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THE ROAD WE HAVE TRAVELED: FIVE DECADES OF BUILDING
THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES: 1919-1969

By George Novack

1969 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the split in the Socialist Party which resulted in the formal constitution of the communist movement as an independent party in the United States. The next stage in constructing the revolutionary party in this country must continue and extend the actual road followed by the revolutionary vanguard over that half century. It must be based upon the main lessons to be derived from all the complex and difficult experiences in creating a political organization capable of leading the working masses, white and black, to the conquest of power in the stronghold of world imperialism.

I. The First Ten Years of American Communism and the Origins of American Trotskyism

The American Communist Party arose out of the impact of two colossal international events on American radicalism. One was the First World War; the other was the Russian Revolution. Its origins testify to the decisive part played by world developments in shaping American history and its revolutionary components in particular. This fact also refutes the outlook of those provincial-minded nativists who in theory or practice want to delete the influence of international factors from the American scene.

The formation of the CP represented an immense step forward in Marxist doctrine and party organization. It initiated the assimilation of the return to authentic scientific socialism and the enrichment of its teachings accomplished by the leadership of Lenin, Trotsky and their associates in making the Russian Revolution. Above all, it replaced the primitive, loose, heterogeneous, all-inclusive concept of party organization practiced by the Socialist Party of Hillquit, Berger and Debs, which miserably failed to pass the test of events after 1917, with the superior Bolshevik model. This was to be a politically homogeneous and democratically centralized organization, based on a principled program and guided by a clear revolutionary perspective. These advances have remained permanent acquisitions of American Marxists.

The history of the American CP in the first decade after its formation falls into two distinct and opposing periods. During the heroic period up to 1923 the founders of the party attracted the cream of the revolutionary elements in the country and worked with some success to weld these initial cadres together on the new foundations charted by the Third International. In its personnel,

program and perspectives, our own movement was a lineal descendant and direct inheritor of this rebirth of revolutionary consciousness and activity under the banner of Leninism.

This progressive period was followed by five years of intense and blind factional warfare from 1923 to 1928 which impeded and disoriented the party. Its gradual degeneration, which began in the middle of the twenties and was virtually completed by the end of the decade, was the consequence of two different factors, one national, the other international.

The deadening conservatism of American life and politics, generated by the unprecedented boom of American capitalism from 1922 to 1929 coincided with the reactionary swing in the Soviet Union as the Stalinist bureaucracy rose to power. As Stalinism came to dominate the Comintern the intervention and influence of the Russian leadership which had inspired and invigorated the American revolutionists in Lenin's day, turned into its opposite and became a source of unmitigated evil. The combination of these two powerful adverse factors corrupted most of the original CP leadership and confused its ranks.

These retrogressive processes culminated in the expulsion of the first adherents to the Communist Left Opposition from the CP in November 1928. This schism inaugurated an entirely new chapter in the struggle for the construction of a revolutionary vanguard in the United States.

The founders of American Trotskyism did not reject or discard any of the theoretical and organizational lessons gained from the experiences of October 1917 and the first five years of the Communist International. To the contrary, they placed these at the cornerstone of their program. More than that, they incorporated into their arsenal the contributions of the Left Opposition arising from the controversies which divided world communism since 1923 over the course to be taken by the first workers state and the strategy of the international struggle against capitalism. They counterposed the program and perspectives of the permanent revolution to the revisionist and nationalist Stalinist innovation of "socialism in one country" and fought for workers democracy against the despotism of the Soviet bureaucracy.

Above all, the founders of our party exposed and rejected the conclu-

sions of reformism, conciliationism and "peaceful co-existence" with the imperialist and democratic bourgeoisie which logically flowed from the theory of "one-country socialism." This line inexorably transformed the American CP and its similars elsewhere from revolutionary opponents of capitalist rule into pressure bodies in the service of Moscow's foreign policy. It led, first to a tacit, then to a more and more explicit, renunciation of any independent class struggle strategy for taking power in their own country.

J.P. Cannon and his associates affirmed confidence in the capacity of the working class in the advanced countries to transform society, as Marxism indicated. The most decisive sector of that class was located in the United States. Basing their program and perspectives on developing the revolutionary potential of the American workers, the pioneer Trotskyists set out to assemble and educate a grouping of revolutionary Marxists committed to the aims of combating and overthrowing American capitalism and building socialism, not in one country but on a world scale. Revolutionary internationalism, workers democracy, a socialist America -- these three ideas have been abiding guidelines of our movement through the four decades of its existence.

II. The Development of American Trotskyism From 1928 to 1968

From the oldest veteran to the newest recruit the ranks of the SWP today span four successive generations of American revolutionists. The disparate age levels of its membership indicate how protracted and difficult the process of reconstituting the revolutionary vanguard in the United States has been in the face of the foundering of the CP.

The evolution of American Trotskyism over the past forty years has not proceeded according to a preconceived plan or followed a direct path. It has been conditioned by colossal world events and the circumstances of its environment which at each stage has imposed specific tasks upon its cadres, circumscribed its sphere of action, and, in the final analysis, determined the rate of its progress and the scope of its achievements.

Our movement has passed through five distinct phases of development since its formation. These time intervals extend roughly from 1928 to 1933; 1933 to 1940; 1940 to 1947; 1948 to 1960; and 1960 to 1968. What have been the salient features, the main tasks, and the principal accomplishments of these different periods?

A. The Pioneering Years: 1928-1933

At its outset our movement put forward its program to the radical public. The clear and comprehensive enunciation of its positions on the key issues of the class struggle accorded with the mandate of Marxism and the practice of Leninism which regard the fundamental program -- and action in harmony with it -- as the prime factor in determining the nature of a political grouping. This original set of revolutionary Marxist ideas has remained the bedrock of our movement, the basis for the recruitment and education of its cadres, and provided the guidelines for all our work. It is incorporated in the most extensive and enduring library of literature available to any tendency of American radicalism.

In this pioneering period the relationship of forces, the fewness of our numbers and international considerations made it necessary to concentrate our activity upon the work of propaganda for our distinctive views. The leadership deliberately decided that the paramount job at that juncture was to form a firm cadre which thoroughly understood the nature of Stalinism and had assimilated the gist of the criticisms and ideas of the Left Opposition. The advice of people who urged us to abandon this more modest task for a grandiose program of "mass work" as a shortcut to greater influence was rejected as unwise.

The energies of the members were devoted to bringing out the weekly Militant regularly and distributing the paper, publishing books and pamphlets popularizing the positions of the Left Opposition, and carrying on other propaganda activities. Participation in mass struggles of one kind or another was subordinated to these primary tasks and remained at a minimum.

The Communist League of America then functioned as an outlawed faction of the Stalinized CP, seeking to win over dissident members and followers to its ideas. It looked to the force of events and its own pressure to change the course of the CP. The policy of reform applied in this country followed the general line of the International Left Opposition led by Trotsky.

Although this tactic failed to check or reverse the degeneration of the CP, it did succeed in assembling a staunch core of several hundred revolutionary militants committed to fundamental Marxist principles. The consistent propaganda struggle against Stalinism armed our members with an understanding of what was happening in the Soviet Union and to the Communist International. This

enabled them to survive, grow and withstand the physical attacks and political pressures exerted by the Stalinists.

The infant movement experienced severe hardships because of the stagnation of organized labor during the depression. Its isolation was intensified by the upsurge of official Communism owing to the mounting prestige of the Soviet Union amidst the manifest collapse of capitalism and the progress made under the First Five-Year Plan which masked the crimes of the bureaucratic regime. However, the conviction of the correctness of its ideas and outlook was an un-failing source of moral stamina which aided our small group to come through that trying time. Notwithstanding its paucity of forces and material resources, American Trotskyism passed its first great test by the sheer fact of its survival. It is today the oldest and sturdiest section of world Trotskyism.

B. Period of Growth: 1933-1940

Hitler's coming to power in February 1933 changed the Trotskyist attitude toward the CP. At the same time the upsurge of the working class at home following Roosevelt's inauguration and the revival of industry enabled our movement to break out of enforced isolation into a broader arena of mass action.

The terrible defeat inflicted upon the strongest section of the European working class outside the Soviet Union, the capitulation of the German CP without a struggle, and the subsequent refusal of the Comintern leadership to admit the errors which led to the catastrophe doomed the Communist International as an agency of revolution. The recognition of this fact brought about a reorientation of world Trotskyism. From a faction seeking to reform the Communist International and reverse the course of the American CP, we became the heralds of a new International and the building of a new independent revolutionary Marxist party in the United States.

In line with these objectives, our forces turned away from preoccupation with the CP, paid special attention to all those political groups and tendencies which were in ferment and moving, however hesitantly, in a revolutionary direction, and sought to establish closer contacts with them. This endeavor bore its first fruits early in 1934 in the fusion of the Communist League with Muste's American Workers Party. The unification, arrived at after hard negotiation on the basis of common agreement on fundamental principles, gave a big impetus to our movement.

This move on the political front was facilitated and solidified by a simul-

taneous turn from activity as a circle of propagandists to systematic, if small-scale, entry into mass work among the unemployed and employed. This tactical re-orientation was made possible and gave results because of the explosive energies released by the awakened mass militancy, strikes and organizing drives which culminated in the industrial unionism of the CIO.

The preceding creation of cadres knit together on a national scale by common ideas and methods was the indispensable prerequisite for carrying out this twofold transformation of our work in relation to union activity and the cementing of connections with the best of the leftward-moving elements in other political tendencies.

These outward-going initiatives ran up against resistance from sectarian comrades (the Oehlerites) who were stuck fast in the past, refused to keep in step with the march of developments in the class struggle or to recognize and seize the new opportunities for growth. The new course also provided an occasion for the manifestation of opportunism and an inclination to flout party discipline and control under cover of immersion in mass work (Field). Both tendencies had to be combatted and defeated in order to ensure the advancement of the party and its hegemony over its constituents.

The hard-fought victorious Minneapolis teamster strikes along with the integration of our members in the auto, maritime and some other industries gave our movement its first significant footholds in the ranks of the labor movement. The party began to acquire a less literary and petty-bourgeois and a more proletarian composition, spirit and activity. For the remainder of the thirties the extension of trade union work held a top priority for the party.

The unification with the Musteites did not overcome the restrictions upon our expansion imposed by the existence of the CP and the SP which were considerably larger organizations wielding much more weight in radical circles. After the Old Guard quit the Socialist Party in 1935 and Norman Thomas invited other radicals into his all-inclusive organization, we decided to join it in order to win the more militant members of its left wing and youth to revolutionary ideas.

