

Monthly Supplement

March 1975

A History of The Progressive Labor Party part 12

ANTI-COMMUNISM REPULSED

The ruling class had accurately assessed the vital leadership role that the PLP was playing in the State strike. Thus, they unleashed several major red-baiting efforts at the height of the strike when things were going very badly for them. Smith began the anti-communist campaign in November with vague references to "the forces of darkness who are bent on confrontation for their own ends." Hayakawa openly declared that "outside agitators, SDS types, are converging on the S.F. State campus from all parts of the country" and that most of these demonstrators were "hopped up on drugs." Reagan, in his half hour TV talk, said, "these violent demonstrations are attacks against the people of California and are instigated by SDS, PL, and the BSU." S.F.'s "own" Joe Alioto capped off this red-baiting barrage with a special news conference in which he announced that "everything could be settled at S.F. State if the small group of Maoists

The San Francisco State Strike

The fundamental strategy to defeat anti-communism is to win more communists, through the battles of the class struggle. We attempted to act on this understanding, and consequently the WSA caucus at State grew rapidly during the year of the strike, and the Party membership more than doubled.

POLITICAL LESSONS

Due to the tremendous strength of the strike, the Hayakawa Administration was eventually forced to

liberalism and fully rely on and mobilize the masses. In addition, the ruthlessly violent nature of the state and the fact that it is a tool of the ruling capitalist class was exposed.

Also, of significance, the mass base developed for the PLP and WSA caucus at State and other struggles around the country laid the basis for the defeat of the right-wing RYM at the SDS Convention in June 1969.

Within the framework of these invaluable lessons and gains, there were certain objective factors operating and certain subjective errors on the part of PLP, which prevented both the party and the mass movement from making the fullest possible gains from the strike.

Up until 1968, we also had the outlook that the nationalism of the colonized nations and national minorities here in the U.S. was progressive. Thus, during the strike we tended to cater to nationalism within the TWLF and put ourselves forward, given we were leading the anti-fascist struggle, as the true revolutionary-nationalists. We did not fully grasp the bourgeois character of nationalist ideology and how it ultimately compromised the struggle against racist oppression.

Toward the end and mainly after the strike, the PLP began the necessary indeed vital, process of openly breaking with nationalism and attempting to fight for a working class line. However our party still did not fully grasp how to deal with the question of racism and nationalism and during this period we made certain racist errors. The most serious of these in the student movement was our position (after the State strike) opposing preferential admissions of minority students. This was a racist error and was a costly mistake to both the party and the mass movement. It gave credibility to the line "opposition to nationalism is racist." It thus acted to

“. . . throughout the strike the PLP had always been open and out front that we were revolutionary communists who advocated armed socialist revolution as the only fundamental solution to racism and imperialism.”

could be isolated." (At that time the Chinese Communist Party had a militant position against U.S. imperialism and PLP had fraternal relations with the CCP).

From the earliest days of the movement at San Francisco State back in 1966 and up to and throughout the strike the PLP had always been open and out front that we were revolutionary communists who advocated armed socialist revolution as the only fundamental solution to racism and imperialism. During the strike the Party put out numerous independent leaflets, held forums, etc. to reach masses of students with our Marxist-Leninist line. On the January 6 picket line PLP members handed out 3,000 copies of a special **Challenge** supplement on the State strike, analyzing its political lessons. So, when Hayakawa, Reagan and Alioto started to bait PLP and cry "reds!", "outside agitators!", etc., it was no revelation to the masses of strikers! In fact, many strikers realized that the vanguard line of the communist PLP on fighting racism, taking mass militant action, rejecting liberal pacifism, and building a worker-student alliance had been crucial to the successful development of the strike. Moreover, they knew that PLP did not just verbalize these positions, but that the PLP cadre had been instrumental in leading the strike along these lines. Thus, because of the correctness of our line, the openness with which we put it forward, and our ability to carry it out in the actual battles against the class enemy, the anti-communist campaign launched against the strike failed.

Inside the ranks of the strikers some revisionist elements tried to push the ruling class' anti-communist line against the PLP. These phoney snivelled about "PL-dominated meetings" and "foreign ideology." These present-day Mensheviks fared no better than Hayakawa and Alioto.

give in on most of the demands: the preferential admissions program was established with financial aid; sixteen new full-time minority faculty were hired for the next semester; the racist Bedesom was "re-assigned" and eventually "allowed to retire" early; academic (but not civil) amnesty was granted to almost all of the strikers; and of course Hayakawa had already offered to set a Black Studies Department and School of Ethnic Studies and hire some minority administrators. Civil amnesty was not granted and several strike leaders and activists were sentenced to long jail terms. PLP and others continued the fight against racism in the courts and in jail.

“. . . because of the correctness of our line, the openness with which we put it forward, and our ability to carry it out in the actual battles against the class enemy, the anti-communist campaign against the strike failed.”

Even more significant than the winning of some reforms against the racist policies of the University was the political significance of the strike. The tremendous militancy, the unprecedented mass participation, and the protracted character of the State strike raised the whole student movement to a new level of struggle against the ruling class. Many vital political lessons were driven home: the primacy of fighting racism; the necessity to defeat anti-communism and to build a worker-student alliance; and the need to reject pacifism and

reinforce nationalism.

However, this position was in sharp contradiction to the PLP's anti-racist role in the state strike, where in fact we led the fight for preferential admissions and other struggles of that period. Thus, as we now self-critically repudiate our error on this question, we are bringing our line on this question back in accordance with the Party's anti-racist practice.

The polemics on racism and nationalism continued at the June 1969 SDS convention.