

Resignation

Sara Diamond
Vancouver, B.C.

March 23, 1980.

Vancouver Branch,
Revolutionary Workers League

Dear Comrades:

It is my decision at this time to leave the Revolutionary Workers League. It has taken me several weeks to write this letter, despite making this decision upon receipt of a letter from the Political Committee confirming that the gay and lesbian debate would not be part of the convention agenda, at least a month ago. The delay represents the extreme level of conflict and pain I feel at having to leave an organization which I have struggled to build and to lead for five years. However, I am no longer able to work politically within the organization and to build it as an active and confident member. This recent decision comes not from a personal crisis or a distancing from the practice and politics of revolutionary Marxism, on the contrary, my reemersion into the trade union movement has had the opposite effect. Rather, I find myself experiencing several areas of profound difference with the direction of the organization.

Firstly, as a context to this letter: I am in complete agreement with the reorientation of the revolutionary organization to the trade union movement. This turn is strategically central to the struggle for socialism both in the long and short term. The conjuncture makes the importance of the turn even more apparent: clearly, the combination of attacks on the working class, the ongoing political crisis of the Canadian state and the deepening social crisis are producing a new wave of radicalization within the working class and its organizations. It is clearly important to build strong fractions in industry, in the key industrial unions.

But it is within the context of an overall turn to the labour movement that I find my first area of difference with the organization and its trajectory, in the failure to integrate the strategic importance of the struggle for women's liberation and the construction of the autonomous women's movement into the conception and practice of the turn.

This is manifested through a complete peripheralization of the public sector in the organization's analysis of the labour movement, let alone its prioritization. (The latter is far less dangerous and although unnecessary, could even be excused based on the organization's disintegration and loss of cadre over the last year and a half). But the former, represents a failure to seriously analyze the composition of the working class in late capitalist society. It represents a conscious blindness towards the important struggles of public sector workers, the high level of consciousness they have displayed against their boss: the state, the function their battles with the employer plays in setting the standard for private sector workers and unorganized women, the important advances made by these workers in the arena of social questions (because they represent oppressed layers' to a greater extent than unionized industrial workers), etc. This blindness is occurring at a time when the division between public and private sector unions have been central in undermining the fighting power of the labour movement, in both nations.

But beyond this, the public sector is the central employer of unionized women workers. These women will be central in advancing the struggles and organization of non-organized and newly organized working women. Many of the important campaigns of the women's movement have emerged or been taken up by this sector. (For example, CUPE has been fighting for the implementation of affirmative action for several years now). This sector in Quebec has been involved in some important experiences around workers control (hospital and media takeovers during 1972). There is no question that public sector workers will have an important role to play in the emergence of a class struggle left and a working class women's movement.

And what of the RWL's/LOR's location in industry in regards to the struggle for women's liberation. Does it represent an adequate view of the centrality of this struggle to the overall politicization of the working class, to the strategic necessity of women's liberation in the struggle for socialism? Yes and no.

There is no question in my mind that the work that the comrades have been doing through the Women into Stelco Campaign in Hamilton is very important political work. Affirmative action represents not only a struggle for the democratic rights of women to work wherever they wish without discrimination, but far beyond that a direct attack on the sexual division of labour and gender identity, by demonstrating the ability of women to work in all sectors of public life, and forcing a social integration of men and women within the labour force, the political life of the union etc. However, the potential of this struggle will only be realized when large numbers of women in the female job ghettos fight, through their organizations, for jobs in male-dominated industry. This process will have profound effects on not only the politicization and strength of the women's movement, but on the trade unions, as they learn to cooperate and defend such efforts by women. It will amplify the effects of the current campaign in strengthening the left-wing in the USWA many times. But such a campaign requires a militant politicized leadership. By abdicating from locating itself in the female job ghettos (the organized sectors of course) the RWL/LOR will abdicate from this kind of overall leadership of the struggle for women's liberation. This struggle will not be waged from the vantage point of a small minority of women workers in the large concentration of male industrial workers. It requires the mobilization of broad layers of working class women. Their vanguard is

The question of our location in industry goes far beyond affirmative action. Again and again comrades of the majority have argued against implantation in plants and sectors where women are concentrated, proposing that we concentrate in the biggest plants (which often do not employ women). The very nature of the sexual division of labour and the oppression of women under capitalism means that women are excluded from these sectors.

