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Brother, Can You Spare A Ukrainian Section?

Red and Black Notes

Autumn 2003

The little world in which the left ekes out its meagre existence recently saw a minor scandal emerge, when a Ukrainian Trotskyist organization affiliated to the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) simultaneously represented itself to several other left-wing and Trotskyist organizations as "their" sections.

Although many of the organizations conned have grudgingly admitted earlier suspicions, it seems that the deception was discovered when one group shared information with another, and both organizations identified the same 'comrade' as one of their members. Quickly the entire house of cards collapsed, as organization after organization moved to distance themselves from their former comrades. The CWI also distanced itself, by suspending the section and announcing a full-scale inquiry into the activities of its Ukrainian group.

Among those organizations conned were the International Bolshevik Tendency, the League for the Revolutionary Party, the Internationalist Group, the Socialist Labor Party, News & Letters, Workers Power, the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party,

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and the Socialist Party of Great Britain. While the SPGB was quick to level the accusation that the entire operation was simply a typical Leninist trick to obtain funds for the CWI, they have offered little proof and other organizations have not been so forthcoming in their accusations. The extent of the CWI's involvement remains to be seen, but many have found the denials issued by the organization to be less than forthcoming, especially since senior members of the CWI group in Ukraine were involved in the deception.

Two obvious questions spring to mind in this juicy affair. The first, is why anyone would go to such trouble for what seems to be little gains? While "western money" no doubt travels much further in the former Soviet bloc, none of the organizations involved in the scam were exactly flush with cash. The IBT have admitted their material aid to the group was paying the rent on an office for a few months, and other groups have made similar admissions. The SPGB on the other hand provided a computer. Even so, apart from the scale of the deception, this is hardly the stuff of which great scams are made. A well-planned pyramid scheme would likely have brought much greater returns, without the need to study the ins and out of the feuding international Trotskyist movement. And study they did. By their own account, the IBT were quite impressed with the group's understanding of programme.

The second question is why so many organizations, including Trotskyists, DeLeonists, left communists, Marxism-Humanists, and Impossibilists and possibly others were so successfully conned? There's an old adage, that if something sounds too good to be true, it is. The LRP in their statement argue that it was their internationalism that was their downfall. They were committed to building an international organization, and thus it was easier to con them.

But more likely it was the lure of the former Soviet Union. For its entire existence, the Soviet Union was a major focus for political organizations, pro or con. And while the Ukrainian tricksters were no doubt skilled in their deception, their masquerade as revo-

lutionaries echoing the worldview of various western leftists made a powerful catch.

Whether opportunism and corruption fueled this group, or whether it was the work of the State or the Russian mob (as some have suggested) remains to be seen. However, the lesson seems to be, the next time someone approaches your group to sell you a used political party. Hold onto your wallet. Caveat emptor!