During the short sojourn in the SP from 1936 through 1937 we organized and conducted the campaign to secure asylum for Trotsky in Mexico, save the lives of the Old Bolsheviks, and expose Stalin's frameups in the Moscow Trials through the Dewey Commission of Inquiry. This ambitious and historic undertaking was a landmark in our defense work.

The centrist officialdom of the SP, fearing the rapid spread of our influence and the criticism of their positions on the Spanish Civil War and the condemnation of their support to LaGuardia, the reform-fusion Republican candidate for mayor of New York, expelled the Trotskyists late in 1937.

The balance sheet of entry showed the following positive results. (1) We had won over the majority of the Socialist youth and those workers really interested in making a socialist revolution, more than doubling our numbers. (2) Our forces accumulated valuable political experience. (3) The entry aided our penetration of the auto, maritime and other unions so that the proletarian orientation, which remained a constant concern of our movement, was enhanced. (4) By expelling its left wing, the SP finally cut itself off from the radicalized youth and union militants, dealing itself crippling blows from which it never recovered.

While these developments reduced the superiority of the SP over our forces, the CP retained its overwhelming predominance in the radical movement. Despite its opportunism, the CP continued to grow. From the mid-thirties to the end of the forties it towered over all other tendencies. It was solidly entrenched in the CIO, exercised a strong attraction upon radicalizing intellectuals and in cultural circles, and had the greatest influence among the youth and Afro-Americans. It conducted a merciless slander campaign designed to keep our movement quarantined and ideas tabooed in all these areas. It proved difficult for us to get an objective hearing and overcome the sheer size and weight of the forces under the sway of Stalinism.

The Socialist Workers Party was founded on New Year's Day 1938. The Fourth International was launched nine months later. Although the young party had good prospects and made some headway, it was not given much time to display its capacities. The Moscow Trials and the shadow of the oncoming war led to a retreat of the intellectuals and a dampening of radicalism. Then the Stalin-Hitler Pact, which ushered in the Second World War in August 1939, hit the party, brought out its latent weaknesses, and precipitated the gravest and most thoroughgoing of all the internal struggles in the movement since its inception.

The petty-bourgeois opposition led by Burnham, Shachtman and Abern began its assault on the program of the Fourth International around the issue of the defense of the Soviet Union. But the conflict soon involved most of the basic questions of Marxism from the validity and value of dialectical materialism to

the nature of the first workers state and the character of the party. Trotsky described the aims of the opposition as "an attempt to disqualify and overthrow the theoretical foundations, the political principles and organizational methods of our movement."

Impelled by the ferocious anti-Soviet propaganda and the war pressure, Burnham, Shachtman and their followers broke away from the SWP in April 1940. They founded the Workers Party which set up shop in competition with our movement and led a vacillating existence until it was liquidated into the Socialist Party in the 1950's.

Although almost forty percent of the membership went with Burnham and Shachtman, American Trotskyism gained more than it lost from the struggle and split with the petty bourgeois opposition. The struggle tempered the party majority which proved its fidelity to Marxism, its ability to defend its program under fire, and its determination to be a genuinely Leninist and proletarian organization. The controversy also produced two precious contributions to Marxist literature: Trotsky's collection In Defense of Marxism and Cannon's The Struggle for a Proletarian Party. These classics have ever since been indispensable to the education of our members.

Fortunately, the showdown with the minority was concluded months before the USSR was invaded and the U.S. entered the Second World War. Thanks to its intransigent stand in defense of Marxist principles, the party was well equipped to meet these earth-shaking events without wavering or flinching.

C. The War Years and the Postwar Strike Wave: 1940-1947

Months before Pearl Harbor, the party and its foremost unionists were subjected to combined attack by the labor bureaucracy and the federal government. Minneapolis Teamster Local 544 had been the principal base of our influence in the unions and the spearhead of labor organization throughout the Northwest. After its leaders refused to bow before his dictatorial edicts, Tobin, the president of the Teamsters International who was also head of the Democratic Labor Committee, appointed a receiver over the local. When the members voted to disaffiliate from the AFL and join the CIO, Roosevelt at Tobin's behest ordered the Department of Justice to indict the Local 544 officers and SWP leaders under the Smith Act, the first time it was invoked.

The prosecution tested the capacity of both the party and its working class militants to stand by their avowed principles under the most intense pressures.

The party proceeded to organize a nationwide campaign against the indictments. Through the Civil Rights Defense Committee it developed a strong and broad defense movement which secured support from 150 unions representing over five million members and made the Minneapolis case the most important civil liberties cause during World War II. The activity of the entire party from July 1941 to February 1945 revolved around work on this case which endangered the legal existence of one organization and involved the imprisonment of its best political and union leaders.

The defendants utilized the courtroom to expound their real views against the allegations of the prosecutors. One of the most enduring byproducts of the Minneapolis trial is the official court record of the testimony given by James P. Cannon. For the past three decades Socialism on Trial has been the most widely read primer of Trotskyism and it is the best introduction to the application of Marxist ideas to American problems.

The prosecution of the 18 and the U.S. declaration of war on the day they were sentenced to prison terms signaled the beginning of another period of intense hardship for the party. Unlike the Vietnam war, the war of American imperialism against the Axis was accepted as necessary by the people; socialist opposition to it received scant support. Many young party activists were drafted into the armed forces. The unionists who remained had to swim against the stream. The party had all it could do simply to keep afloat.

After effectively withstanding the first governmental assaults, the membership held on tenaciously and successfully weathered this rigorous wartime isolation. It proved fully capable of moving forward again once the tide turned.

This period of party history falls into two parts. The first comprised almost three years of contraction and defensive struggles under extremely unfavorable conditions capped by the imprisonment of its front-rank leaders. The two outstanding acts of mass resistance during the first part of the war were the March on Washington (which, although it was called off, did give Afro-Americans easier access to more jobs in industry) and the coal miners strikes. The party threw its full support behind both of these struggles.

The second phase emerged as the war fever wore off and new stirrings agitated the ranks of labor. While its leaders were still behind bars, the party moved out to take advantage of the new openings presented by the fight against the wage-freeze, the no-strike pledge and in favor

of independent labor political action. The national convention in November 1944 already recorded appreciable signs of progress in various fields: increased sales and subscriptions to The Militant, stepped-up recruitment of workers and Afro-Americans, greater influence in key union locals, and a burst of optimism among the membership.

This expansion continued without letup for the next three years. The entire party stepped out boldly and made progress in numerous directions. It established sizeable and influential fractions in several industrial unions such as auto, steel, rubber, aircraft and maritime. It energetically intervened in movements for Afro-American equality and drew hundreds of black militants into its ranks. The press attained its highest circulation and was often issued twice a week. Party branches were set up in many new localities. By its 1946 convention in Chicago the SWP had the largest membership in its history, having doubled its numbers in the preceding year. It had strong points of support among the industrial workers and in many black communities from coast to coast.

Despite the growth of our party, the slow progress of the Fourth International and the failure of the workers to take power in Western Europe after the downfall of Hitlerism produced a much smaller repetition of petty-bourgeois pessimism and indiscipline in the emergence of the Goldman-Morrow-Loris opposition. This tendency was easily disposed of and, shortly after leaving our movement, its leaders renounced Marxism and fell into political passivity.

By this time the SP had by and large fallen out of the running. The CP on the other hand had acquired almost one hundred thousand members and retained its commanding positions in the unions and other areas. However, it had been discredited among the best union militants and the Afro-American communities by its capitulation to Roosevelt's policies, its support of the no-strike pledge and its discontinuance of all mass struggle against the racists during Stalin's alliance with Roosevelt.

At the same time the unblemished record of the SWP in defense of labor's rights, the interests of the Afro-Americans and its socialist ideas enhanced its reputation in these same circles. The magnificent offensive of the unions against the corporations during the massive strike wave of 1945-47 energized our members and supporters and imparted a powerful impulse to almost all departments of party activity. American labor's greatest upsurge coincided quite properly with the quickest and greatest

growth of our movement.

Owing to the absence of ferment on the campuses and the general weakness of the student movement, we were however unable to reconstitute our youth organization which had been destroyed by the Shachtmanite split.

For a brief time it appeared that the SWP was on the way to transforming itself from the status of a small and restricted propaganda group into an organization of mass agitation and action. Its expanding influence in the left wing of the industrial unions and among the black militants placed that almost within reach. The ranks were poised and ready to realize this objective.

Then, quite unexpectedly, a sharp turn occurred in the national and international situations which altered and nullified this outlook. The consequences of the cold war dashed these hopes, closed off further possibilities of expansion for a prolonged period, and thrust the party back into agonizing isolation for a long term of years.

D. The Cold War Witchhunt Era: 1948-1960

The political terrorism of anti-communism and the witchhunt coupled with the prolonged prosperity, the omnipotent union bureaucratism and labor conservatism beginning with 1947 administered a stiff setback to the whole gamut of American radicalism. While the CP was the main target and victim of capitalist persecution and was dealt the heaviest blows, our party likewise suffered severely at the hands of reaction.

At the opening of this dark period, however, the party took one of its biggest steps forward in national politics. Up to this point it did not have the requisite conditions, forces or resources for entering candidates in the presidential race. In 1948, in the face of competition from the newly formed Progressive Party, our party launched its first presidential ticket. Its candidates conducted a vigorous nationwide campaign to popularize its program against the two major capitalist parties and the short-lived reformist Wallace experiment backed by the CP.

This has been a permanent advance. Overcoming many obstacles, the SWP has never since been absent from the national elections but has regularly run candidates every four years. 1968 witnessed its biggest campaign to date.

The intensified reactionary atmosphere during the Korean War years from 1950 to 1953 placed the party in ever more difficult circumstances. The youth, the Afro-Americans and the union mili-

tants were all equally immobilized and the possibilities of recruitment dwindled to a bare minimum.

Under the relentless reaction steady attrition set in. The workers grew more and more unresponsive to our ideas and proposals. Almost the entire membership of most of our largest union fractions in auto, aircraft, steel and maritime was blacklisted and ousted from their jobs. Many fine worker militants, seeing less and less chance for effective opposition against the bureaucracy, drifted out of the party. So did many disappointed black comrades who had expected the party to mobilize wide support for their demands. Branches withered and disappeared.

