

Report on Oakland United Front Conference

On July 18, the three-day United Front Against Fascism conference convened in Oakland. The conference included speeches on how various groups should oppose 'fascism', and on 'community control (decentralization) of police'.

Called by the Black Panther Party (BPP) along with the 'Communist' Party (CP), the conference was endorsed by various liberal and 'radical' groups and individuals.

Hardly a conference, the meeting was really one long lecture. The same theme was repeated over and over. Throughout, disagreements - even questions - were squashed. 5000 attended the first night, but that soon dwindled to one-tenth the number, only reaching 2000 briefly at the very end. Most delegates were white students; perhaps 10% were Black. Many delegates left disgusted, and most thought the conference had failed. They found speeches thoroughly irrelevant to actual struggles and were turned off by the attempt by 'Revolutionary' Youth Movement (RYM) and Panther goon squads to intimidate disagreement away. In general, people disagreed with inviting ruling class agents - Black cops, 'liberal' Democrats and the anti-people 'Communist' Party - while pro-working class people, including SDS and PL members, were barred. Most important: many rejected the political strategy of the conference.

The first session included speeches by CPer Herbert Aptheker (who dominated the evening), Bobby Seale (BPP) and Carleton Goodlett, millionaire editor of a Black 'community' newspaper, the Sun Reporter.

They all said the same thing: We've got to fight 'fascism' which is the rule of 'avaricious businessmen', 'lying politicians', and, above all, 'fascist pig police'. The key is uniting all 'anti-fascist elements' including those in the ruling class (?). The main obstacle is the centralized police structure. The main task is to vote ourselves control over the cops. Kick out the old pigs and elect new ones who will be stationed in the neighborhoods they 'protect'.

CP Liberalism

This line of thought -- which appeals to people's fear of current repression and is defended by accusing its opponents of wanting to see the Panthers wiped out -- is not a new strategy. Many SDSers are familiar with it as the politics of the 'Communist' Party. Most of us have rejected the CP -- in fact we figured it was pretty much dead and gone. But at the conference, it became clear we've been dead wrong! The CP represents a very real threat to the growing, militant, anti-racist, anti-imperialist movement. The CP has developed a close alliance with the top BPP leaders. With that as a cover, the CP tried to capture the movement at the Oakland conference. The conference was a flop. But the bid will continue, and, especially with the BPP's national leadership as allies, the CP shouldn't be underestimated.

Backing 'Liberal' Imperialism

The CP sees a split in the ruling class between 'liberals' and 'reactionaries' as key. The 'reactionaries' are vicious elements who want fascism while the 'liberals' oppose it. They're so opposed, in fact, that they will possibly ally with the people -- from whom they've squeezed out a fortune! The CP therefore pushes a strategy of backing ruling class 'liberals' against the ever-present threat of a takeover by the 'ultra-right'. Thus the CP has supported and worked for one 'lesser-of-two-evils' candidate after another. JFK, LBJ, Lindsay, McCarthy -- the CP splits hairs to back the 'good guy'. Thus, in 1965, the CP's People's World (1/30/65) claimed: 'Pres. Johnson's concern with the nation's domestic well-being is unquestionably genuine.'

Every liberal illusion that in practice holds people back from fighting imperialism, every liberal lie is pushed by the CP -- from peaceful coexistence internationally, to voting in fundamental change at home.

Vote for LBJ or else Goldwater will get you! Back Reuther -- he's not as bad as the KKK, right? And Lindsay -- would you rather be clubbed to death in the subway by roving fascists?

But LBJ delivered on Goldwater's promise to bomb North Vietnam. JFK had planned that bombing several years before. And it was the great bulwark against fascism, Mayor Stokes, who called out cops and National Guard against Black working people in Cleveland. And labor's 'friend' Reuther has been breaking strikes and crushing every rank-and-file movement in the UAW for years! And McCarthy admitted he was just trying to 'get the kids off the streets'. (As another of his activities, he lobbies for drug companies -- or perhaps they are also 'good imperialists'?) It was RFK who okayed the 'ultra-extreme-right-wing' wire taps that were placed on various Black leaders' phones. And the Poverty Agency which the CP helps build all over the country -- it's controlled by the same government which sends out similar pacification teams to defeat the South Vietnamese people!

