



A split in the League for the Fifth International

Mon, 05/06/2006 - 22:00

A split has occurred in the League for the Fifth International. A minority of members - most of them members of the British Section - have been expelled for secretly drawing up detailed plans to split the League on the eve of its seventh congress, due before the end of July.

This split plan had not the slightest excuse. Until the discovery of these plans no disciplinary measures have been taken by the majority against the minority. No violation of restriction of their rights to argue their positions within our organisation has occurred. Nor have the splitters, up to the last minute, argued that their views and those of the majority were programmatically incompatible. Therefore to secretly plan to split the League and indeed, as we will show, to damage it in every way they could, was a totally unprincipled and disloyal act. No serious organisation could tolerate such a violation of its fundamental right to exist. To expel them is an elementary act of self-protection.

A grouping of members had been waging an internal struggle for two years, first as an informal grouping, then as a tendency, then finally as a minority national faction in the British Section and then as an international faction. No disciplinary measures whatsoever were taken against them. They were accorded all their rights, they presented alternative documents, were able to speak to them in all the sections of the League they chose to attend. Since the launching of our pre-congress period in January, 10 internal bulletins have carried this discussion over international perspectives and the tactics and tasks for building the organisation. Over the last month the sections have held national aggregates of members to decide on which basic documents, those of the Majority or the Minority should be the basis of debate at congress.

The only problem for the minority faction was that outside the British Section and the four members of the Australian section their support was negligible. They recognised they had no chance of winning a majority at the congress and were unwilling to continue within the League after it. They described the prospect of having to remain in the League as being 'trapped'.

This is nonsense. The League is a voluntary organisation and no one is obliged to remain in an organisation whose programme and policies they reject. Had the comrades simply announced that they were leaving for fundamental political reasons we would have condemned these political positions and said farewell, with some regret since some of the comrades have been members for twenty years or more. But instead of an honourable exit, they broke obligations that should be elementary for working class militants as long as they remain members of an organisation.

Indeed the actions they were planning to carry out - in order to damage in every way the organisation they were members of - were truly shameful, a real stain on their political record. This method will disfigure the internal life of any new organisation they attempt to create and should make them objects of scorn and suspicion within the broader labour movement. If this is how they behave to an organisation that has treated them with respect as long time comrades, which has fully accorded them all their rights, what further degeneration can be expected?

The evidence for this appalling behaviour is undeniable: thanks to the fact that we have been sent all the faction's electronic correspondence with one another. What does it reveal?

At a meeting of the Minority Faction at the Workers Power (Britain) pre-congress aggregate on the 10th June, they decided to split from the organisation, make preparations for a new organisation and campaign to inflict maximum damage on the League.

The main issue of debate had been whether to split at the League's Seventh Congress in July or to boycott the Congress, break discipline and intervene against the League into the International Conference of the REVOLUTION youth group, and hold a 'founding meeting' in London while the League meets in the Czech Republic. All of them make it clear that the only question was which could cause most damage to the League.

It is clear from the emails that, in an online 'referendum', a clear majority favoured an early split before the congress, because they feared their own demoralisation as a result of having to argue with the majority at the congress. They feared that they would either 'get trapped' by having no excusable pretext for leaving or would have to walk out after a heavy defeat. Instead they have decided to hold a founding conference in London with the British minority and the two Australian delegates. The latter were brazenly encouraged to get the money for their fares paid from the League for attending its congress and then attend the split meeting instead.

The International Faction talk spitefully about the need to 'maximise the chaos and disarray into the ranks of the organisation we leave behind?', to 'disorientate and demoralise' majority members and to be 'particularly aggressive' to young supporters of the majority to 'make them ask themselves if politics is really for them?' (Mark H, 'Re: Congress and Tactics?', June 23rd 2006) They then propose expropriating contact and membership lists, materials and equipment from the London office in the week before the split as part of a plan to materially cripple the League (Mark H, 'Re: Congress and Tactics?', June 23rd 2006).