The Johnson-Forest group, which had returned to the SWP in 1949 after their break with the Shachtmanites, again bolted from the party soon after the Korean War broke out. The processes of desertion eventually affected the inner core of the party through the leaders and followers of the dissident Cochran faction. Their assault on our program, which was intertwined with a split in the Fourth International, erupted at the height of McCarthyism and its excruciating squeeze on our movement. It enlisted the most exhausted and disillusioned elements of the membership.

These cadres had been disheartened by the postwar strangulation of the revolution in Western Europe, the Kremlin's expansion in Eastern Europe and the successes of Stalinism in Asia. Softened by prosperity and wearied by incessant and inconclusive struggling against the stream, they lost faith in the revolutionary potential of the American working class and began to doubt the principles of Marxism and the future of Trotskyism. Above all, they no longer believed in the possibility of building a mass revolutionary party capable of overthrowing capitalism in the United States.

This minority threatened to undo all the basic conquests of our movement since its birth since they were so dead-set against our aim of building a proletarian vanguard party. At the cost of an unavoidable split, the majority did succeed in beating back this challenge to its heritage and further existence. Soon after its defection, the Cochranite combination disclosed its true liquidationist colors, disintegrated, and did not last out the decade.

One of the brightest achievements of those years was the seven-year fight waged around the victimization of the legless veteran, James Kutcher, whose case was deliberately singled out as the most dramatic vehicle for opposing the government loyalty purge. The campaign

on his behalf mobilized widespread sympathy and support and, after eleven hearings, the legless veteran was restored to his job. This was one of the outstanding victories against the witchhunters.

All energies were absorbed during this period to keep the party intact and as active as external conditions permitted. There was no alternative but to ward off the blows and wait out the sweep of reaction.

All other tendencies confronted the same problems. The SP went from bad to worse politically and organizationally, and had little life left by the end of the fifties. The CP suffered the greatest losses. The unions under its domination were expelled from the CIO and many of its opportunist trade union figures like Curran and Quill went over wholly to the labor bureaucracy.

The CP had become so hated and discredited that it could not muster any broad support for its defense against government prosecution. Its ranks grew more and more demoralized and divided. This once-powerful organization was under extremely inept leadership and kept sliding rapidly downhill.

The repercussions of the Khrushchev report confirming Stalin's crimes and the Hungarian revolt in 1956 delivered smashing blows to its unity and morale and decimated its ranks. Thousands walked away in dreadful disillusionment from the party. The CP is still hemorrhaging from the continuing effects of the decomposition of world Stalinism.

Every single grouping on the left suffered drastically during the cold war. The radical movement as a whole lost virtually an entire generation of recruitment. Our party came out of that ordeal with the best morale since world events had substantiated our basic ideas. Making the most of the upheaval in American radicalism generated by the crisis within the hard-hit CP, during the regroupment period our ranks began to move into a position where the immense disproportion of forces and influence between the two organizations, which had prevailed for more than three decades, was steadily lessened to our advantage.

E. Years of Revival: 1960-1968

With the beginning of the sixties the victory of the Cuban Revolution, the civil rights movement, the emergence of the New Left and the end of student apathy spurred the revival of radicalism in several sectors of American society. This was manifested within our own movement by the reconstitution of a Trotskyist youth organization for the first time in twenty years. The Young Socialist

Alliance became the prime vehicle for the regeneration of the weakened SWP.

Our party did its utmost to recruit and integrate young rebels from the campus into its depleted ranks and bring them into the leadership. This was imperative in order to cope with the enlarged opportunities presented to it.

The reorientation of our movement to the changed national and international situation and the transition to a wider arena was not accomplished without internal controversies and breaks with a diversified range of dissidents who proved to be unassimilable and undisciplined or had abandoned the convictions we had held in common. These included the Robertson, Wohlforth, Kirk-Kaye, Boulton and Swabeck groups.

All together these did not amount to as much as earlier oppositions and their departures did not impede the progress of our movement from 1960 to 1965. The domestic defections were more than counterbalanced by the healing of the ten-year split in the Fourth International in 1963 which unified the forces of world Trotskyism.

However, the party's attention during the decade was directed not toward such internal dissensions but outward to the struggles agitating the country. Its three principal areas of activity were the black liberation struggle, the student ferment and the antiwar movement.

While the SWP supported every action against racism, it was especially concerned to give aid and keep in step with the most combative and progressive forces in the black liberation struggle such as SNCC, Robert Williams, Malcolm X, the militant nationalists, the Black Panthers and DRUM. Through our solidarity with these militants and the publication of our resolutions, books and pamphlets on their problems, particularly through the contributions of George Breitman, we won a hearing and respect for our positions and ideas. The SWP was the first radical group to recognize and explain the progressive nature and revolutionary implications of black nationalism as expounded by Malcolm X.

From its inception the YSA sought to establish itself on the campuses as the chief spokesman and organizer of the socialist-minded student rebels. By its November 1968 convention it had members on 101 campuses throughout the country and solid locals on many of the leading and largest universities.

This success was largely attributable to the role it had played in the antiwar movement which was based upon the student activists. The SWP was the only

radical party which ran against Johnson in the 1964 presidential campaign and warned against his warlike intentions. The SWP and YSA threw their full forces into the antiwar protest which mounted after Johnson's renewed air strikes against North Vietnam in February 1965. This gave the party its first opening in many years to participate in extensive mass action on a nationwide scale.

We consistently strove to build an antiwar coalition of diverse forces aiming at the mobilization of the largest body of protest around the single issue of ending the war by bringing the troops home at once from Vietnam. In many places the SWP and YSA members and supporters were the best organizers and formed the backbone of the antiwar committees.

The experience of working within the antiwar movement with all its twists and turns from 1964 on was an immensely educative one for our young cadres. The anticapitalist and antiwar positions of the SWP and YSA and their support for the Cuban Revolution, their fight for socialist democracy in the workers states, black nationalism, independent black and labor political action and revolutionary socialism have earned wide esteem in radical circles. This has been evidenced in the remarkable growth of the YSA during the Halstead-Boutelle presidential campaign of 1968 and the concomitant revitalization of the party.

Rival tendencies have not benefited in equal measure over this period largely because of their inability to adjust their policies to the necessities of the struggles unfolding among the student youth, the black nationalists and the antiwar activists. On the other hand, our movement has made its gains by recognizing the requirements of their struggles and working out a correct and consistent attitude toward them.

* *

Our party has three times had to

endure isolation and fight for its survival: from 1929 to 1933; in the first years of the Second World War; and during the cold war. It successfully came through these periods of extreme adversity, despite defections.

A revolutionary party which has set itself the goal of combatting and defeating the mightiest of imperialist powers on its home ground must always be prepared to meet and parry the blows of reaction. But that is not the situation now facing our movement. From all signs we are entering a phase of intensified mass radicalism with highly promising conditions for the rapid growth of the revolutionary vanguard.

All the developments we have outlined have paved the way for gaining hegemony over all competing tendencies within American radicalism. This prospect is within reach. In the latter part of the sixties the relationship of forces among the rival tendencies of American radicalism have continued to shift in our favor. Today in many regions the SWP is stronger than the CP and is in some places the only active and organized radical group.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of American Communism, our forces face the future with assurance. The SWP consciously carries forward the best traditions of America's revolutionary past embodied in such figures as Sam Adams and Tom Paine, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Nat Turner, Wendell Phillips and John Brown, Albert Parsons, Mother Jones, Eugene Debs and "Big Bill" Haywood. It is determined to become the kind of multi-national revolutionary Marxist party which can lead the masses of America to victory over the capitalist ruling class and to socialism in association with the other liberated peoples on this planet.

August 15, 1969
New York

THE COURSE OF U.S. IMPERIALISM AND THE
REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE FOR A SOCIALIST AMERICA

(Draft Political Resolution submitted by the Political Committee)

I.

The single most decisive event in the social and political history of mankind will be the coming American revolution. This revolution will close the terrible period of the death agony of capitalism with its social decay, hunger, wars, and bestial reaction, and open the socialist era of abundance, peace, and harmony -- of a truly human civilization on a global scale.

From its inception, the American Trotskyist movement has been dedicated to bringing about this colossal change at the first historic opportunity. In collaboration with its cothinkers in the Fourth International it has concentrated on the one key element that can be prepared in advance by conscious effort -- construction of a leadership of the political caliber required to achieve success.

Nowhere else in the world do revolutionists face such formidable obstacles as in the heartland of U.S. imperialism. The ruling class is the richest, most powerful, and most ruthless yet seen. Its political leaders are aware of the threat to their system which socialism has become since the first major blow was struck against it in the Russian Revolution of October 1917 led by Lenin and Trotsky. They are determined to block that threat by all the means at their disposal -- by political stratagem and concessions, if possible; by naked force, if necessary.

To win against this power, huge mass forces must be mobilized, including the majority of the workers and their allies among the national minorities and the middle classes. These forces must find organized political expression in a Leninist party able to anticipate, to assess correctly, and to respond adequately to all the exigencies of the struggle as it moves forward and reaches its climactic phases.

The selecting, training and hardening of cadres to form the framework of such a party is thus of crucial importance. How well this daily task is fulfilled now will help determine the outcome of the more spectacular battles to be fought out in the period lying ahead.

To carry out this function properly, it is necessary to continually estimate where we stand in the light of what has already been accomplished and what lies ahead. This has to be done in the context of the broad class struggle -- which is not determined by us but by mighty

social forces of international scope, above all the aims, decisions, and course of American imperialism.

This resolution is not designed to analyze the current conjuncture of events or lay out the immediate tasks and campaigns of the party. Other resolutions and reports will deal with these. This document proposes, along with the companion article on "The Road We Have Traveled," to present a general view of the development of U.S. imperialism over the past quarter century, the response of the oppositional forces within the country to it, the beginning of a new radicalization, and the role of our party.

II.

Like the other national centers of capitalism, the United States was impelled by the internal contradictions of its economic system to continually expand. After spreading across the North American continent, slaughtering and dispossessing the Indians and overpowering the slave system in the South in the process, it became a world imperialist power at the turn of the century. In the Spanish-American War, U.S. imperialism seized sectors of the decayed Spanish empire outright, dislodged Spain from Cuba, and proceeded to establish its own empire in Latin America and the Pacific. But American wealth and power remained overshadowed by British imperialism.

As a consequence of World War I, the United States gained preeminence over the European imperialist centers. Nevertheless, its standing as the world's chief imperialist power remained subject to challenge from its rivals. And their empires remained largely intact, in some instances even expanding.

