

From *International Correspondence*
No. 7, April-May, 1985

IC MAG SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

The Bolshevik League, “Left” in Form, Right in Essence

(The following is a polemic written by former members of the Bolshevik League, Jose deLeon and Karen Morrissy. They, along with others in the BL, have united with a recent position taken by the Editorial Committee of International Correspondence which resulted in the purge of BL from the E.C.I.C.)

The Founding of the BL and *Bolshevik Revelation*

In February, 1984, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik League (BL) issued a statement entitled, "In Response to the Dakar Declaration, 1983," published in *International Correspondence* #7.* This was BL's self-criticism of "Left"-wing Communist and Right Opportunist deviations in its history up to that point. It revealed that the BL since its founding had been dominated by semi-Trotskyite and "Left"-wing communist deviations. Attempts to rectify these errors had laid bare BL's Right Opportunist tendencies and Social-Democratic practices.

The "Response to Dakar" addressed the "left" and right deviations, with the intention of rectifying the BL. This present paper, however, aims to deepen the criticisms only to bury this

* The Dakar Declaration (See *IC Mag* #4 or *IC* #7) was a declaration resulting from a conference in Dakar, Senegal, issued by Bolshevik forces from Mali, Senegal and Canada. The Dakar Declaration represented a key turning point in the history of the young Bolshevik trend, demarcating and purging various semi-Trotskyite forces and political lines within this new trend of revolutionary communism. We urge everyone interested in pursuing a study of the enclosed criticisms to study this journal. As well, this present critique will avoid going into detailed ideological and political critiques of semi-Trotskyism because much of this has been presented in *IC* 7 and BL's "In Response to the Dakar Declaration"

bankrupt, essentially non-functional League, whose existence has become an obstacle to the development of the Bolshevism it claims to represent. Only in this way can an effective call be made to rally genuine internationalists in the U.S. to the central task of constructing a genuine Communist Party in the US.

From its very inception, the BL had failed to make an ideological and political break with centrism, i.e., a 'left' cover for a right line. Despite loud proclamations of reviving Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy in the face of thirty years of opportunist domination of the International Communist Movement, the two reports presented at the Founding Conference of the BL in November, 1979, were semi-Trotskyite and semi-Maoist declarations. The Political Report on the international situation was a caricature of the Leninist analysis of imperialism as the epoch of moribund capitalism. It contained a "left" wing version of the old revisionist disease of American Exceptionalism which has weakened the US Communist Movement historically.

While claiming to address the fundamental contradictions during the imperialist epoch, which J.V. Stalin analyzed in *The Foundations of Leninism* * BL's Political Report focuses only on the competition between the two imperialist blocs led by the US and Russia. Aside from this being barely a concealed version of the Maoist "two super-powers" theory which BL claimed to reject, it is given primary importance as an inter-imperialist rivalry which dominates all other contradictions in the world, e.g., between labor and capital and between imperialism and the colonies.

The BL reduced the world situation to a battle in which the US and Russian imperialists rival one another for world con-

* J.V. Stalin analyzes three fundamental contradictions which exist in the entire epoch of imperialism. namely: The *first contradiction* is the contradiction-between labour and capital.... The *second contradiction* is the contradiction among the various financial groups and imperialist powers in their struggle for sources of raw materials, for foreign territory ...The *third contradiction* is the contradiction between the handful of ruling, 'civilized' nations and the hundreds of millions of the colonial and dependent peoples of the world..." [*The Foundations of Leninism*, J.V. Stalin, F.L.P., p. 4-5]

quest. All other motions in the world are presented as a function of this inter-imperialist contradiction. All national liberation movements were considered bankrupt and existed only as pawns of one or another of the imperialist blocs. The struggle of the workers against the capitalists is in an ebb, under the firm control of the labor aristocracy and competing factions of the US bourgeoisie. Thus, contrary to the Leninist analysis of the intensification of class struggle as imperialist crisis worsens, there is no view of a leftward swing in the working class. Instead, the death throes of US imperialism are viewed as the product of a conspiratorial battle between two factions of the US bourgeoisie, the Trilateral Commission/Rockefeller co. vs. the "Sunbelt" capitalists. This is American Exceptionalism.

The Communist International described American Exceptionalism as follows: "a crisis of capitalism, but not of American capitalism; a swing of the masses to the left, but not in America; the necessity of accentuating the struggle against reformism, but not in the United States; a necessity for struggling against the right danger, but not in the American Communist Party. And yet, the present period, when the process of shaking the foundation of capitalist stabilization is going on, signifies for the United States that it is being ever more closely involved in the general crisis of capitalism... the American capital crisis will shake also the foundation of the power of American imperialism. Under these conditions the theory of 'exceptionalism' is a reflection of the pressure of American capitalism and reformism which are endeavoring to create among the mass of workers an impression of absolute firmness and 'exceptional' imperialist might of in spite of the accentuation of class contradictions. [*The Communist International in America*, "Brief Outline of the History of the Communist Party USA and the Struggle for Bolshevization", p. xi.]

This American exceptionalism reflected itself in the organizational sphere in the BL's second Founding Report on Party Building and Organizational Tasks. Ignoring Lenin's plan to lay the skeleton for the Party through the publication and distribution of a political newspaper (the famous "Iskra" Plan), the BL essentially repeated the "Party-building" plan used by the various US Maoists of the 70's. Its essential feature is an embryonic Par-

ty organization which aims to grow into the Communist Party.

