

THE GUARDIAN SETS OUT TO BUILD ITSELF A PARTY:

A PFOC Critique—1st of a Series

The *Guardian*, a weekly paper of significant national circulation, has been promoting a series of articles on the subject of party-building. Beginning on Dec. 1, 1976, this series has included articles by Irwin Silber; the staff statement titled "The Fight for Women's Emancipation" (Mar. 9); and comments from the Potomac Socialist Organization (PSO) and from the Philadelphia Workers Organizing Committee.

Prairie Fire Organizing Committee has decided that our national leadership collective together with the comrades responsible for our journal, *BREAKTHROUGH*, will prepare and publish a critical review of this series. At a time when many revolutionaries have come to agree that party-building is our primary task, the *Guardian* is delegating to itself a major role in the party-building debate. The views of the *Guardian* reach many serious anti-imperialists and revolutionaries, who have come to rely on the paper as a source of news and comment on international politics and liberation struggles. Editorially, the *Guardian* has taken positions on a number of liberation struggles with which we have substantial, though qualified, agreement as an organization. This has been the case in support and solidarity activity around the struggles in Central and Southern Africa—Angola, Mozambique, Zaire, Azania, Namibia, and Zimbabwe.

Nevertheless it is Prairie Fire's analysis that the general line of the *Guardian*,

especially its position on party-building, propagates a view of imperialism that leads away from revolution and blocks real party-building. The *Guardian* follows a very common revision of Marx' and Engels' work by identifying the main contradiction of capitalism/imperialism as that between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, or as they sometimes say it, the imperialist bourgeoisie and the "working class as a whole." This disastrously wrong definition is the main theoretical basis of the recent series of articles on party-building. By this wrong definition, the *Guardian* avoids the contradiction fundamental to capitalism at all its stages including its final stage, imperialism, which is the contradiction between social production and private appropriation. By substituting one form of the class struggle for a scientific understanding of the fundamental contradiction of capitalist/imperialist society, the *Guardian* places itself in opposition to a correct understanding of the class struggle as it has been transformed under imperialism.

In the early history of capitalism, the fundamental contradiction of capitalism was most clearly expressed in the conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie and the class struggle of the working class against the bourgeoisie became the main revolutionary drive of that period of history.

Imperialism has changed the content and form of class struggle world-wide. As whole nations, their people, states, resources and cultures have been subjugated to reap profit for a small number of oppressor

nations, the superprofits of empire have been used to maintain national supremacy in advanced capitalist/imperialist countries and to subvert the revolutionary strivings of the working class. Lenin, building on Marx' and Engels' analysis of the British working class in the British empire, wrote *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, to define this distinct stage in the history of capitalism. In *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* and many writings and speeches after 1915, Lenin further developed this analysis of imperialism and of the growing revolutionary forces throughout the world.

Lenin saw that the primary contradiction of capitalism in its imperialist stage is that between a small number of oppressor nations and the large number of oppressed nations containing the majority of the world's people. Imperialism is not only monopoly capitalism, as the *Guardian* states, but also it is a parasitic and moribund (dying) capitalism. A handful of nations are living off the exploitation of a larger number of oppressed nations, and imperialism as a system is dying as these oppressed nations rise up to liberate themselves and seize control of their resources, political and economic life, and culture. Just as the revolution in Russia broke the

weakest link of the chain, so Lenin maintained in his later writings, that national liberation struggles of oppressed nations had moved to leadership in the world proletarian socialist revolution against the entire capitalist system.

Understanding Lenin's analysis of effects of empire on workers in oppressed nations is especially important for world communists in the US. In order to struggle against opportunism and great-national chauvinism, that is, to take the correct revolutionary stand, oppressed national workers must support, with concrete struggles for self-determination waged by oppressed nations—especially those nations subjugated by their own oppressor nation. This means supporting the right of oppressed nations to conduct their own national liberation struggles and to decide their own political strategy and goals.

The *Guardian* articles reveal the disastrous effects of adopting Silber's wrong analysis to the revolutionary process in the US. The refusal of the *Guardian* to deal seriously with the nature and consequences of the imperialist history of the US is covered by a flood of words about Marxism-Leninism and anti-revisionism. Therefore its liquidation of a



Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Miami, 1972. An organization that demonstrated support for the Vietnamese war of national liberation. Our history of solidarity with the Vietnamese is a positive step toward fighting US subjugation of all oppressed nations inside the US and around the world.

imperialism becomes an active pushing of opportunism and economism and an attack upon the content of Marxist-Leninist science. The *Guardian's* extensive coverage of revolutionary events is thus converted into a cover that obscures Irwin Silber and editor Jack Smith's essentially white supremacist, male supremacist and anti-imperialist approach to politics.

Below is a summary of some of the major ways that the *Guardian* series attacks and undermines party-building and revolution in the name of Marxism-Leninism and party-building.

These points will be developed in greater depth in subsequent articles, beginning with the critique of the *Guardian's* position on women's oppression and liberation in this issue of *BREAKTHROUGH*.

