and fax machine. The following example of double-think has also featured in other purges:

"all opposition to the line of the I.S. [ICL International Secretariat] was labelled 'anti-internationalist' and fundamentally deviant on the party question. We replied that the Germany dispute was a false fight to find a Stalinophilic deviation, that the alleged facts, analysis and conclusions bore no resemblance to reality. *Defenders of the I.S. and IEC line declared that if we thought that, then we must believe that they are bureaucratic witchhunters.*"

—emphasis added

In the ICL a "hostile" attitude to the leadership is incompatible with membership. Those who dispute accusations by the leadership must believe that the leadership levels false charges. But such a belief constitutes "hostility." And so the circle is closed.

## Mexican Leadership Purged

The SL has not been able to assimilate many of the handful of cadres they have regrouped internationally over the past 15 years. This is attributable to the disparity between the ICL's orthodox Trotskyist facade and the unpleasant reality of life on the inside. One of the main charges made in the purge of Negrete and Socorro was "anti-internationalism." Roughly translated, this means daring to disagree with instructions from the U.S. leadership. After the purge of Negrete, who, perhaps for cosmetic reasons, was apparently not suspended but rather placed on (involuntary) leave, Socorro was brought back to New York to stand trial on a variety of charges, including "breaking discipline" by getting separated from other GEM members in the midst of the several hundred thousand participants in Mexico City's May Day demonstration. This is the kind of infraction that only a perceived factional opponent would ever have to stand trial for in the first place. The result of the trial was of course a forgone conclusion: she was found guilty.

Two days later she criticized the ICL's trial procedure at an internal SL meeting:

"I was, a number of years ago, abducted and raped and

the fucking bourgeois court gave the rapist more justice than I got. And that is the truth. That is the truth. And it is a travesty and it's a shame on this party."

The next day the SL Political Bureau, citing this remark, responded:

"Membership must be based on something other than open hatred, contempt and derision, fundamentally counterposed to our basic principles. To therefore hereby expel Socorro for her comment..."

In other words, criticism of the SL's juridical procedures is now an expellable offense. One of the more puzzling features of the Salzburg/Norden resignation statement is their characterization of Socorro's remark as "unconscionable and false." We were not present at either trial, but judging from the SL's own account of the procedure, as well as Salzburg/Norden's observations, it is not apparent why her comment was either "unconscionable" or "false."

## Democratic-Centralism in the SL

Perhaps Norden/Salzburg have good reason for their criticism of Socorro, but it seems more probable that their comment somehow reflects the influence of a quarter of a century spent in the Spartacist League. This is also evident in their claim that:

"Over the recent period, and particularly in the past several weeks, the I.S. has taken a series of measures breaking sharply with our Spartacist traditions and norms of internal debate governed by Leninist democratic centralism and instead imposing increasing restrictions and reprisals."

—emphasis added

While it was necessary to have some room for political debate at the top of the SL (particularly within the editorial board), the fact is that the internal political life of the SL and its satellites has been pretty arid for the last couple of decades. As we noted in our initial declaration in October 1982, the SL/iSt had not had an internal tendency or faction since 1968. We commented that this distinguished the internal regime of the SL from that of Lenin's Bolshevik Party, Trotsky's Fourth International and James P. Cannon's Socialist Workers Party:

"Trotsky's method of dealing with intra-party political struggle was quite different than that of the present leadership of the iSt. Political differences were fought out politically and where possible attempts were made to re-integrate oppositionists. Seymour [the SL's preeminent intellectual and author of *Lenin and the Vanguard Party*] makes the same observation as regards the Bolsheviks.

"The fact is there is something pretty unhealthy about a Trotskyist organization in which there have been virtually no political tendency or faction fights for a decade and a half."

The ICL leadership has naturally always been a bit shy about addressing this question, but such a record strongly suggests that the SL's departure from Leninist democracy occurred years ago, not weeks ago. ICL cadres (like Healyites or Stalinists) who suddenly find themselves outside the organization to which they devoted their lives are forced to spend some time thinking back and trying to make sense of their experience. It is not

uncommon for them to begin with the assumption that things were basically okay—that there was at least rough justice—in most, if not all, cases that preceded their own. But often after further reflection and/or investigation, they realize that their experience was not really unique or unprecedented after all.

### **‘WV Collective’ Terminated**

The impact of these events for the ICL can hardly be over-estimated. Robertson is well aware of this, which is why he has rushed to circulate this latest “internal” bulletin. As usual, his main concern is preserving his dues base. He evidently figures that it is best to undergo a short, sharp shock—particularly since it is clearly all going to come out anyway. Everyone familiar with the SL knows that this represents a deep split in the core cadre of the group. The apolitical authority fights, which have reduced every section of the ICL to shells directed by people deficient in either brain or backbone (or both), have now taken their toll on the *Workers Vanguard* editorial board. This can only further erode any expectation on the part of the aging layer of those who joined in the early 1970s and still remain in “Jimstown” that somehow, someday, things might start to turn around.

