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MIDDLE-CLASS "SOCIALISTS" JOIN FORCES

RMC Dissolves Into SWP

In August, over 40 members of the Revolutionary Marxist Collective (RMC) joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) at the Socialist Workers Party's 29th Convention. Both groups claim that the merger represents a significant event in the building of a revolutionary party in the United States. In fact, it is nothing but a maneuver on the part of the SWP to build its prestige among middle-class liberals and radicals.

The RMC and SWP claim that both groups are in agreement on all basic questions, except the Russian Question. The RMC recognizes that Russia, China, Cuba and the other so-called socialist countries are state-capitalist. The SWP believes that these state-capitalist countries are workers' states.

Both groups declare that the difference is no obstacle to the RMC joining the SWP. At the same time, the SWP states that the Russian Question involves basic questions of Marxist theory and practice. This contradiction helps reveal the true meaning of this supposed fusion of tendencies.

The Russian Question

Behind the Russian Question lies the essence of Marxism. Marx and Engels declared that the emancipation of the working class can only be the work of the working class itself. Only the working class can destroy rotting capitalism, establish workers' states and build communism.

But the SWP rejects this. It believes that workers' rule is not necessary for there to be a workers' government. It calls Russia a

workers' state, even though the workers there are completely frozen out of power in society. And it believes that the workers are not necessary to have a proletarian revolution that smashes capitalism.

For example, it calls the state-capitalist countries in Eastern Europe "workers' states" even though the workers of Eastern Europe never rose up to kick out the capitalists. They never smashed the capitalist states, nor did they set up their own states based on workers' councils, factory committees, and other democratic mass organizations. Instead, the Russian army and the local Stalinist parties expropriated the old Eastern European capitalists and created new state-capitalist ruling classes.

State capitalism

To do this the Russians and their Stalinist puppets smashed the workers and destroyed their independent organizations. Today the workers in these countries are an exploited and oppressed class, which is deprived of the most basic rights, such as the right to strike and organize unions, freedom of speech, and so on. The workers in all state-capitalist countries are wage slaves, who sell their labor power in return for wages.

The SWP's position on the Russian Question shows that it sees the working class as a class which cannot rule in its own name. It sees it as a class which is herded about by other, supposedly more dynamic social forces. The SWP's view of the workers is the view of the middle and upper classes, who feel that they ought to be the rulers over the working class. This

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view infects and corrupts the SWP's entire political practice.

If an organization believes that other classes, particularly middle-class forces, can overthrow capitalism and establish more progressive societies, it will work to saddle the workers with a variety of pro-capitalist leaderships.

A real Marxist organization will fight to raise the consciousness and political independence of the working class. It will try to show the workers that they can and must overthrow capitalism and build a truly free and just society. And it will show the workers and all the oppressed people that the liberal politicians, the trade union bureaucrats and other middle-class forces are deadly enemies of the working class and all oppressed people.

Middle-class "socialism"

The SWP's approach is the very opposite of this. For years, it completely ignored the working class. Instead, it concentrated its efforts on the middle-class movements. Within these movements the SWP did not fight for the program of revolutionary socialism. It didn't try to expose the liberal politicians and other people who misled the masses. On the contrary, in these movements the SWP built a base for liberal capitalist politicians. It built their authority and prestige.

The SWP believed they were using the liberals to build the movement. But in fact, the liberals used the SWP to build their own base in these movements, and to eventually take them over.

SWP supports hacks

Today, the SWP is playing the same treasonous role in the trade unions. For example, they built Ed Sadlowski's campaign in the United Steelworkers Union without ever explaining to the workers that he is an agent of the capitalists. If the SWP gets its way in the labor movement, it will help build the base of the liberal bureaucrats, who will then use this power to crush the workers.

This is the logic, in practice, of the SWP's position on the Russian Question.

The RMC agrees with the political practice of the SWP. Despite its formal position on the class nature of the state-capitalist countries, the RMC stands on the same middle-class program. But the people who make up the RMC did not always stand on a middle-class program.

About half the RMC membership, and all its leaders, used to be members of the Revolutionary Socialist League. Some of them were part of the RSL at its founding. And they participated in discussions of our political program, particularly our analysis of state capitalism. Throughout all this, they claimed to want to build a working-class revolutionary party. And they claimed to agree with our analysis of the SWP.

