

SPARTACIST EAST

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Radicals and the U.S. Army

The anti-war movement began as a liberal reaction against the unsuccessful and unpopular Vietnam war, among those who thought U.S. imperialist aims could better be served by other means. It rapidly developed into a large, middle-class coalition between liberals, New Left students and the ostensible "Marxist" organizations, whose focus was demonstrations aimed at putting pressure on the "doves" in government.

The proven futility of such demonstrations drove a section of the movement to a new strategy of hopefully more forceful action, mainly "into the streets" for confrontations with the cops, which usually resulted only in the arrest of these more vociferous protesters. In accordance with the "confrontationist" mood, draft refusal, previously the monopoly of the absolute pacifists, became the rallying cry of the radicals, especially SDS. Opting for Canada or jail was justified with the same moral arguments as the pacifists used--the individual's responsibility for the government's war--but was also seen as a tactic that would succeed in ending the war where tame demonstrations had failed.

Role of the "Marxists"

Most of the so-called "Marxist" groups gave at least tacit support to the "We Won't Go" mood so long as it was prevalent in the radical milieu. The Spartacist League, however, opposed the suicidal draft resistance tactic as far back as 1965, when we wrote:

"To identify the army as a whole with the officers and Special Forces is to give up without a fight what is, for a revolutionist, one of the decisive battles of our movement: the struggle for the political allegiance of working-class soldiers.... When petit-bourgeois individuals turn their backs on this arena in personal protest, they sever any tie with working-class youths who are going, and will continue to go, when called up by the draft."

(CCNY Campus Spartacist, Nov. 1965)

The mass anti-war movement, however, was approaching its end. Without a real program or working-class orientation, it had no ballast to prevent its being almost entirely co-opted by McCarthy. As draft resisters began to draw stiff jail sentences, the Army began to look like a more promising arena for the almost defunct anti-war movement, especially as anti-war sentiment began to manifest itself willy-nilly in the Army. Always ready to adapt, the so-called "Marxists" who had earlier shrunk from opposing draft resistance when it was popular suddenly began to orient towards a G.I.-directed movement against the Vietnam war.

Radicals in the Army

The anti-war movement among G.I.s themselves by no means represents a total break from past illusions. One current, exemplified by The Bond, a soldiers' paper sponsored by the adventurist Marcyite YAWF, maintains a confrontationist mentality and the attempt to create martyrs in the Army, as "confront the brass" replaces "confront the cops". The Bond, one of the first G.I. anti-war organs, met with considerable eagerness among G.I.s who were ripe for anti-war views and the idea of an American Servicemen's Union, although its willfully provocative character has not gone unrecognized by soldiers.

Numerous other G.I. publications have now sprung up at bases around the country, produced by both long-time radicals and newly-politicized soldiers. In the main, these efforts are both promising and flawed as soldiers grope for an understanding of their situation and their society. One important example is G.I.s United (Fort Jackson). This group, which has carried out some excellent activities, has not yet seen through the Black Nationalist myth. They have not yet come out either for working-class demands or the logical implications of Black Nationalism (which would be, perhaps, a separate black Army, the demand for more black officers, etc.).

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The Odyssey of the SDS Labor Committee

Reacting against futile, individualistic "confrontationism", sections of the New Left have made a partial turn toward the working class. The NYC SDS Labor Committee of the ex-Trotskyist Lynn Marcus is part of this trend and shows its contradictory aspects. The Committee was ostensibly aimed toward the working class but opposed systematic work within the unions; they reacted against anarchistic campus radicalism but themselves embodied the same elitism; they hated "sectarianism" but became an "anti-sect" sectlet; their core had had bad experiences in PL but generalized this to all-encompassing cynicism. When their eccentric schemes failed to produce the expected easy successes, their weak side began to dominate, culminating in a de facto bloc with the Socialist Party.

The Paper Offensive

Socialists traditionally have sought to develop a working-class base within the union movement. The Labor Committee explicitly disdains this approach, seeking instead to promote "direct action"--specifically a mass strike--strictly through outside propaganda and agitation. In practice, this has consisted in distributing masses of literature raising demands (e.g., \$100 a week minimum wage, "tax the landlords", etc.) which bear no relation to the ongoing struggles of workers. Their strategy rests on a belief that an immanent economic collapse will shatter the

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The Socialist Workers Party

The SWP has recently become predominant in the anti-war G.I. movement. G.I. protest has become the SWP's new bandwagon about which to enthuse. In previous years, the SWP played a dual and contradictory anti-war role. They saw themselves as the radicals of the movement, with the slogan "Bring the Troops Home Now" (a soft and social-patriotic formulation of the correct demand for immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops), and based their 1968 election campaign propaganda largely on the Vietnam issue. Organizationally, they were the cement which held together the coalition of pro-imperialist liberals and New Left radicals, by submerging all politics in their explicit "single-issue" coalition.

workers' faith in their existing organizations and leaders and force them to adopt new forms of struggle, making work by radicals in the unions themselves unnecessary.