In the leaflet we distributed at the SL’s debate with Ernest Mandel in November 1994 we commented that the internal difficulties of the SL leadership foreshadowed a “succession struggle” that “will erupt when Number One is no longer around to settle all disputes by personal fiat.” We also noted that, “The current targets [of Robertson’s inner circle] seem to be the leading members of the editorial board of *Workers Vanguard*” and commented that:

“The members of the WV collective, who have slavishly endured such abuse for years, may be missing a few vertebrae, but they constitute the brightest and most political elements in the group, and are therefore the most logical candidates for future leadership.”

Norden is no longer short-listed for the job of taking over the post-Robertson SL, but he and Salzburg did demonstrate that there were at least a few vertebrae intact among the “WV collective.”

Joseph Seymour is now the only one left at the top of the SL from the “cliquist” literati denounced in *Spartacist* several years ago. He only appears in the bulletin as the author of an opaque farewell to Norden, with whom he toiled for so many years in WV. Long pained by Robertson’s insistence on driving out most of the more political and talented SL recruits, while promoting “reliable” low-caliber apparatchiks, Seymour might be feeling a bit lonely right now. His letter to Norden ignores the specifics of the various charges and instead chides him for thinking that it is possible to make a breakthrough in this period. This, says Seymour, marks Norden as a “man of the pre-1976 era,” i.e., someone who is out of sync with the shrunken historic possibilities of the moment.

In his letter to Norden, Seymour comments: “I sometimes find it conceptually useful to look at our organization as if I were *not* a member of it.” As the group’s leading intellectual, Seymour has traditionally been per-

mitted a considerable degree of detachment from the operational side of the SL. Norden *et al.*, on the other hand, have had their detachment thrust upon them. Whatever one’s vantage point, the picture must be discouraging for those who accept Robertson’s dictum that only the ICL possesses the capacity to “facilitate the emancipation of the proletariat internationally.”

### **Ascension of Prince Albert**

A revolutionary organization cannot be built upon the principle of deference to the whims of a single individual. But a political obedience cult can have no other basis. The history of the Spartacist League over the past two decades is that of an organization in transition from the one to the other. The termination of the “Norden Group” appears to be the culmination of the protracted process of pulverizing any sense of political independence in the leading cadre who remain from the revolutionary SL of the 1970s. The SL’s bulletin is entitled “Norden’s ‘Group’: Shamefaced Defectors From Trotskyism,” but there is little evidence that they have so far defected from anything but the obligation to accept that “the party leadership,” i.e., James Robertson and his surrogates, is always right. In a speech delivered in Germany in late January, Al Nelson put his finger on the real reason for getting rid of Norden:

“In the past when one of these episodes provoked a fight in the party he [Norden] would grudgingly yield to the party’s judgment and go on to something else. But not this time. For six months he has categorically defied the party’s judgment...”

Nelson concluded his January 16 document attacking Norden with the following classical statement of an apparatus man:

“It is the responsibility and duty of party leaders who steer the party off its programmatic course to *assist* the party in correcting that departure. You can’t do that by standing back and thumbing your nose at the party. You can’t be right against the whole party.”

In the SL these days “the whole party” doesn’t add up to a great deal, as Nelson’s preeminence indicates. Norden’s opposition was tolerated for as long as it was because he was so important to the whole operation. In their resignation statement, Norden and Salzburg recount how Norden was gradually stripped of one post after another, in what was evidently an attempt to isolate him internally, while gradually increasing the pressure on him to capitulate. In response to the leadership’s charge that Norden had gradually wiggled out of his political responsibilities, they write:

“This cynical question is designed to get around the fact, which the I.S. knows full well, that Norden didn’t ‘unilaterally suspend his political responsibilities,’ but rather *he was removed from them*. Following the 20 July 1995 I.S. meeting, Norden was removed step by step from operational responsibility for the work in areas which he previously oversaw. This was immediately true for everything concerning Germany except work on *Spartakist*; Brosius took over phone contact with the SpAD. On Mexico, Richard D. was assigned to maintain regular communication with the GEM. This can be verified simply by looking at the reports and fax traffic. On Brazil,

Norden supervised the trip by Abrao and Adam in August 1995, but after that communication with Brazil was handled through other comrades.

"This culminated in the January 1996 IEC meeting, where Norden was removed from full IEC membership; thereafter he was no longer responsible for any particular area of work in the I.S...."