In World War II, the United States smashed the combined attempt of Germany and Japan to overcome the American lead and, in passing, reduced Britain to the status of a satellite power. As for the other imperialist centers, they were brought down to a still humbler level and have had little choice but to watch the U.S. move at its leisure into their former colonial holdings.

Thus in 1945, at the close of World War II a quarter of a century ago, American imperialism appeared to have achieved a position from which it could move in a fairly short time to domination of the globe. Even the land of the October Revolution, despite the defeat of German imperialism, appeared to lay in shambles after the years of Stalin's ruin-

ous policies that culminated in paving the way for the invasion of Hitler's armies. It was not without a certain plausibility that Wall Street talked of a "Pax Americana" governing the "American Century."

And in 1946 the cold war, reversing the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, indicated what area of the world America's rulers had in mind for their next big advance.

However, Washington ran into obstacles the ruling class did not count on in pursuing its strategy of world domination after winning World War II. First of all, the American people were in no mood for another conflict abroad. Under the impact of the "Get Us Home" movement, the massive draftee army was temporarily disabled as an effective instrument of imperialist conquest. Secondly, the Soviet victory had immense consequences of a revolutionary nature. Owing to their planned economy, the Soviet people were able to make a remarkably swift recovery from the devastation wrought by World War II. Solving the "secret" of the atom bomb and making new advances in rocketry, the Soviet Union soon emerged as second only to the United States in power, a country of such formidable defensive capacities as to deter even the strategists in the pay of the Pentagon.

A revolutionary wave in Europe, sweeping through Italy, France, and Belgium, required immediate attention, resulting in a vast outpouring of dollars in the Marshall Plan to shore up tottering European capitalism.

The overturn of the capitalist economic structure in a series of Eastern European countries changed the relation of forces still further as economic planning became rooted in this area.

The colonial upsurge, beginning in Indochina and Indonesia, added still another complication.

Finally, the downfall of Chiang Kai-shek and the victory of the Chinese Revolution in 1949 added such weight to the anticapitalist camp that the world relationship of forces was altered further to the disadvantage of U.S. imperialism.

Moreover, the Chinese success gave extraordinary impetus to the colonial revolution elsewhere in Asia, throughout Africa, and in Latin America. The reverberations were visible in Korea, Iran, Guatemala, Algeria, Iraq, the Congo. This upsurge culminated in the revolutionary victory in Cuba in 1959 and the establishment of the first workers state in the western hemisphere.

The strategists of U.S. imperialism have had to constantly revise the tactical pursuit of their unaltered strategic goal of world domination in accordance with these realities. Over the past 25 years they have engaged in an unending series of probes and thrusts against their class adversaries on a global scale. Whenever and wherever they have encountered stiff resistance or suffered a reversal, they have been obliged to pull back and reassess the situation before taking the next moves. Wherever they have registered successes or encountered vacillations in their class enemies they have thrust aggressively ahead.

In face of the revolutionary upsurge in the colonial areas, U.S. imperialism was compelled to readjust its timetable of world conquest. In the case of Korea, General MacArthur carried the American flag up to the Yalu River, only to be hurled back by China; and the truce in Korea signaled the first grave military reversal of the U.S. in this century. Domestic opposition to U.S. involvement in Korea forced the Democrats out of the White House after 20 years of the Roosevelt coalition."

The defeat in Korea was followed by the disaster suffered by French imperialism at Dienbienphu in 1954. For a time U.S. imperialism was even thrown on the defensive in its hemispheric base of Latin America. With adequate leadership, the Guatemalan people might have accomplished in 1954 what the Cubans succeeded in doing five years later. Time was consumed as Wall Street sought to bring the restless populations in its empire under better control and to aid its satellites in clubbing down the unrest in the areas ruled by them.

Despite these complications, Washington opened offensives in several areas. In the Middle East, Eisenhower dispatched marines to Lebanon in 1958, taking over from England and France the primary responsibility for containing the Arab revolution. A more ambitious undertaking was Kennedy's intervention in Cuba in 1961 which ended in the defeat of the expeditionary forces at Playa Girón. Washington's willingness to bring its unparalleled military might into play was further evidenced in the Caribbean crisis of 1962 when Kennedy instituted the naval blockade and was even prepared to launch nuclear weapons if the Kremlin refused to back down and withdraw its missiles from Cuba.

During the early 1960's American imperialism and its allies registered some significant successes in holding back the tide of revolution in the colonial world. These included the intervention in the Congo that ended in the mur-

der of Lumumba and the toppling of the workers and farmers government in Algeria, both of which they feared could become Africa's Cuba. They smashed the incipient revolution in Brazil and the uprising in Santo Domingo, installed military regimes in a series of Latin-American countries, removed Nkrumah in Ghana and, most important of all, backed the crushing of the huge Communist Party in Indonesia and the slaughtering of some 500,000 of its members and followers.

These setbacks to the revolutionary forces in the colonial world encouraged the strategists of U.S. imperialism, who were additionally elated by the appearance of a deep rift between the USSR and China. When the Sino-Soviet conflict reached such a pitch that the two sides appeared incapable of uniting in joint action in face of an aggressive move by their common foe, Washington escalated its intervention in Vietnam. The Pentagon energetically exploited the opening provided by the Sino-Soviet split and Peking's preoccupation with the "cultural revolution" by putting half a million troops in South Vietnam and systematically bombing the workers state of North Vietnam.

Success in this enterprise would have signified the establishment of another bridgehead on the mainland of Asia to supplement the bases in the arc extending from Korea, through Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Thailand. This would have opened the road to further thrusts of the same kind. The world was justifiably alarmed over the possibility that the war in Vietnam would turn out to be the prelude to a nuclear showdown.

The U.S. stepped up its military operations in South Vietnam and bombed the North in order to save its puppet regime in Saigon, crush the revolution there and thus administer a terrible lesson to other colonial peoples that might challenge its hegemony. However, thanks above all to the indomitable resistance of the Vietnamese insurgents, it failed to attain these objectives. Instead, it exposed the limitations of its massive military machine in coping with popular revolution, diminished its prestige among its allies, and provoked at home the greatest antiwar movement in its history. This constitutes a new major setback in carrying through its scheme to subjugate the world.

III.

These international objectives pursued by U.S. imperialism have nurtured militarism and fostered the expansion of those sectors of industry most closely tied to the production of armaments and such related endeavors as the space pro-

gram.

A quarter of a century after the end of World War II, American imperialism had more than 1,500,000 troops stationed abroad -- one-fourth of them in Europe, almost one-half in Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. These troops were deployed in accordance with Washington's "commitments" to defend forty-eight countries tied to American imperialism.

From the first two "crude" atom bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the American arsenal of nuclear weapons now includes miniaturized atomic shells that can be fired from cannon and intercontinental missiles capable of obliterating entire regions. New "improved" models of these fiendish weapons are under constant production, not to mention occasional massive boosts in this field like those represented by the "Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicle" (MIRV) program and the "Safe-guard Anti-Ballistic Missile" (ABM) system. In addition, the U.S. has in its arsenal chemical and biological weapons of equally fearsome nature. The military budget, already \$40 billion a year in 1960, had doubled to almost \$80 billion by the end of the decade.

This expansion of the armaments program, with its accompanying stepped up military-diplomatic offensive, was made possible economically by the uninterrupted growth of American productive capacity for the past three decades and the accelerated penetration of American capital abroad. The importance of the latter factor is symbolized by the fact that, while in terms of output the U.S. remains first in the world and the Soviet Union second, third place is now held by "U.S. investments abroad." In absolute figures, this category exceeds the output of either Germany or Japan.

The enormous outlays to pay for past wars, current wars, and the preparation of future wars have saved American capitalism from a major depression in the past three decades, enabling it to surmount several recessions without sharp crises. A possible slump in the mid-sixties was averted by the increased spending to finance the war in Vietnam, and the longest uninterrupted boom in American history was maintained.

During the past eight years of boom, the concentration, centralization and expansion of American capital internationally proceeded at a faster pace than any time in history. Structural unemployment was reduced from the five to six million level of the Eisenhower period -- which was considered by the capitalists to be "low" -- to three to four million. Modern industrial methods were

widely extended into agriculture, business and public administration, and educational institutions. While skilled jobs increased significantly, unskilled jobs precipitously declined as a consequence of the technological changes occurring in the economy.

But the prosperity has had another side. The diversion of such huge resources into the pursuit of war and the growth of a colossal public and private debt has been both profitable for big business and essential in dampening the business cycle. However, the consequent inflation has become a bigger and bigger problem.

This has undermined the international role of the dollar. In view of the ever-worsening position of the pound and franc as a result of the liquidation of the British and French empires, the relative weakening of the stable value of the dollar has accelerated the prospect of an explosive international monetary crisis. At home, inflation has driven prices upward at an increasing pace so that the cost of basic necessities has reached unheard-of levels in the United States.

During the 1960's American capitalism permitted the real value of the dollar to deteriorate in order to prop up and prolong domestic prosperity even at the expense of its function as the key international currency. This expedient has become less and less feasible as an anti-recessionary tool. In order to protect the conditions for the continued growth of world trade and foreign investment U.S. imperialism is now compelled to maintain the stability of the dollar even to the detriment of internal economic activity, production and employment.

While the American capitalists have poured the country's resources into fighting "brush wars" and in raising their capacity to reduce all of civilization to rubble in a nuclear war, their competitors abroad, above all Japan and Germany, have been modernizing their technology, bringing them into position to offer increasing competition to American products in the world market in the coming period.

The difficulties with the dollar coupled with the consequences of this intensified international competition will exert heavy pressure upon American big business to narrow the considerable wage differential they have been able to maintain over their foreign competitors. This they can do only by increasing pressure on wages, working conditions and employment and at the cost of heating up the class struggle at home.

* * *

The astronomical expenditures for war have been felt in other ways. They have meant steady cutbacks in social benefits, the progressive deterioration of public services, accelerated decay of the cities, and a losing battle against massive pollution of the environment.

This has led to a growing awareness among the masses of the immense gap between present-day technical and productive possibilities in America and what has been achieved under the ruling class' order of priorities. This is a constant and growing source of general social discontent.

The working masses also see that, while the government is ready to undertake and underwrite -- that is, socialize -- all types of large-scale projects demanded by big business and the military, it makes the most grudging and pitifully inadequate expenditures for the most urgent needs of the people in housing, welfare, medical care, etc. Small wonder that the achievement of landing two men on the moon seemed irrational. Why spend \$25 billion on that while children go hungry in the United States?