Underlying this strategy is an idealist concept of social behavior. Workers do not act in a political vacuum. There is a structure of organization and authority within the working-class movement, whose leaderships play a decisive role in shaping attitudes and forging actions. Unless a worker already has strong personal views, he will give far greater weight to the policies advocated by his union leadership than to ideas set forth by unknown, outside radicals. Further, a worker who might read and agree with the Labor Committees' views has no organizational means to fight for these policies, except to raise them in his union in opposition to the existing union bureaucracy. In any social organization, one becomes a leader by demonstrating a capacity to direct its day-to-day activities. In the unions, anyone who challenges the existing leadership must, all the more, demonstrate such a capacity and not merely advocate some attractive-sounding policies.

The Labor Committee's worker-directed actions, not surprisingly, have been a complete failure. Despite the free distribution of umpteen thousand copies of Solidarity in the garment center, the Committee (far from

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The SWP has now leaped into the G.I. work. Their activities have consisted almost entirely, however, in organizing nominal G.I. actions consisting of a few G.I.s and a lot of enthusing civilians, such as the 5-6 April demonstrations. Current calls for these demonstrations include the idea that agitation among G.I.s is important because G.I.s alone can stop the war. This is an attempt to find a shortcut, like the idea of black liberation through "urban guerilla warfare", to bypass the crucial task of uniting all the sections of the working-class--black and white, civilians and soldiers--in a struggle against capitalism. The G.I. movement is vitally important not because it can end the war alone, but because the Army is a place where radicals, predominantly middle-class, can reach and convince the masses of working-class youth with whom they are sharing common problems in the enormously educational experience of seeing U.S. imperialism first hand.

leading a mass strike!) has not even expanded its base of contacts beyond its original nucleus. The failure of this work is generally acknowledged and the resulting demoralization openly discussed within the Labor Committee. Perhaps as a result, one section of the Committee wants greater activity in reformist organizations. For socialists, struggle in reformist workers' organizations is both legitimate and necessary. But unless the radicals present a hard opposition, they will simply end up doing leg work for the professional reformists and union bureaucrats. Without a rank-and-file base forged in concrete struggle, "alliances" between radicals and reformists are likely to benefit the latter.

But whatever the abstract merits of work in reformist organizations, the Labor Committee's experience in this regard has been both unprincipled and self-defeating. In the past few months, the Committee has been working with the Welfare Rights Organization, a group which is trying to expand the scope of welfare, and whose leaders explicitly favor a redistribution of income between employed workers and the poor. Its main activity currently is a campaign to get low-paid employed workers to apply for wage supplements from the Welfare Department. This activity explicitly contradicts the Labor Committee's own position of calling for workers to fight for a \$100 minimum wage, rather than handouts to supplement starvation wages. Faced with internal criticism of its relations with the Welfare Rights Organization, the Committee passed a resolution stating they would continue to work with the group without supporting

(or publicly opposing) its major activity!

The Labor Committee initially pursued a left course which included, notably, critical support to the UFT in the recent teachers' strike. /see article in this issue/ As a result they were denounced as "racists" by the rest of SDS and ultimately their group was ordered dissolved by SDS in late Dec. 1968.

The Path of Jay Lovestone

Demoralized by their failures, one of the Committee's leading cadre wrote an article for the 23 Jan. issue of New America (organ of the Socialist Party) attacking SDS and PL. It is ironic, given the Committee's impassioned opposition to "police socialism", that they should collaborate with the leading ideological exponent of anti-Communism in the labor and radical movements, thus lending support, authenticity and a "left" cover to the witch-hunt being organized to smother the radical student movement. Having failed to foment a general strike in the garment center or a rent strike on the West Side, the Labor Committee members have become frustrated and are seeking greener pastures. An all too familiar phenomenon in the history of the socialist movement is the talented young intellectual who, having failed to arouse the masses after a few years (or, in this case, months!), seeks to become an advisor to the labor bureaucracy and political establishment. The labor Committee members who voted on 16 Feb. to uphold the Papert article have taken the first step on the path of Jay Lovestone, Michael Harrington and others, today's foremost exponents of the "enlightened advisor to kings" approach to socialist politics.

