

Polemics with the Spartacist League

Sectarians, 'Scabs' & Socialists

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Introduction

This pamphlet contains an exchange on the picket-line question between supporters of the International Bolshevik Tendency in New York and *Workers Vanguard* (WV), the newspaper of the Spartacist League/U.S. The issues in dispute arose from a building cleaners' strike in New York last January. The first two items are reprints of articles that appeared in the 2 February and 16 February 1996 issues of WV attacking an unnamed IBT supporter for "scabbing" on the strike. Jim C., a prominent IBT supporter in New York, replied with a letter dated 21 February which appeared (in a slightly abridged form) in the 15 March issue of WV, along with a reply. We have reprinted Jim C.'s original letter with those portions which WV deleted in brackets. The final item is a rejoinder to WV, dated 24 April, from Dave Eastman for the New York IBT with, as an appendix, a reduction of the 15 March WV page layout.

New York
25 May 1996

"New York Building Workers Strike," reprinted from *Workers Vanguard*, 2 February 1996

NEW YORK, January 30—The strike by over 30,000 janitors, porters, repairmen and elevator operators at commercial office buildings in New York City has now entered its fourth week. Striking members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32B-32J are picketing over 1,000 commercial office buildings in a battle against the real estate barons' attempt to impose a two-tier wage system which would lower starting wages by 40 percent. The outcome of the strike by 32B-32J, the home local of new AFL-CIO chief John Sweeney, will have an impact on labor struggle across the country.

But while the strikers remain solid, picketing and marching in snow and freezing weather, frustration and anger are mounting. The union tops have kept the membership in the dark and refused to put some muscle in the picket lines, because that would mean defying the bosses' anti-union laws. The strikers have faced strikebreakers wielding bats and guns and taken scores of arrests, as Giuliani's cops herd deliverymen and scab cleaners through the picket lines.

Strikers daily watch throngs of office workers, skilled-trades workers, delivery drivers and trash haulers walk through their picket lines. It's an outrage that supervisors organized by 32B-32J, whose contract expires at the end of January, are still on the job! Mass pickets are needed to shut down major office towers like the World Trade Center. There is an urgent need for an elected strike committee to take control of the strike and start playing hardball. Many Teamster-organized UPS drivers (and many unorganized Federal Express workers) aren't crossing the lines, but many other Teamsters are. Strikers and their supporters should demonstrate outside Teamsters offices to demand that the union order *all* its members to honor their picket lines. Instead, the union tops are pursuing a dead-end strategy that can only lead to disaster.

As we wrote in our last issue, "If every union in town honored the elementary labor principle that *picket lines mean don't cross*, the strike could be won in a matter of days." After a January 10

meeting of the NYC Central Labor Council, Local 32B-32J head Gus Bevana announced that the other unions would be "honoring our picket lines." Meanwhile, *the CLC tops themselves have been crossing picket lines every day* at their own 386 Park Avenue South headquarters! The union fat cats even held a "strike support" luncheon on January 18 inside the struck Woolworth Building.

It isn't only the cravenly pro-capitalist labor bureaucrats who are spitting on the strikers' picket lines. The rad-lib *Village Voice* (23 January) actually ran a photo of pickets in front of its building where the paper continues to be published. Numerous groups claiming to be "socialist" are no better. The International Socialist Organization (ISO) headlines in its latest *Socialist Worker* that "It Will Be Up to Rank-and-File Building Workers to Build Solidarity" and lambastes electricians for crossing picket lines. But ISO supporters walked right through a picket line outside the New School for Social Research in downtown Manhattan in order to hold one of their advertised weekly forums. And on their way through the door, these scab "socialists" had the chutzpah to offer their "support" to the picketing strikers.

Then there is the so-called "Bolshevik" Tendency (BT). Confronted by a Spartacist League supporter after skulking out of a picketed office building, one BT supporter tried to alibi his strikebreaking with the union bureaucrats' line that the strike was not directed against his employer but against the "building management." When put on the spot about their supporter's scabbing, BTers at a "Student-Worker Strike Support Committee" meeting organized by various left groups on January 26 cynically sputtered, "Is every one of your members honoring the lines?" Any class-conscious worker, not just a communist, understands in his guts the elementary working-class principle that *picket lines mean don't cross!* As the traditional miners song goes, "Which side are you on?"

For decades, the labor bureaucrats have made a mockery of the picket-line

principle, inventing "informational picket lines" as a dodge and abjectly capitulating to the bosses' anti-strike laws. Reflecting their real class loyalties, the CLC tops find themselves on the bosses' side of the picket line, where they're joined by not a few "leftist" groups. Workers need a class-struggle union leadership forged in political struggle against the lieutenants of capital within the labor movement, who bind workers to their class enemy through their ties to the Democratic Party. A revolutionary workers party must be forged to champion the cause of all the oppressed and fight for a workers government to expropriate the bosses. *Victory to the building workers strike!* ■

"Scab 'Socialists' Caught Out at CUNY," reprinted from *Workers Vanguard*, 16 February 1996

A team of Spartacist supporters went to the picket lines at the City University of New York on January 30 to talk to striking building maintenance workers in Local 32B-32J and to join the lines. That night, a "Student-Worker Strike Support Committee" meeting was planned for the CUNY Graduate Center—a struck facility. We pointed out to strikers on the line that any strike supporters who felt the need to cross picket lines to "talk" weren't friends of the strike. We discussed the necessity of shutting down facilities by drawing in key unions, like the Teamsters who deliver fuel and packages. A number of strikers stressed that they wanted to fight for picket lines that kept buildings from operating instead of standing out in the cold for days in a symbolic appeal to the real estate barons.

An SYC member who is a student at the Graduate Center carried a sign that went to the point: "Spartacus Youth Club Says: Build Picket Lines, Don't Cross Them." Members of the Revolutionary Socialist Group (RSG)—a tiny study circle based at the College of Staten Island—were the main builders of this "strike support" meeting, along with the Bolshevik Tendency (BT). When a BTer who'd been crossing the pickets at his workplace showed up, some older strikers from East Europe began chanting, "Scab out! Scab, scab!" The BTer scurried away. Several other left groups then arrived, including Labor Militant and the League for a Revolutionary Party. One member of the coalition loudly protested holding the meeting: "I disagree with the Spartacists on many things, but they're right about this one: Picket lines mean don't cross." He began shouting this and some strikers chanted, "Strike! Strike!"

The so-called "strike support committee" began to discuss their dilemma on the sidewalk. Members of the RSG were in a tizzy, screaming that our presence on the picket lines was meant to "sabotage" their meeting. After trying (in vain) to convince picketers to allow them to cross the picket lines, one RSGer said, "We don't want to cross a picket line today" (another day, another tactic?). Meanwhile, two members of the International Socialist Organization ignored the whole question and crossed the lines

to enter their office.