In the Spartacist League today the selection of cadres does not take place on the basis of their political capacities and commitment to the program of Trotskyism, but rather on the basis of their "loyalty" to the leadership. It is therefore somehow fitting that faithful Al Nelson (the only veteran, besides Robertson himself, of the SL's predecessor, the Revolutionary Tendency of the Socialist Workers Party/U.S.) should emerge as the victor in the fight which defines and shapes the final, irreversible decline of the ICL. Nelson's detractors may grumble that he's rather dull, very insecure, has a tendency to be a

bully and is sometimes a bit unstable. But they ignore his other qualities: he has a certain base cunning, and, more importantly, he is thoroughly, deeply, unremittingly loyal to Robertson. Robertson is well aware of Nelson's limitations and has occasionally had to jerk his chain—but one needs to do that with pit bulls.

While the SL degenerated beyond recognition, its press continued to publish some first rate articles. *Workers Vanguard* was the main reason why anyone would want to join the SL. But a high-quality political newspaper requires high-quality political people to produce it. It cannot be written without discussion and argument—phenomena which the Robertson regime, in its desire for absolute control, profoundly distrusts. With the expulsion of Norden/Salzburg, and the triumph of the hacks over the "WV collective," the SL leadership divests itself of the one thing that has unnaturally prolonged its life: a compelling literary facade. ■

**Bulletin No. 6**

**March 1991, \$2 (16 pages)**

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— Translated from *Neue Arbeiterpresse* No. 633, 23 November 1990

“Statement of the Gruppe Spartakus on the Bundestag Elections: No Vote to the SPD/No Vote to the PDS—Critical Support to the SpAD”

— Translated from a leaflet by the Gruppe Spartakus, German section of the International Bolshevik Tendency, 17 November 1990

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— Typescript of a letter by Barry Weisleder, longtime spokesman for the United Secretariat in Canada, 15 November 1990

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“Real Trotskyist Platform or Spartacist Platform”: Contribution to the Debate with Algerian PST Militants

— by Damien Elliott, editor of *l'Egalité*, newspaper of the JCR, youth group of French section of the United Secretariat, August 1992

“Open Letter to the JCR-*l'Egalité*”

— by the Ligue Trotskyiste de France, 27 July 1992

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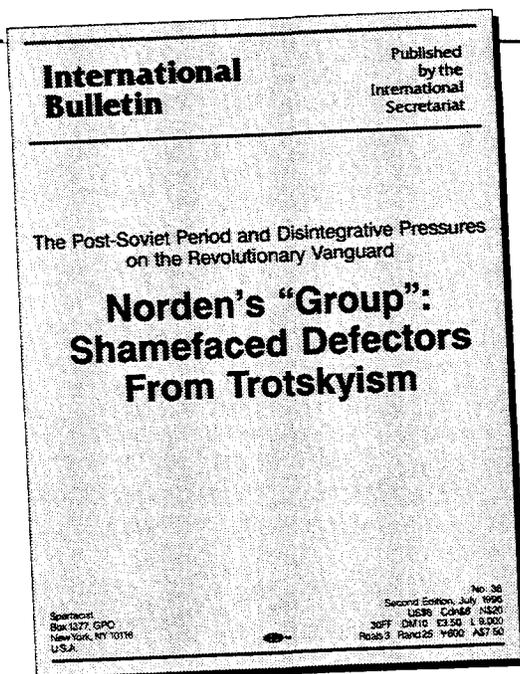
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Second Edition (June 1973)

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Counterfeit Trotskyists”

— From *Spartacist* No. 17-18, August-September 1970

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Wohlforth Terminated”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 61, 31 January 1975

### Bulletin No. 4

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1917, *Journal of the Bolshevik Tendency*, No. 1

First issue of the publication of the Bolshevik Tendency, formerly “External Tendency of the Spartacist League,” includes “I Liked Gerry Healy...: The Robertson School of Party Building” and “SL’s Cop-Baiting Celebrity: ‘Powerful Testimony’...to the Police”

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Letter to *Workers Vanguard* by Cathy Nason for  
the Bolshevik Tendency, 8 April 1988

“On the Slogan ‘Marines Out of Lebanon,  
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— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*  
No. 2, January 1984

“BT Says Don’t Hail Red Army in Afghanistan”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 449, 25 March 1988

“WV Flinches on 007: A Textbook Example”

— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*  
No. 2, January 1984

“BT Protests Too Much” (reply from letters  
column)

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 453, 20 May 1988

“Challenger’s ‘Major Malfunction’: No Disaster  
for the Working Class”

— From 1917 No. 2, Summer 1986

ET Statement of 12 November 1983: “A Loss of  
Nerve and a Loss of Will”

— From *Bulletin of the External Tendency of the iSt*  
No. 2, January 1984

“Marxism and Bloodthirstiness”

— From *Workers Vanguard* No. 345, 6 January 1984

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