

SPARTACIST EAST

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the white backlash and how to fight it!

NYC MAYORALTY ELECTION

The election of Mario Procaccino and John Marchi as candidates for the two major parties continues the swing to the right that began with the election of Reagan in California and gained momentum from Wallace's northern campaign. The increased appeal of the right to large sections of the white working class reflects hostility not only to the black movement and its ally, the radical student movement, but also a deep discontent with the liberal establishment and its policies.

The New Anti-Labor Liberalism

With the assassination of Robert Kennedy, John Lindsay became the leading spokesman of the "new politics". Originating in the civil rights movement, the "new politics" projected an alliance between the college-educated middle classes, presumably motivated by social idealism, and the poor and disadvantaged, primarily the Blacks and other ethnic minorities. Apart from foreign policy, the principal program of the "new politics" has aimed at improving the conditions of the black population through diverse forms of state action in the ghetto. Most black and liberal/radical supporters of the "new politics" are genuinely motivated by concern for the welfare of the black masses. However, far-sighted bourgeois politicians like Lindsay and Kennedy are primarily interested in creating a black middle class as a means of buying off the ghetto masses.

From its inception, the "new politics" has been explicitly hostile to the white working class and the organized labor movement. On the part of Blacks, this represents an understandable reaction to the racism of many white workers and the narrow self-centeredness of the trade union bureaucracy. On the part of student radicals, this anti-working class sentiment reflects not only a reaction to the conservatism of the labor movement, but also hostility to what many radicals regard as the "bourgeois life-style" of the white working

class. In its most conscious form, this rejection of the "American way of life" best represented by the Yippies permeates a large section of the radical movement.

A section of the ruling class, exemplified by Kennedy and Lindsay, has consciously sought to exploit the anti-labor sentiments of militant Blacks and college-bred left-liberals to weaken the power of the trade unions. No major American politician has been as aggressively anti-union as John Lindsay, who has continually sought to present the unions as the main enemy of the poor, particularly the black poor. Not only in the teachers strike, but also in the transit and garbage strikes, Lindsay has posed the strikers as being against "the community". This despite the fact that half the transit and garbage workers are black and bring as much money into the ghettos as the welfare budget.

Lindsay's hostility to the labor movement comes from the realization that, given the limits of capitalism, the resources needed to create a black middle class must come from the better-paid sections of the working class. Since the "new politicians" explicitly advocate a re-distribution of income against the mass of American workers (e. g. the Kerner Report) it is hardly surprising that right-wing politicians appear to many white workers as the defenders of their material interests.

Despite Lindsay's much touted concern for the black masses, the ghetto population has suffered under the Lindsay administration. The demands of the Vietnam war economy have actually worsened the economic condition of Blacks, as of all workers. And Lindsay has deliberately contributed to these attacks on the black masses' standard of living by allowing landlords to raise rents and by cutting back the hospital and education budgets and welfare standards. In fact, Lindsay's verbal concessions to black militancy and his appointment of black "leaders" to prestige posi-

tions are deliberately designed to disguise how his policies are hurting the black population. Faced with a serious challenge from the right, Lindsay has recently moved to strengthen his "law and order" image by putting a cop on his ticket and framing up the Black Panther 21.

And the Washed-Up Old Liberalism

If Marchi's victory was an important defeat for the new liberalism, Procaccino's victory over Wagner is perhaps an even more important defeat for the old liberalism, whose principal support comes from the trade union bureaucracy. Faced with growing right-wing sentiment among the rank and file, the trade union bureaucracy sought to counter this by going back to the personification of Democratic liberal "consensus" politics -- Robert F. Wagner. The anxiety of the labor bureaucracy is indicated by their unprecedented step of unanimously endorsing a candidate in the Democratic primary. Within the context of the present election, Wagner's candidacy meant the maintenance of the status quo, no significant concessions toward the black population and a crackdown on dissidents. Wagner's defeat means that a majority of white working-class New Yorkers cannot be won back to his 1950's-style liberalism bolstered by a "get-tough" policy toward the Blacks and student radicals.

The working class is in deep revolt against the liberal establishment (including the trade union bureaucracy) and this revolt is rooted in the economic conditions. Since the Vietnam war expanded in 1965, the combined effect of higher taxes and inflation has caused an actual decline in the real wages of factory workers. Despite an upsurge in strikes, marked by considerable rank and file militancy, the "business as usual" trade union leadership has completely failed to offset the deterioration of the workers' standard of living.

