

# SPARTACIST-WEST

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## PARTY & CLASS: The Basis of Independence

The calling of the "Statewide Conference on Power and Politics" is both a reaction to and a manifestation of the bankruptcy of liberalism. The current gubernatorial campaign is completely permeated with this bankruptcy. The rhetoric of the Democratic politicians is in such flagrant opposition to their practices that a significant section of their middle-class supporters is questioning its allegiance to that party and considering various forms of independence. The fact that a reactionary Republican is in a position to utilize the disgust of large numbers of people with

the hypocrisy of the "liberal" state administration underlines this bankruptcy. Reagan's demagogery is obviously intended to win him the support of much of what would otherwise be a liberal and radical constituency. For instance, his railing against taxes cannot fail to strike a responsive chord among workers who are watching their wages disappear through the increased taxation and inflation occasioned by the Vietnam war. The working class is generally sophisticated enough to see a class threat in Reagan, but falls short of

(Continued on inside pages.)



With fancy footwork they can dodge bothersome ripples, but where is the wave that will wash them away for good?

# CLASSLESS "INDEPENDENCE" IS THE ROAD

(Continued from front page.)

recognizing the more subtle class threat in the Democratic Party. Any independent campaign, to be meaningful, must directly confront this threat.

Also dramatizing the failure of liberalism are the "radical" liberal leaders (such as Scheer and Keating) who seek to utilize the campus and ghetto radicalizations as a means to strengthen their own political pokerhand in the game of Democratic party politics. These people, isolated within the party as a direct result of the inability of liberalism to be anything more than rhetorical camouflage for the most blatant illiberalism, are now trying to get back by amassing a large constituency. They are blind to the fact that capitalist politicians of either party listen more to money than to voters. These middle-class quasi-idealists cannot gain the political influence they want, but they can divert the real idealists of the movement into the channels of self-defeat and self-delusions, silted with the decomposing refuse of past radicalizations, overgrown with the slimes of past ideologies, and damned by the dikes of gold. All radicals seriously concerned with the problems of poverty, racism and war must begin with a total rejection of this party of corporate wealth, social oppression and political illusion.

But simple independence of the Democratic party per se is not enough. It is only because this party is the political representative of a fundamental social system that it constitutes a trap for would-be radicals and a class threat qualitatively no different than Reagan. A political movement which breaks with this party but not with the system, calling only for reforms, improvements, and "basic changes", defeats its purpose as readily as the reform democrats and straight-forward coalitionists defeat theirs. The Democratic party cannot be "taken over" and turned against the system, but the system can take over, isolate and destroy the strongest reform movement.

Perhaps the best example of this is the Henry A. Wallace presidential campaign of 1948 run "independently" by the Progressive party. This anti-war and pro-labor campaign managed in 45 states to overcome the barriers designed to prevent a third party from getting on the ballot. Its program called for reforms such as nego-

tiating with the Soviet Union, legal guarantees for civil rights, federal aid to housing, education and health, and in general for a return to the FDR program. But precisely because it sought to pressure the system (mainly by exerting pressure on the Democratic party) into making good on promises already made, the Progressive movement was quickly dissipated by Democratic reformists in a "better position" to pressure and promise. The Democratic party stole the progressive "thunder" by adopting all its demands except ending conscription and repeal of the Taft-Hartley law. The National Guardian in effect hailed this as a victory: "They (the progressives) have handed Harry S. Truman an unmistakable mandate to return to the principles of Franklin D. Roosevelt." (8 November 1948)! The Progressive party disappeared as an independent movement within a few years; it did nothing to build a continuing struggle for the needs of the black and white workers and the poor; and it altered not by one iota with its reformist "pressures" the system of exploitation, war, racism and poverty in this country. Such "victorious" disasters must be avoided at all costs in our struggle for independent politics today!

The bankruptcy of "corporate liberalism"--of which the more "radical" liberalisms of Kennedy-Fulbright on over to the Scheers and Keatings are but "left" refractions--stems directly from the total inability of the capitalist system to cope in any meaningful way with the chronic ills of modern society. Unemployment, war production and exploitation are necessities for the ruling class to "profitably" maintain its existence; while racism, wars, "reformist" lies and traitorous trade union bureaucrats are its vitally needed instruments and allies in the maintenance of political power over the working class, student dissidents, and the general population. Thus the Progressive party, though it sounded quite radical in propaganda, was because of its essentially bourgeois reformist program an extremely valuable support to the continued existence of the oppressive system against which it rallied but within which it worked. In fact, it was (and similar "independent" reformist movements of today are) no better than the "lesser evil" politics of Johnson vs. Goldwater or Brown vs. Reagan. Both the Johnson-Browns, and the Wallace-aping

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phony independents, are representatives of some section or other of the same ruling class which causes and requires the brutality, wars and racism so frankly advocated by the Goldwaters' and Reagans'. The lesson of the 1964 presidential election, that one cannot support a "lesser evil" Democrat like Johnson to avoid the evils openly advocated by the reactionaries like Goldwater has been fairly well learned by the student anti-war and black liberation movements. But the critical core of this lesson--that behind the two identical parties lies a single reactionary class which is in no way prevented from utilizing for its own ends any other political movements which adapt to it programmatically--has yet to be learned by those elements in these movements which are looking toward the emergence of purely-independent-of-the-D. P. campaign in the current election period.

