

Revolutionary Regroupment Reagrupamento Revolucionário



For the rebirth of the Fourth International! - Pelo renascimento da Quarta Internacional!

Home Links Português Français Español Publications Historic Documents Contact

[Appendix 4 to [Letter of Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency](#) by Samuel Trachtenberg]

Letter (circa 1998) by the IBT's Jason Wright documenting his leaving the Revolutionary Workers League

The following letter (circa 1998) by the IBT's Jason Wright (see <http://www.bolshevik.org/1917/no28/no28NewOrleans.html>) documenting his leaving the Revolutionary Workers League is appendix #3 to Resignation from the International Bolshevik Tendency by Samuel Trachtenberg. In it Wright documents the RWL's leadership's history of attempting to neutralize internal critics (including eventually himself) by seeking to convince their followers that criticisms of themselves must reflect mental illness, a tactic now also used by the leadership of the International Bolshevik Tendency. In the letter Wright documents his own previous history of acting as a "handraiser" and unscrupulous hatchetman against the RWL bureaucrats opponents (a role he has now chosen to reprise inside the IBT), before receiving a bit of karmic justice in eventually getting the same treatment himself from his masters. In the experience of all social movements, it almost seems that some people are destined to be perpetual hacks. The IBT previously itself quite accurately described a similar regime loyalist hack inside the Spartacist League, a universal type most activists will recognize having encountered at one time or another.

" [A] Nelson's detractors may grumble that he's rather dull, very insecure, has a tendency to be a bully and is sometimes a bit unstable. But they ignore his other qualities: he has a certain base cunning, and, more importantly, he is thoroughly, deeply, unremittingly loyal to Robertson. Robertson is well aware of Nelson's limitations and has occasionally had to jerk his chain----but one needs to do that with pit bulls.

"Workers Vanguard De-Collectivized", 1917 #18, 1996

.....
Edward,

Thanks for your note. I found your message very disturbing but not particularly surprising. In fact the RWL in Detroit has had a long history of attempting to have its disaffected members or individuals attempting to organize oppositions, committed into mental institutions. I speak from experience, having been committed in the Capitol District Psychiatric Center at Shanta's instructions about 48 hours before I quit the RWL in an attempt to prevent me from attending a Central Committee meeting (which I was entitled to attend as an observer) in Detroit. I was very fortunate in that my Mother, with whom I had been on bad terms since joining the RWL, came to my rescue and threatened to sue CDPC if they did not release me. The first document we published when founding the MEG was Don's resignation statement. He devotes several paragraphs of this to what can only be called the RWL's "tactical policy" of attempting to institutionalise any leading cadre who threaten to oppose the RWL PC and show the least sign of depression. I had been reluctant to mail you the MEG back materials right away because I think they contain a few imperfect formulations that I would not stand behind today. In reading them today, I as their primary author, would desperately want someone to view them in the context of Don and my movement at that time, ie. a course we charted away from the RWL and toward an orthodox anti-revisionist Trotskyism. This or that formulation I would have today developed differently, though on the whole I think what little original MEG literature there was represents a vast improvement over that of the RWL. If you would like to see it I would be happy to mail you copies so that you can see that this is not a fundamentally new development.

It is so old in fact that I remember the SL in the early 80's ran an expose on a comrade the RWL had attempted to institutionalise when she quit the organization. That the SL, well on the "Road to Jimstown" still felt comfortable denouncing the cultism of the RWL shows how unhealthy the RWL's internal life was even at that time. Heather herself had a similar experience to this before. The incident was perhaps one of the most critical ones in my decision to leave the RWL. In Decemeber of 1993 she began a secret relationship with Luke behind the back of her then boyfriend, Sheldon, a young black worker from Detroit. When Sheldon discovered Heather's "infidelity" in January of 1994 he attempted to kill himself. I was in Detroit at the time for some sort of winter school or conference (I don't recall exactly right now.) While most of the time when visiting Detroit I was put up at either Luke's apartment or George and Eileen's house, on this occassion there were so many comrades in town that I stayed in Heather and Sheldon's apartment. Sheldon was supposed to walk me to Wayne State University where the RWL was meeting the next day. When we woke up however Sheldon told me he wasn't feeling well and gave me directions to the campus instead. I and the other comrades who had crashed in that apartment proceeded to the RWL or NWROC event. During the lunch break Shanta approached me, concerned by the fact Sheldon had not come with us. Evidently she was aware of the recent turbulence in Heather and Sheldon's relationship and had an inkling of what had happened. After we left the apartment I am told Sheldon swallowed a bottle of aspirin and a bottle of draino.

