

SPARTACIST-WEST

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Debacle at Chicago The Poverty of New Politics

The Labor Day New Politics convention in Chicago demonstrated in an overly dramatic fashion the utter bankruptcy of the New Left and with it considerable sections of the American socialist movement. This fact, long visible to the more thoughtful, was demonstrated so clearly by the disgraceful fiasco in Chicago that those who still retain illusions concerning the viability of the CNP movement must be written off as either hopelessly naive or corruptly cynical.

The Chicago conference, supposedly representing all elements in opposition to the Vietnam war, turned on two axes--political action and Black-white relations. In the former respect, the convention was paralyzed and unable to arrive at consistent, let alone correct, conclusions. With regard to Black-white relations, the convention degenerated into such a hysterical shambles that its performance cannot be fully analyzed except in terms of psychopathology.

PERMEATION OR CONFRONTATION

On political action the same basic choice faced the convention which has been facing the new protest movement since its birth--to work within the system for reform, or to begin the creation of an independent movement looking to the working class for revolutionary ends. The choice was permeation or confrontation. As might be expected from its past history, the CNP failed to come to grips with this issue, and by its failure, effectively opted for the permeationist approach for influencing the system within its own framework. Rarely has such an orgy of pompous and overblown revolutionary rhetoric led to such anti-revolutionary conclusions.

The political choice was posed concretely around electoral action. One pole was to seek the formation of a third party with a working class or socialist program. The

other pole was, in reality, the approach of seeking reforms through the Democratic Party, on the perfectly logical grounds that there alone was the power that could achieve reform. However, because of the specific context of the convention, the question was never clearly posed in this fundamental way. The Draperite ISC carried the ball for the third party position, but for what amounted to a third capitalist party, lacking a clear class line. On the right end of the CNP political spectrum were the Communist Party-DuBois Club forces, traditional spokesman for the Democratic party line. However, the total discrediting of the Johnson administration, which they had supported in 1964, and the pressures of the Vietnamese war, made it impossible for them to come out openly for a Democratic Party orientation. Instead they were obliged to push various compromise positions which could leave them free to support liberal and dove candidates where desirable. Thus the underlying polarity of the political action question was never really confronted by the convention, and its energies were spent on debating a series of middle positions which obscured the fundamental choice.

PHONY INDEPENDENCE

The common content of all these compromise positions was the attempt to build an outside base from which to exert pressure within the existing framework. This means using the form of independent politics to further the aims of permeationism. Most of the political action debate at the conference centered around the best tactical form through which this operation could be carried out. After the overwhelming defeat of their third capitalist party position the ISC joined with the CP-DuBois group to push the third ticket position, an avowedly temporary sort of independence reactive not to the socio-political system but to its products, the Vietnam war

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and the specific degradation of the Johnson administration. The CP-DuBois elements wanted this solution so that they could oppose the now insupportable Johnson and at the same time back local Democratic doves and liberals. The ISC was willing to accept the form of temporary independence out of conviction that formal independence is in itself a force driving these petty-bourgeois formations leftward.

Opposed to this coalition were the "local organizers", in many areas people whose dedication to actual local organizing was strictly secondary to their opposition to any form of independent electoral action. The final settlement was called "The California Compromise" and was a worthy product of the Scheer school of politics. Third tickets could be run where the local people wished to do so, and not run elsewhere. Unity was preserved by not taking a position on the most pressing question facing the convention.

If the Chicago convention's performance in the field of political action was a declaration of political bankruptcy, its approach to Black-white relations was a revolting spectacle of utter moral degeneration.

BLACK CAUCUS ULTIMATUM

The Black Caucus, from which Blacks unacceptable to the nationalist leadership were excluded, presented the convention with an ultimatum: to adopt the famous 13 points or face a nationalist-engineered split along color lines. The 13 points reflected the current nationalist leadership's counter-revolutionary stance, substituting absurd slogans of racial bitterness for any serious attempts to develop a programmatic attack on the system which oppresses the ghetto. Their empty rhetoric, entirely devoid of revolutionary content, passes for such in some left circles, but by proposing merely a Black cut-in on ghetto exploitation (Feinstein's pawnshop becomes Shabazz's, but it's still a pawnshop), it actually amounts to a diversion and betrayal of the Black people's struggle. Faced with the nationalist ultimatum, guilt-ridden white liberals and radicals went into a paroxysm of self-flagellation and hypocritical humility. Hardly believing a word of it, they passed the resolution by a 3 to 1 margin. They thus revealed an abysmal contempt for the Black position, making in most cases not even a token attempt to debate its merits, as well as a completely justified self-contempt for their own political position. All they wanted was to keep from be-

ing rejected by the Blacks, whom they have been screwing for decades with their liberalism, as they themselves admitted.