One RSGer insisted the idea that "picket lines mean don't cross" is "just a Spart rule." Although not its intent, the idea that fighting to defend picket lines—a tradition upon which the unions were built—is today only upheld by the SL is quite a testament to our organization. As for the rest of the left, they tail the labor bureaucracy, which these days has made a mockery of strikes by setting up picket lines that aren't meant to stop anything or anybody, abjectly capitulating to the bosses' anti-strike laws. But even the labor tops, in a last-minute face-saving gesture to their membership, urged people to honor the basic principle in any strike: "Please don't cross our picket lines," a full-page ad in the *New York Times* (4 February) proclaimed. "If you cross a picket line, you hurt the members of Local 32B-32J and you hurt the members of your union. You hurt yourself too."

At the Grad Center, the difference in political programs wasn't lost on the strikers. When the "committee" announced grandly that "We've decided to hold our meeting out here, with you," strikers, to a man, moved to the other side of the plaza. Meanwhile, a few other Midtown strikers had arrived. An older black woman immediately said, "I don't cross picket lines." She turned to a group of black women approaching, saying that "this isn't our meeting, they're talking like scabs over here," and turned them away. The strikers gave the "leftists" a textbook lesson in struggle.

But some people have trouble learning anything. One night at the Grad Center has led to an outpouring of defensive vitriol on the Internet, home of the pseudo-Trotskyist virtual sandbox. One posting from Tom Smith, a CUNY Grad student, whines that the meeting was "held outside, in the cold" because of the Spartacists' "petty moralism" and insists that the fake leftists weren't scabbing simply because "nobody intended upon going into the building to clean it up." While we're sure these grouplets wouldn't think of lifting a mop, any self-proclaimed socialist should have a gut impulse to honor a picket line: it's a battle line of working-class struggle. Dis-

missing labor solidarity on the lines as “petty moralism” misses a strategic question even the *New York Times* got. In a February 9 editorial, this bourgeois mouthpiece pointed to what pushed the bosses to negotiate: “The owners faced the prospect of marches in the streets and a rally in Madison Square Garden. Other unions were beginning to honor the picket lines.” That’s the “strike support” the ruling class fears. *Picket lines mean don’t cross!* ■

An abridged version of this letter was published in the 15 March issue of WV. The portions WV deleted are marked in brackets "< >".

New York
21 February 1996

To the Editor of *Workers Vanguard*:

<Upon leaving my workplace a few weeks ago, I was momentarily blinded by a flash of light from the camera of a Spartacist League photographer, evidently dispatched to the scene for the exclusive purpose of snapping my picture. Although neither the resulting photo nor my name was printed in *Workers Vanguard*,> I am obviously the supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency you accuse of scabbing on the recent Service Employees International Union (SEIU) strike in New York City ("Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross", *Workers Vanguard*, 2 February). Your next issue carries a piece entitled "Scab 'Socialists' Caught Out at CUNY" (16 February), in which you label as "scabs" the twenty or so leftists who showed up for a strike-support meeting at City University of New York Graduate Center on the evening of January 30. I write in order to answer these shameful libels--as well as your idiotic reports of "skulking" and "scurrying" and "sputtering"--with a statement of the facts about both the SEIU strike at the *Village Voice*, where I have been a union steward for ten years, and the meeting at CUNY Grad.

First, it should be noted that the six cleaning and maintenance workers at the *Village Voice* were not on strike against the *Voice* or the owner of the building that houses it. Their employer is the Building Maintenance Services Corporation, a management firm that contracts with the *Voice* and other companies. The picketers outside made it clear from the start that they were not appealing to *Voice* employees to stay away, but were there to prevent anyone else from entering the building to do their jobs. Neither I nor any of my fellow union members did the work normally performed by strikers--the defining activity of a scab in the eyes of any trade unionist, or, for that matter, anyone else outside the Spartacist League.

The situation at the *Voice* building (which contains one other firm as well as some residential tenants) could be compared to that of an industrial park, where there is a single entrance for a variety of different companies. According to the SL's definition of a scab--apparently anyone who, for whatever reason, enters a worksite at which pickets are present--all workers in such a park allowed by the picketers to go to their jobs in the non-struck firms would be "scabs." So too was every typesetter, secretary, dishwasher or desk clerk who went to work in the more than 1,000 commercial buildings affected by the SEIU strike. <Scabs as well, according to your logic, were the several hundred members of the American Federation of Teachers who were on the job at New York University on 31 January when they held a demonstration to support SEIU strikers on their campus--a "scab"-initiated action in which SL members saw fit to march.>

The SEIU would indeed have won the strike in a matter of days if all workers in the affected buildings had stayed off the job in solidarity. But such an action would in most cases have been a sympathy strike--i.e., a strike against employers other than those of the aggrieved union--and would have required a high degree of class consciousness. This is not likely to be brought about by isolated leftists in the workplace offering themselves up as human sacrifices to the boss. It may sometimes be the duty of Marxists to risk their livelihoods--or their lives--to influence the outcome of collective struggle. But, in this situation, to take a "principled" stand and be victimized without the remotest chance of altering the behavior of a single other worker is the action of someone more interested in saving his or her soul than helping to win a strike. It is

self-martyrdom, not Marxism.

Instead of making an empty moral gesture, I, as part of a shop stewards' committee, met with the *Voice's* publisher to demand that the cleaners sent by the management company to do the strikers' work--the only real scabs at the *Voice*--be expelled from the paper's offices, and that the *Voice* not pay the company for their services for the duration of the strike. The publisher agreed. We also donated \$1500 from our own strike fund to the six SEIU strikers in our building, and collected \$1500 more for them among union members in the shop. Each worker thus received a total of \$500 in strike-support contributions.

<I leave it up to every fair-minded reader to decide whether the above were the actions of a "scab.">

<I also invite readers to compare my strike-support efforts with the activities of the Spartacist League. Your 16 February article conveys the misleading impression that SL members just happened to be picketing at CUNY Grad on the evening of 30 January. In fact your members showed up, once again with cameras at the ready, because you knew in advance of the strike-support meeting and smelled an opportunity to embarrass other leftists, screaming that anyone who entered the building was a "scab.">

<The SL is well known for such capers. During a teaching assistants' strike at the University of Toronto in 1989, a strike-support committee met at the Graduate Students' Union building, which housed the union office and served as strike-support headquarters. Oliver Stephens (one of the most hysterical SLers at the recent CUNY picket) was among a handful of your members who stood outside the Toronto grad building, claiming to be a "picket line" and denouncing those going to the strike-support meeting as "scabs." Unlike your recent behavior at CUNY, this incident never made it into print until now.>

We were not among the initiators of the strike-support meeting at CUNY. But in our judgment there would, in fact, have been nothing wrong with holding this meeting at CUNY Grad with the permission of the picketers; strikers often make dispensations for people to enter struck facilities for special purposes. But, since the SL's ranting did manage to confuse a few of the strikers, the organizers decided to hold their meeting on the sidewalk outside; not a single person in attendance that night entered CUNY Grad, and, contrary to your reportage, several SEIU militants participated actively in the meeting. While we were planning a strike rally for the following day, SL members spent their time approaching participants individually to inform them that I was a "scab."

