

S P A R T A C I S T L E A G U E

INTERNAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

Factional Dispute with the Ellens-Turner Group (1968)

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V. THE AFTERMATH OF THE MLCRC VOTE

by Joseph Seymour

This discussion is necessarily incomplete as the disputes on the question have not been resolved.

The most dishonest aspect of comrade Turner's factional document is his implication that MLCRC has been transformed to the trade union committee of C.I.P.A., deliberately implying that the majority wished to liquidate trade union work and subordinate it to work among petty-bourgeois radicals. The principal successor organization to MLCRC is not the labor committee of CIPA, but the light industry union. This is very clear in the Robertson proposal. The principal argument against MLCRC was that it interfered with caucus building in the union where we had members. The decision about CIPA was made two weeks after the vote to dissolve MLCRC, and was regarded as secondary. Thus, it was expected that three or four comrades work in the CIPA labor committee, while five or six comrades would be in the union, as well as comrade Turner, the national chairman, and local organizer in the fraction. While it is deplorable that comrade Turner should pretend the majority is not interested in building a caucus in an important working-class union, it is even more deplorable that the minority comrades, who constitute the main element of the proposed caucus, have not interested themselves in building this caucus (there has been no union fraction meeting thus far), and have waged a running battle to reverse the majority's decision, and continue MLCRC work in the hospital union, culminating in comrade Turner's recent motion to put three comrades into the hospital union, thereby crippling work in the other union.

In discussing the question, it is necessary to separate two distinct questions, which have been confused both in the Turner document and local discussion - the C.I.P.A. labor committee and the scaling down of hospital union work. These are two separate questions. Thus, it is possible to maintain an independent MLCRC and scale down hospital, or conversely, it is possible to establish the CIPA labor committee and continue hospital work as a principal area of concentration.

Before discussing the CIPA labor committee of CIPA in a positive way, a few points of clarification are necessary. To begin with, comrade Turner's expressed views on MLCRC's character are completely contradictory as well as contradictory to that of Ellens, co-leader of MLCRC. On page 16, MLCRC is described as "an unattached organization of trade unionists", yet on page 3 and other places he asserts the need to involve non-Spartacist students and other radicals in its activities. In fact, it was the Robertson motion that held MLCRC should be limited to trade unionists, and Turner who desired to involve all local comrades who were capable of aiding MLCRC, which meant all local comrades. Had the Turner motion been passed, MLCRC would have been anything but an "unattached organization of unionists" for, at least, the near future.

Comrade Turner's assertion that it makes no sense to change the status of MLCRC to a CIPA committee, since it is to function as before, again reflects comrade Turner's overlooking of the light industry union fraction. This, one of our most important areas of trade union work, will operate essentially independent of CIPA.

Comrade Turner's characterization of CIPA as a community organization is erroneous. It was not a community organization in the sense of engaging in community organizing activities. It was a New Left socialist organization, the basis for membership in which was political ideas, rather than specific activities. As a result of historical accident, it had a geographical focus, but people were active

in it, who lived out of the area. This geographical locus should prove no more of an obstacle to city-wide trade union work, than the concentration of MLCRC comrades in the lower east side of Manhattan.

There are three major reasons for establishing the labor-civil rights committee of CIPA. As a public organization, with other activities and some existing name on the Left, it is a better vehicle for informing people of MLCRC's type of activities than MLCRC as it exists. MLCRC has operated in a semi-clandestine way, and its existence is known only to Spartacist members, their sympathizers, and the members of the union they have given leaflets to. Given our limited forces, it makes no sense to duplicate our publicity work.

Since CIPA is engaged in other activities, the labor committee is a logical and convenient way of getting people who become interested in CIPA through its other activities being drawn into trade union work and a working class political perspective. The MLCRC comrades would probably desire, and certainly not object to, any CIPA contact who might be interested in MLCRC, being asked to participate in its activities. In view of this, it is unnecessarily cumbersome to maintain a separate organization.

Our negative experience on the West Coast, where we have a number of capable comrades isolated in different unions, and mixed experience with the social service workers' union has led us to conclude that if we want to build an effective union caucus and recruit to Spartacist, it is necessary to have strong forces, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the union. Ironically, one of the reasons we want to have such a heavy concentration in the light industry union is to institute a policy of heavy, systematic personal contacting, a key feature of Voix Ouvriere's organizational methods, and one that ex-comrade Ellens has been pushing. The principal weakness of our social service workers fraction is that the four comrades have been so busy as union representatives and building an opposition caucus, they have had little time for Spartacist contacting, much less systematic education of contacts.

Our trade experience has been that in order to build an effective oppositional union caucus, it is necessary to have caucus leaders, who are dedicated, politically competent, experienced in union work, and aggressive. One is unlikely to find these qualities in someone who isn't a conscious, political radical. Even in Britain, where the level of class consciousness is generally higher than the U.S., most trade union opposition leaders are Communists or to the left of the Communists. It is unlikely we can build a oppositional caucus in a union without, at least, one person, who, if not a comrade, is, at least, a close sympathizer. At the present time, in New York, we only have sufficient forces to establish one more effective trade union caucus. The principal bottleneck to expanding our trade union work is lack of cadre in other unions. Such cadre can be acquired in three basic ways - sending non-union comrades or sympathizers in the unions, contacting radical oppositionists through some external method (e.g., blanket leafleting), contacting workers, who might become oppositional cadre and developing them to a point where they are politically capable of doing so.

The labor-civil rights committee of CIPA is designed to lay the basis for oppositional work in other unions by utilizing all three methods. By drawing non-union radicals into work centering on the unions, it will provide an incentive for them to join the unions they are trying to affect, while the knowledge they acquire in the committee will be useful should they enter the union. It is possible that the activities of the committee will locate already active oppositionists or radicals who are immediately capable of organizing an opposition. More likely, the

committee will run into discontented workers who are not presently capable of establishing an opposition. In this case, the committee and other activities of CIPA provides an excellent vehicle for politically educating such workers and guiding their trade union activities to a point where they are capable of organizing such an oppositional caucus.

Should the labor committee be engaged in caucus building, in the sense of conducting all caucus business within CIPA - labor committee meetings? I believe the answer is no. First, having an intra-union caucus function formally in an outside organization is unwise for security reasons. (This was also true of the heavily Spartacist MLCRC). Second, workers might be willing to join an intra-union caucus, who would not be willing to join an outside organization. Again, this is equally true of an independent MLCRC. The labor committee should limit itself to guiding individuals, who would constitute the leaders of intra-union caucuses. Should the time arise when we have a number of successful caucuses, a formal federation of such caucuses might well be desirable.

In discussing the hospital workers' union, it is important to understand that the decision to continue a heavy concentration on the hospital workers' union after the liquidation of our fraction was neither open-ended nor arbitrarily limited, but had a specific political point. This point derived from the fact that the leaflets, which had been handed out to the hospitals, were not simply general radical propaganda, but had a semi-agitational character. During the period in which the leaflets were being handed out, the union was going through pre-contract discussions. Our main point was that the most important issue was a living wage for the lowest paid workers, which meant a very large money wage increase for these workers. It was felt that if the leadership didn't come through on this issue at contract time, discontented, poorly paid workers would be more likely to seek us out. The contract was signed in late June, and was generally considered good on the money question, with a more than ten percent increase in the lowest wage category. Now, two months later, it is unlikely we will be able to capitalize on the positions we took on the contract, particularly since MLCRC hasn't distributed anything in that period, using the unresolved character of MLCRC as an excuse for inaction.

Now, the fact that we have a number of comrades in the light industry union and no comrades in the hospital workers' union (as well as two hostile ex-comrades) does not automatically mean that we should concentrate in the light industry union, rather than on hospital workers, but the burden of proof certainly falls on the minority to demonstrate why we shouldn't.

What reasons does the minority give for a continued concentration on hospital work? First, that they have put a good deal of time and effort into the hospital work. And the minority accuses the leadership of routinism!

Second, that the leaflets have been well received by the hospital workers. This statement is vague, unquantifiable, and doesn't mean a damn thing unless we have hospital worker contacts.

The third, and only important, argument the minority has is that they have a number of "good" contacts. It must be understood that these supposed contacts of MLCRC are literally that. They are not members of MLCRC, have not participated in its meetings and activities. They are simply visited in their homes by particular members of MLCRC. They do not know each or all the members of MLCRC - and there are members of MLCRC, who have never seen any of the supposed contacts.

The minority claims to have six hospital worker contacts. One is an ex-Spartacist who is now sympathetic to the Ross-Newman grouping. Four of the other five are admittedly unpolitical and have no idea what socialist politics is. In fact, one of the initial objections to transferring MLCRC to CIPA was that the contacts would not work in a formally socialist organization. To understand the full implications of this it is necessary to realize that in talking about the hospital workers union, we are not talking about a union of white, southern shoe clerks. The union president Leon Davis is a known ex-CPer and remains a soft fellow traveller. It was the only union in the city to support the Socialist Party the last time they ran for local office. The executive secretary, Morris Foner, is more or less an open CPer. Another union bureaucrat, Sidney van Luther, has expressed willingness to run for office under the Peace and Freedom banner. A Workers' League member received 25% of the vote for a union wide position, running as an obvious radical. In view of this, one is permitted to raise an eyebrow when told our "good" contacts, the future nucleus of a left opposition, are not familiar with radical politics and may be shy about joining CIPA.

However, the majority doesn't want to be dogmatic. They may be unpolitical and yet excellent contacts. The majority simply wished to see them, to get some idea of their character. We suggested a social (originally suggested by MLCRC) to evaluate them, or some other function or functions. The minority not only objected to the form of the evaluation, but to the very idea that an evaluation of their contacts be a criteria for determining the future character of hospital union work, although the existence of "good" contacts is the only justification for the continued concentration on this union. If the MLCRC people really had militant contacts, wanting to fight the bureaucracy, and wanted to continue a heavy orientation in the hospital union, they would have been anxious to have non-MLCRC comrades meet these contacts, even on a personal basis. However, just the opposite was the case. The minority were positively secretive and guarded about their so-called contacts. This peculiar unwillingness to permit non-minority comrades to see their contacts has led some majority comrades to conjecture that MLCRC's hospital worker contacts are purely fictitious.

The minority contends that they haven't done enough work to judge the value of the hospital union as an area of work. This is seemingly a plausible argument, but, nevertheless, contains several weaknesses. To begin with, the minority appears unwilling to set a time limit for hospital work, and many of the arguments for continuing it as a main arena now will be equally valid if hospital work is continued for the next year. Secondly, with the signing of a three year contract this July, we have nothing in particular to say to the hospital workers and no reason to assume they will respond more favorably than several other unions of similar character. But most important, and again, the heavy emphasis on the hospital union detracts from doing real oppositional work in a union where we have members. And nothing about the hospital union justifies that.

The latest development, before the departure of the Ellens wing of the minority was a motion by comrade Turner to send three comrades into the hospital union, effectively curtailing our work in the other union. Thus, after arguing, for a few months, that not enough work had been done to assess the potential of the hospital union, the minority turned around and decided that the hospital workers union was unquestionably the most fruitful in the city, even to the point of changing the job orientation of a number of comrades. Apart from the previous arguments in favor of hospital union work, a fourth was added, namely, that since hospitals contained relatively large concentrations of workers, this made our work technically easier and generated a worker psychology similar to that of heavy industrial workers (another example of the minority's profound application of Marxian sociology.)

While the existence of relatively large units of production in an industry is certainly convenient for organizing purposes, it hardly compensates for the convenience of having people in a union. Moreover, there is a contradiction between wanting to concentrate on the poorest paid workers and wanting to work with large production units. In capitalist enterprise, there is a fairly good correlation between small production units and low wages, because the former generally mean no economies of scale and stagnant technology, and, therefore, no monopoly profits and unskilled labor. This correlation is recognized in the Turner Memorandum, point 8E explicitly stating one of MLCRC's aims will be to organize small non-union shops.

The minority has contended that to cut back hospital work at this would leave their contacts stranded and is an indication of contempt for the working class on the part of the majority. It should be re-emphasized that these alleged contacts do not now nor ever have functioned in MLCRC. They are simply contacted individually, in their homes, by particular members of MLCRC. Moreover, MLCRC hasn't distributed a hospital leaflet in the last months. It is most difficult to see how these contacts can be disappointed by shifting our main emphasis to another union, since they can always be contacted personally, even if hospital work, MLCRC, CIPA, and the Spartacist League, for that matter, were liquidated. However, it is not the intention of the majority to liquidate hospital union work. The local motion on the subject read, "if the evaluation is negative, the labor committee of CIPA should treat hospital work on par with the six best trade union situations in the city." Thus, even if the local decided not to concentrate on the hospital union, the labor committee of CIPA could and should do more toward the hospital workers than the minority-dominated MLCRC has currently been doing.

This ludicrous insistence on making our main center of trade union work a union where we have no members rather than one where we do and this obsessive concern with the hospital worker's union can not be dealt with in rational terms, but only has meaning within the context of the faction fight, itself. After all, the primary reason MLCRC initially decided to concentrate on the hospital workers union was that it was the only largely black and Puerto Rican union that we had members in. Had Newman and Smith worked in another, comparable, union, MLCRC would have decided to concentrate there, and we would now be having the same debate, only with another union as the focus. As the minority has clearly indicated, MLCRC's hospital work was regarded as a pilot project for their theories on how to build a working class base, at this time. Comrade Turner and ex-comrade Ellens were the unquestioned leaders of MLCRC. They closely directed the activities of Smith and Newman, while the latter were in MLCRC. The line and tone of the newsletters distributed was one comrade Turner believes is most effective in winning over black and other minority workers. The basic method of MLCRC - regular newsletters followed up by personal contacting - Ellens considers the ideal way to do factory work. Now, after six months hard work, MLCRC's hospital work has been a complete failure - not a single contact is willing to show up at a single activity. In large part, this failure can be laid to the defection of Smith and Newman. Although their inability to convince the only two trade unionists under their direct leadership to remain in MLCRC and the Spartacist League does not speak well for comrade Turner' and ex-comrade Ellens' and Stoute's self-advertised abilities to develop worker cadre and guide trade union activity. However, even had the two comrades remained there is no particular reason to believe any significant recruitment of black and Puerto Rican workers to MLCRC would have occurred. Rather than admit the failure of hospital work or blame it on Smith and Newman, the minority insists this imminently fruitful trade union work was deliberately sabotaged by the majority, to prevent the minority comrades from proving what magnificent working class revolutionaries they are.

9 September 1968

VI. MEMORANDUM ON INTERNAL EDUCATION

by Joseph Seymour

One of the unfortunate aspects of faction fights is that one often rejects the correct criticism and useful suggestions of the opposition because of their factional motivation and hostile presentation. In the present faction fight, I believe the minority's criticisms of our lack of systematic internal education are justified. The need for such formal education is particularly important in a national organization, such as ours, with many small groups of isolated comrades, who can not deepen their theoretical understanding and pick up certain political skills through personal, largely informal, contact with the national leadership.

A division of labor and hierarchical structure of political authority is a necessary, indeed, inevitable, aspect of any organization. However, I believe the division of labor in the Spartacist is too determined by routinism and voluntarism. And the existing structure of political authority has unnecessarily inhibited internal theoretical discussion. When a major issue comes up, the political line is generally determined by the P.B., very often in the form of an article in the paper. This position is generally accepted by the membership and not subject to critical analysis (which is not at all the same as political criticism), except by comrades with a particular interest in the topic and a few standard comrades with distinct points of view (eg. Harry Turner and myself).

