

SPARTACIST-WEST

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STALINISM ATTACKS THE LEFT Opportunism Prevents Working-class Solidarity

Recent experiences have graphically—and brutally—demonstrated how foreign the concept of workers' democracy is on the U.S. left, and how sickened the left is with opportunism and sectarianism. The rampant renewal of gross exclusionism and physical attacks by certain leading elements against critics to their left is a logical outgrowth of the resurgence of stalinism in the radical movement.

ORIGINS OF STALINISM

Stalinism, which is an imitation of a working-class ideology, is the set of ideas used to justify the rule, in the name of the working class, of a privileged, bureaucratic caste in the so-called "communist" countries (degenerated and deformed workers' states.) It was originally used by Stalin to sell out working-class struggles around the world in the interests of a few diplomatic gains for this new ruling elite in the Soviet Union. This was done chiefly by making unprincipled alliances with various liberal "friends" of the Soviet Union; today, Stalinist ideas are still used as a cover for such alliances as well as for reformism, nationalism, and every conceivable petty-bourgeois distortion of the workers' interests—all done in the name of those interests! Exclusionism and physical attacks are required to make this lie stick.

Everyone remembers (and in their remembering they usually try to forget, or sweep under the rug) the United Front Against Fascism (UFAF) conference in Oakland last summer which was a grotesque circus of exclusions, physical confrontations and beatings, visited by the Panthers and their CP-oriented allies on various groups to the left of them, for the purpose of masking the blatant, class-collaborationist alliance with liberals that was going on inside (see "Re-Birth of the Pop Front" in Spartacist West #17, 22 August 1969.) Few are yet aware of the similar, though smaller-scale events which occurred outside the "Birthday Party" rally at the Berkeley Community Theater Feb. 15th, 1970. Members of the Spartacist League, Committee for a Labor Party (CLP), "United Irishman" and American Com-

munist Movement (ACM) were driven away from the steps outside the hall simply for distributing literature. There were no provocations, threats or disruptions of any kind. Two members of SL were driven to the ground for resisting shoving attacks made on them by Panther guards.

This attack had been ordered against the ACM because of a critical article the group had published in a previous issue of its paper, thus openly demonstrating the real motives of the Panther leadership: fear of criticism. Spartacist immediately sent a letter of protest to the Panthers and the SL together with the CLP immediately drew up a second letter for circulation to other groups to sign as a joint protest. This second, "Open Letter..." simply explained the events, went on to assert the right of all groups on the left to freely propagate their ideas in public, and said that exclusionism and bullying were ruling-class tactics. It expressed complete solidarity with the Panthers against the cops, denounced any criticism not in this context, called for disciplining of the responsible people, and concluded with the slogans, "Down with bullying tactics on the left! Defend the Panthers! All Power to the Workers!" (Copies of both letters are available from SPARTACIST.)

PANTHER APOLOGY

Made aware of this second letter, a chief Panther Party spokesman personally apologized to the SL members who had been shoved to the ground, because the attack on them "had not been authorized" (it had only been authorized against the ACM.) However, he refused to listen to any discussion on the issue of exclusionism and strongly threatened the SL with similar treatment or worse should it continue to be critical of the Panthers. He said it was "Marxism" to beat any opponent you can't argue with. The Spartacists' main concern was not with themselves personally but rather with the principle that all groups on the left, including the stalinist ACM, have a right to exist and freely propagate their ideas in public. (continued on inside pages)

STALINISM, continued

Because of this basically hostile reaction masked by an attempt to side-step the issue with a "personal" apology, SL and CLP continued to circulate their "Open Letter..." to other groups for signatures. The responses from these groups in general revealed deep-seated dishonesty, opportunism, chronic narrow-mindedness and sectarianism. Two of the more hypocritical organizations (because they claimed to agree with the main principle at least, yet refused to sign) were the SWP and the Workers' League.

The SWP refused to sign because the last paragraph of the Open Letter contains a demand that the Panthers discipline the members responsible for the attack, and this is "interfering in the internal affairs of a black nationalist organization." They said that their position on this question had been made clear in The Militant articles on the UFAF conference exclusions. These articles were a pack of lies and distortions designed to mask the weak-kneed, do-nothing attitude they took at the time the exclusions were going on (they were one of the few groups not to be excluded--see "An Open Letter to the SWP and YSA Memberships", from SPARTACIST) When it was pointed out to them that they could sign the letter with a statement of their own attached next to their name dissociating themselves from the last paragraph and explaining why, they continued to refuse, thus revealing their real motives as being something else: sectarianism and opportunist fear of openly criticizing the Panthers.

SWP SELL-OUT

Amazingly, their final decision on this was taken just after the SWP-YSA itself was assaulted by stalinist groups at the Women's Day Rally in SF. (see below) The SWP Women's fraction even drew up a similar protest letter about this event, which they asked Spartacist and the CLP to sign at the same time as they refused to sign the "Open Letter..." to the Panthers! This contradictory behavior was a clear betrayal of the SWP-YSA membership itself, which is sustaining attacks from stalinists, by its opportunist and sectarian leadership. The SWP-initiated letter was signed without reservation by Spartacist and CLP, members of both of which were physically assaulted while attempting to defend the YSA table in question.

The Workers' League refused to sign because the letter was "too minimal," in that it did not contain enough political analysis, although, they said they agreed with everything that was in it. This was utter hypocrisy, since the WL has proven in practice that it has no objection to being politically "minimal." Re-

cently WL members publicly called for the formation of a caucus in an important SF city employees union on the basis of a set of demands which completely omitted politics. It took the recent city employees strike against labor-backed Alioto's government to make them see the immediate need for the labor party demand. The real reason for their refusal to sign was a sectarian reflex which sometimes accompanies this kind of opportunism: fear of being somehow "tainted" by rubbing shoulders with other groups in united front actions.

Space prohibits us from detailing the reasons for the refusals of these other groups to sign the letter: "United Irishman" and ACM, the two other groups that were excluded; SDS at Cal., (which was swayed mainly by PL's reasoning--see below), Bay Area Peace Action Council (where the SWP led in opposing signing), the IWW, Anti-Imperialist Coalition, and S.L.I.G. The only group besides Spartacist and CLP to sign was the International Socialists (IS), who attached a brief statement of their own.

We must credit PL with giving one of the most honest responses to the open letter. Their spokesman refused to sign because "We don't sign anything with Spartacist," and "We might want to do the same thing to you outside one of our meetings." When it was pointed out that PL's thinking on this is the same as that which leads the Panthers to physically exclude PL from their meetings, the spokesman replied, "They are right to exclude us!" So why does PL try to get in? "We are right to try to get in also; they are on the other side of the class line and we are revolutionary!"

Literature from Spartacist

Literature relating to the events and issues discussed in this issue is available from Spartacist, including both letters of protest to the Panthers, and the previous issue of Spartacist-West, on the UFAF conference. Write:

— BAY AREA SPARTACIST LEAGUE —
Box 852 Main PO Box 26076 Cust. House
Berkeley, Cal. 94701 S. F., Cal. 94126
Phone: 525-5243 Phone: 861-2090

PL, therefore, in its move to some key Trotskyist positions (such as seeing the reactionary nature of nationalism), has also carried some elements of stalinist practice to an absurd extreme. While they correctly see the most important bad aspects of Panther practice (the alliance with liberals), they remain incapable of seeing the dual character of groups such as the Panthers, and they retain a completely sectarian, stalinist manner of dealing

with the problem: if you disagree with it, it must be counter-revolutionary; therefore smash it "by any means necessary."

The exclusions at the Panther rally and the circulation of the open letter coincided with another little-noticed exclusion: members of Spartacist, CLP, IS and several independents were excluded from the Strike Support Committee by PL and its friends. The committee was clearly supposed to be open to anyone who supported strikes; this was said both at the meetings and in a public leaflet. After the first meeting, however, it was said that the CLP and their friends had "disrupted" the meeting with "intellectual" discussion; that they were really "anti-working class", etc. All the charges were such blatant lies that in order to exclude everyone, in effect, who was not a sympathizer of PL, they were finally forced to admit that the group was not open after all (they even used property rights as an excuse — see the leaflet, "This Is Not an Open Group...!" available from CLP, Box 6241, Albany, Cal.)

This continuing adherence to anti-political, stalinist forms of struggle, despite their move to the left, reflects the contradiction that PL embodies within its ranks: their rejection of several key concepts of Stalinism-Maoism, such as nationalism and the bloc of four classes, as well as their rejection of important aspects of CP practice, is in dire conflict with their origins as a Stalinist-Maoist tendency (PL is still the official Maoist organization in the U.S.). If they draw the logical conclusions from their recent positions—and some of their more honest members are certainly doing this—they must reject Maoism and Stalinism itself; yet if they do this, they have no basis for existence outside the Marxist (Trotskyist) movement. The closer they get to this step, which, for a Stalinist organization is momentous, the more they fight it. They rely on organizational conservatism and anti-political methods of strug-

gle against opponents in order to mask their confusion and indecision.

WOMENS' DAY ATTACKS

The context of the much better-known attack on the YSA table by Revolutionary Union (RU) members and others at the Women's Day rally in San Francisco should now be clear. It was not an isolated event, nor did it have anything to do with the lie spread at the time to the effect that the SWP-YSA had organized a "scab" rally in Berkeley to conflict with the main rally (the Berkeley rally had been timed to precede the other, and the publicity had called on everyone to go to the SF rally afterwards). It was part of a conscious attempt by the right-wing Stalinist leadership around the Panthers and the RU to build a protective wall of immunity of criticism around themselves. This is invariably the tactic of leaderships whose political positions are untenable.