This lesson of class analysis impels Marxists to call for a break with these "independent reform" candidates and the middle-class orientation which they represent, and a turn in orientation to the working class instead. But many in the New left object, "Why can't we do it ourselves through alliances with those elements of the middle classes closest to us as radical students?" and "What point is there in orienting to the low level of the worker, who is on the average backward and racist?" Radicals are incapable of achieving their goals merely as students with middle class allies because they lack the power. The only major achievement of the student anti-war movement, for instance, has been to force some people to ask questions and learn about the war. The working class is one of the only two basic classes in modern society precisely because it alone is "socially situated at the heart of modern capitalism's basic and in fact defining, institution; industry." (Moody, Epsteiner and Flug, "Toward the Working class" in New Left Notes, 9/6/66. This article is recommended for its clear and very detailed discussion of many of the objections to an orientation to the working class prevalent in the New Left).

This vast potential power wage workers hold as a class goes unused for a progressive reordering of society precisely because the workers as a rule are "backward", i. e., they lack consciousness as a class and fail to recognize the socio-politi-

tical implications of their power as society's producers. Racist, collaborationist union bureaucrats keep the class divided against itself and try to contain the struggle into which the rank and file is constantly forced in order to maintain wages and conditions against the taxes, inflation and speed-ups of the bosses.

An orientation toward the working class is primarily an ideological commitment to raise the consciousness of workers to an awareness of their power and to their interests as a class in the resolute prosecution of the class struggle against the rulers and their society of poverty, racism and war. The primary role of radical students should be to undertake this basic task of education and seek to supply leadership to the working class. This cannot be done by supporting the "radical" reformists who, whether in or out of the Democratic party, seek working class votes on the basis of false promises and consiliation with the capitalist system.

A boycott of the election, proposed by some, does nothing to confront the basic questions involved. Elections are not meaningless; they are a vehicle for propaganda and one of the prime arenas of political struggle. To take no position is to acquiesce in the status quo.

To recapitulate: "independent" politics on the basis of organizational separation from the ruling parties but not programmatic rejection of the ruling system can only lead to the agonizing protraction and qualitative deepening of the "lesser evil", "democratic process" and "reform from within" illusions which still permeate the radical and "New Left" movements in this country. In opposition to this, revolutionary Marxists and all serious radicals must raise the call for a Freedom-Labor party and for an independent write-in campaign in the current election which will have this as one of its central programmatic demands. The program's chief emphasis should be on a clear break from all loyalty to and all confidence in the social system in this country; it must see the class character of this system and clearly advocate a Labor party as the greatest need and only realistic course for the masses of unemployed, poor, and black, white and Mexican-American workers.

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# Black Power - Class Power

(ONCE AGAIN ON BLACK POWER)

Until fairly recently the dominant tone of the black movement in this country, in its image if not its reality, was that set by the liberal integrationists, the Martin Luther Kings and the Bayard Rustins. Theirs was the politics of black liberalism. The goal was formal, legal, equality; civil rights; or the northernizing of the south. The beneficiaries of this campaign were to be that narrow segment of the black population which is middle class or close to it and is commonly called "the black bourgeoisie." The political strategy was to seek the support of, and to avoid antagonizing, the liberal establishment, and, logically enough, to seek to bring to bear the powers of the federal government which is controlled by this establishment. The tactics to be used were characterized by a heavy reliance on non-violence and moral confrontation.

The civil rights movement was thus a coherent whole, one whose politics, tactics, and ideology were well adapted to the social stratum which led it and benefited by it. The hitch, of course, was that this movement meant very little for the overwhelming mass of the black people in America, who are either working class or economically and socially marginal and hence even more deprived. The black troops of the bourgeois generals began to demand that the movement turn its attention to their needs. This pressure was able to throw up a militant left wing, mainly but not exclusively within SNCC. At the same time, the locus of the struggle began to shift to include the northern ghettos, the bastions as well as the prisons of the black masses.

In contrast to the reform program of the civil rights movement, the demands of the black masses are necessarily and inherently class demands, and demands which the ruling class cannot meet. The call for jobs, for housing, and for emancipation from police brutalization (attacking the very basis of the state) -- these cannot be answered by another civil rights bill from Washington. Their pursuit leads inevitably to a sharper and sharper confrontation with the ruling class. It is this transition

which is represented by the black power slogan. Its popularization represents the repudiation of tokenism, liberal tutelage, reliance on the federal government, and the non-violent philosophy of moral suasion. In this sense, therefore, black power is class power, and should be supported by all socialist forces.

However, this development occurs at a time when the working class as a whole, except for its black contingent and isolated cases here and there, is quiescent, and in a mood to go along with the status quo. This contradiction between the black vanguard and the rest of the class distorts the black movement, and this distortion is reflected in the "black power" slogan. "Black power" has class content only conditionally, that is, the slogan in the abstract is classless, and takes on class content only from the specific historical context from which it emerges. This weakens the slogan profoundly, and opens it up to various kinds of abuse. It can be used by petty bourgeois black nationalist elements who want to slice the social cake along color rather than class lines and to promote reactionary color mysticism. More seriously, it can be degraded to mean mere support for black politicians operating within the system. To Adam Clayton Powell the slogan means, or he hopes it will mean, just himself and a bunch of black aldermen.

For these reasons, the support that Marxists give to this slogan must be critical, seeking always to deepen its class content. To say that the slogan now has nothing to offer the white workers, has no appeal to them, is true, but irrelevant. This is an error into which I feel C.K.'s article in our previous issue falls. The black movement today sees the white working class mainly in the form of the Cicero rioters, to whose sensibilities no concessions are due. When the class as a whole, including its backward white section, emerges as a self-conscious and active force, then it will be possible realistically to raise the question of transcending the old slogan. "Black power" will become "workers' power." In the meantime, black power represents a new and more advanced stage of the social confrontation in **America.**

--G. W.