The following two recommendations are aimed at deepening the theoretical understanding of the membership as a whole and developing the political skills of the comrades. They have no particular virtue in themselves and can be supplemented or replaced by other activities geared to the same aims. If these recommendations are adopted by the membership, close contacts should also be urged to participate in the following two programs.

* * *

I. Periodically, all comrades should make a written contribution, of some minimum length, on a selected topic. If this discussion is not to have a forced and artificial character, the topic selected must have the following characteristics. It must be a live issue in the Spartacist, one which affects our future political line and activities, and propaganda orientation. It must be a broad and complex issue, with many theoretical and tactical aspects, so that the discussion is not a repetition of familiar arguments of a pro or con variety.

At the present time, I believe a topic meeting these specifications is the black question. Comrade Turner's very definite views, adopted by the new Ellens grouping, and my (expectedly controversial) reply should provide a good basis for a Spartacist wide discussion. Moreover, considerable changes have occurred in the black movement since the writing of Red and Black, which would justify a re-appraisal of this question, in any case.

II. The ability to write an effective leaflet is a skill to which every revolutionist should aspire. Any member of the S.L. may find himself in an isolated position (eg. the lone member in a union) where he can not turn to a more competent comrade, and where failure to distribute a leaflet is equivalent to political abstention. Therefore, periodically (twice or three times a year), every comrade should draft a leaflet, of minimum and maximum length, on a selected subject or subjects. Again, the subject of the leaflet should be relevant to our present activities. Right now, we need a good leaflet addressed to draftees and soldiers. Apart from giving comrades practice in leaflet writing, the above program is likely to broaden our core of qualified leaflet writers and provide us with some good

leaflets.

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If all contributions stemming from these programs were mimeoed and distributed nationally, this would create a tremendous burden on our, now significantly weakened, national office staff. This can be a powerful economic argument for not adopting these recommendations. Since the primary purpose of these programs is self education, rather than the determination of a line or production of useable propaganda, failure to publish and distribute all the contributions would not completely destroy the value of these programs.

A number of ways of economizing on N.O. resources are possible. Only those contributions the writers believe to be a valuable contribution to the discussion will be published, or some editorial board selection might operate. Alternatively, no contributions stemming from this program need be distributed, and comrades desiring that their views be circulated throughout the organization, could write a separate, and presumably longer document. Similar methods are available to deal with the draft leaflets.

If some selective method of distribution is decided upon, I remind the comrades that the principal purpose of these programs is internal education, and if the comrades believe they have learned something and produced something valuable, that is what is important.

14 September 1968

New York, N.Y.

16 September 1968

Libby Scheier
Berkeley, Cal.

Dear Libby;

I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to talk to you before you left New York; Kay told me that she saw you, but I'm not satisfied with what was the apparent outcome of that meeting. She said you were "hard with the majority" (meaning a hard-line majorityite) and were overly concerned with the idea that we had a "split perspective" all along but refused to admit it openly. I don't know exactly how you stand politically: I think our positions in the document Proletarian vs. Petty-Bourgeois Politics are pretty clear. If they're not, I'd like to discuss them in further correspondence. If, on the other hand, your mind is made up absolutely, please say so and I won't waste any more time.

What I'd like to go into a little bit is this business of the "split perspective", and what constitutes "principled" or "unprincipled" splitting. Cde. JR has been invalidating everything I say by instilling in the minds of other cdes the idea that I am really very naive politically, that I am under the thumb of "sister Kay," that I am an "ill-digested fellow traveler only half won over from anarchism" (this in a recent letter to me), etc. But I think my views in the current fight tend more toward an overly pedantic acceptance of Lenin and Trotsky than toward anarchy. At any rate, if I am indeed as naive as JR claims, I should certainly rely more on VI and Lev Davidovitch than on JR for my education. I think you'll find that even JR's historical justifications (he particularly recommended to me "Dog Days of the Left Opposition," from James P. Cannon's horribly written History of American Trotskyism) actually vindicate the minority! What I'm trying to say is that I hope that you won't consider the level of my political development as a criterion in determining the validity of my views: they aren't "my" views at all--they are in clear black and white in the writings of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, and in the archives of the SL itself.

First of all, it is not true that we had a "split perspective" all along. There may have been forebodings in some of our minds at the beginning of the fight that Uh, oh, we can't possibly win this one and we'll probably have to leave the organization, but this should be perfectly understandable to anyone who examines the nature of the SL: there is obviously little or no chance of winning a majority of members to our viewpoint--the SL itself in its educational methods and structure guarantees that. The fact is that we hoped very much that we would be able to make the membership see the logic of our position, through a literary discussion and, more important, through our ability to demonstrate our views by implementing them. When it was apparent to us that we were not going to convince any more people in the literary discussion (and this includes verbal as well as written discussion), and that we were not going to be allowed to demonstrate anything in action, we left. The SL is not going to be changed as we would like to have seen it changed--this in itself vindicates our split. The majority would have us remain in the org as a "loyal minority," dispite the fact that there would be absolutely no possibility at all of us winning over a majority.

Now, you may think that this is not so, and that if we'd stayed in a bit longer we'd have won more people over. That may be so. I'm sure JR was afraid of this too. But we are positive that we could not win over a majority in any reasonable length of time; thus, for us, the only reason for remaining in longer would be to prune a few more branches before we split.

Because split we had to. The "objective situation" is not going to stand still while a few potty-bourgeois play literary games. There is a hell of a lot to be done, and killing two or three years in the SL only postpones for that length of time the beginning of it.

The majority now is trying to discredit us with charges of "desertion," cowardice," trying to wreck the SL," etc. This is an extension of the peculiar Myth of Ego which JR has consciously built up: that the SL is somehow the living embodiment of the continuity of Marxism in this country, and for that reason professed Marxists are bound to show it loyalty. This is a lot of bullshit. Consciousness is embodied in people, not in file cabinets. The SL's "history" is embodied in the minds of the cdes who lived it, but also in the minds of those to whom it has been taught. At any rate, minority cdes who went through the SWP fight have just as much claim to the embodiment of that experience as JR. And any group of people who set out to put through the task of implementing the Marxist program via the principles of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky can legitimately covet one's allegiance.

There is one criterion which is of decisive importance in determining just who deserves one's loyalty, and that is the question of building a working class base. Lenin says it. He spells it out. None of this shit about "stages" and "objective situations" and so forth. Read Left-Wing Communism or What is to be Done?; they are entirely unambiguous. If the SL were a working class based organization, with influence in the workers' movement, then, and only then, might the question of leaving the org be one of principle. Otherwise, it is purely a matter of tactics, and of personal loyalty to one's co-workers in the org. And any "loyalty" we supposedly owe to our former cdes is far outweighed by our much higher loyalty to...the working class!

The majority says we are, therefore, "super-proletarian." What exactly does this mean? That we "idealize" the workers? On the contrary, we say that we must begin as soon as possible to vie for the support of the working class; otherwise the door is left open for more "opportune" influences: opportunists, bureaucrats, and even fascists. Far from idealizing the workers, we see quite clearly the impossibility of ever reaching them if we don't begin now.

Does the charge of being "super-proletarian" mean that we place our loyalty to the class higher than our loyalty to the Marxist program? Trotsky once made an interesting comment. He said that if he, and Lenin, and the Marxist program were proven incorrect, and the future of mankind was a dismal prospect of "Bureaucratic Collectivism," with a new class of despots and the workers as slaves, his (Trotsky's) loyalty would still be with the slaves. Schachtman felt that "Bureaucratic Collectivism" was inevitable, and thus supported its rise objectively, or something like that.)

Our loyalty is to the class, as Marxism says it is capable of becoming. Since we are Marxists, there is no division in our minds between what is inherently within the class and what is in the Marxist program. If the time ever came when the class was counter-posed to the Marxist program, then I think, we would, like Trotsky, side with the class. This is, of course, purely an artificial division, and, in fact, the SL has shown that it is on the side of neither the Marxist program or the class. Talk is cheap. In a battle, your friends are on the barricades with you; everyone else is an enemy.

What seems to be bothering you, and several other cdes who expressed sympathy with the minority on some points, is that we didn't stay in the org for your sake; that we deserted you. This is fine and dandy, but the concrete objective situation must be considered. Of course we are aware that we, in a sense, deserted you. But the other priorities are more pressing. It is the majority which has instilled a

false sense of loyalty to the outward forms of Leninism, not the minority. There should be absolutely no criteria to determine your staying or leaving the SL other than those outlined above. Lenin himself says this. Time and again in his works he refers to the need for the masses of workers and their experience to be an integral part of any attempt to construct a revolutionary party. The forms of Leninism--discipline, loyalty, Democratic Centralism--are, according to Lenin, meaningless without the participation of the broad masses of the working class. Somehow, this axiom, which we have raised over and over again, falls on deaf ears, yours included.

Gallitin expressed sympathy with some of our views, but his whole immediate future is mapped out for him by the SL, and he was committed to it before he ever heard of us. There is little or no chance of reaching him. And this holds true for others in the org, including you. The only way we could ever finally convince you is by demonstration, and within the SL this was expressly forbidden. I won't hide the fact that you were a surprise--we counted on winning you over, and were extremely disappointed. At any rate (that's my favorite phrase) I'd like to continue corresponding with you, if you like. But it must be on a political basis, not on the basis of "desertion," "traitors," or any of that shit.....

Oh yes, one last thing: JR will no doubt try to justify the "defection" of Helen by attributing it to her weakness for Marion, etc. Actually, it was quite the other way around. Helen was for a long time trapped in a lonely loyalty to the only stable thing in her life, the SL. She was trained to be a non-thinker, a vegetable. Marion helped her to feel that she did indeed have a brain, and this gave her the courage to do some thinking of her own. I just want to prepare you for the demagogue.

Regards,

Jerry

* * * * *

Berkeley, California
23 Sept. 1968

Jerry Engelbach
New York, N.Y.

Dear Jerry,

I find answering you rather difficult, because much of your letter was confused and emotional to the obscuring of politics. Your entire discussion of class loyalty as opposed to theoretical or group loyalty, juxtaposed to your eclectic but heavy reliance on "VI and Lev Davidovitch" was a contradictory mishmash. I don't intend to make this letter a thorough political polemic, but will try to respond to specific things in your letter.

Yes, Kay is right. I am "hard with the majority," and getting harder all the time. If you wish this to mean that further political debate between us is precluded, that is up to you.

On Kay. When she saw me after the split, her only approach to me was to undermine my confidence in decisions I'd made. There was next to no political content in her words to me. She repeatedly reminded me of my lack of experience, and when I

would use certain words, she would say how unfortunate it was that I used them incorrectly, without bothering to give "correct" definitions. In the same way, she mentioned my speech (at the discussion meeting before the split) about exemplary work being real work, indicating she was certain this was not my reason for aligning myself with the minority. When I replied that it certainly was part of my reason, she passed over this. When I pressed her for a refutation later, she made a few remarks, but never entered into a political discussion with me. She capped our meeting with a warning for me: that I keep my eyes open, take stock of things in about a year (presumably by that time my ability to comprehend politics would have improved), and not "fade out" of politics.

This meeting, as well as the minority's surprising sudden departure, served to reinforce the majority's claim that you are not serious. Yes, I do feel that the early split indicates a lack of seriousness. If after a mere six months of fighting (if actual discussion on the issues had been going on that long), you can feel you had no chance of winning, how on this earth are you going to have the perseverance to maintain a long-range struggle within the working class where things are going to be much more difficult than factional party struggles?

The apolitical content of Kay's approach to me indicates further this lack of seriousness. You people have never once put forth a political program. When I pressed Kay for some of the minority's concrete perspectives, she said she'd rather not discuss it. Clandestinity is one thing, but it certainly need not prevent a concrete general discussion of a program. By program, I do not mean vague promises to be serious contactors on the working class level. This hardly constitutes a program. Cde. Seymour's speech at the end of that discussion period was very pertinent. How do you expect people to get up and follow you when you have presented nothing positive or concrete to follow?

As far as any "objective situation" making you split: this, Jerry, is "bullshit." The fact of one cde. perpetually screaming at you is no objective situation demanding a split. Any political person who can be "trained to be a non-thinker, a vegetable" by someone else with a stronger personality, was not a serious political to begin with. My feelings about Helen J. (since you brought her up) follow similarly.

I'm afraid your rantings about "JR" indicate a certain ego problem on your part. But this psychological mudslinging is meaningless. It also makes me sick. The political questions cannot be snowed over by cries of demogoguery. Demagogic personalities will appear in every political group, despite your most sincere efforts at purification. There was never at any time coercion exercised upon minority members. If you are destroyed by loud fights, that is your political weakness.

The question of priorities and having a working class base has been gone over ad infinitum. But perhaps my position needs clarification. As I indicated above, I do not intend to make this letter a lengthy political treatise. Therefore, briefly, I think the conception of priorities held now by the S.L. is correct. I think a lessening of an orientation to the ORO's would be politically suicidal. The leftist hegemony held by these groups has serious implications for future working class struggles. Attention must constantly be rivetted on politics and theory, to prevent action from degenerating into empty action, into action for its own sake. I think more union work, quantitatively and qualitatively, needs to be done by our comrades, but not to the detriment of other essential tasks. Nor do these tasks take away from union work, they complement it. Each supports the other and grows from the other, dialectically.

Furthermore, you continually confuse composition of the party with composition of a mass base, in addition to neglecting the fact that only a well-organized party can begin to develop a mass base.

I am sorry you left the org., because I like you and like working with you. I'm afraid though that your impatient enthusiasm may eventually shoot you out of politics altogether.

Yours,

Libby

[New York]
Sept. 17, 1968

[Berkeley]

Dear Chris,

The enclosed envelope is for Gene's personal attention. He requested that his mail be sent to him through you.

I want to take the opportunity, however, to open up a correspondence with you, and exchange views on the dispute in the organization. Al reported to the New York local about his sojourn in the Bay Area and his presentation of the majority position to a meeting there. I was told, of course, that you identify with the majority.

Now that Kay and six others have left the SL, you may have decided that the debate is over. I want to assure you that it is not. Despite the majority's propaganda to the effect that the differences are entirely the result of a conspiracy by Kay Ellens which "Turner served to ornament", the facts are that the present fight would have taken place whether or not Kay Ellens had ever existed. The issues might have been more clearly posed in that event.

As we are separated by a continent, and insofar as knowledge of dissent in the PB was acquired through minutes, usually long delayed, always carrying the essence of Cde. Robertson's views, and usually carrying my disagreements under the esoteric hieroglyphic Disc: Turner, you could not be aware that a struggle had been in preparation for some time, and before Kay turned up.

In "Whither the SL", I tried to point out that while partial struggles had developed over the frequency of the press and the erratic manner in which the NO was functioning, the present minority was still deluding itself that the perspectives of the SL leadership were toward the building of a Leninist party. When the "Memorandum on the Negro Struggle" was passed unanimously by the PB and CC, I felt that doubts which I had begun to develop concerning the seriousness of Cde. Robertson in working for a Leninist vanguard in the US had been resolved.