A third underlying bitter realization is that the expenditure of resources and lives in military undertakings around the globe neither increases security nor gives any assurance of avoiding a world conflagration. To the contrary, the deeper the involvement, the greater the danger becomes of precipitating a nuclear showdown.

At the same time as they become aware of these glaring contradictions people increasingly feel that they have little or no direct control over what matters most in their own lives. The major decisions which shape their destinies are made by alien forces and no conventional means within their immediate reach can affect them.

IV.

The political climate of the post-war period falls into two sharply contrasting phases: the initiation of the cold war and the consequent witchhunt atmosphere which prevailed until the 1960's began, and the emergence of a new wave of radicalization that has far from run its course.

The current stage was opened by the upsurge in the struggle for black liberation in the mid-fifties. Although the ruling class sought to confine the movement to purely judicial and parliamentary channels, it kept spilling over into mass demonstrations and direct actions. This stimulated militant black nationalist consciousness on a massive scale which exploded in the mid-sixties in the

successive spontaneous uprisings in the ghettos.

As McCarthyism gradually wore itself out, the "silent generation" of youth passed from the scene. Under the impact of the black struggle and then the Cuban Revolution, a new generation was drawn into action and came to more and more radical conclusions. The Free Speech fight at Berkeley in 1964 inaugurated an unprecedented ferment in America's educational institutions.

The escalation of American aggression in Vietnam in 1965 gave a qualitative boost to this radicalization. It also precipitated rifts within the ruling class. Involving merely the tactical question of whether it was wise to have become so deeply involved in Vietnam and whether a retreat was called for -- the better to promote the fundamental objectives of American imperialism abroad -- this division was nevertheless of considerable importance. It facilitated the growing radicalization by further legitimatizing dissent and placing an obstacle in the way of a repressive crack-down by the authorities on the antiwar forces.

Increasing numbers of youth advanced from criticism of the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party in its denial of democratic rights for the Afro-American people and sympathy with the colonial peoples in their struggle against imperialism to consciously anti-imperialist and even anticapitalist positions. The administration failed to whip up any mass enthusiasm for its war. This was manifested in the refusal of the workers to suspend union struggles for higher wages and better conditions as military operations escalated. Their attitude toward the war turned from apathy to deepening opposition as they experienced its consequences in mounting casualties, skyrocketing prices, rising taxes, deteriorating services and a consequent stagnation in their standard of living.

Two features of the current radicalization have great relevance to the revolutionary perspectives of our movement.

First, it arose during a prolonged prosperity. Always in preceding times such periods of prosperity had reversed rising opposition to the capitalist status quo.

Second, it leaped forward in the midst of an ongoing war whereas in all earlier imperialist conflicts patriotic hysteria had drowned out or suppressed the voices of dissent.

The war-induced prosperity of the early 1940's, reinforced by the anti-

fascist complexion of the official propaganda, dissipated the radicalization generated by the depression of the 1930's; and the postwar boom, supplemented by the government-sponsored anti-Communist witchhunting, cut off all prospects of anticapitalist action soon after the close of World War II.

By contrast, the current unprecedented development of a wave of radicalization despite an economic boom and an avowed crusade "against Communism" takes on added significance.

This indicates that the two principal means exploited by America's ruling class to head off and strangle social and political protest are losing much of their efficacy. These two economic and political factors that enabled the capitalists to maintain social stability and restrict the spread and scope of radicalism in the 1940's and 1950's will hardly be so powerfully operative in the coming decade. The long-term boom extended by the leap in Vietnam-related military spending has created an inflationary problem that must be cooled down -- not extended. The dissensions and divisions among the workers states make the fabrication of a "Communist menace to the American way of life" a less and less credible bogey for enforcing conformity and lining up the American people behind the schemes of the monopolists and militarists.

In addition, Americans have become increasingly skeptical about the honesty and trustworthiness of the powers that be. This distrust became vocalized on a wide scale and was expressed in significant public demonstrations as opposition to the Vietnam war swept through the college and high school youth, the Afro-Americans, the intellectuals and professions, the churches, and penetrated the armed forces. Much of the publicity issued in Saigon and Washington on the declared aims and progress of the war became discounted and recognized as a tissue of lies.

The basic dilemma faced by America's rulers today is this: The very measures required to halt the world revolutionary process come into increasing conflict with the maintenance of stability and class peace at home.

The American capitalist system lacks the resources to both maintain its foreign "commitments," which logically involve an endless series of Vietnams, and grant economic concessions and social improvements on a scale sufficient to dissipate the pressures engendering radicalization of the masses. To cut down its foreign "commitments" to the degree required would mean in reality foregoing indefinitely -- actually, giving up --

its major world orientation since the end of World War II. The American ruling class cannot undertake a reduction of such scope since it would run counter to the basic economic imperatives of the capitalist system itself and would permit an unimpeded upsurge in the world revolution.

The ruling class, of course, may contemplate trying to end the radicalization by suppressing it. The most thorough way of doing this would be through fascism. However, this murderous method is not on the order of the day. Fascism, in the classical sense of a completely reactionary movement based on the demagogic mobilization of broad sectors of the petty bourgeoisie and directed to the complete smashing of the trade unions and all the popular organizations and democratic rights of the masses, is not feasible in the United States today if only because the broad base for it is still lacking. Even if such a base existed, the American ruling class would hesitate long before resorting to the fascist solution, not only to uphold its reputation with the "free world" but because such a course would bring on an armed struggle that could well turn against its fomenters and bring a swift end to capitalist rule.

What the ruling class will most likely attempt in an effort to stem the radicalization is a combination of granting whatever concessions are possible and the increasing use of "law and order" legislation, reactionary court decisions, the clubs of the police, and bayonets of the National Guard.

The use of naked force in this way under a parliamentary regime is not the same as the political system of fascism. It cannot be sustained for a long period; it offers only a temporary block to the advance of radicalization on a mass scale; and it often proves to be counterproductive, arousing not fear and intimidation but fresh depths of resentment, anger, and resistance.

Whatever mixture of repression and concessions may be decided on by the ruling class, the American political scene is obviously in for increasing class polarization. This signifies on the one hand increasing assertiveness by the right wings of the Democratic and Republican parties and the conservative formations beyond them; and on the other hand increasing dissatisfaction among the masses with the old formations and a growing impulsion to break loose from them.

Thus the main perspective for the coming period is a breakdown of the relative political equilibrium characteristic of the heyday of American capitalism, increasing strains on the two-party system, the rise of small third capitalist parties both to the right and the left, and the

development of extraordinary openings and opportunities for independent black and labor political action along with the growth of revolutionary socialist ideas and influence.

V.

Our capacity to take advantage of the new opportunities will be determined to a great degree by the skill with which we employ the methods projected and exemplified in the Transitional Program.

The key is to find demands corresponding to the present level of political understanding of the masses and to their objective needs. But demands which, in the course of struggle, lead to a higher level of understanding, independent organization, mobilization, and conflict with capitalist prerogatives; and thus tend to break through the framework of capitalism.

The central axis of such demands involves the struggle of the masses to control their own lives, their source of livelihood, their environment, the management of industry, the national decisions affecting their fate. The struggle for control in these various fields merges into a struggle for government power. The first big step along this road is the achievement of independence from capitalist political parties and the initiation of independent political organization by a section of the labor movement or black community.

The process of radicalization develops unevenly. Depending on their background, their situation in society, the immediate problems they face, and their susceptibility to being influenced by examples of struggle and organization in other areas, various sectors of the masses gain political consciousness and go into action at different times and at different rates. A layer in the lead for a period can slow down and on occasion be outstripped by a layer awakening later under somewhat different circumstances. This layer in turn may mark time or even slip back as still another sector begins to move, often applying the most effective methods observed in other areas of struggle. Thus the black masses can be far out in front while the white workers lag far in the rear.

The real movement of the various sectors must be studied with careful attention and objectivity and special transitional slogans devised to correspond with their stage of development.

This is why the Socialist Workers Party strives to develop its program in such a way as to address particular sectors in a language they can understand and with concrete proposals on the prob-

lems of greatest immediate concern to them. The most important of these social forces are the black community, the youth and the organized working class.

* * *

The current stage of the struggle of the Afro-American people for self-determination which began in the middle fifties expanded with the meteoric rise of Malcolm X in the sixties and the mass combativity manifested in the ghetto explosions. One measure of the immense rise in nationalist consciousness has been the recent Newsweek survey showing that one-fifth of the Afro-Americans now believe that the only way they can achieve real progress is through the establishment of a separate black nation. This mass separatist sentiment is the clearest single sign of wholesale rejection of illusions about the future of capitalist America.

The Socialist Workers Party was prepared theoretically for these developments, having discussed their possibility in the thirties with Leon Trotsky, who brought the Leninist teachings on the national question and the vast experience of the Russian Revolution to bear on this very problem in the U.S.

The liberals, and likewise many revolutionists, viewed the struggle of the black masses as aiming at integration within the white capitalist structure and as simply a component of labor struggles. Trotsky foresaw more complex -- and more revolutionary -- possibilities. In his opinion, the black masses would come to reject this type of "integration" in view of the centuries of bitter experience with racial oppression they had suffered. In the course of their struggle for emancipation, a consciousness that its goal could be realized only through winning unconditional self-determination, and not integration or equality within racist American capitalism would more and more clearly manifest itself. Marxist revolutionists had the duty of unconditionally supporting the independent organization and struggle of the black masses. Only the firm maintenance of such support could prepare the conditions for a powerful political alliance between independently organized, nationalist-minded Afro-Americans and socialist-oriented workers, black and white, in opposition to the entire capitalist system.

It would take the establishment of a workers government to open the possibility of establishing, if desired by Afro-Americans, a black nation either as part of a federated socialist republic or in complete independence if Afro-Americans so wished. Moreover, after trying either alternative, they would be free to switch. Independent black mass organizations

would be the ultimate guarantee of safeguarding this right. And no organization that did not clearly state this would be considered a revolutionary or trustworthy ally by the Afro-Americans.

The movement for black liberation is a complex and contradictory fusion of two explosive trends. One is an irrepressible and powerful democratic thrust for self-determination as a distinctive national minority. This is combined with a proletarian struggle against the capitalist rulers. All those who fail to understand the dual character of the Afro-American movement and combined characteristics of the coming American revolution are bound to go astray in comprehending its development and orienting correctly toward it.

