

SPARTACIST LEAGUE
INTERNAL BULLETIN

Voix Ouvriere, the Ellens Group and the
Spartacist League

contents

- Organizational Methods by Kay Ellens, 8 April 1968.
- The Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere by Liz Gordon, 6 August 1968.
- "Politicalizing" To Avoid Politics by Jerry E., Kay E., Shirley S., 13 August 1968.
- Once Again on VO by Liz Gordon, 19 August 1968.
- Fact, Faction and the "VO Controversy" by Dave Cunningham, 28 August 1968.
- Letter to the Spartacist League by S. Levy for Socialist Current, 2 September 1968.
- Crawford-Gordon Exchange on the SL Dispute and VO, 6 August 1968-21 October 1968.

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ORGANIZATIONAL METHODS

This report will attempt to explain how one section of the European Trotskyist movement functions. Although their beginnings and some of their methods are due to specific conditions, they have, in general, taken the logic of Lenin's ideas and built an organization accordingly.

They see the development of a Marxist-Leninist organization--its ability to produce revolutionaries, who can then project their influence within wider and wider circles within the working class and the population as a whole, its ability to fulfill its historic role-- this development must be seen in a conscious, systematic way.

There are two essential changes an individual revolutionary must go through before he or she can function in a meaningful way in this organization. First is the development of a working class point of view toward existing problems, and second is the simultaneous breakdown of individualistic attitudes and development of collective, responsible attitudes. These changes take a long time and have as their goal the development of a comrade whose gut reaction as well as consciousness enable him to become a revolutionary cadre within a Leninist organization. This transformation is, of course, done consciously on the part of the organization as a whole as well as on the part of the individual being changed (as soon as he becomes sufficiently politically conscious to do so). This organization feels that the application of consciousness to all aspects of the building of the revolutionary party and the development of the revolutionaries therein, cannot be sufficiently stressed. This means, at minimum, looking at the logical outcome of one's theories and practices.

To give you a picture of how the development and training of cadre is carried out in this organization, I will trace the process by which contacts are turned into cadre.

TREATMENT OF CONTACTS

Contact "A", a student, hangs around the left-wing circles of the student union (an organization, not a building). He's sort of sympathetic to various anti-imperialist sentiments and "third-world" attitudes. "A" becomes a contact when he has a discussion with a comrade who is distributing leaflets announcing one of the monthly forums. The coming meeting is on China and "A" expresses interest in this organization's position on China, so this is what they discuss. Both are busy at that moment so they agree to discuss further at a later time. "A" comes to the forum, gets some literature and the comrade sets up another meeting with him to discuss the forum and the literature. A series of meetings takes place between "A" and Comrade "X" on a more or less weekly basis. Comrade "X" convinces Contact "A" to the point that he gets a sub, contributes a little money each month and agrees to help out on some of the work. The weekly appointments between Comrade "X" and Contact "A" become more regular, and a lot of reading material is fed into the program, material of a basic nature pertaining to the discussions they've been having. (Novels are also important to open discussions of attitudes--such as racism, nationalism, Bohemianism, the woman question--class consciousness, or to get the contact in the habit of reading.) "A" becomes increasingly interested and reads more and works on one or more of the following teams: (these are regular weekly assignments) poster paste-up, newspaper sales, distributions or prospectings (these are teams going door to door in housing projects). And his weekly discussions continue, though he might be seeing another comrade now.

After a few months of continued activity and study (and if the contact is

at all aggressive, he will begin having contacts of his own; how to bring them along becomes a topic for his weekly discussions). Comrade "X" invites "A" to a regular class (held each week all winter long) and soon recommends "A" for membership in a sympathizers' circle. His recommendation includes reports from those comrades in charge of the one or more teams he is working on. Contact "A"'s recommendation is discussed in the next monthly executive committee meeting. If the comrades decide that "A" is sufficiently serious and reliable, his application-recommendation will be accepted and he will be at the next meeting of the sympathizers circle he has been assigned to.

The sympathizers circles include all new people, including those who will be remaining only sympathizers. Not everyone who is interested in revolutionary ideas is able to function as a reliable cadre-type revolutionary. Those who are not can function as sympathizers, come to their circle meetings, classes and of course public meetings, if they do some work for the organization (for example one sale a week). By the same token, if a contact will not at least read or work, he will not have any discussion time after a few discussions. The comrades have earlier made it clear that if the contact is not serious enough to even read, then he is not serious enough to be wasting time on.

Now to pick up the thread with contacts "B" and "C". "C" works where a factory bulletin of this organization is being put out. It is a very large factory and he works in another building; consequently his knowledge of this bulletin is haphazard. "C" is not a union member (even within a large plant only about 12% of the workers are union members adding all the different union memberships together--there is no such thing as a closed shop in this country) and hears about this factory bulletin only because he happened to come to work one day through the main doors and got a leaflet. His curiosity brought him to the location near work mentioned in the factory bulletin. (The comrades locate someplace that can be advertised, usually a coffee shop, where at a specific time each week the public can buy literature and discuss current events, factory and trade union activities and general politics. These coffee shops are advertised in the factory bulletins and in the weekly newspaper, stating the day and time the comrades will be there.)

So "C" comes to this coffee shop and is drawn into the contacting sessions, that is, he is discussing individually with a comrade on a more or less regular basis. He is also, in a short while, drawn into the production of the factory bulletin (or even eventually starting a new one for his building). He develops sufficiently to join a sympathizers' circle. His development as a revolutionary is under way.

"C" had brought his wife "B" to a forum a few months before this. "B", in the course of a discussion with a comrade at the forum, had agreed to continue their discussion later in the week. It then became the responsibility of another comrade to aid Contact "B" in her political development. Contact "B"'s education then proceeds independently from that of her husband's relationship to the organization. (The level of consciousness of both of them will have to be upgraded in order to overcome the difficulties which this society produces on these questions.) She will be going into a different sympathizers circle than that of her husband's and, in general, will be dealt with so much as an individual that most of the comrades will not know the details of her personal life. Her political functioning and development will be her responsibility.

DEVELOPMENT OF SYMPATHIZERS

In order to deepen and broaden the political education of the sympathizers, they attend a few week-long study sessions. The first of these is referred to as

an organizers session and attempts to deepen the understanding of the sympathizers with the political positions of the organization, some history and sociology of the working class of that country and the political positions to be found within it, and the various methods of functioning (and reasons for these) that the organization has been using. Later study-sessions will focus on specific questions (such as the State) and will entail primarily reading the relevant material and discussing it. (These sort of study-sessions are held by the trade unions and even corporations to train their own adherents or executives -- the subject matter and organization of these sessions are, of course, rather different.)

These 8-day study sessions are organized for work -- breakfast at 8, work at 9. At the first of these study sessions, the work consists of reading and discussing a full, yet relatively simple, range of topics, from 2 to 8 per day, scattering subject matter in order to handle the simpler concepts first. (This same idea is followed through in the contacting sessions, where very basic concepts in philosophy, economics, history, political and organizational theory are dealt with and followed up with increasingly complex problems of each of these aspects of Marxian theory, as well as their interrelationship, and as a whole.)

The full morning and afternoon are taken up with discussion within small groups of 5 or 6. Position papers are read and discussed within each group which is led by a discussion leader. In the evening the small groups meet together for an overall discussion. A couple of songs are taught each day from world working class revolutionary history -- from the Paris Commune to today. There is time set aside for field activity, stenciling and mimeing and a social evening.

The following topics were discussed at this particular elementary study session. (The points elaborated on are those pertaining to organizational methods.) The topics are not in the order in which they were taken up at the study session, but in order as to subject.

OUTLINE OF STUDY WEEK SESSION

(Paragraphs 3 to 13 elaborate points on organizational methods.)

1. What is Bourgeois Democracy? What is Fascism? Fascism in Germany, in Italy. Other States characterized as Fascist such as Spain, Portugal, France 1940-45, France under the Fifth Republic, and some of the dictators in the Third World. The Fascist Organizations in France. Political Parties in France. Socialism, Utopian and Scientific. The Nature of the Soviet Union. Stalinism in USSR. Stalinism in the other CPs outside of the USSR. Eastern Europe. The Under-developed Countries. China, Algeria, Cuba. The Program in the Under-developed Countries. The History of the Fourth International and Causes of its Failure. This Group's Relationship With the Fourth International. Other Groups of the Extreme Left. That Which Distinguishes this Group from Other Groups in that Country. The Transitional Program. The Tasks of Our Historical Period.
2. Factory Conditions and trade union work in that country were discussed: The Division Between Skilled and Unskilled Workers; Salary, Hours and Piece Work Problems; General Working Conditions; Contracts; Grievances and Demands; The Present Trade Union Structure in that Country. (Sometimes there are discussions of these problems in other countries.) The History of the trade unions in that Country; The Organizations General Trade Union Work; Trade Union Delegates.

3. Contact work and the development of militants and cadres:
This is the basic work of the organization. It can continue even in underground conditions. Personal, regular contact should be maintained between the militant and the person who it is hoped will become a militant. The contact should be seen alone at regular weekly (or more) appointments. (Unless as a security measure the meetings must be changed in time and place each week.) Students functioning entirely in the student community should be seen outside the student quarters so they can get used to going out of their way a bit. The role of this sort of contact work is the transformation of someone just interested in revolutionary ideas into a politicised and devoted revolutionary, or at least into such a sympathizer. One tries to develop the contact politically, explaining the necessity of reading and getting him in the habit of reading. The purpose of this long sustained contact work is that of human transformation. One aims to transform this contact into an educator, organizer, recruiter and revolutionary catalyst within the working class. One tries to change the contacts whole behavior, attitude and approach (his comportment) toward others and his attitude toward himself so he can begin to function as a transmitter of the ideas and actions aimed at overthrowing capitalism.
4. The Organizational Principles of This Group:
One organizes to do something, to get results. The aim is an organization which is efficient and effective. They organize those who are in close general agreement and organize them according to their levels of commitment (i.e. sympathizer, candidate-member or member). Therefore someone whose commitment is limited to a few hours a week is not in the same cell or circle as those with a higher level of commitment.
5. The general comportment of a militant, toward others as well as toward himself, is honest and serious, politically and socially. The militant must develop and maintain a respect for the individual so that women are treated equally, and workers and students also. For example, students who have more free time, do as much, if not more, mimeoing than preparing classes or writing. A militant in the factory must be honest and serious in dealing with daily problems on the job. He should accept the same work discipline as the others -- be on time, work at the same pace as others, etc. Remember your fellow workers are also comrades in arms. And you want the other workers to regard you as always on their side and ready to help. The militant's job outside the factory is to seek to win the confidence of the workers. This confidence is won by an organization because of the individuals within it who are serious and honest, who do not play at being either a worker or intellectual, who don't act as if they know something they don't etc. The militant's seriousness must be shown to the workers all the time, even in small ways, by being on time and carrying out what he says he's going to do.
6. The self-defense of the working class was discussed.

7. How does one begin if found alone in another town: There are currently materials coming out of the center -- newspapers to sell, posters to paste up and a "location" to be gotten and advertised in the paper. With a small base in the area one can prepare one's own posters on local problems (with the local address), leaflets, local press releases and letters, prospectings and of course the continuing contact work. All this requires technical services, mimeo machine, typewriter, etc. and consequently financial arrangements with the local contact when possible. In general, be around many different groups of people and constantly try to find and develop contacts. In the case of the militant who finds himself with contacts and those who are progressing beyond that stage, it is good to begin an activity with them. It is not necessary to wait until they can be organized to have a common activity with them. For example, a factory bulletin can be started. They are ready to be organized when there are a few at the same level of commitment and availability who are ready to do something together. Remember that each activity means that there will be other tasks that ride along with it and follow as natural consequences. Take these into account, determine if this group is ready for them or could be prepared for them. Other questions arise very soon and are handled elsewhere: finances, secrecy and technical problems. (These problems are discussed long before the sympathizer comes to one of these "organizers study-weeks.")
8. Some of the problems and approaches of doing political work among the workers: The militant must have a general competence about factory life in general, the various craft divisions and qualifications, the payment systems and the general organization of the work. Some of this information can be found in the local press, library and leaflets. During periods of quiescence, militants are found in very small numbers. Then, workers are unspirited, not interested in organization and are under a lot of pressure by the Stalinists. This organization's solution for this situation is through factory bulletins. In this way an isolated militant can have a "public" activity even if he cannot, or is not ready to, face the Stalinists, the boss or the lack of understanding of his friends. The factory bulletins permit public, yet secret, activity; permit the organization of workers who do not yet have sufficient consciousness to join the party; permit the organization of the guys on the job around the bulletin, its writing and distribution and discussion of it. This slight resurgence of activity can help the workers regain confidence in themselves while waiting the necessary time until one is stronger or a higher decisive stage is reached. Therefore the factory bulletins are an adaption to a difficult situation -- of a decline of working class consciousness, paternalism, terrorism and suppression from the bosses and Stalinists. The need to maintain working class contact, to train militants how to function in the working class, to win and develop workers into revolutionaries -- these can be aided through the development of a factory bulletin. It is a primary activity, simple and easy, which can be proposed to a worker contact. It is not excluded that the militant distribute the bulletin himself. In general, contacts are urged to go into the trade unions. (The primary trade union in which work is conducted is the Stalinist controlled national trade union federation, as it is the most influential among the workers.) Though there might be few workers there and

be completely bureaucratic, the CP-led union has the most national control and influence in the working class as a whole. It is very important to look well ahead and discuss all the various problems and personal inconveniences possibly facing the factory militant, in the shop and in the union, and what protective measures are taken.

9. The political, organizational and technical aspects of doing a factory bulletin: One works with any worker who sees the need of actively participating in the class struggle and is opposed to capitalism and the union bureaucrats (even if he doesn't refer to them by those names), and who will provide information about the shop, and work with a group which is both anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist, that is a Trotskyist group. The bulletin should be presented on a regular basis in order to show our full commitment and readiness to fight and be reliable. These factory bulletins are political discussions of the everyday struggle against oppression, indignities, injustices, lack of safety, etc. (Their format is: one side is a political editorial and the other side, articles about the shop (sometimes including general events)).
10. Production of the Factory Bulletin: It is important that the worker contact contribute towards the production of the factory bulletin: a) Financially, even a minimum amount should be paid each month toward the costs of the bulletin. b) The contact should be sure that he won't be quitting the plant soon. and c) that he does get together with those comrades working on the bulletin every 2 weeks at a minimum to discuss the articles and help write them. The job of the organization is to plan and organize these little get togethers in order to try for the fullest participation possible from the contact in the shop. It then also becomes easier to verify the information, which is very important, and the writing and discussing of the articles helps politicalize the contacts.
11. Distributions: If distributions can be done inside the factory by the contacts, so much the better. These inside distributions can be done clandestinely if necessary (such as by putting them in strategic locations, which only workers of that company can get to.) This further shows that the bulletins come from inside and serves as a means of making and mobilizing contacts. The bulletin should, of course, have some local character, it is an expression of political developments inside the plant. The advantage of an external distribution is that 1000 or more workers in that given plant can be reached. (Be sure to foresee problems with cops, guards, Stalinists, etc.). It is best to distribute at the employees entrances or front gate at the morning shift. The future possibilities of this factory bulletin work are as a means of bringing workers to the organization, recruiting some and gathering the others as the base of a revolutionary party.
12. Some of the problems encountered when writing the factory bulletins: Generally, the workers know the various problems and conditions within the plant, but often take for granted the daily manifestation of their oppression, exploitation and degradation. A more specific understanding of the 2 types of articles is required -- there are direct articles in response to a specific incident in the shop and a second type of article which is indirect, about general conditions inside and outside of the shop (these shouldn't be more than 10 lines long). It is important not to engage in merely reportage journalism -- each article must bring something in the way of political enlightenment. (Then the sympathizers try their hand out in

writing an article based on some information which had provided material for an article and maybe an action in the past.) This was followed with lessons in stenciling, mimeoing, and distributing with the use of protective teams.

13. The Organization itself, its basis and means of functioning -- from detailed problems to the broader conceptions of Leninism about the kind of organization one needs to do the job one wants to do. For example, meetings should have a regular rhythm, agendas should be discussed, decided and stuck to. There must be someone responsible for each activity: a secretary is very important, he serves as the memory of the group in order to verify the execution of decisions which have been taken; a treasurer should be someone who has a fairly well-ordered financial life for himself; and of course comrades in charge of the various technical processes, stenciling, mimeoing, sales, distributions, etc. It is best to have reports of various activities in written form. The weekly organizational meetings are the basis of functioning. They are in a way educational circles as well as work sessions because daily political problems must be dealt with in the course of the functioning problems. Lenin on concepts of the revolutionary party was read and discussed as to the whys and hows, under what circumstances are things similar or different, etc. It is hoped, of course, that the study session has increased the political awareness of the sympathizer so that he will aim toward the changes necessary for membership. Possibly he will begin to take over some of his own changes; for example, instead of doing only those tasks he enjoys doing, when he feels like doing them, he learns to adjust his life, personal and political, to the needs and rhythm of the organization. He learns to not be satisfied with surface answers to his many questions, but to study, think and aim for the foundations in political thought and the implementation thereof. He will never be more than a sympathizer unless he is quite serious, honest, reliable and discreet (in addition to having general political agreement). It is realized that these changes take a great deal of time, and require the conscious functioning of the entire organization which is geared toward the production of working-class revolutionaries, or at least revolutionaries who are able to function politically within the working-class.

Within the sympathizers' circles, the comrades learn how the organization functions without having to take a full load of responsibility. The weekly meetings of the sympathizers' circle are business meetings revolving around the work of the organization -- the production and distribution of a factory bulletin (or 2), the reaction from the workers in the shop involved, the problems in, and between the various trade unions represented in the shop; the problems of the contact work being done by the members of the circle as well as their own political understanding -- all this takes up a goodly portion of the meetings, so that while business meetings, they are very educational.

As a contact or sympathizer, the comrade learns how the application of Marxist principles relates to his life. For example, one of the principles of Leninism is that the revolutionary organization -- the entire membership, not just the leadership -- be a cadre organization. To this end, strong pressure is put on the candidate-member either 1) to work in a very large plant where he can function politically within the trade union or in direct propaganda, or 2) to get into a part-time situation enabling him to function more or less full time politically. In order to avoid handicapping those comrades who work 9 hours a day in a factory or office, they are

helped to be able to take time off, say 3 months at a stretch, to build a marxist theoretical foundation for themselves. In this way, the perspective of building working-class Marxist leadership can be effectively implemented. Those comrades who are effectively "full-time" function in the same way as the other comrades -- that is, contact development; classes; leading sympathizers' circles; writing; and all the technical aspects of bulletin, newspaper, magazine and poster production and distribution -- only they put more time into it. In addition, they function from 8 in the morning to midnight or so, as the comrades in factories must do. With everyone having the same rhythm, meetings start on time and end at reasonable hours (at least most of the time). These are some of the ways which mutual respect and comradely functioning are developed in that organization -- not to mention the effectiveness and efficiency of that functioning.

DEVELOPMENT OF CANDIDATE-MEMBERS

When the level of understanding and commitment increases sufficiently and the contact-sympathizer has decided to become a revolutionary, he applies for membership. If his application is accepted, he becomes what we call a candidate-member. The candidate-members are organized separately. They are in "circles" of the organizations as distinct from "cells." These circles are more or less the most active section of the organization. They have one of the leaders of the organization as a guide and are organized separately so that a tighter training program can be maintained. This way slack habits of the older members won't interfere with the developing comrades' habits. His political contact with the organization as a whole takes place in the monthly general membership meetings, where he has voice, in the monthly trade union commission meetings, where he has voice, and in public meetings and classes (both of which are semi-public).

As candidate-members, "A", "B" and "C" (naturally their party names) find that the tempo of political life has substantially increased. They are now "intraining" to become professional in their political activities. The responsibilities the comrades have as sympathizers will be retained and others added on -- possibly heading up a new paste-up team in a new section of the city, or a new sales team, or added responsibility in the expanding printing and mimeoing work; outside responsibilities in the student union, trade union youth or social groups increase under careful guidance. The candidate-member is encouraged and aided in writing small articles for the bulletins (with the hope, and trained with that in mind, that he will be able to take over the coordination and editorship of such a bulletin). The additional required responsibilities are: 1) to participate in a team geared to aid a given section of the country. Each area is visited every two weeks, though it is rotated so that any one comrade goes out of the center every 6 weeks. With participation by a few comrades from the center every 2 weeks, work progresses steadily and sometimes rapidly enough for the outlying area to become a new smaller center and begin sending its teams out to its surrounding areas. 2) to take on a series of classes, giving one class every 3 weeks. The classes are held weekly (in other words, 3 comrades handle a series) all around the outskirts of the city (the working-class neighborhoods) and in other cities. These are classes with groups of high-school or college students, a group of workers in a given plant, a group of young workers living in residences set up for them, etc. These classes are on relatively easy subjects, historical or descriptive, and are as important for the knowledge and training of the candidate-member as for

those attending the class. The comrade receives aid on what to read (rather re-read for the most part), where to find other relevant material, suggestion on the organization of the talk and discussion, etc. (The candidate-members themselves, as well as the sympathizers, are required to attend weekly classes of an advanced nature taught by the members.)

CANDIDATE-MEMBERS' CIRCLES

The agenda of the candidate-members' circles will give you an idea how the organization runs. The various financial points are handled first: members' and contacts' sustainers, money from newspaper and journal sales, sale of the invitation cards (to be resold to contacts) to the monthly public forums -- the one in the center had about 800 attending as of January 1968 -- the distribution of sets of factory bulletins of that week, and the distribution of internal discussion material should there be any. These various functions frequently take place early in the evening as the comrades arrive, so that when everyone has arrived the meeting can begin with the reports.

The first report is from the "Secretariat." This is a body composed of one member from each cell (including those out of town) and coordinates activities, tabulates reports, irons out problems. The report involves what has been done in the organization as a whole during the past week and what is to be done this week.

Then there is a general point entitled technique. This point covers: paste-up of posters, sales (around 3000 a week as of January 1968), door-to-door prospection, stenciling, mimeoing, distributions (there are, as of January 1968, over 60 factory bulletins -- approximately 80,000 leaflets -- distributed every 2 weeks), mailing, trips to other areas, maintenance of the 30 or so "locations" once a week.-- These technical points are usually raised in those cells or circles when a comrade responsible for an aspect of the work makes his report or if there are general problems or an expansion or reorganization, etc.

Classes are then discussed: are there any problems in the class schedule Does everyone have a series? Are you working with a group which will be ready for a class series in the near future?

The discussion on contacts, next on the agenda, is an extremely important one. The education and development of a contact into a responsible and devoted revolutionary is one of the most responsible and crucial jobs a comrade can take on. Contacts are discussed individually, distinctions being made between those whom one sees once in a while and those who one hopes will become militants, and/or revolutionaries and are being worked with toward that goal. The general advice of the group guides the candidate-member on how to work with his contacts, how far to push, when and how; what reading material and which activities would be good for the contact to work on, etc; when to pass the contact over to someone else, who, how, etc; how to guide him on the job, at school, in other organizations, in his personal life, so that the contact can become increasingly conscious of his political role in this society; how to discuss general conduct and social attitudes -- how to transform this contact into a revolutionary.

--As one of the basic functions of a revolutionary party is the transmission of knowledge (the revolutionary party has been called the memory of the working

class), one of the most important educations a comrade must have is how to transmit the full range of revolutionary communist theory and practice to other potential comrades who will then be in a position to further transmit this theory and practice... Until a net-work is built up, such that it can aim toward leading the working class (whose confidence it has gained) to power. So how to develop contacts into revolutionary cadre is fundamental for a Marxist.--

The candidate-members' circle then discusses the factory or office of the comrade(s) involved, how they're functioning, what should be done, etc. Most of the preparation of the factory bulletins takes place at this time. In this way almost any one of the comrades (there are about 8 to a circle or cell) can "take over" a contact from the plant and work with him on the bulletin production and writing, and discuss plant conditions as well as general political questions.

The meeting then discusses events of the week and the organization's position on them.

This training period lasts from 6 months to maybe a year. Petty-bourgeois comrades are frequently tested out for a longer period than working class comrade for several reasons: 1) the story of the fiery student who gave the best 2 years of his life for the revolution and the workers didn't even go on strike... 2) the need to maintain the working class base of the organization and expand it in order to affect even small events of the political and social life of the country and 3) comrades who are intellectuals, were trained as intellectuals or who show this potential are pushed hardest. They must give more of themselves, must be fully engaged, in order to be effectively creative, to enjoy what they're doing and to function politically within the working class over the years.

The cell meetings of the full members of the organization have a similar agenda with a few additional points to be discussed at the monthly executive committee meetings and those of the membership, and discussions of the sympathizers' or candidate-members' circles run by one of the comrades in the cell. (Both circles and cells have from 6 to 8 members. If there are more than that, a discussion of each comrades' contacts and activities for the week becomes unwieldy.)

One of the effects of dividing comrades along levels of commitment is that a democracy pervades which is deeper than the formal one. When decisions are made, most comrades are conscious of the ramifications and innuendos; and they are consciously carried out. So one does not frequently have decisions which are not carried out to their fullest.

Some of these details of organizational functioning are a function of time, place and circumstances. In general, they are the application of some basic principles of Leninism, including the preparation of a private organization paralleling the development of the open one. Realizing that an organization cannot "go underground" at the drop of a hat, the comrades are trained in conspiratorial methods. And certainly, in this case, the best knowing is by doing. Everyone has a pseudo name and is known only by that name. Various headquarters and meeting places are known only to those whose political functioning requires this knowledge. Telephones and mail are used with caution, given their public nature. One does not "unintentionally" gather in public places nor carry on loud political discussions in such places. These precautions need not hinder the organization from functioning publically. The organization in question certainly functions quite publically as do many of its trade union comrades who have developed a base.

The aspects of the organization's functioning described on this report are considered by them to be the organizational foundations for a revolutionary organization composed of the vanguard of the working class. Therefore, there is the need to have the organizational forms which enable workers to become cadre. The factory bulletins are a training ground for the young revolutionary and can be the rallying point for the workers in the plant. Contact work, the second corner-stone, is essential in the transformation of a friend to revolutionary ideas into a comrade functioning in the collective unit of an organization whose members need to rely on each other. And thirdly, discretion and secrecy are essential if one is to increase, even if only in a small way, the cohesiveness and effective power of the working class.

This organization started out as a very small group, a hand-full of young comrades, some contacts -- 2 years later the first factory bulletin came out. Many of the organizational forms described here were developed as they grew. They kept in mind that the desired results of their efforts was the construction of a combat organization composed of conscious, dedicated and reliable comrades, effective and efficient communists who are capable of winning the confidence of the working class and leading it to power.

Kay Ellons

08 April 68

This report was presented and discussed in the PB meeting of 6 May, 1968. The PB decided the report was to be sent out enclosed with the minutes of that meeting in order to: "1). promote consideration nationally and by the locals of what practices, if any, would be applicable by the SL; 2). to invite discussion and comment." The Report is confidential and is to be kept within the membership of the SL.

The Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere

by Liz Gordon

While the Turner-Ellens-Stoute Minority faction has not, at least yet, taken a formal position on the Voix Ouvriere group, the organizational methods of VO, at least as described by Comrade Ellens, have played an important role in the present factional dispute in the SL. Presumably the Minority has chosen not to take a position as a faction on the questions raised by Ellens' report of 8 April 1968 on "Organizational Methods" of a European Trotskyist group which was circulated by Comrade Ellens nationally. The group in question, the French "Union Communiste", has since been dissolved by government decree as a result of the May general strike and its organs, Voix Ouvriere and the bilingual Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle, no longer appear. (The document submitted by Turner on 17 July 1968 is the first document to be signed by the Minority comrades collectively.) At the same time, the tendency of which Comrade Ellens is a leading spokesman has concentrated its fire heavily on questions of organization and so-called "Leninist functioning." Comrade Ellens' first documentary contribution to the discussion was an attachment to the PB minutes of 25 March 1968, as a statement qualifying her vote in favor of Comrade Robertson's motions on how we seek to function politically and organizationally. These motions were presented and motivated in the PB meeting of 4 March. Her entire statement was, "The three motions on organization do not take into account that we are not functioning in a Leninist manner. This must be done in their implementation." While Comrade Ellens' justification for having circulated her report on VO's organizational methods herself and over the head of the PB was that the report was not a factional document, her use of the time allotted her during her recent July trip to the Bay Area for a factional presentation to present the organizational ideas of VO has made it clear that VO is being used as a major factional issue by the Minority. This makes it necessary that the Majority respond to the issues raised.

It seems clear that the Minority, or Comrade Ellens at least, has been attempting to sell VO's successes and impressive aspects, especially in lieu of a more concrete schema of proposals by them for what the SL should seek to be and to do. This is not to say that there has been no political basis of real differences in the founding of the Minority tendency. The general proposition of "getting to the masses" and an implied policy of proletarianization as the solution to the SL's ills has become more and more clear, and poses legitimate political questions which must be discussed in their own right. But the question of VO and its organizational methods has been a second current running through the proselytizing of Comrade Ellens and, further, is one which ties in well, at least superficially, with the expressed concern with "getting to the working class," since VO is presented as being the model of a proletarian Trotskyist organization with proper "Leninist functioning" which the SL should emulate. VO has been used as a prime recruiting device of the Minority and is therefore de facto part of the Minority's program for change.

It is in a way unfortunate that VO has become a factional football. The necessity of answering the attributions and attacks of the Minority makes us insist here on the weak sides of VO. The comrades must keep in mind that VO is in many respects a fine and Trotskyist organization, and it is not an accident that the SL has chosen to maintain fraternal relations between our two groups. Further, VO has behaved towards the SL and the IC (the two organizations we have had to observe VO most closely) in a serious, comradely and scrupulous manner. Likewise, the comrades must keep in mind that, despite the Minority's attempt to suggest an implicit identity between itself and VO, the Minority is not VO. In choosing to wear the mantle of VO, Ellens is implicitly assigning to VO her opinions of the SL and her concept of what VO is. A VO'er, for example, might choose to accentuate some of its disagreements with the SL over political questions which Comrade Ellens has not chosen to treat in her representation of what is basic to that organization. For another example, Comrade Ellens has stated that VO's position against having full-time political functionaries is not very important and flows from a specific difference between French and U.S. conditions, i.e., the allegedly greater ease of getting a part-time job in France. Judging from the whole of VO's organizational outlook, it seems likely that VO itself considers this question of considerable importance and strongly disapproves of having full-timers whose only political assignment is party work. In short, we cannot exclude the possibility that VO views itself differently from the way Comrade Ellens views it and/or that she has chosen to emphasize those ideas and aspects of VO which would be most "saleable" to SL'ers, in order to recruit to her faction. Similarly, we have had rather little day-to-day contact with VO's actual functioning and cannot judge whether Ellens' picture of VO's efficiency is idealized. One SL'er whose contact with VO was much more limited than Comrade Ellens' points out that, despite Ellens' assertion that "meetings start on time," those which she [this other SL'er] attended started late, monthly meetings 45 minutes late, classes less so. Trivial reminders like this may serve to keep us within the bounds of reality. But the most important point, of course, is that we must not be misled by the spectre of VO being raised to lend weight to the arguments of the Minority; if Comrade Ellens has received the VO "franchise," we are not aware of it.

False Comparison

One obvious point to be made about the use of VO as a factional point by Ellens is that the comparison is not particularly fitting. While the organizational theories of VO are certainly relevant points to be debated, as are VO's political differences with the SL, VO certainly cannot be used as a measure of efficiency or effectiveness. According to Comrade Ellens' report, the VO organization has four times as many full members as the SL, four times as many candidate members and again four times as many organized sympathizers. Using our membership criteria, this would give them eight times as many members as we have (we do not distinguish in counting our members between fulls and candidates) and four times as many of a category for which we have no equivalent, but would be roughly whatever close contacts we have regular working relations with in arenas and,

in addition, have sufficient agreement with us to work with us to some extent as the SL, circulating the paper and the like. Thus the SL has at this point roughly one-twelfth VO's strength in members and contacts. Clearly our existence is much more tentative, our standards for what makes a minimally acceptable member somewhat lower by necessity, and our expected efficiency of functioning in no way comparable. Further, while VO's membership is overwhelmingly concentrated in Paris, ours is very lightly spread over an area which, translated into French terms, extends over the equivalent of Paris to the Sahara to the Urals. Hence the effective force we can bring to bear on the main American center, New York, is in the range of one one-hundredth of VO's sheer numerical impact in Paris! It is clear that the burdens on our national center include not only maintaining local functioning in the political center of the country with far less concentrated forces but also attempting to service a national organization with local groups thousands of miles away. While we must concern ourselves with VO's theories of organization, we must realize that to reduce them in our minds to being identical with VO's more efficient functioning is to render them absurd.

Selection of Leadership

The actual organizational structure of VO is, in our terms, rather frightful. According to the information in Comrade Ellens' written organizational report and verbal presentation to the PB of 30 January 1968, VO's structure may be described as federated in the choosing of a national political leadership. ("Federated" in this context should not be taken to mean that locals are autonomous in their co-ordination with each other or with the central leadership.) Members of the VO equivalent of the Central Committee are chosen on the following basis; one member of each cell is elected by the cell to serve on the higher body. This is not necessarily undemocratic (cells are undoubtedly of roughly equal size; this system is not equivalent to our having, for example, one representative apiece from Berkeley and Austin) but it is most certainly not Leninist. In a Leninist organization like the SL, the central political leadership is chosen by the membership as a whole irrespective of what local they come from, on the basis of political positions. Attempts to make VO's system more workable in practice (for example, by having a second CC-level person from a cell choose to attend CC meetings as an observer, or juggling the membership in the cells to be sure that there is somebody qualified in each one--and who would get to gerrymander the cells in this way anyway?) may rectify individual inequities but are in principle not enough to reconcile this structure with Leninist principles of organization. Such a selection of national leadership on the highest bodies of the organization is clearly incompatible with proportional representation for national minority factions. If one cell is in its majority in opposition on some question, it can of course send somebody representing its particular views to the CC. But what if a minority view is spread across several cells, without a majority in any? The selection of a leadership geographically, rather than on the sole basis of political views, does a fundamental injustice to the right of factional democracy in a Leninist organization. The right to factions is key in the Leninist method of determining the line of the organization. While it is quite likely that minority elements are given some lee-

way in the VO organization--we have no knowledge of VO's provisions for internal discussion--and may well be positively encouraged by the leadership, VO's structure means that any representation of minority views necessarily has the character of a privilege, not a right. To be permitted--if they are permitted--to discuss differences internally is not enough; part of the Leninist concept of internal discussion is the right to stand for election on the basis of views, have representation proportional to the strength of those views in the entire organization, and seek to become a majority and determine the line of the organization. Minority views should not simply be aired as criticisms; there must be a mechanism for their competing with the majority line, which means ultimately the right to elect leaders embodying the line.

A further aspect of the selection of the political leadership is even stranger. Three particular leading VO'ers are automatically put on the CC-type body, without standing for election by the membership in the cells or otherwise. While we have no evidence to indicate that the co-option of these particular leading comrades is anything but in accord with what would be the result if these designated leaders stood for election on the same basis as the others, it is certainly clear that such a provision leaves the door open to bureaucratic abuse of the worst sort. At best this feature is a kind of benevolent despotism, even if it is never abused.

Contact Work and Education

Other features of VO's organizational practice are quite good. These features are not so much structural as practical, although there are theories behind the emphasis they are given. Undoubtedly the most touted of these practices has been VO's systematic contact work. Another is the heavy emphasis on internal Marxist education of members. I would hope it is clear that the SL is strongly in favor of both these practices. Energetic pursuit of contacts and an attempt to make high Trotskyists of all members are mainly just common sense. The New York local has adopted a motion in favor of energetic and sustained contact with contacts, and has put Comrade Ellens in charge of this aspect of functioning. The local has also nominated Ellens for local organizer on two occasions in order to assist her in putting into action whatever practical improvements in functioning she had learned from VO or could think up. (She has repeatedly refused to accept the post, perhaps to avoid taking responsibility for making her schemas live up to the implied promises.)

At the same time there are features of VO's emphases on systematic contact work and internal education which are not wholly positive. In our discussions in the PB following Comrade Ellens' presentation, some comrades felt that the extreme emphasis on individual contacting seemed to produce an excessively linear assessment of tasks. A process of individual members discussing with individual contacts can proceed almost independently of the course of development of objective situation and struggle; each member should recruit a certain number of contacts per year by individually convincing individuals. Such a conception leads to a kind of theory of stages; everybody recruits contacts until we reach a size of x members, then

we move on to a different stage (There is no room in such a conception for the possibility that under some circumstances a group might get smaller rather than ever and automatically larger.) PB comrades also feared that such an approach, if overemphasized, could lead to VO's ignoring political struggle with competing organizations and leftward-moving sections of other groups, the possibility of splits in opponent groups on the basis of Bolshevik politics. The struggle to become the vanguard party entails not only increasing one's own forces but also combating whatever "ostensibly revolutionary organizations" are competing for the banner of revolutionary Marxism, by exposing them and seeking to win individual members and sections of such groups to one's own program. Otherwise, all groups might grow by linear contacting, with little progress being made toward political clarification and the crystallization of a vanguard party.

Regarding internal Marxist education and a disdain for coffee-klatch, cafe-society politicking, this indicates first of all VO's concern with being serious. But VO's method of putting this desire into practice can be criticized. One of the features considered by VO, according to Comrade Ellens, as integral to this approach is the organizing of people according to their levels of commitment. The resulting division into full and candidate member cells has something of a hierarchical character. In the candidate member cells, each of which contains one full member assigned to it, a kind of student-to-teacher relationship could develop; instead of all members being considered as equals, the newer members would be second-class citizens. Great stress is put by Comrade Ellens on the advantages this type of organization offers for education and re-shaping the minds of new members in an anti-petty-bourgeois direction. However, such a concept of education is a very formalistic one. With the exception of the monthly political meetings and the contact with the one assigned full member, the candidate members are isolated from working contact with the real cadres of the organization on the living political questions. In addition, the Leninist concept of education is that the most important way in which comrades are educated is through internal factional struggle. Purely on educational grounds, then, the lack of this basic Leninist practice renders the VO concept of education purely formal in character. Education means to a Leninist far more than the study of texts.

Organization tied to Politics

The function of organizational structure and methods is to safeguard against bureaucratic abuse and political stultification. While the leading cadre of VO may well lean over backwards to prevent these faults, whatever internal democracy exists in VO exists in spite of and not because of VO's much-touted organizational procedures. We want our members to have rights, not to be constantly granted privileges by a benevolent and paternalistic leadership.

Thus we have severe criticisms of VO's organizational practices. Before going on to examine VO's intimately related theoretical positions on organizational and political questions, we would like to establish that they are extremely relevant to the present dispute within the SL. No doubt the Minority would like to disclaim responsibility for VO's positions, pointing out that they have never tried

to defend all of VO's views. In fact, our Minority would probably like to avoid defending any of them. Our Minority would like to stand entirely on the basis of VO's functioning. And certainly, if one seeks only to demonstrate that VO is a more effective organization than the SL (i.e., visits more contacts, holds more classes, has more union fractions, has a better publication schedule) then one need not defend VO's theories. But, as shown above, to show that an organization twelve times the size of another is more effective is not very startling, and cannot exhaust the relevance of the VO example in the eyes of the Minority. In having made VO a factional point, Comrade Ellens has made it incumbent upon her faction to show 1) that the SL's weaknesses relative to VO are a result of the SL's political line and/or its organizational practices and 2) that the Minority's program and proposals have the answer. So far, with the exception of the question of energetic contact work (which suggestion has been widely accepted by the organization and the leadership), no other specifics of VO's practices have been frankly suggested for the SL out of the totality of the VO example. Yet this cannot possibly exhaust the criticisms of Comrade Ellens or explain why she felt it necessary to make an extended report on VO's functioning as part of the time allotted her in the Bay Area for a factional presentation. It is hardly necessary to form a faction in order to argue for systematic contact work. What Ellens seeks to capitalize on through raising the issue of VO is the non-success of the SL over the past year or so, during which time membership size has been about constant. The Minority attempts to lay these difficulties at the door of 1) our allegedly non-proletarian orientation and, 2) our allegedly non-Leninist mode of functioning. Both Ellens and Turner have submitted documents dealing with the first point; VO has been offered as the model of what we should be if not for the second. But to select a few gimmicks (e.g., systematic contacting) out of one's model is not enough. Since VO is irrelevant as a quantitative measure of the SL (i.e., efficiency in functioning), the Minority must mean VO to be a qualitative measure--i.e., relevant for its principles of organization, its politics, since the question of who has the right line is always relevant to any organization no matter what its size. The theories and practices of VO form an integrated whole, and the Minority must take responsibility for the organizational and political theories of VO, not simply seek to take credit for its efficiency and its practical features.

Theory Behind Organizational Emphasis

Underlying VO's emphasis on organizational methods is the proposition, with which we heartily concur, that organizational questions are not separate from politics and that organizational theories are themselves political questions. According to Ellens, the concern with organizational questions began during and after the second World War, when the individuals who were to form VO reacted against the increasing social-patriotism of the formerly-Trotskyist organizations in France. VO's founders sought to determine what practices and concepts of functioning had facilitated the deterioration into revisionism. From Ellens' representation to the PB of 30 January 1968: "They decided that the policies taken by the other groups had come about in the absence of contact with working-class areas, as a way of meeting widespread petty-bourgeois sentiment. They wanted to

avoid themselves coming under such strong petty-bourgeois influences. They saw that groups could change their policies very easily under pressure and concluded that this was a function of a lack of basic education and training and an attitude toward being a lifetime Trotskyist revolutionary...." Ellens' presentation to the PB of 6 May also dealt with this point and stressed VO's determination to avoid functioning like an unserious, dilettantish discussion group. Ellens' organization report of 8 April deals with the necessity of rooting out petty-bourgeois hang-ups, proletarianization of the organization and of the minds of petty-bourgeois recruits and deepening seriousness and commitment. Through its internal education and organizational methods, VO, according to Ellens, is frankly trying to prevent the seeds of political degeneration from springing up in their organization.

At the London conference of the IC in April 1966, the VO comrades submitted several documents dealing with the question of Pabloism and the Fourth International. Their view was that this revisionism stemmed primarily from the petty-bourgeois composition of the Trotskyist movement. To quote from their documents:

"...the failure of the Fourth International was due to the refusal of its militants and of its leaders...to admit that the social composition of the sections in majority petty-bourgeois, intellectuals, necessitated strict political and organization measures to keep out corrupt elements, and, as far as possible, to escape from the influence of petty-bourgeois ideology by making a maximum effort to recruit within the working-class, and by obliging elements of petty-bourgeois origin to tie themselves to work in the factories.... Pabloism, in the form of liquidationism, was but the finished expression of this petty-bourgeois opportunism of all the sections of the International.... Pabloism was not the cause of the failure and the demise of the Fourth International; it was its product."

And later:

"Our organization was born precisely of the necessity to separate physically from the petty-bourgeois environment with its Social-Democratic practices which made up the Trotskyist organizations in France at the beginning of the war, to be able to recruit, educate and form cadres capable of putting into practice Leninist and Trotskyist organizational principles and which were not content with "Bolshevik" verbiage covering up opportunist practice. It is because we ran up against the sarcasm and incomprehension of the militants of the Fourth International with respect to these questions that we had to carry on an activity separate from the Fourth International, although we have always upheld its ideas and its program."

Another document makes it clear that "petty-bourgeois ideology" is defined by VO by the class composition of those who hold the ideas; in another document they speak about seeing "the Pabloite degeneration as an elaborated form of the ideology of certain strata of the petty-bourgeoisie influenced by the apparatus of imperialism and of the bureaucracy." (our emphasis) In our opinion, Pabloism

is a petty-bourgeois ideology because it denigrates the idea of a proletarian class party and a proletarian revolution in favor of revolutions made by petty-bourgeois or bureaucratic strata in the interests of a class other than the proletariat--e.g., Negroes as a multi-class nationality, peasants in Latin America, a petty-bourgeois bureaucratic elite. On the question of the roots of Pabloism, see SPARTACIST No. 6, the statement of the SL delegation to the IC conference. While one may argue with merit that the lack of deep roots within the working class is a built-in source of weakness and can in changing circumstances reinforce and even produce deep disorientation and a tendency to shift the axis of the party away from a revolutionary line, should one then conclude that a super-proletarian orientation is a safeguard against political error and revisionism? A number of questions are raised: Should one expel one's members of petty-bourgeois origins? This would undoubtedly reduce the size and effectiveness of the organization, but surely it is preferable to have a small organization with the right line than a large group which is necessarily centrist. How completely can one revamp the consciousness of one's petty-bourgeois members by formal Marxist education? or alternately, "are one's members of petty-bourgeois origins still petty-bourgeois despite having chosen to become "class traitors" in favor of the cause of the proletariat? What of Lenin's concept of declassed professional revolutionaries? With such an analysis, how does one explain the conservative tendencies that have developed in the Russian Bolshevik party, or the CPUSA, or the SWP, among the party's trade unionists? (Regarding the latter, see Cannon's article on the Cochran group, "Trade Unionists and Revolutionists," Fourth International magazine, Spring 1954.) Or, on the most serious note, what do you do in an objective situation (which includes your size, composition and roots) in which you are not likely to have great success in reaching and recruiting workers?

The Politics of VO

Continuing with the correct proposition that politics and organization are intimately related, we come to the political positions of VO. Let us note first of all that we are dealing here with the positions of difference between VO and the SL, which is to say, in our terms, with their wrong positions; we must continue to keep in mind that many of VO's positions are correct. The Minority, ignoring the intimate connection between organizational and political questions, has chosen repeatedly not to deal with VO's political differences with the SL. They have not chosen to defend VO's positions; neither have they put themselves on record as being opposed to them. In fairness to the Minority, this should be taken to constitute not necessarily agreement on VO's politics, but rather an elaborate non-concern over political questions. Yet we must assume that VO itself, unlike the Minority, would agree that political questions are important in evaluating an organization. And perhaps this document will at least cause our Minority to tell us where they stand on VO's political differences with the SL.

In general, VO's emphasis on class composition is indicative of its semi-syndicalist deviation from Trotskyism. In a letter to a comrade in Europe on 20 January 1967 I characterized VO as having "an excessive concentration on 'the point of production'" and as

having "semi-syndicalist tendencies." This leads them to a de-emphasis of the importance of Marxist theory and the consequent over-emphasis on organization. It is not an accident that in the "Outline of Study-Week Session" reproduced in the Ellens document, of the 13 numbered points 11 of them, in her words, "elaborate points on organizational methods." VO seems to feel that it is defined primarily as a tendency by its organizational theories rather than by its politics; and in the sections quoted above from the documents presented to the IC conference VO frankly defines its modes of functioning as the basis for its separate existence.

VO's semi-syndicalist deviation from Trotskyism (which is not to say that VO has a semi-syndicalist perspective or that it is not Trotskyist) is the main methodological point which produces both VO's political strengths and its political weaknesses. In its domestic line, VO was the only left-of-Stalinism organization with a significant base in the working class, but was limited in its influence in the radical student movement. Unlike the SWP's orientation exclusively to the petty-bourgeoisie, excessive concentration in the working class cannot be defined as a political sell-out, but may well be a tactical error. When elevated to the level of a theory, it is a theoretical one.

In its international line, VO does very well indeed whenever the working class is a real factor in the situation; VO's line on, for example, the Chinese "Cultural Revolution" made its primary insistence, correctly, on the need for the working class to act as a class in its own interests and the need for a Trotskyist vanguard party. Unlike the Healyites, Pabloites, Posadasites and their ilk, VO knew that the Shanghai general strike was important that the working class is not a fascist class, that the Cultural Revolution is directed against the workers. They were not about to give any quarter to the enemies of the Chinese working class.

Yet in situations in which the ascension of the working class to power does not seem to be an immediate possibility, VO is disoriented. Their strong proletarian class instinct (the positive aspect of their emphasis on working-class composition and work in the mass movement) is not a sufficient substitute for consistent Marxist theoretical analysis in such cases. On a whole series of issues involving what seem to them to be national questions or sections of the population other than the working class (U.S. Negroes, Latin American peasants, petty-bourgeois guerrilla movements, the Viet Cong) VO's line and essential methodology is not qualitatively different from that of the Pabloists.

VO on the U.S. Negro Question

Regarding the Negro Question, Class Struggle/Lutte de Classe of October 1967 (No. 8) stated: "If a Trotskyist organization appears within the black population this could, through a quirk of history, and our epoch abounds in such quirks, bring down the international citadel of capitalism through a class struggle in which the national and racial factor is predominant at the beginning." VO here sees the Negro Question as a legitimate national question, although they nonetheless view the national question as ultimately

secondary to the class question. Further, we have here the possibility that the black movement, or, by implication, any movement, can spontaneously generate a Trotskyist leadership. In methodology, this is not different from the Pabloists' abdication.

To quote further, "The white population can learn to forget its racism, half through solidarity with people who know how to defend themselves and half through fear." Of the two criteria here, the first in sensible--i.e., respect. The concept of the white populations' increasing fear having any progressive, anti-racist aspect is wishful thinking and is dangerously wrong. White working-class racism can only be eroded by the opposite of fear, the realization of common interests with the black workers. Race fear, on the contrary, has only reactionary effects. In Algeria, the increasing predominance of the race-nationality question ended by the total eclipse of the class question and caused the total demise of the communist movement which had previously had strong holdings among the white workers in Algeria. The classic response of the racial or national grouping which is "on top" in the society to fear of the other race is a massacre. A fear reaction can only strengthen a reactionary solution. It is the recognition of common class interests which alone can heighten the tempo and intensity of class struggles and increasing consciousness on the part of the whites.

VO goes on, "The oppressed must build their own power to free themselves." The lesson drawn by us here is an anti-nationalist one, the fight against lumpenization of the ghetto masses. To the extent that the Negroes have no economic power through unions and the possibility of strikes, etc., they become increasingly vulnerable to a fascist solution, in the worst case, of concentration camps, deportation, extermination. VO continues, "The most radical among the present leaders of the black movement [i.e., H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael] have already progressed a great deal. Will they, in the course of the struggle, come to a socialist consciousness, a clear vision of the antagonistic classes...? One cannot say." Again the possibility of spontaneous development of socialist consciousness without the intervention of the Trotskyists is raised. Continuing, "The first necessary step is to create a black revolutionary organization, strictly independent on a national basis on all levels from American organizations including whites. It is not a matter of creating a mass organization. It is a matter of creating a Trotskyist revolutionary party, an authentic organization of the struggle of American blacks, since the black population has the highest level of consciousness." This is a frank statement of a dual vanguardist position.

Examining VO's conclusions, we find: "If the Trotskyists are incapable of taking the head of the black movement, as it is now constituted, and in a manner appropriate to the movement, they have only several years, if not several months, left before they can do nothing but support Carmichael and Brown unconditionally, attributing to them an unconscious and transcendent socialism in order to appease their own conscience. At the present time, the actions of Brown and Carmichael must be physically supported, while their limits must be pointed out unhesitatingly." Thus, to the extent that the present leaders are not supplanted, they must be supported.

Having nothing to offer as transitional demands, with the exception of the question of self-defense, it is hard to see how VO could avoid this position which is essentially liquidationist and capitulatory to Black Nationalism. An active VO'er, informed on American conditions, with whom we discussed, agreed with our criticisms of this line and said that it flowed simply from lack of knowledge of the U.S. situation. Yet this issue is not the only example of such disorientation.

VO took a position of support to the Arab side in the Arab-Israeli conflict. To be sure, their line was less obnoxious and more honest than that of the Pabloists; VO denied that there was any such animal as the "Arab Revolution." Yet VO's position, while more honest and therefore less consistent, shows again the inability to respond in a correct manner in a situation where the class question seems immediately less prominent than some other question, i.e., the national question. It is worth noting here that at least at that time Comrade Ellens held the VO position on this question. Despite the PB having raised political criticisms of this and other political positions of VO at two times (PB meetings of 30 January and 6 May). Comrade Ellens is evidently so little interested in VO's politics that there has been no way to tell whether she still holds her former position on this question; she has never bothered to say.

VO on the Soviet Bloc

As VO would no doubt be quick to say, the Russian Question is paramount for Trotskyists. And on this question, VO has shown itself unable to develop and apply Trotskyist theory to the East European Soviet bloc countries, China and Cuba. As all comrades should already be aware, VO recognizes the Soviet Union as a deformed or degenerated workers state and China, Cuba and the East European Soviet bloc countries as capitalist. (From the logic of their analysis, they should not recognize the Soviet Union as a deformed workers state either.) The methodology here is again that of the Pabloists, with the important difference that VO chooses to take essentially a revolutionary state capitalist position while the Pabloist position is liquidationist of the Trotskyist vanguard party and essentially a capitulation to Stalinism regarding political revolution.

The underlying methodology of the VO position is made clear in VO's comradely and serious critique of the SL's Guerrilla Warfare Theses (SPARTACIST No. 11) which appeared in Class Struggle #15, May 1968. This critique is mainly concerned with the question of Cuba. VO shares with the Healyite IC the view that Cuba is a capitalist state, and for much of the same reasons. The view seems to be that if we grant that Cuba is a deformed workers state, there is no more reasons for a Trotskyist party; if the petty-bourgeoisie can ever be forced to break with the capitalist economic system and establish what is viewed as a deformed kind of socialism, Trotskyists can have no perspective except to become a left pressure group seeking to push the Stalinists to the left. A few quotations will make their position clear.

