

Alex Steiner's tangled web of political deceit

WSWS Editorial Board

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On January 28, the political provocateur Alex Steiner posted on his blog site, permanent-revolution.org, a letter he had received from an allegedly anonymous informant, which was a scurrilous denunciation of the defense campaign being conducted by the International Committee of the Fourth International on behalf of imprisoned Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk. The letter claimed that the ICFI had recklessly exposed Syrotiuk to the Ukrainian secret police (SBU) by publishing articles in which his real name, "Ostap Rerikh," was used rather than a political alias. Moreover, according to Steiner's supposedly anonymous informant, the name "Bogdan Syrotiuk" was actually a pseudonym invented by the ICFI to cover up its culpability for the arrest of the young Trotskyist leader. The import of the letter was its assertion that the defense campaign being conducted by the ICFI was a political fraud, mired in cover-up and deceit, in which not even the real name of the political prisoner was correctly identified.

The text of the letter posted by Steiner was extraordinarily vituperative, accusing the ICFI leadership of an "apparent attempt to exploit his [Bogdan's] imprisonment for political gain..."

Steiner and his associate Sam Tissot did not present any information that corroborated the allegations of their informant's letter. They stated that they had "been able to establish the identity of the sender, however, we will not undermine their wish to remain anonymous."

Steiner and Tissot claimed that they "had asked a representative of the WSWS for a comment but did not receive a response."

Prior to the posting of this letter, Steiner's blog site had not carried a single report on the arrest of Bogdan Syrotiuk in April 2024, let alone issued a statement calling for his release. But suddenly, during court sessions being conducted by the Ukrainian prosecutors of Syrotiuk, Steiner posted a letter that had no other purpose than to discredit the ICFI and undermine the defense campaign.

Within three days, Steiner's attempt to disrupt the defense campaign collapsed. On February 1, he posted "A Correction and an Apology," stating:

We have been informed that the letter we published on Jan 28 from an anonymous source is factually incorrect and therefore we are removing the letter and our comments based on the letter. The letter claimed that Bogdan Syrotiuk was a pseudonym of the Ukrainian political prisoner and leader of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists (YGBL) and that Ostap Rerikh was his legal name. This claim was factually incorrect. On the basis of this mistaken information the letter went on to accuse the World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) of using Bogdan's real name instead of a pseudonym in a series of articles reporting on the YGBL, thereby needlessly exposing Bogdan Syrotiuk's identity to the repressive arm of Ukrainian intelligence forces. We, the editorial board of the Permanent Revolution website, apologize for publishing and commenting on this factually mistaken letter. It should not have happened.

Steiner did not present a serious and credible explanation of how he had come to serve as an instrument of a provocation aimed at discrediting the ICFI's defense campaign and sabotaging the fight for Syrotiuk's freedom. Steiner's "apology" was a dishonest and self-justifying cover-up.

Steiner did not reveal who had provided him with the new information, or what the information was, that compelled him to print a retraction. But the timing of the retraction, less than 72 hours after the allegations had been posted on Steiner's blog site, testifies to their shoddiness. There was absolutely no factual substance to the allegations that Steiner had posted.

On February 4, the *World Socialist Web Site* posted a statement titled, "A provocation that failed: On Alex Steiner's attempt to discredit the ICFI's defense of Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk." The WSWS rejected Steiner's apology, which combined self-serving euphemisms, evasive excuses, and outright lies to justify his participation in a political provocation. The letter that Steiner and Tissot had endorsed and posted on their blog site did not consist, as they claimed, of merely "mistaken information." Its content was a malicious and self-evident fabrication, entirely unsupported by any factual evidence. Steiner's apology concocted the story of the letter having been received from an "anonymous" source, and that he had no reason to doubt its credibility.

Not only had Steiner known the author's identity. He also knew, several weeks before posting the letter, that the individual from whom he had received the false allegations had posted, using the X handle *Alexander Goldman@bukvasevich*, anti-communist denunciations of Lenin, Trotsky and the October Revolution. Moreover, this individual had also posted in late December 2024 and early January 2025 the same false allegations of ICFI culpability for Comrade Bogdan's arrest.