The PC, which included Luke, met in special session that evening. At night a special meeting of all RWL candidate members and members currently in Detroit and Ann Arbor was convened. Leland presented a motion, endorsed by the PC, to censure Heather, Luke and Jodi, who at that time was Heather's best friend and a former lover of Luke's. The accusation against Jodi stemmed from the allegation that she had, with deliberate malice and forthought, made possible the relationship between Heather and Luke, knowing that the results would be disasterous and that they would reflect badly on Luke as a member of the PC. Everyone, including I am ashamed to say myself, voted for the PC's resolution.

Luke made a speech that reaked of Maoist self-criticism, stating that the struggle for revolutionary consciousness under capitalism was a constant battle to assert true, revolutionary consciousness over the false consciousness imposed by capitalism. A struggle between our best aspects and our worst. Luke felt that in succumbing to his attraction for Heather he had capitulated to his worst side which prided personal pleasure and sexual satisfaction over the welfare of the organization. He made a statement that as the person who had been most responsible for developing Sheldon as a contact of the organization, he knew better then anyone the profound mistrust Sheldon had of all white people and the lingering influence of Black Nationalism on his consciousness. Luke stated that his actions had been absolutely inexcusable. Heather and Jody then made similar self criticisms about themselves.

While the general pattern in the RWL was one of ushering comrades into mental wards, they did everything in their power to see to it that Sheldon's hospital stay was as short as possible. The stated reason was that the RWL wished to minimize the risk of a scandal in either the bourgoise press or the workers movement. Specifically Leland, in a private conversation that same weekend, told me he was terrified of Workers Vanguard getting a hold of the information and printing it. While the SL went through its own string of suicidal comrades in the 80's Leland believed they would not hesitate to make ammo of this. For both Leland and Shanta, the recruitment of Sheldon, a black worker, represented exactly what the organization "needed" and they were scared shitless that they would gain a reputation of being a cult that drove such individuals to suicide.

To this end the RWL organized "private care" for Sheldon. At first this took the form of Heather being ordered to break off all relations with Luke and make herself available to administer to all Sheldon's needs. I suspect it may also have involved the pilfering of some form of psychotropic or anti-depressent drugs from the hospital in which Shanta and others worked and the RWL administering them to Sheldon on their own authority. I had not heard the rumor about the drugs before leaving Detroit, but the policy of chaining Heather to Sheldon's bedside had already been decided upon by the time I had that private meeting with Leland.

I had had an argument nearly a year earlier over the attempt by the leadership to dictate comrade's private lives. In that instance it had involved the RWL denouncing a lesbian couple, Liv and Andi, who had founded the RWL operation in Albany, when they refused to take complete financial responsibility for supporting their housemate (also now an RWL member) Tanya. Tanya had been unemployed for some time and Andi and Liv had carried most of the bills. When Tanya found a job they asked her to pay some of the money back. A short time before Liv had dropped out of active membership and Shanta had begun "suggesting" that Andi break off their relationship. In fact Andi did break off her relationship with Liv around that time. Andi was then told that they did not have the right to expect any financial

renumeration from Tanya, she was told they should both kick Liv out of the apartment and expect her to swallow most of the expenses. When Andi sided with Liv in this financial argument pressure was put on her which, among several other factors, led to her leaving the organization.

Shortly after Andi quit I was in Detroit as an invited guest observer at a Central Committee meeting, the same one in which Kieth H., who was shortly to defect to the SL, objected to Leland's position on the Russian question. After the meeting I approached Shanta and expressed the opinion that Andi had been unjustly pushed out of the organization. Foolishly, I believed at that time that I was within my rights to raise such a criticism (in private no less). The experience disavowed me of the notion. Shanta began shrieking that I was a racist (Tanya is black while Andi and Liv are white) in the middle of the room attracting the attention of numerous other comrades in the room. the experience was thoroughly humiliating and damaging and taught me to keep my mouth shut when it came to directives emerging from the PC.

