

VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

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Contents: Electoral Policy, New York City	p. 5
Black Panthers and Fascism	6
Nationalism and Internationalism Theory and Practice	8

ELECTORAL POLICY--NEW YORK CITY

For revolutionary Marxists, bourgeois democracy is one of the forms of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, best suited in "normal" times, i.e., when the threat of social revolution is not imminent, for the maintenance of the system of exploitation.

Illusions about the state as a neutral or even benevolent institution are best nurtured in this environment.

Bourgeois democracy, with its built-in devices for guaranteeing the rule of the minority, is also the form of capitalist class rule under which the working class can best be organized by its vanguard party for the socialist revolution.

Labor Party

History has shown that the electoral apparatus under capitalism can never be more than an index of the political maturity of the working class, and that meaningful reforms won, are essentially by-products of the revolutionary struggle.

The American working class still functions politically as an appendage to the capitalist parties.

We believe that a qualitative leap in consciousness will take place with the formation of a labor party based on the trade-unions; that the revolutionary vanguard party will be built in the process of winning the mass of workers for the transitional labor party, and in fighting for a revolutionary pro-

gram within it.]

The Electoral Arena

Critical support for ostensibly socialist and working class candidates in elections differs from a united front agreement between organizations, but is essentially its variant, and allows for electoral support on similar conditions, namely, that the action advance the interests of the working class, and that freedom of criticism be maintained so that, in the process of exposing the opportunists, the mass of workers can be won to a revolutionary program and organization.

The question which must be answered is whether critical support to the candidates of parties calling themselves socialist and communist is warranted in the forthcoming mayoral elections.

We recognize that socialist electioneering will have little immediate impact on the working class. Still, critical support can have meaning provided that the electoral activities of these parties can help advance socialist consciousness, even if in a limited

and contradictory manner. It can do so, however, only if we are able to fulfill our responsibility, to make clear that not the slightest confidence is to be reposed in them.

Parties and Programs

The Communist (CP) and Socialist Workers (SWP) parties, are running candidates for mayor, the former, Rasheed Storey, the latter, Paul Butelle, along with four running mates. We have not seen an electoral announcement from the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), but it is likely that it will also offer one or more candidates in this election.

The CP's program raises the issue of socialism only in "ultimate" terms, and calls for the "broadest coalition of people's forces to combat racism, war and monopoly". It is willing to withdraw its candidate in the interest of "such broad coalition struggles", presumably, a "Popular Front" behind Mayor Lindsay or a liberal Democrat. [Its candidate and program which crosses class lines, does not deserve the slightest support from socialists]

The SLP has traditionally run socialist candidates on a timeless program of voting socialism in by the ballot. It refuses to support demands which could win workers to the socialist banner, on the basis that these "reforms", by "ameliorating" the conditions of the working class only postpone the day when socialism will be voted in, the American "deomocratic" way. Its peculiar combination of reformism,

sectarianism, and anti-sovietism in the tradition of right-wing social-democracy, would require socialists to afford it extremely critical support, only if no more suitable alternative existed.

As for the SWP and its candidates, it schizophrenically identifies with black nationalism on the front of its campaign leaflets, justifying its scabbing on teachers on this basis, and relegates demands for the "socialist reconstruction of America" and for a labor party, to the rear, to the extent that the latter demand is mentioned at all. [It becomes increasingly difficult for the uninitiated to discern differences between the CP's and SWP's platforms]

The SWP, however, does retain its socialist and labor party planks. As the liberal coalition behind Lindsay gets under way, it can be expected to strive for the support of the traditionally socialist voter, by attempting to distinguish itself from the CP and the more militant-sounding liberals, through greater emphasis on these planks.

We might, at that time, consider calling for a vote for its candidates, while making quite clear that the SWP is a right-centrist organization, and that it broke from revolutionary socialism long ago by its decisions to ride the coat-tails of the bureaucrats of the Cuban deformed workers' state and of black nationalism. We will withhold endorsements pending developments in the campaign.

