

INTERNAL INFORMATION BULLETIN

June 1974

No. 5 in 1974

DOCUMENTS FROM THE LSA/LSO

Ross Dowson Leads Walkout from Canadian Section	3
Statement of the Eighteen Splitters	19

The material in this bulletin is reprinted from Vol. 2, No. 6 (May 1974) of the Internal Information Bulletin of the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere, the Canadian section of the Fourth International. It is published for the information of the members of the Socialist Workers Party.

30 cents

Published by

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

14 Charles Lane, New York, N.Y. 10014

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The material in this bulletin deals with the split of the Ross Dowson grouping from the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, Canadian section of the Fourth International. The split took place just as the discussion on the New Democratic Party was beginning to unfold in the leadership of the LSA/LSO.

The Labor Party Tendency, to which the splitters had belonged, submitted its first document to the January 1974 plenum of the LSA/LSO Central Committee. Some initial discussion of the criticisms raised in the document took place at this plenum. The Central Committee then voted to refer the Labor Party Tendency document to the Political Committee to enable it to have a full discussion of the points raised in the document, and take a position on the document. Before this could be done, the Dowson grouping split.

Only a portion of Labor Party Tendency members resigned from the LSA/LSO; others organized a new tendency to continue to put forward their point of view inside the Canadian section.

Following the plenum, the Political Committee published five bulletins containing reports and contributions at the plenum on the question of the New Democratic Party, and other questions raised by the Labor Party Tendency.

The following material relevant to the Dowson split, not included in this bulletin, is available from the Central Office of the LSA/LSO, 334 Queen Street West, Toronto 2B, Ontario, Canada.

1. Political Committee Statement on Popular Frontism, Internal Discussion Bulletin (IDB), vol. 2 in 1973, no. 1 (\$.10)
2. Young-Dowson Exchange on Question of Party Unity, Internal Information Bulletin (IIB), vol. 2, no. 1 (Jan. 1974) (\$.30)
3. Our Tasks in the NDP Today (report adopted by January 1974 Central Committee plenum), IIB, vol. 2, no. 2. (\$.65)
4. Subversion of our NDP Orientation -- Statement of the Labor Party Tendency, IIB, vol. 2, no. 3. (\$1.10)
5. Class Collaboration and Independent Working Class Action: Fundamentals of our Policy Towards the NDP (Political Committee Report to the January 1974 Central Committee plenum), IIB, vol. 2, no. 4. (\$.60)
6. Young-Dowson exchange on character of NDP governments, IIB, vol. 2, no. 5. (\$.45)

ROSS DOWSON LEADS WALKOUT FROM CANADIAN SECTION

by John Riddell

On February 19, 1974, a group of 18 members resigned from the League for Socialist Action/Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière (LSA/LSO).

Their short statement claims that the League has "degenerated into a sect" and can no longer serve as an instrument to build the revolutionary party. The League, they claim, has "adapted to ultra-left pressures" and has violated "all the historical positions of Canadian Trotskyism." They reject any attempt to win other members of the League to their views, through internal discussion and common experience. In their view, the process of "sectarian degeneration" has gripped the League's membership to the point that "it is impossible to hold out any hope of influencing and halting the plunge into sectarian isolation."

The two-page statement of the splitters mentions briefly five points of difference with the political positions of the League. These are Canadian nationalism, the New Democratic Party, Québec, women's liberation, and our organizational character. It does not explain their position on any of these points. On two points, they did not await membership discussions where their views would be debated. On the other three points, they never presented their views to the leading bodies or membership of the League.

On Canadian nationalism, and the New Democratic Party (NDP), their views were advanced by organized tendencies within the League -- the United Tendency before the April 1973 convention, and the Labor Party Tendency (LPT) formed in October 1973. After a very lengthy discussion, the positions of the United Tendency were decisively rejected by 91% of the delegates at the April 1973 convention. A reopening of the discussion had been planned, at an early date, to permit the contending views to be reassessed in the light of experience. The eighteen, saw no purpose in participating in this discussion.

The views of the Labor Party Tendency were presented to the leadership only in January 1974. Its document, The Subversion of our NDP Orientation, was submitted too late for a full discussion at the January plenum, and the Central Committee decided to refer it to the Political Committee for consideration. The plenum had been unable to clarify the nature of the differences. The Central Committee therefore stressed that the Political Committee should move ahead as rapidly as possible to come to grips with the dispute, to prepare the ground for a membership discussion of this question. But the splitters rejected this discussion, resigning both from the Labor Party Tendency and from the League.

On the other three questions, individuals had voiced opinions and differences. But they had not pressed them as matters of urgent concern. Indeed, the splitters did not, as a grouping, present their views, either to the League membership or to any leading body. The split statement was the first

time the League heard that an organized group of comrades had differences on these questions.

A split in a revolutionary Marxist organization can be required if full inner-party discussion shows that differences involve fundamental principles of Marxism and, therefore, are incapable of being resolved through the test of further experience and further discussion.

Explaining his split to Political Committee representatives on February 19, Dowson said that he did not believe the League had violated any of the basic principles of Trotskyism. His grouping nonetheless refused to discuss its views with other League members. On several points its members turned down requests that they make their views known to the League membership. The split was unjustified and unprincipled, and a violation of the Leninist doctrine of party building.

Attempts to Block the Split

The League's leading bodies had no opportunity to assess the views of the Labor Party Tendency before the January plenum. Nonetheless, the LPT had already concluded that the chances of winning other League members to its views were very slim. The League was "degenerating," its document said, and was fast approaching a "qualitative transformation." Dowson specified that after this "transformation," the League would "cease to be Trotskyist," implying that at that point, he would have to split from the League.

Art Young, ISA/LSO Organizational Secretary, made a special contribution to the plenum, appealing for a halt to this split talk. These ill-considered and irresponsible statements, he said, reflected a factional atmosphere that had an obvious cause. Up to the plenum, the Labor Party Tendency had developed its views in isolation from the League, failing to present its views to the League or its leadership. Such a procedure encourages "prejudicial thinking" and "warps capacity for political judgement." The presentation of the LPT document opened the road to eliminating this problem, he said, through united discussion. A further means to overcome a split dynamic was for LPT members to join in the common work and common experience in building the League.