<The resulting rally at the World Trade Center drew four hundred people, most of them strikers. This rally, the largest of the strike, upset the anti-communist SEIU bureaucrats, who had issued repeated instructions to their increasingly restive base not to participate in any "unauthorized" rallies or demonstrations. Yet, despite the fact that the rally took place only blocks from SL headquarters, you saw fit to dispatch a much smaller team than you had sent to the planning meeting the night before, and that only toward the end. Thus, while others organized public rallies or pro-strike activities at the workplace, the SL's efforts during the SEIU strike centered on spying upon, policing and scab-baiting other leftists.>

The SL is hardly qualified for the role of the left's moral policeman. During the crucial PATCO strike of 1981, air traffic controllers, unlike the SEIU, appealed to other workers and to the public at large to boycott the airlines, and also set up picket lines to try to shut down the airports. Yet

taking a train instead of a plane was apparently too much of an inconvenience for the jet-set socialists of the SL leadership, who flew routinely throughout the strike. When several SL members (who were later among the founders of the External Tendency, precursor of the BT) objected to this flouting of the union's call for a boycott of scab services, the Robertsonite leadership even made flying during the strike a point of honor, castigating those who objected as "moralists" and "trade-union fetishists." The SL's injunction that all leftists should have pointlessly risked their jobs during the SEIU strike may sound a lot like moralism. But a genuine moralist must at least believe in the morality s/he preaches. You, on the other hand, give hypocrisy a bad name.

Jim C.

"Socialist Scabs Squirm," reprinted from *Workers Vanguard*, 15 March 1996

WV replies: No self-respecting trade unionist, no supporter of the workers movement, and certainly no communist, crosses picket lines, ever.

Whining apologetics for scabbing by self-styled "revolutionaries" seem to be quite a thriving cottage industry these days. In addition to the "Bolshevik" Tendency (BT) missive—which is nearly twice as long in the original—we have received an even lengthier diatribe along the same lines from an even tinier grouplet with the grandiose title of Communist Workers Organizing Committee (CWOC). During the four-week strike by the SEIU Local 32B-32J building workers, the BT didn't put out a single statement on this major union struggle. The CWOC did manage to upload a strike support statement on the Internet...on March 1. Hello? The strike ended on February 4. Echoing the BT, their strategy for "victory" called for "mass picketing" outside and "strike support committees" inside the struck buildings—of those who crossed the picket lines!

The cynicism of Jim C.'s contemptuous alibis for scabbing does not detract from the seriousness of the question. Solid picket lines that *nobody* and *nothing* crosses are not only central to winning labor battles, they go to the core of the question of workers revolution—the need to unite the working class in struggle around its common class interests. As Leon Trotsky noted in the Transitional Program, "strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army."

Crossing a picket line is *scabbing*, pure and simple. Jim C. tries to paint this elementary working-class principle as some outlandish Spartacist invention, pointing to all the workers in commercial buildings who crossed the strikers' lines. Everyone else was doing it, he argues, so do you call them all scabs? As Marxists, we understand that the level of consciousness of the working class is determined in the first instance by the character of its leadership. It is the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, with its decades of "informational picket lines," impotent consumer boycotts and "corporate campaigns"—and outright strikebreaking—which is responsible for

the erosion of understanding within the working class that *picket lines mean don't cross*.

Yet the BT masquerades as an organization which claims to offer an alternative, indeed a revolutionary, leadership for the working class. To justify his treachery, Jim C. pleads that he was only doing what other backward workers did. In fact, the BT & Co. demonstrated less working-class consciousness than even many ordinary, *non-union* FedEx workers, who honored the 32B-32J picket lines despite the fact that they were also not directed against "their employer."

Even the *Wall Street Journal* (17 January) acknowledged during the strike that in the not-so-distant past, as a labor expert they quoted put it, "There used to be families that grew up believing that crossing a picket line is the equivalent of pushing an old lady off a curb." The *Journal* recognized the importance of the erosion of picket lines for *its* class, headlining its article, "Declining Power of Picket Lines Blunts New York Maintenance Workers' Strike." And no less a crass business unionist than Local 32B-32J president Gus Bevona—on the last day of the strike, when it no longer meant anything—finally called on "Members of All Unions" to "Please Don't Cross Our Picket Lines." This appeal recalls Oscar Wilde's aphorism that hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue.

Indeed, until just a few years ago, even bourgeois politicians who were trying to pass themselves off as "friends of labor" knew that you don't cross picket lines. During the 1976 Democratic Party presidential primaries, several of the candidates didn't show up to speak to the Society of Newspaper Editors because they would have had to cross the picket line of the broadcast employees union NABET, then on strike against NBC. In the Spring of 1977, even *King Gustaf of Sweden* refused to cross a picket line of Bay Area Rapid Transit workers in California.

Jim C. raises a bunch of specious arguments to cover his tracks. The *Village Voice* building, a lower Manhattan office building, is like an "industrial park," he claims. What a joke! But even if we were talking about a real industrial park, the

BT's line would be an alibi for strike-breaking. In the *maquiladora* "free trade" assembly plants in Mexico, for example, as we have noted, the few strikes that have succeeded are ones where workers from one factory succeeded in *shutting down the entire industrial park* by mass picketing at the entrances.

In fact, Jim C. concedes that "the SEIU would indeed have won the strike in a matter of days if all workers in the affected buildings had stayed off the job in solidarity." But he dismisses this possibility out of hand, calling it a "sympathy strike," just like the bureaucrats do when they want to hide behind the capitalists' laws against "secondary strikes." This isn't a matter of declaring a sympathy strike but a simple matter of honoring picket lines outside your workplace.

In Britain, the BT recently put out a leaflet praising Liverpool dockers who were fired for not crossing a picket line, and calling to "Throw the Scabs Off the Liverpool Docks!" The strikers actually sent delegations around the world to picket ships that had been loaded by scabs in Liverpool. In Newark, as in other ports, longshoremen refused to handle the cargo, respecting the British dockers' picket lines. By Jim C.'s twisted logic, he would have had no principled reason not to cross those lines either.

The one substantive political argument the BT raises in its letter, which could be titled "In Defense of Scabbing," is the claim that a scab is only someone who does "the work normally performed by strikers." This is the retrograde line of the craft-union bureaucrats, who peddle this excuse to justify crossing the strike lines of other crafts. With the BT's line, no strike on the railroads, in construction or the newspaper industry—where the workforces are divided into numerous craft unions—could ever win. Fundamentally Jim C.'s argument is counterposed to the fight for industrial unionism.

The BT's acquiescence to divisions within the working class fostered by the bourgeoisie shows up as well in its revoltingly "color-blind" attitude to black oppression. When Jim C. and his BT pals attended a recent New York SL forum on the "Class-Struggle Road to Black Liberation" to defend his scabbing, they had not one word to say about the forum's topic. And this in discussing

a strike whose ranks included mostly black, Hispanic and immigrant workers! Nothing new here from an outfit which sneered at our mass labor/black mobilizations to stop the Klan and Nazis as "ghetto" work. Likewise in Canada, the BT capitulates to the Anglo-dominated status quo, calling for a "No" vote in last October's referendum on independence for Quebec.

