

# SPARTACIST EAST

Published by the NYC Spartacist League  
Box 1377 G. P. O., New York, N. Y. 10001

Number 2  
June 1969

on the student revolution -

## CAMPUS OCTOBER?

The past year has witnessed an unprecedented wave of student campus struggles attracting national attention. The major and most publicized of these actions such as at City College of New York, Cornell University, San Francisco State College have been focused around demands for open admissions for oppressed minority groups and black cultural studies programs. Yet, upon examination of their net result, one sees little in the way of ideological growth or the creation of socially valuable gains. Part of the reason for this lies in the fact that the New Left has little understanding of its own history and almost no perspective for the future.

### The Growth of the Left

Students and others who became radicals in the 60's did so as a response, primarily intellectual and unrelated to class forces, to the false values of a corrupt society, to a colonial war abroad and racial discrimination at home. In rebelling against the mores of American culture, the New Left broke with the anti-communist, cold war liberalism of the League for Industrial Democracy in 1962 and developed a strong sense of social idealism that manifested itself most strongly in the early civil-rights movement. When the Viet Nam war exploded, most of these youth, or their immediate successors, were naturally repelled by it; this sense of social consciousness was transformed into the anti-war movement. Also, the mid-60's saw the first of the ghetto eruptions in the northern cities evidencing the strongly felt pent-up frustrations of the masses of oppressed black peo-

ple. The New Left was strongly impressed by these events, and the leading elements, particularly Students for a Democratic Society, took up the cudgel of the "anti-imperialist" and "anti-racist" movement.

Part of the method which the New Left adopted to support the struggles of others was to "organize" people to be against the war and racism, but without any idea of what to do with them afterwards. Initially this tactic was implemented through debates, teach-ins and limited sit-ins against those who represented the war, such as Army recruiters, Dow Chemical, etc. Since the New Left operated almost solely in the campus milieu, the primary focus of its work was intellectual. When it made its first attempts at reaching out to the world off campus, it carried with it the same concept of "organizing" people to the amorphous protest movement against the society and the evil it was creating. Predominantly, however, rejection was aimed at the failures of America to live up to its professed ideals, and contained no alternative solutions, no projection of a new pattern of organized society.

### The New Marxists

Today, a section of the New Left calls itself socialist, talks about a "class analysis", and is beginning to speak in terms of Marxism-Leninism. This seems on the surface to be a qualitative shift in the perspective of the New Left. Yet, is it real? Or has the New Left simply cast off "Che", "doing your  
cont'd on next page

## REVOLUTION

own thing" and a crude concept of "student power" for something else? If it has rejected its emotionally based "idealism" and developed a materialist conception of history; if it has created a program for the working class to seize power based upon the direct class antagonisms in society, instead of using the University's reflection of its class nature as a substitute, then why is the movement isolated from the working class, bewildered in its political orientation, and lacking any of the forms of struggle such as a Party?

There can be no answer other than that the New Left is talking another language; using traditional Marxist verbiage, but meaning something entirely different. All the terms have been redefined to mean something else: Capitalism becomes "neo-Capitalism" or "post-industrial society"; students, black people and college-trained white-collar workers become the new "proletarians"; the production process becomes the University, and Students for a Democratic Society is defined as the "vanguard". This means by definition that there can be no contradictions when white New Lefters talk about class struggle while seizing the office of the president of a University to demand study programs in black history for ghetto residents. For the "vanguard" is indeed leading the struggle of "the proletariat" to overcome capitalism, thus altering "the production process" as a means of liberating mankind from the oppressive burden of work.

What is described above would be very interesting if it had more than a passing relationship to the real world. But it doesn't. It has instead tragic implications; for it means that many earnest, would-be revolutionists are still bound up in a distorted view of the world. What started out as an idealistic, white-guilt protest movement of middle-class college students has become a guilt-ridden radical movement that has been incapable of seeing events in class terms, only in racial terms. It has been unable to see that whatever else may separate people from each other--race, age, sex, language, etc.--it is exploitation under Capitalism which causes and exacerbates all other cleavages in society, and that only through a revolution by the whole of the proletariat can the solution of the other social ills even be attempted.