"In the last analysis, such a state will be a workers' state only if the working class seizes power and builds its own

state apparatus. And this holds true whatever the extent of the economic reforms carried out." (page 13) "And to consider that this state interference has the slightest 'workers' or 'socialist' character leads directly to abandoning the proletariat in favor of other social groups supposed able to play the same historical role. Indeed, this conception leads to openly admitting that bourgeois organizations (or petty-bourgeois organizations) can, by leaning on certain petty-bourgeois and in any case non-proletarian social layers, create workers' states, even deformed ones, and lay the bases for significant economic progress in the underdeveloped countries. This is the very negation of the Communist Manifesto. It is also the negation of the reasoning which led Trotsky to characterize the USSR as a 'deformed workers' state' because of the particular and decisive role played by the proletariat in its creation." (page 14)

It is clear that a kind of healthy attitude leads VO to this analysis: they fear that to grant Cuba (and by implication East Europe or anyplace where the workers never took power) a characterization of "deformed workers state" will cause them to sell out. And they don't want to sell out. This is admirable. However, this position also leads them to deny reality. The East European states, and Cuba, and China, are identical in qualitative terms to what now exists in the Soviet Union as result of its degeneration. The power of theory and a dynamic and creative approach to a changing world is that it is not necessary to falsify history in order to reach a revolutionary conclusion.

The basis of VO's theoretical incapacity over these questions is a too close identification between a "workers state" and a "deformed workers state." It is this error which leads the Pabloists to liquidationism: if the Stalinists or the petty bourgeoisie can ever, under the pressure of one of the two contradictory forces operating on them, actually create something which is "pretty good," then what role is there for the Fourth International? What the VO comrades forget here is that in order for the Soviet Union to go from being a workers state, however seriously threatened and in crisis, to a deformed workers state, it required a political counter-revolution and the physical extermination of the old Bolshevik party. VO and the Pabloists see only a quantitative difference between the victorious Russian workers state and the product of its degeneration.

The Spartacist analysis has two virtues: it leads us to a revolutionary conclusion, and it is correct. We concur wholeheartedly that "such a state will be a workers state only if the working class seizes power and builds its own state apparatus." But the VO comrades apply this same criterion to a deformed workers state. Is this criterion true now for the USSR? Certainly not. Yet VO considers it a deformed workers state. Their only reason must be that in the USSR the working class once did hold political power. This can be only a sentimental reason for characterizing the Soviet Union as a deformed workers state. Further, to hold that such a state does not have the slightest "workers" or "socialist" character is oversimplistic, and denies the fundamental contra-

diction facing the bureaucracies: that they are both the enemies of the working class in their own countries and internationally and at the same time rest on top of a state in which the economic system and the formal ideology constantly pose the issue of workers control. The renunciation of the recognition of this fundamental contradiction has been the basis for all third camp theories--Shachtman's bureaucratic collectivism and J.R. Johnson's or Tony Cliff's state capitalism. Finally, VO's semi-syndicalism leads them to write off the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie (for example, in the Cuban case) as fundamentally irrelevant to Marxists. In fact, the cause of intermediate classes can at times overlap to some extent the interests of working-class revolution; in such cases we will conclude an uneasy alliance with these forces--for example, the slogan of a workers' and peasants' government. Where we agree with VO is that the working class must maintain hegemony over the peasants and that the vanguard party is absolutely not a two-class party, but a party of the proletariat.

Further, let us not be too bemused by the fact that VO's analysis is at present both incorrect and episodically revolutionary. Incorrect analysis takes its toll, and we may in the future find out positions dramatically counterposed. VO would critically defend the Soviet Union against imperialist aggression. But what line would they take in a war between East and West Germany? Let us hope that VO would find some inconsistent excuse to avoid being neutral about the reintroduction of capitalism into the deformed workers states. Or, what was their line on the India-China border war? Here is a clear case in which the logic of their position must lead them to be neutral.

The "Trotskyist Family"

Another political weakness of VO has been a too-fraternal and non-combative attitude toward other formally "Trotskyist" groups. At the London Conference in 1966 we raised the criticism that VO seemed to have a conception of a "Trotskyist family" (see SPARTACIST No. 6), that they seemed to have the conception that all groups calling themselves "Trotskyist" were actually Trotskyist. This criticism, at least, of all the ones we have raised, has been disputed by Comrade Ellens as a question of fact. She has stated that VO only recognizes a certain responsibility to new members of "Trotskyist" groups who may have joined such groups on the basis of their formal "Trotskyism" rather than their opportunist practices. If this is the case, of course, the SL has the same view, in insisting on the necessity for a continual struggle to expose the Pabloists and others as not really Trotskyists and for clarification and polarization in groups which are the only representatives of formal "Trotskyism" in their countries and therefore may include members who would choose a revolutionary position. Yet the present rather disturbing course of VO lends some preliminary support to our criticism of their "Trotskyist family" orientation.

Re-Unification with Pabloism?

Much concern has been voiced within the SL over the unity-of-action pact signed between the Pabloists and VO, and later also

signed by the Pablo Pabloites, who are insignificant in France. The text of the pact is:

"In view of the development of the present situation, which cruelly points up the absence of a revolutionary leadership, and considering that it is essential to unify the struggle carried on by the organizations claiming to be Trotskyist, representatives of the Union Communiste [VO], the Parti Communiste Internationaliste [Pabloist] and the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire [Pabloist youth] met on Sunday, May 19, 1968, and decided to form a permanent coordinating committee for their three organizations. This coordinating committee now calls on all organizations claiming to be Trotskyist to join in this move. The three organizations advise their members everywhere to come together to coordinate their activity." (Reprinted in Intercontinental Press, 3 June 1968)

While initially it was not clear whether VO viewed this agreement as the beginning of a reunification of the "Trotskyist" movement, the Healyites in their denunciations and the Pabloists in their applaudings of the pact certainly view it as such. Several comrades in the PB raised the fear that VO had been disoriented by finding itself on the same side of the barricades with the Pabloists and were reacting in an overfraternal manner to this, and perhaps also as a reaction to the inability of the leftists to bring France past the negative situation of a general strike into a positive struggle for workers' power. It was decided after discussion in the PB and NYC local to raise in the article for SPARTACIST No. 12 on the French events the criticism that VO had chosen the wrong axis to capitalize on the French events and the exposure of the PCF-CGT; that the comrades should have called upon all those who stand in favor of workers' committees and workers' power to come together to form the needed new vanguard party of the working class--that is, for regroupment based on the Bolshevik program, not only on the basis of the formal protestations of Trotskyism of the various groups, which latter axis might include some who actually stood outside the actual basis for the formation of a new revolutionary party and might exclude sections of groups who had moved left under the pressure of the events and now stood for workers' power. Although we consider it highly unlikely that VO now wishes consciously an unprincipled unification with the Pabloists, a group such as VO which has functioned on the basis of subjective revolutionary class instinct without much theoretical capacity could well find itself in such a situation despite its intentions.

Concern over this point has been strengthened considerably by the front-page editorial in the new Lutte Ouvriere No. 4, dated 17 July 1968, entitled "Towards the Revolutionary Party." The article states:

"May '68 has been a forceful demonstration of the validity of revolutionary ideas.... The future now depends on the capacity of the revolutionary movement to capitalize on this acquisition of confidence.... We have already written and repeated several times in our columns that this is only possible if the revolutionary movement is capable of surmounting

its division into multiple indifferent tendencies however distrustful each is of the others.... To struggle for the fusion of the forces which, until now, have been fighting dispersed, and to surmount for that the obstacles, the misunderstandings, the dangers, this is the most imperative duty of all revolutionaries at this time. The objection which one meets most frequently among even those revolutionaries who are most sincerely desirous of seeing the far left possessing the organization strength equal to its ideas concerns the seeming incompatibility between effectiveness and the absence of centralism, the latter being understood as monolithism.... However it is not only that the unity of action doesn't exclude the free confrontation of ideas; this is even the condition for action to stand on a sane base. The bolshevik party...has known in the course of its history numerous tendencies and sometimes even factions. Its militants have by all means the right and even the duty to publicly defend their own ideas even when [the ideas] are in contradiction with the official positions of the Party. [?].... Also it is not a question of hiding that the political differences which separate the revolutionary tendencies are important and sometimes grave.... It is the experiencing of action and experience (of the facts) which will be charged with selecting the ideas. But in order for that to be, it is necessary that the revolutionary movement have a stake in the events and that will not really be the case unless they are united. What seems the most difficult [problem] to surmount is that the differences are not only political, but concern even the conception of the Party. But even that is up to experience to determine, for if the different revolutionary currents wait, before uniting themselves, to convince one another only by the discussion, they can wait a long time. Events, by contrast, do not wait. Certainly the unification of the existing revolutionary forces will not give [us] ipso facto a party capable of leading the struggle of the proletariat to victory. Such a party will be forged through long years of struggle.... Unification is not an end, it is a beginning.... Revolutionary militants that are separated by important differences learned to struggle together in the factories, in the neighborhoods, in the different committees, and to make a common front against their common enemies. They discover, through the daily combat that they lead together that, although what separates them is sometimes very important, what unites them is fundamental." (our emphasis)

This seems to be a call for a unification among the ostensibly revolutionary organizations. Parenthetically, one might note that the most serious difficulty is conceived to be differing concepts of the party, i.e., of organizational questions, rather than political differences. No demands are raised as to the basis of such a unification--unification on the basis of what political program, workers power? formal Trotskyism? being left of CP?--except that all the revolutionary organizations (in this conception, there seem to be lots of them) should unite in order to make their combined force strong enough to influence the events. From having called for all Trotskyist organizations to get together on no par-

ticular basis except an implied opposition to the CP's reformism (in the original unity-of-action pact), there is now a move to call for all "revolutionary" groups to get together on no basis whatsoever. Judging from VO's past history of principled (and perhaps too standoffish) behavior towards other groups, we find it likely that Trotskyists will pull back from the present course before such a unification, or at least find itself compelled after such a unification to split out and reaffirm a program which is to be found nowhere in this editorial and a commitment to Trotskyism which is to be found nowhere in this publication.

What is pervasive to VO's political errors is the syndicalist-related feeling (and resulting practice) that the working class is immune from anti-revolutionary deviations and a kind of narrow "workerism" which leaves them without a revolutionary line towards other struggles (U.S. Negroes, the Arab peasant masses) and without any axis towards social transformations in which the working class has been largely absent (East Europe, Cuba). This "workerism" is a current in the Bolshevik movement which has been fought since the Leninist amplification of Marxism, e.g., in "What is to be Done?", written by Lenin in 1902. The working class is our class because it is the only class capable of decisively smashing the capitalist system and laying the basis for social progress in our epoch. The working class is not, however, a magic talisman to ward off evil and bring automatic success to the socialist movement.

The Minority and VO

As pointed out above, the Minority as a faction has not embraced the Ellens VO document as they have the Turner document. At the same time it is clear that VO is being used by Comrade Ellens as an at least informal recruiting device and an implicit comparison with the SL. Yet, Ellens has steadfastly refused to deal with VO in a serious and political way. She has sought to sell VO's successes as a plank in the Minority's program for the SL, but only covertly. She has created the image (perhaps somewhat idealized) of VO as an eminently serious (which it is) and efficient organization through propagandizing VO's gimmicks--systematic contacting, orderly meetings, internal Marxist educational programs, proletarianizing the psyches of petty-bourgeois members--while only tacitly accepting VO's essential and theoretical organizational precepts and ignoring VO's politics. We are tacitly promised that we can be "as good" as VO if we will support the Minority, but since neither the organizational philosophy nor the politics is frankly pushed, her assurances can mean only that an organization of our size can be as effective as one twelve times larger through the institution of systematic contacting and the like. Ellens has sought to concentrate on the gimmicks of VO and ignore the basic questions. Further, the strengths of VO are certainly not employed and embodied by the Minority--any VO'er worth his salt would be horrified with the proposition that the situation for the SL in the New York hospital workers' union was essentially unchanged by the departure of both party members in the union. If there is one thing which epitomizes VO's strength it is the desire to be involved in real struggle, to have a caucus-

building perspective in unions, to be above all serious and responsible in its work in the mass movement. Finally, there is no indication that a VO'er in the SL would concentrate so exclusively on the techniques of organization; in short, VO is not as non-political as our Minority.

The Spartacist League has very grave weaknesses--in its functioning, its resources, its human material. And it has a strength--its uniquely correct political line. It is the particular political ideas of the SL which justify its existence as a separate organization. Let us not be so eager, as is the Minority, to sell our strength down the river in exchange for phantom schemes and implied promises which cannot solve our problems. Those who support the Minority are headed for a political destination which they perhaps do not know yet, but which is liquidation of Trotskyism.

(corrected)

6 August 1968

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"POLITICALIZING" TO AVOID POLITICS

Comrade Gordon's document: the Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere is the majority's "response" to the V.O. report; this response was necessitated by the principles of organization raised by the report since they represent a qualitative (i.e., class) difference in functioning. This class issue is cowardly avoided by Com. G., however, who instead talks about "factional issues," "formal positions" and other meaningless abstractions.

Before we examine the successive main sections of the document, let us clarify several things.

First, this document of the majority (conservative tendency) is not really a response to the VO report. Rather it expresses the majority's old fear of doing political work in the working class. For the four months since the report was submitted, the majority has attempted to avoid any full serious discussions in the locals of this report which attempted to explain how a fraternal group does function--and function politically--in the working class. Because the discussions have begun to take place, the majority now is forced to discredit and slander the fraternal group and the comrade who submitted the report. That they resort to such methods is merely one more expression of the majority's attempts to avoid contact with the class it purports to someday lead. As long ago as the winter of 1966, Com. Robertson's "political analysis" of VO's process of developing worker cadre was the aphorism: "Having a working class base is no guarantee against degeneration." That is true, comrades, but not reversible. Not having a working class base is a guarantee of degeneration. The "height" of Trotskyism reached by Cmd. J.R.'s evasion is similar to the idea that having legs doesn't guarantee you'll be able to walk.

Second, the need to deal exclusively with (and for that matter distort) the forms of organization, means either that the content (i.e. class content) is totally beyond the comprehension of our "high-archivists" or that the fear and mistrust of the working class is akin to that of the New Left adherents. Can you imagine Cmd. J.R. as the leader of a serious revolutionary party composed largely of class-conscious workers functioning politically (and daily) in the class struggle?

Third, let us establish with a few quotes the type of inanity and basic dishonesty which pervades this document.

Page 1, para. 2: Comrade E. "has been attempting to sell VO's successes and impressive aspects, especially in lieu of a more concrete schema of proposals by them for what the SL should seek to be and to do". It appears that Cmd. Gordon has forgotten the fight in the NYC local over MLCRC work, when the majority in effect dismantled trade union work already in progress. This work embodied very concrete proposals for what the SL should seek to be and to do, proposals advanced and supported by the minority. It appears she also has not read the document, "What Is a Working Class Perspective?" submitted by Cmd. Ellens, and "Whither the S.L.?" submitted by Cmd. Turner. Both of these contain very concrete proposals--although certainly not the schema that she asked for. The oversights of the majority's are complemented by their inability to understand that the recruitment and training of worker cadre is not the same thing as "getting to the masses." Such a distortion perpetuated by the majority is simply a reflection of its elitism and anti-Leninism.

Page 2, para. 1: That "VO has behaved towards the SL... in a serious, comradely and scrupulous manner" is true. It is disgusting that one cannot say the

same for the SL. In almost 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ years since the London conference, during which time the SL has been in so-called "fraternal relations" with VO it has not deemed it important enough to engage in a dialogue with this "fraternal" organization on either those political or organizational principles on which the two organizations differ. Class Struggle, for example, has been published since February 1967, and has included many articles which are clearly counterposed to many of the SL's theoretical positions. In one and one half years, the SL hasn't answered any of those articles--unless we consider N.O. corridor gossip as "answers". But for internal consumption, a 17 page document filled with distortions, lies and slanders, is rapidly produced. How cynical! Does the leadership of the Conservative Tendency not wish to enlighten VO on its "weaknesses"?

The same page and para.: Cmd. K.E.'s "representation of what is basic to that organization," i.e. its functioning, was accentuated due to a "misunderstanding" on the part of Cmd. K.E. As the result of a request from Cmd. J.R., she thought that this is what the SL wanted to learn from VO. From earlier statements she had been led to believe that is what the organization wanted her to learn when she was there. She, for example, received carbons of two letters to New Orleans: 18 January 1967 "she (Kay) is working closely with the VO group in France and learning a great deal about their methods of recruiting and cadre-training". 20 January 1967 "she has been doing exceedingly valuable work".

The same page and para.: The "SL'er whose contact with VO was much more limited" had been, in reality a contact of one single VO'er for a few months and had, it seems, known a couple of public meetings to start late. The VO report deals with principles which are assiduously carried out. To point to the exceptions of several public meetings starting late (and remember, for VO, legitimate difficulties such as Stalinist attempts to interfere with meetings, do arise) is simply to beg the question posed by those principles.

Finally all the sophistry of this one paragraph is designed to prove--what? That "If Comrade Ellens has received the VO 'franchise', we are not aware of it." What a pitifully bureaucratic mentality this reveals!

From this point on we will focus on the way this document of the majority has evaded the main political questions raised by the VO report and the significance of the particular evasions. We will order our discussion by following the main sections of the majority's document.

Under the subheading False Comparison, Cmd. G. actually admits that "the organizational theories of VO are certainly relevant points to be debated"... Yet two of the three organizational principles of VO which Cmd. E. summarized on page 11 para. 1 of the VO report were never mentioned. Is it because they deal specifically with the development of worker cadre? And isn't this precisely the point of the dispute between the minority and the majority? Her document, therefore, becomes purely a means of avoiding the fundamental class differences between the majority and the minority.

Rather than discuss two of the three main principles discussed in the VO report, Cmd. Liz G. instead has devised an elaborate mathematical discussion on comparative sizes. Yes, comrades of the majority, the SL is smaller than VO. But since when is this "an objective situation" as stated on page 8 of L.G.'s "very fine" document? Obviously Cmd. G. has no concept of what Marxists mean by subjective and objective conditions. Subjective conditions are the consciousness--the embodiment of Marxist consciousness by the cadre, by the workers' vanguard--its

composition and its class roots. If Cmd. G. includes all of these as "objective conditions," what are the subjective conditions?--one's intentions, will, ego or personality?

For Cmd. L.G. to pose the question of different sizes means that she implicitly is holding up the SL as a model of how a Trotskyist org. the size of the SL should function. But even the majority knows that is not so. If the SL were serious about developing into a Leninist party its "expected efficiency of functioning" would, within the limits of its size, be very high in order to lay a solid and serious foundation for a future party. Instead, the cynicism, demoralization and elitism of the "leadership" has produced by far more ex-SLers than it has cadre.

The whole section Selection of Leadership, is first of all a misrepresentation of even the forms of VO's functioning. But more importantly the discussion is carried on only in terms of forms. In this section the majority adopts a superior attitude toward VO's organizational system by saying that it "is certainly not Leninist." This is so, it seems, because VO does not follow the "Leninist principles of organization." Such principles have form and content. As a matter of fact, for Marxists, form is determined by content giving expression to it. In this section, the majority insists that by adopting Lenin's formulas the SL is a Leninist org. The majority sees no need to even mention class content when discussing Leninist principles of organization. The closest reference in this document the majority comes to this class content is vague mentions of VO's semi-syndicalism because of its preoccupation with the development of worker-cadre. (Trotsky rather insisted on this precisely as absolutely necessary to a revolutionary organization. See In Defense of Marxism or some of the pertinent quotations from it in "What Is a Working Class Perspective?" by Cmd. Ellens 22 May.) So the majority insists on defining Leninism merely by its forms which are democracy and centralism. But comrades, these forms also have content. To speak of "the right of factions" or of "Bolshevik discipline" as though these "forms" could exist without the intervention of the working class within the organization's structure, is to engage in phrasemongering, as Lenin himself said. It is to vitiate the fundamental concepts of Leninism.

The proof of its formalism is that in spite of its "Leninist principles", the SL suffers precisely from "bureaucratic abuse of the worst sort." (Obvious recent examples are Cmd. J.R.'s use of the SL phone to line-up Cmds. in other locals during the past six months of internal dispute, or the sudden appearance of P.B. minutes for 4 March with Cmd. J.R.'s very carefully edited response to criticisms on N.O. functioning. This discussion took place over a number of meetings, but only one set of minutes containing his criticism of other comrades, have appeared--the first set since November 1967!) Clearly, the majority considers Leninism to be mere formula, devoid of class content and practical content. (They act as though they think Robertson's rules factionalism can replace Leninism in a revolutionary organization.)

Form Vs. Content in the Section "Contact Work and Education"

The fact that the majority does not understand that form is not enough is shown in this section of Cmd. L.G.'s document. She first attempts to show that the majority is in favor of contact work by pointing to a motion adopted by the New York local. The motion by the way is simply in favor, of all things, of "common sense." Isn't that wonderful! Well, now with that fine motion for "energetic and sustained contact with contacts" the factional point has been made. Let's not worry about actually learning the work and doing it, after all, we don't want possibly to succumb to those dangerous VO methods. Besides this might produce "an exces-

sively linear assessment of tasks" (whatever that means). And it might produce an ignoring of political struggle with the "ORO's". It is hard to see why contact work "a la VO" and "political struggle" with the ORO's is mutually exclusive. They are, if anything, complementary?

The height of the majority's formalism comes when Cmd. L.G. complains that VO's separation of candidate members from full members turns the candidate members into "second class citizens." She instead suggests that all members should be "considered as equals" (our emphasis). Comrades of the majority, please look at the content of this question. Candidate members in general are not political equals. They have neither the experience nor background which would allow them to be. Obviously, for our legal Leninists of the majority, the form of equality, filled with mystical bourgeois egotism, is more important than working to educate all comrades so there can be content to the "equality". Cmd. J.R. made this quite sneeringly clear, at the PB meeting of 11 March 1968: "I'm a factionalist, not an educator." Where did Lenin say, as Cmd. L.G. seems to believe, that internal factional struggle is "the most important way in which comrades are educated"? We want to know exactly where Lenin said that! After he spent 7 years developing a working class cadre and base, he said in the course of a faction fight that that fight will add to the comrades' consciousness. That is all.

The Proof That "Organization Is Tied to Politics"

In this section Cde. L.G. of the majority cynically dares to pretend concern that "organizational structure and methods...safeguard against bureaucratic abuse and political stultification." The collective sharing of responsibilities among the comrades and the lively political life inside the organization certainly "attest" to this, no doubt. This is an obvious diversion based on the following syllogism. 1) The SL is formally right on all questions; 2) VO has different organizational forms than the SL; 3) VO is of course wrong--and therefore the minority is wrong in its political characterizations. The question it totally avoids is that the content of the SL's functioning is bureaucratic and politically stultifying. Perhaps its "forms" need to be examined with that in mind.

Cmd. L.G., who formally insists on the tie between organization and politics, can, however, see the VO report as seeking "only to demonstrate that VO is a more effective organization than the SL (i.e. visits more contacts, holds more classes, has more fractions, has a better [this word could have been left out] publication schedule)." She dismisses their implementation of Leninism--politically functioning within the working class in order to develop worker cadre so that the politicalization along Marxist lines and organization in a Leninist party can be effectuated within the working class. This is dismissed as "a few gimmicks." This is absolute proof that the majority sees no connection whatsoever between organization and politics. For the majority the vital political questions of organization become legalistic formulas totally devoid of content. The question of the party is one of forms; its political Leninist content is forgotten. For the majority, the political questions (i.e., "high Trotskyism") are the academic pearls they cast before swine from time to time.

In this section (page 6, line 11), Cmd. L.G. insists that the minority must show two points. She seems to forget the past months of discussion in N.Y.C. which were taken up precisely on point number 1. The point which has been made over and over is that the SL's weaknesses are precisely produced by its organizational practices (giving the full political meaning to organizational). If the majority chooses not to hear because it considers itself immune to change, that is another question, but the point has been made fully. Point number 2, that the

minority's program and proposals have the answer, has been shown as much as is possible abstractly. This was done by showing that our conceptions of building a party were attune with those of Lenin and Trotsky. When we showed this, the majority dismissed us by saying In Defense of Marxism was no longer relevant. The majority should also remember that it destroyed, for all practical purposes, the MLCRC work so that the minority could not really show the validity of its program.

A Digression on Program

Point number 2 embodies an interesting concept, that of program, which requires a slight digression. "Program" is to Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism the theory and its development along action lines. The programmatic contribution of Leninism (the subject of our debate) was the construction of a Revolutionary Party which could politicalize and organize the proletariat for the seizure of power. The theory guiding this program is 1) the analysis of the capitalist state, 2) the nature of the petty-bourgeoisie and its inability to overthrow capitalism, 3) the necessity of the proletariat to take political power in order to change the economic structure. These are some of the major theories explaining the programmatic point. Let us look at A Draft Programme of Our Party, written in 1899 (see Vol. 4). Lenin carefully explained the necessity of a program "the tremendous importance of a programme for the consolidation and consistent activity of a political party." (page 229) "...of uniting--of organization. This is a step for which a programme is a necessity. The programme must formulate our basic views; precisely establish our immediate political tasks; point out the immediate demands that establish our immediate political tasks; point out the immediate demands that must show the area of agitational activity; give unity to the agitational work, expand and deepen it..." (page 230).

It is precisely the basic question of Lenin's program which has been demanded of the majority--and which has not yet been answered--the question of how and when the "Conservative Tendency" sees itself constructing (or at least participating in its construction--and if so with whom--) the working class revolutionary party.

The SL's Petty-Bourgeois "Theory Behind Organizational Emphasis"

The long awaited rebuttal of VO's principles of organization (2 out of 3 of which aren't even discussed) is, in case you hadn't recognized it, the next section. Unfortunately for the majority, what Cmd. L.G. is trying to rebut is not simply VO's principles, but Leninist-Trotskyist principles.

This section exhibits the basic blind spot which has made it impossible for Cmd. L.G. and the rest of the majority to understand what is meant by petty-bourgeois when referring to the SL. These comrades see the term "class composition" as referring either to parentage or working skills. Parentage is relevant when referring to "class origins." The "class composition" of a revolutionary organization refers first to its active commitment to the working class, aiding it to work toward the task of taking power; second, to the life styles of the comrades (which might have to be changed) which enables the comrades to function politically within the working class. It is really a shame that Cmd. L.G. has not yet read In Defense of Marxism. Or she at least might glance through some of the quotes from it in "What Is A Working Class Perspective?" Because Trotsky said a great deal about training cadre in the class struggle, about decisively breaking from the petty-bourgeois environment, etc. It seems to us that taking Trotsky's word on this would be better practice than taking that of Cmd. L.G., unless of course, she can prove that Trotsky was wrong on this point.

After quoting two paragraphs of VO's which clearly distinguish (and indicates the interrelation) between petty-bourgeois social composition, influence of petty-bourgeois ideology, petty-bourgeois origin, petty-bourgeois opportunism, petty-bourgeois environment, social-democratic practices,--Cmd. L.G. dares to tell us that VO defines "petty-bourgeois ideology...by the class composition of those who hold the ideas."

Instead of quoting from VO, the majority asserts that another document makes it clear that petty-bourgeois ideology is defined by VO by the "class composition of those who hold the ideas." Again, class composition of an organization is not simple "origin" as Cmd. L.G. would have us believe.