The problem of winning full democratic rights and national emancipation for black Americans is a task which was unsolved by the American bourgeois revolutionists of the 18th and 19th centuries and has been handed down for solution to the socialist revolution of the 20th century. The revolutionary potential of this nationalist movement has already been evidenced in the fact that it initiated and continues to deepen the mood of radicalism in this country and that the black masses and the black workers are the spearhead of opposition to the status quo. This vanguard role of black nationalism is bound to intensify rather than diminish in the further unfolding of the Third American Revolution.

The Afro-American struggle for liberation is the most formidable expression of the logic of permanent revolution in American life today. It has begun on the basis of a fight for national emancipation. But this democratic objective cannot be obtained except through all-out combat against the entire capitalist system which holds down the black masses for its own profiteering reasons. Thus, regardless of the prevailing ideas of its participants, the thrust toward national liberation inexorably tends to merge with the broader class struggle against capitalist domination.

The oppression and exploitation inflicted upon Afro-Americans cannot be removed by capitalism for four main reasons: (1) Black capitalism is much too weak, timid, and dependent on white business circles to carve a place for an independent black nation. (2) The white capitalist structure requires keeping the blacks at the very bottom of the social scale in order to maintain a reserve army of cheap labor that puts a check on the wage demands of other sectors and serves as a ready supply of workers in areas of sudden economic expansion. (3) Even if the ruling class could be persuaded that Afro-Americans deserve spe-

cial economic treatment and social upgrading they would reject emancipating them because this would call certain inviolable private property rights into question. It would also immediately raise the related struggles of the most poverty-stricken whites and other oppressed national minorities to explosive proportions. (4) The capitalists maintain their rule through the ancient device of keeping the working masses from uniting in a common struggle to displace them. They do this by implanting and fostering the worst prejudices. Holding a sector like the blacks in the position of pariahs, economically depressed and educationally disadvantaged, is too potent a means of blocking solidarity among the masses for America's ruling class to give up.

The special social composition of the Afro-American population is no less decisive a factor than the material interests of the plutocracy in sharpening the revolutionary edge of its struggle. The Afro-Americans are not peasants dispersed in backward rural areas; they are predominantly proletarians concentrated in the biggest cities and the key industries and services.

They are subjected to double exploitation as blacks and as workers. Compelled to exist by selling their labor power, their wages as blacks tend to be the lowest, their rate of unemployment the highest, their opportunities for advancement and skills the slightest. Their demands as the most exploited section of the working class dovetail with the demands of the poorest of the poor for better conditions of life.

The class composition and status of the black workers can be expected to objectively propel them into leading positions in the black community, in the building and direction of a black party and the inclusion of working class demands in its program, and in the anti-bureaucratic struggles in the unions. Their experiences in these struggles will make it easier to win the most far-sighted among them to socialist ideas and to membership in a multi-national Leninist combat party.

The combined character of the mass Afro-American movement to gain power to have control over their own future precludes any separation of stages in the struggle for its nationalist demands and socialist objectives. There cannot first be a successfully concluded struggle for national independence and democratic rights and afterwards a struggle for social liberation. The two must be indissolubly combined and will, in fact, reciprocally reinforce each other. The nationalist demands must be tied in with working class demands in order to obtain

either.

But there is more to the matter than this. The struggle for black liberation is bound to be an exceedingly powerful stimulant to developing the anticapitalist movement of the whole American working class. The formation of a black party would transform American politics by upsetting its long established organizational structure and alignments, leading to the disintegration of the Democratic Party coalition and setting an example of independent political action for organized labor. Through their black caucuses in the unions the black workers have already taken the initiative in contending against the racist and reactionary policies of the ossified bureaucrats, thus helping to begin the work of breaking their stranglehold upon the labor movement.

The failure to appreciate the revolutionary dynamism inherent in the Afro-American drive for self-determination causes many white radicals to misunderstand or depreciate the revolutionary thrust and potential of black nationalism. On the other hand, the current crisis of leadership in the black community is traceable to a failure to understand how the democratic demands pointing to self-determination, such as black control of the black community, can be tied in with transitional demands which promote the fundamental objectives of the working class movement in the struggle for socialism.

The continual ferment, periodic mass militancy and spontaneous uprisings in the ghettos show what combativity exists. Yet up to now the black community lacks not only an independent mass party but even an organized vanguard clearly dedicated to the task of building such a party.

The first step toward resolving this glaring contradiction is to work out a program that sharply delineates the nature and goals of the black liberation struggle and projects a course of action that can lead toward the construction of an influential black mass party and the education of its cadres. Suggestions along this line are included in the SWP resolution: "A Transitional Program for Black Liberation."

* * *

The rebellion of the youth, currently observable in its sharpest form on the campuses, has become a new factor in American politics and social struggle. The student youth occupy a place of increasing social weight in the United States. The growing campus population of almost 7,000,000 already exceeds the number of farmers. They are concentrated

in educational areas or institutions to a degree exceeding the work force in all but the most giant factory complexes.

The general nature of the problems of the youth radicalization and the strategy for solving them have been dealt with in the resolution, "Worldwide Youth Radicalization and the Tasks of the Fourth International." This resolution, while international in scope, is directly relevant to the radicalization of the youth in the United States and its meaning for the American revolutionary socialist movement.

The radicalization of the campuses in the sixties was a serious matter for U.S. imperialism because of the influence the attitudes of American students have had upon the rest of their generation in the high schools, factories and the armed forces. This was shown with the utmost clarity in the role played by the youth in organizing, spearheading and broadening the opposition against the Vietnam war and the degree to which the oppositional attitudes spread, even penetrating the armed forces.

By emerging after a decade of the new rise of the black liberation movement, the large-scale youth radicalization in effect opened up a second domestic front in the offensive against America's capitalist rulers.

The days of a "silent generation" among the youth are definitively done with. The decades of political acquiescence on the campuses and the high schools are over. Whatever ups and downs may occur as the ruling class seeks to allay the rebellion of the youth, the campus will never be the same. The ups and downs will take place in the framework of a long term deepening of the revolt and an increasing disposition among vanguard students to be receptive to revolutionary socialist policies and ideas.

Because of the backwardness of American politics and the extremely low level of socialist consciousness among the workers, the student movement at its present point in the United States plays a disproportionate and extremely significant role as a testing ground for political ideas and realignments. The campuses along with the black communities are today the main arenas where the principal issues of revolutionary strategy and policy are being openly debated.

The socialist current that is able to gain ideological and organizational hegemony over the new radical generation in open competition against its rivals will be in the most favorable position to take advantage of any breakthroughs which subsequently occur in the ranks of

the working class. This prospect enhances the importance of participating in student struggles while systematically polemicizing against all currents, from the opportunists and reformists to the ultralefts, in order to win the best elements to the banner of revolutionary Marxism.

The magnitude of the student population and its increasing impact upon political life make imperative fraternal collaboration with and support to the efforts of the Young Socialist Alliance to build solid bases on educational institutions from coast to coast. It will fight for the leadership of the radical youth in the spheres of both ideology and action, imbue them with the ideals of socialist internationalism, and bring fresh new cadres toward the revolutionary party.

* * *

The labor movement still suffers from the political inertia induced by the combination of government witchhunting and sustained prosperity that followed the brief postwar upsurge of 1945-46. But molecular changes have occurred that are important to note. Four significant new features deserve special attention.

First is the increased number of black workers in basic industry. In such basic industries as auto, steel and rubber, ghetto youth, brought into the plants, have come into the labor movement in significant numbers. Today they are burdened with the dirtiest and most grueling jobs.

They are the same ones who have initiated black caucuses, independent actions against the labor bureaucracy, and the beginnings of independent formations that are disturbing the quiescent atmosphere within the labor movement and improving the atmosphere for growing oppositional moods. Socialists and militants in the unions have the obligation to explain the progressive significance of these vanguard initiatives of the black workers to their fellow members and back them to the hilt.

Secondly, the age level in the unions is declining. This is a consequence of the expansion of jobs under the impact of the boom, particularly in the sixties. Not only has the average age level gone down, but the percentage of union members who have been in industry less than five years has gone up by 15 percent in the past five years. A large percentage of the work force is now made up of men and women belonging to the post-Korean War, post-McCarthy generation.

They have never gone through a major recession or experienced massive layoffs or plant shutdowns. They have not gone through a series of bitter, prolonged strike struggles. They picture the future as a repetition of the past as they have known it -- regular wage gains through bargaining sessions, a more or less steady increment over the years to their standard of living, and steady employment. They also incline to assume that if things should go wrong the government will surely do something about it.

But their inexperience has other implications. An economic downturn, suddenly confronting them with the basic anarchy of the capitalist system, could rapidly turn many of these young workers, however conservative their present political consciousness, into the most militant and revolutionary-minded sector of the working class.

The third feature is the transformation in status of large layers of skilled and semi-skilled salaried personnel in technical, administrative, service, and educational fields. The technological changes over the last 20 years have rationalized and introduced industrial methods into whole new sectors of production and proletarianized its personnel. The rigid hierarchical organization in these areas more and more resembles the alienating work process in the plant. This makes the workers in these occupations much more receptive than before to militant unionism and radical ideas.

Because of their connection with college education this category of workers are most liable to direct influence by the moods of campus radicalization which they often transmit into their circles.

The fourth feature is the increased number of public employees; that is, workers hired by the federal, state, county and local governments. The number of workers who confront the state in the boss-employee relation constitutes the fastest growing proportion of the union movement. Because of their direct confrontation with government representatives in all negotiations on wages and working conditions such unions cannot escape immediate involvement in political issues.

The main political struggles of the day -- around the needs of the Afro-American people, the rebellion of the youth, against the war -- are taking place outside the trade union movement. This is one of the consequences of the persistence with which the labor officialdom has clung to its alliance with the Democratic Party machine. But the repercussions of these struggles have been

felt to an increasing degree within the unions; and it is only a question of time until the number of unions directly caught up in them grows.

A large left wing in the American labor movement will most likely emerge in response to a threatened deterioration in working conditions and living standards which will arouse and impel workers to organized counteraction. Their caucuses will be affected from the first by the degree of radicalism prevalent in the country, the black communities and among the students.

To sustain itself, a left wing formed and fighting under such conditions would have to be guided by a class consciousness clear enough to grasp the necessity for labor to forge its own political party. Its aim would be to gain independence from the state instead of serving as an agency of Washington against the interests of oppressed peoples abroad and the rank and file of the unions at home.

The struggle for democracy within the unions is crucial and will have to go hand in hand with the fight of the ranks to win a majority against subordination to the political parties and government of the bosses.