## WITHOUT

Because it is in the nature of the New Left's isolation on the campus to follow other struggles in order to build student radicalism, rather than become part of the general class struggle, it is constantly searching for new political phenomena to tail-end. Originally, there was the Vietnamese Revolution. When that issue was so easily absorbed by a slick liberal—Eugene McCarthy—because the movement was built on a classless "single issue" basis rather than linked with a class line against capitalism, the student movement was forced to conjure up something new to take its place. And indeed something was always around which fitted in nicely with the New Left's Third World and racial analysis—the black struggle, which had previously played a secondary role in the New Left's propaganda, being regarded as something for the Blacks to work out themselves.

### "Black Studies"

Black people, responding partly to their own isolation, fear and repression, and partly to an uncritical attitude on the Left, have become not only more conscious of how awful this society is, but also overwhelmingly Black Nationalist. Behind the growth of this consciousness, of course, lies the history of oppression, exploitation and racial discrimination, which have been inextricably bound up with the growth of American Capitalism. From their arrival in this country, the Negro people have been an integral part of American class society while at the same time forcibly segregated at the bottom of this society. Various factors—the variety of African origins, deliberate dispersal of slaves with common tribal backgrounds, the fact that most slaves brought from Africa were male—facilitated the total destruction of African languages, social institutions and cultural memories. Today, American Black people are subjugated doubly as a racial caste and as workers, and though their lives are shaped by the work they are forced to do, their consciousness has been shaped more by their ghetto experiences and cultural isolation.

Now it is proposed that a new layer of black youth are going to be made more aware of their history, language, art and culture, which though seemingly beneficial, also works strongly to create the illusion that

# THE WORKING CLASS ?

American Blacks are somehow still Africans, not Americans, and that the struggle is not here, but somewhere else in the "third world". Moreover, "black history" in America cannot possibly be separated from "white history"--there could have been no slave without the slave master. Entire programs such as are being conceived now will only serve to increase the idea that race is the dominant division among mankind and retard the possible growth of socialist consciousness. Additionally, more black youth will be inculcated with the attitude-forming process that is actually one of the main functions of the University in society.

## "Open Admissions"

Yet, there can be no doubt as to the social value inherent in the chance that has been created via the demand for "open admissions" for numbers of black youth to escape from the bottom of society, where they have been so long oppressed. It is only shortsightedness and insensitivity that can permit radicals to oppose this demand as Progressive Labor has done at City College of New York and elsewhere. The major criticism that should be made is that "open admissions" shouldn't just be for Black people, where the conception only serves to reinforce ethnic consciousness, but should be expanded to "open admissions" for all. This is something that would put truly revolutionary pressure upon the bourgeoisie, and tend to unite all sections of the oppressed in society.

What is to be opposed is the concept that only Blacks can decide what is right for Blacks, and that the role of whites is to support their black allies uncritically. Among the outstanding exceptions to this theme have been members of the Black Panthers, who, though they hold a contradictory mixture of socialist and Nationalist views see the dangers implicit in this kind of artificial cleavage between radicals. To quote Kathleen Cleaver from New Left Notes of 1 May, 1969:

"For SDS to agree with Huey P. Newton and the Black Panther Party does not seem to be any abrogation of black people's rights. It is a necessary step in breaking down the prison of racism that keeps both black and white people fighting separately against capitalist exploitation and perpetuates the very capitalist-imperialist-neocolonialist empire that has black people as

its foremost victims. Ideas are not the property of a racial group, but belong instead in the realm of the true or false."

Whatever gains in the way of admissions to universities are made for Black people it should be obvious right away to student radicals that these demands are certainly non-revolutionary. For example, they have failed to consider why so many college presidents have been persuaded to construct separate studies and separate degree programs for black students. The reason is that for the construction of the black middle class, so necessary for the preservation of Capitalism, programs are needed which can sweep larger quantities of black youth than ever before through four years of college with the program offered being ultimately of little significance; it is the degree that counts. What this would do, it is hoped, would give black youth a greater stake in the society, provide more black faces as show pieces for corporations, more black small businessmen, and staff more government "anti-poverty" programs and civil service jobs. But this point has not been obvious to the New Left, for they have chosen to make their political judgment an emotional, moral one. Having accepted the proposition that anything that blacks do must be revolutionary, there is nothing more for the New Left to do but support them uncritically.

## Anti-Labor Aspects

In New York City, where there has been a sharp upturn in labor struggles in the past two years as a result of war and inflation (e. g., Sanitationmen, Con Ed workers, fuel deliverymen, hospital workers and teachers) the left has permitted its concern for the residents of the "community" to alter its political stance. It has mobilized its forces against the unions in their struggle with a ruthless city administration, thus aiding the city to attack the "community" by cutting at the real wages and working conditions of its workers. The New Left's chronic inability to see the unions as a basis of struggle has thus been transformed into blatant anti-unionism, which called for these strikes, supposedly against the interests of the "community", to be smashed and one of the most hard-fought-for gains of the working class -- the unions-- themselves to be endangered. The New Left has reacted morally, not politically, to the union bureau-

cont'd on back page

cracies' policies, which range from cold war liberalism to overt racism, CIA ties and physical gangsterism, and New Left radicals almost without exception have accepted Black Nationalist rhetoric that the only possible approach to unionized white workers is unremitting hostility born of desperation. The potential of Blacks, in general more militant as a result of their greater oppression, to play a vanguard role as workers in militant rank-and-file union struggle is never raised as New Lefters content themselves with sectarian anti-unionism.

### Worker-Student Alliance ?

A major group fighting within SDS has been the Progressive Labor Party. They claim to have fought for a working class orientation within SDS by advocating concepts such as the "student-worker alliance" and the summer "work-in" as projects for New Lefters who, having seen the need for a class revolution, want to break from their isolation on campus and implement their ideas elsewhere.

The alliance between students and workers as conceived and used by PL is an opportunistic one. Students, historically conservative and representing the upper-middle layers of society, have rarely been allied with the working class movement, and only recently in the United States has there been a radical student movement of any size. Because of the New Left's recent growth and PL's involvement in it, PL poses the alliance as though the working class was just another ally for the student movement; something like the peasantry in Russia, to be given second-rate status. The result of this capitulation to their milieu, is that PL has failed to raise the understanding of students as to the pivotal relationship of the working class to the revolution. Actually, the formulation should be turned the other way--for a worker-student alliance.

The other major problem with this is that a "student-worker alliance" is a static conception which bears no relation to the ebb and flow of the class struggle, which would be the determining factor in any working agreement between students and workers. As the Richmond Oil strike in Berkeley this winter well demonstrated, unity is possible between students and workers, but only in an action situation, and for the most part is requisite upon favorable reception by the workers. There was obviously development of consciousness on the part of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Energy workers, but this

was due to their need to fight oppression as applied by Standard Oil and the State, while the student role was less important. There is significance, however, in the exchange of pickets from one line to another. Both sides learned a great deal about the others' struggles, with the most important lessons being learned by the students about the nature of the class struggle, and how it accelerates consciousness far faster than a thousand demonstrations or a hundred teach-ins ever could.

The concept of the summer "work-in", which is also being sponsored by the National Collective in SDS, is more seriously flawed than the "student-worker alliance". Although it might be a good thing for students from the campus to work in a factory and exchange sweat with workers, it is likely that sweat is all that will be exchanged! For without a program to take into a factory, and the perspective of a long range involvement, the "work-in" is likely to breed more animosity and distrust than good. This PL-conceived "workerism" bears no relation to the application of a Marxist-Leninist concept that sees the necessity of uniting workers, students and oppressed minority groups around a transitional program of struggle.

### What Should the New Left Do?

Today, as the political climate of the country moves rightward, with the election of Nixon, increased racial antagonisms and serious police invasions of the campus, the student left is more isolated than ever from the rest of its potential allies. Sensing that something is wrong, the New Left has adopted an ultra-leftist tactic-confrontation politics-substituting bravado for political theory. What is needed, for example, are political demands that will link student militancy with the existing consciousness of the workers and create a political force that will break the Capitalist political domination by the two-party system. The most urgent demand that can alter the existing fragmentation, break through ethnic consciousness and unite the working class is the demand for a Labor Party!

## SPARTACIST

Box 1377, G.P.O., New York, N.Y. 10001  
 six issues — 50c      twelve issues — \$1

Name .....

Address .....

City..... State..... Zip.....