The experience had a somewhat scarring effect on me in that it showed a number of comrades, already possessing a certain appetite for Stalinist style beauracratism, that I was fair game for criticism in the leaderships eyes. As such my political life was for several months very difficult in Albany. Sarah W. and Yvette F. were continually denouncing me for one thing or another and I was held at candidte membership for an extended period of time.

This changed only because of an anti-Operation Rescue campaign organized by the Albany local in Philladelphia. Luke was sent out from Detroit to head the operation. Yvette was the tactical leader while I ended up by being left behind in our Motel room because some prior arrests whose trials were pending made the lawyers feel it was unadvisable for me to risk a further arrest. As such I headed the mobile office, which involved preparing studies for contacts we had brought with us, taking clippings from local papers and ultimately writing propaganda in the form of an NWROC newsletter called "The Organizer." Because the org devoted so few resources to Phillie, and there were so many abortion clinics and we never knew which one would be hit, I proposed we institute "flying pickets" just as the American trotskyists had done with the Teamster strikes in the 1930's. A comrade was assigned to watch each clinic and report back to me at the office and I acted as a dispatcher. Because everyone was calling in to report as soon as we knew where a hit was happening I would tell the other comrades calling in to go to the clinic under seige.

Philadelphia marked a shift of wind for me that made me think that I could continue in the RWL. Leland and Luke, impressed by my writing, study preperations and tactical suggestion "advised" the Albany local to elect me to the executive committee and make me a full member. It also strengthened an alliance between Leland and myself that persisted throughout most of the time I remained in the RWL.

I think this digression is significant in order to point out why I was a hand raiser during the self crit session, but why I thought in private I might be able to reason with Leland. Before leaving Detroit in January of 1994 I suggested, in my private conversation with Leland, that it was psychological torture to "chain" Heather B. to Sheldon's bedside. That the org had no right to order her to play nurse maid to man who she had a relationship with that had obviously been heading toward a break up. Leland said that of course I was "theoretically" right, but that certain exceptional circumstances justified an exceptional course of action. that the health of the RWL had to be placed above the personal welfare of individual members. I was relieved that he did not denounce me as a racist, but he did tell me that if I objected to the PC's handling of the case the moment I should have raised the criticisms at the special session called immediately after the event and that the matter must now be formally considered closed. Of course in a sense this itself was a warning to me, I knew, and Leland knew I knew, that had I raised criticisms at that public meeting I would have been driven to capitualate or quit the org then and there. In fact, no doubt Luke would have denounced me at that moment for defending him.

Later handling of the Sheldon case proceeded from bad to worse. I was told by Luke that there was a second failed suicide attempt and I later learned from Don that after I left the organization there was a period in which Sheldon's "private treatment" amounted to the RWL keeping him under a form of "house arrest" with comrades standing guard 24 hours a day. The PC did reverse itself shortly thereafter on the need for Heather to remain as Sheldon's compainion. Instead it decided to move her as far from Detroit as possible, reassigning her to the BA Local. Outside his self-criticism, Luke's part in the affair was quickly forgotten and never-again (to the best of my knowledge) held against him. You would be in a better position then me to know what ever became of Sheldon. I did hear a report from a former European supporter of the ITC that he attended (as a guest observer) a National Conference in Detroit, where a working class black man stood up and decalred that he was "all better now" and "would try to never cause the RWL such problems again." I am assuming this was Sheldon though I have no way of verifying it.

It was just a few months later that I quit the RWL. The events that led to my quit began with the submission of a minority tendency document called "For a Democratic Centralist RWL" to an RWL CC meeting I attended on November 21, 1993. This document, co-authored by Lisa W. and Marty S. (who now run the Marxist Workers Group an ostensibly Trotskyist Organization that exists almost exclusively in their rich imaginations and the ethers of the internet). In the end I was not in agreement with this document. But I was appalled when the leadership attempted to prevent them from distributing it and tried to recollect the copies they had handed out to members. I was one of several comrades who hid the copies I had been given and lied saying I had not received it. Eventually several of us met secretly to discuss the document, we thought it's over all political orientation was flawed but that certain fundamentals (drift toward sectoralism and New Left style multi-vanguardism, lack of a pledge schedule, inadequate attempts to politically educate comrades, the disorganization of our office) were supportable. We agreed not to join the Lisa/Marty faction, but that I would meet privately with Leland on our behalf to outline what parts of this paper we believed to be accurate.