The WSWS stated:

While the history and nature of his relationship with the provocateur "Alexander Goldman" have not yet been clarified, what can be said with absolute certainty is that Steiner's posting of Goldman's lies was not the result of an unfortunate journalistic mishap. Steiner's politics—and that of his associate Tissot—made them the perfect accomplices of Goldman's provocation.

Steiner himself is not a police agent. But his subjectivism and uncontrollable hatred of the ICFI makes him useful to its enemies. They view permanent-revolution.org as a post office, which they can reliably use when they want to distribute anti-ICFI denunciations and misinformation. Goldman knew that Steiner would grab at the opportunity to attack the ICFI.

Steiner has now responded to the WSWS's statement with, predictably, yet another embittered denunciation of the International Committee. In a statement titled "Scurrilous libel from the WSWS," posted on February 7, Steiner presents himself as the victim of "an outpouring of malicious lies and slanders." Aside from a minor lapse in their fact-checking procedure, Steiner claims that his conduct and motives are beyond reproach. So much

for his “apology.”

Even though the allegations were false, Steiner defends the decision to post the letter on his blog site:

In December we received an unsolicited letter from a source who wished to remain anonymous claiming that the WSWS had compromised the safety of Ukrainian political prisoner Bogdan Syrotiuk by publishing his legal name instead of his pseudonym. The letter claimed that Bogdan Syrotiuk, who is currently incarcerated by the Ukrainian authorities, was a pseudonym of a young member of the Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists, whose legal name was Ostap Rerikh. If true, this would have been a serious violation of elementary security precautions. Having been presented with this material, we felt it was our responsibility to make it public if true.

The first question is why did Steiner believe it was his “responsibility” to publicize allegations that emanated from what Steiner claims was an anonymous source? He adds the proviso, “if true.” But they were lies. There was no factual evidence that corroborated the allegations. Of what possible benefit would the posting of the “anonymous” denunciation be to the defense of Syrotiuk?

The correct political response to the receipt of the dubious letter in December, from an allegedly anonymous source, would have been to immediately forward the letter to the *World Socialist Web Site*, with a warning that the ICFI’s defense of Bogdan appears to be the target of a provocation. It is a basic principle of working class and socialist organizations, however serious their political differences, to collaborate in the common struggle against state provocations. But Steiner did no such thing. His only concern was how the posting of this defamatory information could damage the International Committee, the Socialist Equality Party, and, for good measure, David North personally. As for the fate of Bogdan Syrotiuk, that was of no interest to the self-obsessed Steiner whatsoever.

Responding as the allegedly anonymous provocateur had expected he would, Steiner grabbed at the bait.

In his response to the exposure of his provocation, Steiner enumerates what he claims to be the falsifications of the WSWS. He claims that he did send two emails to the address of David North, on January 24 and January 27, informing him that the letter was about to be published. Having received no response, Steiner proceeded to post the letter on January 28, with a provocative introduction written by Sam Tissot.

North did not receive any email from Steiner. But Steiner, implying that the WSWS is lying, declares, “We are confident that it did arrive at its destination on the WSWS email server.” But Steiner trips himself with his reference to the WSWS email server. The email address used by North is not located on the WSWS server. Due to technical problems, North ceased using it well over a year ago. However, Steiner’s error might be dismissed as unintentional but for the fact that his own explanation makes clear that he made no serious effort to contact the WSWS or the Socialist Equality Party. Why, one must ask, did Steiner send his 72-hour warning to only one email address? When he did not receive confirmation from North that his warning had arrived, why did Steiner not send the letter to other email addresses?

The answer Steiner gives is demonstrably false. He writes: “As we could not find a generic email address we could use to write to the WSWS Editorial Board anywhere on the WSWS site we used an email that we know had been valid for North not long before.”

In fact, a contact form is posted prominently on the *World Socialist Web Site*. It is to this address that communications intended for the editorial

board and North personally are regularly sent. It reads:

Use this form on this page to send your comments and feedback to the *World Socialist Web Site*. You can also use this form to report conditions at your workplace or other information. We will protect your anonymity.