It only began to dawn on me during the debate on MLCRC that Cde. Robertson and I had entirely differing perspectives. Cde. Robertson, in supporting the "Memorandum" had evidently hoped that it would sooth the disquiet in the organization which was beginning to unsettle it, and perhaps, in true eclectic fashion, hoped that it might "work", i.e., some quick breakthrough. When it became apparent to him that MLCRC was a serious effort at concentration in a union with a majority of black and Puerto Rican workers, that it might mean a shift in priorities from petty-bourgeois activities, that it involved such questions as changes in the SL so that it could recruit and keep workers, at that point, in the heat of the struggle, the real differences emerged, as I have documented.

We consider Cde. Robertson's perspectives and the performance of the NO based upon these perspectives to have been disastrous for the SL. An attractive and promising organization of some eighty-odd revolutionists has probably been whittled down to half that number of functioning cadre. Even that half was functioning erratically and beset with doubt before tendencies and factions formed. Cde. Robertson, who plays such a dominant role in the organization has to be held chiefly accountable. All the ability with which I have credited him can achieve nothing worthwhile given the perspectives he has held and continues to hold.

I hope that you will let me know what your present thinking is - why and to

what extent you agree with the majority, and whether you have found anything of merit in the minority's position. If you are simply reacting in a loyalist organizational reflex, fearful that the minority, by fighting for its point of view is acting to destroy the SL, then I must point out to you that the responsibility of those who consider themselves to be revolutionary socialists is to build a vanguard party of the working-class. Our criticism is posed for this purpose and no other.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Comradely greetings,

Harry Turner

[Berkeley]
30 September 1968

[New York]

Dear Harry,

I gave the envelope you sent for Gene to him, and was pleased to hear from you personally about your views on the struggle in the S.L. One criticism I have had of the minority, at least until now, is that it has seemed unconcerned about getting its views to the comrades of the S.L., whom it claimed to want to convince.

I'm very much aware of the continuing factional situation in the S.L. Soon after the split, Gene informed me of his intention to help re-organize the remaining minority and aim at fighting to the convention. Since then, a semi-factional situation has developed here, with Gene and at least one other comrade, Joanne, in strong sympathy with each other on an important question of our strategy and tactics here.

To the extent that they represent the newly reconstituted minority, (which is still not completely clear), it should not come as a surprise that the main thrust of their position on this question is away from political clarity and toward conciliation with opportunism! I find their behavior to be a confirmation of the political characterizations and predictions which have been made by cde. Robertson since the beginning of the struggle.

The question at hand is the recent split in the Committee for a Labor Party between those forces, led by us (but not only us), supporting the position against suing unions expressed in the editorial of the first issue of Workers Action, and the elements around Earl Gilman (W.L.) and Dave Adrian opposing it. The latter were against sending a delegate to the IWCC (Fox group) convention in November who was bound to carry the line in that editorial. When the motion to send a delegate (Stan) under such conditions passed, they walked out. They did this despite their contention that the whole question is purely tactical in nature and despite the absence of any prohibition against individual CLP members going to the convention on their own with a minority position. (In the Workers Action editorial board meeting which preceded this meeting, Dave Adrian proclaimed his intention to be there on his own anyway, said he didn't care about being a delegate, and that all he wanted was the right to hold a minority position).

The opportunists around Gilman and Adrian are forming another group, which is trying to continue to publish Workers Action illegitimately. Most recently, Adrian and two ex-PL friends (who were weak CLP supporters before) invaded the CLP meeting last Sunday 29 September, after having walked out of the meeting two weeks previously (CLP meetings are every two weeks). Adrian had to be thrown out. Despite this threat, Gene and Joanne are for all-out efforts at conciliation (without specifying on what terms) and reconstitution of the old group. Gene at least talked independently of conciliation with Adrian between the two meetings and both of them dragged their feet when Adrian invaded the second CLP meeting. Gene voted against the motion to throw him out while Joanne abstained, and both insisted on a lot of "discussion".

These developments at the second CLP meeting came after the S.L. meeting at which the original split in the CLP was discussed. It was treated as a post mortem discussion, since no one expected Adrian to attempt to get back in the CLP in any way. It was a serious discussion, however, and the consensus was definitely not for the conciliationist line which Gene and Joanne took. Most comrades saw Adrian for the enemy that he is, and accepted that. Gene and Joanne were unable to accept the kind of political struggle that is required. They felt that the whole thing

was premature on our part, and should have been thoroughly discussed at S.L. meetings in advance. This was impossible, since the question of sending a delegate was going to be on the CLP agenda that night no matter what we did about it. Also, the whole issue in dispute in the CLP had been discussed many times in S.L. meetings. The comrades should have been able (and in fact did very well) to mobilize on short notice for the fight. Gene insisted that our whole strategy in CLP has been wrong from the beginning, but gave as an example only that we didn't "throw enough sops" to Adrian at the meeting to prevent him from splitting. Then he denies that he is trying to conciliate (when Adrian invaded the second CLP meeting, he turned to Gene at one point and said to him "I thought you wanted to conciliate?" despite the fact that Gene had already voted against throwing him out).

There were sufficient "sops" in our strategy in the CLP to allow Adrian to remain as a minority within a principled group if he wanted to, since the motion did not prevent him from going to the convention on his own as an individual and saying what ever he pleased. As I pointed out before, this was all he claimed to want. Gene is just looking for excuses to avoid hard political struggle, which he finds distasteful. I believe that he really does support the principled question of going to the courts in his union work, but when it comes to hard struggle in the political arena, he collapses.

It is too bad that in our S.L. analysis meeting, there were no motions made, (since none seemed required after the fact) for now the grounds against Gene and Joanne for breaking discipline are clouded and unclear. Nevertheless, they committed an error of that caliber, since they carried out their own views in a struggle situation in clear opposition to the position of the S.L. Some action, as yet undecided, will be initiated against them.

This split was late in coming rather than premature. Ever since the initial compromise (in which Gilman and Adrian wrote a "letter to the editor" answering the editorial), Adrian has been running us ragged bringing his opportunist and even liberal and Uncle Tom friends to meetings specifically to try to offset S.L. influence on this question. Gene's and Joanne's tendency is to conciliate opportunism rather than face the realities of political struggle. It is political struggle--the constant rebuilding of political clarity against the erosive influences which continually recur within the movement--which is our most important task today. This, it seems, is the most important dividing line between the majority and minority tendencies within the S.L.

Perhaps I should back track a bit and explain briefly how I came to support the majority. It was not a "loyalist organizational reflex", but a rather difficult critical assessment which was made easier by the minority itself.

I have long held most of the gripes and criticisms of our functioning--on the lack of a press, P.B. minutes, etc.--which the minority can muster. I have also had criticisms of the quality of leadership in the S.L. which I have made known to cde. Robertson. I'm sure no member of the majority would deny that there are many problems in these areas...in fact, it was the majority which first pointed them out (that is, the leadership was aware of these problems before the factional struggle). I know, however, that a faction fight aimed at a split (which you, from your letter, give the impression of working toward) will not solve my gripes about the many failures of the S.L. and its leadership.

On the question of the general perspectives of the S.L., my support for the majority was not automatic either. In fact, it took considerably longer to get a clear picture of just what is involved in this question here than it did in New York.

The turning point for me was Kay's visit here. She convinced me because she seemed willing to break a chunk away from the S.L. if Robertson applied pressure, and yet completely lacked an alternative perspective, much less a better one. She relied on a description of V.O. for her presentation, and her program consisted in little more than "more contacting". She seemed unwilling to approach the question of perspectives seriously for distaste of the political struggle involved. Her anti-factionalism had a phony ring, since she practically said she was willing to split "if necessary". Her praise for the way V.O. makes its decisions seemed to have the pragmatic as a primary concern, and her defense of the lack of a polemical attitude in V.O.'s press was a clear denial of the need for political struggle (since then, V.O.'s overly unfactional regroupment tactics has made this need clearer).

This came just as I was beginning to see clearly the need for greater political vigilance and struggle as the necessary basis for work in the trade union and mass movements. The CLP was making significant strides towards its goal of being a coordinating body for functioning left-wing caucuses on the basis of a transitional, labor party program. Yet the political divisions within it were becoming paramount. Our opponents in the CLP were the most advanced elements, besides ourselves, in the labor movement, yet they embodied the opportunist fallacies and mistaken political ideas which are the chief obstacles in the path of a new working class movement. Moreover, there was a continuous spectrum between these small mistakes of today and the heritage of Stalinist betrayal brought into the CLP in residue form by Adrian, and between Gilman's capitulation to this residue and Healyism. A failure to clarify differences with Adrian and Gilman in the sharpest and strongest possible manner was a failure to understand the necessary basis for rebuilding the revolutionary workers movement out of the wreckage of the past.

It was this consideration along with others that made me view Kay's "perspective" as an illusory palliative, and your application of your own Memorandum as a hasty, unreasoned, overkill approach. We could sacrifice our balanced program (or, I should say, our correct perspective of having a balanced program) for a concentrated effort at recruiting a worker cadre immediately, but the price would very soon be paid in political currency. We would gain a cadre and lose our goals. We have to have a working class orientation which will not only be real today in the form of trade union work and a worker-cadre (which will have to be recruited with long, patient, caucus-building work, not through mass leafletings alone), but also, even more important, one which will be good twenty years from now in the form of the political clarity and resilience of the movement we build.

If we all turn now to doing work in the unions like the admittedly excellent work Gene is doing, but then fail to see what needs to be done politically against opponents who represent in the last analysis the influence of alien class forces within the workers movement, then we have accomplished nothing. We do not merely need to build a vanguard party of the working class. We need to build a party which will be capable of seizing power at just the right moment in struggle, and which will be capable of defeating the most subtle political enemies of the working class in the eyes of the workers themselves. Will the party you want be able to pass this test Cde. Turner?

cc: S.L.N.O., BASL, Miriam R.,
files

Comradely greetings,
Chris K.

P.S. Gene and Joanne were reprimanded. All comrades thought there had been a clear breach of discipline, including the two themselves (after discussion), which is why more serious action was forgone.

C.K. 4 October.

Copy of Factional Circular

New York, N.Y.
30 September 1968

Dear Comrade,

Now that Kay and six others have left the SL, you may have decided that the internal struggle is over. We want to assure you that it is not. Despite the Majority's propaganda to the effect that the differences are entirely the result of a conspiracy by Kay Ellens, the facts are that the present struggle would have taken place whether or not Kay had ever existed. The issues might have been more clearly posed in that event. Her premature departure indicated quite clearly that she was never concerned with fighting for an alternative leadership.

Kay not only opposed the content of the organization as non-Leninist, a conclusion with which we agreed, but the form of the SL as well, a conclusion with which we disagree. We want to infuse the SL's organizational form with a Leninist content.

It is our opinion that the turn to the working class envisioned by the Memorandum on the Negro Struggle is vital for the present course and future development of the SL. This means that we make the central focus of our work the most exploited black and Spanish-speaking workers, and organize a campaign to build civil rights caucuses in the unions in which they are concentrated. Not a token implementation, but a recognition of a development which is becoming clear, even to SDS (see New Left Notes July 29, 1968 on the Topeka strike of hospital workers), that this is the basic approach to building class unity between black and white workers. For us, this work is inseparable from the building of a Leninist vanguard in the U.S.

The Majority leadership of the SL, and Cde. Robertson in particular, has no confidence that workers, particularly the most oppressed workers, can be won for a Leninist organization in the process of development, and therefore no prospect of building a Leninist vanguard. It is basically for this reason that they orientate toward the student milieu.

We are pressing for a conference about New Year's Day to decide the direction of the organization. We would hope that you would agree with our point of view, or would at least desire to discuss our positions and your own differences, either with the Majority or the Minority, or both.

We assume of course that you have received the Minority documents, the Memorandum and Whither the Spartacist League. We are presently preparing an answer to the Majority documents. Should you desire to be associated with the Minority, we would be happy to send you an advance copy for your critical attention.

Hoping to hear from you shortly.

Comradely yours,

Hugh F.
Harry Turner

SOME NOTES ON POLITICAL STRUGGLE

Joanne Syrek, Berkeley

"Political struggles do not take place in a vacuum." Nor does the daily implementation of our political program. This implementation means not merely respecting a piece of paper, but dealing with people. The recent period indicates that we tend to be deficient not even in tact, but in awareness of subjective factors, and also of the life situation of those we meet in the political arena.

Exiles

This is not accidental, but is a reaction to the terrific pressures we are subject to. As Lenin and Trotsky were exiles from their own land, our politics makes us exiles in our own land, in our own time. It is not surprising that we cling to our program with a fervor and jealousy worthy of the Christian martyrs.

It is not surprising, but neither is it acceptable--to fall into the cozy habit of regarding our program as the only truth, and our actions as the only possible. Vigilance means not only guarding the program against "contamination", but guarding ourselves against the kind of defensive arrogance which is the quickest road to sectarianism and cynicism.

Split

The split of the so-called "Minority" does not automatically mean its ideas are worthless, and its departure does not relieve us of the obligation to conduct an exhaustive discussion.

Discussion and criticism is vital. However, there is a growing tendency in our organization to consider any criticism as at best factional and at worst disloyal. "We chastise whom we love", and criticism is one of the higher forms of loyalty to the party.

TU Turn

It is clear, from the history of Bolshevism, from the situation now, and from our own activity, that a primarily trade union orientation is correct.

The key word here is "primarily." I do not suggest that campus-ORO work be totally neglected. However, we are more likely to recruit cadre from the ORO-Campus milieu by genuine activity in the working class than by a mountain of leafleting and literary struggle.

The Coin

This turn toward the working class demands a constant and pervasive re-examination of ourselves and our attitudes.

I have been struck by the apposite relationship of SL to the old Johnson-Forest tendency. J-F practiced a nauseatingly vulgar hero-worship of the working class, denied the need for the revolutionary party, and confines itself to "going to the workers to listen."

SL, on the other side of the coin, titters at the idea that we have anything to gain by listening to workers; we need only bring our program whole, pristine and inviolable to them, persuade them to accept it and the task is done. (With, of

course, them doing the killing.)

The true development of the party lies apart from either of these extremes. As Cde. Geoff W. remarked, the answer lies in not only a permeation by the party of the working class, but crucially, a permeation of the party by the working class.

This is why the turn toward trade union work*is vital. Otherwise we doom ourselves to becoming just another dessicated corpse in the path to the revolution.

*TU work also includes Leagues of the Unemployed, Welfare Rights Orgs, etc.

(Your comments and criticisms are invited.)

5 October 1968

An Appeal On Some Questions And Implications Of The Split In The SL

by Dave Cunningham

An Open Letter
To (and for) a 'Loyal Opposition':

The circumstances surrounding the split within the minority of the Spartacist League and the subsequent departure from the SL of seven supporters of that faction, was a clear, if negative, confirmation of (at least one feature of) the majority's assessment of the nature of that 'bloc'. This assessment, originally made by deduction and extrapolation, was that a 'conspiracy' led by Kay Ellens had existed in the N.Y. local of the SL from shortly after her arrival in the U.S. from France throughout the whole course of the present factional struggle, and only disappearing from our ranks after her 'resignation' and those of six supporters. This point, I believe, has been proven beyond any further reasonable doubt.

This is true beyond question despite the fact that some secondary questions, relating to the origins, development and scope of this (literal) conspiracy are still somewhat muddy: the final confirmation of this matter rests on a good deal of empirical, factual material which only recently became available. We know this much, anyway: the Ellens group (part of it, at least) was all the time part of an international tendency which ran all the way to, if not controlled by (a point yet to be established), the 'top three' leadership of our 'fraternal' continental European organization. This can be said without hedging, without contradiction; some gray, vague areas exist only because none of the protagonists have to date admitted it. But the facts in this matter are overwhelming, and do not admit alternative reading.