This debator's trick is essential in the majority's argument for this simplistic presentation of the idea forms the basic link in a little logical chain designed to show that VO has romanticized and idealized the working class, i.e., that theoretically it's nothing more than a simple child. By extension, of course, the minority then is pushed into the same category.

Let us follow the chain.

Link number 1: VO believes "that revisionism stemmed primarily from the petty-bourgeois composition of the Trotskyist movement."

Link number 2: VO is supposed to hold that class composition means class origins of a party's members. Remember that "class composition" is defined in terms of life-style and active committment--which is a dynamic definition and is the only way the professional revolutionary of petty-bourgeois origin can be judged. If one tries to define class composition strictly in terms of "origin", which is what Cmd. L.G. would have us believe is VO's definition, how could they "deal with the necessity of rooting out petty-bourgeois hang-ups, proletarianization of the organization and of the minds of petty-bourgeois recruits and deepening seriousness and commitment" (page 7, line 8, our emphasis). Cmd. L.G., we're sure, would agree with us that VO is much too serious to go through the futile attempt of changing the "origins" of a petty-bourgeois recruit.

Link number 3: VO is supposed to hold that petty-bourgeois ideology is defined by the class composition (i.e. origins) of those who hold the idea.

Link number 4: Therefore the Pabloite degeneration is, in effect, "the ideology of certain strata of the petty-bourgeoisie."

Look how easily link number 4 slides back into link number 1. And look how smoothly VO is made to appear like a simple child. VO obviously believes that all they must do is recruit workers to be saved from Pabloism (or all we must do in order to walk is have legs). And it only took a bit of distorting to do it.

The chain is paralleled by a little game Cmd. L.G. plays--somewhat like children tossing a coin and yelling "Heads I win, tails you lose." First she blithely tells us that "while one may argue with merit that the lack of deep roots within the working class is a built-in source of weakness", she then ends up sneaking in the idea that VO and the minority hold that a "super-proletarianization" is a "safeguard against political error and revisionism."

And finally she implies that the minority (or VO--it is now unclear) has proposed proletarianizing the SL by "formal Marxist education." A neat, unsavory little debator's trick.

Going back to line 14 of page 8: Cmd. L.G. asks if one should "expel one's members of petty-bourgeois origin." If one of them is going to be this dishonest, it would be an excellent idea! But Trotsky only proposed expelling those who could not settle in the workers' milieu.

Why all this fantastic distortion? Obviously in order to prove that the "Theory Behind Organizational Emphasis" is all wrong. Therefore, the SL can disregard this whole problem, this horrible spectre of "proletarianization", the various attempts at a serious, working class approach. In this way the precious list of priorities, set up when we claimed that we wanted back into the SWP, can be saved. Cmd. L.G., herself, said that the majority "would go down dying on this list of priorities." The comrade, ironically, is correct.

All this distortion proves the erstwhile leadership of the SL must have no respect whatsoever for the membership. Imagine giving one's own comrades this snow job. And for what? Because then it becomes so easy for the "theoretical prowess" of the SL majority to shine forth, so clear and correct. And on which question?--why the organizational question, of course.

Let us examine the theoretical prowess of the majority as shown in this document. After discounting, with the above daisy chain, VO's analysis of the degeneration of the Fourth International, Cmd. L.G. offers the SL's own "uniquely correct" understanding. First she traps the majority in an interesting explanation of why Pabloism is a petty-bourgeois ideology: "because it denigrates the idea of a proletarian class party and a proletarian revolution in favor of revolutions made by petty-bourgeois or bureaucratic strata in the interest of a class other than the proletariat." We certainly hope that doesn't mean the majority thinks that revolutions made by petty-bourgeois or bureaucratic strata in the interest of the proletariat would be ok. Or even that they could be made.

The majority finds the "roots" of Pabloism are amazingly simple to explain (even explain away). It is basically due to "the inability to forge revolutionary parties." (The quote is from Spartacist number 6, to which the document refers.). This is the case because of "the failure of Leon Trotsky's perspective of the break-up of the Soviet bureaucracy and of new October revolutions in the aftermath of the war." Thus political life is made very simple--the majority can blame it all on objective conditions as it tries to do with everything else. And no wonder--considering what Cmd. L.G. defines as part of the objective situation: "size, composition and roots." With such a simplistic definition all is well, for our consciousness certainly can have no effect on all these "objective circumstances." If that is the case, what we do, our life style and which class we direct ourselves to will have nothing to do with revisionism or with the kind of Pabloist degeneration which the Trotskyist movement already has undergone. Thus the majority need not change. It is free to sit back and excuse itself with the plaintive rhetorical question this document poses: "what do you do in an objective situation (which includes your size, composition and roots) in which you are not likely to have great success in reaching and recruiting workers?" Obviously the SL expects to remain above history.

"The Politics of VO" -- As Seen Through the Eyes of the Majority

Your "minority", Cmd. L.G., 'has already told you "where they stand on VO's political difference with the SL." Yet you can only answer by ignoring the question of the development of worker-cadre or by setting up lies and distortions about the questions you call "political" ones. Try dealing with the real political dispute.

We learn, from Cmd. L.G. that "VO's semi-syndicalist deviation from Trotskyism...is the main methodological point which produces both VO's political strengths and its political weaknesses." We also learn that on a great many questions "VO's line and essential methodology is not qualitatively different from that of the Pabloists." Just how VO deviates from Trotsky in a semi-syndicalist way is not discussed. Obviously Cmd. L.G. considers that knowledge of this is not really important, for the SL will never be caught dead going in for an "excessive concentration in the working class." Instead the SL has carried over "the SWP's orientation exclusively to the petty bourgeoisie" with its own original contribution -- the SL gives lip-service to working class arenas. It seems likely that it is the SL, with its devotion to the petty-bourgeoisie, which is likely to have the methodology of the Pabloists.

More Distortions and Lies -- This Time on the Negro Struggle

VO and the SL do have differences on the Negro struggle, but the majority is unable to deal with them honestly, for implicit in the differences is a criticism of the SL's functioning. Therefore, Cmd. L.G. chooses to misread from VO in order to turn VO into Pabloists: "Thus, to the extent that present leaders are not supplanted, they must be supported." What is being said is that if the SL (assuming that it is revolutionary) does not get off its high observer's ass to develop the black worker-cadre necessary to supplant Carmichael and Brown, the SL will, as the SWP did before it -- and for basically the same reasons -- be forced to end up supporting a Carmichael or a Brown -- or remain a "pure" observer. Sectarianism and opportunism are but two sides of the same coin, which have a common root in the inability of the "ostensibly revolutionary" leadership to develop a working class revolutionary party. To avoid these implications, Cmd. L.G. openly falsifies what an "active VOer" said about the VO article. What he did say was that in Europe it appeared as if Carmichael and Brown were organizing a base. He agreed that there was a "lack of knowledge", yes, but he did not agree with the SL's "criticism of this line."

And More Distortions: The Arab-Israeli War

What is most curious is: "Despite the PB having raised political criticisms of this and other political positions of VO at 2 times (30 Jan. and 6 May)". Do you mean to say, Cmd. L.G., that at that PB meeting a couple of days after Cmd. K.E. returned, or at Jim's temper tantrum on 6 May when Cmd. J.R. rattled off 10-12 "political positions of VO" (some of them as badly distorted as they are in Cmd. L.G.'s document) -- at which times Cmd. K.E. had the possibility of answering yes or no -- that this was raising political criticisms? We realize that the SL (especially the PB) is practically devoid of political discussion, but to confuse Cmd. J.R.'s ramblings with "political criticism" is to show the real poverty of political discussion in the SL.

Cmd. K.E. had written in asking what the SL position was and tentatively indicated support for the Arab side and has since not "bothered to say" what her position is on this or on many questions tossed around in snorting fits -- especially when they are used solely to divert the discussion from the "political position" of construction of a workers revolutionary party.

And More Distortions: The Soviet Bloc

There are a couple of very strange methodological approaches taken by Cmd. L.G. in this section. In the second paragraph on page 12, we are told that "VO and the Pabloists see only a quantitative difference between the victorious

Russian workers state and the product of its degeneration." Does that mean, Cmd. L.G., that the SL sees a qualitative difference? That would mean that there is a difference in the class nature between a workers' state and the degenerated workers' state. (Cmd. L.G. refers to the Soviet Union after its political counter-revolution as a "deformed workers' state." We will assume that she realizes that there is a difference between "deformed" and "degenerated.")

There is no qualitative difference between a workers' state and a degenerated (or deformed) workers' state. One would find the qualitative difference between the party and the governmental apparatus in the two states, but not in the state itself.

Then on page 13 -- "VO's semi-syndicalism leads them to write off the peasantry and petty-bourgeoisie...as fundamentally irrelevant to Marxists." (I can only refer comrades to the articles in Class Struggle) But a Marxist is aiming for the "dictatorship of the proletariat" is he not? And a Marxist is supposed to be developing "a party of the proletariat". Is that not so? Of course it is. Even Cmd. L.G. must admit that, and does at the end of that paragraph: "where we agree with VO is that the working class must maintain hegemony over the peasants and that the vanguard party is absolutely not a two-class party, but a party of the proletariat." This last statement, by the way, indicates that Cmd. L.G. thinks that VO does see the "relevance" of the peasantry. But then, she seems often to contradict herself.

Obviously, in this document, we have only been trying to expose the majority comrades "methodology," their distortions and lies. It might be instructive for the SL to carry on a dialogue with VO on these questions -- as would be such a discussion inside the SL -- but not as a means of avoiding the fundamental political question posed by the current discussion.

Re-Unification -- How Will the Revolutionary Party Be Built?

Finally, the inability to understand the current events in France which the majority exhibits in this document indicates also, that the majority has no conception of the way in which the revolutionary party will be forged -- neither in France nor in the U.S. Cmd. L.G.'s section on Re-Unification should have included a few more quotes. The following are taken from the August special issue (which arrived around July 28th):

"This last year the far left organizations, whether Trotskyists or Maoists, had considerably developed, but that did not however, change in a qualitative way, the conditions in which they worked.

"May 1968 has thoroughly modified this situation. For the first time since the degeneration of the Communist International, the far left has appeared as a non-negligible force in this country. Thousands of young people and what is determinant, young workers, have turned towards it, not only towards the ideas, but also to revolutionary action.

"The revolutionary party has already found the mass basis which would enable it to exist as such.

"The problem of the building of this party is set in new terms. The question is no longer to find ways enabling revolutionaries to win over working class militants, it is henceforth to organize those who potentially exist, who have revealed themselves during the events. And this has to be done rapidly before

a possible ebb with its consequence of demoralization could eliminate the gains of May.

"Now, a lot of those militants are bewildered by the division of the far left. They do not see what to base their choice on, and they don't have the real means of making their choice. None of the tendencies, whether Trotskyist or Maoist, have the possibility of capitalizing for itself these new possibilities, but all of them, in joining their effort can do it.

"It is not a question of praising for opportunist reasons an unprincipled unity. Anyway, all the militants who struggle on the left of the CP will, one day or another, find themselves by the force of circumstances in the same revolutionary party. Or this party is not to exist. Only inveterate sectarians could and still can go along thinking that they are able to build alone their party, isolated in their ivory tower.

"It is one of the merits of May to have demonstrated that all the revolutionary militants whatever were their tendency, could usefully work together. And, as a matter of fact, whether they decided it consciously or had been swept along by the force of the facts and events, most of those who call for the socialist revolution found themselves shoulder to shoulder in the struggle.

"The far left today must prove it is able to overcome its divisions to gather all the energies which revealed themselves during the last weeks. For this it is necessary that each of its constituent tendencies acts without forgetting that it is but a tendency of the future party; that it rejects any kind of sectarianism, any kind of "shop owner" or competition sentiment; that it considers the interests of the revolutionary movement as a whole as its own interests.

"All must also be done to unify, as soon as possible, all the revolutionary tendencies in a same party.

"This will naturally be possible only if each tendency keeps the right and real possibility of defending its own ideas inside the unified party." (our emphasis)

(from "The Question of the Party" in the same special issue)

"But the problem which was posed in May, and in a crucial manner, was the organization of the proletariat, and not only in the limited sense of the term organization within parties and unions, but in its larger sense, that of organizing the class itself, as such, contesting the power of the bourgeoisie.

"It is not yet the problem of the seizure of power, of all the power, but that of the construction of the embryo of workers' power. It should have been created, in each place of work, a democratically elected committee, representing the whole of the workers, that is call a strike committee or otherwise... that these committees weave together thousands of coordination ties, throughout the whole country, in all the different places of work...locally...regionally...nationally...to begin the process of certain sectors, at least of the economic machinery of the country...

"There are two factors which would have permitted the accomplishment of these tasks. First, is a much higher degree of spontaneous consciousness of the

working class. But this is a factor on which the revolutionaries had no means to directly act...

"The second factor, is a revolutionary party. Such a party could have possibly been precisely able to engage the movement of May along the road which we have just described..."

"Such a party, solidly implanted in the working class...only, will permit the working class to escape the hold over it by traitorous leadership..."

"The role of the party is to expose the traps stretched out by the bourgeoisie and by the reformist organizations at its service."

These quotes could easily be summed up with "Such a party will be forged through long years of struggle...Unification is not an end, it is a beginning..." (from Cmd. L.G.'s quote on page 15 of her document).

That this can be construed as "a call for a unification among the ostensibly revolutionary organizations" (as it is put at the bottom of page 15) means that the comrades of the majority think in very rigid and formalistic terms.

Yes, the difficulty of forging a revolutionary party is "that the differences are not only political, but concern even the conception of the party." This is part of the underlined section of the quote Cmd. L.G. chose to cite. But somehow, she construes this to mean "that the most serious difficulty is conceived to be differing concepts of the party, i.e., of organization questions, rather than political questions."

Leninism is therefore not a "political question" for the majority comrades. The only conclusion we must draw is that yes, indeed, "the SL has very grave weaknesses -- in its functioning, its resources, its human material..." and in its consciousness.

Jerry E.
Kay E.
Shirley S.

13 August 1968

ONCE AGAIN ON VO

by Liz Gordon

In replying to Ellens' and Stoute's "Politicalizing" to Avoid Politics, I intend to concentrate on those points in which important differences of line or of fact between the Majority and the Minority are concerned. If other points are passed over, the comrades might refer back to my original document (The Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere), which in my opinion stands up pretty well against its detractors. The most important thing about the "Politicalizing"... document is that, while it mainly ignores most of the political questions raised in my document, it defends and takes responsibility for some of the positions which until now had been only implicit, although vitally important, parts of the program of the Ellens faction. Previously, it had been possible to correctly infer some of the positions of Comrade Ellens, but fairly difficult to raise them for discussion because she herself raised them in the guise of "information" without making explicit her agreement with them. (Her original Organizational Methods document was in this category.) In fact, while it had become clear to us that as far as Ellens was concerned the organizational approach of VO constituted the main positions of the Minority faction, Comrade Turner vehemently denounced our replying to the VO question as "a red herring" irrelevant to the discussion within the SL. The "Politicalizing"... document therefore has considerable educational value for the discussion, inasmuch as it contains a treatment and systematization of some of VO's views whose relationship to the SL dispute could previously be only inferred. The correctness of our inferences and their relevance has been confirmed by the "Politicalizing"... document. Perhaps the most important examples of this are the introduction of the security question and the argumentation regarding the methodology behind the denial that the East European Soviet bloc states are deformed workers states. Both of these points will be discussed below.

Unfortunately for the educational value of the discussion, the Minority document seeks to blur over and shore up the arguments by including in almost every point various epithets and insults. Rather than seek to convince the comrades around the country of their positions, the Minority comrades prefer to transmit their emotions. This seems to constitute part of the Minority's essential methodological approach. Instead of arguing over the epithets or throwing insults around in return, I would just like to cite the insults in the Minority document so that the comrades will realize just what percentage of the total verbiage of the Minority document is spent in insults: "cowardly", "meaningless abstractions", "discredit and slander", "totally beyond the comprehension of our 'high-archivists'", "the type of inanity and basic dishonesty which pervades this document", "N.O. corridor gossip", "a 17 page document filled with distortions, lies and slanders", "cynical", "sophistry", "a pitifully bureaucratic mentality", "evasions", "the cynicism, demoralization and elitism of the 'leadership'", "formalism", "mystical bourgeois egotism", "Cde. L.G. of the Majority cynically dares to pretend concern...", "It is really a shame that Cmd. L.G. has not yet read In Defense of Marxism", "Cmd. L.G. dares to tell us that...", "this

debater's trick", "simplistic presentation", "a little game Cmd. L.G. plays", "sneaking in the idea that...", "a neat, unsavory little debater's trick", "if one of them is going to be this dishonest", "fantastic distortion", "all this distortion", "snow job", "lies and distortions", "Cmd. L.G. chooses to misread", "Cmd. L.G. openly falsifies", "Jim's temper tantrum", "Cmd. J.R.'s ramblings", "questions tossed around in snorting fits", "distortions and lies". I would suggest that the comrades, after reading the entire exchange, might go back and reread my original document just to see how many so-called lies, slanders and distortions they can find!

Strangely enough, there may even be an explanation for the emphatically non-educational tone of the Minority document. The Minority comrades clearly disagree with the proposition that factional struggle is vitally important to the education of comrades. They cite my statement on page 5 of The SL, the Minority and VO that "the Leninist concept of education is that the most important way in which comrades are educated is through internal factional struggle" and demand to be shown where Lenin ever said such a thing. This reveals a disturbing element of formalism in the Minority's thinking; the collected works of Lenin is a very good Bible indeed, but no Bible is a substitute for thought. If the comrades had not been so blinded by formalism, they might have reflected on this: is it an accident that the overwhelming majority of the best political "texts" we have were written not as abstract educational treatises but in living polemical struggle? As a few examples: Anti-Duhring, What is to be Done?, One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward, State and Revolution, Left-Wing Communism, Reform or Revolution, The Third International After Lenin, The Struggle for a Proletarian Party, and how many more? And perhaps the most grotesque example: where, comrades, do we find the most brilliant exposition of dialectical materialism? In my opinion, it is the essay by Trotsky The ABC of Dialectics in, of all things, the book the Minority likes best to quote--In Defense of Marxism, a collection of Trotsky's letters and polemics, written, of course, for the faction fight against the Shachtmanites!

Who's Avoiding Politics?

The tone and insults of the Minority document also serve the purpose of enabling the Minority to defend their VOism without having to take responsibility for it. This is done by accusing the Majority of "lies" and "distortions" about VO's positions. A little reflection will convince the comrades that there are substantial political differences between the SL and VO on several important political questions--the class nature of the East European states, the explanation of the roots of Pabloism, the U.S. Negro question, basic theories of organization--and that it is not necessary to lie in order to find some. In my document, The SL, the Minority and VO, I attempted to present VO's line on several disputed questions and argue against it from the standpoint of the SL. My reasons were twofold: to demonstrate to comrades who agree with the line of the SL politically but have criticisms of its functioning that VO is also an organization with weaknesses as well as strengths, and to force the Minority to take a stand on VO's political differences with the SL instead of simply claiming credit for VO's efficiency and strength:

while avoiding the issues on which VO is wrong. We knew that the Minority was an unstable political bloc, with VOism being paramount for Ellens and her supporters and Turner keeping silent on the way the Minority was using the VO issue and the differences with VOism--on certain theoretical questions and organizational practices, and especially clandestinity--which he had expressed previous to the emergence of open factional differences in the organization. We also knew that Ellens preferred to keep VOism implicit, at least in debate and discussion with Majority supporters (we have no idea what she tells her followers), and to confine herself to organizational theories and avoid many other questions altogether.

My twofold aim succeeded only partially. First, it may have caused some difficulty in the Minority camp, as the Ellens-Stoute reply was not signed by Comrade Turner. Second, it did cause Ellens and her faction to take some position on the political questions raised, but the Minority reply is not very satisfactory in terms of the political clarification which I had hoped would result. Perhaps the most significant thing about the Minority reply is that it is not very political. Rather than forthrightly facing the existence of differences between the SL and VO, Ellens and company prefer to denounce my rendering of VO's positions as "lies" and "distortions". It is easy to see that every position of VO which I disputed is defended by the Ellens Minority document, but in the guise of protecting VO against alleged slanders and willful misrepresentation. Thus Ellens does not have to say: "The SL has x position, VO has y position, and here is why y position is correct." She can say instead: "VO has z position, which Gordon has disgustingly distorted, and here is what the z position really is." But, being experienced political people familiar with this sort of method--for example, having read enthusiastic "news reporting type" coverage of Black Nationalist meetings in The Militant--we can all recognize frantic, passionate VO patriotism when we meet it in the latest Minority document

Despite the title of the Minority document, comrades will surely have noticed that some important political questions are still treated as "diversions" from the supposedly more important politics. Being by now a little tired of trying to get Comrade Ellens to tell me what her position is on the Arab-Israeli conflict, I would just like to urge the comrades around the country not to go off and join the new organization which Ellens will form after leaving this one without having her tell you where her organization will stand on it.

Who Lies?

Before going on to take up some of the more important points raised by the Minority document, I would like to indicate a few things about "dishonesty" and suggest replies to some of the attacks made against the Majority. First, on page 3 the Minority argues about contact work by pretending that I dismissed the whole point by pointing to a motion adopted by the NYC local in favor of contact work. This was a small point, but the Minority is rendering only half of it. They have conveniently overlooked my pointing out that Ellens is in charge of implementing this work. The Minority document indulges in a long passage of sarcastic attribution of attitude to

the Majority ("let's not worry about actually learning the work and doing it...") which seems in this case to apply best to Ellens, who has made the phrase "contact work" a prime recruiting pitch without doing any, for this organization at least.

Next let us look at the case in which the Majority "openly falsifies what an 'active VOer' said about the VO article" on the Negro question. Of course, one might point out that Comrade Ellens was not present at our discussion with him, but this is unimportant. What is more revealing is that by citing what I took to be this comrade's excusing of a wrong line as lack of knowledge of U.S. conditions I was giving VO the benefit of the doubt. Why I should have "openly falsified" what the comrade said in order to weaken my own argument is hard to understand. The reason I included the comrade's reservations about the Negro position was because we do not like to make our points against a straw man. One does not wish to base one's generalizations about VO's methodology on a position which may well have been the result of a lack of information. Thus, if the Minority did not wish to adopt VO's position on the Negro Question, they had a way out, but chose not to take it. As for the supposed "misreading" of the VO position, rather than re-quoting the VO article here (what other interpretation of the extensive quotes given in my document has the Minority offered?), I would urge the comrades to read the VO article (Lutte de Classe/Class Struggle #8, October '67) or at least my quotes from it and decide for themselves the merits of the VO position.

"Bureaucratic Abuse"?

Let us examine the "bureaucratic abuse of the worst sort" which the Minority finds present in the SL. Of the two most "obvious recent examples" which they have chosen, neither one stands up on examination. The first is the alleged use by Comrade Robertson of the SL phone to "line-up" out-of-town comrades. This will no doubt come as a tremendous surprise to the comrades in the smaller locals who have no doubt been feeling extremely isolated from the dispute in the center, at least until the first batch of documents arrived, and would probably be happy to get a phone call made specially to get them in on it all. It is precisely out of regard for the "forms" which the Minority regards as so empty that Comrade Robertson has not used organizational facilities for factional work. The two or so larger locals which Robertson has had occasion to call up for other reasons have been informed of the factional situation and developments, certainly. But in fact as of this date the phone call which included the most information on factional developments made to out-of-town was a call made by Comrade Robertson to the Bay Area for the express purpose of instructing the local to give Comrade Ellens time on the floor at a local meeting to present her oppositional views during her trip across the country. If further proof of the Majority's restraint is required, the Bay Area comrades should remember that when Robertson visited the Bay Area in March he made no mention of the differences that were developing in the PB, although he has the same rights as Ellens to present his opinions to the Bay Area local if he sees fit. Of course, should factional business become business of the organization as a whole--as for example indiscipline or split would make it--Comrade Robertson will be the last

to shirk his duty as National Chairman to keep members of the organization informed of the state of affairs.

The second example of so-called "bureaucratic abuse" is even more revealing for the Minority. The assertion is made that the 4 March PB minutes were supposedly circulated for factional reasons. In fact, the minutes were prepared and circulated partially by chance. (Since the meeting was adjourned before discussion on the Robertson presentation took place, the remarks made by Comrade Robertson and taken down by the secretary were carefully gone over and prepared so that they could be read aloud to the next meeting, in order to stimulate the discussion which might have gotten stale after being postponed for a week after the initial presentation. This had the by-product effect that this set of minutes was in effect half edited, and took much less time than usual to prepare for stenciling.) More importantly, they were circulated for political reasons. Comrade Robertson's presentation attempted to catch the differences which had been emerging in the PB in a very murky way and to put forward as an alternative the Spartacist position on political and organizational approaches. This was an attempt to put the incipient differences and tensions emerging in the PB on a clear political basis. At that time the comrades who had been "making waves" over rather tangential points objected strongly to the attempt to determine whether there were any fundamental political differences in the organization and declared that Robertson was trying to create some, to put words in their mouths, to force a "vote of confidence" for himself by putting up for a vote basic positions which of course they all agreed with. Thus, all comrades professed agreement with the motion presented by Comrade Robertson which is now considered by the Minority to be factional. The proof of this is that at the PB meeting of 25 March, when the vote was finally taken on the Robertson motions after several rounds of discussion, all the comrades including Ellens, Stoute and Turner voted for the motions. So it is "bureaucratic abuse" and factionalism to have circulated in advance of some other back minutes the motions which our Minority professed agreement with! It is a good indicator of Ellens' political acumen that she describes these intensely political minutes as "minutes containing [Robertson's] criticism of other comrades".

I am undoubtedly overlooking other minor points of the same sort, but I am sure that the comrades can read the documents with a critical eye even if they are not familiar with some of the facts and aspects of the situation here.

Forms and Class Content

A very interesting point of view emerges from the Minority's discussion of the so-called "forms" of democratic centralism. To the extent that their long section on page 3 means anything, it seems to mean that you cannot have democratic centralism in an organization "without the intervention of the working class within the organization". This seems very similar to the Healyites' argument that they were justified in busting up the united front at Liege because you can only have united fronts among mass workers' organizations. And it suffers from the same flaw. The working class is not at present

physically intervening en masse in our organization's structure; therefore we should dispense with democratic centralism? Should the SWP ever have had democratic centralism? The Communist League of America, the founding Trotskyist group in the U.S., which was far from a mass party, had democratic centralist organizational forms. What structure would the Minority suggest for us instead--participatory democracy? Will Comrade Ellens' new organization dispense with the democracy or the centralism?