While secretly presenting this continuity with the Maoist movement, the BL announced a rejection of Mao and Hoxha and a return to the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. The first step in this return to orthodoxy was supposedly the BL's pompous declaration that it was being founded as the leading "democratic-centralist". "Leninist-Stalinist" organization which was to break with all opportunism and follow the *Iskra* principles of Lenin in building a Bolshevik Party. Ironically enough, it was this very form of pre-Party organization that obstructed BL cadres from even understanding those *Iskra* principles," let alone implementing them around the publication of *Bolshevik Revolution*. Instead of an ideologically solid core of united and committed Marxist-Leninists working together around a press that would serve as a collective propagandist, agitator, and organizer, a jumble of people constituted themselves as a new sect by means of a two-day conference.

BL was formed from the merging of two "ex"-Maoist circles, both isolated from the working-class movement – the U.S. Leninist Core and Demarcation – and some of their contacts. Their history in the US Left ranged from the Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, the Revolutionary Workers League, the Workers' Congress, Harper's Ferry, the Danville Collective, etc., to various anti-imperialist end student groups. All present at the Founding Conference were coopted as members of the new BL, calling themselves "Bolsheviks" and "Stalinists". Yet their unity was merely that they were forces who were not hostile to the very terms "Bolshevism" and "Stalinism" and rallied to demarcate from Mao's Theory of Three Worlds" and Hoxha's centrist stance and opportunist falsification of contemporary communism. Many had never done more than peripheral study of Lenin and Stalin's writings, and had little or no knowledge of each other through practice. Many continued to have Maoist, Trotskyite, revisionist, and Social-Democratic views that they did not recognize as contradictory to Bolshevism. Thus, a "Bolshevik" organization was brought into being without real ideological unity on Leninism – i.e. *without Bolshevism*.

This occurred through the maneuvers of certain opportunists

(long since purged from the ranks), who hastened to formalize an organization with themselves in positions of leadership in order to further their own careerist goals. Other honest forces went along with this out of an impetuous desire to consolidate the pro-Bolshevik forces as well as an inability to break with the pattern of years of Maoist pre-Party organizations. The result was yet another "pre-Party" circle with another "Marxist-Leninist" publication incapable of penetrating the working class.

This publication, *Bolshevik Revolution*, not only suffered from dogmatism and phrase-mongering journalism, but also developed the semi-Trotskyite political lines laid out at the Founding Conference. It completely liquidated the struggle for self-determination of the Black Nation and presented a semi-Trotskyite analysis on the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. This consisted of categorizing the heroic Nationalist Movement of Puerto Rico of the 1930's-1950's as social-fascist, and dismissing the present Puerto Rican Independence Movement as a contemptible petty bourgeois effort for semi-colonialism.

A low level of ideological and political development existed. This contributed to an atmosphere of slavishness and conciliation to opportunism. While there was much fanfare about building a network for the *Iskra* press, amateurishness in organizational matters and sectarianism toward the masses rendered distribution of *BR* almost nil. This state of affairs was encouraged by the careerist elements among the leadership, since it gave them more opportunity to exploit the organization for their own ends.

It was not until these opportunists were purged that their social-fascist history in the "Revolutionary 'Wing'" of Maoism was unveiled. In light of this, there was some examination of the more blatant forms of the "Wing's" ultra-leftist influence on BL. However, most of this was assumed to be purged with the opportunist individuals. Despite a plan to produce a separate theoretical journal to make the regular press more accessible to workers, the essence of the semi-Trotskyite foundations of BL was not challenged.

In view of the gross opportunism of the purged leaders, the remaining cadres should have scrutinized the whole political ba-

sis of the founding of BL. Instead, elation over the exit of "the" opportunists blinded people to the remaining opportunist line and form of organization. Thus semi-Trotskyism was not understood or routed out.

The Founding of *Workers Tribune*, yet semi-Trotskyism persists

Although *Workers Tribune* was less rhetorical than *BR*, the first 9 issues (Feb '81-June '82) carried on the errors of the Founding Documents. Of course, due to the lack of ideological and political unity in the organization, some articles put forth better positions than others. However, the main political current continued in the path of semi-Trotskyism.*

WT continued to project a simplistic and metaphysical analysis of the US bourgeoisie as two warring factions. Thus, the role of the working class in destroying the bourgeoisie was minimized; the bourgeois factions will hopefully destroy each other via conspiracies. On the other hand, the proletariat is portrayed as a stagnant class, virtually puppets under the thumb of the labor aristocrats. *WT* was more concerned with the activity of the remnants of the petty bourgeois Maoist movement than with the leftward swing of the workers movement.

The women's movement was also conspicuously absent from consideration. Women's issues were rarely addressed. The struggle for ERA was addressed only once in all this time and dismissed in only 2 sentences. In view of the obvious lack of concern for women's equality, it is no surprise that the position expressed was a condemnation of ERA. This came from the "leftist" view that the bourgeoisie will only use an ERA to rob women of existing protective legislation. This is a clear example of the way "leftism" serves as a cover for tacit support for the male supremacist denial of constitutional equal rights for wom-

* Semi-Trotskyism is a description of a "left" wing communist deviation which, while it openly rejects Leon Trotsky's petty-bourgeois leftist theories and his counter-revolutionary heritage, continues to advocate many of Trotsky's petty-bourgeois "leftist" conceptions of "revolution". Like Trotskyism, semi-Trotskyism's social basis is petty-bourgeois.

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On the national-colonial question, BL downplayed the heroic national liberation struggles. Despite a constant phrasemongering for support of a "worker and peasant revolution" led by a needed "Bolshevik Party", the peasant question and the revolution in colonies and semi-colonies were actually denied their importance in the anti-imperialist fight. The vacillating nature of the national bourgeoisie in the colonial struggles was ignored, falling into the Trotskyite deviation of skipping over necessary phases of struggle in the democratic revolution.