Steiner could not have been unaware of this form. But he chose not to use it. There is another question that he fails to answer. Why did he and Tissot not send the letter to other email and text message addresses? Tissot, who was expelled from the French section of the ICFI last year for refusing to respect the confidentiality of internal party communications, regularly sends emails and text messages to members of the party. He even has access to the cell phone numbers of his former comrades. Having received no reply from North, why did Tissot not send the “anonymous letter” to alternative addresses?

Another unanswered question is why Steiner rushed into publication. What was the urgent necessity that required the posting of the letter? Steiner, as his own timeline shows, received what he claims to have been an anonymous communication one month earlier, on December 17. The email that he claims to have sent to North is dated January 24. Thus, Steiner sat on the letter for approximately five weeks before, if one accepts his claim, forwarding it to a non-functioning email address.

Even if one is prepared to accept Steiner’s unsubstantiated claim that he sent an email to David North, it is apparent that he did the very least possible, under the circumstances, to notify the *World Socialist Web Site* of his intention to publish the fabricated letter. Rather than consider the highly likely possibility that North had not seen his letter, Steiner rushed into publication. His action was determined by a combination of colossally bad judgment, a malicious indifference to political principles, and uncontrollable subjective hatred of the International Committee and desire to sabotage its political work, whatever the consequences.

Steiner then turns his attention to the WSWS’s next “falsification,” i.e., that he concocted the story of an “anonymous” letter to justify his use of factually unsubstantiated allegations from a dubious right-wing source. He denounces the following statement in the WSWS article of February 4:

The claim made by Steiner and Tissot that the source of the false information they posted on January 28 was a “letter” from a source who wished to remain anonymous is an out and out lie.

Steiner accuses the WSWS of “spreading lies.” In support of his angry self-justification, Steiner proceeds to post a series of screen shots which he claims verifies his version of events. In fact, the record that is documented in the screen shots are a damning refutation of Steiner’s alibi. Steiner reproduces four email exchanges with his informant.

The first—dated Tue. December 17, 2024, 5:26 a.m.—is headlined “Political leadership of the ICFI is responsible for the arrest of Ostap Rerikh (Bogdan Syrotiuk).” It is not an anonymous communication. It bears the name “danielbukvasevic” and the email address danielbukvasevic@proton.me. Steiner reproduces the first sentence of the letter.

A letter with a name and email address cannot be plausibly described as anonymous. Moreover, Steiner does not respond in a manner that would indicate that the letter, with its damaging allegations, arrived from an anonymous and unknown source.

Within just six hours, on Tue. Dec 17, 2024, 11:46 a.m., Steiner replies:

Daniel, Thank you for this report. Do you want to go public with this information? Comradely, Alex

This is not the reply that a person would send to an anonymous source purveying damaging information. Steiner, addressing the informant by his first name, Daniel, immediately indicates his interest in posting the allegations and closes with the salutation, “Comradely, Alex.”

The next email—dated Dec 18, 2024, 5:37 a.m.—reads:

Yes, Alex. Thank you for your message. I did intend for this information to be made public.

Best regards,
Daniel

The writer, indicating familiarity, addresses the message to “Alex.” The salutation is one that is commonly used between acquaintances and friends.

Steiner’s response—dated Dec 18, 2024, 2:04 p.m.—indicates concern about the credibility of the information, as the story makes no sense. He writes:

I am sure you understand that we have to be careful on anything involving Ukraine and its intelligence agencies. I did confirm that the WSWS published 4 articles using the real name of the person and seems to have only adopted the pseudonym **AFTER** his arrest, which is pretty strange. What’s the point of using a pseudonym if he has already been arrested?

I would like to know more about you and get some confirmation of what you say.

Bukvasevic’s reply came on Thu, Dec 19, 2024, 7:14 a.m.

Dear Alex,

Thank you for your thoughtful response. After further consideration, I have decided not to continue our discussion at this time. I appreciate your understanding and your professionalism throughout our correspondence.

Kind regards,
Daniel

This reply should have been sufficient to convince Steiner of the obviously dubious character of his informant and his allegations. When asked by Steiner to provide information about himself and substantiate his claims, Bukvasevic cut off further communications with “Dear Alex.”