It is a measure of the decadence of the great majority of the white radicals at the convention that the only one of the 13 points to arouse serious opposition was one of the few essentially correct, if one-sided, points, condemning Zionist imperialism. To the irrational nationalists of the Black Caucus, the white radicals were able to oppose only--their own reactionary and sentimental ethnocentrism.

The Black Caucus' ultimatum served the good purpose of exposing these liberals and radicals for the hypocrites and incompetents that they are. The DuBois-CP group, for example, came out in a hastily-written (self-revealing in times of stress) leaflet for the patriotic approach.

DUBIOUS WINNER

The usual custom after one of these all-left jamborees is to tote up the score and decide which of the competing tendencies gained most and which lost most. However, given the depth of the debacle at Chicago, it is difficult to find a winner. If there was one, it was the CP, which was able temporarily to gain a preponderance of influence in the Black Caucus after the more militant elements split. They also were pleased at the defeat of a third party position, and achieved a compromise which facilitated their double game of opposition to Johnson and support for Democratic doves. Throughout the conference, they demonstrated that if they could not dominate, they could, in the absence of strong and effective forces to their left, at least exercise veto power.

For the ISC, the conference was a disaster. At the subsequent San Luis Obispo conference, their parity offer was rejected by the state Black Caucus, and this rejection in turn led to a subsequent split in the white radical ranks. The dissident elements went off to demonstrate their militancy by attending the CDC conference. This leaves the ISC virtually alone holding the Peace-and-Freedom bag.

All this sectarian interplay, however, is of secondary importance. The major significance of the Chicago conference was the death of the myth of the American New Left. The New Left was a bright, new movement, free of the old hangups and full of imaginative know-how. Chicago revealed its total incompetence. The New Left was a potent new source of power and youthful vigor on

What is the Spartacist League?

The Spartacist League is a revolutionary Marxist organization which seeks, in the U.S. context, to contribute to the fundamental task of our epoch, the building of viable and effective sections of that international party which can lead the working-class to its own emancipation and hence that of all the oppressed. Our goal is workers' power, the socialist revolution in the United States.

The history of socialist organizations in the U.S. as elsewhere is one of growth and degeneration. Many groups have, for a time, carried the banner of Marxist revolution in our society. From the Socialist Labor Party of the late 19th century, through the Debsian Socialist Party of before the first World War, the Communist Party of the twenties, and the Socialist Workers Party of the thirties and forties, American Marxists have maintained the integrity and continuity of the revolutionary movement.

WORKING-CLASS POLITICS

That which has distinguished all these in their revolutionary periods is a principled and consistent dedication to the working-class as the necessary and decisive instrument of social emancipation. Our dedication to this proposition is not based on romantic illusions concerning the present political, social, or moral attitudes of dominant sections of the working-class, but rather by a Marxist and scientific insight into the objective social forces which make it possible for the working-class and only the working-class to play this revolutionary role. This attitude on our part is not reserved for Sunday platform speeches, but informs all our analyses of current political questions and our tactical approach to their resolution.

The original impetus which gave rise to the formation of the nucleus of the Spartacist League within its parent organization, the SWP, between 1961 and 1963, was the actual abandonment of this position by the SWP under the pressures of long isolation from popular mass movements, disappointment at the meagre fruits of the crisis of the CP's in 1956-57, and an increasingly desperate desire to find, in the face of working-class quiescence, a non-proletarian shortcut to the revolution. The achievements of the Castro regime in Cuba and its struggle with U.S. imperialism led the SWP to a world view which sees the peasantry of the colonial and semi-colonial worlds, led by a petty-bour-

geois democratic revolutionary grouping like Castro's, able to carry out the proletarian revolution without or even against the proletariat. We, on the contrary, rejected the concept that a regime and social order in which the working class has no power, no party, no independent organs of expression and combat could represent workers' power, or be a step on the road to socialism. By calling for the organization of working class struggle against the regimes of the Castro's and the Ben Bella's, the heroes of the hour for the pseudo-revolutionaries, we placed ourselves in irrevocable opposition to all tendencies leaning on these regimes for political and ideological support, and laid the basis for our own independent existence.