In practice, this line forced the BL into national chauvinist activity which isolated it from progressive anti-imperialist forces. A BL leaflet entitled "El Salvador, Revolution for Sale" was rejected by many at a "US Out of El Salvador" rally. This national chauvinist deviation displayed a great fanfare of "left" phrases to disguise the fact that the main blow was being launched at the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations rather than at imperialism and national chauvinism.

In the Black and Puerto Rican movements in the US, the BL displayed such an ultra-left line and tactics. BL's participation in the founding conventions of the National Black United Front and the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights consisted primarily of attacks on the leadership and participants for not being proletarian. Yet BL did nothing itself to mobilize Black and Latin proletarians to attend these conventions! On the contrary, even the BL cadres who attended were unprepared to participate. BL's ultra-leftism in the National movements not only effectively isolated its cadres, but alienated a number of progressive Blacks and Latins from Bolshevism. Instead of seeing Communists as vanguard fighters against white supremacy, members of NBUF and NCPRR saw BL operating as a sect whose main activity was intellectual criticism of attempts to organize the national movements.

Of course, there were BL cadres who were able to win respect and influence. But these individuals found that often their activity was in contradiction with the national chauvinist positions in *WT*. Due to their lack of ideological development and the

BL's anarchistic methods of organization, contradictions in line were not posed clearly. Often those cadres most involved in the practical work were those who lacked academic skills and felt insecure in their ability to grasp and apply M-L theory. For obvious reasons, these were for the most part the proletarian, oppressed rationality and women members. As a result, the leadership was ideologically led by a "leftist" intellectual anarchist. The ideological weakness of the present communist movement worldwide, the rotten legacy of American Exceptionalism, as well as a general passivity and intellectual laziness on the part of cadres, provided a liberal context where differences with the line of *WT* (or differences within the pages of *WT* itself) could go unrecognized.

However, to the benefit of the revolutionary fighters in the BL, the young Bolshevik trend had been developing a body-of theoretical work on the current influence of semi-Trotskyism and its connection to Maoism. "The Historical Convergence of Maoism and Trotskyism" and "The Political Meaning of the Assassination of Stalin" (written by *Lines of Demarcation* of Canada) laid a basis for understanding these forms of opportunism. In the summer of 1981, there appeared the first critique by BL of semi-Trotskyites, "On the Origins and Character of WWII, A Caricature of Leninism and semi-Trotskyism". This polemic against other semi-Trotskyites in the US and elsewhere, actually led to the ideological strengthening of various comrades in the BL. It set the stage for realizing that the problem of semi-Trotskyism was not only outside the BL, but also within the BL.

But it took another painful year before a definitive struggle on line took place. This erupted over a Political Report presented to the BL in January, '82 which contained a number of anti-proletarian and national chauvinist errors. This was combined with a Social-Democratic approach to organization.

Throughout 1982 an exposure of the petty bourgeois character of intellectual anarchism encouraged proletarian cadres to become active in struggling for a correct line and deepening ties with the workers and national movements. By September, '82, the leftward swing of the US working class was acknowledged and the necessity for work at the factories and in the trade unions

encouraged, in the national movements here and the national liberation struggles elsewhere, there was a recognition that the petty bourgeoisie and even national bourgeoisie in the oppressed nations! movements could play a progressive role in the anti-imperialist struggle and should not be condemned out of hand. The BU's series of articles on the heroic Palestinian peoples' fight for their existence as a nation put to shame BL's past semi-Trotskyite failure to support the PLO. Views existed, especially by the intellectual anarchist, which called upon the Bolshevik trend to examine the legitimacy of the illegal and racist Zionist occupation of Palestine. As a result, the importance of the peasant question and the national liberation struggle were taken up in *International Correspondence* and the semi-Trotskyite and national chauvinist lines on these questions began to be criticized.

At the same time that these deviations in line were brought out, social-democratic errors in organization were also criticized. That anarchistic methods of work, looseness, and lack of discipline sprang from social-democratic traditions in the Communist Movement was a vital lesson to learn. But in the course of criticizing the social-democratic errors in organization, the BL unfortunately ignored that the entire concept of the "pre-Party" organization is rooted in sectarianism. ‘

Failure to make a dialectical analysis of the organizational problems with the ideological and political deviations resulted in no real move forward. In fact, the “solution” to BL's organizational problems was mistakenly conceived as the need to strengthen the "pre-Party apparatus" by consolidating a democratic centralist, party-type structure. Although the term "*Iskra* plan" was used, the *Iskra* principles were not. The proposed plan of rectification was to build an organization to put out the press rather than vice versa. The BL central committee was thus doomed to fruitless effort to devise grandiose formal structures which would magically transform an ideologically and politically diverse group of people into a truly "Bolshevik League".

In the Struggle Against “Leftism”, Right Opportunism is Revealed

“Left” in form, right in essence! This aptly categorizes BL as

the struggle against semi-Trotskyism intensified. Strip away the "leftist" mask and right opportunism stands revealed. The call to end BL's "left"-sectarian isolation from the workers' movement by going back to the trade unions, fighting for workers' democracy, and addressing the questions raised by strikes and the daily shop floor struggle, met with resistance from the Right. In opposition to the Marxist premise that the industrial proletariat is the vanguard emerged shades of various bourgeois "new working class" theories which opposed going lower and deeper into the proletariat. Economism and cadres' lack of political work at the workplaces and in the unions was often blamed on the "apathy" and "lack of militancy" of the workers themselves. The shades of "new working class" theories raised that the industrial sector represented mainly white workers who were privileged and bribed, hence, putting into question the principle that the industrial workers constitute the vanguard of the working class. Those petty bourgeois cadres who had been the most "Bolshevik" of "Bolsheviks" when they thought "Bolshevism" meant arm chair theory, now resisted organizational discipline, refused work, sabotaged tasks, or resigned, in a liquidationist retreat to an individualist, comfortable lifestyle.