In the coming period in which deflationary policies and increased unemployment will be accompanied by the threat of rising prices, it will be essential to put forth the transitional demand for a sliding scale of both wages and hours. The first is the only safeguard for the real income of the workers under rapid inflation. The second is designed to unite the working class by more equitably dividing up the available jobs with no reduction in take-home pay. The fight for the coupling of these two transitional demands will be the only effective way to answer the attempts by big business and its government to make the workers bear the brunt of the periodic recessions and at the same time to combat the inevitable wage-ceiling proposals under inflationary conditions.

The demand for workers control in industry as projected by the Transitional Program could find growing acceptance in this process. This slogan accords with the aspiration of the workers to have the decisive voice in the organization of production against the intensified exploitation and deepening alienation imposed by capitalist rationalization. It coincides with the growing demands of the radicalizing youth and Afro-Americans for power to control their daily lives, environment and destinies.

The concept of workers control ex-

tends into demanding that the company books be opened for public inspection, and that watchdog committees be set up to check company practices. Such committees naturally suggest setting up consumer committees that could be organized on a neighborhood basis to check the prices and quality of goods as inflation threatens the family marketbasket of every worker.

The interference by the government and the impact of its policies on all areas of life objectively pose the question of political power before the working class. The increasing concentration, centralization and conglomeration of capital and its grip upon local, state and federal government more and more threatens to render impotent the methods of even militant business unionism. What the individual corporation is compelled to grant through normal bargaining processes can easily be snatched away by government monetary and tax policies. The formation of an independent labor party is the next giant step the unions must take to defend the elementary interests of the working class. Thus, propaganda for the labor party must remain in the very center of any program for both a genuine left wing in the unions and for our party.

This puts a heavy premium at this stage of the radicalization on circulating our press and literature to disseminate our basic ideas to open-minded unionists. Education in the overall socialist program leading to stepped up recruitment is our priority task in the labor movement.

VI.

The change of political climate in the sixties is often attributed to the rise of a "New Left" by those who have only a superficial acquaintance with its basic characteristics. It has actually been the first stage of a new radicalization which expresses the drive of rebellious youth, black and white, to break away from liberalism, reformism and pacifism and take the road leading toward anticapitalist struggle. This attitude is evidenced in the opposition of the dissident youth to the imperialists in Washington and those who kowtow to them and by their rejection of the social-democratic and Stalinist movements both at home and abroad.

This radicalization is marked by a set of special features arising from its spontaneous nature, ideological primitiveness and instability and the absence of direction from any mass political formation or large Marxist party with clear authority.

Most of the new radicals are unsuspecting victims of the effects of the prolonged cold war period which deeply dis-

rupted the continuity of American radicalism, dimmed its best traditions, and opened wide the field in which aberrant tendencies can spring up.

The partial vacuum on the left has been created by the following developments:

1. The incapacities of the labor bureaucracy and the various leaderships of the black community in the past three decades to cut loose from the two-party system and initiate independent political action.

2. The destruction of the social democracy as an effective force in the American political scene owing to the degeneration of its central leadership, which backed the alliance between the labor officialdom and the Democratic machine and ended up offering critical advice to the State Department on how best to fight "Communism" abroad.

3. The inability of the Communist Party to recover from its suicidal course during World War II, when, as its contribution to Stalin's "people's front," it came out in open support of U.S. imperialism and attempted to sacrifice the welfare of labor and the black community to this policy. After the unremitting pounding by the witchhunters the CP was further decimated by the massive desertions following Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin in 1956.

Both the Socialist Party's submission to the State Department and the Communist Party's subservience to Moscow were equally repugnant to the new radicals since their initial targets of rebellion were "liberal" anti-Communism and bureaucratic opportunism.

4. The labor conservatism and the erosion suffered by the entire radical movement in consequence of the years of sustained economic prosperity and virulent witchhunting. In particular, this cut off the promising rapid expansion of the Socialist Workers Party at the end of World War II. Thus the Marxist vanguard was a very small force as the radicalization began.

Owing to these circumstances the struggles attending and promoting the new wave of radicalization have been disconnected and atomized instead of being programmatically and organizationally coordinated through the influence of any single leadership.

Whereas the CP was the overwhelmingly dominant force in all circles of the left during the 1930's, no single political grouping or ideological current has gained a comparable supremacy in the current radicalization. What we see in-

stead is a pluralism of tendencies and diversity of policies fiercely contending against one another for the allegiance of unaffiliated militants.

This situation accounts for the openness of the movement and the non-exclusionist attitudes which have come to prevail in it. These stand in refreshing contrast to the ultra-factional monopoly over the left the Stalinists were able to exercise during the 1930's and the ban they sought to impose upon the views of all critics and revolutionary opponents.

The promising leftward shift of the radicalizing youth has become prey to two dangers.

Despite their avowed aversion to liberalism and formal renunciation of reformism, sizable sectors of militants can still become disoriented by the demagogic devices of the opportunistic leftists in and around the Democratic Party, who are headed by the CP. So long as no significant steps are taken toward launching independent black or labor parties, they can be lured into chasing after the illusory prospects of accomplishing something within the established capitalist electoral arena or through some radical-sounding middle-class makeshift like the Peace and Freedom Party. In one form or another, this is the principal trap set in the path of the young radicals because of the resources of sophisticated circles of the ruling class and the persistent efforts made by Moscow and its acolytes in the U.S. to seek alliance with these circles.

On the other hand, at the present time a significant number of radicals are susceptible to and carried away by ultra-left adventurism. They are vulnerable to its dangers through inexperience, their petty-bourgeois backgrounds, the absence of a militant workers movement and a strong Marxist leadership from the arena of struggle, and their ignorance or rejection of a revolutionary program and perspective which could give firm guidance and a clear goal to their actions. Their sympathy and admiration for the Cuban, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arab and African revolutions often leads to a simplistic conception of the role of armed struggle and guerrilla war in advancing and winning a revolution. They make a mechanical transfer, which is usually purely rhetorical, of the tactics and techniques used by the colonial fighters to the vastly different situation and concrete problems of the revolutionary movement in the United States.

The violence of the ruling class has also played a role in fostering ultra-leftism. Club-wielding, trigger-happy cops are expert at provoking their victims into a blind fury. But, however com-

prehensible they may be, ill-considered responses are hardly effective in countering the violence of the police. The cops prefer to precipitate battles with isolated groups and weak organizations in such a way as to make it most difficult for them to mobilize active sympathy on a wide scale. They are much more cautious when they are confronted by mass actions, directed by well-organized formations that know how to utilize defensive formulations and other effective political countertactics.

The principal political force in promoting ultraleftism has been the Maoists and those influenced by them. The Maoists facilitate the work of the opportunists by their irrational adventures, by the openings they provide for the worst kind of provocations, and by their zealous application of Mao Tsetung Thought to the American scene.

At bottom the ultraleftism of the Maoists is not qualitatively different in its results from the opportunism practiced by the followers of Moscow. Both offer diversionary substitutes for a correct revolutionary program and effective revolutionary action. This accounts for the remarkable ease with which some of these seemingly absolutely opposed tendencies can form unprincipled alliances or suddenly change places with one another. The one constant in their positions and activities is hostility to the principled line of revolutionary Marxism.

The evolution of the now fragmented SDS leadership, which has swung in a few years from radical reformism to crude adventurism and quasi-Stalinist methods, is a conspicuous case of how opportunism and ultraleftism can succeed one another and be mixed together in the most bizarre combinations under the conditions of the current radicalization.

VII.

To win the coming socialist revolution in America, a politically homogeneous party, structured in accordance with the Leninist principles of democratic centralism, is required. Such a party, rooted in the masses, embodying the experience accumulated by past generations of dedicated revolutionists, tested in common action, and hardened through years of battles under the most varied conditions, gains the political know-how that is absolutely essential to overcome the material resources, political skill, and obstinate determination of the ruling class to retain its historically doomed grip on society.

The Communist Party, the major obstacle that has stood in the way of the construction of such a party for the past

forty years, is no longer in position to automatically renew itself from a fresh wave of radicalization. Although they remain our central rival for leadership of the coming mass movements, the years of a Stalinist party dominating the left are behind us. The actual relationship of forces now offers American Trotskyism its most favorable opportunity for growth and influence. Our cadres stand at least on a par with those of the CP or the Maoists, and are greater than any the social democrats can muster.

Unlike the anarchists and spontaneists of all sorts, our movement recognizes the indispensable and central role of the Leninist party in carrying through the anticapitalist struggle to victory. Such a party welds together the most conscious elements of the entire toiling population and their spokesmen around a clear body of scientific doctrine, class traditions, and a revolutionary political program.

The character and structure of the revolutionary party is determined by the nature of the adversary it must combat and overthrow. The centralized bourgeois state incorporates and reinforces all the divisions among the working masses to ensure its domination.

A single centralized multi-national revolutionary party is required in order to successfully combat, outmaneuver, and overthrow the highly centralized power and agencies of the class enemy and carry out the main tasks of socialism. It is necessary in order to politically overcome the uneven development of different sections of the working class and the national divisions that mark American social struggles. It enables all these separate forces to be united under a single banner and around a common program, to gain confidence through common experiences, and become a powerful and invincible fighting force against their common enemy.

This is how Lenin proceeded. Czarist Russia constituted "a prison-house of nationalities." Yet even there, Lenin was the staunchest advocate of a single workers combat party uniting the Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish, Georgian, Finnish, and other Marxists as the only instrument that could lead to victory.

It is evident that the coming American revolution, now in the process of formation, is destined to have a combined character. The democratic struggles of the oppressed national minorities and the anticapitalist movement of the working class will reinforce each other. These dual aspects of the revolution are most fully embodied in the black workers, who have both a keen class and nationalist

consciousness, who participated in the uprisings in industrial centers, and have formed black caucuses in the unions.

The proletarian composition of the black community can lead both to the proletarian leadership and incorporation of proletarian demands in the program of a black political party and facilitate the recruitment of black militants to the revolutionary socialist party.

The CP and SP seek to form multi-national reformist parties in which socialist consciousness does not reinforce revolutionary nationalist consciousness, but which negates it. Some ultra-lefts in SDS propose to divide the functions of the workers vanguard between a white radical leadership and some all-black organization. Others, like Progressive Labor, condemn black nationalism as reactionary. All of these groups are wrong or one-sided on this question. Either they deny the anticapitalist implications and revolutionary character of the independent struggle for self-determination by the national minorities, or fail to grasp the combined character of the Third American Revolution, or reject in practice the construction of a politically homogeneous multi-national revolutionary workers party to unite and lead the working masses to power.