There is ONE ruling class! To be sure, the bourgeoisie has certain internal differences. But these are a matter of timing and style. Reagan uses sweet talk, and violence. So did LBJ. (Remember Watts!) Same with Lindsay (a 'good guy'), and the 'somewhat bad' Nixon. (How does he differ from the last 20 presidents?) Is Carleton Goodlett, a leader of the CP-BPP 'United Front', any better than any other newspaper boss? Maybe the cops and scabs he used for union-busting in his 'community' newspaper were also 'anti-fascist elements'?

Which politicians are not 'demagogic liars'? Which businessmen are not 'avaricious' bastards? And perhaps we should say, then, that all those college presidents who attacked SDS with cops are 'good' now that they've told Congress not to pass special laws but rather 'let the schools handle their own'. Are they now anti-fascist? Are cops controlled by 'good' poli-

ticians (Stokes, Lindsay) anti-fascist, and those sent out by 'bad guys' (Reagan) not similarly tainted?

Differences exist. But they are not over WHETHER OR NOT to crush the people's sharpening fight against the tightening capitalist screw, the daily worsening of conditions which are faced by most people -- especially Black working people. How can the people ally with those who feed on the people?

What the rulers quibble over is: How should we use which tactics at what time? Besides that, their 'differences' are strictly phony. Depending on who they are trying to con, they use a different approach. Their act creates the illusion of choice. Millions are coming to see through this farce, despite the CP's best efforts to paint the circus tent red so as to preserve the illusion.

BPP leaders have been moving closer to the CP for months. One example is the increasing influence of CP-line lawyer Charles Garry, who heads Huey Newton's legal defense. The Panthers once said that 'unless Huey goes free, the sky's the limit'. Everyone understood this pretty clearly as, let us say, a call for collective militancy. But Garry gave the slogan a new interpretation. The sky, he noted, is the Supreme Court! Thus, the people don't need mass struggles, they don't need rebellions. Some 'good guys' on the Supreme Court will save us from 'bad' local pigs. Who does Garry think is giving these local pigs their orders?

The BPP leaders didn't fire Garry for his POLITICAL ATTACK on their previous stand. Instead he was called a 'Lenin of the courtroom' and made a veritable BPP spokesman!

Good Pigs?

'The only good pig is a dead one,' used to be the BPP slogan. They argued that Black people can't depend on ANY member of the ruling class, that they must defend themselves, in a militant way, based on class understanding. This approach produced great respect among Black people around the country. Huey Newton was a hero to millions.

But now, BPP national leader Bobby Seale says: 'Community control of the police itself is in fact directed to the ballot. The community control of the police concept is related to a petition that is to be circulated in every city. You get a percentage of the voters in that city to sign the petition, thereby it automatically goes on the ballot where the masses of the people themselves can in fact vote to decentralize police departments. Naturally electoral politics is going to be affected by the conference because the conference is going to deal with whether or not it's going to support politicians who do not stand up against fascism. This will be the machinery all across the country to let the politicians know that we will not vote for you and we will in fact work for that politician who works for community control of police and who stands for the end of fascism and the other points that come out of the conference.' (Black Panther, 7/12/69, emphasis added)

In other words, the only good pigs are... pigs the people 'control'? From advocating relying only on the people - and this idea is really the essence of the countless Black rebellions - the BPP leaders have adopted the CP stand: rely on politicians who back liberal stands.

Is Fascism Coming?