While the publication of *Liberation for the Black Nation* represented a step forward in rectifying the neglect of the Black National question in the US, various problems on this question persisted. The persistence of white chauvinism is revealed in the BL's and WT's lack of a policy of addressing the concrete tasks of white communists in the workers' movement towards the problems of white supremacy and racism. Rather than battle the racism and white supremacy which exists in the working-class movement, most of the white cadres, really did very little work on this topic, except to tail the activities of oppressed nationality activists. Very little agitational work, on a consistent basis, was directed against racism and white supremacy. Very little distribution of *Liberation for the Black Nation* was done by the white cadres among white workers. Internally, there existed a belittlement of the leading role of certain Black cadres who displayed great leadership ability. For a C.C. which had historically been majority white (except for the year of 1984- 85), very little, was

done to determine a correct line and policy of white communists in the struggle against racism and white supremacy and in active support for Black liberation.

Other deviations which persisted were the reducing of the territorial questions of the Black Nation to an agrarian question of Black Belt counties and the failure to consistently address the Black question in the US as part of the oppression of the Black race world-wide. As well, the "leftist" deviation towards the Black petty bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie continued. However, with the belated position of critical support for Harold Washington and the critical support for the FDR- FMLN and the role of Cayetano Carpio in El Salvador in *WT*, the struggle against semi-Trotskyism on the national question resulted in the purge of the leading intellectual anarchist in the BL. As well, certain cadres guilty of social-democratic and rightist deviations resigned, seeking a liquidationist solution to past "leftist" practices.

The struggles on the Woman Question revealed a similar pattern. For years BL had ignored the women's movement through its ultra-left position that feminism, rather than male chauvinism, should be the main target of Marxist-Leninist attack. As the errors of this "left" line were combatted, male chauvinism within the group became painfully evident. This was most obvious in BL's lack of addressing the positive struggles of working-class women in *WT*. For an organization that was majority women, very little was done in interjecting Bolshevik politics in the movements of women workers. Within the BL, male chauvinism was also revealed in male cadres' failure to study or distribute the material presented on the woman question, to fight for women's equality in the workplace or other spheres of activity and to come to the assistance of female cadres in such tasks as household responsibilities and upbringing children. The various problems that compose women's oppression, especially for single parents, were at play in the BL, lending to the low ideological development of women cadres. Conciliation to this, as well as the severe problems of spontaneity, hampered work among women. The pamphlet, *The Crisis, A War Against Women*, did not get published until a most a year after the articles were writ-

ten, despite a paper commitment to its urgency. Otter international tasks around women were never done at all.

Otter theoretical tasks, such as the development of a correct line on the Chicano National question, the Native National Question, and the Puerto Rican national and colonial question, were never completed because of the disruptions caused by opportunism internally. As the struggle against semi-Trotskyism intensified, right opportunism and the worship of spontaneity grew.

Internationalist responsibilities of the BL were not upheld as a result of the problems of opportunism. Tasks of distribution and expansion of literature were sabotaged or very poorly conducted. The commitment to publish a consistent Spanish publication, *Tribune Obrera* and a French publication, *Tribune Ouvriere* were not followed through. International campaigns of the trend, such as the struggle to free the arrested comrades in Senegal or to seek more support for the Kimberly 5 of South Africa, were not carried into the so-called "mass work".

Unfortunately, many cadres who did get involved with practical work in the workers', national, or women's movements, often left their Bolshevik politics behind. Swept along by the spontaneous movement, they ran behind the activity of the day-to-day struggle. That *WT* was not a useful vehicle for training leaders from the mass movements became an excuse for abandoning the press rather than changing it. While those cadres who were seriously conducting mass work busied themselves in building rank and file caucuses or mass organizations, the struggle to develop a real *Iskra* type political newspaper of the working class was liquidated. The already low distribution of *WT* began to decrease. The problem of what to do with the BL, what to do with *WT*, and how to correctly implement the *Iskra* principles applied to the conditions in the US were raised, but were not answered. The "key link" to party building, according to Lenin's *What Is To Be Done*, was being dropped while BL busied itself organizing the mass movement. As BL struggled against the academic approach toward Marxism-Leninism, the belittlement of theory and the worship of spontaneity – the ideological roots of all opportunism – took reign at the level of the C.C. and throughout the BL. In other words as BL dropped off the mask of "Leftism" it found a

Menshevik circle of people with a limited degree of discipline.

The Dakar Declaration and Problems of internationalism

Many of the problems and errors of the BL were not unique. Comrades in other countries had also been forced to deal with a Maoist history, with semi-Trotskyite errors in line with petty bourgeois intellectual anarchists, etc.

The genuine Internationalists developed in the struggle against this opportunism. Starting from the premise that there *is* a revolutionary theory {Leninism) synthesized in the Programme of the VI Congress of the Communist International, they took up the task of applying that theory in practice to today's conditions. This process was summed up in the Dakar Declaration of 1983, and their revolutionary activity has continued to develop since then.

The BL/WT, however, did not remain in step with the overall ideological and political development of the trend. By the time of the Dakar Declaration, BL/WT's most able cadres were so preoccupied with running around in the mass movement that we belittled the significance of the Dakar Declaration. This indifference to the development of the trend revealed that BL/WT was afflicted by the worship of spontaneity and a lack of Proletarian Internationalism to an alarming degree. The lack of discipline and belittling of theory had infected the whole atmosphere of the group with opportunism in the succeeding period politically.

Thus, even the belated BL "Response to Dakar," which contained a correct exposure of BL's past semi-Trotskyite views of imperialism, still did not go far enough. Despite severe criticism of BL's errors on the national-colonial question, it did not examine these in the context of their affinity with the semi-Trotskyite views of La Voie Ouvriere (Ivory Coast), En Avant (Togo), and Union de Lutte Communiste (Upper Volta), who had been purged from the trend. Worse still, the BL did not carry out an uncompromising struggle against the remnants of these views among its cadres.