The RSL, however, was founded in a period of lull in the class struggle. The workers were in retreat and the influence of the left was at a low point. In 1974, under this pressure, the future RMC leaders got demoralized. They began to question whether they wanted to undertake the hard struggle to build a truly revolutionary working-class party. When our perspective

was to develop all sides of revolutionary work—developing theory, building a revolutionary newspaper, and rooting ourselves in the working class—the RMC leaders proposed that we devote ourselves exclusively to study and theoretical work.

To fight for their strategy, they formed a faction, and resigned from their posts in the RSL. A few weeks before our convention in early 1975, they resigned from the organization. From the time they quit the RSL until March of this year, the RMC studied and published a large body of theory. They apparently believed that this theoretical work, by itself, would build the RMC as a political tendency.

During this period, the RMC gave in further to the reactionary pressures of U.S. capitalism. They swung politically way to the right. By March of this year, the RMC realized that theory, without practice, could not build a political organization. And they also realized that, with the exception of the Russian Question, they were in agreement with the reformist politics of the SWP.

At their convention in March, the RMC decided to seek fusion with the SWP. In August, the RMC dissolved into the SWP. The evolution of the RMC shows that in its politics it is a middle-class tendency.

To us, the Russian Question involves the very nature of socialism, the proletarian revolution and the strategy for building a revolutionary party. To the RMC leaders—like all middle-class intellectuals who fail to break with their class background—the Russian Question is of little importance to the real struggle. The RMC's middle-class outlook was more than enough to overcome their theoretical differences with the SWP.

Why fusion?

But why is the SWP interested in the RMC, with its state-capitalist analysis? And why has it made such a big deal about this fusion? First, through the merger, the SWP gains over 40 new members, including some talented intellectuals. But there is something more important.

In the present period, the opportunist left organizations are growing. The more left-wing tendencies are relatively isolated. In this situation, the SWP is trying to build its influence among middle-class liberals and trade union bureaucrats. It is also trying to establish itself as the place where all radicals belong.

For example, the SWP is fishing for the growing number of people in the Socialist Labor Party who are disturbed by the bureaucratic and abstentionist policies of that

organization. The SWP leaders want to convince all these people that they will be welcome in and around the SWP. But the SWP has a problem. All these people disagree with the SWP's position on Russia. The liberals and bureaucrats are anti-communist. And the SLP militants recognize that Russia, China, Cuba and the other state-capitalist countries are not workers' states.

SWP maneuver

The SWP leaders figure that if they can lure the RMC, with its state-capitalist position, into joining the SWP, this will encourage other people with doubts about the SWP to support and join their party. As part of this maneuver, the SWP leaders gave the RMC leaders high positions and are promising a democratic discussion of the Russian Question.

For all this, the SWP risks nothing. Despite the RMC leaders' positions, the SWP leadership has nothing to fear. There is no internal democracy in the SWP, and the SWP leadership will make sure that the RMC leaders have no independent power or authority. In the meantime, the RMC rank and file will be isolated and split up into eight cities to weaken their impact. If despite this the RMC appears to be winning supporters to their position on the Russian Question, or anything else, the SWP leadership will come up with some excuse to expel the "disloyal" members.

Phony debate

Finally, the SWP majority cannot lose the debate on Russia. The people recruited to the SWP do not look at the world from the point of view of the working class. They don't believe the working class can run society. It will be impossible for the RMC to convince such people that the state-capitalist countries are not workers' states. Besides, the RMC has already given up too much ground to make an effective fight for the state-capitalist position.

Despite the hurrahs of the SWP and RMC, this fusion is no victory for the working class. It represents, instead, a consolidation of middle-class, anti-working-class forces.

But the fusion has its positive side. It helps clear the air. As the RMC dissolves and the other fake revolutionary organizations to the left of the SWP disintegrate, it will become ever clearer that there are two fundamental perspectives facing the working class. These are: 1) middle-class radicalism, best represented by the SWP and the Communist Party, which means the destruction of the socialist revolution; or 2) Bolshevism, represented by the RSL, which stands for the victory of the international working class and the construction of socialist society run by and for the masses of working people. □