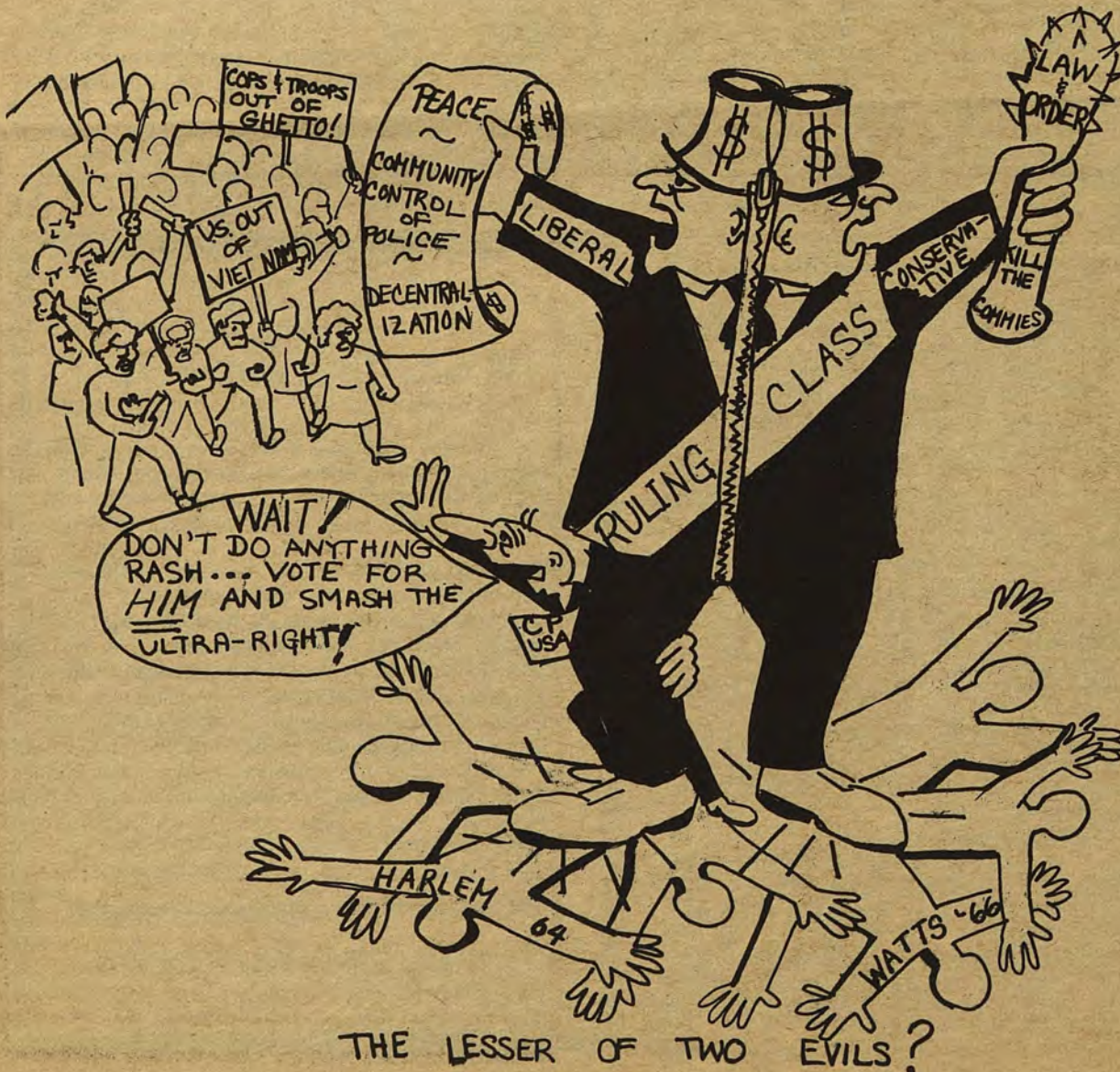
What is fascism? What are we supposed to unite against? Without attempting a full discussion - impossible in this article - some things should be talked about.

Fascism does NOT mean a change in who runs things. The bourgeoisie owned the industries, banks, etc., in Germany in 1923, when bourgeois democracy existed, and they controlled the government -- it was THEIR government! That remained the same in 1933, under fascism! Fascism meant that the terror that is ALWAYS present under bourgeois rule was far more open. No opposition of any serious kind was permitted. So-called bourgeois freedoms (speech, press, etc.) were dropped. The soft covering was removed from the bourgeoisie's hob-nailed boot.

In terms of the social base of the regime, the rulers dropped all appeals to 'liberal' ideology and openly cultivated everything decadent, built on every reactionary tendency among the less clear sections of the middle class and to a lesser extent, among workers.

Two things are key. First, this was not a matter of a few 'ultra-rightists' taking over. The big bourgeoisie backed fascism! They backed it because it was ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY to them. There was a great and increasing danger of communist revolution. That takes us to the second key point: millions of workers actively backed reds. The ruling class instituted fascism for the same reason they sent troops to the Congo. To stay in business.

Now, this is not the case right now in the U.S. Black and white workers have not been organized into



United Front Conference cont. from p. 4

a gigantic force by communist or other anti-imperialist leaders. Most of the titanic class struggle that's going on - especially Black rebellions and wildcat strikes - is not linked with left-wing leadership.

The ruling class always dislikes fascism. They would much prefer to rule with a cover of liberal illusion. (This, of course, allows them to use force -- the point is, the force is better disguised, less likely to be seen as the weapon of a class.) Fascism is only introduced as a desperate measure, when bourgeois democracy just won't work any more!

Most people in the U.S. still accept liberalism to some extent -- whether it's the liberalism of Kennedy, McCarthy, Humphrey, or just lots of liberal ideas. Despite many doubts, despite a context of sharpening class struggle, there is not yet a massive revolutionary awareness among millions of people. So the bourgeoisie DOES NOT NEED FASCISM. We are not such a threat yet.

'Nice Cop - Nasty Cop'

There's a lot of repression. Many - especially BPP members - are being attacked sharply by the rulers, both 'liberal' and otherwise. We must defend these people! But this repression - while serious - is not a new thing in U.S. history. As black and white workers know too well, in the 1930s, hundreds were killed and wounded in single strikes -- for example, the infamous Republic Steel massacre. In the Palmer Raids, many were beaten and deported to countries where they were jailed or shot. The rulers have always used the stick to defeat movements.

So repression exists. It has two uses. One is to simply crush the people's movements. A subtler function is at this time probably more important. That function is to defuse the movement's politics. The rulers figure that after a good beating with the stick, the carrot will look more attractive.

That's an old cop trick. Two cops interrogate someone. The first - 'Bad Cop' - punches the prisoner around, cursing him, turns on the bright lights. The works. After awhile, the second - 'Nice Cop' - enters. 'Cut it out,' he warns 'Mean Cop'. 'Don't treat this guy like that! Put that goddam rubber hose away!' 'Bad Cop' sulks out. Offering the prisoner a cigarette, 'Nice Cop' comforts him. Then he offers some friendly advice. 'You'd better come clean. There's no telling what 'Bad Cop' is apt to do!'

That is essentially what was done to the BPP. When Huey called for armed self-defense, the rulers

pulled out the stick. Faced with what they conceived as unbeatable power, the leaders have dropped their militant stand and adopted the CP's approach. (They took the advice of 'Nice Cop'.)

The irony is tragic. The BPP was faced with repression -- much of it from 'liberal' imperialists. The BPP leaders took the line that fascism (which the CP convinced them is the 'ultra-right') is coming. Then they switched their attack from the BOURGEOISIE to the 'RIGHT-WING'. Now they're pushing the politics of reforming a PART of the state, which the bourgeoisie controls COMPLETELY! Having once stressed the need to fight the rulers, they now wish to ally with the (huge) 'liberal' section of the bourgeoisie -- to reform a group (the police) who they once said were only good when dead! Once leading the most militant large group of Black people, they are now allied with the most reactionary force on the 'left' -- the CP!

The CP Bears Poisonous Gifts

The BPP was vulnerable to this 'make-them-change-their-politics' attack because of an internal weakness. BPP leaders lacked faith in working people's ability to defend revolutionaries. That alone can explain why they turned to the CP. The CP is experienced and well organized, with lots of money, contacts, and big-time lawyers. The CP was quick to take advantage of the BPP leaders' position and their lack of faith in the people, while the BPP national leadership compromised militant politics to 'meet the urgency' of the situation. As the strings attached to the CP's aid have tightened, as the CP has won the BPP national leaders more and more to their theories, they have found themselves in a position to gain far greater influence in the movement. So we have the fruits of the alliance: the Oakland conference. From their position of strength (they hope), the CP is trying to force 'community control of police' and 'oppose the ultra-right' on the entire movement. THIS MUST BE DEFEATED!

Rely on the People!

This sort of thing really happens often -- on a smaller scale. That is, in many struggles, we water down our politics under the threat of repression. But, as in all cases, the people CAN in fact be relied on! This can be seen from past experience of the BPP. The key reason Huey Newton is alive is that the power structure knew that sending him to the chair

would mean much of the nation would explode in 'costly' rebellions. The threat of the people's fierce anger - not Garry's wheeling-dealing - saved Huey! Relying on the CP, on pig reform, and on ruling class liberals will kill ANY anti-imperialist movement, whether an SDS chapter or the BPP!

RYM Shares Bad Politics

'Revolutionary' Youth Movement (RYM) leaders (that is, the group that is trying to split SDS) like to rhetorically denounce retreat and reliance on lib-

cont. p. 6

Build New Left Notes

New Left Notes is the news organ and political journal of SDS. It should be a place to struggle for good ideas through shared experiences and criticisms. It should serve the movement. It is your paper. Send:

- * Articles: especially on the concrete struggles that we should know about and learn from
- * Photographs: include with articles whenever possible, but also send in with caption or short explanation
- * Cartoons, drawings, etc.: help fight bourgeois art
- * Posters, Leaflets: can be very helpful to other chapters
- * Clippings from the Bourgeois Press: newspaper and magazine articles can be revealing
- * Work-In: anecdotes, information, and analysis from your own experience are good for NLN as well as possible contributions to future Work-In pamphlet
- * Letters: anecdotes, comments, disagreements, criticisms, questions, etc. We learn through criticisms, we change through struggle. Letters are a vital part of building political struggle in NLN.

All should be sent to the national headquarters at 173a Massachusetts Avenue, second floor, Boston, Mass. 02115; phone, 617/267-6152. Always include your phone number as well as return address. Send in articles as early as possible to make any necessary editorial consultation as easy and cheap as possible. Most articles should be three double spaced pages (typewritten).

eralism. But practice belies their rhetoric!

Garry said: 'On May 1, we believe that we are going to have enough legal arguments to show that the action of the state of California in denying bail is a denial of due process of law, and we believe that Judge Zirpoli has the courage to be able to grant this bail, if we can persuade him.' The argument - given favorable coverage in the Black Panther - again backs 'good guy' rulers instead of attacking the government as the people's ENEMY! It relies on 'liberal' servants of the bourgeoisie instead of the people!

So does RYM! Their reaction to the repression is to recede and protect themselves! Putting themselves first, they have retreated into isolated, sectarian politics and relied on 'their own' for protection when attacked, making wild gestures at false security. This is non-reliance-on-the-people in militant dress. It also comes out in the ordinary, undisguised liberal way. Thus, in court, the RYM group at San Francisco State, called the Joe Hill Caucus, has had a strategy of acquittals 'by any means necessary'. Playing on fear of jail, they led students to accept a free speech defense, saying people should hide the S.F. State strike's politics. The result, of course, has been demoralization. Of course nobody wants to go to jail. But in order to turn the rulers' attacks around, we have to raise our politics clearly in court.