In addition Workers Power (Australia) voted unanimously at its aggregate to support one of its members 'ignoring Majority faction dictates at the Revo Conference 2006' i.e. to break from the League policy of continuing the work of strengthening international democratic centralism within REVOLUTION and instead fight for it to completely break its links with the League. (Lisa F, 'WPA Aggregate/Faction meeting'),

The Faction planned to cease paying League subs from July and began transferring money to a new bank account, having discussed a subscription scale for their new organisation. Some of them it seems have already cancelled their subscriptions.

The Faction has entered into communications with organisations and individuals hostile to the League in Austria and has a project of 'regroupment discussion' listing an assortment of centrist and sectarian organisations, including some who split from the League over issues on which the then faction leaders totally supported the majority.

Clearly as a result of this extended (but inadvertent) confession, the International Secretariat of the League had to take action to protect the League. It has expelled the faction, with of course the right to appeal to our Congress - though it is hard to see what such an appeal could consist of faced with such damning evidence. As one of the faction leaders remarked in one of his emails: 'if there are any more leaks we are dead ducks.'

We will not suggest that the reason for this was that the comrades are all bad people, however reprehensible their actions. People do not split an organisation they have built for thirty years in a fit of moral collapse. The reason is a rapid process of political degeneration.

In essence, the Faction evolved from a rejection of national perspectives in Britain. In 2004 the relative downturn in the class struggle, in the antiwar movement in the anticapitalist or anti-globalization movement after the high point of 2001-2003 convinced the faction leaders, then only an informal grouping, that the key issues of WPB's perspectives - the fight around the slogan of a new workers party, the need for a rank and file movement, the fight for the Fifth International in the European Social Forum - all had to be dropped in favour of a tailist and routinist perspective in the trade unions.

Connected with this they wanted to stick with the tactic of critical electoral support for Labour, exaggerating the scale of Labour's pro-working class reforms, the continued loyalty to Labour, the illusions in Gordon Brown etc. Thus they maintained that there was no resonance for a call for new workers' parties or electoral alternatives to New Labour. They minimised the significance of the RMT and FBU breaks from Labour, they minimised the significance of the real

decline of the Labour vote that year.

There was, they said, no resonance for the call for a new working class party. The majority correctly characterized this as tailism, basing their demands not on the needs of the working class but on the existing consciousness of the main body of the class. In this way they failed to give a clear political lead to the vanguard who showed a desire to break from Labour, though it has as yet arrived at no clear decision on what the political alternative should be. The Minority would have had us abandon the role of Marxists which is to show the right way, to trailblaze, to offer political leadership, not to follow where the working class as a whole was going, only raising slogans where they already have 'resonance'. In two national conferences of Workers Power (Britain) the minority suffered first a narrow and then a more clear defeat.

In fact the Minority had no unified alternative to the Majority's approach. Part of the Minority opposed the demand for a new workers' party in principle, claiming that the tactic did not apply because there is already a workers party in Britain - the Labour Party. The other wing of the Minority, less dogmatic but also less consistent - argued that the demand could apply, but used tailist logic, saying it should only be used where there is resonance for it, ie within the RMT or the FBU, but not across the working class movement as a whole.

Should they form a new organisation, one of their first challenges will be overcoming the fact that they are split down the middle on a central question for the class struggle in Britain today.

The minority, perhaps because they included so many 'old leaders' of WPB - Mark H, Keith H, Stuart K - became embittered by these defeats. Some minority members had had longer or shorter periods outside the group in the late nineties or early 2000s, missed its reviving and reorienting struggles and indeed felt somewhat hostile to them because they were different to the type of struggles they had experienced when they entered politics in the mid-eighties. Others had voluntarily left the leading bodies of the section and international tendency for apparently personal reasons. This whole stratum, many of them long time white collar trade union militants of some standing and a good record of struggle, nevertheless proved year in year out totally incapable of recruiting to the organisation. They became embittered and jealous of those who were recruiting and building.

Meanwhile our work in the anticapitalist movement and amongst youth prospered and whilst there was steady loss from the older comrades, to private life, careers, health and family problems, the younger comrades kept the British Section growing. The attempt to get the older comrades to collectively discuss changes to their routine or to learn anything at all from the youth work was greeted with cries of indignation, accusations of disrespect and even persecution. The comrades effectively boycotted the areas of work that they did not approve of, like campaigning for a new workers' party. Again and again the comrades sought an alibi in the supposedly adverse objective conditions.