BLACK PANTHERS AND FASCISM

The Black Panther Party (BPP) has called a conference in Oakland, California, July 18 through 21, inviting "all organizations representing the people" to form a "united front against fascism in America". "Community control of police to end fascism" is stated to be its primary objective, and 5,000 or more are expected to attend.

This so-called united front, in reality a classless "people's front", was first enunciated by the Comintern's Georgi Dimitroff, in 1935, two years after the victory of

Hitler over the German working class, prepared by the Social-Democratic and Communist parties, each in its own way. It officially marked Stalin's turn from

ultra-left policies to the overt counter-revolutionary policy of cooperating with the capitalist "democracies". In every country, the Communist parties united with the "liberal" section of the capitalist Class. In the US, the "democratic front" transformed a generation of revolutionists into supporters of the Democratic Party.

[Organizations such as the SWP and Workers World (WW), who worship at the shrine of spontaneity, who insist that all Black demands be unconditionally supported, have again confirmed Lenin's proposition, that in the absence of struggle by a vanguard party to win the working class for its scientifically-determined program, bourgeois ideology must predominate.] The CP, the most insidious carrier of bourgeois ideology in the "left" today, in winning the leadership of the BPP to its counter-revolutionary neo-Popular Front line, threatens to turn a most significant manifestation of the Black people's struggle for an end to its special oppression into a completely reformist movement with a militant facade.

The BPP won mass support among the most exploited sections of the Black people through its struggles against the conditions of ghetto life. However, its program, evolving to incorporate anti-capitalist as well as anti-imperialist positions, also retains its reformist black nationalist, "Third World" and Maoist conceptions. Its confused program makes the BPP an easy victim, on the one hand, of the police, as a result of its paramilitary guerrillaist postures, and on the other hand, of the opportunists on the left, witness its co-optation by PFP in last year's presidential elections, by the anti-PL sections of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and by the Communist Party.

Because its black nationalist hang-ups preclude a clear class line and an understanding that the capitalist state is the instrument of the ruling class, it has pro-

posed such petty-bourgeois utopias as a United Nations plebiscite "to determine the will of the black people as to their national destiny", and separate police departments under "community control... for the major communities of any city...black...white...Mexican-American...".

The notorious male supremacist views voiced by BPP spokesmen at the recently-held SDS convention, correspond, not only to "normal" male egoism fostered by class society--in which women become dehumanized sexual objects, drudges in the home, and super-exploited in the labor market--but are fortified by black nationalist attitudes.

Because the BPP has been the incessant target of police attacks, outrageous brutality, frame-ups and murders; because muddle-headed organizations such as WW have confused themselves and others about the nature of fascism; and because it serves the CP to utilize the rhetoric about fascism in behalf of its coalition with the liberal bourgeoisie, the BPP is unable to recognize that it is the victim of bourgeois democracy, as expressed toward the exploited who militantly struggle for a better life, as its history abundantly demonstrates.

Unlike the WL which congratulates itself on having "nothing to do with black nationalism", the tag it seems to hang on all black organizations, we believe that the conference should be utilized to conduct a struggle within the BPP and the Black movement for revolutionary politics, for a consistent class approach to all questions, including a principled defense of the BPP members and all other militants against police attack.

We urge all who can to attend in order to fight for Marxist clarity and principle. Only on this basis, can the BPP be saved from a disastrous course, can its members hope to become a part, perhaps an important and even vital part, of the working class vanguard.