My meeting with Leland was a disaster. In retrospect I think it was when the leadership made up its mind to break me or drive me out trying. Leland fumed that I knew nothing about Marxism, that I was a petite-bourgeois dilettante and that Lisa and Marty's criticisms were correct only in the manner that a broken clock is right at least twice a day. I foolishly alluded to having several comrades (including one in the BA) behind me, but nevertheless did not name several comrades who were fence-sitters in order to protect them. Leland worked very hard to convert us to the leadership side and met with each of us for hours to convince us we had to back the leadership and give things time, that a major split would be disastrous and that the course could be changed and our grievances redressed if we backed Leland. I think we reluctantly bought into this. The comrade from the BA and I both returned to our locals as "experts" on the Lisa-Marty tendency and gave classes on why the document was wrong and why no-one should support them. It was a bold move on Leland's part of course to attempt to convert people who peripherally supported the dissidents into their main denouncers. Lisa and Marty through their sectarian intrigues which were wretched even then, made this slightly easier to do. We didn't really want to line up behind them. And we had tremendous faith in Leland's revolutionary integrity.

Nonetheless I can't help feeling in retrospect that I did absolutely the wrong thing at that moment. I had one foot on the road to becoming a part of bureaucratic time-serving apparatus, in enouncing Lisa and Marty without expressing my own reservations I was standing somewhere apart from the best traditions of Trotskyism. My personal low point is perhaps epitomized by the fact that I was of the few who knew that the allegations contained in Marty and Lisa's January 27, 1994 letter accusing "A member of the [RWL of being] caught stealing private correspondence from the mailbox of one of our members, and sending it to the RWL Political Committee (PC)" (An Open Letter to the RWL/U.S. from the Communist Internationalist Organizing Committee) was true, it happened in the BA on the instructions of the PC. I think I had a number of doubts at that time, reservations which centred on the fact that "Democratic Centralism" as practised by the RWL had more in common with the politics of Zinoviev or German Social Democracy than those of Trotsky and Lenin. I loved reading history, and in all the histories of the Bolsheviks I had read I could see nothing comparable in their best period to the politics of the RWL. In fact in both programme and internal life I began to recognize more than a smattering of third period stalinism about the RWL.

I never believed the problem stemmed from democratic centralism itself, but rather the RWL's perversion of democratic centralism. I could see that the degree of rigid centralism dictated by the RWL's PC was more than would likely be necessary even in a revolutionary, military situation (a situation we were as far from then as today) and that it strangled any sort of healthy political functioning. This was the reason I decided not to attempt to initiate a faction fight, despite the fact I felt we should formally retract our wrong Solidarnost position, reopen discussion on the current nature of the Soviet Union, critically examine our attitude toward the rest of the left and adopt some of the policies Marty and Lisa had in passing suggested. Odd as it may sound, I simultaneously felt I could pressure Leland to chart a better course, and that there was too little democratic functioning to launch any sort of fight.

Two years of continual lumpenization in the RWL had meanwhile taken a toll on my mental health. While formally enrolled in college I neither attended classes nor worked. The RWL did not have many paid staffers, nonetheless I was subsidised (in an extremely minimal manner) by the organization in order so that I could work for the org. full time. I was constantly broke, without money for books or an adequate diet, couch surfing at various comrades apartments. I was devoting my every waking moment to an organization in which I sensed, with growing alarm, that something was fundamentally wrong. I was heading for a break down.

This was exacerbated by a relationship I was in with a young female contact. Because this was against org. rules they

argued for Stacey to be moved to Detroit, saying her political development would be greatly accelerated if she were not constantly forced to function in my shadow. I privately endorsed this just as Luke, Heather and Jody had publicly endorsed the RWL's verdicts on their private lives. This only served to heighten the conflict that raged within me. I fell into a deep depression.

