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J. Percy
105 Reservoir Street
Surry Hills. 2010
Australia

Dear Barry,

Because of the way events have developed in the last period in the IML and in Resistance, this letter is in no way an official IML report to you. It is a personal report of recent events from my point of view. Enclosed with this letter is the official viewpoint of the IML, that is, a resolution passed at the IML executive by four votes to three. The majority consisted of Bob Gould (who wrote the resolution), Jean Brick (an activist at Sydney University), Kieth James and Peter Voysey (who both work in the bookshop). The minority consisted of myself, my brother Jim Percy and Sol Salby (the Israeli comrade at NSW University.) In one sense, then, this letter could be considered a minority report, although we have constituted a formal faction within the IML. I have both enclosed both the resolution and this letter in the one envelope so that you might compare the two positions at the same time, the mail being sometimes erratic. Enclosed also are all documents written for the recent faction fight in Resistance, which I will explain in detail later in this letter.

The political disputes which have erupted in the last few weeks will probably come as no surprise to you. They arise basically from the same political differences that were being aired while you were in Australia last year. I realize that you will not intervene directly, as you refrained from intervening last year, and that this is the position of the SWP, and the FI in these matters. However, the political issues have clarified a certain extent since your visit and the personal and organizational questions are less important, although still a large factor. Thus it seems that your advice to the IML on certain political principles might be possible? In any case, would it be in order for you personally to give us advice on certain questions if we could guarantee that such advice would not be used for factional purposes, and that the fact that you had given advice was not disclosed? Naturally enough we believe that we are carrying out this struggle along lines that you, the SWP and the FI would, in general support, and that it is based on the correct principles. However, because we are relatively new to the Trotskyist movement, and have no experienced older people in the background to give us advice, we would honestly welcome criticism of any of our actions or political position.

The IML

SINCE THE TIME OF YOUR VISIT, the IML has not progressed. In fact, it has regressed. No public activity has ever been carried out, except for one publication, "The Worldwide Radicalization of Youth" document. It has carried out no internal political education.

Meetings were cut back to once a month (with supposedly regular fraction meetings in three spheres -- the Universities, the ALP and Labor movement, and High Schools and Resistance). These met but once. People were admitted to the group for personal reasons, and even political opponents, cynical about Trotskyism and the need for a revolutionary party were admitted. We won on some questions. We were successful in fighting for an executive, and in the size of the executive, 7, but in elections for the executive we were in a minority. Megan Sharpe, the comrade from England, previously in the IMG, was not elected to the executive, thanks to some clever voting by Bob Gould, and that, along with some personal attacks by him has caused her to withdraw from political activity since that time. However, although in a minority on the executive, I still decided to stay on as secretary, aware that no one from the other "side" had much interest in getting it off the ground. In fact, I have been solely responsible for what little activity the IML has been actively engaged in. Now, on a lot of these questions we were to blame, in a way, in that we should have fought much harder, and clarified the political issues involved. However, we were not very experienced. Our political conceptions though, are much clearer now.

The last IML meeting was held in December. It was hastily convened and not all comrades were informed of it. Consequently it was very small. The decision to send me to the YSA convention was taken at two executive meetings, some two weeks earlier than this meeting. There had been one IML general meeting between the executive meeting and the meeting in December. (The distorted statement on the matter of the YSA convention contained in the IML executive majority report contained with the letter needs some explanation. Cde Jean was the only executive member to indicate she was voting for me for the sake of unity, and she changed from an abstention to a "for" vote. Cdes Peter and Keith both voted for me as first choice. Cde Sol was absent. Also voting for myself were me and my bother (the "other member" referred to in the resolution). At the general meeting in December a replacement for me on the executive while I was overseas was elected -- Robynne Murphy, the secretary of the Labor club at NSW University, who supports us. She defeated Howard Morris, an older, less active member who generally supports Bob. However, in the election for secretary, Jean Brick defeated Jim Percy. Since that meeting in December, there has been neither an executive meeting or a general meeting, until yesterday morning (Sunday 15 February) when the executive passed the resolution enclosed. Now it is a moot point whether I should have resumed the secretary's position, immediately I came back and called the first meeting myself. While in America, I learnt that we had set up a bookshop in Melbourne and I expected that things would be going well with the IML, and that Jean would call an IML general meeting so that I could report back and we could elect a new secretary (and executive, which was due to be re-elected.)