Two points need to be made about Steiner’s exhibits. First, there is reason to believe that they are only part of a more extensive correspondence. The level of familiarity and the choice of salutation strongly indicate that the exchanges involved more than a total of five brief emails over a period of three days. Bukvasevic’s expression of his appreciation for Steiner’s “understanding and professionalism throughout our correspondence” suggests more than the limited exchanges reproduced by Steiner. But be that as it may, if this is the entirety of Steiner’s exchanges with Bukvasevic, it testifies to the malicious irresponsibility of Steiner’s decision to post the allegations.

The second point is that nowhere in the exhibits provided by Steiner

does Bukvasevic request anonymity. He provides a name and email address. There is a line at the top of the second screenshot that reads “Anonymous.” But it is unrelated to the actual content of the email. Steiner’s claim that “we did indeed receive a letter from someone who signed the letter “Anonymous” is contradicted by the screenshots that he provides. None of the letters were signed “Anonymous.” All the emails are either addressed to or signed by “Daniel.”

According to Steiner, he and Tissot’s “immediate reaction to Anonymous/Bukvasevic breaking off contact with us was to consider the matter closed and at that point we had no intention of publishing the letter.” This was an unprincipled course of action. The matter was by no means “closed.” Now that it was evident that the letter was a provocation, Steiner was politically obligated to inform the ICFI and the WSWS. He did not follow this course of action. Steiner temporarily put the letter aside, and waited for a pretext to publish the letter.

In the weeks that followed, Daniel Bukvasevic adopted a new handle, Alexander Goldman. Under this name he posted a series of anti-communist diatribes and reproduced all the allegations relating to the ICFI’s defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk that he had sent to Steiner. But though he adopted a new name, he preserved the identifier @Bukvasevich. If Steiner had made any attempt to investigate the background and whereabouts of his informant, a Google search of @bukvasevich would have immediately taken him to the anti-communist diatribes of Alexander Goldman@bukvasevich. The WSWS stated:

Steiner invented the story of an anonymous letter to conceal from readers of permanent-revolution.org the fact that he was making use of fraudulent material, for which there existed no corroborating evidence, provided by an agent provocateur and anti-communist enemy of Marxism and Trotskyism...

Steiner knew that the allegations posted by his blog site would have no credibility if their source was known. Therefore, he concocted the cover story of the “letter” from a sender who wished to remain anonymous.

But there is no escaping the fact that Steiner placed his blog site at the service of a provocateur intent on assisting the Ukrainian police and sabotaging the defense campaign mounted by the ICFI.

In response to this damning indictment, Steiner resorts to the absolutely unbelievable claim that

In fact, we were not aware of the tweets from “Goldman.” Our only source of information was the letter we received from an Anonymous [sic] source with an email handle of “danielbukvasevic.” We had no way of knowing that “danielbukvasevic” and “Alexander Goldman” were the same person as we had never seen Goldman’s tweets and were not even aware of Goldman’s existence.

“No way of knowing”! Steiner had only to conduct a search of “danielbukvasevic” or “@bukvasevich” to discover the link to Goldman. But if one were to believe the unbelievable—that Steiner never took the minimal steps to ascertain the identity of his informant—it demonstrates the irresponsibility, recklessness and downright stupidity of Steiner, a man so blinded by subjective hatred that he is easily made use of as the instrument of an agent provocateur. Astonishingly, given this record of gross political negligence, Steiner proceeds to condemn as a falsification the charge that “We were reckless and did not exercise any due diligence

before publishing the letter..." Steiner writes cynically, "In fact, we exercised plenty of due diligence but in hindsight it obviously was not enough."

Finally, Steiner explains his decision to post the letter after establishing that Daniel Bukvasevic had previously used the twitter handle @DanReznikWSWS, and identified himself as "a member of the ICFI and translator for the WSWS in Serbo-Croat on Twitter and Reddit." It was based on this information "that we determined—mistakenly—that the allegations made in the letter were credible." Steiner fails to explain how he managed to discover the connection between Bukvasevic and Reznik without discovering in the course of the same search the link between Bukvasevic and Goldman.

In any case, the conclusion drawn by Steiner does not flow from the allegedly "new" information. The fact that Bukvasevic also used the identity "Dan Reznik" did not add a single fact in support of his baseless allegations.