While comrades in Senegal, Mali, and Canada made strides

in divesting themselves of Maoist pre-Party organizational baggage and moved towards developing an *Iskra*-type path of struggle, the BL failed to move in step with the rest of this growing trend. The changes made by BL to correspond to changes made by the trend were purely mechanical; they did not reflect a real development in understanding and applying the *Iskra* principle to the real world.

Whereas other comrades broke from the framework of the pre-Party sect, the BL merely dropped its organizational name. Calling itself by the title of the press, *WT*, while perhaps less presumptuous, did nothing to change its erroneous conception of itself as a pre-Party formation. Seeing newspapers rather than magazines produced elsewhere in the trend, BL/*WT* concerned itself with formal discussions of newspaper vs magazine format. While the issue of a newspaper was raised in the C.C., the resolution of this problem was shelved, and postponed for the future. Far from moving toward the *Iskra* concept of training and organizing around the press, less and less of BL/*WT*'s activity was concerned with producing and distributing its publication. Although *WT* appeared more regularly and contained more coverage of the workers' movement, this was due more and more to individual effort. Most of the cadres did not use *WT* in their work, nor did they contribute to it.

Since the politics of the Dakar statement and BL Response had never been assimilated by BL/*WT* cadre, left-sectarianism on the Black national question remained an obstacle to developing a correct line on Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition in the US Presidential elections. Even after a political decision had been made to give Jackson critical support the first written propaganda vacillated on this and gave no clear direction. A popular leaflet with a good political exposure could have provided clarity and momentum to the leftward swing of certain sectors of the working class and oppressed nationalities who supported a move for Jackson to run outside the framework of the Democratic Party. But in fact, the final *WT* leaflet, while containing correct positions, was too little too late.

Instead of penetrating the Labor for Jackson Coalition and the oppressed nationality organizations with the *WT* position on

Jackson, the propaganda was hardly utilized. The correct application of the *Iskra* principles would have meant active distribution of the press to train and rally the progressive activists in the campaign. Collaborators and distributors could have been organized for doing further articles on the campaign and connecting issues such as racism, imperialist war preparations, cutbacks in social programs, unemployment etc. White strikers-who supported Jackson in Homestead, Pa. and were beginning to see the connections between the capitalist attack on labor and Black oppression could have been educated more to the nature of imperialism. Blacks who opposed capitulation to the Democratic Party could have used the press to clarify and fight for their position. The resources and skills necessary for doing this existed in BL/WT. The revolutionary vision, ideological unity and organizational discipline did not.

When *WT* finally appeared as a monthly publication in Sept. 84, it contained rightist deviations on the topic of the struggle for a Labor Party in the US. In its task to unmask the liberal imperialist politics of the Democratic Party, *WT* overexaggerated the role that the Labor Party could play in preventing an imperialist war and in combating the capitalist offensive. As well, *WT* failed to address its readership on the relationship of the struggle for a Labor Party and the struggle for a Communist Party, the political vanguard of the working class. J.V. Stalin long ago pointed out: "The bourgeoisie in America have two parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, but the American workers have no mass political party of their own. Do not the comrades think that the absence of such a mass workers' party, even one like that in Britain (the Labor Party), weakens the working class in its political fight against the capitalists?" [SW 10: 133-4] While this may be so today also, the way that *WT* addressed this question was in a rightist fashion, again revealing the problems of tailing the spontaneity of the growing leftward swing in labor, and the various "solutions" that many social-democratic and "leftist" forces advance, without a real sober analysis of the immediate tasks of communists in the labor movement today.

Even with a monthly *WT*, with more coverage of labor and agitational articles, the BL failed to utilize and organize around

the press. Thus, despite the efforts of some genuine Internationalists in its ranks, BL/WT exposed itself as a bankrupt formation instead of a vehicle for spearheading a vanguard Party for socialist revolution in the US. BL/WT objectively became an obstacle to the spread of Bolshevism. But to further understand the roots of BL/WT's opportunism, we must also examine the roots of the BL in the Maoist movement of the '70's.

The Maoist Party Building Spree, A Heritage We Should All Renounce

In the 1960's and early '70's there existed a mass revolution-ary upheaval in the Black liberation movement and the move-ments of other oppressed nationalities (Chicano, Puerto Rican, etc.). These were interconnected in the anti-Vietnam War Movement, the student rebellions, and the women's movement. Yet a true revolutionary situation did not exist in the US, On the contrary, from the late '50's to the '60s the workers' movement had been at an ebb, politically acquiescent to the AFL-CIO's opportunist policy of tailing the Democratic Party. This was re-reflective of the partial stabilization of capitalism during this peri-od, which economically enabled the US bourgeoisie to buffer the class contradictions with the proletariat.

With the International Communist Movement dominated by the Chinese Communist Party, declaring support for armed struggle in the "third world" in demarcation from the pacifist, "detente" policy of Russian revisionism, the Maoist influence found fertile soil in the revolutionary upsurge of the oppressed nationalities and anti-war student movements of the '60's and early '70's. The upsurge of the '60's entered into an ebb in the early '70's as a combined result of open police terror and reac-tion, the end of the Vietnam War, reformist concessions on the part of the US government, and police infiltration activities in the mass revolutionary formations. The early '70's gave rise to the formation of numerous Maoist formations: the Communist League, October League, Revolutionary Union, I Wor Kuen, Black Workers Congress, Puerto Rican Revolutionary Workers Organization, August Twenty-Ninth Movement, Central Organi-zation of US Marxist-Leninist Organizations, Workers View-

point, the Revolutionary Workers League, El Comit -MINP, Congress of African Peoples, Revolutionary Communist League, numerous split-offs of all these, and other circles like Harper's Ferry, Prairie Fire, Sojourner Truth, etc. (The upsurge also gave rise to many new splits and formations of Trotskyite grouplets. However, this analysis concentrates on the particular Maoist movement which claimed to be "Marxist-Leninist").