This conspiracy had a dual nature: assembling the components for a 'new' Trotskyist organization, to be based on a primitive, somewhat deformed version of Voix Ouvriere, a now-liquidated French group, by stripping the finest cadre from the Spartacist League; at the same time the liquidation of the SL as an opponent group carried out by means of a simultaneous wrecking operation. Ellens was unlucky in both respects: the human material of her cadre were, as a whole, rather far down the 'excellence' list; the wrecking operation ground to a halt, and she led her people out.

One difficulty in dealing with the Ellens situation was that, almost throughout the entire factional struggle, she and her followers were submerged in a minority bloc with Turner, a bloc which had a political line and thrust somewhat different from the Ellensites' ultimate positions. It seems evident, then, that Ellens kept the nature and scope - even the existence - of the conspiracy's true face concealed even from her minority factional comrades (at least insofar as Comrades Turner and Hugh F. were concerned). It is evident from the internal logic of "Whither the Spartacist League?", Comrade Turner's major factional statement to date, that he did not know of such an operation. In fact, logic dictates, not until after the Ellens wing of the then minority split away from the S.L. was such evidence and knowledge of the fact made available to comrades Turner and Hugh F., and that only from majorityite revelations regarding uncovered evidence.

This conclusion is only, once again, further confirmation of the correctness of the view that those comrades of the minority who did not indicate an outright split perspective, who refused the invitation to leave the S.L. along with Ellens and Stoute, were being used as respectable ornaments, as covers, behind which the wrecking operation moved, and who were setups to be discarded at the propitious - the splitting - moment.

Now, anyone can be used - up to a certain point. No one can be faulted for not being omniscient. The trouble is, those minority comrades still in the SL were adamant and bullheaded in their refusal even to listen to our arguments beforehand, considered every allegation of 'split consciousness', no matter how evident, as plain slander; refused to analyse the kind of bloc they were in (a rotten one, i.e. without a common political program); allowed their reaction to personally abrasive relations with comrade Robertson and other majority comrades to become a substitute in itself for a political program, and to allow these frictions to escalate the differences and warp their judgement. And so, being used by Ellens in this manner, when they should realistically have called a halt to their factional work and production of heat long enough to take a hard look at the real situation and the real differences, they defaulted on their responsibility as members and as oppositionalists.

Which means that, irrespective of their loyalty and intentions, their authority, to say nothing of their ability to fuse together a faction, has been seriously, perhaps irreparably, weakened. This hurts not only them but the SL majority as well, as it deprives us of a real fight to the conclusion, with the attendant internal education and clarifications. It must be obvious to anyone that the discussion is in a state of suspension, if not completely aborted.

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That is the situation as it stands now. One can say to the minority people: it is of course mainly your problem, and I am not making an application to function as your attorney. But the situation right now is a swamp, breeding rumors, hostility and suspicion, and that decidedly is a cancerous thing to have in any kind of serious organization. This is an instance where what helps you helps us; at the same time, if you are to recover the respect you once had in the SL, if you ever want to have influence in this organization again, you have to take a number of steps to clarify the issues: in other words you have to function as factional opponents rather than as dupes of Kay Ellens. Comrade Turner stated, at the last local meeting, that he was a "political person" and that he intended to continue functioning as one: I see no reason not to take him at his word. But the comrades of the present minority know as well as I that the strength of any tendency - or polemic, or faction for that matter - rests ultimately on the firmness and hardness of the ground under you. That said, these comrades must know that it is the widespread opinion of the SL rank-and-file that they are presently in the position of trying to keep their balance in the midst of a landslide.

As you well know from recently-distributed documents written by comrade Gordon and myself, it is the position of the majority that the split within the minority, leading to the walkout of Ellens and her clique from both the faction and the League, was centered primarily on the question of the minority's self-delegated duty to function in some manner as agents, model-builders or patriots-at-a-distance of VO. While this necessarily was a deduction on our part in the sense that we had no pipeline to the minority caucuses, it is based on the only conceivable reading of the meaning of the fact that it was only those minority comrades who refused to sign the VO loyalty pledge, " 'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" who are still in the SL. What we want to know, then, is this: what is it that keeps you in the SL when your factional comrades walked out? why did they split from you? what is the nature of your relationship to the SL now? what do you want, or better yet expect, to accomplish as oppositionalists within the SL now, since for the foreseeable future you can have little real hope of changing the leadership? A large number of majority comrades at the present believe, as a result of no clear statements to the contrary by yourselves, that you intend to split at the forthcoming National Con-

vention and are at present just trying to find a few more members to take out with you: don't you think it would be worthwhile to comment on these impressions? Of course, no one can force you to answer these questions if you really don't want to, but your refusal to do so will have certain implications. You must know now, even if you didn't know before, that clarification on these points is vital to the SL's ability to protect itself from another wrecking operation, for the maintenance of yourselves as responsible comrades, and that further refusal to clarify political differences with us, with Ellens, and on the general subject of your perspectives toward the SL will leave only one possible conclusion for us to draw.

Speaking personally, I will say that I raise these things neither to embarrass you or hint at 'disloyalty', but to get some basic issues straightened out. Because the present 'limbo' status of your present relationship within the SL is, or at any rate should be, intolerable.

As an example, comrade Turner's vote against the expulsion of Stoute and Ellens at the 16 September Political Bureau meeting where it was posed, and his explanation of the motivation of this vote at the next N.Y. local meeting, was not only incompatible with the SL's traditions and past practices, with the Leninist conception of democratic centralism itself, but also downright incredible in its immediate implications for us. The argument, insofar as I was able to follow it, was that political questions and agreement transcended "organizational" questions, and so you were unable to vote against them. Not only (!) did this imply you stood closer to them than to us, which is horrible enough, but also that we had no right at all to protect ourselves and the integrity of the organization against the wrecking operation which Ellens had directed against us. This argument is fantastic. And it thus was hardly accidental that comrade Seymour, speaking immediately after you but light-miles from being a rabid factionalist or organizational tough-guy, casually remarked he believed you could probably be expelled for what you had just said.

Something of equally serious import is also involved, one which counterposes our differences, and is not a question of interpretation of what you said at a local meeting. Comrade Syrek, one of the suspended Ellensite followers, wrote a letter (circulated widely throughout the SL on his own initiative, not through the national Office) in which he makes it quite clear that the Ellensites will continue to make the "petty-bourgeois" Spartacist League their central prime target for political work. That this is directly in contradiction to their stated position in concentrating on the working class, not the ORO's, does not bother them, or me - after all, both they and I already know how seriously these people hold their positions, their principles. That is, they apparently intend to continue circulating resignations, statements, denunciations and the like to our people. One of these documents, which they consider their own to do with as they wish, is Comrade Turner's "Whither the Spartacist League?" They intend to continue to invoke Turner's authority and name, not to strengthen the SL (the purpose for which the document itself states) but to wreck it.

There is no question that they can in no sense claim to be heir to Turner's statement. Two sections of it clearly call for alternative leadership, not the SL's destruction; thus:

The SL, on the other hand, has proven, in the four and one half years of its existence, that it is the only organization in the US able to develop thoroughly Marxist positions on all the issues before it, and that it is able to withstand the pressures to make opportunist adaptations, as its positions on the American Question (Negro, anti-war, electoral), the Russian Question

(China, Cuba, etc.), and other international questions, such as the Arab-Israeli war, demonstrate.

And:

The fundamental need of the SL, at this time, is for an alternative leadership which will accept its historic responsibility to build such a vanguard party in the US, and which does not quail before the contradiction of the small size of the SL, and the large magnitude of its responsibility.

In an earlier article I have already pointed out that the Ellensites could never in good conscience have signed this, and gave some reasons why: there is a blatant contradiction, obvious to anyone, between signing this and their later course of action. Rational life does not permit such incongruities; it was on the basis of this contradiction I proved they were the liars and conspirators they most assuredly were. What they intend now is likewise obvious: to use a statement defending activity to create an alternative leadership - a permitted course of action - to be used for the opposite purpose: for a wrecking tool, for slander.

But their morals aside, I want to direct an argument to Comrade Turner (who is by way of being the crowbar they want to use to pull us apart): solidarity with the SL, on the minimum grounds of your endorsement of the passages quoted above from "Whither the SL?", would dictate your immediate denunciation of these people for their course.

This assumes, of course, that you still agree with your call earlier in the fight for an alternative leadership. You should make it clear in no uncertain terms that you wrote your minority statement from the position of loyal opposition, that your perspective was and is as you detailed it above, and that the Ellensites' continued use of your document slanders you as much as us. You should make it clear that your purpose in writing it was in order to aid the SL, not defame it. The circulation of such a statement to members and supporters of the SL will do much to carry out your stated and desired intent to make us stronger.

Such a statement on your part will not only strengthen the SL as a whole; it will go far in clearing the air. Solidarity with the majority on this minimal point will aid you as well as us, and perform the needed function for you in rescuing your authority and responsible role as a "loyal opposition". You must know your association in a common bloc with Ellens has debilitated your functioning greatly and set up a "credibility gap" syndrome insofar as our understanding of your intentions is concerned: it is in your interest, as well as ours, to lift any suspicion or cynicism about your motives.

I hope the minority comrades will accept this as I intended it, not as arrogant presumption on my part. I do not get my kicks pouring ashes over people's heads. But I do not want to see this organization wrecked, either, (it is quite clear that Ellens' new groups is a liquidationist, profoundly revisionist one, one unlikely to be in existence six months from now.) The reason for unity on this point is a call for a common attempt to shore up the foundations of the only organization in this country capable of forging a revolutionary instrument of the working class.

7 October 1968

Postscript to "An Open Letter" (of October 7, 1968)

I have just had the chance to read a copy of the latest document by comrade Turner for the "reorganized minority", "The Internal Struggle Continues" (7 October.) I will withhold until later a general comment on the statement as a whole. There are, however, some observations and general comments about the Ellens wing of the minority there which seem to me to have a direct bearing on what I wrote in the "Open Letter" and deserve to be discussed here.

The way comrade Turner approaches the issue of the split and the new Ellens organization is discreet and tactful to the point of being uncritical, a method which only underscores the urgency of the need for clarification on those points I dealt with above. To say, as Turner does, that "The issues posed by the minority have not been resolved, and the course of the SL for the next period has not yet been decided," only begs the issue, looks like a mildly-stated ultimatum and does not tell me anything about the basic questions that really divide us. Which "Minority" is Turner talking about? The united one, the section which split, the reorganized one? The qualification "as defined in 'Whither the Spartacist League?'" does not help any, either, because everyone in the Minority at the time that document came out, including the expelled members Ellens and Stoute, signed a statement of support for it. Does he agree with me, as I wrote in "Fact, Faction, etc.", that they had no right to sign it? Does he still consider these people part of the "minority", even though they are outside the organization? He doesn't say!

His argument becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. He will not get much of a debate, if any, on the points he raises unless and until these points raised are clarified. To put it bluntly: the price you have to pay to have the internal discussion continue (I suspect the 'internal struggle' is over) is frankness on your perspective. If your perspective is to carry on within the SL after the Convention, whether you win or lose, even if you plan to do so as oppositionalists, then we can have the discussion fought out to a conclusion.

But if you have already split in your mind, if you plan to walk out at the Convention, then you cannot reasonably ask us to suspend other outside activity, tie up our staff, to continue a discussion which conclusion has already been decided and which would only consist in our wasting our time. It would be a luxury for you, but one which we (the Majority, people who plan, win or lose, to stay in) would have to pay for. And it is not reasonable for us to sabotage our own limited functioning unless there can be some foreseeable gain.

There is far too much ambiguity in "The Internal Struggle Continues" to suit me. Take the second paragraph of the statement:

Those who have resigned have indicated that they did not feel that the organization could be salvaged, that its leadership had demonstrated a "qualitative incapacity to break with its past", and, that the organization had proven itself "unable to commit itself to advocate(and) work towards" the task of building a serious Marxist-Leninist organization in the US. We who remain consider the judgement on the SL to be premature, and hope, in continuing the struggle, to win the SL cadre to the minority's perspectives.

And what does Turner think about the "resignations" and the perspectives of the Ellensites? He says he thinks they were "premature". What is that supposed to mean? The word is carefully neutral, only "temporarily" critical. By his choice of words, Turner says, to me at least, that he does not wish to pass real judgement on these splitters, that he sees no qualitative difference between being in the SL and out of

it. Comrade Turner prides himself on his grasp of dialectics: perhaps he would enlighten us as to the means by which he has decided that the differences between participation in a centralist, Leninist organization - with the commensurate acceptance of its discipline - and breaking from it is only a matter of degree, of temporal quantity, of being only a slight bit "premature". He will find, I think, that the majorityite SL comrades have some rather definite opinions on the subject.

Such a neutral term applied to enemies of the SL suggests to me that comrade Turner is hedging on the issue. Perhaps he doesn't want to make harsh judgements on them, yet? Perhaps he doesn't want to burn bridges to Ellens? But comrade Turner, you are placing us in an intolerable position. Because we insist that a precondition to the continuation of the discussion consists precisely in a show on your part of a willingness to do just that, to burn these bridges for all of us to see. Because we say that comrades are comrades, but enemies are enemies, and that there can be no hedging on this point, that their actions in leaving the SL as they did placed Ellens, Stoute, and their clique in the enemy camp. Until you agree with us on this point, further discussion on other topics would be pointless and indeed harmful to us.

We do not ask you to surrender your differences. You may think we want to hold onto people through "mistaken conceptions of organizational loyalty", but this is not true. There is a right of factions, of organized oppositionalists, to exist within the SL and to fight for the implementation of their views, and I hope I shall never see the day when that right is limited or proscribed. We will accept you gladly as "loyal oppositionalists" even if we believe your views are fallacious and their implementation harmful. And this is not just a formal right; factions have the right to preach their views and be heard.

But we make, also, a distinction between "loyalty" and "disloyalty", although we will go out of our way to make sure that the term "disloyalty" is not used as a club to beat down dissenters. This is not at issue here. The nature of the split as such, and the decision of two members of the Minority to stay within the SL - without making specific their disagreement with the splitters, without criticizing them beyond reference to their "premature" leaving, and by indicating, as even a cursory reading of "The Internal Struggle Continues" will show, that no fundamental political disagreement (on Turner's terms) exists - raises precisely this question of "loyalty", i.e., of a perspective to stay within the SL. The burden of choosing sides now, Ellens or us, lies with the remaining Minority; their ambiguity to date has only added to the fog, when the necessity is to dispel it.

D.C.

8 October 1968

THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY...

I. TURNER'S CREDENTIALS FOR LEADING THE SL

The essential Minority has split, but opposition remains with us, in the person of Comrade Turner, who has announced his intention to stay in the SL and continue to fight for his ideas. This in itself is hardly reprehensible--indeed it is praiseworthy if Comrade Turner can overcome his profound alienation from the organization and its leadership enough to remain within it to struggle. Yet it is understandable that some of us, at least, cannot help but view the continuation of Comrade Turner's extravagant fulminating with a rather jaundiced eye. In this document, I would like to try to explain why, especially to out-of-town comrades whose only experience with Comrade Turner has been what he writes in his documents.

