

The LFI Chooses Sectarianism

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).

SPARTACIST 

Supplement
10 October 2023

— Only Death and Defeat with Hamas —

A Revolutionary Road for Palestinian Liberation

Let's get two things straight. First, Palestinians face brutal national oppression and indiscriminate murder by the state of Israel—they have every right to defend themselves, including through force. Second, the targeted murder of Israeli civilians by Hamas and its allies is a despicable crime which is totally counterproductive for Palestinian liberation. With Gaza now facing starvation and mass murder at the hands of the Israel

confrontation under these conditions will bring defeat and untold death to the Palestinian people. There can be no victory without breaking the link between the Jewish working people and their rulers, and this cannot be done without recognizing the democratic right of the Israeli Jewish people to live as a nation in Israel/Palestine. Islamists and Palestinian nationalists are always caught between either directing their fight against the entire Jewish population or leading to increasing collaboration with the Zionist state. Both

10 October 2023

icl-fi.org/english/esp/2023-10-10-palestine/

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 liv-

ing 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.

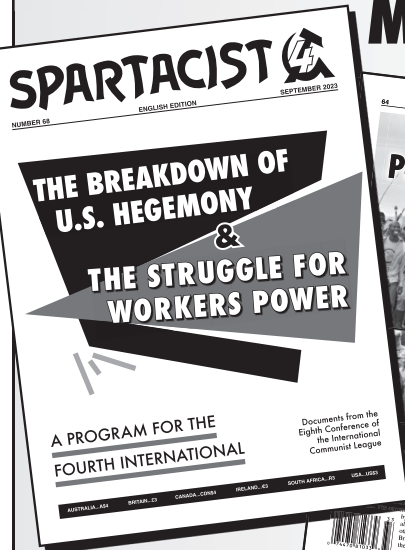

3) Quebec and Language Laws

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

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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?

* * *

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.

Letter to the IG/League for the Fourth International

2 September 2023

Dear comrades,

The recent international conference of the ICL has reoriented our party on fundamental questions (see link to *Spart-*

acist [<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 our 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 demagogy 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

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?¹ Does it include the flagrantly chauvinist campaign against North African comrades who opposed the ICL leaders' abandoning the commitment to publish an exile publication?² Or coming clean about the unspeakable witch hunt by the ICL in 1999 against the leaders of its Italian section?³

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.⁴

1 See our July 1996 pamphlet *From a Drift Toward Abstentionism to Desertion from the Class Struggle*.

2 See "'Chauvinist Hydra' Devours SL/ICL: Some History Ex-Trotskyists Would Like to Keep Hidden," *The Internationalist* No. 59, March-April 2020.

3 See *Back to Trotskyism!* (May 2016).

4 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.

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,⁵ "provocateur"-baiting,⁶ 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,⁷ 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.

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.⁸

5 See "ICL Refuses to Call for Defeat of U.S. Imperialism. 'Anti-American' Bait the Internationalist Group," *The Internationalist* No. 12, Fall 2001.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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 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

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 demagoguery 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

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

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

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.¹ 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

¹ See [The Internationalist](#) No. 5, April-May 1998.

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.

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

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