At bottom, the BT tails after the union bureaucracy, whose pro-capitalist politics lead them to degrade *every* working-class principle, resulting in the current devastation of the organized labor movement. This can be seen in the 1981 PATCO strike. In the BT's lying rendition, the striking air traffic controllers set up picket lines "to try to shut down the airports," as well as calling for a (consumer) boycott of the airlines, and the Spartacist League "flouted" this call. In fact, it was the Spartacist League which *uniquely* fought for mass pickets to shut down the airports. The PATCO and AFL-CIO tops *refused* to picket at entrances for Machinists and Teamsters—whose labor kept the airports functioning—fearing that this would mean a confrontation with the capitalist state. (By Jim C.'s logic, they weren't scabbing either, since they weren't working in the control towers!) To cover their betrayal, the bureaucracy substituted the cheap ploy of appealing to passengers outside the terminals not to fly. When his subterfuges are stripped away, Jim C.'s "charge" against the SL is that we refused to buy into the impotent diversionary consumer boycott.

In fact, at a Spartacist League/Britain public class last month, a London BTER acknowledged, "Now it's true that there was no physical picket line at the airport." In other words, the accusation that the SL scabbed on the PATCO strike is just another BT lie. But then, for these sophists the existence of a picket line is irrelevant: "It's not a geographical or physical thing," the London BTERS protested. Apparently for the BT, picket lines are metaphysical phenomena, while they readily waltz across the actual "geographical, physical" strike lines.

In fact, picket lines are a very "physical thing": they are the battle lines of the class war. In periods of intensified workers struggles, this is clear to any worker. In bastions of union strength such as the

coal fields, for decades a single picket was enough to shut down a pit. And woe to those who tried to cross. As a sign outside a fortified UMW picket station in Kentucky in 1977 read, "Warning: The Stearns Miners Have Determined That Scabbing Is Dangerous to Your Health." Or as Jack London put it in his famous poem, "The Scab": "No man has a right to scab so long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in, or a rope long enough to hang his body with."

The BT is not alone in its predilection for scabbing. Social democrats like the International Socialist Organization regularly cross picket lines. During the 32B-32J strike, the ISO held its "socialist" meetings inside struck facilities. But then again, even during the momentous 1984-85 British miners strike, the ISO's patrons there crowded about their steel worker members crossing miners' picket lines. And one "left" group made crossing picket lines the virtual reason for its existence: the founding issue of the Revolutionary Workers League's paper was devoted to alibiing its strikebreaking in a 1977 University of Michigan campus workers strike.

The intrepid picket line crosser Jim C. blusters that it "may sometimes be the duty of Marxists to risk their livelihoods—or their lives." But not for him, and not now. Unlike such petty-bourgeois dilettantes, Trotskyists take the class struggle seriously. When we call on other workers to honor pickets, we practice what we preach. Several SL supporters lost their jobs because they wouldn't cross the building workers' picket lines during the recent strike. The "Bolshevik" Tendency quitters who were once in our organization might recall the case of steel worker Keith Anwar in Chicago, who was fired in 1979 for respecting picket lines set up by another United Steel Workers local. For the sneering traitors of the BT, this is "self-martyrdom." For communists it is a question of standing with our class. ■

New York
24 April 1996

To the Editor of *Workers Vanguard*:

Under the headline "'Socialist' Scabs Squirm," the *Workers Vanguard* of 15 March published a letter from Jim C. (a supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency--IBT), replying to the SL's accusations of "scabbing" on the recent building cleaners' strike in New York. The facts in the case are clear: six members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) picketed at various times outside the building that houses the *Village Voice*, where Jim C. works. The SEIU members work for a building management company on contract with the *Voice*, and had no dispute with the *Voice*, the building owner or any other tenant. The strikers were not attempting to stop workers going into the *Voice*, but were solely interested in stopping scab cleaners. When the management company brought scabs into the building, Jim C. and the other stewards at the *Voice* had the scabs expelled and ensured that the company was not paid for the duration of the strike. On top of that, the *Voice* unionists donated some \$3000 to the strikers.

Workers Vanguard concludes from the above that Jim C. had "scabbed" on the SEIU strike. We disagree. The *Voice* was not being struck, the pickets were not trying to close it, and therefore its workers were not "scabbing." You claim:

"Crossing a picket line is scabbing, pure and simple. Jim C. tries to paint this elementary working-class principle as some outlandish Spartacist invention, pointing to all the workers in commercial buildings who crossed the strikers' lines. Everyone else was doing it, he argues, so do you call them all scabs? As Marxists, we understand that the level of consciousness of the working class is determined in the first instance by the character of its leadership."

But, as Jim C. asked, do you consider all the workers at the *Village Voice* (as well as hundreds of thousands of other New York City workers) to be "scabs"? Or, as the above passage implies, is this epithet reserved exclusively for those workers who are identified with one of your opponents on the left?

In the introduction to Jim C.'s letter, *WV* claims that it has been "abridged for space." Yet the two pages devoted to the exchange are padded with five photos, two graphics and a two-column ad! (The ad alone takes up almost as much space as all the deletions from the original letter.) It is worth noting that most of the deletions concern your own activities. The first is a reference to the fact that a *Workers Vanguard* photographer was skulking around outside the *Village Voice* waiting to snap Jim C.'s picture as he left work one night. The second excision concerns the fact that SL members joined several hundred members of the American Federation of Teachers from New York University in a 31 January demonstration in support of the cleaners. The letter points out that, according to *WV*'s definition, this was "a 'scab'-initiated action in which SL members saw fit to march," since the demonstrating AFT members worked at NYU where the cleaners were also on strike.

The third omission addresses your sectarian attitude to attempts to build strike support:

"Your 16 February article conveys the misleading impression that SL members just happened to be picketing at CUNY Grad on the evening of 30 January. In fact your members showed up, once again with cameras at the ready, because you knew in advance of the strike-support meeting and smelled an opportunity to embarrass other leftists, screaming that anyone who entered the building was a 'scab.'

"The SL is well known for such capers. During a teaching assistants' strike at the University of

Toronto in 1989, a strike-support committee met at the Graduate Students' Union building, which housed the union office and served as strike-support headquarters. Oliver Stephens (one of the most hysterical SLers at the recent CUNY picket) was among a handful of your members who stood outside the Toronto grad building, claiming to be a 'picket line' and denouncing those going to the strike-support meeting as 'scabs.' Unlike your recent behavior at CUNY, this incident never made it into print until now.

This was not the first time the SL set up its own "picket line" and invoked its "principles" as a cover for sectarian wrecking. In November 1984 the SL attempted to sabotage an anti-apartheid labor boycott on the docks of San Francisco because one of our supporters played a key role in leading the action. On that occasion the Spartacist League set up a "picket line" of its own members in front of the ship that the longshoremen were preparing to board. When the militant dockers ignored the SL provocation, and boarded the *Nedlloyd Kimberley* to initiate the boycott of South African cargo, the SLers denounced them as "scabs"!

In the 1960s and 1970s when the Spartacist League was a revolutionary organization, it struggled to forge an alternative, class-struggle leadership in the unions. In a number of major unions in the U.S., including longshore, phone and auto, serious and widely respected oppositional caucuses were built, which recruited workers to a program of revolutionary class struggle. These caucuses were largely dismantled in the early 1980s, as the SL leadership turned its back on the unions. Today the SL has no trade-union work. Despite WV's posture as an intransigent fighter for the working class, SLers today are invariably found standing outside the struggles of the contemporary labor movement.