Role in the Faction Fight

The principal problem in girding ourselves up for the continuation of factional hostilities with Turner is that he is unable to see his own present position and past role very clearly. Throughout the faction fight, Comrade Turner clearly considered himself the "leader" of the Minority faction. What is far more important, he believed that it was his ideas, as formulated in his "Memorandum" and in Whither the Spartacist League?, that constituted the essential politics of the Minority. Comrade Turner repeatedly denounced as ridiculous our allegation that the Minority was in substance the brain-child of Ellens, a pseudo-VO cell, with a split perspective, which would adopt VO's politics, outlook and practices (including clandestinity) immediately upon departure from the organization. Comrade Turner was evidently taken in completely by Ellens' cynical kowtowing to his pretensions--for example, her defining Turner's document (Whither the SL?) as the basic Minority document, while in fact using tacit VOism as the basis for her proselytizing and recruitment. Turner was not swayed in his faith in Ellens by the Majority (especially Comrade Cunningham) repeatedly pointing out to him that Ellens' faction was based on "defending" and emulating VO, not on his document. We pointed out the implications of Ellens' having confined her entire factional presentation to the Bay Area local, as documented in their local minutes, to a description of VO's techniques of functioning. Nor was Turner swayed by the testimony of our Philadelphia comrades that while there on a visit Ellens and Stoute had preached clandestinity to SLers and contacts. The Majority constantly pointed out to Comrade Turner, in tones ranging from friendly exhortation to polemical denunciation, that the Minority was an unprincipled anti-leadership bloc, with Ellensism-VOism being paramount for most of its adherents, in which Turner did not belong in view of his criticisms (expressed previous to the outbreak of harsh factional disagreements) of VO's structure and politics. Turner's response was always the same: the Majority was making an "amalgam" of the various Minority positions on supposedly minor issues like VO, that the whole question of VO was a deliberate "red herring" on the part of the Majority, that the Minority was principled because it was united on essentials, i.e., the Turner factional document.

To anyone less blinded by personal pride than Comrade Turner, the real nature of the Minority would have been apparent. But even

now, after the split of 7 people (the entire Minority with the exception of Turner and his one supporter, Hugh F.), the appearance of Ellens' "Politicalizing" to Avoid Politics making any further denunciations of the VO issue as a "red herring" ludicrous, the revelation of the contents of the letters Syrek had been writing as a member of the united Minority (from Syrek's 19 August letter to Stan: "On top of all this came comrade Kay with information of fascinating significance: a Trotskyist group in an industrial country in the present period has been recruiting worker-militants.... [This] completely torpedoes our basic Spartacist operational theory....")--even after all this Comrade Turner cannot give up his contention that he, armed with Whither the SL?, defined what the Minority stood for. He can without embarrassment characterize the split of the 7 Ellensites as "frictional losses" of the sort that are inevitable in any faction fight; presumably, the remaining 2 Minorityites constitute the real Minority, the characteristic Minority, the hard core. Looked at from a more rational point of view, it is Turner and Hugh, of course, that are the "frictional losses".

Poor Turner, who was evidently so despised by his own factional colleagues that when they resigned from the SL and mailed their resignation statement to NYC comrades and around the country, they did not, by Comrade Turner's own testimony, even bother to send him a copy! Even now, Turner cannot see that his pet project, which he continues to laud to this day, the MLCRC (and which was practically identical to the NYC Minority faction, as its members were Turner, Ellens, Stoute, Jerry, Espartaco, Hugh and one lone Majority supporter), was actually the embryo of the same mini-VO circle which has now been set up outside the SL.

Without VOism, What Remains?

Comrade Turner's opinions to the contrary, the VO issue was extremely important to the Minority, and not only subjectively. VOism was important because when it is removed--when a comrade admits the SL's political superiority to VO and the importance of being right on political questions--the remainder of the Minority's positions is trivial. Without VOism, the Minority is unattractive in the extreme. Its documents are dull, repetitive and blatantly dishonest, and its positions no longer have any particular authority. And without the authority of VO behind them, these positions become quite unconvincing, because there is a lot about them to make them immediately suspect. The anti-theoretical pitch of the Minority should immediately be suspect to Trotskyists, as should any panacea-mongering which claims an easy (if unspecific) solution to problems which any thoughtful SLer should realize are not subject to easy solution in a situation of increasing rightward motion in the U.S. and the working class.

Further, Turner cannot disown the Ellensites as quickly as he would like. SL members--no matter what their opinions on the factional issues--will not easily forgive Turner for aiding in the removal of a number of people from our ranks by having lent his authority to Ellens' attempts to recruit to her splitting faction. Turner seems to have forgotten already that he was in a political bloc with

the Ellensites, supported their words and their actions, even to the extent of calling one of our Philadelphia comrades a liar because of this comrade's representation of what Ellens and Stoute said and did there. The rest of us have not forgotten that Comrade Turner put himself on record as denying that Ellens and Stoute could possibly have behaved in a disloyal and undisciplined manner in Philadelphia. Was Comrade Turner really so blind that he could believe this of his factional colleagues, whose subsequent conduct demonstrates so fully that they were indeed capable of disloyal behavior? If he was, if he was sincerely taken in by Ellens' protestations of loyalty and good faith at that time, an apology at least is in order now to the comrade whom Turner denounced repeatedly as a liar and slanderer of Ellens over this incident, now that so much evidence of Ellens' manner of operating has come to light.

If Turner refuses to be contaminated by VOism, "Turnerism" is nonetheless compromised by the actions of the rest of the Minority who, in addition to their allegiance to Ellens' VO model, hold many "Turnerite" positions (denunciation of the SL's alleged "petty-bourgeois" orientation, prating about the importance of getting to the workers, etc.). These positions form a consistent pattern with the actions of the Ellens group within and without the SL, especially the liquidationist course they are currently following. If Comrade Turner wants to maintain that his comrades should not judge his ideas by the use to which Ellens has put them, he must do more than declare that he will remain in the SL instead of splitting as they have done. He must show us how he thinks his ideas could be carried out without leading to the kind of liquidationism which Ellens is pursuing.

Previous History as a Leader

If Comrade Turner showed supreme bad judgment in choosing as his ally a conscious conspirator, his previous record in the SL is also nothing to crow about. His capitulationist position on the Maoist purge is generally known by the comrades, although Turner himself is so blind to his own record, and so convinced of his infallibility, that he cannot bring himself to admit that he once wanted to give critical support to the Maoist wing of the Chinese bureaucracy. Turner, when he became convinced of the SL position on the Chinese events became convinced that he had never believed anything else. Turner to this day will denounce as a slander the assertion that he ever held a position of critical support to the Maoists against the Liu-ists. Fortunately, his own documents written at the time are part of the record and are available to the comrades for verification (see PB minutes of 3 October 1966 and PB minutes and attachments of 26 December 1966).

Comrade Turner was the only prominent member of the organization who thought the Spartacist delegation to the London IC Conference in April 1966 should have "apologised" to Healy for having unwittingly broken a trumped-up "rule" (see PB minutes of 25 April 1966, which report Turner's abstention on the motion to endorse the decisions of the SL delegation to the Conference). In all fairness, it should be noted that Comrade Turner was not showing any particular fondness for Healy or the Wohlforth organization--merely weakness, and the

feeling that the unification with ACFI, which all of us in good faith had expected would go through, should be accomplished no matter what. What Turner was showing, even then, was an inability to bear disappointment and the frustration of expectations. Turner's impatience and weakness with regard to Healy and the hoped-for unification of forces was also evident earlier, at the Montreal Conference in October 1965. Turner's conciliatory manner then was not lost on Healy; it is no accident that later, after the 1966 rupture, Healy chose Turner as one of the two SLers (the other was the now-notorious Sherwood) to whom he addressed his letter of 15 April (appended to 25 April 1966 PB minutes).

Comrade Turner's inability to grasp a complex political line has become apparent in several incidents, perhaps the most notable of which was the discussion of Che Guevara's death by the PB not long before the emergence of clear-cut factional differences. Turner stated that the death of Guevara was of no interest to Marxists, because Guevara's program and tactics for social change in Latin America were incorrect and not based on the working class. Citing the elitism of the guerillaist tactic, Turner did not see that Marxists had any stake in who won the battle between the Guevarists and the Bolivian Army. For Turner, Guevara was wrong and that was the end of the matter. He was unable to see any parallel between Guevara and our attitude toward, for example, anti-war "confrontationists", whose theories and tactics we oppose politically, whom we nevertheless defend when they are attacked by the cops of the capitalist state. Turner compared Guevara's role to that of Adam Clayton Powell, "Black Power"-talking politician of the Democratic Party.

Comrade Turner, who wanted to capitulate to the Maoists on the one hand, was here putting the Guevarist-Fidelists on the cops' side of the class line. What these two contradictory positions have in common is that they both show Turner's inability to grasp the subtlety of the Marxist approach to revisionists and bureaucratic strata.

Turner Looks at our Functioning

Comrade Turner is known in the NYC organization as the comrade who is least able to grasp our real problems. He had always had the rather heart-warming position (until recently!) that organizational functionaries should be paid a living wage, completely irrespective of the SL's inability to do so. On the question of the SPARTACIST, he has been as impatient as Comrade Seymour (insisting that we must get the paper out immediately no matter what) while being as perfectionist after the fact as Comrade Henry (about the awkward formulations and omissions that an additional week or two of copy editing might have corrected). Both Seymour and Henry have been somewhat utopian about our press problems, the former about frequency and the latter about quality, but one can respect both their points of view. But what attitude except impatience can one have towards a comrade who is chronically incapable of understanding that you can't have it both ways? Turner is also distinguished among leading comrades in his having done nothing (except complain) in the direction of solving our press problems. He himself has never written a single article for the paper!; moreover, he was opposed to the proposal to

bring Comrade Cunningham from the Midwest to be a full-time editor, although he was unable to offer any counter-suggestions.

Turner's understanding of democratic centralist functioning and proper procedure has always been based on the assumption that there are different rules for him than for other comrades. He is notorious in the New York local for insisting that he be granted all kinds of petty special privileges (e.g., after a round of debate has been concluded he can be expected to ask for, not a second round for everybody, but just an extra turn for himself). His complaints and accusations of bureaucratic unfairness, some of them incredible (e.g., that a line was dropped in Seymour "VI" not as a result of a typist's mistake, but deliberately), abound. Yet his own behavior in a few instances where he had the opportunity to do as he pleased shows what kind of regime Comrade Turner would run if his fight in the SL were successful. The example which comes most readily to mind is the NYC local Executive meeting at which Comrade Joel S. was present to discuss the proposal of creating a post of Assistant Organizer, for which his name had been suggested. At this meeting Comrade Turner savagely attacked Comrade Joel's integrity and moral fitness to be an officer of the local. When Joel took the floor to respond to the attack, Turner tried to prevent him from speaking on the grounds that the Exec had overlooked the necessary formality of a motion to admit Joel (who was not an Exec member) to the meeting with voice. Another comrade immediately made a motion to that effect, both because Joel's presence at the meeting had been requested by the local Organizer to discuss that agenda point and so that Joel would be able to respond to the attack. Comrade Turner, and his supporter Hugh F., actually voted against the motion--an action which even formally could not be justified except as an example of unparalleled personal malice. As the Minority at that time had an accidental 4-to-3 majority on the Exec, Joel would not have been able to speak on his own alleged moral unfitness to run for local office, if another Minorityite had not had cold feet and abstained on the motion. Comrade Turner, in the limitless self-righteousness which makes him so confident that (by definition) he can never be wrong, is so busy jumping at phantom violations of his own rights that he cannot, even for a moment, take the trouble to imagine how he would feel if he were on the receiving end of the kind of high-handed conduct he doled out to another comrade.

Turner as a Working-Class Leader (?)

Turner has sought to legitimize his own political credentials by attacking everyone else's. Following the verbiage of Ellens and Stoute, he has spoken at length about the alleged "petty-bourgeois dilettantism" of the national leadership. One comrade from out-of-town was sincerely impressed by the impression Turner tries to project of himself as what used to be called "an honest worker"; during a recent visit to New York this comrade mentioned to us that of course Turner is a longshoreman. Actually, of course, Comrade Turner is a supervisor in an administrative bureaucracy, and undoubtedly makes one of the highest salaries of any member in the organization. Unlike Turner, however, although he applies "super-proletarian" criteria to everyone else, we do not hold his job or his class origins against him. Nonetheless, it is important that the comrades not be

drawn into accepting at face value Comrade Turner's picture of himself as an "honest worker" fearlessly fighting the cynical "politicos" of an entrenched bureaucracy.

On Balance

It is necessary nonetheless to give Comrade Turner his due--not because I shrink from the harshness of the characterizations I have made (and certainly the tone of Turner's own verbal statements and documents makes polite verbal pussyfooting unnecessary by this point) but because we must look at both sides of the story if we are to understand the roots of Comrade Turner's current factional frenzy.

Comrade Turner did his best for the SL for a long time. It was not for nothing that he was elected to the leadership, as he tried to play a responsible and leading role and had a considerable fund of experience in the communist movement (mostly as a fifth-level leader in the CP) which he sought to make part of the SL's collective experience. From the beginning, Turner had a certain vulnerability to radical "public opinion" and a tendency toward impatience. But both these qualities had their positive sides and enabled Turner to make a contribution to the collective leadership. Because he was too vulnerable to the moods and the barbs of our critics, Comrade Turner was often concerned in advance that we would be attacked for some position or formulation, enabling us to anticipate in advance persuasive arguments to "take out" our opponents. Comrade Turner's impatience for success also played a positive role sometimes, as it goaded him to push the organization into activity. Several times Comrade Turner was the impetus which drove a sluggish local to intervene with a leaflet in a situation which it had been viewing only passively. These traits always had their weak sides also, of course, but so long as Turner maintained a basic sense of identification with the organization and its aims, he was responsive to criticism, and other comrades were generally able to compensate for his weaknesses.

Yet just as the SL's failure to succeed, on balance, in its expectations of intervention and growth pushed the Ellens-Stoute people into looking for a panacea and fleeing the political line which had not brought them the world on a platter, so these difficulties proved ultimately to be too much for Comrade Turner. His impatience got the upper hand. Driven to exasperation by a serious delay in the production of the paper, Comrade Turner made his first attempt to form an oppositional faction in about February of 1968. The people he tried to enlist in his we-want-the-paper-now group were Jack Glenn, whom he knew to have certain minority positions, and Joseph Seymour, who has always been something of a "loner" politically, with a way of looking at things which, while not at variance to our line, has always been very much his own. In view of his later history with Ellens, it is significant that his earlier attempt at opposition was such an obvious example of a rotten bloc. Comrade Glenn was previously almost an adherent of Posadism and was still residually sympathetic to some of its aspects. Comrade Seymour, whose individualistic politics have since been branded "racist" by Turner, became Turner's principal antagonist during the MLCRC fight. (Shortly after

Turner's abortive attempt to build an opposition out of these ill-assorted "oppositionists", Comrade Glenn resigned from the organization, although he still remains in strong and active agreement with us.)