The lessons learned and the conclusions drawn from this period have also saved us from what is today the growing suction of the Maoist whirlpool, where the petty-bourgeois enthusiasm of the Chinese Red Guards, based on a potentially privileged student youth acting not only against the more conservative elements within the bureaucracy, but much more fundamentally against the Chinese working-class itself, has drawn many militant elements into a political dead-end.

BLACK POWER

It is our attitude to the working-class which determines our stand on all the crucial issues of the day, including the complex question of the ghetto revolts and the "Black Power" slogan. Because we see the uprisings as an elementary striking out by the most oppressed section of the working class against oppression which is objectively class in basis, we support these outbursts, while at the same time recognizing that their lack of organization and defined goals dooms them to failure, and creates a potential for the destruction of the most militant elements in the Black community. The popularization of the Black Power slogan represents the repudiation of tokenism, liberal tutelage, reliance on the federal government, and on the non-violent philosophy of moral suasion. It therefore should be supported by all revolutionaries. However, this slogan arises at a time when the white working-class as a whole is quiescent and in a mood to go along with the status quo. This gives rise to a tendency by the most militant Black elements to slice the social cake not along the fundamental class lines, but along the apparent lines of ac-

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tion, the line of color. Those Black spokesmen who encourage this tendency and give expression to it, while accurately reflecting the mood of the most militant elements in the ghetto, actually present the ruling class in this country with an invaluable gift, facilitating their task of utilizing the latent or overt racism endemic in all sections of the U.S. population to turn the white working class into the active enemy of the Black movement, thus subverting the interests of both groups for the benefit of their common oppressors. The "all blacks against all whites" approach is not leadership but Spokesmanship, for . . . "A real leader doesn't adjust his tactic in accordance with the attitude of the masses, but in accordance with the development of history."

MID-EAST CONFLICT

It is this same orientation toward the working class and its historical role which determines our attitude toward such events as the Near-East conflict, where rejecting both the sentimental ethno-centrism of the Zionist elements and their sympathizers, and also the Maoist-Nasserite approach which sees the bourgeois nationalists of the Arab states leading an anti-imperialist revolution, we have called for no confidence in either side, and for the transformation of the national war into a civil war. Only the joint efforts of the working classes of the Arab states and Israel to overthrow their bourgeois leaderships and to create a workers' republic in the Near East can end the conflict in the Near East.

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the political scene. Chicago revealed its political impotence. Above all, the New Left represented honesty, integrity, telling it like it is, the spirit of the Berkeley FSM, in contrast to the tarnished reputation of the old left. Chicago's action toward the Black Caucus and the 13 points revealed its cynical moral hypocrisy. The New Left will linger on. After all, are not the C.P. and even the SLP still with us? The myth, however, is dead. For those who substitute classlessness for class, empiricism for Marxism, anti-intellectualism for the science of society, who reject history and the relevance if not the very reality of anything that occurred before they were born, the chickens came home to roost at Chicago. The task of building a genuine and viable left in this country remains before us.

In the peace movement, we are opposed to the demonstration tactics favored by both the CP and SWP, typified by such silly petty-bourgeois pacifist gimmicks as the Peace Torch Marathon. Not bigger and better demonstrations, but only the mobilization of the working-class can end the war. We therefore have propagandized within the peace movement for an approach which would have as its aim a one-day work stoppage in a significant number of shops and factories throughout the country. We feel that the setting of such a goal would force the present petty-bourgeois movement to orient itself in reality toward the working-class, not just as another pressure group like ministers and doctors, but as the one decisive social sector.

WE WON'T GO?

On the draft, we call not for individualist grandstand plays along the "We Won't Go" style, resulting only in the imprisonment or isolation of anti-war militants, but for the cool but militant exercise of their constitutional rights within the armed forces by drafted anti-war youths. We commend the example of Pvt. Petrick to all who are serious about anti-military activity.

Our position on the unique role of the working-class in no way implies a denigration or neglect of the function of the revolutionary sections of the intelligentsia, students, and the like. Indeed, it is only to the extent that such elements bring clearly developed socialist ideology into the working-class that that class can play its historical role. Thus, the fight for ideology, for political clarity among socialist intelligentsia, far from being a sideshow, is an essential link in the process of the proletarian revolution. However, we say that it is only within the working-class that the ideology developed by the revolutionary intelligentsia can take on flesh and muscle, and be objectified as actual power.

If you are interested in learning more about an organization like ours, or discussing any of these points in further detail, write to PO Box 852, Berkeley, California, 94701, or call TH 8-7369.

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