Apart from war economy conditions, there is a deeper reason for the working class' disillusionment with liberalism. On the whole, the improvement in the standard of living of industrial workers has completely failed to live up to the expectations created by liberal propaganda. In the past ten years, the real take-home pay of industrial workers has increased about 1.8% a year, or less than \$2.00 a week a year, at current prices. This is not exactly the kind of gain in keeping with "affluent society" rhetoric. Just as the failure of the liberals to live up to their democratic pretensions disillusioned many students and began the development of the New Left, so

the failure of the liberal establishment to come through with its promises of economic utopia has disillusioned many workers and laid the basis for a new right-wing movement.

The Failure of the Left

In part, the left is paying for its identification with liberalism. Whatever most student radicals may think of themselves, to most workers they represent the lunatic fringe of the Kennedy-Lindsay "new politics". And this view is far from baseless. There is considerable organizational rapport between the radicals and the new liberal establishment; for example, there has been a constant traffic of black spokesmen, such as the Rev. Galamison and Julian Bond, into government positions. The degree to which Eugene McCarthy roped in huge sections of the anti-war movement is another example. So was the Mailer campaign.

The organizational rapport between the mainstream of the American left and the new liberals is rooted in substantial ideological agreement. Both see the fundamental social conflict nationally and internationally as one between the haves and the have-nots, and both see this conflict as largely racial. Both see the basic conflict of our times as one between the rich white world and the oppressed colonial masses ("the wretched of the earth"). Thus the American Blacks are seen not as an integral part of the American class struggle, but as an oppressed colonial people, similar to the Vietnamese and Latin Americans. And both the liberals and the "third world" radicals see the essential solution as a re-distribution of income from the mass of Americans to the less fortunate. The position of the Rudd wing of SDS that white workers should give up their wage differential above Blacks (thereby greatly increasing capitalist profits!) is the logical extension of the recommendations of the Kerner Report and similar to the attempts of Lindsay, Kennedy and Co. to pump money into the ghetto by raising taxes on workers.

At a Black Panther rally the Sunday before the primary, Mark Rudd stated that if white workers didn't give up their racist and pro-imperialist attitudes they would be destroyed by the insurgent colonial masses (including American Blacks). In a certain sense, the vote was the white working class' answer to Rudd and his friends. They are not scared by the specter of Mark Rudd leading the Red Chinese army through the unregenerate sections of Queens. Insofar as the left has declared war on the mass of American workers in the name of the oppressed colonial peoples, it is understandable that many workers lean toward

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politicians who advocate smashing the left.

The American white working class can neither be shamed nor scared into opposing racism. And the result of attempting to shame or scare them in this way is all too obvious. This does not mean that nothing can be done about the increasing racism of white workers. It is common on the left to assign the job of combatting racism to white radicals, usually through some form of moralistic preaching. In fact, the ability of white radicals to affect the racial attitudes of white workers by argument is quite limited. The attitude of white workers toward the black movement is largely determined by the black movement itself. Where black militant groups have supported white workers in struggle they have generally met with a positive response. When SNCC supported the Kentucky miners and the Berkeley students supported the striking oil workers, these groups of workers in turn supported the others' struggles. In part, this was simple gratitude, but it also reflected a common hatred of the ruling class and the beginnings of a genuine sense of common interest. For the black liberation movement to intervene in labor struggles is, of course, not a sure-fire gimmick to overcome white racism but it remains the only way of countering the swing to the right among white workers.

It is necessary for radicals to raise demands which transcend race polarization by both uniting around workers common class interests and fighting the special oppression of black workers.

SWP's Insupportable Campaign

In past elections, the Spartacist League has given critical support to the Socialist Workers Party and other radical groups running on a formally socialist program, because we believe there is validity for class-based electoral activity (e. g., getting thrown off the ballot can serve to expose the "liberal" Lindsay). However, for the first time the Spartacist League has found it impossible to even critically support an SWP campaign, that of Paul Boutelle for Mayor, which is based on the anti-class "CPish" slogan of "Black and Puerto Rican control of the Black and Puerto Rican community". Were Boutelle running on the program of say Alain Krivine, candidate last May of the French section of the international grouping with which the SWP is associated--i. e., a generally correct program featuring demands to protect and extend the workers' gains in the general strike--his campaign would be supportable. Instead, the SWP is seeking to take advantage of and exacerbate the increasing racial division of the population and to capitalize on its opposition to the

teachers strike in favor of phony "community control". (The SWP candidate for City Council, Jeff Mackler, heads a teachers' group which advocated scabbing during the strike.) The effect of the SWP's mayoral campaign is to increase the racial and ethnic polarization within the working class, identify itself with ruling-class attempts to smash the trade union movement in the name of the ghetto masses, and strengthen reactionary forces within the white working class. Ironically, even this pathetic debasement of their former politics in the hope of picking up liberal support is undercut by the liberals' co-opting the SWP program. The Halstead anti-war campaign was destroyed by the McCarthy movement and the Peace and Freedom/Freedom and Peace melange.