In the SEIU strike, for example, your supporters did **nothing** in **any** union to build support for the strike. You did not initiate any strike support actions, nor did you help build those initiated by others. Instead you concentrated on scab-baiting the handful of leftists who did attempt to affect the outcome. WV makes much of the fact that the planning meeting was originally called (with the agreement of the strikers) at CUNY Grad, a building on a campus where SEIU members were picketing. When objections were raised to the location, the organizers promptly reversed themselves and decided to hold their meeting on the picket line. Yet the SL still refused to participate. WV deletes the passage in Jim C.'s letter that reports the outcome of the meeting in front of CUNY Grad:

"The resulting rally at the World Trade Center drew four hundred people, most of them strikers. This rally, the largest of the strike, upset the anti-communist SEIU bureaucrats, who had issued repeated instructions to their increasingly restive base not to participate in any 'unauthorized' rallies or demonstrations. Yet, despite the fact that the rally took place only blocks from SL headquarters, you saw fit to dispatch a much smaller team than you had sent to the planning meeting the night before, and that only toward the end. Thus, while others organized public rallies or pro-strike activities at the workplace, the SL's efforts during the SEIU strike centered on spying upon, policing and scab-baiting other leftists."

Beyond the events of the SEIU strike, there are several other general political questions posed in the exchange. Jim C. writes:

"The situation at the Voice building (which contains one other firm as well as some residential tenants) could be compared to that of an industrial park, where there is a single entrance for a variety of different companies. According to the SL's definition of a scab--apparently anyone who, for whatever reason, enters a worksite at which pickets are present--all workers in such a park allowed by the picketers to go to their jobs in the non-struck firms would be 'scabs.'"

Workers Vanguard responds:

"the BT's line would be an alibi for strikebreaking. In the maquiladora 'free trade' assembly plants in Mexico, for example, as we have noted, the few strikes that have succeeded are ones where workers from one factory succeeded in shutting down the entire industrial park by mass picketing at the entrances."

All socialists can agree that mass pickets capable of shutting down all the premises where multiple employers share a gate is optimal. Similarly, we could all agree that a general strike in solidarity could also be a powerful means of supporting an isolated group of strikers. But sometimes it is easier to make militant tactical proposals than to implement them.

If pickets at the entrance to an industrial park (or a shopping mall, or an office building with multiple tenants) only attempt to shut down the one enterprise that is being struck, then no serious trade-union militant, even in the most class-conscious labor movement, would designate workers permitted to go to work in the other shops or offices as "scabs" or "strikebreakers." This is the nub of our difference. And what about the residential tenants in the *Voice* building—were those who returned home at night also "scabbing"? Should they have slept in the street?

The SL leadership's pseudo-militant posturing complements its abandonment of a serious trade-union perspective. A critical moment in this process came during the 1981 PATCO strike. When Ronald Reagan declared his intent to crush the air traffic controllers, the headline on *Workers Vanguard* called for mass pickets to "Shut Down the Airports!" But the secret, internal position of the SL leadership was "fly!, fly!, fly!" In your reply to Jim C., you attempt to wriggle out of this shameful position:

"In the BT's lying rendition, the striking air traffic controllers set up picket lines 'to try to shut down the airports' as well as calling for a (consumer) boycott of the airlines, and the Spartacist League 'flouted' this call. In fact it was the Spartacist League which uniquely fought for mass pickets to shut down the airports. The PATCO and AFL-CIO tops refused to picket at entrances for Machinists and Teamsters—whose labor kept the airports functioning—fearing that this would mean a confrontation with the capitalist state. (By Jim C.'s logic, they weren't scabbing either, since they weren't working in the control towers!) To cover their betrayal, the bureaucracy substituted the cheap ploy of appealing to passengers outside the terminals not to fly. When his subterfuges are stripped away, Jim C.'s 'charge' against the SL is that we refused to buy into the impotent diversionary consumer boycott."

This welter of accusations, self-promotion and red herrings is designed to avoid answering two simple questions: 1) did PATCO set up picket lines at the airports?, and 2) did members of the SL leadership fly during the PATCO strike? It is certainly true that the key to victory in the strike was labor solidarity, and that the AFL-CIO leadership stabbed the PATCO strikers in the back. PATCO was a very small union, spread very thin across the U.S., and therefore unable to muster sizable pickets, or even cover most of its worksites on a daily basis. But PATCO did put up pickets and it did attempt to stop scabs. Perhaps the "uniqueness" of your attempts "to shut down the airports" lay in the fact that you did so by ignoring the labor boycott and purchasing tickets on the very planes that the scab controllers were directing!

If today the SL leadership indignantly suggests that there were no real PATCO lines to be honored, the bourgeois press at the time (and even *WV*) was telling a different story. For example, the *San Francisco Chronicle* of 6 August 1981 ran a photo of PATCO picketers at Chicago's O'Hare Airport trying to stop an Air Force sergeant who was "training to take their places." The *San Francisco Chronicle* of 22 August 1981, reported large picket lines at Bay Area

airports on the previous day:

"The major demonstrations, coordinated by AFL-CIO labor councils, concentrated on distributing fliers at worker entrances to the airports and airlines from 6 to 8 a.m. then convened for mass picketing and leafleting at the terminals."

Workers Vanguard (11 September 1981) reported the same event:

"in Oakland, several hundred unionists picketed all four lanes of the highway leading to the airport. Alameda Central Labor Council leader Dick Groulx had earlier addressed a PATCO strike meeting in Fremont calling for a 'complete shutdown of the airports.' But on August 21 he worked out a deal with the cops to let militants block the road for several minutes at a time and then periodically clear the way to let accumulated traffic pass: picket lines became glorified stop lights! At a subsequent Oakland Airport picket on September 4, an even larger crowd of 600 workers, many of them from public employees unions, mounted an aggressive, frustrated stand-off with the cops."

The same issue of WV also reported how:

"In Northern California, Oakland city bus drivers stop short of the airports, forcing riders to walk the rest of the way. (The Amalgamated Transit Union in the Bay Area has threatened to fine any member \$500 who crosses a PATCO picket line.)"

The SL may wish to claim that there were no PATCO picket lines, but the scabs knew better. The 6 September *San Francisco Examiner* ran an article entitled "Hardships of the controllers who didn't strike," which described the difficulties faced by scabs crossing the lines:

"Volumes have been written on the stressful nature of the air traffic controller's job. But as one controller said, 'It's a lot more stressful going through that picket line than it is working in there.' Controllers at the Fremont facility, which employed 275 controllers before the strike, said 25 tires have been punctured by roofing nails thrown under their cars. They say their homes have been belted with eggs, and several windows have been broken.

"'Going through the gate is very annoying,' said Richner. 'And we're not getting much help from the local authorities to stop people pressing up against the (car) window and screaming and spitting at us'."

You claim that we are "lying" in suggesting that PATCO picketed the airports. But *Workers Vanguard* (11 September 1981) itself sheds some light on this. It reprinted the following call by SL supporters in the "Ad Hoc Committee for Labor Solidarity" among New York public transit workers:

"Shut down the airports! All unions must stop crossing PATCO picket lines.