Ross Dowson's reply to this contribution rejected these proposals for maintaining the League's unity, and reaffirmed the extreme formulations of the LPT document. He confirmed the leadership's fears that members of the LPT were on a split course by saying that some members would propose that the tendency walk out of the ISA/LSO. "I would deplore that any comrades would pull out... I don't know what you anticipate from me," he said, pointedly ignoring Young's suggestions for a common effort to reduce the split danger.

The Political Committee moved quickly to try to head off this threat of split. It began a program to rapidly publish the LPT document, together with other material from the NDP

discussion at the plenum. It published the Young-Dowson exchange on party unity, so that the League membership would be informed of the split threat, and the moral authority of League members, and particularly of loyal LPT members, could be brought to bear to turn the splitters from this course.

Second, the Political Committee urged Dowson to begin to present and discuss his views to the Political Committee, particularly on questions like the character of NDP governments, and the nature of popular fronts. On these two questions, Dowson had charged the Political Committee with errors that would violate fundamental Trotskyist principles -- yet **he** refused to explain his position to any Political Committee members.

Third, the Political Committee sought means to join with LPTers in common political work, particularly in the work of the World Congress. Ross Dowson was urged to attend the World Congress as part of the Canadian delegation, and another LPT member was asked to join the delegation as a translator. Both refused, citing personal difficulties.

When word was received on February 19, that Ross Dowson and a group of members were resigning, Political Committee members, Joan Newbigging and Gary Porter spoke to Dowson and Jim Mitchell, appealing to them to remain within the League. They asked Dowson and Mitchell to suggest what measures the Political Committee could take that might help avert the split. Dowson explained that they had resigned, that this was final, and that no actions by the Political Committee could change this fact.

The Political Committee appeals today to the splitters to change their course and to rejoin the League. But the Dowson grouping has taken a different course. It has established a rival organization, the "Socialist League." The Socialist League is an opponent organization. That is, it sees the LSA/LSO as an obstacle to building the revolutionary party, and it is trying to persuade other LSA/LSO members to resign. Its aim is to destroy the LSA/LSO and build the Socialist League in its place.

What Were the Political Differences?

The five questions cited by the Dowson grouping's February 19, statement are the only indication of the political differences which led them to split from the League. Nor has the Socialist League, which they set up, yet made any programmatic statement.

On one of the five points, women's liberation, the splitters left no clue as to their real views. In the 1972-1973 League discussion of women's liberation, they were to be found supporting two counterposed positions, criticizing the leadership from diametrically opposed viewpoints. One grouping held for example that the leadership was wrong because, in its view, the leadership was dumping the campaign for the right to abortion. The other grouping denounced the

leadership for continuing to give priority to this campaign.

The splitters say only "our work in Women's Liberation has become unhinged." We can only assume that they continue to disagree on this issue, just as they did in 1973. They appear to have formed a bloc on a single point: they agree that the League's policy is "unhinged." Such unprincipled combinationism is a poor omen for the future of their new group.

A look at their positions on the remaining four questions gives a clear idea of their political direction.

Partisans of "Progressive Canadian Nationalism"

The Dowson grouping's split statement tells us:

"(The League's) sectarian course first found overt political expression some two years ago in the dumping of the 1968 convention resolution, Canada-U.S. Relations -- a socialist viewpoint. This document had enabled us to meet the challenge of the anti-imperialist sentiment developing in an anti-Canadian capitalist direction, which placed us in a position to meet the challenge of the development of a new Canadian nationalism. This stands in stark contrast to our present position which has made it impossible to relate to this key aspect of the current radicalization."

The statement does not say what is this "new Canadian nationalism," which it holds to be so important. It covers its evasion with an incomprehensible reference to "anti-imperialist sentiment developing in an anti-Canadian capitalist direction." Nonetheless, what they are getting at is clear to those in the know. It is the pro-Canadian-nationalist position advanced by the United Tendency in the April 1973 convention.

Basing itself on the aspects of the 1968 resolution on Canada-U.S. Relations which proved to be seriously in error, the United Tendency called on the League to "identify with" this "new Canadian nationalism," of an anti-U.S. variety. They called it "essentially progressive," and said it had an "anti-capitalist dynamic." The United Tendency saw this Canadian nationalism as new and unique in the world, and claimed it could only be understood by breaking new ground in Marxist theory.

This is the position cited by the Dowson grouping to justify their split.

After a long and exhaustive debate, an overwhelming majority of the League's membership adopted the resolution, Canada and the Crisis of World Imperialism, which reasserted the long-standing position of Canadian Trotskyism on the reactionary character of Canadian nationalism.

It defended the Marxist view that while national consciousness can play a progressive role in oppressed nations, "in

imperialist countries, nationalism is the ideology of the ruling class, of class collaboration."

Supporters of this resolution agreed with the United Tendency that the growth of Canadian nationalism exerted pressure on the League, and posed a major challenge to the League. The fact that many workers, and most of the Canadian left embrace nationalism today, is no reason to abandon the established Marxist view of nationalism and hail this phenomenon as progressive. To do so is to break with a fundamental principle of Marxism.

The League's membership will soon be able to assess the April 1973 convention decision in the light of experience. Some League members hold to the view argued in 1973 by the United Tendency. Others believe that the majority view has been borne out by experience -- for example, by Ottawa's actions in the 1973 "oil crisis," which saw the government cover its defense of the interests of the Canadian capitalist class with a large measure of nationalist demagoguery.

The Dowson grouping's split reveals that it lacks confidence in its own views, and believes it cannot win the support of League members to its pro-Canadian-nationalist position.

