

REPORT TO THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE LENINIST TROTSKYIST
FACTION ON APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

by Mary-Alice Waters, August 31, 1975

Comrades have all had a chance to study the material concerning several applications for membership in the faction. The documentation available in English and French includes:

1. Letters of application from 10 comrades in the French section, the LCR; from three additional comrades in the LCR; and from one comrade in Brussels who is a member of the Belgian section, the LRT/RAL.
2. Replies to these letters of application and coordinating committee correspondence concerning them.
3. Several of the main documents of Tendency 4 (T4), one of the tendencies in the French section prior to their December 1974 convention:
 - a. Part I of T4's major political document entitled "Neither a Workerist 'Turn' nor a Revisionist 'Correction' -- Build the Trotskyist Party" (published in LCR internal bulletin CRS #22)
 - b. The "Theses on Work Among Women" submitted to the LCR convention by T4 as part of their organizational theses (supplement to Rouge No. 270)
 - c. The statement by the LTF members in France explaining why they joined T4 (CRS #22)
4. A July 10, 1975, letter from "the ten" to the LTF Steering Committee, clarifying some of the points raised in a previous letter to them.
5. A document entitled "Why we are Joining the Leninist Trotskyist Faction" also by "the ten", published in the LCR internal bulletin CRS #31.

As comrades can see there are really three different groups of applications involved here, even though each comrade is of course asking to join as an individual, not as part of a group.

We are all encouraged by this development in the French section particularly, and the fact that the LTF has politically won an important group of comrades there. It's a big step forward in our fight to win the majority of the international,

At the same time, these applications are different from any others we have received since the faction was formed two years ago. All other applications have been from comrades who stated their complete agreement

with the LTF platform documents and indicated no difference on any question. Such applications have been rapidly accepted, usually after discussion with the comrades concerned.

The applications we are now considering, however, are the first we have received from comrades who state agreement with the platform documents of the LTF, but at the same time indicate a difference on one or more important points. That is why the coordinating committee decided to refer consideration of these applications to the steering committee as a whole. It is important that the faction leadership agree with whatever decision we reach.

Involved here is one of the differences between a tendency and a faction. With an ideological tendency, anyone who agrees with and votes for the documents of the tendency is automatically a part of the tendency. There is no concept of discipline over the conduct of tendency members, no need for any structure, and no one takes responsibility for what other members of the tendency say or do. A faction however, is different. Not only do members of a faction have to agree with the line of the faction as expressed in its platform, they must also agree to work together in a disciplined way. And the faction as a whole takes responsibility for every member. The faction itself must decide if a person's positions and actions are in harmony with or in contradiction to the line of the faction. And, of course, even if it is decided that a particular position does not preclude membership in a common faction, whatever differences there are must be stated openly before the membership of the party (and in this case the international).

The IMT's adaptation to ultraleftism

The major difference expressed by "the ten" is outlined in their first letter to the faction. After stating their agreement with the political line of the LTF they add that they disagree with "the characterization of the international majority that underlies the documents produced by the faction: seeing a one-sided logic of concessions to ultraleftism behind the line of the majority since the 9th world congress turn." They add that in their view the majority's politics should be characterized as "centrist." They think that the majority's opportunist errors should be emphasized as the real logic of their positions.

This general point of view, as expressed by "the ten" is not new to us. Comrades in the leadership of the

Spanish Liga Comunista share at least some elements of this analysis. We have discussed this several times in the leadership meetings of the faction, and have rejected this analysis. The new statement adopted yesterday, "The Portuguese Revolution and the New Problems That Face the Fourth International," again reaffirms the LTF's analysis of the ultraleft derailment of the Fourth International by the turn of the 9th world congress and explains how this has led to the current concessions to ultraleftism in the line of the majority on Portugal, and to a new crisis of the Fourth International.

We, of course, agree that ultraleftism always, sooner or later, leads to opportunist errors, as is happening in Portugal today. And an ultraleft bias yields adventures, sectarian errors and opportunist mistakes. But the LTF insists that the fundamental error of the IMT is the ultraleft axis of their political line. That is what must be corrected.