They developed perspectives that denied any overall upward swing in the international class struggle, observing only 'that it is uneven.' In fact they turned a blind eye to clear evidence that the intensity of class conflict is rising sharply in most countries in the world: in Latin America, the Middle East, Central Asia, Europe, the USA and the Far East. They have yielded to the fashionable glut of 'Chinamania' - emphasising a long term, largely contradiction-free rise of China to the status of imperialist power and main rival of the USA.

They have openly toyed with revising Lenin's theory of imperialism to remove the issue of decay and stagnation. They have suggested that the world is in a Kondratiev-style long wave that will ensure expansion till at least 2015 and which will act to dampen down class struggle. Again this represents a yielding to current neoliberal bourgeois ideology. Because the League rejected this and defended our analysis of globalization as a period where the tendencies to stagnation in the world economy were still present, despite powerful countervailing tendencies represented by the massive export of capital to China and India, the Minority faction cried that we were 'catastrophists', misrepresenting our views as if we believed that capitalism is on the verge of collapse.

The faction also systematically ignored or grossly underestimated the strength and scale of the movements resisting neo-liberalism and imperialist war, regarding them as dead or as good as dead. Unfortunately the wish is father to the

thought. Seeking a return to 'more propaganda' and regarding the League's turn to combining propaganda with agitation focused on the youth and the vanguard fighters against neoliberalism as 'voluntarism?', they adopted a more and more passive propagandist approach. With this was combined a tailist and routinist approach to trade union work. If there was resonance, i.e. if workers were already raising certain demands then good, so could we. If not we couldn't and shouldn't.

They advocated too the abandonment the League's struggle to fight for a Fifth International in the global movements of resistance in the European and World Social Forums. Instead they talked of a regroupment perspective with (unspecified) Trotskyist left centrists.

In short, in the name of resisting 'voluntarism' they attempt to move the League firmly in the direction of passive propagandism and a discussion circle existence.

They then went on to attack the youth work that had been so successful in Britain and Austria, and the abandon the democratic centralism which has been established in REVOLUTION.

They also proposed to retreat from the League's own international democratic centralism to a semi-federal system - an International Executive Committee elected by the sections not the congress, and therefore not accountable to the League as a whole. This strategy would liquidate not only our programme but, in undermining democratic centralism, would weaken the unity and effectiveness of our whole organization. of the masses in struggle, through agitation as well as propaganda.

To undermine democratic centralism, to minimise a militant orientation towards the new struggles and movements of workers and youth, to try to break up a small but real international organisation, in effect means to give up the struggle for a revolutionary fighting organisation.

The international leadership and the great majority of the membership of the League rejected this whole approach. For us it represents a shying away from the tasks of a new period of growing struggles where big questions are posed, not least a major crisis of leadership of the working class. This period requires revolutionaries to address our criticisms and fight for our alternatives not just among small circles of left centrists predominantly drawn from the intelligentsia. We have to bring these ideas to the vanguard It represents a petty bourgeois capitulation in face of the enormous tasks of the class struggle and the corresponding responsibilities for revolutionaries.

The League at its Fifth and Sixth congresses (in 2000 and 2003) analysed the new period which opened with the turn of the century, developed tactics for it and indeed adopted a new programme in 2003 'From Protest to Power'. In rejecting all the major elements of the League's perspective and tasks, the Minority covertly rejected key elements of From Protest to Power. While they were in the League they denied this, but we can safely predict that they will dump it unceremoniously now that are 'free'. What they replace it with will indeed be interesting.

The Minority wanted to undo all this work and naturally found themselves in conflict with the majority of the League who have led this work and been recruited through it. Faced with new tasks, with a mounting level of struggle, with the need to turn the good old truths into good new truths, to sharpen our weapons and use them, the Minority drew back.

The Faction assembled many of those comrades who were skeptical and unenthusiastic about our strategic and tactical developments even in the earlier part of this new period. They eventually (2004-06) came to oppose them more totally and to seek to reverse them. That was their right. No one ever denied them it, despite the frankly hysterical accusations of intolerance, bureaucratism and even Stalinism emanating from the ranks of the Faction in the last few months.