The neglect by the RWL of concentrating its militants in industry in part in sectors where there are concentrations of women is wrong on several counts. It negates the actual strategic importance of some of these sectors to the class struggle: what do comrades say to the recent strike of Bell workers in Montreal and Ontario. Clearly we should be working in the non-industrial communications sector, and as operators, not in the plants. Secondly, it fails to see the dynamic which can emerge, even in a small plant between the radicalization of women workers and the discrepancy with the rest of their industrial sector. Our perspectives would keep us out of Fleck, Radio Shack, Puretex, Blue Cross, B.C. Ice-type locations.

But most importantly, there is a broad political level at which this conception is wrong: the failure of revolutionaries to locate in areas where women are concentrated, in unions where women are concentrated means that the women workers, in their unions, will not be exposed to the politics of the RWL/LOR, in the coming period of radicalization. This has implications far beyond the struggle for women's liberation: it represents a defacto statement by the organization of the relative unimportance of working class trade union women within the general political struggles of the working class in the upcoming period. Despite the importance of the struggle, affirmative action will not be implemented in full until the struggle for socialist revolution has occurred, women will for the most part, remain in female job sectors.

What of the organization's programme? Certainly the RWL/LOR has retreated on some fairly significant questions: the move away from women's committees as a goal in the union represents a questioning of the right of the oppressed to self-organization, and the strategic importance of the self-organization of women. As well, the organization retreated on defense of the right to abortion, and at a time when severe attacks were launched by the right against women. In B.C., reality intervened, and we are again working around this question. Instead we have concentrated on affirmative action to the exclusion of other central political concerns of women.

And what of the autonomous womens movement as it presently exists. The organization has exhibited a sectarianism towards feminism which it certainly does not exhibit towards the NDP or other struggles (nuclear, anti-imperialist) other than gay liberation. I agree with comrades who have criticized the women's movement for its failure to reorientate en masse to the needs of working women. This criticism is not true of the majority, and groups within the women's movement have made a turn of sorts. (Women's Research Centre has worked for years for example on the organization of farm and domestic workers, Working Women Unite has initiated some important work, etc.). There are political differences around strategy (understandably, given that women have radicalized from a variety of different experiences and that there is no common programme to unite them). The womens movement has played a central role and will continue to do so. It is a reservoir of skilled organizing cadre. It continues to attract newly radicalized women to its midst when it engaged in struggles, and through its organizations. It has developed a profound critique of social relations and the complex exploitation and oppression of women, analyses which we have borrowed from to make our own (the Fourth International). It has created a lesbian movement which has played an important role in affirming womens strength and combativity and potential as autonomous beings, as well as challenging the sexual division of labour and the structure and morality of the patriarchal family. The women's movement will continue to play an important role in initiating campaigns which will be taken up inside the unions. Women are, at this time, clearly rallying within the existing women's movement around some important campaigns: defense of the right to abortion and changing the laws, equal pay for work of equal value, Quebec's right to self-determination, etc. (Vancouver alone). The RWL should be involved in a polemic with these women about the need to root the womens movement in the working class and the most effective strategies for this, not sterilely denouncing their peripheralization.

The move away from the women's movement seems part of a general climate inside the organization which fails to deal with the personal integration and needs of its militants. If the organization overcomes its paralysis and begins to recruit it will miseducate and deform its new cadre unless there are structures for feminist practice and discussion inside the RWL/LOR.

So comrades, we disagree not on the centrality of the turn to the trade unions, but on what unions the organization should prioritize and what relationship the organization should have to the struggle for woman's liberation. Possibly, the experiences of the organization in industry, the debates within the RWL/LOR in the future and the exigencies of the class struggle will lead to a reassessment of this question.

But it is not for this reason alone that I find myself forced to leave the organization, and thus the ranks of the Fourth International. And it is here that I share many of the sentiments expressed in the letter of Amy, Gary, Natalie and Gerard.

I will be quite blunt comrades. The decision by the leadership to suppress the lesbian and gay discussion has made it impossible for me to stay inside the organization. As a comrade who has worked for two and one half years to push this discussion forward, who participated in forming a tendency to insure that the section would have the discussion and to develop a position, who tried to defactionalize the discussion by presenting reports which contained information and historical material to the branch and the Bulletin (never printed), who struggled to develop perspectives for this area of work which would be in the framework of the turn to the unions and would concretize our theoretical positions, who tried despite the pressures towards sectarianism in response to the absence of a discussion to act as a rounded leadership member of the organization, to play a role in the other "central" discussions of the organization, who continued to be active in building the organization and recruiting to it, I have come to the conclusion that remaining inside the RWL/LOR requires that I either retreat into the closet (accept the suppression of the debate) or into the ghetto (continue to be deformed into focusing all of my political energy on making this discussion occur). Both propositions are unacceptable.

Why do I use the words suppression? It is incredible that this discussion, so long on the agenda, has not been allowed to take place, let alone facilitated. INCREDIBLE, comrades. Every other discussion has been integrated into the deliberations of the organization (the NDP discussion most certainly has) and this discussion has been blocked on every level, except for a brief three week spree when it was used as a factional football. It was decided at every convention and plenum since fusion that this discussion would proceed (i.e. decided by the ranks of the organization), yet, at every level the contributions of TZ comrades and TZ and the attack by Sam and informal text by Judy in a two and a half year period there has been no effort by the leadership to seriously deal with the question. At the same time, no assistance was given to the comrades to develop a position, who were struggling to do so. Rather, we were attacked by the Political Committee for exceeding their authority, and a witchhunt environment was created around the debate. Documents and personal contributions (all of which but the latest were within the 20 page writing limit) were not printed although the debate was "open". (This includes a detailed history of the debate and the attempts at having the discussion). Our minutes (TZ) were printed, our responses and full documentation not.

Still we persisted to push for the discussion and to elaborate positions. Plants which grow in a desert adapt to the climate: there is no question that there were certain errors and perhaps "deviations" in some of the TZ position. In the hybrid environment around the debate, there was no real discussion, and certainly no room for motion. Is this the way for a revolutionary organization to deal with an oppressed layer within its ranks? Is this how the RWL/LOR will deal with women workers it recruits who struggle for childcare? Or did TZ comrades deserve special treatment, because of the "petit-bourgeois" character of gay and lesbian oppression?

In any case, it was not surprising that comrades concluded that they were unwanted within the

unwanted members of the organization, that a layer of the leadership wished to see us driven out of the organization. And that desire has in part been realized, the open gay and lesbian members of the caucus and the tendency have left. Despite my own feelings of strong general agreement with the organization and certainly with the Fourth International, I feel that I have no other choice. And as profoundly as that, I feel that my democratic rights inside the organization have been violated. I have little confidence that this debate will ever occur, although it will most certainly surface, for there are many lesbians and gays within the unions, both industrial and non-industrial and the attacks on our rights have only just begun. The organization will be called on to defend these rights and to have a position.

This letter cannot make a critique of our practice on this question, the RWL/LOR has had none, outside of the freelancing of a few individuals. The positions of TZ are documented, although our final text was returned to us, and stand for the organization to use as it sees fit.

Well, comrades, I have had my say. I have concentrated on two areas of discussion and difference have had growing and often expressed concerns with the failure of the organization to work in English Canada around the defense of Quebec's right to self-determination, and cannot do this at the last convention to now do this work and look forward to collaborating with the organization around it in the next period. As well, I have differed with some of the reorientation to the NDP and the view of the upcoming referendum, these are differences which could coexist within the current framework of the RWL/LOR.

I continue to have a profound respect for the work which the RWL/LOR has done around many questions, and will continue to defend this work. I am certain that the organization will be involved in some effective union interventions, and will try, to the best of my ability, to defend the organization around such work. I remain in sympathy with the Fourth International and with the project of constructing a revolutionary Trotskyist organization, within the pan-Canadian state, and so, despite my deep disagreements around feminism and my profound anger at the way in which the organization has dealt with the gay and lesbian debate remain sympathetic to the RWL/LOR. Above all, I remain in sympathy with the aspirations of its militants and place my confidence in them to carry forward the struggle for a feminist and gay and lesbian liberationist perspective within the Fourth International.

It is my hope to work with the RWL/LOR around the right of self-determination for Quebec, women's liberation and most importantly with the organization where our paths intersect in the labour movement, and towards the construction of a class struggle left-wing.

Towards the revolutionary socialist-feminist
future!

Sara Diamond

Sara (Zoro)