But despite its grotesquerie, this line of logic does cast some light on the practices of the Ellens Minority tendency. For one thing, if we, as Trotskyists, were to make an entry into another organization--for example, the French turn--we would not want the entered organization to have democratic centralist forms. Feeling little sense of identification with that organization and the preservation of its majority line externally, we would be delighted with the chance, for example, to have our own public organ while inside that organization. The Minority has made it clear that it considers the SL as a centrist or "social-democratic" organization, and certainly for a social-democratic organization to insist on Leninist discipline is unfair. The Minority considers SL discipline to be a matter of empty "form", and this is what is behind its refusal to turn up at the N.O. when assigned to help with the production and circulation of the discussion material nationally, on the grounds of their own "more important work" elsewhere. The Minority comrades not only disagree with the organization's assessment of what is important, but also refuse to acknowledge that if they want to remain members they must carry out the priorities set up for their work regardless of whether they agree or not. Likewise this attitude explains why several members of the Minority have missed urgent full mobilizations of the NYC organization in order to write factional documents. This also explains why Comrade Ellens, while insisting the organization should have real discipline, change the life-styles of all the comrades, etc., has reneged on her obligation to go to New Orleans. (Incidentally, the two letters to New Orleans from the N.O. that the Minority document cites as proof of Ellens' credentials were actually attempts to placate the New Orleans local, which was becoming somewhat impatient to find out when Comrade Ellens would get back from Europe, by assuring them that she was acquiring valuable experience which would be put to good use in New Orleans.) But all comrades should realize that the SL does not take its responsibilities lightly and cannot permit this constant flaunting of our discipline, which is a joke to Comrade Ellens but which we take very seriously indeed, as she will find out if she continues in this manner.

Pabloism and the "Daisy Chain"

The Minority attempts to deny that VO believes that "revisionism stemmed primarily from the petty-bourgeois composition of the Trotskyist movement". They attempt to show, by a rather irrelevant and incoherent logic which is supposed to be mine, that I have derived the assertion that Pabloism is "the ideology of certain strata of the petty-bourgeoisie" from false logic and attributed the position to VO. But comrades, I did not attribute this position to VO on the basis of the Minority's "daisy chain" of "logic" (which I mainly

don't understand). It is a quote from a VO document, cited on page 7 of my document! This quote is amply supported by others from VO's article and the section quoted from Ellens' presentation to the 30 January PB.

The Minority attempts to save itself from this position by introducing a distinction between "petty-bourgeois composition" and "petty-bourgeois origins". However, there is not ordinarily an enormous difference between the two. The Spartacist League has a number of members of middle-class origin who have been trade unionists in industry for many years, and is at present starting several others on this course, but would not deny the predominantly "petty-bourgeois composition" of our membership. Petty-bourgeois composition normally means origin, or at least occupational category (and despite wishful thinking type projects like PL's "Summer in a Factory" program, there is usually a relationship between a comrade's background and his occupation). "Petty-bourgeois composition" is not some mystical question of ideas in the head. When Cannon spoke of the party's "proletarian core" as not supporting the petty-bourgeois opposition, he meant, obviously, the trade unionists; otherwise it would have been a meaningless truism to say that the "proletarian core" did not support the petty-bourgeois opposition. If the Minority does not mean class background, what do they mean by "petty-bourgeois composition"? I had assumed they meant that we should recruit lots of workers, but perhaps they mean after all that we should recruit from petty-bourgeois arenas and re-educate our recruits.

But the primary point is this: The quotations from VO amply demonstrate that VO not only sees non-proletarian composition as a source of weakness (which it is), but that they believe proletarian composition is an automatic safeguard against revisionism. An organization isolated from the working class cannot hope to sustain and develop a revolutionary line indefinitely. This is an important point. An organization does not exist in a vacuum, and is not the only subjective factor on the scene. Other pressures, other people's actions and desires, opponents, the power of capitalist society and ideology, can exercise a distorting influence, and certainly will, in the long run, if their influence is not combatted by the building of ties in the working class. But surmounting isolation from the working class is not a question of abstract composition--the presence of workers in a study circle--but of rooting the organization in the working class through fractions. To be sure, there is a connection between the ability to build fractions easily and successfully and the composition of the organization: it would be difficult to establish a steelworkers' fraction with ex-students, for example. But workers (or mentally reconstructed non-worker ex-students) do not automatically protect an organization against revisionism. VO has translated a necessary condition into a sufficient one.

The fundamental difference on this point is contained in the Minority's objection to my formulation of why Pabloism is a petty-bourgeois ideology. I said that the reason is "because it denigrates the idea of a proletarian class party and a proletarian revolution in favor of revolutions made by petty-bourgeois or bureau-

cratic strata in the interest of a class other than the proletariat." (original emphasis) Thus, what is wrong with the Pabloists is not that they are petty-bourgeois in composition (which by the way is not necessarily the case everywhere), but that their line cannot have the result of bringing the working class to power. The Minority says, "we certainly hope that doesn't mean the majority thinks that revolutions made by petty-bourgeois or bureaucratic strata in the interest of the proletariat would be okay." (original emphasis) But comrades, that would be fine. If the Columbia student SDS, which wants to establish a communist society (ask them) actually could do so, that would be just fine. If one could have a successful communist revolution without the workers, that would be fine. If one could have a successful communist revolution without a vanguard party, that would be fine too. The reason we insist on the necessity for a proletarian vanguard party is not just because Lenin said it, but because it is the only thing that has the possibility of successfully bringing about the kind of society we want to see. The Spartacist League, although it does not have a majority of workers in it now, acts in the interests of the working class. The CP, although it does have a lot of workers in it (just see the union news in the CP press), does not act in the interests of the working class. The reason we consider the CP or the SWP to be revisionist is not that their non-proletarian orientation means they can't have any workers among their members but that without a proletarian, revolutionary, internationalist vanguard orientation and line you can only reach ends other than a revolution which will establish a communist society.

The Soviet Bloc

Perhaps the most important point to emerge from the Minority document is to be found on pages 8-9, where the Minority disagrees with the "strange methodological approaches" of the Majority on the nature of Stalinism. The section is called, And More Distortions: The Soviet Bloc. However, it seems that there was no distortion of the Minority's position involved, as they do assert that there is no qualitative difference between a workers state and a deformed workers state. As demonstrated in my original document, this line is the essential methodological basis of Pabloism. The SL does indeed see a qualitative difference between the Russian workers state of 1917 and the product of its degeneration. This qualitative difference is embodied in the fact that it took a political counter-revolution and the physical extermination of the old Bolsheviks to make this transformation. It does not require a political revolution to establish a quantitative shift; if the difference is quantitative, the revisionists would be right about "bureaucratic self-reform". The basis of Pabloism is the attempt to set up only a quantitative difference between a workers state and a deformed workers state-- the proposition that workers democracy is "normative" and that workers states range from "very good indeed" (USSR 1917) to "very bad indeed" (USSR during the Stalin purge period). Certainly the comrades will recognize this logic as the SWP applies it to Cuba, which states that Cuba is really a "not bad" workers state, although yet lacking the "forms" of workers democracy. Now, as I tried to show in my original document, this methodology regarding the characterization "deformed workers state" is basic to VO's theoretical assess-

ment of East Europe etc., but is not completely generalized by them; i.e., their position is contradictory. The Minority develops this theoretical departure from Trotskyism, thus generalizing the worst aspects of VO and adopting them for itself.

Then we have the question of the "three main principles of organization" according to the Minority, delineated on page 11 of the Ellens Organizational Methods report. These are: contact work, the factory bulletins and the security question. The new Minority document attempts to attribute to the Majority fear of dealing with these points, with the exception of contact work. The reason they were not dealt with earlier is rather more simple. My original document was an attempt to deal with VO in the context of the Minority faction in the SL, not an exhaustive dissertation on VO itself. The reason I dealt so heavily with contact work was that the "principle" of systematic contacting was the only concrete practice (as opposed to general approach) of VO which Comrade Ellens took responsibility for and advocated for the SL. (She of course has advocated a number of fundamental changes in our priorities and policies, but of the VO example she had chosen explicitly only contact work.) I was not aware, for example, that the factory bulletins as an instrument for training workers (or as a technique of propaganda, for that matter) were an issue in the factional dispute, and still see no reason to explore the similarities and dissimilarities between VO's factory bulletins and our caucus leaflets of various sorts, except to note that it is an approach which has seemed to work extremely well for VO and parenthetically that it is co-ordinated with the existence of VO fractions--not MLCRC-type fictions. I would have certain questions regarding the approach if applied to U.S. conditions (relating to the "dual unionist" implications of an intra-union leaflet called a "Spartacist bulletin" or something like that) but hesitate to discuss them now inasmuch as nobody has made a point of the factory bulletins seriously, before Ellens raised the spectre of the "three main points of organization" in order to imply that the Majority is chicken.

The Clandestinity Question

My reason for not dealing with the security question was a more important one--namely, it was hard to tell how much of the Minority's practice has been personal paranoia and how much is advocated as a policy for our organization to follow. We have a fundamental difference on the security question with the VO comrades, but could not assume because of this that VO itself would simply transpose their own security practices onto U.S. conditions in the way the Minority seems to have done. And of course the minute that anyone of the Majority raised our differences with VO on anything (and especially the security question) as relevant to the SL dispute, Comrade Turner screamed bloody murder about "red herrings"--i.e., that the Minority did not have VO's positions or that at least the Minority was not united on them. But now that it has emerged through more discussion and especially in this latest Minority document that Ellens, as the leader of the Minority, is seeking to form essentially an American VO (who has found any points of disagreement between the Minority and VO, at least in the Minority's eyes?), we can take up the security question without being accused of "red herrings".

The Spartacist League has a policy of security, not clandestinity. This means we take measures to protect the livelihood of individuals (e.g., we often use party names for documents and the public press) while fighting to maintain the legality of the organization. We know that we cannot prevent the authorities from knowing pretty well who our comrades are if they want to take the trouble to open our mail, tap our phones, plant agents, etc. But we seek to prevent them from getting any documentary proof that will be sufficient legally to prove an individual's membership in the SL, in the event of something like another witchhunt period. (A real fascist take-over, freeing the bourgeoisie to seize "reds" and imprison them without going through any of the mechanisms of bourgeois democracy, and even worse, is something that we cannot now protect our members against; we can only work by political means to prevent it from happening.) We also take special measures to protect individuals from victimization--thus we have members who cannot be public members or publicly identified with the organization, and in all union situations our unionists work through intra-union caucuses in their public union work, not through SL-identified bodies. And of course we practice discretion and the dreaded common sense so that the government spy agencies will have to take some trouble for the information they get. And our security practices take into account the different situations and areas of the country in which we operate. Where we draw the line on security measures is when they accomplish nothing except confusing our own people.

The organization does not now have a publicly advertised national headquarters, but it has a public and legal existence. We seek to respond to the threats of HUAC-types not by "going underground" but by aggressively fighting for our democratic rights and asserting at every juncture that we are a legal organization. It has been pointed out before that for an organization of our size to "go underground" is essentially a form of liquidationism--one of our problems is that we are not visible enough! We have a hard enough time making ourselves known on the left and propagandizing our line; that's why we like newspaper publicity. We do not have anywhere near enough forces to successfully do all the things we want to do and intervene in all the arenas where we could have an effect. To "go underground" is just to make everything ten times harder. Further, there are numerous examples of what's wrong with security paranoia and how it is actually an objective danger. When a Minority comrade (before we knew there was a Minority) made an airplane reservation under a fictitious name in order to go to the South to visit an important local for the organization, most of us were frankly horrified. That comrade had already given up the recognition that the SL is a legal organization. If one were rational, one would not sneak around like that unless one were going to carry out some illegal act (which our comrade of course was not). But such procedures at best do nothing else but alert the authorities to watch our organization ever more closely, and in the worst case can actually set the organization up for a frame-up--if some crime had been committed and we had been investigated, how would we explain why a comrade had assumed a false name unless he or she had evil designs in his or her head?

Let us look at a few factual examples of the danger of exag-

gerated clandestinity "precautions". A number of radical Black Nationalist organizations have actually facilitated their being framed up by the cops. The combination of loudly proclaimed clandestinity and verbal terrorism as a response to a feeling of helplessness was characteristic of both RAM and the Black Liberation Front, the "Statue of Liberty plot" people. A recent, rather mediocre book on Black Nationalism (H. Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual) diagnosed paranoia as the occupational disease of Negroes in a pervasively racist society. Undoubtedly nervous about their ideas and operations, RAM and the others probably adopted undergroundism as a form of self-protection, but the effect was only to facilitate penetration by police provocateurs and flamboyant frame-up trials.

Why Ellens' Clandestinity?

So if clandestinity is both futile in terms of security and damaging to one's effectiveness, then what are its advantages? First of all, and perhaps most obvious, it is enjoyable to people who want to play at being revolutionaries, as it is much more dramatic and colorful than caucus-building, and of course it is comfortable for people who are slightly (or more than slightly) paranoid. Clandestinity measures can provide an illusory sense of greater safety and security--after all, if code names, no telephones, secret meeting places and the like so obviously make things harder for the members concerned, surely they must make things harder for the cops, right?

But the clandestinity policy has important political implications which must not be overlooked. The task of a Trotskyist group is not only to have militants working through non-SL caucuses in the unions. A Trotskyist group must fight for Trotskyism; it must have activities in which it presents its full program. It must combat other tendencies politically, not only through its public press but in the arenas in which it is active. It must have a public existence and some public members, who not only have "individual contacts" but who present the SL line in the arena. The essence of the Ellens clandestinity policy is that the line of the organization is presented only through contacting work on an individual basis. Thus, members will present their ideas only to the people who are by definition the most open and sympathetic. They will not have to take responsibility for their line in front of their opponents, to have their ideas contend openly with the competing programs and to demonstrate their correctness in open confrontation. Months ago a now-departed member of Espartaco staff and associate of Ellens refused to go into CIPA, on the grounds that the assignment would jeopardize her security. It was pointed out that in her case she would not have to be known even as an SL supporter, but simply as a radical or socialist. She considered this so unacceptable that in order to avoid going into this activity she broke relations with us and has not been seen since.

It should be pointed out here that there is an important implication to the Ellens emphasis on contact work that I have been very slow in realizing. To us, contact work means just following up on contacts in order to recruit them. To Ellens, however, contacting is the way in which all political work is to be conducted. No mat-

ter what arena he or she is in, the Ellensite would avoid being known as a member of any organization and would not engage in political work as we understand it. He or she would just develop a circle of individual contacts, seen one at a time, and would work on convincing each individual of the necessity of various "good things", socialism etc. If in no arenas are the members to be known as members of an organization, this means each member must generate with each contact the entire political program presumably on the basis of personal experiences, as he does not have the experiences of the organization, public activities and a public propaganda organ to draw upon. Isn't it clear what kind of low-level propagandizing will result? One can see how Ellens' interpretation of "contact work" ties in with the clandestinity approach and entirely vitiates even the concept of an organization, replacing it with a study circle, a collection of people working only as individuals. Not only is the Ellens group indifferent to the vital work of politically combatting the other ORO's politically, but they would even be unable, for example, to participate in a demonstration as part of a Spartacist contingent, as this would violate "semi-undergroundism".

Trotskyism in France

Finally, regarding the question of reunification with the Pabloists, I would like to thank the Minority comrades for the translation of the quotes from the August issue of Lutte Ouvriere, but I really don't see how they refute the Majority position on the evident rapprochement taking place. Let us sketch out our perspective for Trotskyists in France. First of all, this is the time to increase polemicizing against the other ORO's. The main reason for the drive toward unification advanced in verbal discussion has been that all the organizations to the left of the CP recruited during the May events large numbers of workers who wanted to be revolutionary and were reached first by a particular organization, without being necessarily Maoists, Pabloists, etc. This is undoubtedly true. Therefore, now is the time to raise the political nature of these organizations in order to show these new members that the organizations they have joined are not really revolutionary--to clarify the political issues and polarize the new members. (A newly-recruited member of the Pabloist organization, for example, may not be particularly a Pabloist now, but he will become one as his organization strives to educate him in its particular line and assimilate him.) Second, the Trotskyists should push very hard for united front actions where the organizations have a political basis of agreement on an issue, in order to increase contact with the rank and file of these other organizations. Now, after the experience of fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with members of the other organizations, the rank and filers of centrist groups will make it very difficult for their leaders to refuse common actions without revealing fear of political confrontation between their members and others and thereby exposing themselves. Finally, in the event that a new centrist party of the sort that is being called for now in Lutte Ouvriere, along the lines of the PSOP (Parti Socialiste Ouvriere et Paysan--formed 1938 in the aftermath of a similar general strike) is formed in France, Trotskyists should consider an entry into such a party--with the intention of working toward the crystallization of a Bolshevik

faction around themselves within the organization on the basis of the full Trotskyist program. Unfortunately, recent materials from France and discussions have made it clear that the Trotskyists there do not have such an approach in mind.

By way of a conclusion, I would like to apologize to the comrades who have made their way through this document for the banality of the factual points discussed in the earlier sections. I believe that it was necessary to set the record straight about the alleged "bureaucratic abuses" and the like because some of the out-of-town comrades who have not had the opportunity to observe the Minority up close might have given some credence to Ellens' accusations and have been disturbed by them. What I hope the comrades have gotten out of this long reply, however, is more than these trivial points. I hope that I have been able to project an accurate and clear idea of the relevance of VO to our dispute and to clarify some of the questions in dispute between the Majority and VO in the minds of those who do not see these issues as a way of "politicalizing" to avoid politics.

--19 August 1968

FACT, FACTION AND THE "VO CONTROVERSY":

A DISCUSSION OF SOME POSSIBLE RAMIFICATIONS

by Dave Cunningham

August 28: What follows was originally conceived of and begun as just one section of another - and more temperate - assessment I am preparing on various minority contributions to the present factional struggle. But because it was in process of being written just at the time of the formal resignation of four comrades closely related to this particular topic, it grew far beyond its projected size and implications. I thought it best, then, to write it as fast as I could and turn it in separately. Under the circumstances of the resignations, I was afraid that the central part of the discussion would be aborted - and I wanted something positive (in the nature of an analysis of various minority views) to come out of this fight. I also thought it was necessary to answer some charges, since it is apparent many minority criticisms did not fall on infertile soil.

The following in its entirety was written in spurts in odd hours between 21 and 28 August. Beyond questions of grammar and trying to clean up the more unintelligible parts, I have left the bulk of the material as I wrote it then. The rapid course of events has made some dislocations obvious; but I did not think the effort necessary to rewrite the entire section was either appropriate or justified.

* * * * *

I. Class Struggle Within The S.L.?

Before getting into the argument the reader must keep something in mind regarding what the fight has been about: this first section should be read as a preliminary statement.

Comrade Turner did not clarify the discussion very much when he wrote the section of his "Whither the Spartacist League?" entitled 'Class Basis of the Dispute'; instead of seeing the debate over the 'allocation of forces' for what it was - a debate over where to put the people we had into the most effective areas where they could work (I take the composition of the SL as a given fact: obviously, there is no serious question regarding the middle-class, petty-bourgeois origins of the majority of our comrades.), Turner saw it as much more: a clash between various class forces in US society. Instead of illuminating the situation, he opened a Pandora's box of howling theoretical horrors, and the lid is not yet back on.

As an excuse for this kind of argument he quotes a passage from Trotsky, written during the preparation of the Shachtman-Abern-Burnham split: "Any serious fight in the party is always in the final analysis a reflection of the class struggle."

Now, rightly understood, that passage serves as an accurate description (on one level) of what was going on in the SWP in the immediate pre-war period; what I find obscure to the highest degree is how that situation is in any way similar to the present faction fight. Unless you really want to be literal-minded, i.e., start a faction fight, claim it's "a serious fight in the party", conclude this fight must be a reflection of the class struggle (quoting Trotsky to prove it). Then all you have to do is accuse your opponents of being the "petty-bourgeois tendency in the party" and bingo! The standard of the working

class appears miraculously on your shoulder. If this is what Turner's case consists of then it should be obvious that the majority in the present faction fight could, with as much if not more justification in this matter, do precisely the same thing - label the minority "a petty-bourgeois opposition in the party". Of course, the minority got there first, but then that's surely not the significant thing here. I can see it now: two polarized groups totally occupied in their work of smearing the others as 'petty-bourgeois'. What an enormously educative and meaningful fight that would be!

Turner, by quoting that passage from Trotsky as a justification (more accurately, as a pretext) for labelling the so-called Robertson-Seymour 'bloc' a petty-bourgeois tendency in the SL, is misusing Marxism and Marxist method in a manner more reminiscent of religious fundamentalism than Leninist-Trotskyist politics; this sort of thing cannot but obscure and raise false issues in an already complex situation. Marxist insights of this nature are not absolutes, but...insights.

The 1939-40 SWP Minority

To illustrate this point, we should go into some little detail as to what was going on in the SWP at the time Trotsky made that remark cited by Turner. Two things seem salient. First, a large section, based especially in New York, was becoming uncomfortable with the politics of the Trotsky-Cannon leadership and found themselves in the Shachtman-Burnham-Abern circle. These people were, as one can reconstruct the mood from Dwight MacDonald's Memoirs of a Revolutionist (he is, probably, a typical figure) largely petty-bourgeois in origin, leftish middle class in style, largely Jewish, a closed group around the semi-Trotskyist literary circle, i.e., Partisan Review, etc. This was obviously not a healthy situation; to some great extent, there was an unfortunate cleavage between the Cannon 'practicals' and the Shachtman-MacDonald 'litterateurs.' The problem was not, however, the petty-bourgeois origins of the N.Y. group which hurt it so much; the operative word in the above characterization, rather, is "closed". This did not permit the necessary cross-fertilization and interaction between the petty-bourgeois and working-class strata.

It is possible to overstate the case of the SL's second-rate human material: if we are to believe Shachtman himself, things weren't all that great (qualitatively) in the SWP in the 30's. Thus:

"It should be borne in mind, further, that precisely because we were so intensely concerned with profound theoretical problems and so preoccupied with "Russian" or "international" questions to the exclusion (whether real or apparent, is beside the point here) of "American" questions, we tended in the early days to attract mainly the younger people, students, intellectuals good and bad, very few workers, even fewer active trade unionists, still fewer trade unionists active in the basic and most important unions, but more than a few dilettantes, well-meaning blunderers, biological chatterboxes, ultraradical oat-sowers, unattachable wanderers, and many other kinds of sociological curiosa. Most of them made bivouac with us for a while, but not for too long. Of the movement, the best were those who completely assimilated the meaning of the proletarian character that the living and genuine socialist movement must have. If he sometimes injected an unjustified polemical or factional warp into his emphasis, it was nonetheless Cannon who was most persistent throughout the early, difficult years of isolation in imbuing all the serious people with an alertness to the need of a proletarian movement; and on the whole he was likewise the most effective of us all."

The above is taken from Part I of Shachtman's "Twenty Five Years of American Trotskyism"; it appeared in the New International, Vol. XX, No.1 (January-February 1954). This is a rather sour assessment, violently anti-Cannon in tone, but I am inclined to believe it, since these elements of the party are largely what Shachtman took with him into the Workers Party in 1940, and I doubt he would unduly blacken their reputations.

Secondly, we must ask what impelled these people into opposition. Not, principally, their class origins. This is that a large section (about half) of the party, in the main the same people, was as a result of the Stalin terror in the Soviet Union, together with Soviet military interventions into Finland, Poland and some of the Balkan states, beginning to panic before bourgeois press-inspired anti-Soviet 'public opinion': as a direct result certain 'theoretical' revisions vis-a-vis the nature of the Russian state began to make their appearance at various places within the SWP. It was easy to trace these revisions back to the source - panic before bourgeois opinion.

Not unreasonably, these 'developments of consciousness' began to show themselves first within the party's intellectual and theoretical strata: it is simply a fact of life in a class society that this element, radical or conservative, tends to feel the 'fluttering in the breeze' of shifting opinion first. It is quite true that the SWP had been quite derelict, under Cannon and Shachtman, of integrating these strata fully into the life of the party - no serious attempt was made to make the party homogeneous.

What Trotsky meant by this phrase (and by the term 'Petty-Bourgeois Opposition') was not that the class origins of these never-too-well assimilated elements were responding somehow either to their petty-bourgeois origins or outlook; what he meant was that they were unduly responsive, generally, in a crisis, to bourgeois influences (notably the anti-communist press). That's all.

How in the world this is supposed to be relevant in the present faction fight in the SL is beyond me - although it seems to me that, if anything, the majority could just as well accuse the minority of a similar panic reaction to a difficult and unrewarding period. That is, if we wanted to fight on this level, and we do not want to. The class origins of the participants are not notably different on either side - honesty would dictate that the minority recognize this. It is likewise true that the majority and minority both want to influence and someday lead the working class. The question is: how do we go about it?

I reiterate: there is no "class basis" to this dispute. Nor is there any "petty-bourgeois orientation" vs. "working-class orientation" division in the local, despite the fact that the minority would love to have such an impression spread. The reader is referred to Seymour's articles, I and III, for a serious attempt to deal with the issues raised.

II. Two Faces Of The Minority

From the very beginning of this discussion it was clear to the comrades of the majority that a certain number of the minority comrades were holding up our fraternal group Voix Ouvriere as the model Trotskyist group to be emulated, at least insofar as their organizational methods and methods of functioning were concerned. Certain other facts - notably a somewhat intemperate attack by comrade Turner, a leader in the united minority, upon comrade Liz Gordon for her document The Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere at the New York local given over to a discussion of the documents to date (this was on

August 14) - made it clear that this was by no means a unanimous view within the minority. Comrade Turner went so far as to claim that the whole VO question was irrelevant and immaterial to the discussion and lambasted the majority for dragging around a red herring to divert attention from the real points in dispute, as if it were we who created the situation!

The confusion was compounded by the fact that at the very moment comrade Turner was giving us (the majority) hell for refusing to stick to the 'fundamental questions' of the discussion, a manuscript typed copy of the document " 'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" (dated the day before, August 13th, and signed by Ellens, Stoute and Jerry E.), literally and almost embarrassingly a panygyric to Voix Ouvriere and also a violent attack on comrade Gordon, was circulating among the local membership present. Since no other minorityite bothered to take the floor to attempt to explain away the confusion, at this point the minority (since everyone assumed they were united) appeared to hold the position that, "Turner's right: the whole VO issue is a lie, a frameup, a red herring; oh, and by the way - don't you dare say anything critical about this fine, upstanding model Trotskyist organization VO which is just all the things we ought to be and which we haven't the slightest interest in beating the drums for!" Needless to say, this argument left those majority comrades who weren't completely bewildered by this apparent gibberish rather sour and cynical about the minority's inability to get their signals straight.

In hindsight what appeared at the time to be a classic foulup in getting the line down seems clearly the rupture line along which the minority bloc tore apart. Comrade Gordon was unenviably the one available target in the field of crossfire and had to take it from all directions. Comrade Turner spoke his piece, which presumably is available on tape; the document " 'Politicalizing'..." has been mimeo'd and is available to the membership. Comrade Turner's comments are more tangential to this discussion; I want to deal with the latter response here.

Why This Article Was Written

It may be objected that there is little reason for someone else to get into the "VO Fight" at this late date since, 1. Comrade Gordon is quite capable of defending herself, and, 2. " 'Politicalizing'..." is its own worst enemy. Granting point 1, there is certainly no harm in numbers, and 2., since the discussion projected by this wing of the minority is being carried on with all the dignity of a broken-bottled gutter brawl, it seems like fun and I would like a small percentage of the action.