The New Democratic Party Debate

The Dowson grouping's split statement tells us:

"As members of the Labor Party Tendency, we challenged the central leadership of the ISA/LSO to halt the clear trend towards a sectarian revision of our strategic orientation to the mass labor party. In face of their denial of any such change we provided the 1974 plenum with a document detailing the sectarian drift of Labor Challenge, as well as the failure of the organizational and executive secretaries to defend our positions against ultra-left attacks on our NDP orientation, both from the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and from the international leadership."

What were the differences on the NDP? The Political Committee repeatedly requested Ross Dowson, from August 1973 on, to explain to it his views on the NDP. These attempts were unsuccessful. When it was formed in October 1973, the Labor Party Tendency did not declare what its political positions were. It simply denounced the leadership for abandoning the movement's position on the NDP and demanded the opening of a discussion on the question.

In the face of this situation, the Political Committee allocated a major part of the plenum to a discussion of our work in the NDP. It prepared reports for the plenum. Time was allocated for the presentation of the views of the LPT. Unfortunately, the preparation of the document on the NDP by the LPT was long delayed, and it was submitted to the Political Committee only five minutes before the plenum session scheduled to discuss it.

The plenum had to limit its discussion to points raised in the oral presentation by Ross Dowson, and it had to refer to the Political Committee discussion of the LPT document. Before this discussion could take place, Dowson had split.

In general, the document considers that the ISA/LSO's criticisms of the NDP leadership's policies have been unrealistic and exaggerated. It holds that the League's policy on the NDP, one of critical support, is marked by sectarian hostility to the party. Of Central Committee members, only Ross Dowson defended such characterizations at the January plenum. Other Central Committee members defended the League's established positions. All agreed that further discussion was necessary to find out just what was at stake in this dispute, and what the real issues were.

Two clearly defined differences emerged at the plenum. Both concerned questions of principle. On both points, the minority view was presented not in the Labor Party Tendency statement, but personally by Ross Dowson. These are the questions of the nature of NDP governments, and our position on popular frontism.

The Class Character of the NDP Provincial Governments

Writing of the January plenum of the Central Committee (CC), the Dowsonite split statement tells us:

"Also the concept was introduced and actually adopted by the CC, that the NDP, 'a social democratic labor party,' upon election, is not a labor government challenged by the contradictions of having to administer a government serving in a bourgeois state apparatus. Although we urged its election to office as a party, in government, as a 'bourgeois government,' we are irreconcilably opposed to it. The result of this thinking is to make our task of winning the working class from reformism more difficult, if not impossible."

The statement singles out this issue as a central factor that made a split necessary.

This issue was debated at the plenum, and the text of contributions by Ross Dowson and Art Young is in the Internal Information Bulletin (IIB), vol. 2, no. 5.

What is at issue here is determining what class rules where a reformist labor party has taken office, as the NDP has done in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. What we see in these provinces is no new phenomenon. Since the turn of the century, reformist labor parties have taken office in many countries to administer the bourgeois state on behalf of the capitalist ruling class. Sometimes these governments undertake many reforms, as the Labour government in Britain after 1945. Sometimes they serve as instruments of brutal reaction and counterrevolution, as did the Social-democratic government in Germany after 1918, when it headed up the struggle to crush the German workers revolution. But in all cases, such governments

are dependent on the bourgeoisie, and defend the class interests of the bourgeoisie. The capitalists use them as instruments for bourgeois rule.

Since 1900, Marxists have expressed this idea of the class character of these governments by calling them "bourgeois governments." They are fundamentally different from "workers and farmers governments," which can be established in periods of mass revolutionary upsurge. The latter are independent of the bourgeoisie, and can take far-reaching measures against capitalist property.

It is clear that the NDP provincial regimes, while governments by the leadership of a labor party, are bourgeois in their class character. They are not responsible to the labor party, to the rank and file, nor to the organized labor movement, they are not workers governments in any sense.

This is the basic Marxist concept which Ross Dowson challenged at the January plenum. The split statement repeats the challenge, saying there is some kind of fundamental contradiction between the NDP government, which it calls a "labor government," and the bourgeoisie. In this context, the term "labor government" seems to signify that it is somehow a government of the working class.

The statement does not understand that we differentiate between the Barrett government and the New Democratic Party. We oppose the government, which rules for the capitalists. We support the party, which is a labor party.

A difference on this point has big implications for our intervention in the class struggle. When we faced the anti-labor Bill 11 in British Columbia, we recognized that there was a class contradiction between the government which proposed this bill and the party which thrust this government into office. We successfully exploited that contradiction, helping to rally the NDP convention against the government's policy. (See John Steele's account in his plenum report, IIB, vol. 2, no. 2.)

Those who see a contradiction between the class character of the NDP government and that of the bourgeoisie could easily think that this government could play a positive role in the fight for liberation. This is the position which led British Columbia NDPers, like Sharon Yandle, to propose a "ministry of women's rights" as an instrument for women's liberation.

Ross Dowson's support of the "women's ministry" demand shows the disastrous results of a false position on the character of NDP governments.

What is a Popular Front?

The Political Resolution of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction correctly points to popular frontism as one of the most insidious and effective forms of class collaborationism utilized by the world bourgeoisie today.

"The distinguishing feature of a people's front is the open inclusion of bourgeois parties in the electoral front as a sector either in charge of determining policies or in whose interests policies are deliberately shaped," the resolution explains. "...To call for a vote for a people's front therefore signifies supporting an electoral platform to advance class collaborationism." It points to the Popular Unity in Chile, and the Union of the Left in France, as two examples of popular frontism today.

This position has been contested by leaders of the International Majority Tendency, who claim these alliances are not popular fronts, and can be granted some form of political support by revolutionary Marxists. The Ligue Communiste, the now banned French Trotskyist organization, gave critical support to the Union of the Left in the 1973 elections. Tariq Ali has written that the Popular Unity was a "workers united front" -- and we normally support workers united fronts.

When the Political Committee adopted a statement on this question in November 1973, analyzing the character of the popular fronts in Chile and France, Ross Dowson refused to vote for it. He said he disagreed with the position of the Political Committee and the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction on this point. Together with others who later split, he argued in branch discussions for a position similar to that of Tariq Ali and the Ligue Communiste. At the plenum he said he agreed with the Ligue Communiste's support of the Union of the Left.