Reznik is an agent provocateur, adopting and deleting identities in accordance with whatever operation he is engaged in. In 2022 he wrote to the WSWS, declaring full support for the ICFI and offering to translate articles into Serbo-Croat. There are many individuals who contact the WSWS and offer assistance for translations. As is now evident, "Reznik," aka Daniel Bukvasevic, was attempting to infiltrate the ICFI. His activities serve as a warning of the need for vigilance against the activities of state agents.

Reznik was unsuccessful. He was never a member of a section of the International Committee or any party organization. Reznik never held a personal meeting with a single party member. His association with the party was limited to occasional online discussions and the exchange of emails.

The ICFI was attentive to signs of Reznik's political instability. This past October, Alex Lantier, a leader of the ICFI's section in France, wrote to Reznik demanding that he take down a tweet in which the latter had endorsed the Stalinists' 1978 assassination of a Croat nationalist writer. Lantier wrote:

This tweet is not Trotskyist. The Trotskyist perspective for the "extinction" of the nation-state system is a world socialist revolution by the international working class. It is not for the physical extermination of everyone who, at one or other point in time, supports the nation-state system or his or her nation-state. Nor do Trotskyists outsource the political struggle against nationalism to the murderers in the Stalinist intelligence services, which were staffed by virulent nationalists. If you have any question about this, you can read *Stalin's Gangsters* by Trotsky.

Because Reznik's X/Twitter account referenced the WSWS, Lantier wrote, "I am concerned about you tweeting what will be seen as an endorsement of the Stalinist assassination of a literary figure. The WSWS and the ICFI cannot take responsibility for such public positions." Lantier insisted that Reznik delete his tweet. Soon after Reznik deleted his @DanReznikWSWS account, broke off contact with the WSWS and began posting as Daniel Bukvasevic.

In early December, Bukvasevic began closing down accounts. At some point he made contact with Steiner, and fed him false information that could be used to discredit the ICFI and undermine the defense of Bogdan Syrotiuk. In selecting Steiner as the messenger of his provocation, Bukvasevic chose his mark well.

Just three weeks have passed since Steiner posted on permanent-revolution.org a slanderous letter provided by an agent-provocateur, who

most likely was working on behalf of the Ukrainian state. The publication of the slanders had no other purpose than to undermine the International Committee's defense of the young Ukrainian Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk, who was taken into custody by the fascist regime in April 2024. Within 72 hours of the publication of the slander, Steiner was compelled to retract and delete the attack. But his pro forma apology for the posting of the letter was a transparent cover-up of his role in abetting the provocation against Bogdan Syrotiuk. The *World Socialist Web Site* has exposed in detail the mendacious and preposterous narrative that has been concocted by Steiner to excuse and justify his conduct. The Young Guard of Bolshevik Leninists—Bogdan's comrades in Russia, Ukraine and other parts of the former Soviet Union—have also issued a sharply-worded protest against Steiner's provocation.

As the scale of his deceit and political complicity in the provocation has been exposed, Steiner has erupted with a new barrage of denunciations. He has discovered the true victim in the events that have unfolded since his blog site first published the letter provided by the SBU provocateur: It is none other than Steiner! This modern incarnation of Dickens' loathsome Pecksniff is now wallowing in self-pity, howling over his ill treatment by the International Committee and the *World Socialist Web Site*. Monumentalizing the scale of his persecution, Steiner modestly compares himself to Karl Marx. Under the headline, "Marx's Struggle against Defamation: A 150th Anniversary Tribute to Herr Vogt," Steiner draws a parallel between the situation confronting Marx in 1860 and that in which Steiner finds himself today.

The work referenced by Steiner, *Herr Vogt*, was written by Karl Marx as an exposure of the libels of a petty-bourgeois radical journalist, Karl Vogt, which aimed at discrediting Marx and his closest political supporters. In the course of his exposure of Vogt's lies, Marx established the connection between the content of Vogt's attacks and the political interests of the reactionary regime of Emperor Louis Bonaparte in France. Marx accused Vogt of being an agent working on behalf of the regime. Ten years later, after the fall of Louis Bonaparte, documents were uncovered that confirmed Vogt's role as an agent.

Steiner turns this historical episode inside out. He writes:

As in the period of political exile following the failure of the 1848 revolutions, we see a similar turn to defamatory agent-baiting within the left in our own time. This is the background behind the increasingly unhinged defamatory accusations in the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) leveled against Alex Steiner and the permanent revolution website.