Luke was sent out to Albany to work with me on a special project we were then involved in. I welcomed this because I thought it was Leland's delivery of his promise to reform the RWL's internal structure. Luke was also very depressed at this time. After endless hours of political work, at the end of each night we would stay up pouring our hearts out to each other about Heather and Stacey. I expressed all of my concerns regarding the RWL to Luke, I felt we had established a deep rapport and that our side was one and the same. Shortly thereafter Luke began asking me if I had considered suicide at all. He informed me he had had a number of self-destructive impulses since his enforced separation from Heather. I admitted that suicide had entered my mind, at least in an abstract sense. Luke spent several nights encouraging me to talk along these lines as well as to share my criticisms of the organization with him.

I told Luke that at the upcoming CC meeting (called for the day before a joint Albany/Detroit anti-Klan action in Indiana), just a few days ahead, I intended to assert myself much more forcefully in the RWL's decision making process. I did not want to keep my criticisms to myself any longer. The day before I was due to leave for Detroit Leland called me up and told me I was not to be allowed to attend the CC meeting because of my depression. I was informed that the PC thought that a visit to Detroit and Stacey might send me "over the edge" and they could not afford a repeat of the incident involving Sheldon. I firmly informed Leland that it was my right as an alternate member to attend any sitting meeting of the CC and that I would appeal Leland's decision to the next full conference of the RWL, I was shocked by Luke's betrayal of my trust and that Leland was perpetrating the same heavy handed tactics I had come to identify with Shanta.

Leland backed off somewhat (or so I thought) and suggested that if I got a psychiatrist's approval (!) I would be allowed to attend the CC meeting. I pointed out that it was then Friday night and that the possibility of me seeing a therapist before our cars caravanned out to Detroit the next morning was next to impossible. Leland then promised to help me by arranging the matter if he could. He asked me to put Luke on the phone, which I did, after which Luke and Leland had a long private conversation.

After that Shanta must have phoned up Mark A. (who I understand you knew in the BA local) who was the senior comrade living in Albany, which was otherwise exclusively a youth local. Luke told me that Leland and Shanta were having Mark come over to pick me up and drive me to CDPC where I could be admitted to the 24 hour suicide crises center. I was told that Leland and Luke had decided that if the therapists at CDPC gave me a clean bill of mental health I would be allowed to attend the CC meeting.

When Mark and I arrived at CDPC Mark went off and had a private discussion with one of the doctors. Later I gathered from the doctor who spoke to me that Mark had told him I had attempted to kill myself several days before and was threatening to do so again now. The clinic refused to allow me to leave, asking me to voluntarily commit myself, which would give them the right to hold me for a couple of weeks. I was informed that if I did not commit myself voluntarily they would be forced to commit me and that I would be held until they felt I was "better" or until I obtained a court order for release. I was horrified, I never felt so trapped against my will. In all the times in the RWL that I had been arrested I always felt confident that George or Eileen was waiting in the Police Station with bail and that the RWL would never leave me to rot in prison. Now they had dragged me to a mental hospital and arranged for me to be held there against my will. After Mark left I managed to call my Mother, who I had not spoken to in months, but who nevertheless arranged my release.

My traumatic personal experience confirmed, beyond any lingering personal loyalty, all my doubts that the RWL in any way represented a continuation of the policies of the Fourth International. I made up my mind there and then that I could not remain in the ITC. But I was concerned about my lover, Stacey, who was in Detroit. I knew from watching the RWL's handling of Liv and Andi (and also my friends Ben and Venessa, another excellent couple who quit) that as soon as the RWL learned I was quitting Stacey would be subjected to incredible pressure to distance herself from me in every way.

I telephoned her as soon as I got back to my Mother's house. My worst fears were confirmed. She informed me that Shanta had told her I was in the hospital because I had tried to kill myself and that it was obviously in both our best

interests if she ended our relationship. Stacey told me she had not believed Shanta and wanted to know what was going on. I told her that I was coming to Detroit and that I would tell her everything that had happened. I let her know I was planning on leaving the RWL and made her promise not to divulge this information to anyone else. I told her we could discuss the whole matter in Detroit and that I wanted her to know I loved her whether she remained a supporter of the RWL or not, but that my own mind was made up.