Many of these Maoist formations grew by cannibalizing previously existing mass organizations. The Maoist leaders, with their petty bourgeois conceptions that the US Socialist Revolution was right around the corner, and their disrespect for the masses, moved in on many of the mass organizations. Some members joined the Maoists, but many left in disgust. Objectively, the Maoist "revolutionaries" assisted the state in dismantling many progressive groups with potential broad support. Militant mass organizations, which arose out of the activity of the 60's, were crushed.

The Maoists all called for the formation of a multinational Communist Party to lead the working class in the "impending revolution." Each had a different "correct line" and published a paper and/or journal. All had the illusion that the Communist Party would be built by them in a matter of years. This movement produced the: Communist Labor Party, Revolutionary Communist Party, Communist Party (M-L), Communist Party, USA (M-L), Communist; Workers Party, and Marxist-Leninist Party USA.

Today, of all the pre-Party "democratic centralist" formations which originated from the Maoist movement, the only ones remaining are: the punk rock RCP, the semi-Trotskyite MLPUSA, the pro-Russia ("critical support") CLP and Line of March, the pro-Albanian *Workers' Herald* circle, and the pro-China League of Revolutionary Struggle.

Putting aside the ideological and political differences (which often degenerated into sectarian and social-fascist struggles), all these groups, including BL, had a similar erroneous conception of building a vanguard Communist Party of the US working class. All of these advanced an American Exceptionalist analysis of US imperialism, in either a right or 'left' version. Most of

these originally exaggerated the revolutionary crisis in America and saw "socialist revolution" around the corner. '

All the Maoist and "ex"-Maoist groupings had the same plan for building the Party. They each established a cadre organization with a "democratic centralist" structure and a press. This was the vanguard Party in embryo, a "pre-Party" formation. By their very nature, such organizations were sectarian. Despite the term "Party," they were bound to "circle spirit" by glorifying their own small circle as some sort of mini-Party. Most eventually proclaimed themselves the "Communist Party" before they folded. Most were dominated by petty bourgeois intellectuals and lacked a base in the working class, yet saw themselves a potential workers' Party.

The polemics and debates which rocked the entire Maoist movement were often conducted on an unprincipled and sectarian basis. But the debates were never really carried out by workers and in the working-class movement, for the simple reason that the Maoists were unable to develop a base in the working class. Those workers interested in communist ideas who attended the debates, usually left disgusted by the childish sectarianism.

The Maoist formula to Party-building was generally: develop political line, unite Marxist-Leninists, and win the advanced to communism. All the groupings, including those who renounced Mao, (e.g., BL) claimed to be pursuing the "correct path". Some measured their success at Party building by the numerical success of their recruitment, the growth of their narrow local work and their ability to merge with other sects. The "left" wing Maoists were so sectarian that they did not even care if they had just a handful of "cadres". They just declared themselves "Parties" based on the purity of their "correct line". Never did the working class actually recognize any of these vanguards as speaking for their interests. Unlike the CPUSA (even the present revisionist one) these sects played very little role in leading strikes or the trade union movement. Workers repulsed their groups and their propaganda out of disgust with their petty bourgeois arrogance and infantile tactics. Unfortunately, their brief encounters of the worst kind with the working class exacerbated already existing anti-communist ideas and distrust.

Rather than blaming their own political errors for their failures, the Maoists blamed the "objective" conditions and the workers. With the collapse of one "Party-building" project after another, exaggeration of the power of US imperialism and its control over the labor and national movements developed. This was accompanied by an underestimation of the leftward swing in the workers and mass movements. **The Maoist "fad" of "Party-building" has given way to demoralization, to liquidationism and to open Social-Democracy.** The struggle to lay the foundations for a true vanguard Party of the working class has been abandoned by many of those former "leaders". The deviations of the BL are rooted in this history. The BL is only a remnant of the "left" wing of this petty-bourgeois Maoist movement. While some have already sought a liquidationist solution to the past opportunist practices, the present vacuum and lack of revolutionary leadership must be filled by something not doomed to failure, a method that works, for example, the *Iskra* plan.

The Iskra Path of Lenin Built the Skeleton of the Bolshevik Party

While many in the US professed to adhere to Lenin's *What is to be Done?*, none every really grasped **the Leninist principle of Party building** applied to the concrete conditions of the country. There existed either complete neglect of the Leninist principles, or a dogmatic and a caricatured approach towards Party-building. The following is only a brief picture of the objective and subjective factors that allowed for the successes of Lenin's *Iskra* plan.

The Russian working class and oppressed masses had been in revolutionary upheaval for several decades. There existed in Russia a revolutionary situation in 1879-1880. Revolutionary theories and movements were widespread. The 1880's-90's produced a mass spontaneous workers' movement which was openly gravitating towards socialist ideals. Russia was already becoming the weakest link in the imperialist chain. The formation of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party in 1898 was only the logical outgrowth of the spontaneous and revolutionary workers movement. However, the RSDLP proved to be insuffi-

cient to lead the workers movement to overthrow the Tsarist regime and seize political power.

Various opportunist trends, (economism, legal Marxism, Narodism, terrorism, and Bundism) all contended with each other in the struggles of the workers and masses. The most advanced-workers who were coming forward from the movement realized that such a loose, amateurish, and legalistic RSDLP, riddled with factions, various opportunist currents, etc. was incapable of being the vanguard workers' Party that was needed to smash Tsarism.