Having said this, we must note something else that is very important. This difference of analysis does not preclude membership in a common, principled faction, unless it leads us to political differences. This does not appear to be the case, as the comrades asking to join all indicate that they are in political agreement with the documents of the LTF.

This touches on one of our major disagreements with the organizational concepts of the majority leadership. We hold that tendencies and factions should not be based on common analysis, a common "problématique" as it is sometimes called, but on common political line.

For example, if we agree that the IMT's line on the constituent assembly, democratic rights, the MFA's people's assemblies and their fantasies on dual power in Portugal are wrong; if we agree on the essential elements of a correct political course -- which we do since we unanimously adopted a line resolution on Portugal at this meeting; then differences over whether the majority arrived at its erroneous positions because of an ultraleft or an opportunist penchant is not a sufficient difference to preclude membership in a common faction. It is not an unimportant difference, because it could lead us to political differences at some stage. But it has not yet done so. With each new test, after thorough discussion and clarification, we find ourselves in political agreement and that is what constitutes the basis of our faction.

The majority's conception of tendencies and factions is almost the polar opposite. To them, what is important is common analysis. If you have a common problématique, then you argue out your

political line and almost any political difference is permissible.

I'll take a relevant example from the last French convention. The majority of delegates to that convention were of the opinion that the LCR should call for a CP-SP government today in France. But the majority of delegates were opposed to putting that political line question to a vote. Many delegates felt it would be incorrect, even unprincipled, to vote for such a political position, if others voting for it arrived at the same position on the basis of a different analysis, i. e., if they had a different opinion about why that slogan was correct today in France. The result was that the convention adopted a political line that the majority of delegates disagreed with! Delegates accepted the discipline of a prior majority vote in their problématique (tendency) and then voted for an analysis not a political line in the convention itself.

In any case, the differences of analysis expressed by the comrades applying to join the faction do not preclude their membership, unless they lead to political differences.

Tendency 4

There is a second factor that comrades should be aware of in considering these applications.

Most of the comrades who are applying to join were part of Tendency 4 in France prior to the last convention. Some of them were part of the leadership of that tendency. Members of the LTF in France also participated in T4, so the LTF tends to be identified with T4 in the minds of the membership of the LCR.

But the documents of T4 contain positions that are in contradiction with positions developed by the LTF in the international debate. We have translated and circulated a number of the T4 documents, so that comrades can study them and make up their own minds about the political line of T4.

Let me give one example, which I think is the clearest -- T4's criticism of the June 21 action and surrounding events. In my opinion, the T4 comrades were straining so hard to prove their case that the axis of the majority's errors is opportunist, not ultraleft, that the main criticism they made of the June 21 action and its repercussions was that the majority was guilty of a right-opportunist capitulation to the mass reformist parties in appealing to them to defend the Ligue against the blows of repression.

The comrades who have asked to join the faction agree that the June 21 action itself was an adventure. But then they go on to state that "this dual aspect -- opportunism and adventurism -- which marked the

initiative of June 21 is reduced in the last analysis to the former element," (CRS #22). This leads them to basically ignore June 21 itself and concentrate their criticism on the defense campaign waged by the Ligue against its banning -- which was probably the most correct thing the Ligue leadership did throughout the whole period!

The line developed in the T4 document stands in rather sharp contrast to that of the LTF as expressed very clearly by Joe Hansen in the document "The Underlying Differences in Method" which was adopted by the LTF as part of its platform. In a rather long section dealing with the meaning and importance of the June 21 action the document emphasizes:

"Thus it would appear reasonable to conclude that the June 21 action was visualized by our comrades as only one of a projected series aimed at 'winning hegemony within the mass vanguard' by demonstrating 'a capacity for effective initiative' corresponding 'to the concerns of the vanguard' without running against 'the currents of mass struggles.' This may have been what Comrade Krivine was referring to in a synthetic and elliptical way in his press interview when he spoke about the use of minority violence and the staging of a test.

"In other words, the Ligue Communiste was engaging in a test of a tactical line developed in the past several years as a French variation of the orientation adopted at the last world congress for Latin America. The tactical line is the employment of minority violence on what are judged to be suitable occasions. The leaders of the Ligue Communiste saw an opportunity in the fascist meeting to mount an 'exemplary action.' The exemplary action was not urban guerrilla war as employed by the Tupamaros or the ERP; but it was close enough, I imagine, to win their applause. This tactical line of engaging in minority violence, of staging operations of this type in isolation from other groups and the masses has been given sanction by the European Perspectives Document although in a form that is not easily seen by the uninitiated."