For a Labor Mayoral Candidate

If there was ever an obvious need for a labor candidate to emphasize the fundamental unity of interest of all workers in the face of economic attacks, it is now. All three candidates are viciously anti-labor, and at a time when attacks on the living standards of all workers are almost an objective necessity for any capitalist politician. Whatever illusions black and Puerto Rican workers have about Lindsay, or Irish and Italian workers about Procaccino, the policies of all the candidates will be to attack the living standards of all sections of the working class--welfare recipients and employed workers, skilled and unskilled, black and white.

DOWN WITH REACTIONARY ETHNIC POLITICS!!! FOR A LABOR MAYOR!!!

Admissions. cont'd

Finally, workers with trained intellects will form a valuable nucleus around which will coalesce the means for the destruction of capitalism. The extension of such valuable tools as the ability to make abstractions, to combat the ideas of the bourgeoisie and to understand the modern world will be but the beginning for many workers. Many will want to pursue the search for knowledge far beyond the rote training of the University; many, forced back into the productive process by the necessities of capitalism, will be just that much more alienated and unwilling to work their long hours, and will be constantly unsatisfied and unsatisfiable workers.

Fighting for this demand means that workers and student radicals have a common struggle around which to unite and which would if won create a needed and useful gain for the working class at the expense of the bourgeoisie.

FOR FREE UNIVERSAL HIGHER EDUCATION WITH STIPEND!!!

OPEN ADMISSIONS

"One of the most important characteristics of every class which develops towards power is its struggle to assimilate and conquer ideologically the traditional intellectuals. Assimilations and conquests are the more rapid and effective the more the given social class puts forward simultaneously its own organic intellectuals."

Antonio Gramsci, The Modern Prince

The question which Gramsci, brilliant leading figure in the history of Italian communism has posed is the necessity for the working class to develop its own leadership. Essential to this is the need to develop a comprehensive world view and political program while at the same time gaining predominance-social and cultural-for that class over the old order. These ideas have important relevance to the struggle going on in the left today over the issue of "Open Admissions".

One major issue in the recent split in SDS has been the demand for "Open Admissions". Until recently, virtually the entire New Left uncritically supported the demands of Blacks for preferential admittance to universities, in keeping with the opportunist refusal of most of the radical movement to break from the tail-ending of petty-bourgeois Black Nationalism. A disastrous ethnic polarization was the inevitable result of a slogan which demanded that white skilled workers and middle-class families give up their aspirations for a better life in favor of the ghetto poor. Underlying this miasma is the carefully constructed myth of the liberal capitalist politicians--that the reason for black poverty and racial oppression is the supposedly opulent living standard and "privileges" of white working people. To pose a struggle for black "Open Admissions" is to split the working class from the outset instead of welding them together in a struggle against the bosses.

Recognizing this problem, the Worker-Student Alliance caucus of SDS has now overreacted, reversing their previous position. They lambast education and its usefulness to the working class, claiming college education is

bourgeois and will foster illusions among workers of individual, non-revolutionary solutions to their oppression. In response, some elements in RYM 2 have added poor whites to the demand, justifying their entire argument with the pitifully naive slogan that "the Universities must serve the people".

The WSA caucus--made up as it is of young middle-class students newly won to the side of the proletariat--perhaps lacks sufficient familiarity with actual workers to see the problem clearly. Marxists must fight any temptation to romantically idealize workers as they are, recognizing that it is not the present consciousness of workers which makes them the only revolutionary class, but their role in the process of production. If all workers, black and white, had the opportunity to get a college education, would they then be able to become "bourgeoisified" in fact? Of course not. Capitalism would continue to need its workers as workers.

In recent years there has arisen a strongly felt desire among many sections of the working class to get their children a better education. No doubt much of this flows directly from the cynical propaganda inspired by the liberal bourgeoisie that said "to get ahead get a good education" while tightly controlling access to keep the vast bulk of the working class out, hoping to skim off the brightest working-class youth to serve capitalism and perpetuate a myth. Nevertheless, the impulse is a vital attack on class privilege and must be supported and expanded into the demand for free universal higher education with stipend.

What is the University ?

The university system under capitalism is maintained in order to serve two main functions--the education of the ruling-class children and the creation of a layer of bureaucrats and technicians to administer capitalist society. One of the contradictions of capitalism, however, is that in order to serve these functions the university must transmit knowledge, and knowledge is a tool for the revolutionary as well. To argue that there are flaws and even dangers inherent in a college education is surely not sufficient grounds for denying revolutionary equalitarianism. Shouldn't workers have the same right to education as SDSers do? The WSA's sectarian position is similar to arguing that we should oppose women's suffrage because nobody should want to vote for the bourgeois parties.

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