"Our Local 100 must stop servicing the scab operations at Kennedy [airport]—shut down the Train to the Plane."

(emphasis added)

Yet instead of following its own advice, the SL leadership chose (secretly) to patronize the "scab operations" throughout the strike. This is the real meaning of WV's statement that the SL "refused to buy into" the boycott. The fact you flew discreetly, and that you still refuse to own up in public to what you did, means that you are all too aware that you were flouting your self-declared principles. Hypocrisy, as you point out, is the tribute vice pays to virtue.

In its reply to Jim C., *Workers Vanguard* refers to the situation of the Liverpool dockers:

"In Britain, the BT recently put out a leaflet praising Liverpool dockers who were fired for not crossing a picket line, and calling to 'Throw the Scabs Off the Liverpool Docks!' The strikers

actually sent delegations around the world to picket ships that had been loaded by scabs in Liverpool. In Newark, as in other ports, longshoremen refused to handle the cargo, respecting the British dockers' picket lines. By Jim C.'s twisted logic, he would have had no principled reason not to cross those lines either."

When Liverpool dockers appeared on the East Coast of the U.S., local longshoremen responded by refusing to touch scab cargo from Britain. Of course dockers should have honored any picket line set up by Liverpool strikers. A boycott of scab cargo, however, does not require the presence of a picket line. In this case, as in others, the physical location of strikers (whether on the docks, at the gates or back in Liverpool) is essentially irrelevant to determining where the class line lies.

There is one correct criticism raised in your reply. The definition of a scab in Jim C.'s letter--someone who does "the work normally performed by strikers"--is indeed too narrow, since it does not include those maintaining or assisting the operation of a struck facility, regardless of the particular job they do. The *Village Voice*, however, was not a struck facility.

Finally, we take note of your cynical complaint that the **three minutes** allocated to us at your public meeting were not used to address the topic of the evening's presentation. Does it occur to you that someone falsely accused of a crime against the working class may want to use this time to defend himself against such slanders? We are quite prepared to discuss any aspect of our revolutionary program with you. As you purport to take a special interest in the interconnected questions of picket lines, Trotskyism and trade-union tactics, we hereby propose a **public debate** on the subject between our two groups, to be held at a mutually convenient time and place, with equal time for presentations by both sides and a neutral chair. If you are prepared to participate in such a debate, please get back to us at your earliest convenience.

Yours for Socialism and Truth,

David Eastman
For the International Bolshevik Tendency

"Socialist" Scabs Squirm

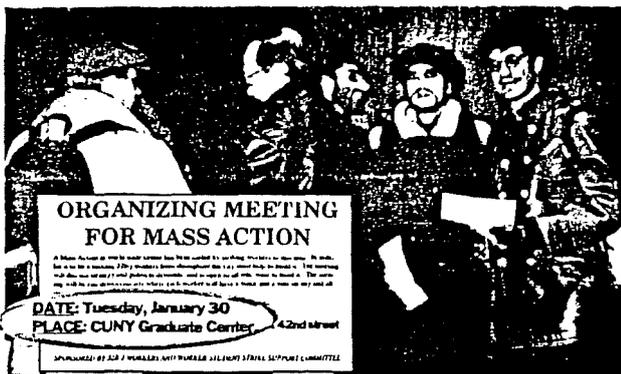
The following letter was abridged for space.

New York
21 February 1996

To the Editor of Workers Vanguard:

I am obviously the supporter of the International Bolshevik Tendency you accuse of scabbing on the recent Service Employees International Union (SEIU) strike in New York City ("Picket Lines Mean Don't Cross!" *Workers Vanguard*, 2 February). Your next issue carries a piece entitled "Scab 'Socialists' Caught Out at CUNY" (16 February), in which you label as "scabs" the twenty or so leftists who showed up for a strike-support meeting at City University of New York Graduate Center on the evening of January 30. I write in order to answer these shameful libels—as well as your idiotic reports of "skulking," "scurrying" and "sputtering"—with a statement of the facts about both the SEIU strike at the *Village Voice*, where I have been a union steward for ten years, and the meeting at CUNY Grad.

First, it should be noted that the six cleaning and maintenance workers at the *Village Voice* were not on strike against the *Voice* or the owner of the building that houses it. Their employer is the Building Maintenance Services Corporation, a management firm that contracts with the *Voice* and other companies. The picketers outside made it clear from the



Caught in the act: fake leftists planned to hold "strike support" meeting behind the picket lines in struck CUNY Grad Center.

quired a high degree of class consciousness. This is not likely to be brought about by isolated leftists in the workplace offering themselves up as human sacrifices to the boss. It may sometimes be the duty of Marxists to risk their livelihoods—or their lives—to influence the outcome of collective struggle. But, in this situation, to take a "principled" stand and be victimized without the remotest chance of altering the behavior of a single other worker is the action of someone

that the *Voice* not pay the company for their services for the duration of the strike. The publisher agreed. We also donated \$1500 from our own strike fund to the six SEIU strikers in our building, and collected \$1500 more for them among union members in the shop. Each worker thus received a total of \$500 in strike-support contributions.

We were not among the initiators of the strike-support meeting at CUNY. But in our judgment there would, in fact, have been nothing wrong with holding this meeting at CUNY Grad with the permission of the picketers; strikers often make dispensations for people to enter struck facilities for special purposes. But, since the SL's ranting did manage to confuse a few of the strikers, the organizers decided to hold their meeting on the sidewalk outside; not a single person in attendance that night entered CUNY Grad, and, contrary to your reportage, several SEIU militants participated actively in the meeting. While we were planning a strike rally for the following day, SL members spent their time approaching participants individually to inform them that I was a "scab."

The SL is hardly qualified for the role of the left's moral policeman. During the crucial PATCO strike of 1981, air traffic controllers, unlike the SEIU, appealed to other workers and to the public at large to boycott the airlines, and also set up picket lines to try to shut down the airports. Yet taking a train instead of a plane was apparently too much of an inconvenience for the jet-set socialists of the SL leadership, who flew routinely throughout the strike. When several SL members (who were later among the

founders of the External Tendency, precursor of the BT) objected to this flouting of the union's call for a boycott of scab services, the Robertsonite leadership even made flying during the strike a point of honor, castigating those who objected as "moralists" and "trade-union fetishists." The SL's injunction that all leftists should have pointlessly risked their jobs during the SEIU strike may sound a lot like moralism. But a genuine moralist must at least believe in the morality s/he preaches. You, on other hand, give hypocrisy a bad name.

Jim C.

WV replies: No self-respecting trade unionist, no supporter of the workers movement, and certainly no communist, crosses picket lines, ever.

Whining apologies for scabbing by self-styled "revolutionaries" seem to be quite a thriving cottage industry these days. In addition to the "Bolshevik" Tendency (BT) missive—which is nearly twice as long in the original—we have received an even lengthier diatribe along the same lines from an even tinier grouplet with the grandiose title of Communist Workers Organizing Committee (CWOC). During the four-week strike by the SEIU Local 32B-32J building workers, the BT didn't put out a single statement on this major union struggle. The CWOC did manage to upload a strike support statement on the Internet...on March 1. Hello? The strike ended on February 4. Echoing the BT, their strategy for "victory" called for "mass picketing" outside and "strike support committees" inside the struck buildings—of those who crossed the picket lines!