The MLCRC Fight

The SPARTACIST finally appeared, but this did not deter Turner from his course. To be fair, one must admit that it is impossible to know whether Turner would have backed down from his "opposition", which at that point was only a bit of undirected boat-rocking, if he had not been snapped up and goaded on by Ellens. The fight itself, as is by now well known, broke out openly over the question of MLCRC, which became in Comrade Robertson's words "a cancer" on the resources of the local, and then "a cancer with a consciousness", beginning to find theoretical justifications for why the MLCRC should absorb half the resources of the local. A coherent explanation of Turner's going into opposition can be made without much reference to Ellens, as was made by Comrade Robertson long before most of us had even realized we had a secret faction on our hands. Thus: Turner had written his Memorandum on the Negro Struggle and was anxious to implement this approach, as indeed were many other comrades who later became part of the Majority. Trying to act on the Memorandum, Turner took charge of the hospital workers' fraction, whose human material was so poor that it was necessary for Comrade Turner and others to do the planning, the writing and the distributing for them. Although the local and the leadership gave the hospital project their full support, and all local members became involved in regular leaflet distributions at hospitals, Turner, anxious for the project's success and instinctively recognizing that very little could be accomplished with our two hospital workers, exhibited an unconscious grabbing reaction and pulled in several additional people, who came to consider the MLCRC their primary political assignment. Despite the hard work being expended, little or no results were forthcoming immediately. The MLCRC, especially after the split of the two hospital workers themselves, became defensive, acquired an esprit de corps and eventually went to war over the local Organizer's insistence that the MLCRC was sapping other local work of manpower. All that remained was for Turner to develop a theory--"union work" (i.e., hospital work) was primary, the counter-insistence on the importance of Trotskyist propaganda and a revolutionary vanguard orientation was "anti-working-class" and a "student orientation", fractions of party members in an industry were no longer necessary, black hospital workers could easily be won to the SL and if they were not beating down our doors the fault must be in our politics, etc.--and the faction fight per se was under way.

But, with the advantage of hindsight, we could tell the story another way. Turner's impatience for success was already getting the upper hand over his identification with the organization. He had already felt pushed to the point of trying to line up allies, a step he had never before taken. But perhaps he might have pulled back if left to his own devices. He never had the chance. Late in January 1968, Kay Ellens had arrived back in the U.S. We did not know then, but we know now, that within a few weeks of her arrival she had decided that the organization needed a drastic overhaul (to say the least) and had begun building a secret faction. Did Turner decide

the SL was "petty-bourgeois" because of the MLCRC fight, or did Ellens suggest it to him? We have until now accepted the MLCRC fight and the development of the Minority faction out of it at face value, as an opposition that grew out of the real disagreement over hospital work. We will probably never know to what extent Turner was actually responsible for his own positions and destructive actions, and to what extent he, and the MLCRC, were used by Ellens as an opportunity to build a faction based on the "proletarianization" line which is her version of VOism.

In any case, this much is clear: Turner, as much as the SLers recruited by Ellens, was pushed by impatience. All his weaknesses came to the fore in his opposition--his self-righteousness, his tendency to oversimplify a complex situation or analysis, his vulnerability to other forces, his conviction that everyone who ever misunderstood him or disagreed with him was putting words in his mouth. On the basis of a shaky theoretical foundation, Comrade Turner made a series of very serious characterizations of the organization and its line (the "class nature" of our politics, its "dilettantism", etc.). Goaded by the reaction to his characterizations, which often included harsh words in reply, he increased the violence (although not the accuracy) of his assaults to the point that it became impossible for him to pull back gracefully.

What Next?

A number of possible courses are open to Comrade Turner now. He can pull in his horns a bit, now that he has lost practically his entire base of support in the organization, but in view of the seriousness of the differences and the extreme harshness of his characterizations of the Majority and the leadership, this seems exceedingly unlikely. He can continue as he has since the split, undeterred by his exposure as a front man for a faction whose real intentions he knew nothing about, convinced of the rightness of his every word and decision during the faction fight. But since his comrades can hardly be expected to leap onto what has so far been such a disastrous bandwagon, such conduct would prove only that he is not really serious about staying in the SL to fight for his ideas, that he is here through bull-headed stubbornness and a desire to "get even". If Comrade Turner really has a perspective of remaining in the SL to win a majority for his politics, he must demonstrate his seriousness to his comrades. He must explain to them the basis for his bloc with Ellens and his reasons for breaking with them to remain in the SL. And he must convince his comrades by his actions that he is, unlike the Ellens crew, a disciplined and loyal member of our organization.

24 October 1968

COPY

[New York]
28 October 1968

[New Orleans]
Dear Joe V.:

We are somewhat surprised that we have not heard any comment from you regarding the current conflict. We had expected to hear from you partly because you are one of the few people in the SL who ever tried to get people to do some serious reading as a means of developing them into cadre; and partly the New Orleans local was about the only place outside New York that attempted a serious implementation of the Turner Memorandum and apparently had a dispute similar to the struggle over the NY MLCRC.

Our own struggle in the NYC local made it clear to us that the SL leadership would not allow the implementation of the "Memorandum on the Negro Struggle", the tentative first steps toward a working class perspective. This implementation would lead to a shift in the composition of the organization, entire perspective, methods of work etc. Members would have to be working-class cadre capable of training and developing members of their class instead of being trained for dependence on one man's decisions. In such an organization there is no possibility for elitism as shown in the SL today towards workers, blacks, etc. There would be no room for show theatre antics and window dressing as opposed to real work. Such an organization would also necessitate a change in the personal habits and levels of functioning of most of the leadership (not to mention the many "book" members). As usual with the SL, if we had wanted to set up an LCRC for show to other radicals (without it however having any real sustained contact with the working class) that would have been allowed--but nothing which would have changed the SL in such a way that would have required most of the comrades to produce on a consistent basis.

Given the numerically and organizationally decisive position of the NYC local, the rest of the org. for all practical purposes was pulled along, or as in the case of the Bay Area local where the comrades were confused and intimidated by JR's many phone calls both warning Chris that "VO methods" were not to be allowed and distorting the minority's positions as "syndicalist" and personally slandering minority comrades. It was clear that the SL would not allow itself to be changed and that if we were serious about our own perspective of developing worker cadre it would have to be done outside the SL. Without the possibility of winning a majority and without the SL having either a worker cadre or many students with any real background in Marxism, it would have been simply formalistic to remain inside the SL, just so we could have said we fought through to the conference. During that same time we can be developing ourselves and contacts we make, so that we will be in a strong position for work rather than in an exhausted condition from a lengthy faction fight. Contrary to the wishful thinking of the office-bound NO staff, we left the SL in order to be able to do some real work--not because we wanted to leave politics.

The second realization that came out of the NYC fight was that the MLCRC, as projected, is insufficient. It provides an organizational basis for making contact with workers in struggles--but it goes no further, it leaves the struggles still on basically a trade union basis. What is required is the means for developing worker contacts into political cadre (and concomitantly, for developing ourselves into cadre capable ultimately of leading workers' struggles--not simply of propagandizing to workers). It is in this area that VO's experience is especially productive and should be studied for the use we can make of it here.

The main difference between our group and the SL is that of the ORO versus cadre-building perspective. The SL's idea is that when it has grown and gained hegemony over the "vanguard", then it will begin to intervene in workers' strug-

gles and to recruit workers. But, what is this "vanguard"? What are these "correct positions" with which the SL is to win over such elements as the left wing of the SWP, PL, parts of PFP, SDS, WL, etc.? How did these Trotskyist positions develop? Why can't the SL recruit workers now? What difference will the numbers of members it has make in its ability to recruit or in the politics it is recruiting to? The majority can find no other defense for its ORO position than what it calls the historical orientation of the F.I. But this is a false reading. The Fourth International developed out of internal struggles in the Communist Parties, and the Trotskyist groups were very small in relation to the mass working-class parties of the time--communist, socialist, etc. In orienting towards these parties, Trotskyists were orienting to the most conscious workers. In the U.S. today there is no mass working-class party, and the ORO's themselves have very few workers and no base in the working class. To orient to them is meaningless--the form of Trotskyist or Leninist politics without the content. The "vanguard" here--Pabloists, Maoists etc.--may indeed be the most conscious elements, but consciously petty-bourgeois, not working-class, in their orientation and intervention in struggles. That these people are the main base on which to build a revolutionary movement is a non-working-class position and very dangerous: this orientation can also lead to great overestimation of the significance of these groups, groups like the PFP and internationally of formations like the guerrilla movements.

To build a working-class revolutionary party requires long range development of cadre, grounded on Marxist-Leninist theory and trained in working-class struggles. It is this which the majority holds is impossible for the SL--in order to avoid making such an admission the majority has accused us of getting our political positions "air mail" and of not being "political." As far as positions go, we must develop our own--we refuse to take them blanket from the SL or anyone else. The SL pretends interest in, for instance, our position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. By such a demand the majority reveals its own idealist bankruptcy. It's not that a position on the Arab-Israeli conflict is not related to the American working class--it is--but the point is that to build a revolutionary Marxist organization it is not necessary to start with such a position. It is much more important to begin with an orientation--to the working class--and with a Marxist-Leninist background and from these to develop our ability to analyze past and present events and historical phenomena, and thus to formulate our own positions.

This has never been the approach of the SL--rather the SL maintains that all of its positions are "correct," even though most of the SL's original ones were formulated by comrades most of whom do not possess even a rudimentary background in Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist theory and are not in contact with the ongoing class struggles. The rest of the SL's positions are carryovers from a rotting SWP whose past was never reanalyzed in order to explain its failure. JR sees nothing contradictory in his boasting that the SL is the repository for "correct" Trotskyist theory at the same time that he realistically admits that its human material is very poor. Does he really imagine that very poor human material (we assume he means politically poor) can produce "correct" political positions? It seems more reasonable that a very poor human material felt compelled to develop positions before it was itself developed into working-class cadre--and now it must defend these positions because it has nothing else.

This is not the way Lenin built the Bolshevik party--the Bolshevik party did not start first with correct ideas, then recruit to these ideas a petty-bourgeois central committee (the smart ones!) and then finally pull along the ordinary workers. This is not the way a revolutionary working class party will be built in this country.

The foregoing should give you some idea of the direction our thoughts are going at the present time. We would like to hear your comments and hope you will take the trouble to send us your ideas on the present situation. Please write care of K. Ellens, New York City.

Comradely,

Shirl and Helen
[Stoute and Janacek]

P.S. We sent several batches of documents your way; but sometimes mail goes astray. If you do not have any of the following we will be glad to send more copies, "Organizational Methods", "What is a Working-Class Perspective?", "Politicalizing to Avoid Politics", "Proletarian vs. Petty-Bourgeois Politics." ("Org. Methods", of course, was not written as a minority document, but has since been incorporated into the fight.)

We are enclosing a list of our current study schedule. At present we are beginning a preparation for working through Capital, first working through the material in the enclosed list. We have just finished some basic readings, which we have gone through in group discussion. We are also discussing some basic and some background material (history, philosophy etc.) in individual discussions between comrades. A large part of our development will be preparing ourselves to be able to teach this material to contacts. This provides a great motivation for learning, in addition to the development of our ability to analyze issues we are confronted with. Fundamental to the method of approach is the assumption that, while some of us may have read more than others, because of our prior mis-experience and mis-education, we are starting more or less from the same level and our basic principle is to develop cadre (not just positions). (By the way, contrary to what Liz seems to think according to her latest document, this study is not at all contradictory to public work and intervention.)

29 October 1968

To the members of the Spartacist League:

On Monday, October 28, 1968, I was "partially and conditionally" suspended from the Spartacist League, from membership in the Political Bureau, and from a "leading, policy making role" in the organization, unless and until I agree to sign a statement to be dictated by the leaders of the majority.

As a "partially and conditionally suspended" member, my documents, The Internal Struggle Continues and Ideology and Practice, will not be produced and circulated by the National Office as part of the material for the forthcoming conference, nor will I be permitted to attend the conference, except to appeal my suspension.

The Rubicon for the Spartacist League, after four years of existence as a separate organization was to have been the conference projected for Christmas week. The future direction and perspectives of the organization were to have been finally decided by the leading cadre assembled for this purpose. The leaders of the majority, fearful of the impact of the minority's documents on the cadre, and unable to politically cope with the exposure of their further political degeneration, has once again resorted to the well-tested organizational methods of the common bureaucrat to remove an opposition.

The brazen effrontery of Robertson, whose agile brain concocted the formula for the exclusion of the remaining minority from the conference, knows no limits. Where, except in Stalinist organizational practice, is there a precedent for a "partial" suspension of a full member of the highest body of an organization? Where, in the practice of revolutionary socialism, have documents bearing on an ongoing dispute in the organization, and submitted before a suspension, been withheld from the membership? Where, except in organizations in the process of political degeneration, have the spokesmen for a minority position been denied the right to present that position to the highest policy-making body of that organization?

In order for these penalties to be abrogated, I must sight a declaration to the effect that I:

1. repudiate my allegations in The Internal Struggle Continues that "An Open Letter To Our Harrassed Minority Comrades" was dictated to Cde. Seymour by Cde. Robertson, withdraw my statements in Ideology and Practice that Cde. Seymour's document, IV. On the Black Question, was deliberately tampered with "to soften the clearly Pabloite line, so that there are now two versions of his document in circulation", and that Cde. Seymour had stated at the NY local that, "We are not interested in recruiting someone who doesn't even know who Malcolm X was", and to apologize publicly and in writing for the "slanders".
2. state that, if Ellens and Stoute were guilty of the charges made against them, they deserved to be expelled.

3. admit to a breach of discipline in mailing a "factional circular" to members of the SL in the "guise of a letter", of not having sent a copy to the National Office, and of not having had the "circular" distributed through the NO in the first place.
4. disavow the position that factional activities preclude organizational assignments, no longer refuse such assignments, and indicate that I will, in future, undertake to function creatively as a leader of the organization, to help carry out its line.
5. admit to a breach of discipline in having continued to discuss the internal situation in the SL with my son, in not preventing him from attending meetings of the Workers League, and to agree to break political ties with him.

Cde. Robertson eliminated all doubt concerning the negotiability of any of these demands. They must be complied with completely, in every aspect, in a "dictated statement" to be supplied by him.

It is, of course, not possible for me to sign such a declaration. Robertson ignores the history of the Revolutionary Tendency in the Socialist Workers Party, incredible as it may seem. Art Phillips, Tim Wohlforth, and Gerry Healy broke with the majority precisely because it refused to sign a statement authored by Gerry Healy, one which they had had no hand in formulating, and which they were not permitted to alter. History, in a manner of speaking, does indeed play queer tricks! However, I did agree to the following concessions which were not considered acceptable by Robertson:

1. I agreed to strike, and, in fact, have stricken all references to Robertson as the author, instigator, or initiator of Seymour's "Open Letter". I agreed to publicly indicate that my belief that the letter was dictated by Robertson was based on inference and not on fact. I also agreed to remove, and, in fact, have removed any references to tampering with Seymour's document, IV. On the Black Question, and to the disputed remark. I would not, however, agree to a written apology to Seymour. The documents, The Internal Struggle Continues and Ideology and Practice, had not been circulated by the NO, and this demand was an obvious factional device without the slightest merit, under the circumstances. In addition, I remain unconvinced that Seymour alone inspired and authored the "Open Letter". I made the same allegation in my presentation to an enlarged meeting of the NY local two months ago, at which Robertson and Seymour both spoke, Robertson from the floor and Seymour in a presentation and summary. Why was my statement challenged only now? I also remain unconvinced by the protestations of both Seymour and Robertson that a mere typographical error was responsible for the two versions of IV. On the Black Question. Seymour's explanation was that his original copy supplied to the NO was at fault, while Robertson indicated that the typist made the error. Nor is an apology in order for my hearing, transcribing, or verifying "difficulties" in connec-

tion with the remark in question.