Dowson failed to respond to requests that he present his views on this question to the Political Committee. The disagreement however touches a crucial point, and has important meaning for our work in Canada.

We have fought against the popular-frontist COPE launched by the Communist Party in Vancouver, counterposing the need for independent labor political action through the NDP. We have taken the same stand in other cities. In Quebec, we have fought against Montreal municipal popular-frontist electoral projects which are based on an alliance with the Parti Québécois, and counterposed the need to launch an independent political party of the labor movement. If our stand against the Union of the Left and the Popular Unity is wrong, as Dowson claims, then our position on these issues is also in question.

Moreover, because popular frontism is a particularly pernicious form of the general problem of class collaborationism, confusion on popular fronts can lead to confusion on other aspects of class collaboration. In fact, rejection of our position on popular frontism in Chile, France and elsewhere in the world today, means rejection of the basic concept behind our policy on the labor party question in Canada over the entire last fifty years. We support independent labor political action, and oppose class collaborationist alliances. To reject this means throwing out our long-standing policy on the NDP and the labor party question.

Perhaps this is why Ross Dowson, while conducting a noisy defense of his version of our position on the NDP, stubbornly refused to explain his views on popular frontism.

Our Position on the Québec Labor Bureaucracy

"This sectarian trend has since encompassed all the historic positions of Canadian Trotskyism. Some of the basic positions of Vive le Québec Libre have been revised."

The assertion that the League has dumped the "historic positions of Canadian Trotskyism" on Québec is curt and unenlightening. The reference here is to a disagreement on the resolution, The Rising Class Struggle in Québec, which was adopted at the April 1973 convention. When this resolution was placed before the Political Committee, Ross Dowson moved two amendments, both of which were defeated. One was to remove the first section, which dealt with the question of nationalism. The other was to "extensively re-edit" the section on the Québec trade union bureaucracy.

The motivation for the second amendment was that in Dowson's view, the resolution contradicted the position of our 1968 resolution on the trade union leadership in Québec. In fact, the resolution quotes the very paragraph of the 1968 resolution cited by Dowson and states its agreement with this position. (see page 51, International Socialist Review, July-August 1973.) But in Dowson's view, the resolution's position on this question, while formally correct, is nullified -- by its criticisms of the labor bureaucracy's errors in the 1972 Québec labor upsurge!

At our December 1972 plenum, Dowson presented a minority report arguing this view, which he submitted for publication in the discussion bulletin (see Internal Discussion Bulletin (IDB) 1972-73, no. 46, pp. 10-12). He abstained on the Central Committee vote on this resolution.

But when the convention took place, Dowson did not present a minority report. This time he voted for the Central Committee resolution. The leadership considered the question resolved. Clearly, however, Dowson continued to press his view in his private circle. It now reappears as a reason for their split.

What is at issue here? The resolution notes how the refusal of the leadership to appeal sentences for "contempt of court" sparked the vast wave of wildcat strikes and protest actions in May 1972. However the leadership's failure to coordinate the protests, to propose demands, and propel it along an anticapitalist path threw the movement into confusion and rapid decline. It also discusses the effect of the leadership's failure to launch a labor party. Then it lists the demands put forward by the Ligue Socialiste Ouvriere during the upsurge.

In criticizing the resolution, Dowson emphasizes that

the labor leadership is more open, less bureaucratized, and plays a more positive role in Québec than in English Canada. That is true, and is also explained by our resolution.

But he shies away from terming this leadership a bureaucracy, and from criticizing its role in the 1972 upsurge. He goes on to question whether we can raise the slogan of the labor party in Québec, and whether we can counterpose it to the Parti Québécois (PQ). He emphasizes that the "essential base" of the Parti Québécois is "among the working class." From this he concludes that we cannot explain to Québec workers that the PQ is a bourgeois party, or that it should be replaced with a labor party (IDB, no. 46, p. 11).

Many passages of this contribution are reminiscent of an earlier "innovation" by Dowson on Québec. In 1972 he argued for the view that the Parti Québécois -- a bourgeois party, as Dowson has always agreed -- would be the "reformist labor experience" of the Québec working class.

Once again, the Dowsonite split prevented any clarification of the differences on this question. However, Dowson's position tends to give ground programmatically before the pressure -- the very considerable pressure -- of the trade union leadership in Québec, and of the Parti Québécois. That is a grave danger sign, but, when the splitters include this reference to Québec in their statement, one can only conclude that they have come to accept the arguments put forward by Dowson in his 1973 contribution.

A Clear Trend: Right-Wing Opportunism

The split grouping thinks the LSA/LSO has capitulated to ultra-left pressures and become a sect. The evidence they introduce to back up their accusation gives a good idea of their own political direction.

--they accuse the League of refusal to budge from the Marxist view of nationalism, despite pressure of rising nationalist sentiment in left circles in English Canada.

--they accuse the League of extreme and exaggerated criticisms of the social-democratic leadership of the New Democratic Party.

--they accuse the League's policy of "critical support" of the NDP as being marked by sectarian hostility to the party.

--they accuse the League of insisting on the Marxist position on the bourgeois character of social-democratic governments.

--they accuse the League of insisting on applying the Trotskyist view of popular frontism to the widely hailed class collaborationist alliances in France and Chile.

--they accuse the League of raising revolutionary criticisms of the Québec trade union leadership, of refusing to

set aside our long-standing slogan for a labor party in Québec, and of being insensitive to the massive illusions of the working class in the Parti Québécois.

Such criticisms show a clear trend. The Dowson grouping is prepared to sweep aside questions of principle, in order to adapt its positions to the pressures of alien class forces, to right wing pressures -- of bourgeois nationalists, of social democratic bureaucrats and of the labor brass. Rather than starting with a Marxist class analysis, and applying this to the reality before us, they start with the moods and fashions of the left milieu in which we work, and then adapt their politics to these pressures. There is a name for this tendency, it is right opportunism. It means breaking with the method and the program of Trotskyism.

Why did the split occur at this time? Part of the explanation lies in developments in the class struggle which have strengthened the reformist pressures on our movement. The detente, which has increased all illusions in the reformist leaderships, has given the latter a certain room for maneuver. It has been accompanied by an increase in class-collaborationist practices in Canada, for example, the growing alliance between the Québec union leadership and the Parti Québécois, and the de facto parliamentary alliance of the NDP with Trudeau's Liberals. We have also seen a certain decline in mass actions, a pause in the student movement, coupled with an increase in support to the reformist leaderships, and the election of the NDP to office in three provinces. Reactionary concepts, like Canadian nationalism press on us, not only through the labor movement, but also through the petit-bourgeois academic milieu.

These can be formidable pressures on a small group. They are all the greater pressures on those who lack roots in the working class, and who are not well grounded in the theory and history of the revolutionary Marxist movement.

Ultraleft pressures are also operating on our movement. These are transmitted in part through the International Majority Tendency of the Fourth International, but come primarily from the layers of newly-radicalized youth looking for a shortcut to the revolution.

Having abandoned the principled program of Trotskyism and the greatest bulwark against the alien class pressures, the organized Trotskyist movement of the LSA/LSO, the Dowson grouping is much more subject to these pressures. It may show a tendency to capitulate to pressures of an ultraleft variety as well as those of a right-opportunist kind. It may flip-flop from opportunist to ultraleft errors -- and back again. But to judge from the split statement, the Socialist League's fundamental inclination will be that of right-wing opportunism.

Opportunist or ultraleft tendencies can often appear in a revolutionary organization. The framework of common discussion and common action permits tendencies like this to be contained, and eventually corrected through the lessons of experience. This is why preservation of our unity is so vital.

But the Dowsonite grouping split on this program of opportunist error. The history of previous breakaways from the League, reaching to the Pabloite and Joe Rosenthal splits and earlier, indicates that such breakaway groups degenerate rapidly. Their errors, whether opportunist or ultraleft, multiply rapidly once the restraining influence of the League and the world Trotskyist movement is removed. The Dowsonite grouping will likely experience a rapid slide away from revolutionary politics into the obscurity of a small centrist sect, or into its liquidation as an independent group.

Dowson Abandons Trotskyist Concept of the Party

The Dowsonite split statement claims that "this wholesale abandonment of our political positions in a sectarian direction had its parallel in the revision of our organizational concepts." It does not explain this position.

In the months before the split, however, Ross Dowson and others of the splitters had developed the view that there is something wrong with our concept of what the League is, and the relationship it bears to the mass revolutionary party of the future. In the January plenum, for example, Dowson said, "We talk about our movement being a party. I notice this is said more and more in our circle. We talk about ourselves as a party. We're not a party, comrades. We have the program of a party, but we're not a party! (He points to the Central Committee members gathered in the hall) Look at us! A party? Do you know what parties are, comrades? They have roots in the masses!"

In explaining his split, February 19, Ross Dowson said to Political Committee representatives that the Political Committee "has developed alien concepts of the party -- the idea that the League is more than the nucleus of the party." Then he asserted that the "LSA is no longer the indispensable nucleus of the mass revolutionary party of the future." Jim Mitchell continued his thought, explaining that the nucleus is now divided, among the LSA, their own grouping, the RMG, the Waffle, the Lambertistes, etc.

The position of the League on this question is contained in its 1970 resolution Building the Revolutionary Party in Canada:

"Is the LSA/LSO the revolutionary party? Certainly it is not a party in the commonly understood sense of presenting itself before the masses as a contestant for political power against all other political forces. In this arena today, it is a supporter and partisan of the New Democratic Party. Nor is it the revolutionary party as it must be, the party that is required, capable of leading the masses to power. It remains a propaganda group, and a relatively small one at that.

"What then distinguishes the LSA/LSO from other groupings now in competition with Trotskyism, or yet to appear? Is Trotskyism merely one tendency among many which, together or in various combinations, will make their contribution to the building of a vanguard party?

"In so far as we are the only force that carries the program of the proletarian revolution in this country, separate and apart from and in contest with all other formations, we are a party -- the party of the Canadian socialist revolution. As for our forces, however much they may fall short in quantity or quality of what we regard as necessary, as historically required, they must be measured by their revolutionary dynamic. They are the possessors of the program of the proletarian revolution; they are the heirs of the revolutionary struggles of the past, and they are the continuators of that struggle today. Our growing forces represent the revolutionary party as it exists today. They are what conscious revolutionaries have been able to assemble and educate through immeasurable efforts over the past decades. Many component forces must be brought together to build the revolutionary party. But the LSA/LSO is the indispensable foundation on which it must be built."

It is the Dowson grouping which has broken from this concept. It no longer views the League as the nucleus of the party. It no longer believes that such a nucleus exists. It apparently does not view such a nucleus as necessary to the building of the party. It thus abandons the historical and theoretical continuity of our movement.

It has revised the Leninist concept of how the party will be built, to bring it into line with its own pessimism about its prospects in Canada today.

A Split from the Fourth International

The split statement of the eighteen mentions their resignation from three organizations: the LSA/LSO, the YS/LJS and the Labor Party Tendency. It neglects to mention the fourth grouping to which they formerly adhered: the Fourth International.

The statement finds other ways of indicating its disinterest in the world Trotskyist movement. It states its commitment to the positions of "Canadian Trotskyism" but makes no mention of the program of Trotskyism, the world movement. It sees the ultra-left attacks on the Canadian section as coming not from the leadership of the International Majority Tendency, but from the "international leadership" as a unified entity. It claims that "ultraleft pressures" are "tearing at the vitals of the component organizations of the Fourth International," making no differentiation between those **that** support the International Majority Tendency and those **that** uphold the program of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction. Most revealing of all, the splitters declare they are partisans of "a Fourth International" -- but make no reference to the Fourth International, the real and living world movement to which they formerly belonged.

Above all, their desertion of the Fourth International to found an independent national grouping shows they think that internationalism is only a secondary and peripheral consideration in building a revolutionary organization.

Ross Dowson stated, in joining the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction, his disagreement on the point of Canadian nationalism. In discussion with Porter and Newbigging, he added that while he agreed with the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction on Latin America, he disagreed with its positions on popular frontism and on labor parties. In light of his growing disagreements with the politics of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction, he decided to split from it.

The Dowson grouping accuses the League of capitulation to ultraleft pressures. But while the League rallied to the defense of Trotskyism against real ultraleft dangers in the world movement by supporting the positions of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction, the Dowson grouping has deserted this struggle. It has walked out of the world movement.

The 1970 resolution on Building the Revolutionary Party in Canada emphasized the central position of the world movement for us:

"Our internationalism is no abstract sentiment of brotherhood. It is rooted in the character of the world economy, the world development of productive forces, and the inter-related character of the class struggle... The vehicle for this struggle must be a world party of socialist revolution -- the Fourth International. The Fourth International is indispensable to the development of our program and world outlook; as a section of the Fourth International, the LSA/LSO is committed to integrating its work into the broader effort to build the world revolutionary party."

In rejecting this concept, the splitters show once again their rejection of fundamentals of Leninism.

The Close of a Period of Internal Crisis

The convention and plenum held at the end of 1973 marked the close of a period dominated by factional struggle and leadership crisis in the League. The convention brought the pre-world congress discussion to a close by recording near-unanimous support for the positions of the Leninist-Trotskyist Faction. The plenum adopted firm decisions on our policy and work in the NDP, and turned the League outwards to a new period of expanding campaigns and renewed growth.

The period of internal crisis began early in 1971 and lasted almost three years. It had three causes. The first was the need to adjust the League's work to shifts in the class struggle; particularly the decline in student activism, the decline of the anti-war movement, the decline of nationalist mass actions in Québec, rising labor struggles and the election of NDP governments. The second was the impact on the Canadian section of the crisis in the Fourth International. The third was a crisis of transition within the leadership of the League itself.

The three problems struck at the same time. This added to the depth of the crisis, and the time required to solve it. The crisis was resolved when two successive conventions in 1973 had

adopted a clear political line on Canadian and world questions, and when a homogeneous majority leadership had consolidated with overwhelming membership support. The League emerges from this period qualitatively stronger, and better armed for the tests of coming years.

The third problem, that of a transition in the League's leadership, proved particularly difficult to resolve. The League survived and grew in the hard years of the 1950's, and grew more rapidly in the 1960's. Furthermore, its character changed fundamentally. It became Canada-wide, rooted itself in the Québécois nation, developed a strong youth section, and took an active part in the work of our world movement. As the 1970 organizational resolution noted, "For the first time a united and homogeneous, if still narrow, leadership cadre of the movement has been assembled." (emphasis added)

The League's continuous existence, and rapid growth, was in no small measure due to the capacities of Ross Dowson, its central political leader since the Second World War. At the same time the League suffered from the limitations of any revolutionary organization which is dependent for many years on the role of a single individual.

By 1970, these limitations had become apparent to all in the leadership, and had begun to brake the development of the League. Political initiatives were still largely limited to the central leader; political line was dependent on his strengths and weaknesses. There was no tradition of debate and resolution of differences in the leadership. How it would fare in the face of new challenges remained to be seen. The central leadership was limited to a single individual for so long that, as the movement grew, the central leadership lagged behind. The clearest sign of this breakdown at the center was our chronic and growing financial crisis. Younger leaders held back from assuming central leadership responsibility or taking independent initiatives. Our leadership was politically united -- yet threatened to break apart because of its inability to build a harmonious team operation.

The existence of problems in the operation of the leadership was recognized by all the leading comrades, but there was no agreement on their causes, or on how to overcome them. Differences developed on the source of the problems. In December, 1971, Ross Dowson told other Political Committee members that "the leadership cadre is dead," and had to be broken apart and renewed by fresh elements from the ranks of the movement. Many other Political Committee members disagreed, and felt the problem was the leadership's collective failure to replace a one-person Central Office with a team operation, through which Dowson could contribute to the development of younger leaders and help assimilate them into a leadership team.

At the March 1972 plenum, Dowson proposed measures to resolve the dilemma. He proposed to resign from the post of executive secretary. He nominated John Riddell for the post of executive secretary, and proposed to collaborate with a new leadership team. These measures were accepted.

Events proved the capacities of the movement under this new leadership team to deal with the most urgent problems. It spotted errors in the development of the League's line on anti-U.S. sentiment and Canadian nationalism, and moved to correct them. It brought under control a fast-growing crisis of the movement's finances. It successfully halted and turned back the attacks of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency. At the April 1973 convention, the membership expressed its political confidence in the leadership's policies.

The leadership was not successful in its attempts, from the outset, to incorporate Ross Dowson into this experience. Just before the March 1972 plenum, he had resigned from the editorial board of the newspaper which he had edited for over 20 years. The January 1973 plenum asked him to reconsider this decision -- with no success. After March, 1972, he refused to be part of the Political Bureau, the executive body which existed at that time within the Political Committee. His separation from the functioning of the leadership was accompanied by his development of differences with the League's established policies. He then pointed to these differences as justification for his non-membership in the executive bodies of the Political Committee, and non-collaboration with the leadership. The other leading comrades pointed out that the development of differences made the integration of Dowson into the functioning leadership of the movement all the more imperative.

At the April 1973 convention, the United Tendency, led by Dowson, and the Majority Tendency dissolved. The Political Committee demonstratively dissolved the Political Bureau, in an attempt to remove any barrier to Dowson's integration into the leadership team. But within four months Dowson decided to cease full-time work for the League, over the objection of the League's other leading officers. He formed a new tendency around new differences -- differences which he refused to discuss with the Political Committee. From there, his course led rapidly to his split in February.

Dowson's refusal to collaborate with the League leadership and his refusal to discuss his differences deprived his tendency of the restraining influence that a properly conducted political discussion could have exerted. Instead of taking advantage of the newly developed strengths of the League, its ability to carry out and resolve a political discussion, Dowson, in his split course, seemed determined to seize upon, magnify and extend all the weaknesses of the League in previous decades.

He set about to build anew, a small grouping in which one individual could play the predominant role and determine the political line. If the League previously had paid more attention to tactical initiatives than to theoretical study, the Dowson grouping set about to divorce tactical flexibility from any considerations of principle whatsoever. If the League had been compelled in an earlier period, the 1950's to survive with limited international contacts, the Dowson grouping decided to break free of any international collaboration whatsoever -- breaking off collaboration with the Socialist Workers Party,

which has played a crucial role in aiding the development of Canadian Trotskyism; breaking off collaboration with the Fourth International.

In the course of abandoning the historical continuity of Trotskyism in Canada, the LSA/LSO, Dowson has graphically demonstrated that no individual is stronger than the organization of which he is a part. Without the collective leadership of the League, Dowson's weaknesses, instead of his strengths, come to the fore.

It is the LSA/LSO which preserves and is building on the firm foundations established in the 1960's and before. Foundations which Ross Dowson did much to establish. Dowson the splitter now rejects his previous work as a party-builder, and judges his life work to be a failure.

Balance Sheet of the Dowson Split

Explaining the split to Comrades Newbigging and Porter on February 19, Jim Mitchell pointed out that over half the inactive members of the Toronto organization were part of his grouping. When adherents of the grouping began to drop out of the League on their own accord, they had no choice, he said, but to split, in order to "save the cadre."

As Mitchell indicates, the split took little from the life and activity of the League. Dowson had not a single supporter for his split among over thirty other members of the Central Committee, and only one supporter among some fifty members of branch executives. The new grouping's prospects are slim. Some of its members find in their liberation from the constraints of the Trotskyist movement and program, an impulse to new activity. But the Socialist League is saddled from the outset with a legacy of opportunist error and the methods of unprincipled factionalism and personal cultism. It has cut itself off from the world Trotskyist movement and from the historically established cadres of Canadian Trotskyism. We must anticipate a rapid continuation of its centrist degeneration.

The LSA/LSO has emerged from the test of the last three years as a vastly strengthened organization. It has gained from the test of the crisis in the world movement, and from adjusting to a turn in the Canadian class struggle. Its internal struggles and its leadership transition of the past three years are a rich textbook in revolutionary Trotskyist politics. For the first time it has documented a rounded political line for the Canadian class struggle, one which its cadres can apply creatively, and fill out through further discussion in coming years.

April 24, 1974

STATEMENT OF THE EIGHTEEN SPLITTERS

To the Members of the LSA/LSO and YS/LJS:

With this statement, the undersigned, in their majority long-standing members, announce their resignation from the League for Socialist Action/La Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, the Young Socialists/Ligue des Jeunes Socialistes, and consequently the Labor Party Tendency.

As partisans of a Fourth International, and as activists in the struggle to build a revolutionary socialist vanguard organization, which alone can assure the victory of the socialist revolution in Canada, we have concluded that we can no longer achieve this aim within the confines of the LSA/LSO or YS/LJS.

The LSA/LSO has degenerated into a sect. This is the result of adaptation to the ultra-left pressures of the new radicalization which have developed both in the Canadian political arena and which are tearing at the vitals of the component organizations of the Fourth International.

This sectarian course first found overt political expression some two years ago in the dumping of the 1968 convention resolution, Canada/U.S. Relations - a socialist viewpoint. This document had enabled us to meet the challenge of the anti-imperialist sentiment developing in an anti-Canadian capitalist direction, which placed us in a position to meet the challenge of the development of a new Canadian nationalism. This stands in stark contrast to our present position which has made it impossible to relate to this key aspect of the current radicalization.

This sectarian trend has since encompassed all the historic positions of Canadian Trotskyism. Some of the basic positions of Vive le Québec Libre have been revised. Our work in Women's Liberation has become unhinged. And finally, our longstanding orientation to the NDP, the touchstone of non-sectarian revolutionary politics in Canada, has been subverted.

As members of the Labor Party Tendency, we challenged the central leadership of the LSA/LSO to halt the clear trend towards a sectarian revision of our strategic orientation to the mass labor party. In face of their denial of any such change we provided the 1974 plenum with a document detailing the sectarian drift of Labor Challenge, as well as the failure of the organizational and executive secretaries to defend our positions against ultra-left attacks on our NDP orientation, both from the Revolutionary Communist Tendency and from the international leadership.

At that plenum a major figure in the central leadership of the League openly attacked the 1970 convention document. Among other things, he contended it led to misunderstandings that are "in large part responsible for the long record of confusion and adaptation of our work in the NDP, particularly in the Waffle experience." Also the concept was introduced and actually adopted by the CC, that the NDP, "a social democratic labor party," upon election, is not a labor government challenged by the contradictions of having to ad-

minister a government serving in a bourgeois state apparatus. Although we urged its election to office as a party, in government, as a "bourgeois government," we are irreconcilably opposed to it. The result of this thinking is to make our task of winning the working class from reformism more difficult, if not impossible.

This wholesale abandonment of our political positions in a sectarian direction has had its parallel in the revision of our organizational concepts.

The leadership of the League has taken on the character of a clique. With the development of internal differences it has generated an extreme factionalism. It has become impossible to hold out any hope of influencing and halting the plunge into sectarian isolation.

For our part we declare we stand on the general line of all the basic documents of the movement and its general practice up to and including the 1968 and 1970 convention positions, and including the 1971 plenum document entitled, The NDP and the Waffle.

We consider ourselves to be continuing in the tradition of the Canadian Trotskyist movement. We intend to move forward and develop these traditions in a new organization. Hopefully, as a result of future political experiences, we will once again find ourselves in a united Trotskyist movement. Until then, life itself will be the judge of our political paths.

Signed:

Gord D.	Wayne R.	Lynda D.
Jim M.	Roz D.	Alice K.
Julie T.	Abie W.	Jim C.
Pat S.	John D.	Jane C.
Ross D.	Ellie K.	Harry K.
Dale R.	Gus T.	Sabena K.

February 19, 1974

STATEMENT OF A TENDENCY FORMATION IN THE LSA/LSO

Early last Fall and immediately prior to our spring convention our press expressed considerable confusion as to our orientation to the NDP, which the Mandel-Maitan-Frank Faction took advantage of for their factional purpose.

In the convention itself the reporter of the Political Resolution in his summary remarks declared that the concept of unconditional but critical support by the Canadian Trotskyists of the mass labor party formation, the NDP, was not his view, and by implication not that of the majority of the leadership. In dissociating himself from this concept he specifically referred to the document Our Orientation to the NDP; the Strategy and its Tactical Application where it is developed at some length. This document, while submitted to the 1970 convention in the name of an individual, had the endorsement of the Political Committee.

Despite periodic protests by some leading comrades and without discussion on the Political Committee or in the Toronto branches, since the convention a whole series of important articles relevant to different aspects of the NDP and our work have been published in our press. These articles show a clear trend towards a sectarian revision of our longstanding strategic orientation and in our opinion, in their totality, constitute an abandonment of our orientation to the mass labor party.

As the 1970 document points out, "Our CCF-NDP orientation and its effective application has been the hardest fought position in the history of the movement, established against trends of centrist conciliationism and liquidationism into the NDP, sectarian opposition to the NDP, and in more recent years, spontaneist and adventurist hostility to it..." And further; "it (the CCF-NDP) is the touchstone of class politics. All working class politics revolve around it and an incorrect position on it is fatal."

It is in order to commence a process of an open and serious discussion within the movement and to defend the longstanding strategic orientation of our movement to the NDP that we declare the formation of the Labor Party Tendency.

October 4, 1973

(signed)

Gord D.
Ross D.
Harry K.
Zane B.
Jim M.
H.M.
Wayne R.

Jim C.
Jane C.
Dale R.
Claire D.
G.T.
Lynda D.

STATEMENT OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEE ON THE FORMATION OF THE
LABOR PARTY TENDENCY.

The Political Committee has received the statement of formation of the "Labor Party Tendency" in the LSA/LSO.

The formation of this tendency comes at an unusual time. Less than six months have passed since our convention, and since the closing of an exhaustive 11-month pre convention discussion. The New Democratic Party orientation was a hotly debated topic at that convention. The convention's position was unambiguous: it adopted a Political Resolution which reaffirmed the LSA/LSO's long-standing orientation to the NDP.

The task after the convention was to turn the movement outward, to take advantage of the many opportunities facing us to build the movement. Only in this way could the correctness of the adopted line be tested.

The movement is heavily involved in preparing for the coming World Congress of the Fourth International, the most important since the 1963 reunification. To form a tendency and demand the reopening of the discussion at such a time is a highly unusual step.

In explaining its formation the Labor Party Tendency claims that recent articles in our press "in their totality, constitute an abandonment of our orientation to the mass labor party." If as it claims, our press had indeed abandoned our orientation to the NDP, the orientation long defended by the leadership and reaffirmed by the convention, it would certainly be urgent to call this to the attention of the Political Committee so that a correction could be made.

The Labor Party Tendency expresses concern that there has been no discussion of the "abandonment of the NDP orientation" in the Political Committee. It is true that members of the Labor Party Tendency have told Political Committee members that they believed our press to have "abandoned the NDP orientation." But they have failed to respond to repeated requests that they present their criticisms to the Political Committee or the Editorial Board, to make a leadership discussion possible.

Comrade Riddell's September 20 letter to Comrade Dowson (appended) explains the view of Political Committee members who have discussed this question with Comrade Dowson. Comrade Riddell writes:

"I told you at our meeting a month ago that as far as I can see, the line we are carrying in Labor Challenge is the line defined by the resolutions adopted by LSA/LSO conventions and plenums ... You think that Labor Challenge's line is in opposition to our orientation to the NDP. Then you should present your criticisms to other leading comrades in the Political Committee. This is the only way we can correct errors, if errors are being made; or bring to light political

differences, if political differences really exist. I still have no idea what is the nature of the political errors which you believe Labor Challenge is making in its NDP coverage -- aside from possible questions of emphasis....

"We all agree, I'm sure, on how harmful it is if criticisms leading comrades may have formulated start to circulate through the ranks of the movement; how harmful it is for any discussion like this to begin in a private circle or on a private basis, before the leadership has had a chance to come to grips with the matter..."

The statement of the Labor Party Tendency does not overcome this problem. It neither indicates what its criticisms are, nor on what political positions it has been formed.

A dangerous situation can arise if a group of comrades begin private discussions where they develop their criticisms of the leadership, without introducing their views into the movement's leading bodies. The dangers of such a situation were described in the 1968 resolution on our organizational principles:

"Concentration on private discussions on the fringe of the movement tends to give comrades involved a one-sided view, lines them up quickly, and prejudices their thinking, before they have heard the open party debate, and warps their capacity for objective political judgement. Such conduct arises from and tends to develop into personal and unprincipled clique politics in the party which must be mercilessly fought against."

A further danger arises if a discussion is opened up in the membership before the leadership has been able to come to grips with the questions at issue. If the leadership is to lead the movement, it must be afforded an opportunity to discuss and take a position on important matters.

The comrades who have formed the Labor Party Tendency aim, through this step, to help achieve a positive clarification of the problems they believe to have seen in our line on the NDP. For such a clarification to take place and for these dangers to be avoided two things are necessary.

The Labor Party Tendency must constitute itself on declared political positions. It must document the positions it has set out to defend, and clarify the exact nature of the "errors" which it has set out to correct.

The Labor Party Tendency must present its criticisms on the line of our press on the NDP to the Political Committee. Thereby the Political Committee will be able to begin in the leadership the "open and serious discussion" desired by the Labor Party Tendency.

October 12, 1973