(IIDB Vol. X, No. 12, p. 40)

The difference between the two documents is rather striking. It is a case where a difference in emphasis passes a qualitative point and becomes a different line.

On other points there was a tendency for the T4 documents to go off in a sectarian direction, as for example, in their emphasis on the dangers of "petty-bourgeois feminism" in the women's movement. The general thrust of their document on women's work is different from the section of the LTF political resolution on the importance of the new rise of women's

struggles. That section of the LTF political resolution, of course, is simply a summary of the major document "Socialist Revolution and the Struggle for Women's Liberation" submitted to the international discussion by the LTF members of the United Secretariat. (See IIDB Vol. X, No. 22.)

On many important questions such as popular frontism, the united front tactic, the call for a workers government, the "new mass vanguard," the positions developed in the documents of T4 seem correct. But the documents are often very abstract and it is not always clear what the positions mean in practice. And indeed when it came down to the level of deriving a concrete political orientation from their analyses, comrades in T4 often disagreed. For example, despite a common analysis of the Union de la Gauche, T4 members were divided over whether it was correct to vote for Mitterand in the 1974 presidential elections or not. That is hardly a question on which French Trotskyists can remain agnostic, even a year after the elections.

As with Tendencies 1, 2, and 3, Tendency 4 was based not on political line, but on common analysis and "method."

It should be pointed out that the comrades who are asking to join the faction agree with the LTF on our general criticisms of the organizational methods and concept of the majority. They agree with us concerning the nature of tendencies and factions. In fact they wrote a rather good criticism of the organizational measures used by the majority leadership of the French section during the pre-convention discussion. Despite their intentions, however, in my opinion they slipped into building a tendency more akin to the IMT's concept than ours.

I also want to emphasize that my opinions on this are not shared by all the members of the LTF in France. LTF comrades in France were divided over the decision to join T4. A number of the comrades thought that given the character of Tendency 4 and some of its positions, joining T4 would not advance political clarity in the French section concerning the views of the LTF. I think they were correct, that joining T4 was a mistake.

The purpose of this report, however, and the reason for this discussion, is not to draw a balance sheet on the functioning of the LTF in France, or even to reach a common assessment concerning T4. We can continue to have differing opinions on this. But all these factors are part of the history leading up to the new applications for membership in the faction, and comrades on the coordinating committee of the faction felt that this information should be available to the steering committee before making a decision about these applications. We felt that comrades should be able to read the T4 documents themselves and form their own judgments.

Most importantly, this background has a bearing on the type of statement that should be made by the LTF if we decide to accept these comrades as members of the faction. I'll come back to that later.

Only alternative to the majority?

I want to say a few words about the other applications. Even though the three comrades from Dijon do not indicate any differences with the documents of the LTF, they do say one thing in their letter of application that is important to clarify in discussions with them and in an LTF statement,

After reviewing their own evolution the comrades state that "it seems to us today that it is only in the framework of the LTF that we can carry out this struggle [against the majority], the LTF representing the only alternative to the international majority,"

Comrade Gaston from the Belgian section states that he wants to join the faction because not joining "can only strengthen the majority."

And "the ten" state in their July 10 letter that they want to join because it is "only on the basis of the Leninist Trotskyist Faction's program and within its organized framework," that a responsible discussion concerning the character of the majority can be organized.

Perhaps these are simply hasty formulations that the comrades, upon reflection, would revise. But since they may indicate a conception of the character of the LTF that we do not share we must take note of them. The LTF is in no way a combination against the majority, nor is it the only alternative to the IMT line. Such an idea is particularly dangerous because it reflects the character of the IMT which is genuinely an anti-LTF combination. That's their problematique. If you agree that the LTF is wrong, join the IMT and fight to make the IMT conform to your views. We all know that was precisely the basis on which people were urged to join the IMT prior to the last world congress, for example, especially those who were in complete disagreement with the IMT's line on Latin America.