I then proceeded to return to the apartment where Luke was staying in time to catch the car to Detroit. Needless to say Mark and Luke were stunned to see me. I told them that CDPC had told them I was fit to travel to Detroit and that I fully expected to be seated in the CC meeting. More hurried discussions with Leland and Shanta in Detroit occurred. It was decided I would be allowed to travel to Detroit after all. I was a bit nervous that once in Michigan they would attempt to commit me again, but I was desperate to talk to Stacey and share with her both the personal and political reasons why I was about to leave the RWL. My fear and my decision to leave prevented me from raising the criticisms I had intended in the CC meeting, which must have been a source of great relief to Leland et al.

Stacey agreed to flee the RWL with me. She told them her grandmother was very sick and that she would have to return to Albany for a week (this was the weekend before Easter weekend) and that she would come back to Detroit after Holliday. The RWL must have sensed something was amiss, but nonetheless approved her leave. From that moment on we were never left alone together. But at the same time the leadership was reluctant to share with the comrades they stuck around us the reasons why we were not to be left alone. At one point, when we were left with only a recent member, Dwayne and a contact Don (who later co-founded the MEG with me) Stacey and I emptied our luggage of all our least valuable belongings and packed anything she cared about into our luggage. Despite our attempt to be discrete I am certain Don and Dwayne saw what we were up to. But a sort of wink and nod passed between us, without speaking they knew what was going on and they let us know in essence that they would not rat us out. I can divulge that much now since both Don and Dwayne were later to leave the RWL expressing criticisms very similar to my own.

The next day we attended the anti-Klan demonstration in Indianapolis. When the demonstration began to dissolve I headed for the car returning to Albany. Stacey was seated in the car while I was informed I would not be immediately returning to Albany, but would be going back to Detroit in Luke's car in order to meet with Leland. I was told I'd be put into a car going from Detroit to Albany on Monday instead. All my fears about another attempt to commit me erupted again. But I felt that without money I was at the mercy of the RWL. My options as I saw them then were either go back to Detroit with Luke or stay behind in Indianapolis and they were practically put to me in those terms. I actually considered staying in Indianapolis, knowing that my step-father's parents lived somewhere in the suburbs and that if I found them I might be able to get busfare back to Albany. But I ultimately decided to return to Detroit. I was actually paranoid Luke might try to leave me on the road somewhere or might ask me lots of probing questions to flush out my intentions. Thinking quickly I encouraged our contact Don, who was also returning to Detroit for a day of studies, to come with me in the car so we could talk about the campus work he was involved in. I don't know if this was necessary, but I was relieved that Don's presence provided me with a witness and prevented Luke and I from engaging in an internal discussion.

Upon arriving in Detroit I attended a debriefing meeting in the office attended by members and close supporters, we were told it was alright to speak as if this were an internal meeting. When Shanta gave her opening speech, which as usual hailed RWL action as a great victory (regardless of the outcome) and portrayed us on the road to a pre-revolutionary situation, I objected. I criticised the RWL's direction (in exceedingly soft terms) for being more interested in limited tactical victories than in the real task before us of building a revolutionary party. The impetus for my change of heart was that I at last recognized that my best defense might not be in hiding and playing it safe, but rather in letting people know that I was being put through the political meat-grinder because I had objections to the course away from Marxism and towards cultism that was constantly steered by the leadership. I hoped if I was institutionalised others would see that it was a way of politically removing me from the party. The fact that people the RWL was hoping to recruit in the near future witnessed my attack gave me reason to hope. These individuals were not so totally locked in and the RWL would miss losing them if they were seen to treat me in too heavy handed a manner.

The next morning I met with Leland. I was attacked for my performance the night before. I was told that I was mentally unhealthy. I was ordered to resign from the local exec and disengage from all practical work and forfeit my seat as a CC alternate. I was not surprised, knowing I would be out of the org or back in a mental hospital by the end of the day I agreed. I agreed to everything Leland said. There was no point in arguing with him. I respected how widely he had read and how much he knew, but I had little respect for him as a political leader anymore. Perhaps I even saw him with a glimmer of sympathy, I saw him as being something of a hostage to Shanta's hyper-activity and penchant for military

adventures. There was nothing left to discuss. When he told me I would be allowed to remain on the Fighting Worker editorial board (a body I had recently been co-opted onto) I spoke as if I thoroughly intended to stay in the organization. Was I a coward? I don't know, after everything I went through even today I don't feel certain of what the RWL is or isn't capable or willing to do.