There are more serious reasons for carrying the attack in that issue into the Ellens-Stoute enemy camp. Occasionally, as seems to be the case here, it is nevertheless necessary to complete the argument and the discussion, even while recognising at the time of writing that it is largely for the record. It is particularly imperative now, both in order to correct errors in fact and also to make a summing-up. Documents in the Marxist movement have a habit of getting into hands outside of those for whom they are specifically written (as we know from our Marxist Bulletin series); they are in point of fact apt to be more persuasive than the more formal, popular, public argumentation and propaganda. So it is especially necessary, when confronted with a bitter, hostile, aggressive polemic like " 'Politicalizing'..." to make it clear that the points raised were erroneous, were distorted and were challenged; otherwise the impression conceivably might be left that our opponents' argument was sufficiently overwhelming and accurate as to leave us completely devastated, gasping for

breath, immobilized, paralysed. And that is hardly the case.

There is another facet to this argument. Other majority documents have made the case that, for Marxists, internal factional struggles have a beneficial side insofar as they offer a means of self-education for the participants; a means of learning through intellectual, theoretical struggle. That the Ellens-Stoute minorityites do not approve of this form of education ("Where did Lenin say, as Comd. L.G. seems to believe, that internal factional struggle is the most important way in which comrades are educated? We want to know exactly where Lenin said that!" etc. etc.) does not in any sense vitiate the point - it is, as a moment's reflection would show, part and parcel of Marxist method and practices for over a century. (Just parenthetically I would like to add that this hostility to education, through factional or any other kind of ideological-theoretical struggle, has its origin in the violently anti-theory, anti-intellectualism pervasive to the Ellens-Stoute wing of the minority. Anyone unconvinced that this is so need only think up and present an alternative explanation to the numerous gibes about "high Trotskyism" and the like which are a constant theme of minority arguments. This leads one to suspect that a motive force for the speed in which the Ellens-Stoute minorityites moved to a split consciousness has been an inability to comprehend, let alone defend, the SL's political positions - and to move into arenas of 'political work' where they suspect (wrongly) this incompetence will not be found out).

One more point needs to be made here - and this is essentially why I feel this article is necessary: this is the question of the presently banned Voix Ouvriere group, the French Trotskyist organization with which we have fraternal ties.

The Stoute-Ellens wing of the minority has been playing fast and loose with the 'methods' of VO, dealing with a rather complex series of issues facing the N.Y. local of the SL as if they were crystal-clear, self-evident truths obvious to anyone not blinded by their petty-bourgeois, elitist, bureaucratic contempt for the working class. This is typical of the 'sucker-bait' approach of these comrades; they do not even attempt to answer any real questions. In " 'Politi-cizing...' " they finally tried to codify their views on paper.

Ever since the factional struggle got hot, Cde. Ellens and her wing have taken it upon themselves to act as the 'defenders' of VO, attempting in a grossly dishonest manner to convey the impression that the 'leadership' (i.e., Robertson), the "N.O. clique" or the "Conservative Tendency" (i.e., everyone in the SL except the Ellens-Stoute wing of the minority) were violently "attacking" VO. Such was not at all the case.

Why The Majority Criticizes VO

I would frankly find it dismaying to think it were necessary to have to explain to anyone in a splinter group of a splinter group, a Marxist group like ours with our particular history, the meaning of 'criticism' in our movement. One need only recall the things Lenin said about his opponents in What is to be Done? and One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: they were savage, brutal, possibly unfair. For that matter read what Trotsky himself wrote about Lenin at just about this time: not only was it hostile and distorted, but it also happened to be untrue! And this sort of thing went on sporadically between the two men at least until the start of World War I; yet it did not keep them from coming together in 1917 as the lever of the Revolution. Can the minority comrades point to anything between the SL and VO a tenth as abrasive as what went on between Lenin and Trotsky?

Some common sense has to be applied here, however much the minority hates that term. I am aware of that passage by Engels, but 'common sense' is not in opposition to dialectical method under the conditions indicated. The political role of any group - and this goes for VO as well as us - which is as a rule not large or concentrated enough to intervene decisively in the class struggle, is to attempt to estimate the balance of class forces, to formulate theoretical positions to clear up complex questions in order to aid revolutionary or rebellious segments of the population to cut through distortions and see their interests clearly, along with the formulating of transitional programs to aid the working class in their conquest of power. Our work, then, is and has to be largely in the field of abstraction: ideas, theories, programs, formulations.

But for us to be successful we have to be right, and we have to be right so many times, so consistently, that we convince by example, by the power of our ideas, our logic, our method. Theory isn't a matter of flipping an intellectual coin, going one way if heads, the other if tails: it's a matter of abstracting the life out of living, breathing reality--and getting it right.

Because if we, or anyone else, come to fundamentally different conclusions about events of world-historical import, somebody's wrong--and that's serious. It may be due to faulty information, or it may be due to wrong method. Being wrong a number of times, in a discernible direction with a discernible tendency, shows a faulty method--that is, a basic flaw in the application of Marxist method. That's essentially what the question of Pabloism in the Trotskyist movement is all about; the Pabloites try for shortcuts, they assign to other class forces--usually one or another section of the petty-bourgeoisie--jobs which can only be done by, and which are the historical tasks of, the industrial working class.

So when we and VO come to different conclusions about different historical occurrences, we want to probe those differences, to find if a distorting method somehow is at work. We believe such weaknesses exist within VO's overall world-view: Comrade Gordon quite accurately pointed these out. It is because we take such great interest in VO's welfare that we scrutinize their work so closely and so critically; we don't usually bother so much with the Healyite, Pabloist, Stalinist groups (we know they'll either screw up or sell out!) The attempt of the Ellens-Stoute group to stand this on its head, to turn fraternal, serious criticism into its opposite, slander, shows (if they mean it) that they no longer understand one of the basic premises of Marxist-Leninist method.

I rather think, however, that they know quite well what they're doing. I think this is simply another stunt, a contribution of 'patriotic' bourgeois politicians, to wrap themselves in the flag hoping that attacks on them will be read as 'illegitimate attacks' on the symbol. This misuse of the 'VO flag' is paradigmatic of the rotten 'method' of the Ellens-Stoute group. I too think that VO has to be protected, all right, but from its self-styled champions; protected from those who avail themselves of our rightly high estimate of our French comrades in order to misuse, to do violence to our organization in VO's name!

Comrade Gordon caught the Ellens-Stoute people out on this point in her original document "The Spartacist League, the Minority and Voix Ouvriere" when she wrote that, "But the most important point, of course, is that we must not be misled by the spectre of VO being raised to lend weight to the arguments of the Minority; if Comrade Ellens has received the VO 'franchise', we are not

aware of it". The Stoute-Ellens-Jerry E. document in reply "Politicalizing'..." assiduously (and typically) avoids any direct answer to this comment, and says only: "What a pitifully bureaucratic mentality this reveals!" Without wanting to appear obvious, it is necessary to state that that's not the only thing it reveals. The bizarre arguments, the wild misstatements of fact, the cheap debater's tricks which cannot convince anyone conversant with the facts and the behavior of that wing of the minority--like so much of the absolute bullshit in Wohlforth's Bulletin, it is obviously written for foreign consumption; it is, in point of fact, the application for that "franchise"! And so it seems appropriate to throw some rocks in that direction.

The Origins of Our Criticism

Comrade Gordon's "The SL, the Minority and VO" was of course the majority statement on Cde. Ellens' document "Organizational Practices". In that document it was necessary to point to certain flaws within VO's structure and politics--points long held by the SL. (This is rendered on page 1 of "Politicalizing'...", as "because the discussions have begun to take place, the majority now is forced to discredit and slander the fraternal group and the comrade who submitted the report." (My emphasis)) But we have had certain criticisms of VO for a long time, and this is nothing new--nor have we now, or ever, attempted to discredit or slander them. Comrade Gordon's observations in her article were simply written expansions on views known, for a long time, within the membership of the SL. As early as November 1966 the criticisms were made in our public press; for example the editorial "Revolution and Truth" where the following comment appears:

"...the Spartacist League is politically much closer to the IC than, for example, Voix Ouvriere, with whom we have strong differences over their state-capitalist position on the Sino-Soviet states, their tendency toward syndicalism, and their erroneous assessment of the Fourth International. But we, like VO, recognize that true solidarity with the International Committee forces requires, etc., etc." (SPARTACIST #8, Nov.-Dec. 1966)

Two issues earlier, in SPARTACIST #6 (June-July 1966, p.6) we made a sharp distinction with the VO comrades over the origins and development of Pabloism within the Trotskyist movement (a point of more than academic interest in this faction fight, since the Stoute-Ellens minorityites have taken over the VO position on this subject in toto, albeit in a cruder, more vulgar, debased form); Comrade Robertson then made the observation that:

"We also disagree with Voix Ouvriere's view that Pabloism can be explained simply by reference to the petty-bourgeois social composition of the F(ourth) I(nternational), any more than one could explain the specific nature of a disease by reference solely to the weakened body in which particular microbes had settled."

The article in which this appeared is entitled "Spartacist Statement to International Conference". Two salient points: the VO comrades were in attendance, and presumably understood the import of the observations; Comrade Robertson's statement was made "on behalf of the Spartacist delegation", which delegation contained both Comrades Gordon and Ellens.

We have never concealed these differences, nor were they thought up on the spur of the moment with slanderous intent, in an off-handed manner and accompanied by "snorting fits" at a couple of Political Bureau meetings, as Comrade Ellens would like to have all her readers think. The quotes above are taken

from our public press, not from documents intended "cynically" for "internal consumption" or from "N.O. corridor gossip," and presumably, since we know the VO comrades pay assiduous and scrupulous attention to our publications, they are quite aware of these differences. What Comrade Gordon did in her document was to restate and detail these differences, and nothing more, i.e., no slander there! If the Stoute-Ellens people are serious about their charges of "slander" they are going to have to look a hell of a lot farther afield than that!

There is a complicating, if ironic, factor here. As I pointed out, Comrade Ellens was among the Spartacist delegation which was thrown out of the 1966 I.C. conference. If she thought Comrade Robertson's comments on VO at the time were slanderous -- if she even thought they were incorrect or downright wrong -- she could and should have said so. She wrote a number of letters on a number of things about the conference to the NO and other comrades -- but there is no disagreement on that score. The subject, "slanderous" or otherwise, is never mentioned. Never.

Besides, both Comrades Ellens and Stoute were on the National Committee, Stoute being both a full Central Committee member and member of the Political Bureau. The subject of VO could not help but have come to the attention of the PB over the past two years. If full members of the PB have differences -- or, for that matter, special views on certain things -- they have the right to attach them to the PB minutes for discussion in the locals. Comrade Stoute could have availed herself, at any time, of this right. If the other (now majorityite) members of the PB were treating VO in a slanderous or uncomradely manner, comrade Stoute had the right and the obligation to make it clear. But she did not do so. If she felt then, as she states now, that it is "disgusting" that the SL has not behaved towards VO in "a serious, comradely, and scrupulous manner," if she thought it were a burning issue (then, not now) that we did not "engage in a dialogue" with VO on our differences in Class Struggle, if she really thought it was "disgusting" that we did not debate those counterposed differences like our various views on the Negro Struggle, the Arab-Israeli war, the question of the Soviet Bloc -- why didn't she say so then? She was in the leadership of the organization -- she might even have volunteered (perish the thought!) to write something! She didn't have to wait until she was writing on a factional document to say so -- or did she?

One would like to say to her: Isn't it just a tiny bit possible, Comrade Stoute, that until you decided to use the "uncomradely" treatment the SL has doled out for a year and a half to Voix Ouvriere as a club with which to beat the majority (i.e., Comrade Robertson), that you didn't give a damn about SL-VO relations, that you couldn't have cared less about the subject? If you really cared then like you say you care now, couldn't you have made the smallest, slightest peep of dissent? Or is it possible that you didn't even read the documents you signed?

III. How The Ellensites Responded

Comrades outside the NY local should attend closely to the tone and argumentation of the Ellens-Stoute manifesto, "'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics," as it has to be seen personally to be believed. The tone ranges from the moderate "it's an outrage!" to near hysteria (e.g., Comrade Gordon "cowardly avoids" issues (as opposed to "cowardly confronts" them?), the SL's behavior toward VO is "disgusting," Comrade Gordon's document is "pervaded" by "inanity" and "basic dishonesty", etc., etc.) (all taken at random from page 1). Since Ellens apparently feels she was co-author, along with Comrade Trotsky, of In

Defense of Marxism, she ought to go through the documents there for the proper level and tone to be used in factional arguments. The point being, of course, to persuade by reason.

Perhaps a couple of examples of the method and level of argument put forth by Stoute-Ellens, of the full flavor and high caliber of their opposition, ought to be stressed for the benefit of those not close to the source of the argument.

Item: Referring to VO's functioning, Comrade Gordon raised a question as to whether or not Ellens' view of VO in "Organizational Practices", on the subject of efficiency, was not a little "idealized", and wrote that "One SL'er whose contact with VO was much more limited than Comrade Ellens' points out that, despite Ellens' assertion that 'meetings start on time,' those which she (this other SL'er) attended started late, monthly meetings 45 minutes late, classes less so." And she drew a conclusion from this that, "Trivial reminders like this may serve to keep us within the bounds of reality."

Now this might appear, to the outsider, to be rather mild and sensible; in no sense can it be construed as a vicious slander or whatever. For that matter, it is not inconceivable that it might even be wrong, without any harm being done; but by no stretch of the imagination, one thinks, can this be a point of blazing significance.

The outsider, unfortunately, would be wrong; he doesn't know our minority. They just can't leave it alone, can't even let that much "criticism" (if it is "criticism") of what they think VO to be pass. So they fire back, coming on in the manner of a Methodist preacher finding a couple of drunks in his flock:

The "SL'er whose contact with VO was much more limited" had been, in reality a contact of one single VO'er for a few months and had, it seems, known a couple of public meetings to start late. The VO report deals with principles which are assiduously carried out. To point to the exceptions of several public meetings starting late (and remember, for VO, legitimate difficulties such as Stalinist attempts to interfere with meetings, do arise) is simply to beg the question posed by those principles.

This isn't a question of "principle" in this debate, since Ellens-Stoute simply could have said that Comrade Gordon was wrong; as a trivial point, supposedly, it could have been ignored. But the rub comes in here, because there of course is a point to all this: among those who idealize "working-class culture" circulates a fiction that punctuality is the highest and most scrupulously attended-to virtue, whereas not starting something on time can only be evidence of "petty-bourgeois individualism". But as we all know, VO is not "petty-bourgeois" whatever in God's name meaning that term has picked up by now), and therefore, VO's meetings have to start on time. A clear, sharp syllogism. The converse of course cannot be admitted, ergo, if empirical evidence exists to the contrary, if a meeting actually did start late, why, then...all the comrades were (of course) out fighting off the weekly Stalinist charge!

Clever thing about the Ellens-Stoute minority's arguments; any way you slice them, we lose. Analysing the above quotation we deduce: as a rule SL meetings don't start on time (petty-bourgeois!), and we haven't had to fight our way into the NO through the Stalinists in Christ knows how long (not serious!). (Just a personal point here: it's kind of inappropriate for Ellens and Stoute

to lecture us on punctuality, as they're near notorious in this local for always turning up extremely late. I haven't the heart to enquire of them if they had really been out, all those times, scuffling it up outside PL headquarters.)

Another item: in "The SL, Minority and VO", Comrade Gordon made the observation that:

"The Comrades must keep in mind that VO is in many respects a fine and Trotskyist organization, and it is not an accident that the SL has chosen to maintain fraternal relations between our two groups. (Just guess why Ellens-Stoute didn't quote that!-D.C.) Further, VO has behaved toward the SL and the I.C. (the two opportunities we have had to observe VO most closely) in a serious, comradely and scrupulous way."

Ellens-Stoute respond to this in the following manner:

"Page 2, para.1: That "VO has behaved towards the SL...in a serious, comradely and scrupulous manner" is true. It is disgusting that one cannot say the same for the SL. In almost 2 1/2 years since the London conference, during which time the SL has been in so-called "fraternal relations" with VO it has not deemed it important enough to engage in a dialogue with this "fraternal" organization on either those political or organizational principles on which the two organizations differ. Class Struggle, for example, has been published since February 1967, and has included many articles which are clearly counterposed to many of the SL's theoretical positions. In one and one half years, the SL hasn't answered any of those articles - unless we consider NO corridor gossip as "answers." But for internal consumption, a 17 page document, filled with distortions, lies and slanders, is rapidly produced. How cynical! Does the leadership of the Conservative Tendency not wish to enlighten VO on its "weaknesses"?"

I believe I have already dealt with the bulk of this above - the fact that we don't conceal from VO our criticisms, that we had available comrades (now in the minority) in the leadership competent to write those articles which didn't get done.

But the implication there that nobody really gave a damn about getting those replies made - and so far as Cde. Robertson, obviously the person under attack, is concerned, on two different occasions he specifically asked leading comrades in this organization to reply, the articles in question being one on the Negro Struggle (October, 1967) and on the Guerrilla Theses (May, 1968). Neither article was brought to completion. The first was set aside by the comrade assigned for personal reasons; as for the latter, the Espartaco comrade (who authored the Theses in the first place) did not do the article because he was in the process of severing his ties with the SL.

That is unfortunately neither a very good reason nor a very good record, but it is the truth. Further, I suspect it is a truth known to Ellens-Stoute and their collaborators. (This is, after all, a small organization: such things are either common knowledge or easy to find out.) Dwight McDonald once made the point that competent journalists do not grow on Trotskyist trees; competent Marxist theoreticians do not exactly line the SL bushes, either. But poor as this record admittedly is, it is a record shared among the whole of the SL leadership, not just by Comrade Robertson.

How The Majority Really Views VO

In point of fact all this righteous indignation is merely a smokescreen, however much those minority comrades who signed " 'Politicalizing'..." wish to pretend otherwise. To answer the question "How do we (i.e., majorityites, loiterers in the N.O. corridors) really think about VO?, I refer interested persons to the lead article in our public press, Spartacist #12 ("To the Brink and Back: French Revolution"; Sept.-Oct. 1968). The front page picture clearly portrays a banner which reads "Solidarity with Voix Ouvriere - Our Worker-Trotskyist Comrades Outlawed by deGaulle - Spartacist". And, odder still (if you are inclined to credit " 'Politicalizing'..." with having a factual basis for its remarks), clearly visible in that picture carrying that banner is the very same comrade who is presently portrayed as a dishonest, malicious slanderer of VO! Admittedly this is not a big thing, but it shows a little something (especially when you consider that Comrade Ellens, the self-appointed self-proclaimed defense attorney for VO was unable to make it - although every single member of the majority, veritably dripping no doubt with anti-working class, anti-VO petty-bourgeois prejudices did manage to get there!). And another small but curious thing - it was Comrade Robertson, the "high archivist", unimaginable leader of "a serious revolutionary party", who was able to drag himself away from his books and the fleshpots of the N.O. corridors long enough to author that slogan. Again, a very small thing, and one certainly not worth mentioning were it not for the fact that it is indicative of something somehow out-of-kilter with the portrait of a hostile, denigrating clique eagerly busy pouring scorn and ridicule all over VO.

We do of course take VO seriously. Rather than insist any more on this point, I refer interested parties to the article mentioned above in Spartacist#12, where they will find, appropriately enough under the subheading Voix Ouvriere, the following passage:

The Voix Ouvriere comrades are the only organization claiming to be Trotskyist which has carried out a working-class line. Initially, their cadres were concentrated in the factories to the extent that they lacked an adequate base within student and petty-bourgeois arenas. They were, however, able to establish permanent liaison committees with the Pabloite organizations, enabling them to coordinate their intervention with the radical students of the JCR. Such increase in contact between these organizations may in the future allow the VO comrades to aid Pabloite youth in breaking away from the revisionism in their movement and orienting decisively toward a revolutionary proletarian perspective.

However, the axis upon which the VO-Pabloite unity of action is based is a false one. The joint statement called upon "all organizations claiming to be Trotskyist to join in this move." The VO comrades feel the recent events constitute "the French 1905." Let us remember that the sequel to the 1905 Russian Revolution was a unification of the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks! It took Lenin several years to break this over-fraternal unity. What has been pointed up in France by the latest CP-CGT betrayal is not the need for a "Trotskyist regroupment" but the need for a new revolutionary party based on the vindicated Bolshevik program, uniting all those, even from such tendencies as the Maoists and syndicalists, who stand in favor of workers' committees of power. We hope that VO, the French Bolsheviks, have not been disoriented as were the Russians in 1905.

As anyone who reads our press knows, we are not given to flattering anyone; that said I refer the reader to the last sentence and let him form his own opinion as to our views on the subject. As a matter of fact, that passage might well be faulted, if anything, for its too-fulsome praise; that, of course, is not the issue here. Is this another "disgusting" majorityite slander? Or isn't it

rather more evidence of our mutually serious attitudes, a fulfilling of our duty to criticize seriously what we consider limitations and errors, just as we praise those who function correctly and well? An uncritical, unserious attitude, like flattery, is cheap: that section of the minority around Ellens-Stoute which chooses to grovel at the feet of an ersatz 'VO' does neither VO nor themselves any credit. This sort of thing, this approach, smacks of Wohlforthism, not Bolshevism; we hope VO finds the implied comparison with Healy, the Socialist Labour League and the IC - our junior league 'VO'ers' sole contribution to the discussion - appropriately dismaying, embarrassing and "disgusting".

IV. The Split In The Minority

The above was written over the period between August 21, a week after the date the typescript of the document " 'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" was turned in to the N.O., and August 25th, the date the N.O. officially received the letter of resignation from Ellens, Stoute, Syrek and Jerry E. I have left it just as it was. The whole point in writing it was, for me at the time, to point to Ellens and Stoute as wreckers, charlatans and hypocrites, in the hope of splitting off some of their supporters. This intent was, in retrospect, hopelessly utopian - Ellens and Stoute were able to speed up the splitting process and energy sufficiently to carry their followers out with them. They did this despite a severe split in their own ranks, and part of the 'united' minority represented by Comrades Turner and Hugh F. apparently intends to stay in the SL and fight in disciplined fashion for their program there.

Looking back on it, splitting at just this time was a smart thing to do. Speaking personally, what has annoyed me throughout the factional "discussion", to render it euphemistically, was the unprincipled nature of the minority. It was from the start an 'anti-regime' bloc, an unprincipled combination of the worst sort, with absolutely no discernable unity on any program save that of hostility to Comrade Robertson. (I made this point orally at the NY local meeting on August 14th, a meeting turned over to debate on the factional differences, and was attacked for it - at the moment I indulge myself in maliciously wondering how the comrades who reacted then with indignation to this suggestion feel about it now?). The minority all along recruited on the basis of personal and political weaknesses - feeling frustrated? don't like Robertson? think the SL is a failure? come join our faction and we'll solve your problems. Program? political agreement? That's nothing but theory (sneer), 'high Trotskyism' (sneer), petty-bourgeois academic pretensions (sneer, hiss, boo.) What do the workers care about 'theory', anyway? (Hurray!) Faction meeting adjourned.

There are dangers in this kind of thing, as I suspect comrade Ellens, the leader of the walkout, will shortly find out to her sorrow. For example; Jerry E. was recruited to the minority largely on the basis of a combination of self-guilt and a violent hatred of any kind of authority (not only Comrade Robertson, but the whole principle of 'centralism', democratic or otherwise.) Comrade Turner, because his personal relations with Robertson were abrasive and because he was impatient with our (the SL's) isolation and our failures. Comrade Stoute, because she has become a Black Nationalist and wants to wreck this nest of white devils. The Espartaco people, because they don't like J.P. Cannon (something they got from Wohlforth), couldn't defend our line in public or in confrontation with ORO members, and were near-pathological on the subject of 'security'. Comrade Syrek because he bought the panacea, i.e., Ellens really had the key to world history. And comrade Janacek, who was a week ago in full, complete agreement with every single majority position, in every single criticism we had of the minority, who knew (and knows now) that Ellens was simply out on a wrecking

operation - because of her personal interest in a minority comrade's welfare. Every single one of these people was recruited into the 'minority' on the basis not of politics, not of program - but on their weaknesses.

This sort of combination is unstable on its face. Which meant that, if she were to succeed in smashing the SL and setting up some sort of rival organization, Comrade Ellens had to work fast. Therefore the argument had to be hot, fast, a lot of documents written, a lot of hostility generated - then split and hope the momentum will carry a sizable chunk of your 'minority' out with you. Which happened, unfortunately.

Exacerbating The Contradictions

Go back and read Comrade Turner's "Whither the Spartacist League?", which for a time was considered the central 'minority' position paper. I am not in the least degree in agreement with its theoretical underpinnings, its method, its political characterization of 'the leadership' or its call for an alternative leadership, but that is not the issue here. It is nevertheless written from a 'party patriot' position; 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."

Within this framework, that is, of being "the only organization in the US able to develop thoroughly Marxist positions on all the issues before it," only unfortunately saddled with a rotten leadership, Comrade Turner develops his thesis, the need to replace the leadership:

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.

Okay. Independent of its fallacious perspective, the course outlined above sees the building of the communist party in the United States the "historic responsibility" of the Spartacist League, no other organization. Turner's document carries the line that "It's our organization, and we're going to make it do its job." An admirable sentiment: a position paper of the "loyal opposition".

But attached to Turner's document, dated 24 July, is a statement of support for this line, with the "basic thrust and general conclusions" all valid and signed by the four other N.Y. members of the minority. They of course qualify the statement of support for this line by reference to probable "differences" which they will expand on later, but they state quite clearly that any such differences exist only "in emphasis or on subordinate points"; the "thrust" is correct.

Yet less than three weeks later, three of the four people signing that note of support for the general line (excepting only Comrade Hugh F.) signed the document " 'Politicalizing'..."; less than one month later, the three had sent in their letter of resignation from the SL. That is, within a period of less than

a month, (taking them at their word, hypothetically) they moved from a position of believing that the SL was the only organization in the US capable of serving as the vanguard for the assembling of the communist party to a position that it (the SL) was so rotten it had become an obstacle in the way of the party, an obstacle to be removed from the planet (which is what setting up another 'revolutionary' party literally means). In less than a month!

I don't believe it. And I don't think there is another comrade (majority or minority) in New York who believes it, either. What it would mean, if one took this argument seriously, is that within this period of a month something changed within the SL (or more exactly, in the minority's perception of the SL) of a qualitative nature, something which transformed a basically healthy organization with a poor leadership into something so fundamentally corrupt that it had to be smashed!

If anyone in what we used to call "the minority" wants to argue with this negative interpretation of their behavior they need only explain this shift in the qualitative nature of the SL. If it happened, if it exists...prove it. Show us how it happened. Because if you can't, if you try to hedge, if you just churn out more 'documents' which don't answer these or any other questions - you stand exposed as wreckers, as fakes...as liars. It is not a question here of misvaluations, or errors, or big mistakes, and god knows we've made enough: these may be an inconvenience, or disorient us. But we can live with mistakes. But lies, a fundamental lack of integrity - that sort of thing destroys you as revolutionaries.

Ornaments And Wreckers

But the Ellens-Stoute bunch did sign the Turner document; then " 'Politicalizing'..."; then their resignations. If they felt as they said in their resignation, why sign a loyal opposition statement making considerably different points, with a completely different orientation?