The vanguard party is the highest expression of the collective consciousness of the working class and the repository of its historical memory. It brings the costly lessons of past experiences to bear upon the problems of the present in order to clarify them and avoid the repetition of previous errors.

The importance of this function has been freshly confirmed by the controversies over strategy and tactics which have agitated the entire left during the sixties. Many of the "old" issues long ago settled by the Marxist movement, which some considered outmoded and irrelevant to American conditions, have once more been sharply raised for consideration and action. Among these are the differences between a popular front and a united front, the value of mass mobilizations versus isolated and individual confrontations, the record of Stalin, the defense of democracy within the workers movement, etc. It becomes more and more difficult for serious militants to avoid taking a stand one way or another upon such questions.

The experiences of the past five years have also forcefully demonstrated the decisive role of programmatic positions in shaping the course of a mass movement and determining its outcome. This could be observed most clearly in the antiwar movement, which brought all tendencies upon the same field and

tested the merit of their proposals in a series of united actions of a mass nature. The campaign mobilization of the SWP and YSA in this movement and our proposals gave the antiwar movement a weight, momentum and direction it would otherwise have lacked.

This resulted in considerable gains for our party. The influence exercised by our ideas in the antiwar movement is a clear example of how even numerically small forces with a realistic appraisal of the situation, an appropriate program, and the capacity to conduct itself in a flexible and non-sectarian manner can fulfill the functions of a revolutionary vanguard. Our role was decisive in the historical impact the antiwar movement had.

Three lessons of the experiences of the past period should be underscored.

1. In view of the fact that no single tendency has hegemony, in the radical movement, the action coalition approach which has guided our tactics in the antiwar movement will continue and be extended to other areas of activity. This is an application of united front methods to the peculiar conditions of the present stage of political and organizational development in the American left. It is the method to bring and keep together a broad diversity of elements in order to build a mass base for action on specific issues directed against the imperialist ruling class.

2. We must take advantage of openings and occasions in the current mass struggles to apply the method and augment the demands of the Transitional Program. We should attempt to extend

them to new sectors of American society which enter upon the field of struggle, as has already been undertaken for the youth radicalization and the Afro-American struggle.

3. Joint action does not entail the suspension of political differentiation and polemical struggle against the opportunists and ultraleftist misleaderships of the radical movement. To the contrary, as ideological debate deepens with the radicalization, we must continually counterpose the program and views of Marxism to the false ideas and positions put forward by rival tendencies.

Our superiority over our opponents does not come from our greater size but rather from the value and consistency of our Marxist principles, the validity of our ideas and the cohesiveness and discipline of our cadres. Our differences with them are not incidental and episodic but fundamental.

The events in France in May-June 1968 show how the contradictions of contemporary capitalism accumulate the most powerful and explosive social forces that can be detonated into action at the most unexpected moment. The United States, with its history of sudden and convulsive changes, is hardly immune to something comparable. All of our gains in the next period will prepare us for such a sharp turn of events when the radicalization of large numbers of workers opens up the possibility of victory.

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August 1969

BLACK CAUCUSES IN THE TRADE UNIONS

[The following memorandum was adopted by the Political Committee on April 18, 1969 and was circulated within the National Committee. It is presented here for the information of the party membership.]

1. Black Caucuses in Relation to Changing Moods in the Working Class

Rebellious moods are developing within this country that tend to undermine the stability of capitalist rule. The trend is manifested by the black power struggle, by the extensive student dissent, by the unprecedented antiwar movement and by mounting unrest among working people.

Within the trade unions objective necessity is impelling the ranks toward class struggle methods in defense of their interests. This is causing the hidebound union bureaucrats to fumble and stumble from crisis to crisis and their policies only serve to aggravate the internal union situation.

As a result new oppositional formations are appearing in the trade unions. At present these groupings tend to be relatively unstable, often tending to exist only temporarily but they also tend to be recurrent. On the whole they are limited in programmatic outlook, lacking in experience, not yet firmly led and generally unable to become consolidated.

A key fact remains, however, that such oppositional formations keep cropping up. The process is tending to deepen within individual unions and it has begun to spread throughout the unions generally. Of special significance is the big new boost the trend is receiving through the rise of black caucuses in the unions.

The record of the union bureaucrats regarding black workers is a sorry one. They follow the liberal-capitalist line of tokenism and gradualism, both on the job and within the unions. This policy has in fact been a key reason for the failure of the unions to really organize workers in the South.

With the union bureaucrats defaulting on issues touching vital needs of black workers, these victims of super-exploitation are taking matters into their own hands. A major consequence has been the present rise of black caucuses in the trade unions, which adds a new dimension to the black power trend. This is a progressive step based on the black workers' right to defend their interests through self-organization, the determination of their own program and the selection of their own leaders.

Black caucuses tend to go beyond the usual main objective of other and earlier caucus formations in the unions, i.e., the winning of union office. While this has been a subsidiary aspect of the perspectives set by black caucuses, their primary activity has tended to center on day-by-day struggles over gut issues. They are linking their fight in the unions with the basic aims of the black community. In doing so they combine economic and social issues in a manner that returns to the promise of the early CIO. That outlook, which is the polar opposite of the racist policy so crassly symbolized by Shanker in the New York teachers union, charts a true course for the union movement as a whole.

As exemplified in auto, the rise of these caucuses reflects the changing weight of black workers in basic industry. There is a proportional increase of blacks on hard production jobs, where they replace white retirees and whites promoted to skilled jobs. The black workers involved are mainly young and in most cases ready for battle. Where one is victimized and the company reaches into the ghetto for a replacement, it will often wind up hiring another fighter. As a body the young black workers are defying the rules and procedures laid down by the union bureaucrats. As part of their fight against racism, they are demanding full rights in the shaping of union policy and in making union decisions.

Conditions on production lines are becoming worse generally. White workers have many grievances of their own against both the company and the union bureaucrats. Initiatives taken by black workers also tend in many respects to serve the class interests of the white workers. This flows from a subtle living process in which the democratic demands of blacks become fused with demands they make as workers. The consequent impact within the union tends objectively to counteract race prejudice among whites. The process implies the generation of black and white class unity. That in turn foreshadows the rise of broadening patterns of united opposition to the union bureaucrats. At the same time the efforts of the black militants tend to push the whole oppositional development in the direction of class struggle concepts.

The dual role played by black workers can be expected to rise to a still higher plane. It entails more than a progressive struggle for their democratic rights as blacks. Their fight also represents a new, vital form of working class initiative, emanating from the most militant sector of the class. In their

dual role, as blacks and as workers, these militants will inject new anticapitalist dimensions into labor struggles at the trade union level. That in turn will help to impel the union ranks toward class political consciousness.

2. Black Caucuses in Relation to the Labor Party Question

Although their basic problems are political in character, the workers have yet to exhaust their efforts to find a solution through trade union methods alone. It should also be noted, however, that changing objective conditions are preparing the workers for a leap in class political consciousness. This is implicit in the growing recognition in the ranks that the unions face a grave crisis of leadership and in the fact that a search has begun for better leaders and more effective means of struggle in defense of the workers' class interests.

There is a growing rank and file demand for full use of the union power in open battle with the capitalists. Implicit in the trend is intensified government intervention on the side of the bosses. Consequent experiences will teach the workers rich lessons about the true role of the capitalist government in the class struggle and about the anti-labor character of all capitalist politicians. That in turn will impel working class sentiment in an anticapitalist direction.

The process will be helped along in two respects by the present black power trends. One aspect is the impact of black caucuses within the trade unions. Another is the impulses toward independent black political action within militant sectors of the black movement as a whole. With black militants coming to the fore inside the trade unions, even the present gestations in the direction of independent black political action are bound to have a certain impact on political thought within the union ranks generally.

Insofar as independent black political action becomes a reality the process will be helped along that much more. Significant growth of an independent black party in opposition to the capitalist parties, in turn, would tend to undermine and could eventually shatter the present broad coalition on which the Democratic Party is based. With such a development labor as a whole would be thrust in the direction of independent class political action along the labor party road.

While objective conditions are gradually ripening for a labor break with capitalist politics, subjective consciousness of the need for that step still lags

badly in the union ranks. It is still a problem of convincing workers of the urgent need to break with all capitalist politicians and form their own party based on the trade unions. That remains primarily a propaganda task.

3. Black Caucuses in Relation to Revolutionary Policy in the Unions

In the changing objective situation we can anticipate new openings for party interventions aimed toward building a class struggle left wing in the unions. Openings may sometimes develop under unusual circumstances and at unpredictable times. An example of such a wedge is Reuther's attack on the black caucuses in the UAW. There are deep implications in the UAW bureaucracy's racist reply to the demands of the black workers.

These militants want the union to combat racism; they want it to defend workers against the corporations; and they want rank and file control over union policy. Reuther's racist counter-attack not only sows divisions inside the union for the purpose of maintaining his bureaucratic rule. It also spurns demands that touch the vital needs of UAW members generally.

In addition the attack on the black caucuses adds up to a threat against all oppositional formations in the union. A problem is thus posed for white UAW members opposed to Reuther. They have a self-interest in defending the right of blacks to organize a caucus. If they don't, Reuther will be in a position to move also against other oppositional formations in the union. That makes the exercise of racial prejudice a dangerous luxury for white opponents of Reuther. It will cut across their class needs.

An objective basis thus exists for a new trend within the UAW. It implies parallel development of both black caucuses and caucuses composed mainly of white workers. Both types of formations are mutually affected by common class needs. They share a common desire to use the union power against the auto corporations. But to do so they must first wrest control from the hands of the Reuther machine.

These needs impel black and white oppositionists in the UAW toward a search for fraternal collaboration. Such a trend would imply the rise of trade union action to a higher plane. The trend will become manifested first at the industry level and in due course experiences in struggle will impel it into the political sphere.

This concrete example signifies a new opening for us in a key trade union.

At present our intervention takes place mainly through our press. In its columns we support the black militants against the Reuther machine. At the same time we seek to educate white militants about the need for unqualified class solidarity with their black brothers in that struggle.

As the situation unfolds we can an-

ticipate new opportunities to extend support to anti-Reuther militants -- both black and white -- in various ways. Out of it all should come an advance in forging a class struggle left wing, in whatever given forms, within the UAW. And implied in this specific development is the opening of comparable opportunities for our party in other trade union situations.