The cynicism of Jim C.'s contemptuous alibi for scabbing does not detract from the seriousness of the question. Solid picket lines that *nobody* and *nothing* crosses are not only central to winning labor battles, they go to the core of the question of workers' revolution—the need to unite the working class in struggle around its common class interests. As Leon Trotsky noted in the Transitional Program, "strike pickets are the basic nuclei of the proletarian army."

Crossing a picket line is *scabbing*, pure and simple. Jim C. tries to paint this elementary working-class principle as some outlandish Spartacist invention, pointing to all the workers in commercial buildings who crossed the strikers' lines. Everyone else was doing it, he argues, so do you call them all scabs? As Marxists, we understand that the level of consciousness of the working class is

continued on page 4

An Appeal to the
Members of
All Unions
From the Striking
Members of
Local 32B-32J

PLEASE DON'T CROSS OUR PICKET LINES

A day late, a dollar short:
on February 4, the last day
of the strike, Local 32B-
32J tops finally called on
all workers to honor their
picket lines.

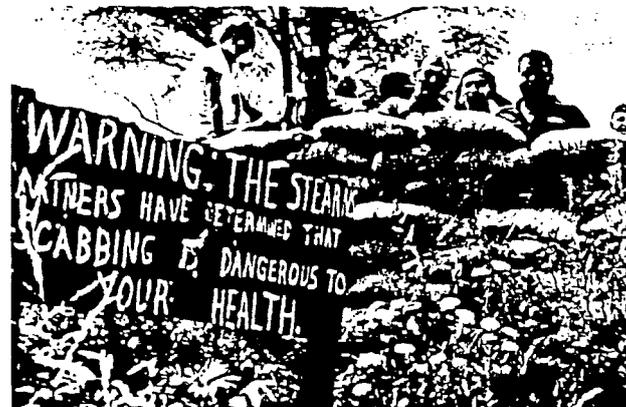
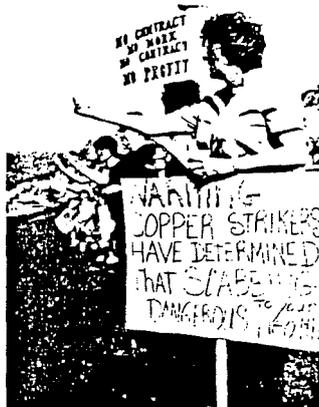
start that they were not appealing to *Voice* employees to stay away, but were there to prevent anyone else from entering the building to do their jobs. Neither I nor any of my fellow union members did the work normally performed by strikers—the defining activity of a scab in the eyes of any trade unionist, or, for that matter, anyone else outside the Spartacist League.

The situation at the *Voice* building (which contains one other firm as well as some residential tenants) could be compared to that of an industrial park, where there is a single entrance for a variety of different companies. According to the SL's definition of a scab—apparently anyone who, for whatever reason, enters a worksite at which pickets are present—all workers in such a park allowed by the picketers to go to their jobs in the non-striking firms would be "scabs." So too was every typesetter, secretary, dishwasher or desk clerk who went to work in the more than 1,000 commercial buildings affected by the SEIU strike.

The SEIU would indeed have won the strike in a matter of days if all workers in the affected buildings had stayed off the job in solidarity. But such an action would in most cases have been a sympathy strike—i.e., a strike against employers other than those of the aggrieved union—and would have re-

more interested in saving his or her soul than helping to win a strike. It is sell-martyrdom, not Marxism.

Instead of making an empty moral gesture, I, as part of a shop stewards' committee, met with the *Voice's* publisher to demand that the cleaners sent by the management company to do the strikers' work—the only real scabs at the *Voice*—be expelled from the paper's offices, and



Picket lines are the battle lines of the class struggle: 1984 Phelps Dodge copper miners (left) and 1977 Stearns, Kentucky coal miners (right) and warning to scabs.

Scabs...

(continued from page 3)

determined in the first instance by the character of its leadership. It is the pro-capitalist trade-union bureaucracy, with its decades of "informational picket lines," impotent consumer boycotts and "corporate campaigns"—and outright strikebreaking—which is responsible for the erosion of understanding within the working class that *picket lines mean don't cross*.

Yet the BT masquerades as an organization which claims to offer an alternative, indeed a revolutionary, leadership for the working class. To justify his treachery, Jim C. pleads that he was only doing what other backward workers did. In fact, the BT & Co. demonstrated less working-class consciousness than even many ordinary, non-union FedEx workers, who honored the 32B-32J picket lines despite the fact that they were also not directed against "their employer."

Even the *Wall Street Journal* (17 January) acknowledged during the strike that in the not-so-distant past, as a labor expert they quoted put it, "There used to be families that grew up believing that crossing a picket line is the equivalent

of Newspaper Editors because they would have had to cross the picket line of the broadcast employees union NABET, then on strike against NBC. In the Spring of 1977, even *King Gustaf of Sweden* refused to cross a picket line of Bay Area Rapid Transit workers in California.

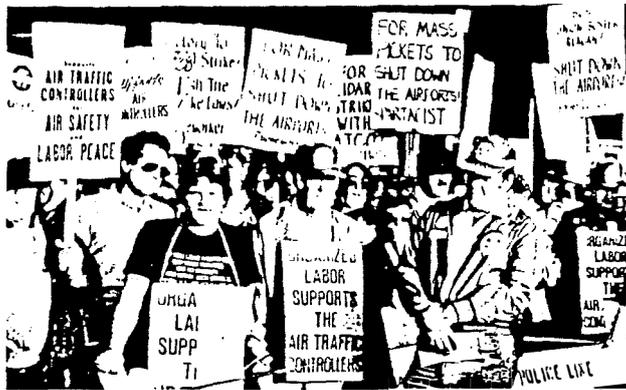
Jim C. raises a bunch of specious arguments to cover his tracks. The *Village Voice* building, a lower Manhattan office building, is like an "industrial park," he claims. What a joke! But even if we were talking about a real industrial park, the BT's line would be an alibi for strikebreaking. In the *maquiladora* "free trade" assembly plants in Mexico, for example, as we have noted, the few strikes that have succeeded are ones where workers from one factory succeeded in *shutting down the entire industrial park* by mass picketing at the entrances.

In fact, Jim C. concedes that "the SEIU would indeed have won the strike in a matter of days if all workers in the affected buildings had stayed off the job in solidarity." But he dismisses this possibility out of hand, calling it a "sympathy strike," just like the bureaucrats do when they want to hide behind the capitalists' laws against "secondary strikes." This isn't a matter of declaring a sympathy strike but a simple matter of honoring picket lines outside your workplace.

In Britain, the BT recently put out a leaflet praising Liverpool dockers who were fired for not crossing a picket line, and calling to "Throw the Scabs Off the Liverpool Docks!" The strikers actually sent delegations around the world to picket ships that had been loaded by scabs in Liverpool. In Newark, as in other ports, longshoremen refused to handle the cargo, respecting the British dockers' picket lines. By Jim C.'s twisted logic, he would have had no principled reason not to cross those lines either.