In any case, an informal discussion took place where Bob Gould agreed that the IML included too many disparate and low level people, and suggested a purge of certain people. He didn't suggest any mechanism for doing this and we were uncertain of what could be done with the IML at this stage. There was no initiative from anyone requesting me to call a general meeting until after suggestions for the reorganization of Resistance were made. At this stage Bob Gould asked me, "Are you going to call a general meeting of the IML?" I told him that as far as I knew Cde Jean was responsible for this. The point was not pressed until Cde Jean called the meeting of the executive on the 15th.

I returned to Australia on Tuesday, January 20th. The following weekend a conference of antiwar and radical activists was held. On Monday a meeting at Sydney University decided to form a Student and Youth Mobilization Committee. The idea for this and the call dated from late November when as Jim Percy has told you, attempts were made to squeeze us out of the antiwar movement. I will report further on the development in this area later. This antiwar conference started on the Friday night of the 23rd. The following Friday, the 30th of January I was scheduled to speak at a public forum at Resistance on my experiences in the U.S. and in particular on the antiwar movement and the YSA. My report was centered to a large degree on the organizational procedures and political activities of the YSA, comparing them to those of Resistance. Areas where I suggested improvement could be made in Resistance were in the leadership, program, educational activities and finances. There was at this meeting a very favorable reaction to my suggestions with hostility or cynicism arising only from Bob Gould and Hadyn Thompson (secretary of the SU Labor Club and candidate for the trip to the U.S.) It was suggested at this meeting that I should put my proposals in written form to a special general meeting on the following Friday, convened for the purpose of discussing them.

During the week forces were rallied who were hostile to proposals that Resistance should have an executive and a socialist program. Consequently at this general meeting my proposals were not put to the vote but rather held off for eight days until Sunday the 15th to allow others to prepare counter-proposals to be included in a mailing to members. The Friday night was a big psychological defeat for myself and my brother and those who had been advocates of the changes. The proposals were distorted to imply that we were forming a Trotskyist youth group, a proto-party, creating a bureaucratic executive, etc. This method of debating the issues swung people against us who had previously called for reforms to our organization. Another factor was that these reforms were criticized as emanating from the Percys and that they, a personal clique, were trying to get sole control of Resistance. Because of the initial setback, the complete lack of understanding of our proposals, and the attempt to label them as the proposals of a personal clique, we decided to form a faction of all those supporting the proposals. The first meeting was held on Sunday the 8th and lasted 4½ hours.

Intensive discussion was carried out amongst the ten people present and decisions taken to modify the proposals, and to amplify and explain them in a documented form, to be included in the mailing. This document was checked and rewritten by several members of the faction. The next meeting of the faction was on Thursday with an attendance of fifteen people. Between the Sunday and this meeting intensive lobbying had begun both by us and by the other side. It must be emphasized that early in the week our opponents were confident of being a majority and that there was no cause to say that the following Sunday meeting would not be decisive. By carefully explaining our proposals we were able to win people to the ideas expressed in them, and by the Thursday night meeting of our faction we could see that we were having some success. At this meeting it was decided to produce a further pamphlet on the differences between the different proposals and also one on the attitude of myself and my brother towards the IML. This was not a faction document as not all of our faction were members of the IML, but because this issue had been raised by both Bob Gould and by Haydn Thompson at the previous Friday meeting and was being used by them as a debating point, it seemed necessary to reply to some of the accusations. Unfortunately, few of the opponents' arguments were in print so when I come later to discuss more fully their attitude to the revolutionary party, I will have to go on what they say in conversation. By the time of our faction meeting on Friday night it was obvious that we had evened the score of a week ago. Twenty people attended this meeting. Drafts of the two documents were read out (IML and "the Differences.") and the second one was discussed etc. These documents were produced on the Saturday and distributed to relevant people. On the Friday we were informed by Jean Brick that she had called an IML executive meeting for Sunday the 15th at 10:00 AM. On Friday also Bob Gould flew to Melbourne where he was scheduled to speak at our opening activity there. He returned with Keith James in time for this executive meeting. (Keith has been in Melbourne for three or four weeks during which time this issue arose.) He had no time to speak with us before voting at the executive meeting against us. (See enclosed the text of the resolution passed by four to three at this meeting).