Explosions of false accusations of agent-baiting within the left become especially destructive under conditions where the employment of genuine police provocateurs are growing.

Steiner's account stands everything on its head. If comparisons are to be drawn between Marx's exposure of Herr Vogt, and the *World Socialist Web Site*'s response to Herr Steiner, they speak entirely and overwhelmingly in favor of the WSWS. In the present-day controversy, the role of Vogt—the purveyor of slanders in the interests of the reactionary Bonapartist dictatorship—is played by Steiner, who posted on his website material that he obtained from an agent of the Ukrainian state police, the SBU.

Steiner absurdly describes Marx's *Herr Vogt* as a polemic against "agent-baiting," when, in fact, Marx's central purpose in writing Vogt was to expose him as a Bonapartist agent seeking to disrupt the nascent socialist movement.

It is ironic that Steiner should pay tribute to *Herr Vogt* and do so in the context of reviving the allegation of "agent-baiting" against the

International Committee and the WSWS. Steiner has overlooked the fact that New Park Publications, the publishing house of the Workers Revolutionary Party (which was then the leading section of the ICFI), published in 1982 a new English translation of the long-neglected masterpiece under the title: *Herr Vogt: A Spy in the Workers Movement*.

The date of publication was significant. As the Foreword explained:

Since 1975 the International Committee of the Fourth International has been engaged in a major investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of its founder Leon Trotsky in 1940, the infiltration of his household by agents of the GPU, and the subsequent infiltration of the Trotskyist movement and in particular the American Socialist Workers Party, by agents of imperialism. The investigation has already produced irrefutable evidence of such infiltration.

From its inception the inquiry has been ignored or derided by the revisionists and their petty-bourgeois circles. The International Committee has been described as “paranoic.”

Historically, it is in good company. What *Herr Vogt* reveals is that from the very earliest years the Marxist movement was obliged to pay the greatest attention to its security and to the exposure of agents in the workers’ movement.

In his revival of the charge of “agent-baiting,” Steiner is following a course dictated by the logic of his effort to justify his role as an accomplice of a police provocation. The term was invented by the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) to discredit and illegalize, on pain of expulsion, all efforts to investigate and expose the activities of police agents inside the party. The first significant use of the term “agent-baiting” came on April 7, 1978, in a letter written by the SWP leadership to Alan Gelfand in response to his demand for an explanation of Joseph Hansen’s secret meetings with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had been concealed from the SWP for nearly 40 years. The SWP wrote: “The Party cannot and will not allow agent-baiting within its ranks. Any further repetition by you of the Healyite slander will not be tolerated.”

In the months and years that followed, the term “agent-baiting” was used with increasing desperation as the Security and the Fourth International investigation produced an overwhelming mass of evidence definitely exposing SWP leader Joseph Hansen’s role as an agent and informer for the Soviet secret police and the FBI.

The term itself—essentially absurd—obtains its operative value by utilizing an Orwellian turn of phrase to associate and equate efforts to defend the party and workers movement against provocateurs and police agents with “Red-baiting” and “Jew-baiting.” Anti-communists engage in the former; anti-Semites in the latter. But who is the target of “agent-baiting”? Of precisely what does the “baiting” consist? The participle “baiting” can be used in an Orwellian “Newspeak” manner to discredit and illegalize a wide swath of left-wing protest activity. Opposition to fascists can be denounced as “Nazi-baiting”; opposition to mass murder and illegal deportations can be discredited as “genocide-baiting.”

Fifty years ago, in May 1975, Alex Steiner was a member of the American delegation to the Sixth Congress of the ICFI that voted unanimously to initiate the Security and the Fourth International investigation. In the years that followed, Steiner even contributed statements under his byline in support of the investigation.

But in late 1978, Steiner abandoned the Trotskyist movement, retreated back into the complacent and dishonest world of middle-class opportunist politics, and that set into motion the protracted process of repudiating, with steadily increasing malice, the principles and ideals that had originally drawn him to the socialist movement. Steiner’s collaboration

with a provocateur against the socialist movement is the terminus of his political and personal degeneration.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact