

SPARTACIST-WEST

Published occasionally by the Bay Area Spartacist League

Number 16



27 June 1969

The Working Class and the P A R K

There are a large number of people who would have us believe that the turmoil around the campuses is the work of spoiled, irresponsible students and hippies, who should have felt more of the lash from their parents, and who should be punished like children now for every single infraction of "law and order."

Despite the widespread support for this "law and order" line, fortunately, most people are aware that there are real issues behind the disturbances and that large scale discontent is not the work of a few malcontented idiots but is a sign of something wrong in society.

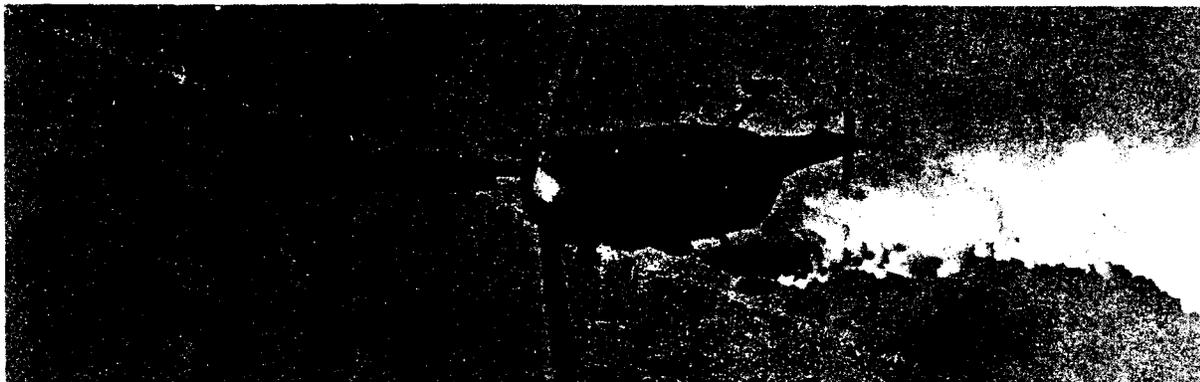
A few brief facts about the park issue will make this more understandable. We all know that legal title to the peoples' park plot belongs to the University of California, but how many know how this came to pass? What is behind this "legal" title? Apparently there is a plan (a much more powerful "plot" than any students or hippies are capable of) on the part of the Board of Regents of U.C. and the Berkeley campus administration to destroy the south campus community. This is a political decision, taken because this mere handful of powerful men—none of whom were ever elect-

ed by the people and none of whom can ever be recalled from office—felt that the south campus community is a source of revolutionary activity and therefore a threat to society (which really means a threat to the power of this handful of powerful men and those who appointed them).

This decision was made at a closed meeting of the Board of Regents (all meetings of supposedly "public" bodies should be open to the public!), about which reports have filtered down to the "common" folk who make up the vast majority of the University community! Anyone who doesn't want to believe this, however, can look at the public record of the reason for the University purchase of the plot which is now peoples' park: plainly stated, it was to remove undesirable elements! This was accomplished by simply tearing down the buildings that were there; this was done long before the University had any idea of what it wanted to use the land for.

THE UNIVERSITY

Speaking of the University and its plans for the park land, just who is "the University" about which everyone speaks, and who is it who wants the park and who doesn't? Is the University the Board of Regents? The Board of Regents is a small group of men who are supposed to be administering the University in the name of the people of California. They are appointed by the governor, but they are by no means representative of the people of California. They are very much like the board of



Helicopter sprays nausea gas on people who were trapped by national guard in Sproul Plaza

directors of a large corporation, and most of their members come from the executives of the largest corporations in the state, such as Bank of America, the Hearst empire (publishing) and Safeway. They run the University in the interests of these large corporations and capitalists who own them, not in the interests of the people.

Back on the campus, the students and faculty are overwhelmingly for the park and against another unnecessary soccer field or any other phony "use" for the land that the chancellor has been able to come up with. The student vote which was held on this issue had a larger turnout than any previous student vote on anything, and the majority in favor of the park was 6 to 1, a greater majority than has ever been attained before for anything. The Berkeley faculty has also voted in favor of the park.

Back to the south campus community: who does it threaten, and why? Clearly there is no threat to the students or faculty, since these groups are for the park and against those who want to destroy this community. Is there then a threat to the south campus community? Reagan has used a petition signed by about forty people to prove that the local community doesn't want the park; however, a survey by the university found 85% of the local residents in favor of the park. The only threat is obviously to the Board of Regents and the capitalist ruling class which they represent. The threat is that the students will stir up too much noise about racism both in the University and in the surrounding community, that they will hold protest demonstrations against the war, that they will refuse to attend classes and other such "dangerous" pressure tactics, and that they will spend too much time aiding strikes of workers in the Bay Area such as in the recent strike of oil workers in Richmond.

WORKERS' INTERESTS

Working people should take the side of the students and park people in this issue, not because the park is a way to improve the working man's condition, but because the students' and park peoples' enemy is the workers' enemy, and if this enemy wins this battle, he will have legitimized his tactics and thus will be all the more able to achieve his real aim, which is to move against the working people by attacking the unions and lowering living standards for the sake of improving and maintaining profits.

The policy that the Board of Regents has set for itself does benefit somebody: the landlords who own buildings in the campus community. They are happy because they can charge outrageously high rents for housing which is in shorter and shorter supply as "the

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University" buys up buildings. The rest of the south campus community is threatened with extinction, and this is not just hippies and dope addicts. There are many students, mainly the poorer ones, and small home owners in this community. When were they ever consulted about this "clean-up" plan?

Despite the militancy, numbers and revolutionary fervor surrounding the peoples' park issue, the left has been confused and hesitant, and the leadership effectively passed to liberals. Thus the big Memorial Day march, which could have easily pulled down the fence or a section of it, was dominated by monitors doing the bidding of the cops and flower-power "love thy enemy" theory. Many radicals wondered how this movement, which started so strong and in which a brother was killed, could have been so effectively defused.

CONTRADICTORY ISSUE

A good part of the answer lies in the nature of the original issue. On the one hand, it was very apolitical and consistent with "hippie" thinking to fight the ruling class by simply planting flowers on a vacant lot. On the other hand, the park met a very real need of the south campus community and challenged in the most immediate and direct way the private property upon which capitalist society is based, making it very political and revolutionary at the same time.

The problem is that as a revolutionary tactic it was a hopeless adventure: to win would mean bringing down the whole system right now. On the other hand, since it was a fight over just one plot of land, it was easy to see how some deal could be made by which part or all of the park would be preserved (perhaps by a "small" sacrifice of the spontaneous planning that went into it at first) while the system, including the University's campaign to buy up south campus property, would remain untouched. It was thus a very real and important struggle of a large community of people, and, superficially at least, very revolutionary, but one which was easily co-opted by the liberals. Much of its power came, of course, simply as a reaction to the murderous brutal-

ity of the cops and the national guard occupation.

Some ostensible Marxist-Leninist organizations, like PL and the Workers League, "solved" this complex question for themselves very neatly by simply rejecting the whole thing as a stupid, hippy adventure which could never reach the working class. This sectarian, formalistic position ignores the very real struggle out of which the park issue emerged and the need of Marxists to intervene in such struggles to educate and recruit cadre to build a revolutionary vanguard party. Lenin strongly warned against precisely this kind of spontaneous, adventurous struggle against a well-organized and armed system, but he also pointed out the need for Marxists to intervene in all the struggles of the people for the purpose of redirecting and uniting them. We might also point out in passing that the Workers League is in international solidarity with the only tendency in France—the Lambertist O.C.I. —which denounced and pulled out of the student barricade struggles in the Latin Quarter only days before the great general strike of last May.



The approach of the park people to the National Guard was encouraging. It showed that the movement sees that the guardsmen are oppressed working and middle-class individuals who should be won over, and it showed that favorable responses can be obtained. It also showed something else, however: that the movement is in no way powerful enough at this stage to bring about a mass response from the armed forces of the state such as would be required in a revolution.

Only a well organized working-class movement would be able to do this. Guardsmen and troops will not throw down their weapons and go over to the people's side unless they are really convinced that the people are powerful, and that means power to take over the whole society and prevent the old rulers from disciplining them as "deserters" or "traitors."

Only the workers can do this.

GENERAL STRIKE

A general strike would have been the way to accomplish this in the recent Berkeley occupation. The movement should have raised the demand for a general strike, and attempted to convince the workers of their interest in opposing the occupation in their way. One way would have been to call a demonstration for a strike at the local labor temple in Oakland. This would focus attention on the do-nothing bureaucrats who run the workers' unions and would have served as a basis for alliance with the growing ranks of militants in the unions who are working to toss these bureaucrats out.

The drastic increase in police power and police repression against the student movement, and most severely against the Black Panthers, is merely a prelude to greater things to come. The workers and the workers organizations are what the ruling class is really after. They are preparing to crush the workers' attempts to prevent drastic cutbacks in their standards of living, job conditions, etc., which will soon be necessary for the capitalists. Workers must be able to see this before it is too late. They should form defense guards to protect their meetings, unions and picket lines. They should fight to restore their unions to the militant instruments of struggle that they should be, instead of platforms for wheeler-dealers that they are now. They should also build a party of their own, a Freedom-Labor Party based on the unions and controlled by the rank-and-file. Militant students and park people would do well to heed this same warning, since without a militant workers movement, their interests will remain subordinate to the whim of the capitalist system.