To yield in an impressionistic way to bourgeois economic propaganda about the strength and expansive power of capitalism, to retreat from the League's programme, to retreat from its democratic centralism, to retreat from the tasks of today and run hell for leather in the direction of fruitless discussions with Trotskyist fragments, gives the opposition the same character as the these fragments themselves: a petit bourgeois one, i.e. a collapse into centrism.

As Trotsky said 'centrism hates to hear itself named.' Mark H in particular took it as a personal insult. 'The Majority have declared class war on us?' he blustered. As though what was at stake was a struggle against the bourgeoisie. No, the struggle against the pressure of petty bourgeois influences, whether these emanate from the disillusioned and tired intelligentsia or the privileged upper strata of the trade union movement is a constant one within revolutionary organisations. It does not mean driving them out or purging them and nothing like this has ever occurred in Workers Power in Britain. Yet on the second day of the conference Mark H declared, 'Workers Power is on the verge of a split?'. And indeed, we now know he was right, because the night before he had agitated for just such a split.

The majority, at this time unaware of this, indeed unaware of the minority's determination to be free of the discipline and the seriousness of a democratic centralist organisation, did all it could to prevent a split. It replied with a statement 'To Split would be a Crime?' in which we said:

'The Majority declares without hesitation: to split would be a crime. The existing leadership has taken not a single step to persecute, let alone expel, any member for holding oppositional, critical or minority views. Nor will we ever; we defy anyone to prove otherwise.

'In fact these provocative and alarmist statements are not designed to be an honest description of the Majority's actions or objectives. Rather they can only be understood as a declaration of the Minority leaders' intent. They are agitating for a split, preparing their supporters to commit an unprincipled act of desertion.

We believe that the Minority's trajectory away from our fighting perspective and programme, and their attempt to revise our Bolshevik organisational methods (opposition to international democratic centralism), is no accident but has a clear 'indeed obvious' social character.

The Minority expresses a conservative reaction to new tasks under the pressure of the intermediate strata, the left trade union leaders' fear of political independence, the scepticism of the centrists and the torpor of the labour aristocratic layers in Britain. In accordance with its inner logic this process has now culminated in a classic petit-bourgeois rebellion against democratic centralism - the highest form of proletarian organisation.

When the Minority leaders respond 'this means a split?', they unwittingly confirm this class prognosis. Proletarian revolutionaries have never held the view that to designate a trend as petit-bourgeois means that it must be driven from our ranks, but that it must be challenged politically, must be fought, because its victory would seriously damage the organisation and set back its struggle for revolutionary leadership.

We are aware that many members of the Minority have an honourable record of commitment to the class struggle and to our revolutionary programme and methods. Precisely for these reasons we want not to drive them out but to win them back from their current course. We are confident that this can be done and that the march of events will prove us right.'

Alas, our optimism was proved wrong. Secretly and dishonestly the faction had already decided to split the organisation. It planned to harm it in every way it could. We have prevented it choosing their moment to cause maximum surprise and disruption.

The Minority believe their departure will demoralise us. They think their past prominence and services to the organisation - real indeed - reflect their current importance. They delude themselves. They believe that new younger comrades cannot match, cannot repeat their achievements. They are wrong.

They should remember the achievements of their own youth in the 1980s. True, to lose senior members who for that very reason make an important financial contribution, to lose trained journalists and theoreticians, to lose significant trade unionists will be a setback. We will not try to deny it. But for two to three years these comrades have shown more and more their negative sides. They also obliged us to engage in a scarcely interrupted internal struggle, one that has occupied many hours. Not a waste of time since internal struggle is a school - not the exhaustion of nerves that petit bourgeois dilettantes imagine. If the issues are important so is the struggle to adopt or preserve a correct line.

Still Workers Power has continued to grow, to intervene in the class struggle, to train and develop new cadres. Now we will certainly have to prioritise even more ruthlessly the use of our resources and make bigger sacrifices. But the ending of this struggle will increase the human resources, the time and energy, that we will be able to devote to intervening in and recruiting in the class struggle. We will go forward to new successes; we have no doubt about that.

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