As soon as I was safe in Albany I quit. To the RWL's consternation I did not drop out of politics. In fact I stood on a joint electoral slate with them (something we had already established prior to my quit) in student government elections and several months later I tried to start acting (with occasional assistance from Stacey) as an external tendency pressuring the RWL to the left and trying to win supporters out of their organization. The RWL asked me to rejoin at one point, at the price of signing a letter denouncing myself for quitting the organization which they could distribute to members. Outside the cultish pressures I laughed at this transparent trap presented to me by Mark A on behalf of the PC. But I also engaged in a great deal of self questioning, afraid that outside the RWL I was worthless, outside the class struggle and abandoning my meaningful commitment to scientific socialism. I had to wait almost a year for the first real breakthrough, that was Don U's resignation statement which outlined the history of abuses perpetrated by the RWL against its membership.

Your story about Heather brings all the old anger and pain back to me like it was yesterday. The RWL's internal life has only a few of the most formal similarities to what structure is like within a healthy revolutionary organization. The RWL in no way practices democratic centralism. I feel quite confident that you will find no example in the history of Lenin's Bolshevik party where comrades were forced to "voluntarily" admit themselves to psychiatric hospital. Heather's affair with Luke, whether it was ill advised or not, was in no way the business of the party. Her sexual relations with Sheldon and her growing separation from him, like her growing involvement with Luke were her personal affair. It is only in occasional, exceptional circumstances (almost unthinkable in this period) that the party would have any business in dictating comrade's sexual relations. If Heather were sleeping with a member of the KKK this would be a reason for the party to act, but to abandon one comrade for another may be personally painful to the individuals involved and may impair for a time their functioning, but it is not a concern of org policy.

In the early Trotskyist movement, while nothing that I know of compares to the RWL, there were some sections (notably the Chinese and the French) where rearrangements of peoples sleeping partners caused subsequent tensions and personal/political splits. It is a proud legacy of the U.S. section that it generally towered above this, being a sizeable disciplined party with good leadership it was not buffeted about by petty arguments over who was sleeping with who. In the RWL the situation is amplified because the functioning is just the opposite. It was also exaggerated because of the youth of all the parties involved. In all the relationships I have mentioned (Liv and Andi, Ben and Venessa, Sheldon, Luke, Heather, Stacey and myself) we are dealing with people who at the oldest end (Luke) were 25 and at the youngest (Stacey) were 16. Capitalism plays a distorting and deforming role on all relationships and the pressures of a cultish party like the RWL only increase that distortion. Young people, falling in love and breaking up for the first time place a great deal of stress on such events, not necessarily amplifying them but rather having not become yet used to them they often have much greater problems dealing with the powerful emotions unleashed. But even that does not make them primarily the responsibility of the organization.

Luke and I and no doubt the others involved were genuinely depressed. But ultimately the RWL, cynically or sincerely, took advantage of my depression to have me committed in what can really only be read as a political move. For a long time I have pondered whether I or not I really was in need of psychiatric therapy at that time. Never before and never since have I experienced such dark bouts of depression. I believe psychiatry under capitalism is still in its infancy, which does not mean that comrades should not have the option of resorting to it when necessary. Even a treatment in an experimental stage is often an improvement on no treatment at all. But the RWL, in ordering comrades to undergo treatment, is utilizing a form of bourgeois medical process to marginalize inactive or oppositional cadre and isolate them from the party. This is horrible.

I have kept silent on many of these affairs in order to a degree to protect the RWL from bourgeois authorities. As a part of the workers movement (however deformed they are) I have not wanted to risk bringing state repression to bare on their group because of my stories. I have shared them only with other ex-RWL members, a handful of my closest friends and a few of the American IBT comrades. But I now want to commit these experiences to the record before they're forgotten, to let you and Heather and others know that this sort of thing is not the healthy functioning of a revolutionary organization, it has nothing in common with the manner in which the IBT operates, and is enough alone (without even addressing the plethora of RWL programmatic deviations) to insure they have no right to claim the mantle of Trotskyism.

fraternally,
Jason

[Back to Letter of Resignation](#)