2. I agreed to make the required statement concerning Ellens and Stoute provided I could assert, at the same time, that I remained unconvinced of their guilt of the charges, that the emphasis on organizational disloyalty was being used to evade the political questions raised, that the insistence on expulsion after resignation for political reasons smacked of what Trotsky had called "Comintern venom", was motivated by malice, was a type of ritual, proxy execution.
3. I agreed to stipulate that a breach of discipline was committed in directly mailing a letter to comrades outside of NY city, while indicating that, after the disbanding of the majority faction, I had believed I was at liberty to do so, in order to inform them of the minority's continuing existence, and that the omission of a copy of the letter to the NO was inadvertant. I also agreed to not send other factional materials of a general nature out directly thereafter, but only through the NO.
4. I would not agree, however, to either directly or indirectly indicate that I had held a position that factional activities precluded organizational assignments, or that I had refused such assignments. As a democratic-centralist, I have always contended that a minority is duty-bound to carry out the line of the organization. Hugh F. and I have, therefore, appeared every Saturday morning at election rallies for the West Side CIPA Assembly candidate, prepared to speak and distribute materials, despite our conviction that this activity was completely worthless. We have also been involved in local sales and distributions every week without fail. To those in the majority intent on harrassing the minority, and their snide remarks that I did not seem "busy", I had responded that I was, in fact, very occupied in preparing minority statements for publication, in corresponding with comrades outside NY, and in carrying out local assignments. While never having refused an assignment on the basis of factional priorities, I had continued to maintain that factional rights were not merely formal in an organization purporting to be Leninist, and that a minority should be allowed time to function as such. As to functioning creatively to carry out a line one believes to be destructive to one's organization, the majority demands the psychologically impossible. A loyal member must carry out a line he disagrees with, but how can he be expected to function creatively in the process, to originate more effective tactics and policies which can only do greater harm to his organization?
5. As to my son, Howard, as he began to identify with Trotskyism, he expressed a desire to attend meetings of the SL, and received a standing invitation to attend local meetings before the faction fight began. His standing invitation was renewed after the dispute erupted, and he, thereby, became fully acquainted with all factional differences. It is, of course, natural that he identifies politically with my views, although I have never tried to impose them on him. It is also quite natural,

under the circumstances, that I have continued to keep him informed about developments in the SL.

Prior to the faction fight, and in the absence of a youth group around the SL (I had indicated to Robertson on several occasions that the basis for such a group existed), Howard became attracted to the Workers League's aborted youth organization. He lost interest in that group because of its low political level, and had stopped attending its meetings long before it went out of existence and long before the faction fight developed. Since then, he has attended one meeting of the Workers League which celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Fourth International and showed films about the French general strike. He has also expressed an interest in a class series on Pragmatism to be led by Wohlforth. It did not require Robertson's threat, given laughingly, at the meeting which renewed Howard's invitation to SL meetings, that "We would beat you up", to ensure that Howard would keep his word not to divulge the SL's internal affairs to opponent organizations. Howard is thoroughly honest and honorable, as one would expect a sixteen-year old, who has been newly imbued with a revolutionary socialist conception, to be. To believe that I would send him to the Workers League to spread information about the faction fight, as Robertson has stated, discredits him, and not Howard or myself. I could not and would not "demand" that Howard not attend the WL meetings, nor would I "break politically" with him. But I did agree to refrain from giving him further information about the internal affairs of the SL.

Despite the considerable concessions on my part, and despite the picayune nature of the charges against me, Robertson insisted on imposing the "partial and conditional" suspension. It became quite obvious that the "conditional" suspension is, in fact, an unconditional and hypocritical political elimination in the guise of a suspension, and that were I to bring myself to sign the statement demanded, other grounds would be found to ensure that neither I, other members of the minority, nor minority documents would be permitted into the conference.

That the leaders of the majority in the SL have far outstripped the SWP in its highhanded treatment of a minority should not occasion surprise. The SWP descended from the height of a genuinely revolutionary organization under the blows of difficult objective conditions and its own theoretical inadequacy. In its degeneration, it had to limit itself in dealing with its dissidents so as to project a simulacrum of its past organizational practice, in order not to unduly disturb its membership. The SL which proved unable and unwilling to reach the height of revolutionary practice, and to develop beyond the politics of the small circle built around a personality, is relatively freer from restraint. Whatever Robertson says goes! Who is to say him nay? Al Nelson, who has throughout his career subordinated his considerable political talents to docilely carrying out Robertson's every whim? Lyndon Henry, who did not even have the courage to come to the meeting of the Political Bureau at which the organizational violence to the remaining minority was done? Dave

Cunningham and Joseph Seymour, who were recently co-opted by Robertson to the PB? Mark Small, whose disastrous loss of self-assurance is cheerfully promoted by Robertson? Joel Salinger, the NY local organizer, who, in his six months of membership in the SL has shown himself to be a particularly apt pupil of the Robertsonian art of organizational malice and manipulation, and who openly stated that I should be expelled for disloyal thoughts?

More than half of the original full members of the central committee elected at the founding conference of the SL are no longer with the organization. Of the remaining four, two show signs of instability which presage their imminent departure as leaders, if not as members of the SL. More than half of the originally elected alternate members of the central committee has also resigned. Robertson reigns supreme!

The founding conference of the SL in September 1966 registered the establishment of a promising organization comprising more than eighty revolutionary socialists. This organization, which we labored to build and maintain is now in extremis as a result of the dilettante stewardship of Robertson and his majority, and his pernicious perspectives for a "splinter propagandist group" oriented mainly toward student radicals. The extent of the failure of the SL can be more readily understood if one compares its accomplishments with that of the early Trotskyists. Under Cannon, with a membership not apparently differing in size, they were able, without interruption, to publish a semi-monthly newspaper, and, eventually, build a party, and help to build a world Trotskyist movement.

The largest share of condemnation for the failure of the SL must be apportioned to Robertson, whose personal qualities, not only his outstanding abilities, but also his serious weaknesses, were harnessed to a limiting and disabling perspective, one that he felt competent to pursue. His narrow vision is, unhappily, the result of his development as a revolutionist from student origins, under conditions of divorce from the working class and its struggles, the situation of a generation of revolutionists. His pre-eminence in the SL, the absence of other authority figures of similar stature able to oppose him, and a cadre without sufficient political background, knowledge and experience, has enabled him to win his present pyrrhic organizational victory, which serves to eliminate the SL as a revolutionary instrument.

Under the circumstances, I have no other recourse but to resign from the Spartacist League. In doing so, I and those in political agreement with me, continue our struggle for a Leninist vanguard party.

A party of the bolshevik-type can only be built, in this as in every country, by basing itself on and sinking ineradicable roots in the working class. In this country, in this historical epoch, this task can only be accomplished on the basis of an orientation by revolutionary socialists toward the most exploited and most revolutionary sections of the class, the black and Spanish-speaking workers. No

movement, no matter how it sees itself, can be considered revolutionary which does not apply itself to this task. The path to the building of socialist consciousness in the working class, in general, today, lies through the black and Spanish-speaking workers, in particular. Socialist consciousness in the class can only be achieved today through the building of transitional organizations and the development of a program able to unite black and white workers. This unity can only be achieved today on the basis of a struggle to end the special oppression of the minority workers, not by asking the black workers to wait for socialism, not by giving black workers "permission" to form separate organizations to fight for "their special interests", and not by other opportunist adaptations to Black Nationalism or white chauvinism.

The building of a Leninist party has proven to be difficult in the extreme, especially in this country. The SWP, the leading Trotskyist party of the Fourth International, proved unequal to, and degenerated in an attempt to by-pass, this fundamental responsibility. The expansion of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and Asia, the emergence of a deformed workers' state in Cuba, the long-lived post World War II economic upsurge, carried in its wake enormous theoretical confusion. In this country, as in every capitalist country, the by-product of the exceptionally difficult objective circumstances, has been the proliferation of a host of small radical organizations, most of whom exist as small circles around a dominant personality, claiming to be the essence of the future revolutionary leadership of the working-class.

As the crisis of world capitalism sharpens, with the ending of the post-war upsurge, as the contradictions of American capitalism continue to intensify, increasingly propelling the workers against the capitalists, their state, and their labor-lieutenants, and also intensifying the struggles of black workers against their special oppression, new opportunities for revolutionists emerge. The struggle to realize them, will not only force those who wish to be revolutionary socialists to the recognition of the urgent necessity of submerging individual egoism to the task of building a working-class vanguard party, but will also serve to clarify the programmatic basis for its accomplishment.

We intend to play an active role in this process. To the extent that we are able, we will seek to promote a principled unity in action which can further our perspectives, with all groups purporting to be revolutionary socialist. We hope to take part at the same time, in an ongoing process of discussion and debate, to clarify the basis on which a Leninist party can be built.

In resigning from the Spartacist League, I, and those in political agreement with me, do not intend to build or join an anti-Spartacist League. We would hope that those who decide to remain in the SL would also wish to be involved in discussion and in action with us. We bear no malice toward any individuals who remain in the SL, or to the organization as such. It is with a sense of profound regret that I end an association of more than five years duration, in recognition that the SL's course is set toward a non-revolutionary future.

Harry Turner

29 October 1968

To the comrades of the Spartacist League:

The national leadership by means of a number of unacceptable demands on Cde. Turner has succeeded in throttling the main voice of the minority, and blocking the circulation of definitive minority documents. These documents should have been available to all comrades in preparation for a national conference where differences could be fought to a conclusion. In addition, Cde. Turner was to be stripped of his position as a member of the Political Bureau, and of his right to attend the conference with voice and vote.

Why has the national leadership found itself compelled to issue a completely unacceptable ultimatum to Cde. Turner, inevitably resulting in his suspension? The reason is that the leadership found itself completely unable to cope with the minority's political positions. The tactics resorted to, for the purpose of preventing a thorough thrashing out of differences, by the majority are the typical bureaucratic methods which a left-centrist grouping, the majority in the Spartacist League, could be expected to utilize.

In order to make the Spartacist League into a viable revolutionary organization, the comrades would have had to replace the national leadership, and implement a program which up to this time has only been given lip service, that is, establish roots in the working class by "blackening" the Spartacist League, and seriously attempting to move the organization in the direction of the working class.

On finding the above impossible to attain, finding valid meaningful criticism stifled, finding dilettantist rhetoric continuing, e.g., expressing identity with the working class and with its most exploited section, the black workers, but with no serious attempt to put words into action, serious comrades must now conclude that the Spartacist League has eliminated itself as a revolutionary organization, and resign as I hereby do.

Hugh F.
[New York]

REPLY TO TURNER

copy

[Berkeley]
20 December 1968

Dear Cde. Turner,

I have held off answering your requests for comment on your various documents because of those suspicions naturally arising from your association with Ellens. That association and its subsequent fortunes seemed either to indicate that you were naive, a quality which a revolutionary politician cannot afford, nor one that seemed likely in view of your experience; or had more sinister implications, which latter thought I tended to repress considering your history as I was aware of it.

Later, I was puzzled by your resignation. Presumably you still felt at the time of Ellens' desertion that the existence of the cadres of the League justified your continuing a principled struggle here, but a month later you quit rather than force an expulsion. What changed so qualitatively to warrant that course? Were it the League, you ought to demonstrate it to us, not just assert it. Was it you? Other explanations did not seem worthy either of you or of attention.

However, I have just read Wohlforth's article, "New Splits in Spartacist" (Bulletin #96), which provides, not only solutions to these nagging questions, but also the basis for an explanation of your actions. Furthermore, it provides a complete vindication of the majority leadership's behavior toward you.

Were there any doubts, misgivings or qualms in my mind about the affair, they have been dispelled. And, dispelled by Wohlforth!

Thank you.

Roger P.

THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY...

II. A COMMENT ON THE TURNER RESIGNATION

by Liz Gordon

Because of Comrade Turner's previous vehement declarations of his intention to stay in the Spartacist League and fight for his positions, the manner in which he contrived to leave the organization was somewhat peculiar. It was necessary for him to find a way of leaving which would get him out of the SL--which he desperately wanted--while at the same time giving the appearance that it had been the organization, and not Turner himself, which had propelled him out the door. His resignation statement is an elaborate smokescreen for this manoeuvre, as I hope will become clear in the course of this examination.

Turner's position in the SL was, briefly, unenviable. He had been grotesquely used by the Ellens-Stoute Minority, believing himself the leader of an opposition based on his Memorandum on the Negro Struggle and his first oppositional document (Whither the Spartacist League), whereas the faction actually was based on "super-proletarianism" and slavish emulation of Voix Ouvriere, the French Trotskyist group. Turner had declared, as "leader" of the Minority, that the Minority had no intention of splitting from the SL. (As the essential Minority, the Ellens-Stoute wing, had every intention of splitting, Turner and his one follower, Hugh F., were the only ones who considered themselves bound by Turner's declaration.) When Ellens-Stoute discarded Turner, the "loyal oppositionist", as a no longer useful front for their wrecking operation, he found that his continued oppositionist role had little possibility of winning any more support in the organization. Further, he had characterized the organization and its political line so harshly, and so exacerbated his personal relations with the leadership and the Majority, that he would hardly want to stick around the SL just for fun.

So, understandably, Turner wanted out. But in view of his pompous declarations about staying in, his pride would not permit him to resign. Nor could he adopt a too-obvious course of getting himself expelled, such as by refusing to carry out clear-cut assignments like meetings and sales. Instead, he chose to run a guerilla warfare campaign, committing little violations, any of which he hoped would look petty if used as the basis of organizational action against him, hoping that he could force the organization to expel him, so that he would be spared the humiliation of having to resign himself.

Turner's tactic succeeded only partially. Although his violations were deliberate and serious enough to warrant expulsion, the Political Bureau chose to restrict its action against him to a partial and conditional suspension, so that Turner could, if he chose, remain in the organization for the completion of the internal discussion and the national conference.

A Partial and Conditional Suspension

Turner's antics were indeed becoming an intolerable burden on

our organization. We had on our hands a member who did nothing except submit mammoth documents (in one month: The Internal Struggle Continues, 7 October 1968, 44 pages; Ideology and Practice, 21 October 1968, 23 pages) containing a rehash of all Turner's old accusations and lukewarm theoretical ramblings, while committing little acts of indiscipline. The course the PB chose, when it could no longer ignore these petty (and some not-so-petty) violations, was to seek to ascertain whether Turner had any intention of stopping them and to insure that Turner could no longer take advantage of the only provision of organizational membership--the opportunity to write oppositional documents and seek to recruit to his micro-faction--while violating the spirit and the letter of the SL's rules.

The written statement which was demanded from Turner, as the condition for reinstating him to the internal life of the organization, contained nothing which a principled political person could not have taken in stride. The substance of Turner's resignation statement is the attempt to justify his refusal to make the declarations asked of him. It is easy to show that these declarations would have been right and proper--and thus that Turner did not make them only because he wanted to leave the SL, if possible while still giving the appearance of having been railroaded out.

1. Repudiation of Slanders

On page 4 of The Internal Struggle Continues, Turner says:

"A case in point in the so-called open letter [An Open Letter To Our "Harassed" Minority Comrades, 9 August 1968] ostensibly written by the NYC local organizer, Joseph Seymour.... Judging from the tone of malice and general style, the letter could only have been dictated to Cde. Seymour, who might well have blushed at the transparent dishonesties incorporated therein."

On page 6 of the same document, Turner refers to the author of the Open Letter as "Cde. Robertson-Seymour".