The one substantive political argument the BT raises in its letter, which could be titled "In Defense of Scabbing," is the claim that a scab is only someone who does "the work normally performed by strikers." This is the retrograde line of the craft-union bureaucrats, who peddle this excuse to justify crossing the strike lines of other crafts. With the BT's line, no strike on the railroads, in construction or the newspaper industry—where the workforces are divided into numerous craft unions—could ever win. Fundamentally Jim C.'s argument is counterposed to the fight for industrial unionism.

The BT's acquiescence to divisions within the working class fostered by the bourgeoisie shows up as well in its revoltingly "color-blind" attitude to black oppression. When Jim C. and his BT pals attended a recent New York SL forum on the "Class-Struggle Road to Black Liberation" to defend his scabbing, they had not one word to say about the forum's topic. And this in discussing a strike whose ranks included mostly black, Hispanic and immigrant workers! Nothing new here from an outfit which sneered at our mass labor/black mobilizations to stop the Klan and Nazis as "ghetto" work. Likewise in Canada, the BT capitulates to the Anglo-dominated status quo, calling for a "No" vote in



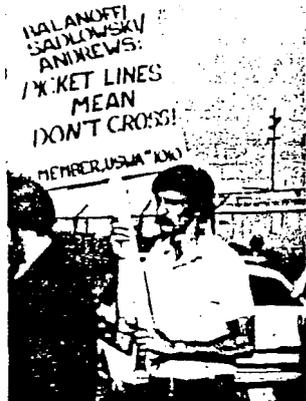
1981 PATCO strike was betrayed by labor tops who pushed diversionary consumer boycott of airlines while refusing to call out Machinists, Teamsters to shut down the airports.

last October's referendum on independence for Quebec.

At bottom, the BT tails after the union bureaucracy, whose pro-capitalist politics lead them to degrade every working-class principle, resulting in the current devastation of the organized labor movement. This can be seen in the 1981 PATCO strike. In the BT's lying rendition, the striking air traffic controllers set up picket lines "to try to shut down the airports," as well as calling for a (consumer) boycott of the airlines, and the Spartacist League "flouted" this call. In fact, it was the Spartacist League which *uniquely* fought for mass pickets

coal fields, for decades a single picket was enough to shut down a pit. And woe to those who tried to cross. As a sign outside a fortified UMW picket station in Kentucky in 1977 read, "Warning: The Stearns Miners Have Determined That Scabbing Is Dangerous to Your Health." Or as Jack London put it in his famous poem, "The Scab": "No man has a right to scab so long as there is a pool of water to drown his carcass in, or a rope long enough to hang his body with."

The BT is not alone in its predilection for scabbing. Social democrats like the International Socialist Organization regularly cross picket lines. During the 32B-



USWA Local 1010 member Keith Anwar, fired in 1979 for refusing to cross a picket line set up by another Steelworkers local.

of pushing an old lady off a curb." The *Journal* recognized the importance of the erosion of picket lines for its class, headlining its article, "Declining Power of Picket Lines Blunts New York Maintenance Workers' Strike." And no less a crass business unionist than Local 32B-32J president Gus Bevona—on the last day of the strike, when it no longer meant anything—finally called on "Members of All Unions" to "Please Don't Cross Our Picket Lines." This appeal recalls Oscar Wilde's aphorism that hypocrisy is the tribute vice pays to virtue.

Indeed, until just a few years ago, even bourgeois politicians who were trying to pass themselves off as "friends of labor" knew that you don't cross picket lines. During the 1976 Democratic Party presidential primaries, several of the candidates didn't show up to speak to the Soci-

GOOD UNION MEMBERS RESPECT PICKET LINES

A good union member is extremely careful when confronted with a picket line situation WHEN A PICKET LINE IS ESTABLISHED on a job where he is working.

1. He LEAVES. He DOES NOT TALK - JUST LEAVES.
2. He READS the PICKET SIGN as he leaves.
3. He DOES NOT hang around near the job.
4. He knows that ONCE A PICKET LINE IS ESTABLISHED, his Business Agents and other union officials are legally gagged and handicapped from giving advice pertaining to THAT JOB. They can only tell him if the Picket Line is AUTHORIZED by the Building Trades.
5. He does NOT ALLOW HIMSELF to be drawn into conversations with ANYONE at the job site.

A GOOD UNION MEMBER KNOWS HIS RIGHTS

- A. He has the right NOT to work behind ANY Picket Line.
- B. He has the right to decide for himself whether to walk off a job being picketed.
- C. He understands that his trade may be under attack and
- D. He knows that a two gate system means a PICKET LINE and he has the RIGHT NOT TO WORK, no matter how many gates the employer sets up.

Machinists union card: respecting picket lines is elementary trade-union principle, today flouted by bureaucrats and scab "socialists."

to shut down the airports. The PATCO and AFL-CIO tops *refused* to picket at entrances for Machinists and Teamsters—whose labor kept the airports functioning—fearing that this would mean a confrontation with the capitalist state. (By Jim C.'s logic, they weren't scabbing either, since they weren't working in the control towers!) To cover their betrayal, the bureaucracy substituted the cheap ploy of appealing to passengers outside the terminals not to fly. When his subterfuges are stripped away, Jim C.'s "charge" against the SL is that we refused to buy into the impotent diversionary consumer boycott.

In fact, at a Spartacist League/Britain public class last month, a London BTER acknowledged, "Now it's true that there was no physical picket line at the airport." In other words, the accusation that the SL scabbed on the PATCO strike is just another BT lie. But then, for these sophists the existence of a picket line is irrelevant: "It's not a geographical or physical thing," the London BTERS protested. Apparently for the BT, picket lines are metaphysical phenomena, while they readily waltz across the actual "geographical, physical" strike lines.

In fact, picket lines are a very "physical thing": they are the battle lines of the class war. In periods of intensified worker struggles, this is clear to any worker. In bastions of union strength such as the

32J strike, the ISO held its "socialist" meetings inside struck facilities. But then again, even during the momentous 1984-85 British miners strike, the ISO's patrons there crowded about their steel worker members crossing miners' picket lines. And one "left" group made crossing picket lines the virtual reason for its existence: the founding issue of the Revolutionary Workers League's paper was devoted to alibing its strikebreaking in a 1977 University of Michigan campus workers strike.

The intrepid picket line crosser Jim C. blusters that it "may sometimes be the duty of Marxists to risk their livelihoods—or their lives." But not for him, and not now. Unlike such petty-bourgeois dilettantes, Trotskyists take the class struggle seriously. When we call on other workers to honor pickets, we practice what we preach. Several SL supporters lost their jobs because they wouldn't cross the building workers' picket lines during the recent strike. The "Bolshevik" Tendency quitters who were once in our organization might recall the case of steel worker Keith Anwar in Chicago, who was fired in 1979 for respecting picket lines set up by another United Steel Workers local. For the sneering traitors of the BT, this is "self-martyrdom." For communists it is a question of standing with our class. ■

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