I don't mean to suggest that the comrades who are asking to join are acting in an unprincipled manner. I'm sure they are not. However, the fact that such formulations could slip into their letters indicates that the majority's organizational conceptions are sometimes reflected even unconsciously.

The LTF is not simply the only alternative to the IMT. It is a principled faction based on explicit and clear program. The only reason to join the LTF is if you agree with its platform. If you disagree on something, the place for that to be discussed is not in the organized framework of the faction -- we have no structure for that,

no bulletin, etc. -- but in the discussion bulletin of the sections, sympathizing organizations and international.

Fighting Pabloism?

The application from comrade Gaston in Brussels must be considered somewhat separately, although he too went through the T4 experience.

Comrade Gaston expresses many more differences with the documents of the LTF than do the comrades in France, and his differences are not simply of analysis. Some points I would consider secondary, or issues that will undoubtedly be clarified in discussion with him -- economic analysis, Cuba, the IT, Vietnam. But there are two points on which we must convince Comrade Gaston before we could accept his application.

First is his view that the real problem facing the Fourth International is Pabloism, and that there was no turn at the 1969 world congress, simply a continuation of a method and strategy that goes back to the beginning of the post-World War II period. We have explained our view of the continuity of method underlying the entryism error of the early fifties and the guerrilla turn of the 1969 world congress. But we disagree that what's involved is "Pabloism." Even worse is dissolving the concrete political character of the 1969 turn into some general formula.

Secondly, in regard to the PST and the defense of democratic rights and institutions, the document "Reply to the IMT's Open Letter No. 2" was approved by the LTF steering committee and agreement with the general line of that document is a condition for membership in the LTF. So we will have to continue discussing with Comrade Gaston on these points.

Two new documents

The comrades who have asked to join have indicated that they agree with the platform of the LTF and the general line of all the documents that comprise it, from the first declaration of the Leninist Trotskyist Tendency, through the Bolivian and Argentine Balance Sheet, Joe Hansen's document on method, the LTF world political resolution, the various statements of the LTF, and the post-world congress exchanges with the IMT on Argentina.

That for us is the basis of membership in the faction. Comrades who agree with those documents agree with the political line of the LTF, even if they have a difference on some points of analysis.

In addition, we have adopted two new documents at this meeting -- a resolution on "The Key Issues in the Portuguese Revolution," and a statement on "The Portuguese Revolution and the New Problems That Face the Fourth International." As rapidly as possible we will have

to discuss these documents with the comrades who are asking to join and find out if they are in agreement with them as well.

If so, we should accept the comrades as members of the faction, asking them to draft a statement for publication in the International Internal Discussion Bulletin outlining any points of difference.

Secondly, I should draft an LTF steering committee statement for the international bulletin in which we would include the following points:

1. Reiteration that the basis for membership in the LTF is agreement with the political line of all LTF documents. Any secondary points of disagreement are explicitly noted.

2. Explanation of the type of differences held by the comrades who have joined. We would explain some of the points outlined in this report concerning differences of analysis and their subordination to political agreement as the basis on which tendencies are properly constituted.

3. Reiteration of the LTF's position on the IMT's adaptation to ultraleftism first codified at the 1969 world congress.

4. Rejection of the characterization of the IMT as a centrist current oscillating between opportunism and adventurism which is rapidly reducible to opportunism.

Here we should add that the LTF does not take responsibility for the documents of Tendency 4. The positions of the LTF are those developed in the LTF platform documents.

5. Reiteration that the LTF is not a place where everyone who disagrees with the IMT gets together, or where the "real" discussion takes place. Differences may arise initially within the faction, but if discussion of those differences fails to resolve them, they will be debated out in the international discussion bulletin, not within the faction.

The purpose of the statement and the way in which it would be presented, would be to take advantage of this new strengthening to the faction to help clarify and educate throughout the international concerning the correct functioning of tendencies and factions. In this perspective too, we should leave open the possibility of publishing the correspondence on these applications for the entire international to show concretely how the LTF acted and why.

August 31, 1975

[The vote on the above report was taken in two parts. The general line of the report was approved unanimously with four abstentions. The specific proposals on the steps to be taken with the perspective of bringing the comrades into the faction was adopted unanimously with one abstention.]