In front of this critical situation, Lenin advanced a plan first outlined in his article *Where to Begin?* and later in *What is to be Done?*. This plan lays out what we call the *Iskra* path. Lenin identified the burning questions confronting the Communist AND workers movement. He responded to the programmatic questions that divided the revolutionary workers movement. He sought the path of creating an all-Russian working class, political newspaper put together by an editorial board of the most ideologically, politically and organizationally developed leaders of the Russian social-democratic labor movement. It was this editorial board of *Iskra*, not a "pre-party, democratic centralist" formation, which addressed the theoretical and practical problems of the revolutionary workers movement. The newspaper became a collective propagandist, agitator and organizer. It rallied the most advanced workers to the path of struggling for a vanguard workers Party. As a result of the activities of Lenin's *Iskra* plan, he was able to draw lines of demarcation with the opportunist trends, not in the abstract, but inside the workers' movement. Lenin brought the polemics into the workers movement. And due to the correctness of Lenin's political views, he was able to rally the majority of the advanced workers to follow his plan for constructing a vanguard workers Party. The term Bolshevik means majority. At the second Congress of the RSDLP, Lenin was able to secure the majority of the workers' and delegates' votes.

Lenin succeeded in building the skeleton of the Party precisely because of the ideological, political and organizational leadership he was able to provide all over Russia via the *Iskra* newspaper and plan. Workers rallied to the Bolshevik Party be-

cause through experience they saw the bankruptcy of the loose, Menshevik RSDLP. Lenin realized that in order to build a vanguard Workers' Party, it was not enough to merge all the Marxist sects and circles together in a conference. Lenin's Bolshevik Party was the advanced detachment, the actual *leader* of the revolutionary workers' movement. And it was precisely due to this Bolshevik Party that the October Revolution succeeded in smashing power in Russia.

The situation in the US in the past three decades, however, has been much different. The working class in the US has not undergone in the last 25 years a revolutionary upheaval. Quite the contrary. It has been in an ebb. The partial stabilization of world capitalism of the '60's, along with the crisis in the International Communist Movement, have been principal factors that have prevented the development of a Revolutionary Workers' Movement.

The contemporary working class has not produced a "Party building movement". In fact, it is only in recent years that a leftward swing is beginning in the workers' movement. The Labor for Jackson movement is a reflection of this. Presently, workers are only beginning to question their past loyalty to the Democratic Party. Some are beginning to examine the possibilities of a Labor Party. But very few have actually moved towards concluding through experience that what is needed is a "Bolshevik Party". While the revisionist CPUSA, the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party, and the Social-democrats in the US were busy capitulating to the pressures of American capitalism, pursuing a reformist path of struggle, the upheavals in the oppressed nationality and student movement gave rise to a "party building" movement. But as stated previously **this movement existed in petty-bourgeois sectors, ideologically led by amateurish, eclectic Maoist and Trotskyite sects.**

But today, there are the seeds of a growing leftward swing in the working class and the oppressed nationality movement. Witness the rise of militant strikes and an opposition movement in a growing number of unions against the concessions drive by the capitalists. Witness the creation of various attempts to form national organizations of the unemployed. Witness the massive

Labor Solidarity Day, the anti-war, and Civil Rights demonstrations. In the movement of oppressed nationalities, the Black movement is once again taking the lead in the struggle against national and racist oppression. Various Black rebellions have already occurred. The formation of mass organizations like the National Black United Front and National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, as well as mass struggles for equal rights and political empowerment, are growing. A working women's movement fighting for pay equity and women's rights has been surging forward. The solidarity movements with South Africa, Central America, are growing. There has developed a farmers' movement. The Rainbow Coalition of 1984 was a reflection of this phenomena. It also revealed the impotency of the Left, unable to assume the leadership of this process. Instead, much of the awakening movement remains under the hegemony of reformism. In short, while the deepening general crisis of imperialism is already giving rise to a leftward swing in the mass movements, there is no conscious vanguard to lead it.

Great prospects exist for the potential merger of Revolutionary Communism with the rising workers' and mass movements. But where do we begin? What is to be done? We cannot continue in the path and the conceptions that were prevalent in the '60's. Likewise, we cannot dogmatically attempt to transplant the experiences of Lenin in his struggle to form the Bolshevik Party.

However, the principles outlined in the *Iskra* plan can indeed be followed. Revolutionary Communists today must identify what are the burning questions which affect the practical development of a socialist movement in the US. Such issues as the right to self-determination of the oppressed Nations within the borders of US imperialism (the Black, Chicano, Native American Nations, etc.), the development of a program and strategy to unify the movement in its onslaught against capital, the issue of the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and its devastating effect on the World Communist and Revolutionary Movements; etc., etc.

But while indeed there are tremendous theoretical tasks, there are also political and practical tasks which must be accomplished in order to ensure that Revolutionary Communism moves

toward the head, and not stay at the rear of the movement. Revolutionary Communists must identify what is the *key link*, the best plan to rally and concentrate a core of revolutionaries in order to assist the education and organization of the working-class struggle.

Contrary to Maoist and Trotskyite sectarian traditions, which sought the formation of "pre-parties", mergers, and pompous self-proclaimed "vanguards", an *independent, revolutionary, political newspaper of the working class* can indeed be the *key link* necessary to rally and bring together the most advanced representatives of the rising workers' and mass movement. There are numerous activists involved in local work. There is a rise of local newspapers and bulletins in the nascent workers movement. There are many today in labor gravitating towards socialist ideals. But there does not exist a real nationwide newspaper which would rally an organization of professional revolutionaries which has the support of this rising movement. On the contrary, there are national "parties" and "pre-parties" which have either failed to penetrate the ranks of labor, or are guilty of leading it astray.

Socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously from within the movement. It develops from without, e.g., via the use of a political newspaper which would conduct an organized, comprehensive political exposure of American capitalism on a regular basis, aspiring to eventually be weekly and even daily. Today there is a vacuum in the sphere of a regular political newspaper of and for the working class, that is not in the control of a self-proclaimed "vanguard", or in the hands of the sell-out labor aristocracy. There do exist several monthly progressive labor publications which attempt to address on a nationwide scale the economic struggles of the working class. But most of these suffer from national chauvinism and economism. They fail to address the right to self-determination of the Black and Chicanos Nations, and shy away from the arena of the political struggles that the working class must pursue.

A newspaper which would regularly expose the bourgeoisie "red-handed" in their crimes, could become a source of information and enthusiasm to the workers' movement. Such a paper would address not only the economic battles of the working

class, but also political struggle of workers. Such a paper must have an *internationalist* perspective, propagating the clarion call for workers of the world to unite. It would have to openly support the struggles for equality and self-determination, not only of the colonies and semi-colonies, but of the oppressed Black, Chicano and Native nations within the US. Such a paper could not be like the *Guardian* newspaper, a paper whose main audience is the petty-bourgeois left. Instead, the paper that must be developed must be geared to the working class, seeking its education and organization. It must aspire to develop its network of agents in the workers' movement. It would seek to answer the problems confronting the working-class movement, to train the new generation of working-class leaders that are coming forward in the battles against racism, concession, etc. It would seek to develop political leaders of the working class by training them to respond to the burning questions of today. The paper could not be a sectarian paper, but a paper which would lead to the clarification of the differences that do exist in the Communist Movement. The paper must attempt to draw lines of demarcation with the various trends of Socialism, with the object of providing the working class with the needed resources to be able to conclude not only with whom to go, but *where* to go.

Such a paper would seek collaborators from all the various sectors of the movement. It would require the support and efforts of writers, collaborators, organizers, agitators, distributors, etc. It could indeed create a nationwide network of agents whose goals would be to eventually lay the foundation for a future workers' Party. But such a *Party* must be the product of a revolutionary workers movement, with a proven staff of working-class leaders and revolutionary organizers with a grasp of Marxist-Leninist theory as well as ties to the working class and mass movements. If we are ever to realize a new and real revolutionary Party of the working class in the US, then the application of the *Iskra* principles, applied to *our conditions today* can be the key link at this juncture to begin to merge revolutionary communism with the rising workers' movement. The press, if led by a strong core of revolutionary communists, and not arm-chair revolutionaries, windbags and intellectuals, can become a propagandist, agitator

and collective organizer.

This type of work has not been attempted in the US. What has prevailed instead have been various "get-rich-quick-schemes" of various petty-bourgeois "condescending saviors", including the Bolshevik League.

Conclusion

While the way to proceed needs to be charted in more detail, what is immediately clear is the need to break from the past. The action to split from BL and call for its liquidation is belated. It should have occurred long ago – at least as early as last February, '84, when the C.C.'s "Response to the Dakar Declaration" revealed how the BL had been, since its inception, guilty of semi-Trotskyism and Right Opportunist flip-flops. Unfortunately, this did not happen, principally because of the failure to break completely with the Maoist traditions of "pre-party" organization and endless attempts at rectification, coupled with economist tailing of the spontaneous mass movement. The ECIC polemic assisted the Internationalists in BL/WT to break from this hopeless swamp. The BL/WT's political role was long overdue!

Despite our criticisms, there have been certain contributions to the development of a revolutionary movement by the BL. The reproduction of various important documents of the Communist International, the defense of the revolutionary legacy of Stalin and the Comintern, the struggle to prepare revolutionaries for the inevitable imperialist world war in the making, as well as the beginning of a struggle for a correct line on the Black racial question, are a few of the advances made by various comrades in and around the BL. In addition, the struggle against opportunism began to train serious proletarian fighters with certain skills, who have committed their lives to the fight for socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat in the US, while providing Internationalist Solidarity to revolutionary movements elsewhere.

Many cadres in the BL, especially the proletarian cadres, did attempt to grasp Marxist-Leninist theory and to combat opportunist lines not only in the movement, but also within the BL itself. As we better understood Bolshevism, we struggled not only to correct deviations,; but also to conduct self-criticism.

Real Bolsheviks should not be afraid of criticisms. We should not be afraid of admitting when we are wrong. We should learn from our mistakes. And because of this correct attitude, despite the *tragic twists and turns* that many of us have undergone, there are still *comrades* who continue with a proletarian *PARTY SPIRIT*, confident that our dream for a real vanguard Workers' Party will see the light of day.

We have developed not only from the struggle for revolutionary Marxism and against opportunism, but also from the mass movement. We have indeed learned from dedicated activists, many of whom we have struggled with and differ with ideologically. At the same time that we are increasingly convinced that only Socialist ideology can lead the working class to victory, we recognize that strong and capable fighters exist in the mass movements who do not yet call themselves "revolutionaries" or "communists". Without respect for the militance and self-sacrifice of these men and women as they daily lead struggles against capitalist injustice, it would be impossible to merge the ideas of scientific socialism with the working-class movement. Without these forces involved, the concept of the *Iskra* plan would be sterile and meaningless.

And, most important, we have developed ties with real *Proletarian Internationalists* around *International Correspondence* who seek to rally with other Revolutionary Communists throughout the world for the sake of unifying our efforts to defeat opportunism and contribute to the process of re-establishing the principles of revolutionary Marxism in the upcoming storm of revolution that is in the making. Ours is not just a US movement. Ours is an international movement seeking to reestablish the internationalist norms that have been disrupted and sabotaged by the Khrushchevites, the Trotskyites, the Maoists, the Social-Democrats, and the Hoxhaites.