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ced the strike as "against black children" and "illegal" (this from self-proclaimed revolutionaries!), conservative tendencies within the union were enormously strengthened and the leadership began to pander to white racist sentiment in an attempt to get outside support for the strike. Most of the members of the UFT were Jewish and, as the strike continued, the sentiment against the UFT slid over into sometimes virulent anti-Semitism. This was exacerbated by the radical organizations' portraying the union strikers as racist ogres. The SWP has been especially notable in this regard, for example printing the poetry of Leslie Campbell in the Militant, expressing no disagreement with its anti-Semitic thrust and thereby condoning it.

The way the New York teachers' strike was

engineered shows that it is only the opening shot of a new series of attacks by the bourgeoisie upon organized labor. By setting one section of the exploited against the other, along a phony racial "union vs. community" axis, the Establishment hopes to prevent struggle for unity and consciousness among all New York workers. The aim of renewed attacks-- and there will be many more-- is to do the spade work for the emergence of a black middle class in the ghetto, to derail the growing anger and militancy. Naturally, the financing and consolidating of this new, black, bourgeoisie are to be taken out of the hides of workers, predominantly, it seems, of unionized workers of other ethnic groups. Despite the phony verbal "radicalism", this tactic is only that of dividing the working class by fomenting racist attitudes--a tactic as old and as rotten as Yankee Capitalism itself.

TEACHERS' STRIKE

The NYC teachers' strike last fall, and the disputes which surrounded it, were of major political importance for two groupings. For the radical movement, it served to underscore weaknesses long present--vacillation, inability or refusal to apply a class analysis, and capitulation to Black Nationalism. For the black people of Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the deception perpetrated by their oppressors was compounded by radical apologists for their mis-leaders, which will produce only disorientation and further frustrations.

The Fraud of "Community Control"

For black people, who are doubly oppressed as blacks and as workers, the central problems of their lives cannot be solved in the classroom. Their oppression is rooted in the political economy of capitalism, which needs the product of the ghetto schools, not as creative human beings, but as a pool of low-skilled and unemployed workers to keep the general level of wages low. The Black Nationalists have not seen through the liberal myth that "becoming educated" is the way out of the ghetto for the mass of black and Puerto Rican youth. At bottom, the solution for the children of Ocean Hill-Brownsville lies in struggle against the system, not upward mobility through the classroom. The classless demand for "community control" masks the matter of who within the "community" controls the schools--i.e., the Ford Foundation (which funded the decentralization experiment) and a few careerists like Rhody McCoy, or the black workers and their children?

The Lindsay administration has consistently pursued a policy aimed at breaking the militant unions which have opposed attempts to ease the City's financial crisis at their expense. As one weapon, the Mayor has used the Taylor Law (which prohibits strikes by public employees) upon the Sanitation, Welfare and Teachers' unions. In the teachers' strike, the Mayor, whose cops daily maintain

oppression in the ghetto, tried to enlist the ghetto residents in his anti-union campaign through advocating fake "community control", thus playing upon the legitimate dissatisfaction of black people and seeking to turn it against the teachers' union as a scapegoat.

Role of the Left

At this crucial juncture, the role of socialists was vital. If the Left had been able to form a radical alliance between teachers and the black population along militant demands, by fighting within the union to challenge the conservative Shanker leadership and making the ghetto population aware of the class interest they share with the union, both groups could have been fighting Lindsay instead of each other. Such an alliance could have been the first step toward building a labor party of the working people to oppose the parties of the bosses. Instead, groups such as the Socialist Workers Party (whose central demand was "Black Control of the Black Community", as if any community could exist independent of the racist, imperialist U.S. society), Progressive Labor (which actually recognized that "community control" is indeed a fraud but which supported that fraud nonetheless) and the overwhelming bulk of the New Left chose the easy way out. They fell in with the rhetoric of the black careerist demagogues, labeling the social-democratic UFT leadership as simply "racist", and, washing their hands of the possibility of struggle in the union, concluded the union should be smashed. They urged teachers to cross the picket lines to break the strike. Many of the less political but well-meaning teachers, feeling torn between the supposed interests of their pupils and their union, did scab, thus discrediting themselves as union militants and negating the possibility of a radical caucus within the UFT which could have seriously challenged the conservative Shanker regime.

Race Polarization

The Shanker leadership had previously shown itself, in the classic tradition of American union bureaucrats, to be insensitive to the broader social issues of oppression and exploitation, limiting itself to a narrow "business union" approach. Goaded by the violent hostility of the demagogues who denoun-

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