Obviously, for one reason only: because the Turner document was factionally sharp. That is, it was bound to add heat to the discussion, would increase the fight (the characterizations "petty-bourgeois, left-centrist, opportunist", contained in it would certainly see to that), and because Comrade Turner has been a respected leader in this organization who had a reputation of trying his best to serve it well. So he would serve as a fine ornament to dangle before the membership as a 'cover' behind which the Ellens-Stoute people could hide, do their wrecking work, and at the same time look serious and 'respectable' to the other SL comrades. I hasten to say this is hardly a private view; rather, it was the commonly accepted opinion with the N.Y. majority for months. Dissenters from this conclusion will have an exceptionally difficult time interpreting the facts behind this conclusion in any other way.

IV. The Retreat From Trotskyism

Comrade Gordon wrote the following paragraph as the conclusion to "The SL the Minority and VO":

The Spartacist League has very grave weaknesses - in its functioning, its resources, its human material. And it has a strength - its uniquely correct political line. It is the particular political ideas of the SL which justify its existence as a separate organization. Let us not be so eager, as is the Minority, to sell our strength down the river in exchange for phantom schemes

and implied promises which cannot solve our problems. Those who support the Minority are headed for a political destination which they perhaps do not know yet, but which is liquidation of Trotskyism. (my emphasis-D.C.)

Coming as it does at the end of an article dealing with VO, the use of the word 'Minority' in that paragraph must be seen as dealing specifically with the Ellens-Stoute wing of the minority alone, and not the entire minority. Presumably, it was something like this that got Turner's goat. (In fairness to Comrade Gordon, of course, it has to be said that the majority was unaware there were internal differences over the VO question among the minority - these were never made known to the SL majority, and as of this writing still have not been. We knew, however the uses to which Ellens was putting VO and her report "Organizational Methods"; the minority was confronted by this and responded by telling us we were being "ludicrous", dragging around "red herrings"; we assumed, therefore, that the whole minority approved. So it now appears, although we cannot precisely reconstruct the dynamics of the split within the minority, that Comrade Gordon's document led to the split into 'loyal' and 'disloyal' factions.)

But, substituting only the words "Ellens-Stoute splitters" for "minority" in the paragraph quoted, the conclusion is not only accurate but prophetic: these people are rapidly in the process of shucking off their Trotskyist politics. What they are bound to create, in their new organization, is by the very logic of their position a "left" face of social democracy. I say this not to slander them but to characterize them. Far from representing a new or unique tendency, their position is quite an old one: many of the people who left the SWP in the post-war period over one question or another have gone into this form of politics; the present Philips-Miller tendency of the "anti-Spartacist bloc" is only the best known of many.

Drift And Method

The Ellens-Stoute people are rapidly moving away from revolutionary Marxism. This can be seen most clearly in a document which came into the N.O. on the same date as their resignations: it no doubt will be dealt with elsewhere. But even within the article " 'Politicalizing'..." this drift can be discerned.

In the section entitled 'False Comparison' of Gordon's "The SL, the Minority and VO", she shows that due to differences in size, etc., "VO certainly cannot be used as a measure of efficiency or effectiveness" then goes on to point out that our effective force in N.Y. is "in the range of one one-hundredth of VO's sheer numerical impact in Paris!" As a result our existence is more tentative and our functioning, obviously, much less efficient.

Again, one would assume, an obvious point. Yet what the minority does with it must be unique even by the peculiar standards of Marxistical sectaria. After labelling Gordon's statement of obvious facts the divising of an "elaborate mathematical discussion" they wade in:

Yes, comrades of the majority, the SL is smaller than VO. But since when is this "an objective situation" as stated on page 8 of L.G.'s "very fine" document? Obviously Cmd. G. has no concept of what Marxists mean by subjective and objective conditions. Subjective conditions are the consciousness - the embodiment of Marxist consciousness by the cadre, by the worker's vanguard - its composition and its class roots. If Cmd. G. includes all of these as "objective conditions," what are the subjective conditions? - one's intentions, will, ego or personality?

For Cmd. L.G. to pose the question of different sizes means that she

implicitly is holding up the SL as a model of how a Trotskyist org. the size of the SL should function. But even the majority knows that is not so. If the SL were serious about developing into a Leninist party its "expected efficiency of functioning" would, within the limits of its size, be very high in order to lay a solid and serious foundation for a future party. Instead, the cynicism, demoralization and elitism of the "leadership" has produced by far more ex-SLers than it has cadre.

Now, apart from that last remark to the effect that we have lost a number of people through "the cynicism, demoralization and elitism of the 'leadership'" (if you really felt that way about it, why have you consistently voted, along with everyone else, to expel them? or are you backtracking, trying to pick up Charlie Smith? What about Mage, Arons or Friedlander? Didn't you vote, along with the 'leadership' and the rest of the majority to expel the "Ross-Newman-Smith" group for gross infraction of discipline? These indictments of the leadership indict you, also!) one must say that this discussion of objective and 'subjective' factors is absolute nonsense from a Marxist perspective.

Materialism. Anyone?

The 'objective conditions' are the terrain we work on, combined with the quality and number of the forces at our command. The American working class is large and powerful, and we are aware of that; it is also virulently anti-communist and severely misled, and we are aware of that too. We are a small group, largely middle class in origin, largely declassé, with on the whole an above-average educational level among us. We did not come to consciousness on the crest of a working-class revolutionary wave, but out of the doldrums of the witch hunt, anti-communist atmosphere, without the working class much visible or in action. (This seems awfully obvious).

The differences between the French and U.S. workers in this respect are enormous. If you (the Ellens-Stoute group) are serious about comparing us with a European Trotskyist organization, you would do better to draw the parallel with West German Trotskyists (where are they?), since the terrain and objective circumstances are more similar. A large majority of the French working class considers itself either socialist or communist; American workers, almost all anti-communist, range from apolitical to the Democratic party. That's kind of important, although I note you didn't mention it.

It is not Comrade Gordon who "has no concept of what Marxists mean by subjective or objective conditions". Your little essay on the subject is at best a parody of Marxist analysis. What it shows, when you say that to make up for our size we should be functioning on a "very high" level, is that, apart from the fact that apparently you never understood Lenin or Trotsky, you have completely discarded a materialist mode of thought and now find yourselves stranded on the shoals of idealism.

This fundamental disorientation afflicting you is even worse in your section on the Negro Struggle, which I will take up later.

What Differences?

After getting no satisfaction in the oral or written discussion up to the date 6 August, Comrade Gordon made the wry remark in her article that "...perhaps this document will at least cause our minority to tell us where they stand on VO's political differences with the SL." To no avail, alas! We still don't know.

Oh, the Ellens-Stoute faction responded. "Your 'minority', Cmd. L.G., has already told you where they stand on VO's political differences with the SL," they wrote. Trouble is, they haven't...anywhere. We still don't know (and are unlikely to find out, either.)

We refer the reader to the sections of " 'Politicalizing'..." which carry the four succeeding scintillating subheads " 'The Politics of VO'--as Seen Through the Eyes of the Majority"; "More Distortions and Lies--This Time on the Negro Struggle"; "And More Distortions: The Arab-Israeli War;" "And More Distortions: The Soviet Bloc".

The Ellenites And The Negro Struggle

So far as the Negro Struggle is concerned, we do have differences with VO. They took a position, in October 1967, which argues that the Black Struggle might somehow generate spontaneously a Trotskyist leadership, that such leaders as H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael might on their own develop a socialist consciousness. Comrade Gordon accurately pointed out that "In methodology, this is not different from the Pabloists' abdication"; she later characterizes the position as having elements of "dual vanguardism", liquidationism and a capitulation to Black Nationalism within it. I think any SL'er reading the article setting out that position (in Class Struggle, October 1967) would agree that comrade Gordon is right, that the article does contain these serious flaws.

And how do the Ellens-Stoute people react? They say that "the majority is unable to deal with (these differences) honestly, for implicit in these differences is a criticism of the SL's functioning". Now this is just wild. Apart from the fact that VO has an incorrect position, which Comrade Gordon pointed out, our estimation of the class forces involved was correct. But the minority attacks us (I think this is what the passage means) for not supplanting the leadership of the Black Struggle! For Christ's sake: WITH LESS THAN 80 PEOPLE SCATTERED ACROSS THE COUNTRY? This is your idea of a sensible criticism? Hell, why be pikers? We haven't led the American Revolution to victory, either! Why don't you attack us for that, while you're at it? A "criticism of the SL's functioning" indeed!

(Just parenthetically, I should like here to ask Comrade Turner: are those the people you were hoping to replace the leadership with?)

On the question of the Arab-Israeli war, the situation is virtually the same. As the SL comrades in general know, our position on the war was one of revolutionary defeatism - on both sides. It was unique, I think, in U.S. radical politics, yet it clearly had its roots in Leninist politics. As a result, it was devastating in its impact. And it is not, of course, a minor point.

The Ellenites And The Middle East

At the time Ellens held the VO position on the war: that is, support to the Arabs. Since this was an important issue at the December 1967 Plenum - resulting in two rounds of discussion, with the lone supporter of the 'Arab Revolution' position finally wilting completely under the barrage of criticism - the PB's position received unanimous support from the participants. Naturally we were curious about Ellen's views on the subject, since she held a position of leadership in the organization.

But she just wouldn't say what she thought! Nor has she changed much: under the title "And More Distortions: the Arab-Israeli War" in the " 'Politicalizing' ..." document she writes:

Cmd. K.E. had written in asking what the SL position was and tentatively indicated support for the Arab side and has since not "bothered to say" what her position is on this or on many questions tossed around in snorting fits - especially when they are used solely to divert the discussion from the "political position" of constructing a workers revolutionary party.

Kind reader, after looking at this for a while, what do you think Ellens' position on this subject is? Do you think you know more about it now than you did before you read it? We should perhaps ask the other minorityites about that charge that the issue is a 'diversion' - if that is so, why didn't you bring it up at the Plenum? If this were only playing games to prevent the real question from coming up, the question of "constructing a workers' revolutionary party" - why didn't you say so then? Poor Comrade Tom, who caught the sharp criticism you were throwing around then (perfectly correctly, I might add) must really appreciate the fact you treated him that way just to create a diversion.

Diversions? Why doesn't Ellens answer the question and have done with it, so she doesn't have to create such absurd roadblocks as saying we're only bringing this up to avoid talking about important things! But she won't: she runs in circles, ducks, bobs, weaves, attempts to misdirect the subject matter - all so she doesn't have to answer that question.

The reader should not be misled. Ellens is of course being as disingenuous as she can, but it is not just that she wants to seem stubborn, principled or coy. She really won't under any conditions answer that particular question. Either she still agrees with the VO position - or she doesn't think it's important. Those of course are two possible answers. But I think the real reason is something else again.

The Reasons Behind Ellens' "Method"

One should keep this in mind. There is a definite pattern involved which appears whenever the Ellenites touch on theoretical issues where the Spartacist League and VO have differences. It can be noted in the three 'distorted' political questions mentioned together - the Negro Struggle, the Arab-Israeli War, the Soviet Bloc, and it is this: they never say either what VO's position is on any given subject, nor what they think of it. Instead they inevitably try to turn the question back on the SL and attack us for real or pretended weaknesses - even if they're not germane. Thus the Negro Struggle section attacks us for not being the "working class leadership party"; the Arab-Israeli section attacks us for creating a diversion and for "snorting fits"; the Soviet Bloc section comes out sheer gibberish (I defy anyone to explicate that passage!), but it all seems to be an attack on Comrade Gordon - although god only knows what for. But throughout, nowhere can anyone tell what VO thinks about any of these things - note how Ellens says she "indicated support for the Arab side", not "the VO side"; no criticism, please - nor what the Ellensites think, either about VO's positions or their own position.

As I said before, this document is an application for the VO 'franchise'. Whatever VO thinks, that will be what the Ellenites think (even if they're afraid to defend that line against us!). Ellens' "method" looks suspiciously like Wohlforth's: the air post from Europe. The only difference will be the difference in calibre between VO and the SLL.

About that "Soviet Bloc" question. It's become a burning question right at the moment, as a result of Soviet military intervention into Czechoslovakia.

Which has produced some interesting theoretical sidelights.

The SL's position was clear-cut, flowing directly from our political line: for Czech socialist freedom, condemnation of the intervention, no support for either Czech or Russian bureaucracies. This made our position again unique among the U.S. left - the Pabloites uncritically supported Dubcek, the Healyites held our position after they got their line from London (The Newsletter had earlier been making noises about a possible peaceful counter-revolution in Czechoslovakia, and presumably Wohlforth thought the SLL might try to be consistent; his group did not come out on a picket line with us). The ISC came out against both U.S. and Soviet "imperialism", PL had a line of sheer gibberish, and the other Stalinist groups came out in support of the Soviet Union.

What the now-departed minorityites thought is not known to us, since they also refused to come out with us. Their official line is: since we're not a mass party, demonstrations are a waste of time. But one really wonders, since a number of them did come out, earlier, for the French demonstration, if that is the case. The implication here is that they didn't, like Wohlforth, know what to think.

The problem for them is this: since VO holds to the position that the USSR is some sort of degenerated workers state while the "bloc" countries are still capitalist, logically, despite criticisms of the method, they should favor the intervention. That is, that's what we would do if we held their line. But they didn't follow their line, and opposed the intervention. Which can only mean they capitulated their line to some other force when the heat was on; in less civilized circles than the SL, this is usually taken to mean crawling before public opinion, in this case, anti-communist opinion.

So Ellens had a problem: whether to jump to the USSR side or the Czech side? She resolved it: not coming out for either by not coming out. This is only one side-product of airmail 'theory'.

For a group which tries to make of itself the nucleus of the Revolutionary Party, such methods are tragic and fatal. It is no accident that Wohlforth is so absurd sometimes or that we think he's pathetic - his apeing of the God-like Healy is only one of the side-effects of constructing your organization out of carbon paper. Thus VO has serious theoretical flaws but is at the same time a serious organization. The Ellensites, at best, will transmit only the flaws.

A Conclusion

That " 'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" is a veritable mine of absurdities is true; but that is largely due to the fact that the people who wrote it are in the position of trying to deal with ideas when they have none. Organizationally, they should not be underestimated (at least so long as they are in close proximity to the SL). Comrades should remember they have just carried out a not-unsuccessful wrecking operation within the SL: as a result this organization has lost the talents of a small number of its people and is by that much consequently weaker. As Comrade Gordon points out, we have very grave weaknesses within this organization in terms of our resources, our functioning, and our human material. It was Ellens' strength, her real talent (despite her general mediocrity), that she found a way successfully to exploit these weaknesses. And while Ellens now has the problem in trying to set up an operation with those people (in my estimation it will fall apart within six months), we depended quite a lot on those very people. Building, Ellens will no doubt discover, is far more difficult than smashing; nevertheless, in her chosen field of smashing, she did not do too badly.

28 August 1968

from: Socialist Current
London, 2 September 1968

to: Spartacist League
New York

Dear Comrades,

We have read the documents relating to the recent faction fight and also your letter to E. Crawford in which you say that the Minority has now left the organization. The following are our observations on the issues involved.

First, we are not in a position really to comment on the organizational disputes which preceded the faction fight. The irregular publication of your paper is something to be deplored and the lack of SL growth something to be regretted. But since we have not been too successful ourselves, to put it mildly, we don't propose to throw bricks.

Second, we find K[ay] E[llens]'s 'Organizational Methods' document as a schoolgirl attempt at an academic treatise and a none too accurate glorification of VO's set-up. When our comrade FR was in Paris last year (in August) he formed the impression that VO probably had quite a high proportion of P[etty] B[ourgeois] members and sympathizers and was probably successfully recruiting these precisely by its ultra-proletarian line. He formed this impression from the leading comrades he met (introduced by code name only), from the very well worked out theories which they had about detaching such PB members from their background (getting them to leave home, etc.) and from a 'public meeting' attended by about 150 persons on the edge of the Latin Quarter. In addition to the people attending, the things that struck him were: the tutor-student relationship between the solitary person on the platform and the audience and the manner in which the prospective audience was assembled in groups of about 5's and 4's, five yards or so apart in an otherwise quiet street, before, at a signal, drifting group-by-group down an alleyway, through a door into a courtyard, where a comrade was collecting one Franc apiece as an admission charge into the adjoining hall. After coming back, FR commented that it was all enjoyably conspiratorial and very studentlike. Certain things in KE's document also give us the same impression. The brain-washing techniques described on pages 1 and 2 and the artificial separation of husband and wife contacts (described on page 2) are things which few workers would tolerate (in France probably even less than in England, and in England probably even less than in the USA--though this is only marginal in degree). Has KE (or VO) any idea what working class life is like? We tend to doubt it from the little description. Again, there is the description (on page 6--point eleven) of leaving leaflets in 'strategic locations' (presumably the lavatories) where 'only the workers of the company can get to'. In England this kind of 'clandestine distribution' would just lead to contemptuous cracks ('The Phantom strikes again') and our guess is that [a] French worker's reaction would be in a similar vein. A potential working class leader has to be seen by his fellow workers, he has to be up front taking the shit, he can't hide behind a packing case.

Third, this apart and irrespective of how accurate KE's account of VO is, it is ridiculous to think that their organizational methods can be trans-shipped across the Atlantic, or even the Channel. VO's semi-syndicalist, conspiratorial techniques get certain results in France because of the fragmentation of the trade union movement there, the historical developments which have led up to this and the very low level of trade union consciousness which has resulted.

Fourth, there is of course the question of VO's larger politics, their positions on international and theoretical issues, etc., which KE did not raise but which L[iz] G[ordon] did (we think correctly). We have relegated our observation about these to almost the last because we think that VO itself puts them in a secondary category. Their insular approach to the world outside France is typified in our opinion by their lack of interest in our proposal last year to jointly develop connections in Germany (using, at that time, our address list). The politics themselves we find highly borrowed and not very creative, as well as being contradictory in essence: class is everything in France, but race more important elsewhere (including the USA).

In conclusion, and to return to the immediate issue, we feel that the faction fight has been a set-back to you, in as much as that you have lost members and have had to suffer the inevitable scars of such a fight. However, we agree with you that it was necessary to fight for a clear political position and this we [in] general agree with you on. We feel that VO was dragged into this polemic by the Minority unnecessarily from an objective, political standpoint, since any differences with them are another issue. However, it became the cement between a hoch-poch of different elements (it appears to us) ranging from KE, through incipient black nationalists to people just dissatisfied by SL's lack of progress, and so it was necessary to them at least.

Just as we are trying to learn from our own failures, you too we feel will be facing up to the dissatisfaction and the factional struggle which fed on it. We both face the problem of building the healthy revolutionary organization which we are always proclaiming. Sincere good wishes and fraternal greetings.

--S. Levy
for Socialist Current

CRAWFORD-GORDON EXCHANGE ON THE SL DISPUTE AND VO

London, 6 August 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

Since I last wrote I have been to France again. I am very sorry about liaising with your comrade who was there and giving him some introductions but I never contacted him as I was terribly busy while I was there. You will probably have read the special August issue of Lutte Ouvriere which I think is very good indeed--particularly the last chapter. Alas LO appears to be the only organisation which is really serious about unity and they have great reservations about unity with the JCR and PCI alone without bringing in the OCI which in some ways is a better type of outfit. The pro-Chinese groups though dedicated will probably find themselves in a strategical, tactical and theoretical impasse though if the repression goes on fiercely enough this may not surface. Do not believe all that you read in the Intercontinental Press/World Outlook, it is very sectarian as regards Lambert who even if he has shot his bolt in the University may well have grown outside among workers. For instance the Newsletter is speaking the truth for once when it claims that the initial strike and factory occupation was initiated by their comrades in Sud Aviation. Of course you can say that the question of who started it is immaterial but there you are. They did not lead the struggle (nobody did) but they triggered it off before anyone else.

A leading comrade, D.'s friend, is over here, on holiday really, but also seeing everybody. The Current do not appear to be very interested in hearing about France from me but there you are.

I met and spoke with Joel Geier of the ISC while I was in Paris. He was off to Czechoslovakia when I last saw him. We are in contact with this group there mentioned in World Outlook who want to start a left fraction or tendency. I can get you the address if you like and you could send them your lit. I think they will need a lot of theoretical help after the stultifying repression of the past period.

A friend of mine has gone to Cuba for what she thought was a cheap holiday but I gather it is a sort of training for guerrillas! Poor little thing I shudder to imagine what her highly respectable parents would think. She sounded from her letter rather fed up. Have you any addresses in Havana you would like me to pass on to her. She is not very developed politically but she is coming on very fast and is doing as best as she can in the camp in organising the English speaking contingent. Fortunately there are another 2 or 3 IS people and a Solidarist but they are all rather young. I gather from her letter that the German contingent are very enthusiastic--I can just imagine! Blond giants charging through the undergrowth carrying vast quantities of assorted iron mongery. Sometimes I am glad I'm just a decadent Englishman. Actually re-reading the letter it may not be a training for guerrillas at all. It is a bit ambiguous but it makes a better story if it is kept as that. I will try to find out more about the camp when she gets back in three or four weeks.

Will anybody else be across? I was very impressed with Comrade B. Geier tells me--though this is of course from a source that is of necessity prejudiced that you are a very inactive group always engaged in sectarian controversy. This is my impression though to be fair I generally agree with you over your differences with others.

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

P.S. I feel much happier over VO's line now. They may have made mistakes but in general I reckon they were justified.

* * * * *

London, 20 August 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

Thank you very much for your last packet which I got yesterday. I find the details of the faction fight interesting and with the exception of Gordon's document principled but at this distance it is quite impossible to make up one's mind. Certainly Seymour seems to have a conception of 'balanced' work. I would normally agree with him but of course our continental friends have got where they have by unbalanced work. Whatever you decide I think that the importance of consistency in your work should not be underrated.

If I have a criticism of the SL it is this: that after failing to get out a paper for 10 months with 1 full timer and 2 part timers in your office you have succeeded in producing about 70 pages of internal documents at the drop of a hat. Put like that it sounds unfair but most people would think you were lunatics--in your sense of priorities.

My regards to all the comrades.

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

* * * * *

London [received 27 August 1968]

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

If I may be permitted to leap into the faction fight from across the Atlantic I can only observe that Liz Gordon's document is an extremely dishonest one. The attempt to hang poor Ellens with all the weird and wonderful VO positions is quite disgraceful. Of course it is a political question but it surely does not involve every other political position under the sun. On page 2 your paragraph about a false comparison is disingenuous for they started with a group even

smaller than the first Sparts and not so long ago either. The meeting which started 45 minutes late was an OPEN one not an internal one where the discipline IS strict. Finally any suggestion that Ellens has received the VO franchise is quite disgraceful. VO would never behave in such a way of underhand manoeuvring it is quite alien to them. They are a good deal more principled than my own group past or present or indeed yours on present form.

However my chief feeling on reading Liz's document was one of disappointment. I adhere to the various Spart positions yet more important I always thought that you were honest in your political methods even if I sometimes thought you crazy in your tactics.

It would take too long to analyse the unpleasant tones of Liz's paper and its many sweeping misrepresentations. I expect it will be done within your organisation anyhow.

I may add that this opinion is also that of some of the leading VO people who are rather upset at the dishonesty rather than the disagreements which they expect.

Sorry to sound so irritable but I am rather annoyed.

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

* * * * *

London, 18 August 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

I am sending this to you by a roundabout way and it concerns the documents about your arguments on organisation.

I hope to God that you have not sent these things to France. The VO people are livid and furious. In Liz Gordon's attack on Ellens you a) identify the organisation in Ellens' document as VO. --- b) You have identified Lutte Ouvriere --- . The veiled reference to the self defense of the workers in Ellens' moreover might be misinterpreted to screw them, 'formation of armed bodies' etc.

I hope you realise what cunts you are if you have fired off these things all over the globe in pursuance of your little squabbles. I devoutly hope I have done you an injustice.

The VO people have photo copies of the documents and intend a reply on the political points to you. They maintain that you have misunderstood them on several issues but I will leave their own defense to them as I am quite sure that they are perfectly capable of it. There are however a few points of organisational fact that they will not deal with so I will.

First the three senior members are ELECTED by a general meeting once a year to their positions on a special Political Committee. Occasionally someone has stood against them but has not succeeded. They are also--as Political Committee members--on the CC. Other people are co-opted onto the CC. This is not a fixed constitution but will be altered as the group changes in size and composition. The only two faction fights they have had the members of the cells divided about equally 60-40 with the split in the CC. They have not had one expulsion!

After the faction fights everybody continued to work to build the organisation just as hard as before. They maintain that as they have all had the same formation politically they do not expect very sharp differences. However if they split off sections of the U.Sec. and Lambert as well as the pro-Chinese they will expect a different situation to appear. Incidentally do not believe all you read in the press of Healy or the U.Sec. about possible unity--it seems very, very unlikely.

WILL YOU PLEASE SHOW THIS PORTION OF THE LETTER TO YOUR POLITICAL BUREAU ONLY AND COMRADE ELLENS IF SHE IS NOT ON IT. I would prefer it if you destroyed it--the rest you can do what you wish with, doubtless you will think of several colourful roles for it.

[Edward Crawford]

* * * * *

New York, 28 August 1968

Edward Crawford
London

Dear Edward,

Well, you have certainly leaped into the fray--and landed smack on your face. The most important point involved is your championing of "poor Ellens" in the attribution of VO's positions to her. First of all, it is quite true that every political position does not automatically involve every other one, although of course they tend to be related, but you might consider the point that despite having been asked numerous times Ellens has never disassociated herself from a single one of VO's political positions on anything. Next, we are enclosing for your information the reply by Ellens and company to my document. This reply makes pure laughable nonsense out of your denial that Ellens has VO's positions, as she vehemently defends a number of their most important positions including the one which is central for Trotskyists, i.e. the methodology regarding the deformed workers states. And speaking of "unpleasant tones", you might keep an eye on the tone of the Ellens document. Some of the minor misrepresentations in the Ellens reply will be dealt with in another document, so I won't bother with them here.

Now, you state that "any suggestion that Ellens has received

the VO franchise is quite disgraceful". Well, let us say first of all that in this case we only posed the question. On the basis of the circumstantial evidence, though, if we had been dealing with any organization other than VO, we would have considered it proven. After close collaboration with VO (which we encouraged, by the way), Ellens returned to this country and immediately formed a secret faction in our organization of which the main verbal rallying point and recruiting pitch was the superiority of VO. During her factional tour to the West Coast, Ellens confined her factional presentation to the Bay Area internal local meeting to VO and its organizational methods. Perhaps we will include the Bay Area local secretary's transcript of her remarks to a future document. Finally, at the time that the factional situation reached its most intense pitch, Ellens was in contact with two important VO cadre who were visiting this country and discussed privately with them several times. The VO organization and leaders in France may well be entirely uninvolved in the factional dispute in the SL, and for their sake we hope they are. We consider the entire manner in which the fight was conducted on the part of Ellens and the outcome (more on that later) as very unlike the way in which we would expect VO to conduct itself in a faction fight. We hope they will not take lightly the possibility that their two people here may well be implicated in the situation. And as I said before, because VO has always behaved previously in a scrupulous and comradely manner toward us, we only asked the question of supposed VO franchise; had we been dealing with any organization other than VO, we would have considered the allegation proven by the evidence.

