

P.B. append

06 NOV 1968

October 29, 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. CV

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 sign 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 meeting 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 publically 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 devise 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 connection 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 expul-

sion 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 inadvertent. 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 harrasing 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

See memo to my informant

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 disasterous 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" orientated 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 appreciably 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
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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.