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NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

Theory and Practice

The more overt enemies of Leninism on the left, self-identified Marxists, attempt to sever Lenin's continuity to Marxist theory in attacking his contributions on the working class vanguard party and the theory of imperialism. The SDS Labor Committee, which has these attributes in common with right-wing social-democrats, in and out of the Socialist Party, has had little to say on the national question as such. However, its own peculiar blend of reformism and the radical posture, its unresolved conglomerate nature (ex-PLP'ers, ex-Trotskyists, ex-"New Left" students), and desire for cosy theoretical murkiness, has led it to attempt to carry water on both shoulders, to oppose the black separatist movement in general, while, at the same time, making "practical" adaptations to sections of it, e.g., the Queens College SEEK students

Leninism's more insidious enemies attempt to transform Lenin into a harmless icon, who can be used to sanctify their opportunist practices. Obedience to theory, which is violated in practice is nowhere more evident than in the treatment of the national question by the so-called Leninists of the CP, SWP, Workers World (WW) and its youth arm, Youth Against War and Fascism (YAWF), the Progressive Labor Party (PLP), the Independent Socialist Clubs (ISC), and the multifarious factions of the neo-"Leninist" Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).

The CP and ISC epigones of Lenin seek little theoretical justification for their positions on the Negro question.

The CP simply attempts to utilize black nationalism, "tacking into" the "popularity that the term self-determination has, ... not... the Marxist meaning" Political Affairs, April 1969), to put pressure on the ruling class for reforms and

concessions within the context of its Brezhnevite program of "peaceful coexistence" and "peaceful transition to socialism." In the wake of the radicalization of the campuses and ghettos, the CP now finds that a more militant verbiage is necessary in pursuit of its reformist and counter-revolutionary line.

The ISC seeks a "practical" path to the socialist revolution, and adjusts its program to empirically viewed reality, ergo its involvement in classless anti-war umbrella activities, support for student adventures, and for black nationalist demands. Its program for the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP) is a masterpiece of reformism. In its desire for "broad" support, the ISC's PFP adopted a left-liberal issue-orientated program, which studiously avoided raising either the issue of socialism, or even of an "independent" labor party, [in addition to its support for black separatists demands.] ?

[The SWP, WW and "New Left" formations, also in a de facto bloc with the CP in anti-war, ghetto and student arenas, assert that "the right of nations to self-determination," Lenin's dictum, is fully applicable to the Negro struggle. On the basis of this formula, they justify support and encouragement for black separatists demands, including so-called community control of ghetto schools, and autonomous departments of Black Studies in universities, in which black students will be taught by black instructors in segregated facilities.

The Negro question in the US, superficially labeled a national question, is mechanically linked with the upsurge of nationalism in the industrially backward sectors of the world, in consonance with the impressionistic and empiricist methodology of opportunism. [The "Third World", a category which presently includes black and Spanish-speaking minorities in the US, is viewed by the opportunists

as a substitute for the "passive" working classes in the advanced capitalist countries.

The Workers League (WL), attempting to combat the division of workers on racial lines, and the opportunist accommodation to black nationalism by so-called Leninists, denies that the slogan, "the right to self-determination" is applicable to the Black people of the US, a finding with which we are in accord. Along with its co-thinkers in the International Committee (IC) of the Fourth International, whose leading section is the Socialist Labour League (SLL) of England, it also relates the upsurge in the Negro struggle to the rise in nationalism, but in the advanced capitalist countries, rather than in the industrially backward, as do the revisionists.

Emphasizing the international nature of working class struggles, it, however, ignores the revolutionary implications of the increasingly militant Negro struggle.

Form and Content

[The WL's Tim Wohlforth attacks PLP's contention that the Negro struggle is "national in form and working class in content", as a "metaphysical distinction", and counters it with his own statically understood conception that "form and content are a unity in the black struggle". On this basis, Wohlforth finds that PLP "objects not to the form of the black struggle--its separateness--but to its content--its black nationalist programme"] (The New Nationalism and the Negro Struggle, p. 13)

Despite Wohlforth's emphasis on Marxist method, on dialectics, his approach is essentially metaphysical. [He confuses the form and the content of the Negro struggle, mistakes its current appearance for its essence, and identifies an aspect of the form, "black nationalist programme"--"separatism" is merely another expression for the same manifestation--as the content

of the struggle. [He then must condemn the real content of the Negro struggle--which is directed against the special oppression of the Black people and the super-exploitation of black workers,] engendered and perpetuated by American capitalism--because much of its leadership, confused by black nationalist ideology, has succeeded in diverting it into self-defeating, sterile and/or reactionary channels.