The principle of workers' democracy has, of course, been so completely submerged under this deluge of stalinist regurgitation that practically no one understands it (see above). Briefly, this principle means that all those who in principle support the workers' movement can freely propagate their ideas and attempt to win dominance in the movement. In this country, which is so saturated with the hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy, the stalinists have developed a typically simplistic over-reaction which only goes to show the blind narrow-mindedness of their perspective: they reject all democracy, that of the workers included. Thus workers' democracy becomes "bourgeois."

IS' MISTAKES

The opposite error is made by IS, the "third camp" tendency. They embrace all democracy; they raise the concept of democracy into an abstraction which stands above the basic class division in society. This led their predecessors in the social-democratic movement to make the fatal mistake of supporting the petty-bourgeois-peasant demand for a constitutional assembly during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, when the only correct demand was for power to the workers' councils (the highest embodiment of workers' democracy)—the same as the central bolshevik-Leninist demand during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Being for "democracy" as a supra-class "principle" makes them incapable of seeing the importance of workers' democracy when it really counts, as against bourgeois democracy, which is reactionary. In the final analysis, they wind up on the other side of the class line, along with the stalinists.

This stalinist exclusionism, coming as it does in a left which is small and still isolated from the bulk of the working class, reflects a
(continued on back page)

— advertisement —

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The Committee for a Labor Party is a group of rank-and-file trade unionists working to bring a militant, political program of struggle to the unions, and for a political party of labor. Send for literature and a subscription to Workers' Action:

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WORKERS LEAGUE LIES!

The March 2nd issue of the Bulletin, organ of the Workers' League, contained a series of slanderous statements about Spartacist. Typically, the article in question—a report on a recent Workers' League conference—failed to deal with Spartacist politics, but resorted instead to old Stalinist-type tactics of petty slanders and simple distortions of fact.

The article charged Spartacist with rejecting internationalism, and what was the proof? The leading Spartacist delegate to the 1966 conference of the International Committee (Healy's group) in England would not yield to Healy's demand that he admit our supposed, petty-bourgeois American chauvinism by apologizing for being unable to attend a session because of extreme fatigue! (see SPARTACIST #6).

The Workers' League conception of internationalism is a miniscule parody of the old Moscow-oriented Communist parties—only in this case it is a tiny band of pseudo-Trotskyists spouting British chauvinism instead of Russian.

To cinch their argument, the Workers' League charges that we handed over to the SWP documents on the 1966 conference which were then published in a pamphlet by the SWP. When challenged by a Spartacist at the WL conference to prove this charge, Wohlforth, head of the WL, could only mutter, "We will", but they still mention no facts in their paper (in fact, the documents were taken by the SWP from a mutual contact). We have distributed the pamphlet because it contains mostly our documents and nothing by the SWP except a relatively accurate introduction by Hansen. Our position on the SWP's revisionism is quite clear in SPARTACIST, for those who can read.

STALINISM, continued

pitiful impotence to really affect events on the part of its perpetrators, and a basic lack of confidence in the workers themselves: it says that they are incapable of deciding for themselves between conflicting ideologies claiming to represent their interests. A true determination of working-class interests depends on unhampered factional struggle between tendencies in the working class, and on the testing of these ideas in practice. Lenin's devotion to this sort of principled factional struggle was the key element in building the only party which has ever led the working class to state power. Those who have refused to speak out against this dangerous tendency are betraying the left as a whole to its traitors — traitors who have consistently sold out working-class struggles, and will do so again. The Panthers specifically will be sold out by the stalinists within their ranks and those

We do not, of course, believe these are "peaceful times" or that the working class is "not in motion", as was charged in the article, and no such thing was said by SL members at the WL conference. We have a perspective of building a Marxist-Leninist party in this country and a truly international movement. Part of this struggle must involve winning over to a working-class perspective those groups involved in special struggles, e. g., womens' liberation, SDS, black liberation, etc. We do not take the simple-minded, non-struggle approach of the Workers' League: that Womens' Liberation is "bullshit", as Wohlforth blurted out at their regional conference; that SDS is just a bunch of stalinist factions which the WL is "proud" they never had anything to do with (as a recent Bulletin boasted, although they've suddenly decided to come to SDS meetings, and have long been in SMC); that all black caucuses are a priori reactionary, etc., etc. All this is said, of course, in the name of proletarian struggle.

For them, this means advocating union activity which avoids political questions in favor of simple bread-and-butter demands, as they did when they supported a recent call for a caucus of city workers in the Bay Area which contained not a single political demand, not even for a labor party or any mention of racism or the war in Vietnam!

Yet the WL asks what are our principled differences! We stand on the basis of the transitional program and proletarian internationalism, which they reject in favor of mindless trade unionism and British chauvinism. Their politics can only be called a mockery of Trotskyism.

outside who capitulate to stalinism; we say categorically that those who opportunistically fail to criticize the Panthers when criticism is necessary will be among the first to betray them.

Expose and Defeat Stalinism!

Defend Workers' Democracy!

All Power to the Workers!

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