Turner was told to repudiate this scandalous allegation. Note that the allegation was not, as is suggested by Turner's resignation statement, that Robertson was the "instigator" or "initiator" of the document. (As a matter of fact, Comrade Robertson did in no sense "instigate" the document. The first he or any of us saw of the Open Letter was when Comrade Seymour handed out some Xerox copies of it to us one Saturday morning on an SL mobilization for the CIPA campaign.) But this accusation would be less serious. Turner stated, not that Seymour is a political dolt who was put up to writing a document with unoriginal ideas inspired by somebody else, the National Chairman, but that Seymour is a forgery politically, who would pass off to his comrades as his own work a document written by somebody else. Turner had accused Seymour of the most cynical kind of political misconduct.

Likewise, Turner's accusation that Comrade Seymour's document on the Black Question was tampered with without his knowledge is very serious. This accusation, like the accusation above, is repeated in Turner's resignation statement. It appeared originally in

Ideology and Practice, page 1.

Clearly, an accusation of this sort must be proved or else withdrawn. It is not enough to "publicly indicate that my belief... was based on inference and not on fact". This slander is of the same sort as: "While I have no proof for this, I infer on the basis of his political role that So-and-so is an FBI agent sent here to make trouble". This kind of mud-slinging at a comrade's reputation is impermissible unless the accuser can offer concrete proof. We would not permit such an unproved statement about any of our comrades to appear in any document.

As Turner admitted on page 2 of his resignation, he could find no justification for refusing to strike these slanders from his documents. But of course he presents this as a substantial concession on his part. What makes his protests ludicrous is that on page 15 of The Internal Struggle Continues, Turner had made this statement:

"For Cde. Seymour to indicate that I have misunderstood him, am misguided, ignorant of the facts, illogical, untheoretical, etc. is entirely within his rights. To impugn my veracity is another matter entirely. He must either support his statements with proof, retract them, or stand condemned as unworthy of the confidence of revolutionists." (my emphasis)

Parenthetically, this paragraph only further demonstrates Turner's unbelievably thin skin. Seymour had nowhere made a Turner-type slander of his own. The statement of Seymour's that seems to have prompted this paragraph from Turner was that Turner had not accurately presented the positions of the Majority comrades.

2. The Organization's Right to Expel

Turner had previously voted against the expulsion of Ellens and Stoute for gross indiscipline. His motivation, given verbally at PB and NYC local meetings, had not been simply that he denied that Ellens and Stoute were guilty as charged. He had also made statements which placed a question over his own membership, as they implied the organization had no right to expel violators of discipline. (His reasoning seemed to be that since Ellens and Stoute did what they did for political reasons, and ones that he was in the main in sympathy with, he could not be asked to vote for their expulsion.) Since any member must recognize the organization's right to enforce its discipline, Turner's stand had to be clarified. (A similar situation had come up previously, when Donna H., who had not broken discipline herself, voted against the expulsion of the Ross grouplet. Turner at that time--5 June 1968--had been perhaps the hardest on that question, insisting along with the rest of us that no member could truly be bound by our discipline if he could not agree that other members who broke discipline should be expelled.)

Therefore, Turner was asked to state that the charges against Ellens and Stoute, if they were true, merited expulsion. He was never, never asked to state he believed the charges were true (although he, their ex-faction colleague, knew far better than we). In the

SWP precedent cited by Turner, Healy demanded that Revolutionary Tendency supporters sign a statement that they believed a certain political line (assessment of the SWP) to be the correct one. Comrades should immediately recognize that Turner was not asked to repudiate any of his beliefs, regarding the guilt of Ellens and Stoute or anything else.

Turner admits he could make the statement that the charges, if true, merited expulsion. All of his "provided that" verbiage is just an attempt to conceal the legitimacy of the PB's demands, to imply he had been asked for something more.

3. Proper Conduct of Internal Discussion

Turner admits he was wrong to mail his factional circular behind the back of the national office. His attempt to explain away his reason for violating our rules and procedure in the first place is transparent. Discussion is regulated by the PB, not by the Majority faction (obviously) and thus the suspension of the Majority faction following the split of the Ellens-Stoute Minority changed nothing about what to do with an internal factional document when one wants to get it circulated. Even Turner himself was unable to stick to the flimsy pretext that his factional circular mailed to the general membership was intra-tendency correspondence which was exempt from N.O. scrutiny. A factional document does not become privileged correspondence because "Dear Comrade" has been written across the top.

Of course, Turner might argue that as his political acumen has never been of the highest caliber, it is not surprising that he made a mistake in this case. One might be tempted to give him the benefit of the doubt, were it not the case that proper procedure for internal factional discussion had been carefully explained to Turner and the rest of the Minority several times, and recently.

First, anticipating that the factional situation was developing to the point that documents might well be forthcoming, Comrade Robertson early in the faction fight, during the spring of 1968, completed the editing on a very long set of back PB minutes because they contained the basic formulation of our procedures on the handling of internal party discussion. (PB minutes, 26 December 1966, point 3 (c), pages 3-5; ratified by the Central Committee Plenum, 31 December 1967) When these minutes were produced and approved by the PB, Robertson directed the attention of the comrades to this section.

Our procedures were also discussed in Turner's presence at the time that, on the initiative of the Majority, joint Majority-Minority editorship of internal materials was set up. They were extensively discussed again shortly after that, when the Minority immediately violated the rules in the production of their first "official" document, Turner's Whither the SL? Jumping over the proper chronological order (one of the reasons why document production is to be supervised by the N.O. is to ensure that documents are produced in the order in which they were submitted) of documents to be stenciled, the Minority began stenciling Whither the SL? itself without the knowledge of the N.O., ignoring the provision for joint editorship (luckily, this document did not contain security violations which would

have necessitated its being restenciled after editing) and making use of a non-SL member to stencil it!

Even by itself, the hullabaloo caused by this violation of procedure should surely have served to implant our regulations firmly in Turner's mind.

The reason Turner has to try to explain, with the nonsensical reasoning about the suspension of the Majority faction, why he violated this rule is that, if his comrades are to accept his picture of himself as the martyred victim, it must not look as if he had committed provocations in the hope of winning himself an expulsion.

4. Members Must Carry Out Assignments

Turner says in his resignation statement, "I would not agree, however, to... indicate that I had held a position that factional activities precluded organizational assignments, or that I had refused such assignments." This is a smoke-screen. We had here another case in which everybody had heard Turner say something which he later denied having said. As this sort of thing had occurred many times before with Turner, we knew exactly how to handle this one. We believed, just as in the case of Turner's verbal statements on the Ellens-Stoute expulsion, that Turner had made a declaration that was incompatible with membership. We believed we had heard him say that he could not be asked to carry out assignments for the organization because his factional activities took priority. What we asked him to state was not that he had ever said this, however, but that he recognized that he as a member was under discipline to carry out assignments, both for the local of which he was a member and in his capacity as a leading member of the organization, a PB and CC member.

Turner admits in his resignation statement that to make such a statement is not unprincipled. In order to find a way to keep from fulfilling the PB's conditions for removing the suspension, he had to pretend he had been asked for something other than the assurance that he would not refuse assignments.

The comrades who were not at the PB meeting undoubtedly do not know (one would never guess from Turner's resignation statement) that the responsibilities the PB had in mind regarding Turner's status as a leading member of the organization were in connection with his post as head of the CC's Trade Union Commission. The tasks required of him as TUC head were such things as corresponding with our out-of-town trade union members and advising them about their union work, attending meetings of NYC union fractions, implementing the line of the Memorandum on the Negro Struggle as agreed upon by the Plenum, etc. Turner admitted his non-functioning in this area was willful, and dreamed up as a justification his impassioned arguments about it being unfair to demand creative, leading work from a member in opposition because it was asking this member to initiate approaches he considered detrimental to the organization. This reasoning, even if it were defensible, would mean that functioning as head of the TUC and doing the work indicated above is, in the eyes of Turner, detrimental to the organization. This casts an interesting

light on Turner's endless accusations that it is the Majority which is (covertly) not interested in or opposed to doing trade union work if we were to take Turner's protestations seriously. Of course, what this shows in reality is not that Turner could not carry out the TUC work in good conscience, but rather that he was trying desperately to think of principled-looking reasons to refuse the PB's demands, in order to achieve by hook or by crook his severance from the organization.

5. The Case of Howard T.

Turner was asked to clarify the status, politically, of his son Howard and to act accordingly. This was the only demand, of the 5 made on him, which Turner was actually, substantively, smoke-screens aside, unwilling to fulfill. Yet this case is so clear that it becomes obvious, on examination, that Turner must have been hard-pressed to find a way to not comply with the PB's motion. For of all Turner's provocations, his conduct with regard to Howard was the most serious of his violations of discipline. No one who was not seeking separation from the organization would ever try to justify such conduct on the part of a member.

Howard had been given a standing invitation to internal SL meetings. Previous to his coming to a hot factional local meeting, he had been "around" the Workers League. Turner explained that Howard, being quite young, had been interested in Wohlforth's current youth group, as we had no "youth" activities of our own. When Howard turned up at the acrimonious, faction-fight-filled local meeting, Turner vouched for Howard's having no intention of joining the Workers League or carrying tales to them, and on the basis of this assurance his standing invitation was renewed.

Thus, to our knowledge, and on the basis of Comrade Turner's assurances, Howard T. was a contact of the SL and, since he had a standing invitation to internal NYC local meetings, was privy to factional matters. Thus Turner was within his formal rights in agitating his son about his internal Minority views.

What Turner omits in the "Howard story" is this: Previous to the "showdown" with Turner, Workers League members had on two separate occasions baited our people: Howie, the son of one of your CC members, has joined our organization. We confronted Turner with this, and Turner replied that Howard was not a WL member (to our knowledge this was true) and that Howard had attended one semi-public class on Marxism to further his political education. Turner waxed indignant that we could tell him to bring pressure, politically, on his son against the WL and in favor of the SL. Turner passionately pointed out that this wasn't the 18th century, that Howie was a separate political entity and human being, that the fathers cannot be held accountable for the political ideas of their sons. Fine! But Turner cannot then justify his proudly-admitted continuing to discuss SL internal matters regularly with this "separate political entity"--a contact of an opponent organization. Either Howard is a close contact of the SL, in which case Turner can discuss internal matters with him and also is duty-bound as an SL member to seek to recruit him to the SL, and to dissuade him from joining an

opponent group. Or Howard is a "separate political entity"; Turner can wash his hands of the responsibility to try to persuade somebody who just happens to be a biological relation of the political ideas of Turner's organization. But "hands off his political development" also means "mouth shut on internal SL matters".

Clearly, Turner had concealed from the SL Howard's current political course, so that he could maintain Howard's formal status as an internal meeting invitee and thus continue to discuss factional affairs with him. Turner also made it clear that he was encouraging Howard to go to the Wohlforthites; he defiantly stated that, after all, Howie has to get his Marxist education somewhere, and he certainly won't get it in the SL!

Now, less than one month after Turner's resignation letter, in which he repeated his characterization of Howard as somebody who was just interested in the WL class series, we were informed that Howard (as well as Hugh F. and Turner himself) was expected to apply for WL membership at their next meeting!

This completes my explication of Turner's alleged frame-up by the SL. It should be clear to everyone that Turner was at pains to think up reasons why he could not comply with the demands which were legitimately made on him, as a result of activities and statements which called his membership in doubt, in order to be able to leave the SL without having to say: I swore we would continue the fight; most of the Minority spit on me and made a fool of my oath; there is nothing left to stay in for; I quit.

Turner Joins the Workers League

The last few pages of Turner's resignation statement consist of political characterizations (with nasty personal insults mixed in, to be sure) along the lines of Turner's previous oppositional positions and documents. To know how we should take Turner's exposition of his politics, let us look at how seriously Turner takes them.

Turner had developed, in the course of his opposition, two main political criticisms of the SL--its "student orientation" and its alleged "racism". This latter, in his view, evidently consisted in what he termed the SL's "refusal" to do "enough" to implement the correct line that the black working class is potentially the most militant, most reachable by the vanguard, most impelled toward struggle, section of the U.S. working class.

Turner also had criticisms of Comrade Robertson and the other leading members of the SL whom he denounced in his resignation. In his resignation statement, however, as well as many times previously, he protests vigorously that his reasons for opposition, and for the final departure from our ranks, are political and not essentially motivated by personal reasons, harsh words, pride, etc. If one accepts this, one would expect Turner's course after resignation to be in the direction, not of more congenial personal relations or the childish vengeful pleasure of joining the "anti-Spartacist League", but of groups which stand politically closer to Turner's professed politics

than the SL. (E.g., one does not denounce the SL for Pabloism and then go and join the SWP!)

Within a month of his suspension from the SL, Turner has joined two organizations which stand further from his alleged political ideas than the SL. First he joined the SDS Labor Committee (Marcus group), an organization composed entirely of petty-bourgeois student radicals. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Workers League, an organization which has always criticized our recognition of the special oppression of black workers, an organization whose avowed position is that the Negroes constitute the most backward section of the working class!

Were Turner's Rights Violated?

One last word to SLers who may have been concerned over Turner's plausible-sounding resignation: it is a far different thing to make life uncomfortable for one's touchy, prickly, paranoid oppositionists than to railroad them out of the organization by bureaucratic injustice. Let nobody think we are being hypocritical: Yes, we wanted Turner to quit. The SWP wanted us to quit. Turner was doing the SL no good, raising no new arguments, had no intention of sticking around after the convention.

But we do not charge the SWP with violations of our rights because they wanted us to quit, raised their voices to us, applied rules and regulations stringently to us, put us through Control Commission hearings, told us to get out. We put out Marxist Bulletins accusing them of undemocratic procedures not because they hurt our feelings but because they violated our rights--re-wrote their constitution to dispose of oppositionists, refused to accept people we had recruited to the SWP into membership, insisted on seeing our intra-tendency discussion materials, made "disloyal attitudes" (or something similar) a crime which was sufficient for expulsion without a single evidence of discipline having been broken, refused to hear our appeals. (Even after all this, we did not quit. They had to throw us out.) We did not split from Healy in 1962 because he imposed "discipline" (the questionable discipline of the Majority of the British section deciding all questions for the Majority of the U.S. section) in action, but because he demanded that we sign a document stating that we believed something we did not believe. We did not refuse to sign Healy's dictated statement because it was dictated, as Turner implies, but because of its content.

Turner was not asked to repudiate a single belief, about his politics, or Ellens-Stoute's guilt as charged, or anything. He was not asked to admit having said anything he later denied having said. He was asked to condemn certain practices (improper circulation of documents, breaking discipline like Ellens-Stoute, talking internal matters to a sympathizer of an opponent group, denying membership obligations on the basis of factional priorities). Any member who cannot say, "such a practice, if committed, would be incompatible with membership" does not belong in a democratic centralist organization.

When the action was finally brought against Turner, we believed it likely that he, consistently impelled by personal pride and anxi-

ous to depart from the SL given any excuse, would resign. But it was by no means inevitable. He had a choice--not a choice between refusal and unprincipled capitulation, but a choice between (1) being fully and immediately reinstated to his full rights on the basis of declarations which any member should be able to make; (2) refusing to make the demanded declarations, abiding by the limitations on his membership and appealing the partial suspension at the convention; and (3) resigning. That Turner chose to resign indicates again that he was incapable of the kind of principled political struggle--which entails the rigorous maintenance of discipline--which we carried out, because we were serious about our politics, in the SWP.

6 January 1969