RYM: Goon Squad for Bad Politics

RYM played a bad role at the conference. RYMers from Joe Hill caucus and the Berkeley Radical Students Union fingered members of SDS and PL. SDSers mostly tried to avoid fights. We concentrated on talking politics to many people. Nevertheless, there were several hassles, some violent. At one point, Mark Rudd tried to grab some leaflets from a guy in PL, starting a fight. Rudd was hurt pretty badly. Several times RYMers jumped SDSers when the odds were heavy on their side. (At a RYM meeting, Rudd soothed his followers, saying, 'Any three of us are a match for one of them!') Inside the hall, roving RYM goons eavesdropped on conversations and threw people out if they were overheard TALKING about PL! (This is not a sign of political confidence.)

RYM: Cloaking the CP Alliance

Aside from playing goon and spying on people, the RYM leaders put on a weird display of contorted phrasemongering, managing NEVER to attack the blatant sellout politics of the conference. They made a few minor attacks on revisionism, but never in fact criticized the BPP-CP alliance, which is the key question.

Here's a sample of discussion in the small (200 member) RYM caucus at the conference:

Q: This conference is a step to the right. Why should we join anti-fascist committees?

A: (Rudd) Well, we already helped set some up in New York and Chicago.

Q: Why haven't you criticized the conference from the floor?

A: (Bruce Franklin) The Panthers don't want us to. One way to support self-determination is to let the Panthers run their own conference even if they make mistakes.

Many at that meeting - not to mention lots of people not in RYM! - opposed RYM's support for the BPP leaders' alliance with the CP. Hiding this support by talking about 'self-determination' is completely opportunist. Even RYM's constant invocation of the PL boogy-man couldn't quiet people's anger.

Advance under Attack

The recent increase in government attacks is due to growing strength of the people's movement, led by non-white sections of the working class. The increased strength and militancy of anti-imperialist, pro-working class ideas is viewed - and rightly so - as a threat by the rulers. So they've stepped up repression. Our response must be: win more people to our 'threatening politics' and RELY ON THE PEOPLE to defend us. The best defense is to attack harder!

On campus this fall, this means winning more students to fighting racism and imperialism, allying with workers. A good basis is put forth in LESS TALK, MORE ACTION -- FIGHT RACISM (see last NLN) -- fighting expansion, kicking cop schools off campus, allying with campus workers.

Just as we must not retreat because of attack from the government, we must not let the movement be destroyed from within. That means defeating ideas - such as those put forth at Oakland - that undermine the people's very capacity to fight. It also means we should take attempts to intimidate pro-working class forces very seriously, politically -- for they only aid the rulers. For instance, a few people were hurt by RYM goon squads at the Oakland conference. Most SDSers adopted a restrained response, so that it would be clear we were not trying to disrupt the conference. We have good memories, however.

Lots of people - a tremendous number - left the conference simply disgusted. They'd come expecting to find something useful -- and they got liberal lectures, goon squad discussion, and the ever-present and very gross hand of the CP wherever they turned. It's very important for people NOT to get demoralized. The conference was, indeed, rotten. The BPP leaders' alliance with the CP is certainly a very serious matter, very harmful. But, at the same time, pro-working class politics are stronger than they've ever been in this country -- at least for a very long time. That includes many rank-and-file members of the BPP! Instead of becoming demoralized, it's key to learn the political lessons of the conference -- the need to oppose ALL so-called 'sections' of the ruling class, to oppose alliances with sellouts like the CP, the need to advance POLITICALLY under attack from the rulers -- the need, when you get down to it, to build a movement that serves the interests of working people. Bad politics will lead to fiascos -- either sooner or later. The point is not to get frustrated, but to learn from mistakes and build a stronger movement!

by Dave Rossof, NIC
Pat Forman, Inter-
organizational Sec'y
Gordon DeMarco, NIC
Leslie Lincoln, NIC
Howie Forman, S.F. State
Mark Taylor, S.F. State
Jim Prickett, NIC