Wohlforth is logically compelled to deny that this special oppression and super-exploitation exists, because of his inability to comprehend that form and content are not fixed metaphysical entities, but dynamic and interacting relationships.

Lenin, in his tactical treatise on the "infantile disease", Left-Wing Communism, directed against German ultra-lefts refusing to work in "historically obsolete" parliaments and "reactionary" unions, demonstrates how a dialectical materialist handles question of form and content:

"Right doctrinairism persisted in recognizing only the old forms, and became utterly bankrupt, for it did not notice the new content. Left doctrinairism persists in the unconditional repudiation of certain old forms, failing to see that the new content is forcing its way through all and sundry forms, that it is our duty as communists to master all forms, to learn how, with the maximum rapidity to supplement one form with another, to substitute one for another and to adapt our tactics to any such change that does not come from our class or our efforts."

We will discuss the question of special oppression and its basic expression, super-exploitation, at greater length, in a separate section of the series on "Nationalism and Internationalism", with particular emphasis on the WL's positions. We concentrate on its positions, as much because of our

agreement with much of its program, as with our disagreements on the Negro question, and because we believe that their position on this vital question, to the extent that it is accepted by revolutionary socialists, places in jeopardy the goal which we both seek, the construction of a Leninist party capable of leading the workers to power.

In addition, the WL is the only organizations on the left which openly denies the existence of special oppression of Negroes in the form of super-exploitation. We believe that polemics with the WL will not only best define and verify the existence of this relationship, but will also serve to delineate our program as well, and show its theoretical consistency.

The leadership of the Spartacist League (SL), in the process of forcing us out of that organization, also repudiated the historic communist position, that black workers are super-exploited (documented in Spartacist League Split).

Unfortunately for the SL, shortly after our ouster, every organization on the left, with the exception of the WL, began to trumpet its discovery of super-exploitation to the heavens. In a grotesque exhibition of unalloyed opportunism, the SL, in a recently issued leaflet, "Mike Klonsky and Brother Stalin", unabashedly referred to "Black and other super-exploited minorities". Its elastic political line and its light minded publishing schedule, effectively remove it from consideration as a serious political opponent. We will, therefore, only discuss its positions in passing, or when lessons from the SL factional struggle can be utilized to give greater clarity to our ideas.

Lenin and Marxist Method

Although Leninism is acknowledged in words to be a continuation and an extension of Marxist theory, Lenin's ideas are usually set forth

in a metaphysical and discontinuous manner, as issuing from a godhead, whose wisdom, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus, emerged full-grown.

Formulas are ripped from their context and proclaimed as supra-historical dogma, after having been prudently trimmed to eliminate any potentially embarrassing appendant ideas. This is the tendentious method of the revisionists of Lenin and Trotsky.

Judging from Wohlforth's "The New Nationalism and the Negro Question", it is also the method of the WL.

Wohlforth inveighs majestically against the opportunists who apply "Lenin's position on the right of nations to self determination... as an abstract schematic formula", (p. 1), and then goes on to quote Lenin against Luxemburg:

"The categorical requirement of Marxist theory in investigating any social question is that it be examined within definite historical limits, and if it refers to a particular country (e.g., the national programme for a given country), that account be taken of the specific features distinguishing that country from others in the same historical epoch." (Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism, p. 51)

Excellent! We shall examine in our next issue the correspondence between Wohlforth's understanding of these words to his own approach to the national question, between his understanding and Lenin's, and between the conclusions drawn by the WL and a Leninist position.

(to be continued)

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