During the Friday night and the Saturday intensive discussions were in continuous session as each side strived to convince the other and uncommitted people. However, during this time it became increasingly clear that we were winning a majority of people to our views. On Saturday night the other side decided to produce two other documents. The first was an article from Socialist Perspective which Bob showed to you when you were here. At the time this was written the IML was not formed. This document has never been discussed in any way since the time of its being written. It can certainly have no claim to being an IML document or our line on the youth group. Our line has always been pragmatic. We have worked it out as we have gone along. The present discussion is the first real attempt to discuss the issues. The second document is an embarrassing one. You may remember Bob's

insistence on giving you this book when you were here. During the week he made his side read it as inoculation against what he describes as "Bullshit Bolshevism." It is in essence the document of a defeated faction which, rather than engage in a debate on the issues seeks a refuge in cynicism. We have sent it because the other side insists it is a serious document. Later when we come to discuss some political issues I will comment on the implications of their charge of "Bullshit Bolshevism."

On the Saturday night we had the final meeting of our faction with some twenty people attending. It was a strategy planning session for the meeting on Sunday and a decision was made to dissolve the faction if successful on Sunday afternoon. After the executive meeting the other side held a meeting to formalize themselves as a faction. The meeting was due to begin at 4:00 PM.

In the Resistance constitution it states that at the request of any one member only financial members are allowed to vote. This was requested. This meant disfranchisement for about four of our supporters and about five of theirs. The first lengthy series of votes centered around the questions of who should vote and how we should proceed. Repeatedly over the next few hours the technique of putting motions saying that the question should not be put, were moved as well as ones that would make us discuss who, in fact, should vote. When these were repeatedly fought against and defeated charges of "Stalin" started to fly thick especially from Bob Gould towards Jim Percy. It was for the first four hours an extremely heated meeting and also spasmodically right to the end at 11:30 last night. We had the numbers on these procedural votes and after 2½ hours of discussion eventually got around to passing our motions for reform. A list of the motions passed and the margins is enclosed. [not available -- R.L.]

On the Saturday and Sunday the strategy of the other side emerged. They wished to delay passing anything. This strategy emerged only after they realized that they were in a minority. They were in fact the ones who set the time and date of the meeting.

Elections

At the end of the meeting elections were held. At this stage of the meeting there were twenty people who supported the opposition's proposals. These decided to constitute themselves as a faction and after negotiations were allotted five of the thirteen positions. The other eight positions were filled by secret ballot amongst a remaining thirty-one people. Their five appointees were Bob Gould, Helen Voysey, Sandra Drysdale, Fred Davis and Peter Voysey. The eight others elected were Jim Percy, Robynne Murphy, John Percy, Sol Salby, Ray Slobodnik, Debbie Payne, Blue Fisher, and Jim Bradman. The other side announced their intention of staying together as a faction. Our faction was disbanded at the time the last motion was passed. The executive has since had its first meeting. The only uncertain thing at this stage is what action the other faction will take in Resistance to retaliate.

On the political "issues." Although political issues have clarified to some extent, they are still vague and unformulated. Certainly on the question of building the revolutionary party, things have developed, but these trends were apparent at your visit last year. Basically we maintain that it is impossible to build a revolutionary Leninist party with people who don't think that you should or are uncertain about whether you should. Thus we would argue that it was wrong to admit the person you argued heatedly with when you were here. What has emerged with several leading comrades in the other-side is that they are uncertain whether you need a Leninist party. Thus Barbara Levy, author of the proposals A, says that she thinks that the Bolsheviks imposed their rule from above during the revolution, etc. This is coupled with Haydn Thompson's admission that: "It seems to be shaping up that the real dividing line between the two factions is that one believes in the need for a revolutionary party and the other doesn't."

We, of course, believe that this is the way things are shaping up, but as yet it is not very much in the open -- only by implication, and nothing on paper. It is important to note the role of Bob Gould in this respect. Rather than polemicize against this backsliding on this issue he has chosen instead to aim his guns at us, calling us the "Bullshit Bolsheviks." Reasons are that he has personal relations with Barbara and lives at the same house as Haydn. He seems to think that their attitude is less dangerous to building the party than ours which he characterizes as "sectarian." We, of course, argue that it is very hard to become sectarian when we have not even carried out discussion or education on the history of the Trotskyist movement, in the current documents, etc. Bob is proposing a cure without the patient ever having ventured near the infected area. We argue that it is high time to expose ourselves to a little of this dangerous talk about building a party, Trotskyism, and the current documents, and to point out that building a party depends on agreement around a common program and enthusiasm to build such a party. We point out that we cannot compromise our program or chances of building a party for the sake of including doubtful individuals or for tactical reasons -- that is, so that "no one can say they are excluded." Indeed, the psychological effect of having such comrades in an organization is shattering to the morale of more inexperienced comrades. Any compromise with it only allows it to grow. This we would suggest is part of the reason for what has happened to people supporting Gould. Gould himself still pays lip service to the need for a party and currently will do something about it, as he sees it as a factional arena at present. Because he is the authority figure at present for the Trotskyist movement, it is easy for him to say that in the "current Australian conditions" and "for tactical peculiarities it is necessary to do this or that, and this is of course within the Marxist traditions and the principles of Trotskyism." He can do this because of the lack of any contrary older experience and with the low educational level of even the older

comrades. We have all relied on his interpretation of the texts in the past and this has been disastrous both as far as developing a leadership goes and in the area of building a party. So what we have is the position of great objective possibilities yet not much return in the area of building the party and increasing the number of active Trotskyists. At this point it would be worth reminding you that even one experienced comrade would be of enormous benefit to us. A Canadian with experience of entrism would be ideal but any experienced comrade would help fill the vacuum.

Entrism

Here the resolution accuses us of wishing to drop our orientation. This is completely untrue. We do have differences, that is, we think that this orientation is often used as an excuse for inactivity in publishing and internal discussion. Also we think that since we have failed to carry it out in any organized way, it should be recognized that our main field of work is still amongst the youth and students and the antiwar movement. But this is as far as we go. Members of our faction are in fact, as active as any of the others in this sphere. What is the case is that Bob Gould disagrees with the European resolution on this matter and now jumps at phantoms back here. Also of course, "entrism sui generis" without an open party with a voice has proved to be useless in terms of recruiting Trotskyist cadres.

Bullshit Bolshevism

As far as our so-called sectarianism is concerned. We deliberately quoted from the statutes of the FI in our open letter to IML members. This is the extent of our writing on this subject. We have made bad mistakes (along with everyone else) by recruiting people with too little understanding of the need for a party and too inexperienced generally. But what we attempted to do to rectify this was not to let them stew in their own juice but to improve the organization of Resistance from where these people are recruited. Anyway, experience of leadership and understanding of basic theory can first be developed in this arena. This is not to say that Resistance is to become an almost exact replica of the YSA as Gould and Co. distort the changes. But obviously leadership cannot be developed without any written program, or a consciously elected and self-conscious leadership.

ON SEVERAL POINTS IN THE RESOLUTION

Ramrod

Full notice was given of the proposed changes. No complaints were raised at this stage. Only when Cde Gould realized he was in a minority did he complain and request a "thorough discussion." Indeed, he submitted counter-proposals. But any lengthy discussion remained for him in the form of reprints.

SWP Support

I would ask you to ignore the insult in this part of the resolution. Naturally, at no time did comrades in the YSA or SWP give instructions or direct advice as to how I should proceed in Australia. At no time did I indicate that they had. On the other hand, of course, I had extensive discussions with them on many questions, especially organizational ones, and found them very helpful. On returning to Australia I found that the ground had already been prepared in a fairly underhanded way by Gould. While I was away, he had been warning people that I would come back a wild YSAer. Indeed, the main reason he gave when supporting Haydn Thompson for the American trip -- was that I was already too much attracted by the YSA and that Haydn was calm and objective - in fact he is quite cynical. So when I came back with some suggestions for improving Resistance I was attacked by Gould and his supporters with retorts like -- "that's just the YSA again" or "you're trying to turn Resistance into the YSA." Now, there's an important distinction between learning from and assimilating overseas experience, and intervention by the FI or a section in the affairs of another section, and Gould apparently fails to recognize this distinction.

At any rate I apologize for being the unwitting cause of this sort of embarrassment to you and the SWP. I would urge that you do not let this insult intimidate you from taking an interest in our affairs, especially before it is tested at a level other than the executive and before the situation clarifies further.

Unanimous IML Policy

Gould's claims that the document reprinted from Socialist Perspective No. 2 are unanimous IML policy are ludicrously false. Indeed, a close reading of the document does not give too many grounds for constructing a non-socialist youth group. This idea is embodied only in the last couple of paragraphs. At any rate Resistance has always been a socialist youth organization in practice and the reasons for formalizing this status quo are presented in our documents. This reprint from S P No. 2, written in 1967, has never been discussed by the IML (formed in May, 1969) and neither has the orientation of our youth activity as such. Certainly, there has been no somersault on our part, only a progressive rise in consciousness of the need for a socialist youth organization.

Struggle for Control

Broadly speaking Bob Gould controls the bookshop and thus most of our finances, and myself and my brother controlled Resistance and its politics. This was the division of labor in our clique. In this sense there was no way we could have gained more control over the organization. Our struggle is so that a proper leadership can be formed and this involves a diminished

control over the organization by us and we hope also, eventually by Gould.

The Future

This Sunday a forum has been called by the IML executive to discuss the question of "How to build a Revolutionary Party." It was called after we requested that a general meeting be held first to discuss the issues. The general meeting will be held a week later. The speakers are Bob Gould, one of us, Phil Sanford (the comrade who was active in SDS and is organizing the Socialist Scholars' Conference, and who has workerite differences with us) and Hall Greenland, the youngest and most vocal Pabloite, who has just returned after two years in England. In this company we are overshadowed by the fluency of the other speakers and it is apparent that the meeting was called to embarrass us publicly and to brand us as sectarian. However, I do not think but that the airing of the issues, and also, I hope the recording of the speeches will be beneficial to us. However, we would have preferred a private discussion before a public forum.

Gould has, as I told you, formed a faction of Resistance and the IML. We do not know if this faction plans to reverse the decisions of last Sunday or not. This is our biggest worry for it will paralyze Resistance again. Furthermore, two of our most vocal supporters have left for Adelaide to start a branch of Resistance there, along with a third supporter. I will keep you informed about further developments. As to the IML. It is unclear how many would support the resolution. There is a lot of bitter feeling, but we think things are about even. At any rate, our attitude towards the IML is roughly this: We want the other faction to clarify their position on building the party and hope that the differences between them will then become apparent. We want to start educational classes on FI documents, SWP history and the history of the Trotskyist movement. If this cannot be done through the IML, then we will do them ourselves. We do not seek a purge of low level recruits. This appears pointless to us with the presence of spontaneist trends. On the other hand we don't see the need to recruit too many more at present, if we can get these organizational proposals working in Resistance.

At any rate, if there is any immediate change in the situation I will write and send another report. I will write in a couple of weeks at the latest, anyway. It is, or course even more important for Cde Mandel to visit us now. Not only will it be an important public event for Trotskyism here, but with this recent business it will provide the FI with a better picture.

I take this opportunity to thank the SWP and YSA for my recent trip. I have no need to emphasize what a valuable educational

experience it was. Although at first the results might appear a little frightening, because of the resolution, I hope and expect that the long-term result will be much more beneficial. Hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours comradely,
John Percy
Jim Percy

P.S. This letter was a joint effort by both of us. Forgive the stylistic changes this has caused.