I. The *Guardian* bases its analysis on the fanciful idea that imperialism exists only outside the borders of the United States, and evades the fact that the history of the US is the history of empire, the history of the subjugation of the Native American, Black, Chicano, Mexicano, and Puerto Rican nations. Thus Irwin Silber does not even mention the issue of oppressed nations within the current borders of the US, but he bases his article on their non-existence, substituting the vague phrase "nationally oppressed people". This enables him to assume without any show of proof that there is a "multi-national" working class in the US, and that it is a settled and agreed fact that there must be a "multi-national" communist party in the US. The reality that numerous Black, Mexican, Chicano, Native American, Puerto Rican and oppressor nation organizations and individuals reject these "facts" is simply ignored. All efforts by revolutionary forces to seriously apply the principle of self-determination in order to overcome the historic white and male supremacy of the US Left is completely beneath the notice of the *Guardian's* party-building experts.

II. Irwin Silber declares that the issues of national and women's oppression are only matters of democratic rights related to *clearing the way* for the "real"

revolutionary struggle of the "whole working class". In a stroke of the pen, the national liberation movements that have been leading the revolutionary process within the current borders of the US are reduced to a fight for civil rights, equality before the law. Similarly, the sweeping and powerful movement for women's liberation that is a leading revolutionary force within the oppressor nation is also gutted of its revolutionary essence.

III. The *Guardian* gives lip service to Marx-Engels-Lenin's analysis of the impact of empire on the working class of the imperial states. But it limits this to a small unimportant group of labor aristocrats and never presents any of the major statements of classic Marxism-Leninism on the entire subject. In this way Marx, Engels, and Lenin are revised, buried and falsified on the entire subject of monopoly capitalism/imperialism and the strategic nature of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist and national liberation struggles worldwide and for the US.

IV. In this series the *Guardian* subordinates anti-imperialist struggle worldwide and in the US to "pure" class struggle of the "multi-national" working class in the US. And though Irwin Silber constantly talks "politics" and "political line", his conclusions constantly reduce to economist, reformist, opportunist organization in command. Nowhere in the whole series does he offer any definition of the political content and basis for a revolutionary anti-imperialist politics and strategy for the US. He omits the question of armed struggle and the responsibility of communists to prepare it. He offers nothing with which to counter the counter-revolutionary violence of the state. And next to nothing about the role of repression or the role of political prisoners.

V. The *Guardian* line on women's oppression and liberation is not even progressive as compared to the revisionist CPUSA. In the past the CP recognized, if only in a limited way, the revolutionary potential of women's struggle and leadership. The *Guardian's* statement does not analyze the male supremacy of the system; it merely substitutes that term for the more

subjective term "sexism". Their statement is marked by male supremacy and crudely sexist remarks; women are still seen as reserves to be caught with bait. We include in this issue an analysis of the "Women's Emancipation" piece as our first specific analysis of the major parts of the *Guardian* series.

VI. The party-building line of Irwin Silber is an organization-first, opportunism-in-command line. To hide this, the question of where parties come from is mystified. The first column of the first article (*Guardian* Dec. 1, 1976) declares that Party-building only begins with the formation of the Party. Communists can't really exist until then, nor real truly Marxist-Leninists. (Who then is Irwin Silber?) In column 3 of the same piece, Silber has it that without communists and Marxist-Leninists there cannot be a Party. So with this chicken and egg impossibility, where does the party really come from? This is not just an editorial slip, for in a later article Silber knocks down the pre-conditions for organizing a party offered by Potomac Socialist Organization without giving any alternative. Silber really has a conception of Marxist-Leninist theory and the Party dropping from the skies into receptive heads—or into one receptive and prophetic head like his own. Because he never refers to theory as generalized experience of world revolution and of the history of the US, the whole thing becomes a total riddle and mystery. This gap is due to the fact that Silber can't or won't face the consequences of analyzing US history scientifically. He doesn't even attempt an evaluation of the history of the 60's and 70's, the old and new left. He only takes cheap shots without defining the motion. He is not the only one. Almost none of the numerous present crop of party-builders even pose the critical question: Why is there no revolutionary Communist Party in the US 56 years after the first one appeared? Why is the labor movement still under the effective control of agents of the ruling class? How long will we tolerate these evasions that count upon our

In sum, the *Guardian* is either evading or dishing up the most superficial answers to all the hard questions. It analyzes none of them, ignores world experience changes and lumps all kinds of things together higgledy-piggledy.

Irwin Silber offers his own shallow statistics in place of facts and analysis. If someone objects, then they are guilty of some original sin. Without any detectable embarrassment, he berates others for lack of seriousness and for snide remarks. Consider the insulting banality of the opening of the entire series on Dec. 1. "Everyone wants a party. Or so they say." This debate?

Still we take all this serious revisionism and white and male supremacy have cost us very much. All of us who are trying to learn to be more serious and scientific are forced to wade our way through all this jumble of statistics. For Irwin Silber and the *Guardian* didn't invent it all. They just serve it with a garnish. The source is the bourgeoisie's domination of our movement by the system of the capitalist empire. We have to deal with it and not ignore it.