1945: SAIGON INSURRECTION,

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In areas where the popular forces were in control Frenchmen were shot: the cruelest functionaries of the old regime, the hated policemen (known by the population to have participated in tortures) are sought out, killed and thrown into the arroyos (canals). Racism, fed by 80 years of imperialist domination and by the contempt of the white men for the yellow men, leaves its imprint on the violence of the masses, which erupts at moments like these. The massacre of a hundred French civilians at the Heraud Estate at Tan-dinh was a painful reminder of this fact. The threats of certain French colons to 'skin the Annamites alive to make leather sandals' boomeranged back against all whites.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Document of Betrayal

1945: THE SAIGON INSURRECTION

The following is the first half of an article entitled, "1945: The Saigon Insurrection", which first appeared in Informations, Correspondance Ouvrieres in France and later in the 27 October 1968 issue of Solidarity, an English anarchist paper. It was written by a militant who participated in the events, and is signed "VAN."

It documents the true nature of Ho Chi Minh's stalinist movement, and revolutionaries would do well to examine this important chapter of Vietnamese history more closely. Revolutions are not made by those who shout "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" loudest; rather, as the introduction in Solidarity concludes, "...in the long run, 'only the truth is revolutionary'."

We have made minor changes in tense and spelling. The second half of the article will be printed in the next issue of Spartacist-West. To be sure of getting your copy, subscribe now.

One of the main concerns of the Vietminh Committee was to ensure its 'recognition' by the British authorities as a de facto government. To this end the Committee did everything it could to show its strength and to demonstrate its ability to 'maintain order.'

Through its press it ordered the dissolution of all the partisan groups that had played an active role in the struggle against Japanese imperialism. All weapons were to be handed over to the Vietminh's own police force. The Vietminh's militia, known as the 'Republican Guard' (cong hoa-ve-binh) and their police thus had a legal monopoly in the carrying of weapons. The groups aimed at by this decision were not only certain religious sects (the Cao-dai and Hoa-hao) but also the workers' committees, several of which were armed. Also aimed at were the Vanguard Youth Organization and a number of 'self-defense groups,' many based on factories or plantations. These stood on a very radical social program but were not prepared to accept complete control by the Viet-minh.

The Trotskyists of the Spark (Tia Sang) group, anticipating an imminent and inevitable confrontation with the military forces of Britain and France, started to distribute leaflets calling for the formation of Popular Action Committees (to-chuc-uy-ban hanh-dong) and for arming of the people. They advocated the creation of a popular assembly, to be the organ of struggle for national independence. Workers of the big Tramway Depot of Go-vap (about 8 km from Saigon), helped by Tia-sang militants, organized a workers' militia. The militia issued an appeal to the workers of the Saigon-Cholon area to arm themselves and to prepare for the inevitable struggle against the forces of British and French imperialism.

By now General Gracy had proclaimed martial law. Before it abandoned the center of Saigon, the Vietminh Committee plastered the walls with posters, inviting the population to 'disperse into the countryside,' to 'avoid confrontation' and to 'remain calm, because the

Committee hopes to open negotiations.' A sense of insecurity hovered over the town, which slowly drained itself of part of its Vietnamese population. During the night of September 22-23, 1945, French troops, supported reoccupied various police stations, the Post Office, the Central Bank and the Town Hall. They met no immediate resistance.

The news spread like a trail of gunpowder and triggered off a veritable insurrection in working-class districts of the town. Explosions were heard in widely separate areas. The movement had broken out without anyone giving any kind of directive. The Vietminh had certainly not called for insurrection. Their one preoccupation was 'law and order' and their own accession to power--following 'negotiations.' In all the outlying suburbs, trees were cut down, cars and lorries turned over, primitive furniture piled up in the streets. Elementary barricades were set up to prevent the passage of French and Gurkha patrols and the taking up of strategic positions by the imperialist forces.

The center of the town rapidly fell under the control of French and Japanese troops, supported by Gurkhas. But the poorer suburbs (Khanh-hoi, Cau-kho, Ban-co, Phu-nhuan, Tan-dinh and Thi-nghe) are firmly in the hands of the rebels. The rebels themselves are not a homogeneous lot. Among them are members of the Popular Committees, of the Vanguard Youth, Cao-daists, and even 'off the line' groups of stalinist 'Republican Guards.'

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