So you hope we haven't circulated our documents all over the globe? We would be interested in knowing how VO obtained photocopies of the documents, since our two organizations have never been in the practice of sending one another internal material. Are you responsible for sending documents with supposed security violations into France itself? Or is it another evidence of the possible collaboration which you dismiss out of hand?

Regarding misrepresentations of VO's positions, the course of the discussion and especially the Ellens document which we enclose makes it quite clear that the Ellens Minority identifies itself totally with VO and considers itself an American counterpart of VO, although you have put yourself on record as denying that. However, my original document made it quite clear that we do not accept this identification as necessarily going the other way around--i.e., we do not accept Ellens as the official spokesman for VO. We think VO is better than Ellens is. We would be very interested in hearing from VO their objections and clarifications, inasmuch as we are much more interested in VO's views than in the sundry non-politicals of the Minority. If there are misinterpretations of their positions in my document, we would like to hear from VO regarding them. However, the new Ellens document makes it quite clear, in the impassioned defense of the positions attributed to them, that we have not misinterpreted any of their positions.

I would be interested in knowing how you know so much about "the meeting which started 45 minutes late", since to my knowledge you have never even met our comrade who told me about the meetings in question.

Finally, now that you have placed yourself in solidarity with Ellens and her Minority, you might be interested in knowing that they have walked out of the Spartacist League. Their orientation is entirely liquidationist; as the most grotesque example, they at this point do not envision their even putting out a publication, but intend to submerge entirely into the unions.

We have been fascinated by your opinions. We note that you have been rather bold in jumping into the fray from a great distance. While we of course do not object to that in principle, you might notice that we have been considerably more cautious with regard to the English situation at various times; despite having followed it very closely and had representatives in England at several points, we have never given tactical advice to our friends in England.

We would of course be interested to hear what else you have to say.

Yours fraternally,
Liz Gordon

P.S. Also enclosed is the latest issue of our paper. We particularly direct your attention to the way in which we treated the erstwhile Trotskyist organizations in France.

* * * * *

London, 2 September 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

I received your letter on August 30. I realize that when I write to you I have to choose my words very carefully as you will if possible misinterpret them if it suits. I have come to the conclusion that you have a positive genius for driving people away from you. Thus you win the faction fight but fail to build. I will deal with your letter by paragraph.

In your 1st paragraph I take your point though you and I must distinguish between Ellens and her faction (or group). I doubt if they all follow a VO line. I know her attitude on the Middle East war but that is all and anyway I thought it had nothing to do with the subject under discussion. Both documents are pretty vicious and I do not like the tone of either. I note Gordon's was first.

In the 2nd paragraph I can only think that the two VO cadre were personal friends on holiday if they were the people I think they were. I do not really see why Ellens should not see them. Incidentally, even if they were leading cadre and advised her they would be quite out of their depth in the sort of game you were both carrying on. They would be absolute virgins in this sort of thing (as I obviously am). Their leading 3 people know about it but the others have never done this sort of thing.

Your 3rd paragraph is the end of the road for me. You seem to imply that I have acted in some stupid way or alternatively that I am some link in a chain of conspiracy and intrigue between Ellens and VO. I will accept some responsibility as my letters were carelessly written but you had better accept my good faith. If you do not apologise for what I believe is a disgraceful smear of a personal nature you can regard this correspondence as closed. I can then give you an explanation but I will not deign to until then.

In the 4th paragraph. I have not put myself on record as denying that Ellens identifies as VO. Do not twist my words. I merely said she had not received the franchise. There was nothing in her written material to suggest that she identified with all VO positions. It was also irrelevant to drag it into the faction fight in your 5th paragraph. The meeting which started late, I refer you to my reply to paragraph 3.

In your 6th paragraph you state that I have placed myself in solidarity with Ellens--again a distortion. I merely said that in one majority document there was a certain dishonesty. Otherwise I did not take sides.

7th paragraph. I take your point and my letters were loosely phrased. I think however that you jumped the gun in attributing a variety of positions to me which I did not have.

Finally if you think about it you may begin to understand why the British left regards the American left with a mixture of contempt and amusement; "they have nothing to do but faction fight" is the general feeling.

Give my regards to all the comrades and Ellens if you still talk to her!

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

P.S. I may occasionally appear to be rude and offensive. I may refer you to the transitional programme, "to tell the truth as it really is". I say what I think. You may not like it but there it is. On the other hand I am not playing some subtle sort of game.

* * * * *

New York, 14 September 1968

Edward Crawford
London

Dear Edward,

I am extremely confused by your last letter. The thing that seems to have upset you most is the question of how VO got copies of our internal documents. First you accused us of having sent documents with supposed security violations into France and told us we were "cunts" for doing so. We replied that we have not sent our internal discussion documents "all over the globe", especially to France, as VO and the SL have never been in the practice of exchanging internal material, and asked whether you yourself had sent them. You respond by calling this "a disgraceful smear of a personal nature" and announce you are willing to break relations with us over it. Actually, had you sent VO our internal documents we would

have considered it a breach of confidence, certainly, but not the ultimate crime. But let's take your reasoning further. We didn't send VO the documents. You didn't either? Okay. Then it is reasonable to conclude that Ellens did. So if you think that your sending them would be the ultimate crime of which the suggestion requires an apology or else, then what kind of super-criminal conduct is it on the part of Ellens, who was as an SL member absolutely bound by our discipline, unlike you, to keep internal matters confidential?

You have provided us with the information that VO's three top leaders knew about the faction fight Ellens was running in the SL. We take your point that you are obviously not any kind of experienced factional operator, but surely you realize what improper conduct this is. VO supposedly has fraternal relations with the SL. Yet they are aware that Ellens is building a faction in the organization largely on the basis of VO patriotism and denouncing the SL as petty-bourgeois, semi-white chauvinist and anti-working-class. And they do nothing! Let us even accept that it was not their idea, that they are not sending Ellens instructions, maybe they don't even agree with everything she says. Shouldn't they at least let us know what's going on? You keep insisting that VO can't be held responsible for Ellens. But Ellens from the day she got back to the U.S. was forming a conspiracy--yes, a real conspiracy--working on secret contacts who were not members of the organization, building another organization. Even if VO doesn't know exactly what she is doing, they do know that it's being done in their name. If they are not in solidarity with it, it is their responsibility to disassociate themselves from it. And if they are--if they agree that the SL is centrist, non-Leninist, petty-bourgeois and anti-working-class--what are they doing with fraternal relations with us? The Ellens faction was underground until she surfaced it by submitting her document, "What is a Working-Class Perspective?" at the end of May. Even at that time it was denied that there was a faction. At that time it was only an ugly suspicion that Ellens was letting VO in on all this. But VO knew differently, no? Why didn't they tell us? Don't they realize that by this they lend their support to everything which Ellens is doing in their name? I HOPE FOR VO'S SAKE THAT THE ELLENS GROUP DOES NOT HAVE THE VO FRANCHISE and for yours that Ellens doesn't have yours either.

Nobody would ever have held you responsible for knowing all the dirty things Ellens has been doing here. Nobody would have expected you to know that VO has been her main verbal recruiting device (aside from personal insults and slanders about members of the leadership.) Only you put yourself in the position of having to know. You were so sure that VO was irrelevant to the faction fight. The "'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" document refutes you. Ellens and the two other members of the Minority who signed it defend the VO methodology on East Europe, the lack of traditional democratic-centralist organizational forms in VO, VO's line on the Negro question. We knew they would, because the fight was being conducted here and we were in a position to know that simplified VOism is Ellensism. You gave VO blanket absolution on the question of contact and improper conduct, but your own evidence of the knowledge of the three VO top leaders refutes this. You should have stuck to points where you

were on more solid ground, where you were in a position to know. But you put yourself on the spot yourself. We can cite you chapter and verse of acts of dishonest conspiratorial indiscipline on the part of Ellens. Nobody would have expected you to know anything about them or to judge on the basis of that knowledge. But you were so sure that "poor Ellens" was being crucified. You could have acted to forestall the exacerbation of relations between the SL and VO, if you had stuck to what you knew about--told us what comradely and honest people you know them to be, what you know about their intentions towards us if you know their intentions were not to split and wreck. Instead what we got from you was more fuel on the fire, poison-pen letters and accusations.

Finally, on crazy factional zeal. Let us not forget that it was Ellens and the Minority who insisted on having a lengthy, exhaustive internal discussion, got us to tie up half our resources on it, and then walked out. That was an example of crazy factional zeal at best, and sabotage at worst. We are a very small and weak organization. It is not easy for us to afford a major factional discussion. Perhaps you think we like having our newly-acquired editor for the paper, our New York City local organizer and our most experienced typist-stencillist (that's me) spend a major proportion of their time writing documents. Do you think we liked finding out that the people who had forced us into this situation considered that they were in a social-democratic, petty-bourgeois opportunist organization that they wouldn't have stayed in no matter what and couldn't wait to get out of? If you find yourself by some strange accident in the SPGB, would you insist that they tie themselves up in knots writing replies to you and then split in the middle? Having a fundamentally different orientation on everything, wouldn't it just be more honest to walk out and found your new group without pretending you wanted to have a discussion about the organization's line and allocation of forces? But of course to them it's just further proof of our inadequacy that we can't carry out a million other activities while fighting with them.

Yours fraternally,
Liz Gordon

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London, 18 September 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

Thank you very much for your kind letter in reply to my rude one. There is however a further misunderstanding to clear up. As far as I know the first the VO comrades knew about your faction fight was when I told a member of their CC in August. I also gave him (by hand) a copy of the first Gordon document as it dealt with their positions. There was thus no problem of it going through the post. Therefore as far as I know their committee of 3 knew nothing of your problems--I merely said that they had had experience of faction fighting in the past. I assumed--in this case falsely--that you were in the habit of sending stuff to them. I am sorry if you think that

this violates your internal discipline and if you came to the conclusion that I, or they, were involved in your quarrels. If you do not wish me to divulge any matter in an internal document that you send me I will of course abide by your wish. However at the time I did not see how you could have any objection. (I had at that time received only Ellens' document of the organisation of a foreign group dated in April and the one I mentioned before.)

When I spoke to them in August they expressed interest and said how much they would like to know about Ellens' concrete proposals for reorganisation of SL work. They obviously had received nothing from her. I am sure that if there is any blame attached it is to me and to your misinterpretation of my remarks rather than to them. What annoyed me was the implication that I was engaged in some underhand manoeuvre which I was not. I sent the letter to a comrade's private address because I did not want it to be read and this address was given to me by Roger A. I did not know at the time to what faction this comrade was attached. Communication is made difficult because for certain reasons which you can perhaps guess I do not wish to be too precise. VO are, after all, suffering from repression and could be liable to fierce sentences in the courts. As far as I know the VO people have not got copies of any factional documents other than the one in the first packet to me. Ellens may have sent others to them but I do not know and it is difficult to find out for you as VO do not answer letters and they have a lot on their plate at the moment.

Let us hope that is an end of it.

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Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

P.S. I have neither sent or received anything from Ellens.

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C O P Y

London, 24 September 1968

[Kay Ellens]

Dear Comrade,

Thanks for your letter dated 20 September which I got yesterday. I have had a bit of a quarrel with the SL about you but I received a lot of documents. I got 85 pages in all made up as follows: 1st packet, document on a foreign group by Ellens and a document on "SL, the Minority and VO" by Liz Gordon. 2nd packet comprised "Whether the SL?", "What is a Working Class Perspective?", "'Politicalizing' to Avoid Politics" and 3 documents by Seymour etc. etc.

I do not really have a position on the faction fight except that I thought Liz's piece on the Minority and VO was rather dishonest and

did not really answer the points which it attempted to answer. I said so and was soundly abused for my pains--to be honest I had gone in for some abuse too over the question of the careless divulging of information. I was accused of playing some machiavellian role in the dispute which was not the case. The SL seemed to think that you were put up to split them by VO. Alas VO have more important things to think about I am sure.

- - -

I went back to Paris at the end of July. I met A. and D. who were over here discussing with us and who helped Cliff with his pamphlet. No I am not in close touch. Our people at the SDS conference at Frankfurt heard rumours that there are splits appearing in the JCR over the possibility of fusion with VO. The guevarist wing is against it apparently. However these are only rumours. I hope to know more at the end of the week.

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

cc: SL

P.S. A little anecdote from Frankfurt. One of the revolutionary 'theorists' let flow a cloudy mass of Hegelian waffle saying "I apologise for empiricism comrades" every time he brought a fact into his speech!!

* * * * *

New York, 14 October 1968

Edward Crawford
London

Dear Comrade Crawford,

We are writing in reply to your last letter which took up the question of private contact between VO and Kay Ellens, when she was still an SL member. We note first of all that you have assumed the role of a quasi-attorney for VO, which under the circumstances we find somewhat peculiar and uncalled for. Without actually saying that you know for a fact that there was no such contact between Ellens and VO, you make every assertion short of that.

The explanation you give for how VO became informed of the factional dispute in the SL is that you turned some documents over to VO in August, and that you believe this to be the first that VO had heard of the matter. We can document that your memory of the time sequence serves you correctly because we mailed out three items together--the Ellens "Organizational Methods" report, the document by Stoute and Ellens ("What is a Working Class Perspective?") and the Gordon document ("The SL, the Minority and VO"). The Gordon document was dated 6 August; thus all three documents--the first ones circulated by us in the internal discussion--must have been mailed to you after that. In the normal course of things it would have taken at least a week to get the documents produced and mailed. Thus they would have been received by you in mid-August.

Now, we know the following things. We know that from at least a month before you could have given these documents to VO, the three VO top leaders were aware that Kay was in factional "difficulties" within the SL. We know that the VOers who visited the U.S. this summer (prior to Ellens' split) were in each case in private correspondence with Kay. We know that Kay was aware that they were coming beforehand, although we were not. Further, both VOers saw Kay and discussed with her before dropping in unannounced on us. (With us, they carefully avoided any discussion of our internal differences, even though one VOer actually inadvertently saw and partially read in our office an internal document of the Majority.) The visiting VOers gave every circumstantial evidence of maintaining a full private contact with Kay.

Regarding the question of whether VO was up to their necks in the SL situation--i.e. was kept thoroughly informed by Kay: while we know this for a fact and can prove it, to any sensible political person it should be a matter of kicking in an open door. From the time of her return here, Kay considered the SL "social-democratic" trash and VO the world's greatest--indeed perfect--organization. It would be peculiar indeed if Kay didn't keep VO fully informed and turn to them for advice.

Beyond this, we have no idea regarding the VO-Kay relationship. Nonetheless we and VO were on friendly fraternal terms and Kay was doing her damndest to wreck the SL. Knowing VO's generally decent attitude toward other declared Trotskyists, we imagine that VO feels acutely embarrassed and would like to wish away the implied disloyalty to the SL with whom it had been on good and hitherto honorable terms.

So, Comrade Crawford, while you write that VO proposes to take us to task for our expression of political differences with VO which VO feels are unfounded, distorted or unjust, we really need to know upon what terrain such a discussion might take place. We would like to know what degree of responsibility VO took for Kay and her tactics when she was in our organization, but politically and emotionally theirs, and what responsibility they take now for her new group. If they disclaim responsibility, then we would like to know why they permitted the private contact. (And, parenthetically, if they do not disclaim responsibility, if they accept Kay as their legitimate political representative, we would like to know why they did not inform us that since they had discovered, along with Kay, that the SL was a "social democratic" organization, they did not then announce that they could not maintain fraternal relations organization-to-organization and why they chose instead to have their supporter wage a fight by guerilla warfare rather than openly and politically.)

We would be obliged if you would assist us in conveying our questions to the VO people, because of the troubled conditions in France just now. (While Kay has had no lack of private and secure means of contact, neither she nor the VOers supplied us with such means, despite our requests.)

To aid you, Comrade Crawford, in understanding our concerns, you have but to consider an identically analogous situation which might have come about last year. You were in Socialist Current and stood distinctly closer to the SL on some questions, such as the Arab-Israeli war. Had you then launched, covertly like Kay or openly, a struggle within SC, and had you also sought private contact with us and declared to SC that the SL was the model for which you were striving, we would have been faced with a choice. As principled people, Comrade Crawford, and moreover as people experienced in factional struggle among Trotskyists--something that VO may well not be, in view of their past isolationism and belief in a "family of Trotskyism"--we would have then done one of two things, based upon our evaluation of the politics as well as on other considerations: (1) We might have turned to SC and stated that in view of the polarization within SC, and because the issues were sufficiently deep-going, we had to declare our support to one wing, thus tabling the organization-to-organization fraternal relations; or (2) we could have continued to deal with SC fraternally, by keeping all political correspondence open, with carbon copies going to all the parties concerned, especially to SC's leadership, by continuing to expect that any political involvement of our own members and sympathizers while in England would be co-ordinated with SC, etc., thus by these means making it clear that we considered the unity of our fraternal associate of greater importance than the differences which divided it. As you will recall, in the specific case, before you left Socialist Current, we did, by implication, by keeping our hands off the English situation, follow the latter course. We hope that this example will assist you in understanding our attitude on the VO situation.

Fraternally,
Liz Gordon
Jim Robertson

cc: Socialist Current

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London, 15 October 1968

Spartacist

Dear Comrades,

Thank you very much for the two packets which I got from you containing further factional material and the PB minutes for 16 September. You finally convinced me with a few minor reservations but I was rather disturbed to notice in the latter document that you state on page 2 that you will "release Crawford's letter proving this allegation" when you refer to Ellens being in contact with VO's top leaders. Did you receive my letter of 18 September?

To recapitulate I merely said that VO's leaders had experience of vicious faction fights--not of this particular one. My fault for ambiguous phrasing and yours for jumping to conclusions which I think you do far too much. This sort of thing made me doubt some of your other material. Anyway as far as I knew VO know nothing of the fight until the middle of August when I showed them the first two documents

that I had received. They then in the person of A. expressed interest. In addition the tone of a letter Ellens sent to me on 20 September certainly did not suggest that she was in close contact with VO as she enquired whether I was and asked for news of them. After all since your fight started in about April things have been going on in France and in June the organisation went underground. Have a sense of proportion for Christ's sake!! How could K.E. have set up lines of communication with VO? She may have wanted to of course. There was of course M. and her companion who were over but I do not think they are quite as senior as you were led to believe. Without being able to offer any documentary proof or anything I am convinced that VO have taken no part whatsoever in your faction fight.

However A. did express disappointment to me that nobody, but nobody, and he expressly mentioned SL and IS, had replied or responded to their attempts to initiate a polemic on Cuba, the Negro question etc. I myself would greatly welcome a reply and a further analysis of your position on the Negro question. I know that there are differences in the VO ranks on this even if they are solid on Cuba and if they tend to go off that line they tend to whole hog state capitalism I think. They also had very considerable differences on the Arab-Israeli dispute but here I believe that the majority won over the minority which was more or less on our position.

Once again I find myself in complete agreement with you on the Stalinist states, the formulation of the Negro question, the Middle East etc. Where I have reservations it is on your local line--attitude to the PFP, the Black Panthers, Rank & File etc. However these are not pressing practical matters in the U.K. and therefore do not greatly affect my relationship with you.

A few further comments about VO. I brought up the same point as you about the degeneration of the FI and its social base. They appeared to concede this but it may have been due to the language problem where nuances get lost. And again either you or K.E. may have done them an injustice on the questions of factions I feel. They are not so completely petty-bourgeois in composition if you include all their so-called sympathisers who work far harder for them than most members of other organisations and I have seen a hell of a lot more of them than Socialist Current. They claimed about [30%] workers before May-June and they do not lie though how many of these were white-collar I do not know. They then totalled about [10-12 times the size of the SL]. A greater weakness is their crazy structure of only [20-25%] full members with voting rights, all part-timers and 90% (yes, no mistake!) Jewish!!! It really does sound like a Judaeo-Bolshevik plot!!! Though I feel that they are often uncomfortable about this constitution they state that it has never been a point of dispute in the organisation.

Last of all the question of clandestinity. I think their modesty is linked up to this. It has drawbacks as well as gains but in the French context they may well be right. I am thinking partic-

ularly of a mass Stalinist party, as well as recent French history. When one asks them what they would recommend in Britain they are evasive and take refuge in generalities (and I am speaking of A. here) and simply say that the same principles apply. Thus when A. expressed great interest in wishing to get hold of K.E.'s practical proposals in the U.S. I thought myself this might be because they had no ideas themselves.

Very recently I got the impression from vague hints from some more recent contacts and lowly people in the organisation that they will be more systematic and serious in their international work to the extent of setting up mini-VOs. But again I am pretty certain that they intend to do this only in Spain, Portugal, Italy and perhaps Belgium. In the first 3 their clandestinity might pay off. They certainly do not intend anything elsewhere in U.K., U.S.A. or Scandinavia or indeed anywhere that Napoleon's eagles did not fly. More seriously anywhere that does not send immigrants to France. When I asked them what they had heard of the situation in the States they said it was a mess. This suggests very faintly that they were not impressed with K.E.--the report that M. had made to them presumably. Also there has been a group in Belgium for some years which called itself Voix Ouvriere but which never as far as I know got "the franchise" as you put it. It had all their positions too. They are not interested in that kind of thing. The new turn to the other latin states will be much more serious.

My guess is that they will become still more reserved towards you without taking up K.E. However a polemic with them on the subjects I mentioned would do a lot of good. I am setting up channels of communication to France for my own organisation and I will certainly forward stuff for you if you wish. Write [directly] for open political discussion and publications. - - -

Here in Britain Healy has suddenly sprung to life and as you have seen he is holding a big conference. It may well be a big success but whether he can hold anything afterwards is another matter; he has done this several times before. He has stated that he will bring out a daily as you have seen by next September. His plans MUST I would have thought depend on the old Morning Star packing up and he may have heard something from inside the CP. I believe the Morning Star is in a very shaky state. I do not think Gerry can possibly hold a daily which is a killing thing. Previously he avoided being pinned down to a date.

Is there any information that you want from these letters? As far as I am concerned they are 'grande peine et dure' with my one finger typing and lousy typewriter and I am not unemployed as far as International Socialism is concerned. So if the stuff is irrelevant for God's sake say so.

Yours fraternally,
Edward Crawford

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New York, 21 October 1968

Edward Crawford
London

Dear Edward,

This is in reply to your letter of 15 October, which seems to have crossed one of ours in the mail. We are very pleased that you have anticipated the main point of our last letter, to request that you transmit our ideas and questions to VO for us, and we therefore readily accept your offer to do so gratefully and with both hands.

I can readily understand that you are beginning to feel a bit bogged down by our correspondence. This discussion is perhaps getting a bit redundant by now, but your information and opinions have been very valuable indeed to us, so much so that we are in the process of stenciling up the exchange (suitably edited vis-a-vis security) for the information of our comrades internally.

The rest of this letter was originally intended as a small footnote, but has been mushrooming in my mind on the way from the post office (where I read your letter) to the typewriter. You seem convinced that we frequently make unfounded assumptions (assuming the worst at all times about everybody), leap to conclusions, etc. I would like to try to convince you that our inferences about Ellens and Stoute are well founded, although made often on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

First of all, the reason for the necessity to rely on circumstantial evidence and inferences is that practically the entire political activity of Ellens and Stoute since the former's return here was concealed from us, so that what we had were little, precise bits of information that would sneak through by their carelessness. For example, the VO comrades who visited here didn't realize the implications of the casual admission that one of them had already seen Kay at the time she (the VOer) first dropped in on us. However, we knew that Kay was underground, so that a way of getting in touch with her was not common knowledge, and the VOer could not have reached her by any address she might have given them when she was in France because she had moved rather recently. So we were able to confront Kay, who was forced to admit that the VOer had written to her prior to coming to visit the U.S., although she had not written us, nor had Kay informed us of the forthcoming visit. It turns out that both the visitors--who were not "companions" but came over here separately--had informed Kay of their visit previous to their arrivals, and in at least one case Kay had instructed one of them to contact her, explicitly before seeing any other SLers. Kay's address after her move could not have been known to them unless they had been in constant communication with her or had access to somebody else in France who had.

Also you should realize that we know Stoute and Ellens, and know that they are not factionally inexperienced babes in the wood. They have been through some hot faction fights previously and in 1961 they at our instruction, worked all night secretly in the SWP headquarters making a duplicate of the Young Socialist mailing list for our ten-

gency when we feared expulsion. Naturally, we wouldn't have expected you to know their previous political and factional history, but I wish you wouldn't assume that we always base our characterizations on crazy factional zeal rather than on observation, evidence, serious consideration and previous experience.

Another, more telling, example of how the process of political inference works is the question of our past predictions of the Minority's future course. Obviously, when dealing with the future, there is no "hard evidence" to work with, and one must operate on the basis of interpolation and projection from the present. (Thus the method is not very different from trying to determine political realities when the "hard evidence" is concealed.) And I must say I think our record is pretty good, although we were at fault in being factionally not alert enough and in taking too many protestations of good faith and non-factional intent at face value at first.

First we began to get suspicious that there was a secret faction, which was strenuously denied for months and is now, of course, confirmed to the fullest. We asserted that Kay was in her head a VOer and was trying to build a mini-VO; this was of course denied until the impassioned adulations of VO in Minority documents made this ludicrous. We predicted that Kay and Shirley had a split perspective, which was vigorously denied until the time of the split. We accused these two of being "undergrounders", which was also denied (Stoute repeatedly insisting that the reason she didn't have a telephone was because she owed the phone company money--until a Majority comrade offered to pay her phone bill for her) and we predicted that as soon as the faction split they would all "go underground". This was amusingly confirmed within a week of the split, when we received a postcard from one of Ellens' supporters requesting us to destroy all record of his address and telephone number and communicate with him only via his post office box. We characterized the Minority's course as semi-syndicalist and liquidationist politically, and compared them to the Johnson-Forrest split of 1947-50 from the Trotskyist movement. As I wrote you previously, one of the first things we found out from them after their split was that they had no plans for bringing out a public propaganda organ, presumably in order to concentrate in the unions. We have now received further confirmation of their politically liquidationist intentions. Stoute and Ellens drove out to visit one of our members-at-large (an "m-a-l" is a member who is isolated in a locality where there are no other SLers) to try to convince her (unsuccessfully, I might add) to leave the organization. They told her that they intended in the near future to move all their people out of New York City to some important Midwest working-class industrial center. Although they probably do not know enough about the history of the movement to realize it, pulling out of the political center of the country in order to get "closer" to the working class was one of the first things the Johnson-Forrestites did as they started on their liquidationist course.

There are undoubtedly other aspects of the prediction picture which I have overlooked, because it's hard to remember things which moved very quickly from being daring (and much-denounced) predictions

and attributions to being obvious and accomplished fact.

So while we are always wary of being hasty in our assumptions and are willing to be convinced that we are wrong, it is not impossible to infer correctly from fragmentary indications.

Yours fraternally,
Liz Gordon

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