

Why I Left Spark and Joined the Spartacist League

by William W.
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During April 2025, I resigned from Spark with some serious political disagreements after over seven years as an active supporter and loyal member in Chicago. These disagreements evolved over the years. Initially, they appeared minor and attributable to misunderstandings or mistakes of the local leadership. But later, I realized the issues were bigger. For example, I objected to content in the Spark newspaper, especially when it failed to politically expose the role of liberal Democratic Party politicians and labor bureaucrats. Over the last year, I noticed that my differences were similar to those expressed by the Spartacist League/ICL. So, after I resigned from Spark I was eager to understand more about the SL and its ideas for the road forward for the Trotskyist movement. After a number of discussions, I decided to join the SL. I will try to summarize the issues that led me down this path.

Electoral Policy

Since Spark is politically affiliated with Lutte Ouvrière (LO) in France, we discussed LO's participation in the French snap elections held during the summer of 2024. I opposed LO's decision to recommend a vote for the New Popular Front (NPF) in the second round. LO had run its own candidates in the first round. But when faced with a first-round defeat, they told their supporters they shouldn't "be embarrassed" to vote for the NPF against the rightist candidate. I was shocked, knowing how tenaciously Trotsky fought against Popular Frontism during the 1930s. It led to betrayals that produced working-class defeats and tragedies in Spain, France, China (1927) and elsewhere. And Trotsky went beyond these specific betrayals to equate popular frontism with Menshevism itself. He argued it was precisely these class-collaborationist policies that he and Lenin fought against and defeated within the Bolshevik Party between April and October 1917. This fight he detailed in his famous work *Lessons of October*.

Later, I learned that Spark was following a similar approach regarding its attitude toward the 2024 U.S. presidential elections. Spark was building Working Class Party (WCP) campaigns in Michigan, California and Illinois and correctly called for a vote for WCP in opposition to both capitalist parties in those elections. However, their approach was different in elections where WCP was not on the ballot, especially the presidential campaign. Some of us in Chicago argued that Spark should give critical support to a slate of working-class candidates running for president in opposition to the capitalist parties. The most prominent of these was the campaign of the Party for Socialism and Liberation, but Spark rejected this approach and ultimately chose to abstain from formally endorsing a presidential slate.

However, they did give some guidance to their members and supporters. Prior to the election, at a Working Class Party national meeting attended by many non-Spark WCP activists, one of Spark's most senior and authoritative national leaders suggested that, since WCP was not running in the presidential election, it was fine if WCP supporters were to vote for Democrat Kamala Harris. I was shocked to hear this news; and when I asked how this could happen, various excuses were offered by Spark national leaders. One said: "The comrade is old and is under pressure from his milieu." This is clearly a violation of basic Marxist principles, which the national leadership of Spark has never repudiated or made any attempt to clarify. In pre-conference discussion, I emphasized that for revolutionary Marxists a vote is a serious action—a statement of political support. And it's definitely unprincipled to give political support to a capitalist candidate or government. Due to the failure of the Spark national leadership to address this situation, I could only conclude that Spark leaders think it's fine if members or supporters vote for capitalist parties if Working Class Party is not running in an election. This was a major factor that triggered my resignation.

The Fight Against Racial and National Oppression

Secondly, I disagree with Spark on the national question. Spark either disagrees with much of Lenin's writings on the right of

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nations to self-determination or thinks it's irrelevant today. While Spark opposes racial oppression, their program for it is purely idealist—unite and fight for socialism. They abstractly call for class unity but are quiet on how this unity can be achieved. It's not good enough to simply explain the common interests of all workers. This ignores or downplays the crucial role of the fight against racial and national oppression. What Spark doesn't say is that all workers have a vested material interest in fighting against racial and national oppression. This means fighting for black liberation in the U.S. and an end to imperialist domination around the world. The unity of the working class must be based on the opposition of the entire class to all forms of racial and national oppression, and support for the struggles of the oppressed against their oppression.