Since the *Guardian* is now promoting an organization, and delegates to itself a major role in the debate on party-building, it has had to print its reasons for this role. We have examined the *Guardian* line in order to get beyond its issue of issue sugar-coated opportunism. By doing this it can be demonstrated that the general line of the *Guardian* party-building pieces is a revision of Marxism-Leninism. The *Guardian* avoids just what is needed: a scientific analysis of the fundamental contradiction of imperialism and its primary manifestation at present in the struggle for national liberation of oppressed nations waged against oppressor nations. Above all, the *Guardian* avoids shedding light on the history of the US, internal and external, as an expanding world empire.

Since the *Guardian* liquidates the historical development of imperialism within the US, it ends up treating it

nations, the forging of a Black nation through centuries of slavery and struggle are denied as a leading revolutionary force; they are not considered at all in the series. For the *Guardian* they do not exist. So the struggles of these nations for self-determination are denied also; instead the *Guardian* mumbles vaguely about nationally oppressed peoples in the US but denies them nationhood as surely as does the ruling class.

The *Guardian's* denial of the existence of the oppressor nation founded and maintained on conquest and white supremacy is reinforced by its denial of the revolutionary character of struggle for women's liberation; for the oppression of women is also essential to the generation of super-profits in the imperialist system. The exploitation and oppression of women is based on both unwaged work in the home and on waged labor in the job market. Added to this is the institutionalization of women's oppression in the laws, schools, hospitals, etc. throughout the imperialist system which culminates in a whole system of male supremacy and male chauvinist ideology. All of which brings tremendous profits and power to the imperialists. The struggle for women's liberation and against male supremacy

and the system of male supremacy has different characteristics in oppressed and oppressor nations. Revolutionary strategies for liberation must take this into account.

For all these contradictions the *Guardian* substitutes the movement of the working class, as a whole. It reduces the struggles for national and women's liberation to struggles for equal rights before bourgeois law within a general movement of all the workers against the bosses. This incredible white and male chauvinism toward revolutionary national and women's struggles has another expression in seeing the trade unions as the primary organizations of working class struggle in the US. These are the same unions whose leadership and activity are dominated by white men, and which are openly dedicated to fighting for a larger share of imperial superprofits, which refuse to face not only the divisions in the working class, but the fact that there are working people of different nations within the US.

Once the *Guardian* denial of revolutionary anti-imperialism is laid down, then the struggles for Black liberation, Native American sovereignty and Mexican/Chicano and Puerto Rican liberation, as well as women's liberation,

"This is precisely why the central point in the Social-Democratic programme must be the distinction between oppressing and oppressed nations, which is the essence of imperialism, which is falsely evaded by the social-chauvinists, and by Kautsky."

— Lenin, "The Revolutionary Proletariat and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (after October 16, 1916).

and for women's leadership is therefore a revolutionary struggle that attacks the imperialist system.

Like all struggles under imperialism, the struggle against the oppression of women

are actually all regarded as detracting from the working class struggle.

All the revolutionary, internationalist and anti-imperialist content of the class struggle in the US is carefully eliminated

and liquidated from the *Guardian* series. The struggle of nations against imperialism, the role of the state in enforcing imperial rule, exploitation, oppression, and genocide takes a back seat to the economic struggles of the "working class as a whole" against the monopoly capitalists (as waged by the trade unionists). The armed might of the state is not mentioned, nor is the just and necessary use of revolutionary violence. Instead "the economic struggles

light years from these constructs. Any attempt to build a revolutionary party this way is futile and will subtract from that goal.

The *Guardian's* line is not the revolutionary way—it should be defeated and replaced with a revolutionary anti-imperialist politics and strategy for party-building. This is the main objective of these criticisms of the theory and politics of the *Guardian*.



credit: What Have Women Done? SF Women's History Group

Women protest the forced sterilization of at least 200 women, mainly Black and Chicana, at the Los Angeles County Hospital. "... the struggle against the oppression of women and the system of male supremacy has different characteristics in oppressed and oppressor nations."

of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie is the most concentrated form of class struggle." (*Guardian*, Mar. 16; 1977, p.21 column 1.)

Thus the *Guardian's* party-building politics are nothing but the crudest sort of economism. Such a line on class struggle in the US has its basis in white and male supremacy and can only come about through revision and falsifying of the science of Marxism-Leninism. Silber's and the *Guardian's* method is anti-historical and non-materialist. It substitutes word-and quotation-juggling for analysis of reality. The real world is thousands of

This is why we stated earlier that the *Guardian* uses its international reportage to cover its opportunism on party-building and revolution. Following the formal conclusion of the party-building series, Irwin Silber has turned to criticizing "Euro-Communism" and even revisionist, economist positions on working class organizing. In a later article we will show that this turning on fellow travellers of opportunism is no change in politics. It is simply more cover, an attempt to cope with the new and growing challenge from the left.