A History of The Progressive Labor Party (continued)

The San Francisco State Strike

Hayakawa's first day in office came on Dec. 13. The strike steering committee had met and made plans to meet Hayakawa's reign of terror with an all-out fight. He was reported as being strong in the quad and reiterated our demands and that we were on our way to victory. The ruling class must have begun to believe their own lies about "it is only a small minority." Because they had "only" 200 riot police on hand and these pigs were unable to break up the rally of 4,000. The strikers then marched to the campus and shut it down. There were numerous scuffles with the cops but they made no full-scale charge that day because of the tremendous militancy and numbers of the strikers and the relatively "small" number of cops. The next day, Dec. 14, was to become known as "Bloody Tuesday" throughout the Bay Area. After Monday's victory for the strikers, Hayakawa had over 1,000 cops and state troops called in from all over Northern California. The strikers, 6,000 strong, again held a mass rally and demonstration at noon in the center of campus. The cops attacked from several sides, and a pitched battle ensued in which thousands of strikers fought the racist police forces for over three hours! Dozens of students suffered serious injuries and one striker almost died from the beating he received during this brutal onslaught. But the militant strikers fought back courageously and defended each other under attack. One cop was laid out cold.

In order to try to defeat the strike, the state government, in cooperation with the ASF State, called out the National Guard. When the cops attacked the strikers, the National Guard remained on the sidelines, while the cops continued to attack the students. The strikers, realizing the importance of the day, continued their struggle and fought back with even greater determination.

Similar rallies and demonstrations continued in cooperation with the police continued through December and the university was effectively stopped from functioning. Only 15,200 per cent of the student body were still attending classes. The daily rallies and confrontations with the police continued, and the cops involved 46,000 of 68,000 who were at the school at any one time. The strike was a strike against the police force and the state government. The strikers only needed to continue the strike, but in fact we grew in numbers and in our determination to fight the fascist state. Many thought Hayakawa to be a madman or a fool. But it was clear he was fighting for the working class and had their support. The New York Times, in its lead editorial of Dec. 6, supported Hayakawa and called upon the public to support the S.F. State and use it as an example to students across the country. Gov. Edmund G. Brown's broadcast in which he promised to use the National Guard if the combined strike and boycott continued was not enough. And Alioto stated, "the police will be used to keep the campus open for those who want to go to class even if it's only 1,000 students" (out of 18,000).

In January the strikers switched tactics to mass picketing around the entrance to the school. By now the majority of students honored the line and supported the strike. Seven hundred to 1,500 picketed every day starting at 7 a.m. There was great unity and militancy on the lines, which made the frequent police charges unable to break the picket lines. In addition, the AFT, representing 300 out of 1,200 faculty, struck over wages, workload, and other rights. The AFT also supported the students' demands. A serious weakness of the AFT's strategy was its attempt to impose pacifism on the strike. However, the students had been through the December days knowing that militancy and self-defense in the face of police terror were essential to win the strike. In balance, when the AFT struck, it was a big shot in the arm for the strike, making it easier and more likely for many more students to stay out. January also saw tremendous support contingents come to State from colleges all over Northern California. Black students at S.F. City College organized a support march over 150 strong from that campus to S.F. State. Scums came from Sonoma State, San Jose State, Sacramento State, U.C. Berkeley, etc. Carloads came from as far away as Hays to give the strikers moral support for their cause. These contingents brought huge banners displaying slogans of solidarity from their campuses, support rallies on their campuses and helped raise bail funds. This great police force and support from other campuses was a great boost to the S.F. State strikers and opened a new level of unity and solidarity in struggle for the school movement.

"good faith," Convocation, six strike leaders (including three members of PLP) received suspension notices from Smith, two hundred pleats in the camp, and classes were still in session with the Conv being "optional." Since many students were not attending the conv, we organized intensive classroom education to go to classes and talk about racism and the demands of the strike. After five days of the Conv it was clear the Administration was stalling and trying to doubletalk around dealing with the university's racist policies. Thousands began to support the strike. Instead of "the fever running its course" the strength of the strike had doubled. The strike leadership denounced the "strike-breaking Convocation" and Minority and White students walked out. We marched united and 2,000 strong through the campus buildings chanting "On Strike—Shut It Down!" Smith's "liberal" tactics had failed to break the strike. Thus having failed the Board of Trustees and the rest of the ruling class, he submitted his resignation. Within hours the Trustees announced the appointment of S. I. Hayakawa, well-known neo
critic, as acting President.

The puppet Hayakawa the ruling class dropped the facade of liberalism and "democracy" and moved openly to crush the strike by force and terror. Hayakawa declared he would break the strike "in three days." Rollins on campus were banned. Picketing was banned. It was declared a misdemeanor to be in the campus quad (scene of the strike's demonstrations) and not in class. "I will use as many police as are necessary to restore order," announced the puppet. In addition to all this, Hayakawa issued "inciting to riot" warrants for several strike leaders, including three PLP members.

While press and politicians ranted about a "convocation" closing down the campus, thousands on campus and from the community came to support the S.F. State boycott.