An example is Spark's position on the Israeli/U.S. war against the Palestinian people. While Spark and LO oppose the genocide in Gaza and Israeli oppression of Palestinians, they also oppose the actual struggle of Palestinians against the grotesque national oppression that is a fixture in their lives. This puts Spark in opposition to Palestinian national liberation and self-determination. While they call for Israel's defeat in the current war, they fail to support the Palestinian liberation struggle. As a result, they discouraged members in Chicago from participating in protests opposing U.S. aid to Israel and supporting Palestinian liberation.

They justify this stand on the grounds that all nationalism is reactionary, including nationalism of those struggling against national oppression. This leaves them standing on the sidelines, abstractly proclaiming the need for unity. Such proclamations are meaningless because the essential requirement for unity between Palestinian and Israeli workers is rejection of Zionism and national oppression. Marxists must participate in the struggles of the oppressed on the basis of our entire program with the goal of linking these struggles to the working class and the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism. This means a political battle against Hamas and all bourgeois nationalist leaders to expose their reactionary role, but at the same time support for an anti-imperialist united front that includes these bourgeois forces in the military defense of the population. The revolutionary strategy required also involves spreading the struggle among the Israeli population, especially its working

class, because a powerful revolutionary working-class movement inside Israel is essential to defeating the Zionist state.

The Class Struggle

I disagreed with Spark's lack of intervention in the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), especially in the buildup to the recent year-long contract negotiations. Since a Spark supporter served on the union's House of Delegates, they were in a good position to take a forceful stand. But Spark tail-ended the social-democratic union leadership and failed to sharply challenge their class-collaborationist strategy, which was totally reliant on the Democratic Party mayor and other Democratic Party politicians. The CTU leaders spent most of their time lobbying and political deal-making, which yielded a drop in the bucket compared to what its members and students actually needed. And what Brandon Johnson and CTU president Stacy Davis Gates have been promising is a pipedream—that public education will be “transformed” via their cooperation and leadership.

Chicago's working class and teachers need to be told the truth: that the transformation of Chicago schools won't occur without a major class fight that includes and is led by the black and Latino working class who suffer most under the existing racially segregated and massively underfunded public school system. And this fight must be independent of and in opposition to the capitalist class and the Democratic or Republican Party-run governments that do its bidding. In my regular discussions with this supporter about CTU delegate meetings, he never relayed any instance where he spoke against the class-collaborationist policies of the leadership, including a motion to support the candidacy of Democrat Brandon Johnson for mayor, nor did he put forward a revolutionary strategy. Despite my urging, I never heard anyone in the leadership argue with him to do so.

Generally, Spark avoids participation in the class struggle and isolates itself from important political struggles and debates within the working-class movement and the left. This is shown in the “Domestic Report” passed at its April 2025 conference (*Class Struggle* No. 123). First, it outlines the wide-ranging ruling class assault on the working class and its allies by Trump and Musk—the widespread job and service cuts, deportations, repression and denial of democratic rights. Then, it correctly points out that the working class is unprepared for this assault. But how should we respond to all of this? The only action it proposes for the next period is to “plant a flag that workers and all those who link their fate to the working class can rally around.”

The document assumes a small-scale or limited response from the working class and its allies and implies that the best thing revolutionaries can do is to go into a sort of retrenchment until the situation becomes more favorable.

A different perspective is necessary. We know that all these attacks are hitting the working class hardest. They are producing a response, a reaction. Defensive struggles are taking shape. This is the reality of the class struggle, and we need to be involved regardless of how big or small the response is. We can't be sitting on the sidelines in the face of these attacks. The fact that the working class is unprepared makes our engagement in the class struggle more important, not less.

Finally, I felt the “Domestic Report” document was lacking in another way. It describes in some detail the current reality by providing a snapshot of the ruling-class attacks and the rightward shift in U.S. politics. But it failed to provide a Marxist perspective on why this shift has occurred or thoughts on how generally things are likely to develop in the months and years to come. In contrast, I feel that the ICL's analysis “U.S. Imperialism Turns the Screws” (*Spartacist* No. 70) does just that. I hope the comrades of Spark will read this document and consider it as an important contribution to a very important discussion. I'd be very interested in hearing and discussing any of your feedback.

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