

# SPARTACIST-WEST

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## SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY

The year 1968 is one of political crisis unmatched in recent U.S. history. The contradictions built into the "American Century" of U.S. world domination are making themselves felt strongly at home. While half a million U.S. troops are unable to quell one small, rebellious corner of the empire, the Black people at home have passed into open rebellion and disillusionment with all myths of the "American dream." The strategy of reconciliation died with Martin Luther King. Defeats abroad and revolts at home are matched by a still growing labor militancy which affects machinists and telephone workers as well as the super-exploited garbage collectors of Memphis.

Despite much excitement and flurries of activity, the U.S. left has shown itself to be fundamentally incapable of seizing the opportunity represented by the divisions in the ruling class, the virtual resignation of the head of state, the defeats of imperialist brutality abroad and its exposure at home, etc. The single exception to this has been noteworthy indeed; in the Bay Area, the Black Panther Party has forged a new unity around a program of organized armed self-defense and serious political struggle.

### SAD STORY

The rest of the story, however, is a sad one. In the case of the Peace and Freedom Party (PFP), the shallowness of its political foundations is being exposed much more rapidly than even its harshest critics expected. At bottom the reason can be determined only by a class analysis: the PFP is a middle class formation suspended between big capitalist politics, specifically Kennedy and McCarthy, on the one hand, and the growing objective need for a new development of working class politics on the other. It is rapidly being ground to bits in this position, with thousands of its supporters, so lightly signed up last year with the promise that "after we get on the ballot you can go back

to the Democratic Party and vote for McCarthy," doing just that. Such shifting sands will never support much of a "third alternative," let alone a serious opposition to the system.

Any discussion of the PFP must deal also with the Independent Socialist Club (ISC), which carries much of the leadership of the PFP and was all that kept it alive during certain critical periods. The ISCers are socialists who, presumably, are interested in finding the way towards the overthrow of capitalism and the reconstruction of society on a socialist basis. How then are they able not only to support, but to lead a formation such as the PFP which they themselves say should not take an openly socialist position and which has indeed rejected such an alternative?

### OPPORTUNIST POLITICS

In seeking the answer to this question, we find a strong relationship between the political weaknesses of the PFP and the deceptively fraudulent and opportunist politics of the ISC.

The Independent Socialist of April, 1968, which appeared just prior to the PFP founding convention in Richmond in mid-March, raises the call for the PFP to "make as its own major pre-occupation . . . the program of independent labor political action—for a LABOR BASED PARTY NOW." (emphasis in original.) This was the main aim of the Labor Party Caucus in the PFP. This caucus, which was called for and supported by Spartacist, had been in existence for some time before the appearance of the ISC call, yet it was totally ignored by the ISC, which later complained that it was "too sectarian." The ISC, in fact, throughout the entire development of the PFP's political character, was the major opponent of this very perspective it claims to support. (See the previous issue of Spartacist-West for a com- (continued on inside pages)

OPPORTUNITY...

plete discussion of this betrayal.)

The ISC's real aims, much more in line with what the PFP actually turned out to be, are expressed in the conclusion of the IS article on the PFP: "The Peace and Freedom Movement, if it is to be a real alternative . . . must stand unequivocally and unhesitatingly for democracy - here in America AND abroad. It must identify its struggles against arbitrary, undemocratic authority with those of the Polish, Spanish and German students; it must see its opposition to capitalist oppression as of a piece with its opposition to the oppression of workers and peasants in South Vietnam and North Vietnam as well as Cuba, Russia, China, Greece, and Spain." The ISC views "opposition to capitalist oppression" almost as an afterthought to a general struggle against an abstract "arbitrary authority" which spans social systems as easily as it bridges oceans.

#### DEMOCRATIC ILLUSIONS

Vital as it is to defend the struggles of students, workers and peasants against the oppressive bureaucracies of the deformed workers states, this raising of democratic goals above the level of the more fundamental question of the social system leads to dangerous illusions along bourgeois-democratic lines. Some of these illusions as well as the reformist character of the PFP itself were expressed in the PFP's "Martin Luther King Memorial Program to End Racism Now," which was presented to the Berkeley City Council. Point 3 of this program calls for "criminal penalties for all acts of discrimination," with "heavy fines and jail sentences" for unions, as well as employers, landlords, realtors, etc. The state cannot attack its own masters—bosses, landlords, realtors—for their racism, but it would welcome an opportunity to attack the unions, especially under the demagogic guise of ending discrimination.

The racism so rampant in the unions and among white workers is really a reflection of the need of capitalists to divide workers against themselves by keeping the Blacks super-exploited at the bottom and maintaining a false notion of racial superiority amongst the whites, which induces them to identify with their bosses, rather than their fellow workers. When the government does intervene (which current talk of anti-strike legislation indicates may be soon), it will be to destroy the fighting power of the unions,

not to eliminate racism. Indeed, the racial division of the workers would probably be deepened as a result of the destruction of the unions.

To raise this demand as the PFP has done indicates precisely the same kind of illusion as was expressed in the ISC article; that somehow the secondary questions of democracy, etc., can be solved regardless of which class is in power and who does the enforcing. Raising democracy to an abstraction, above the class struggle, leads to betrayal of that struggle. When the government does move against the unions, we will remember who called for this in advance.

Although the PFP strives to be radical, its politics reflect its middle-class base. By rejecting a class analysis of society, it remains confined within the limits of political concepts laid down under capitalism. This reformism was pretty effectively built into the PFP from the beginning, and for this reason it was probably a mistake for revolutionaries to enter and help build it. We direct this criticism mainly at ourselves, since we called for entry and a struggle in the PFP for a working class program last November, during the registration drive.

The PFP was built on a purely organizational separation from the Democratic Party, which, considering LBJ and the war, was showing its most repulsive face. The forces such as the ISC, which sought to prevent a deeper analysis of the system behind the organization, were clearly dominant from the beginning. Now that the Democratic Party threatens to show its "peace" face, what need is there for another "peace" party? The differences which were so lightly papered over before are now threatening to destroy the PFP (which, we might add, asked for it).

#### BLACK PANTHERS

The Black Panther Party, as we mentioned earlier, is another question entirely. By applying the organized, armed self-defense tactics pioneered by Robert Williams of Monroe, N.C., and the Deacons for Defense and Justice to a large Northern city in a broad, systematic manner, and combining this with a militant political program and opposition to the Democratic Party, the Panthers have led a giant step forward in the struggle of all the oppressed for a new political opposition to the system. They represent the fundamental advance called for by Spartacist in our efforts to defend and publicize the Deacons, and in our general analy-

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sis of the special needs of the Black minority in the struggle for the American Revolution.

Although not a working class tendency in the fullest sense, the Panthers represent the needs of both black and white workers, because working-class unity can be achieved only through a militant struggle against the special oppression of Black people. A campaign to explain the truth about the Panthers to workers, such as called for by the Committee for a Labor Party (successor to the Labor Party Caucus of the PFP), is a dire necessity.

The Panthers have a serious attitude toward revolutionary theory, although there are still contradictions in their conclusions. In an interview for the Guardian, printed in the PFP News of 8 April 1968, Eldridge Cleaver, Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, says, ". . . we repudiate the capitalist system, we recognize the class nature of the capitalist economic system . . . We recognize the fact that we have been oppressed because we are black people even though we know this oppression was for the purpose of exploitation. So that we have to deal with both exploitation and racial oppression." Much of the Panther analysis of this "dual status" of Black people in the U.S. is very close to the revolutionary marxist analysis, except that, as Cleaver continues, ". . . we recognize the national (our emphasis) character of our struggle."

Cleaver feels that the marxist approach emphasizes economic exploitation while ignoring or underplaying the fact that blacks, including the wealthiest of black "bourgeoisie," are specially oppressed because of the color of their skin. This is a misunderstanding of marxism. As the Spartacist supplement, Black and Red points out, "The Negro people are an oppressed race-color caste, in the main comprising the most exploited layer of the American working class. Because of the generations of exceptional oppression, degradation and humiliation, Black people as a group have special needs and problems necessitating additional and special forms of struggle."

The question is not over the existence of the special oppression of Black people above and beyond the normal exploitation under capitalism, but does this special oppression define the existence of a separate nation? Marxists feel that unlike other historical examples of oppressed national minorities, there is no basis in the case of American Blacks for the development of a separate political-economy, even if the land question could be solved. A separate Black state, carved from within the present U.S. boundaries (or elsewhere) undoubtedly would be a super-exploited and economically dependent client state to U.S. imperialism.

This contradiction of a "national" struggle being waged when there is no real basis for (continued on back page)

## DEFEND THE PANTHERS

The police and the ruling class have mounted a determined effort to wipe out the leadership of the Black Panther Party. The "pigs" and their bosses cannot tolerate militant, armed self-defense groups in the ghetto; their system depends too completely on racism for survival. As of this writing, a total of 9 Panther leaders, including Minister of Defense Huey P. Newton, are in jail on various trumped up charges of murder. Funds for defense and expressions of solidarity are urgently needed. To give money or find out what you can do, contact,

### BLACK PANTHER PARTY

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# SOME OF US NEVER LEARN

On April 22nd in downtown Oakland there occurred half a day of confusion, frustration and game-playing by about 2,000 students who were trying to pull off another Stop the Draft Week (STDW). Referred to by some as a demonstration, it was actually little more than a large exercise in traffic direction by the cops, in which the demonstrators were the traffic.

Spartacist published a leaflet entitled, "When Will We Ever Learn?" for the event, but apparently no one learned anything, least of all the STDW steering committee, which claimed victory.

If the cops were "forced" to rush the inductee buses into the Induction Center an hour early to avoid the crowd, or if they were "forced" to spend the extra time and energy to develop new "crowd control" methods because of the expected demonstra-

tion, this doesn't mean that the demonstration was a "victory". It means that the cops planned ahead and successfully tricked and outmaneuvered it.

There was clear frustration and demoralization amongst the demonstrators as the cosp shuttled them around, and there was a complete breakdown of leadership and plan of action. At least the demonstration avoided a bloody slaughter, but to do this it had to become a farce.

We stand by our leaflet, which said, "the anti-war forces in STDW are channeling their energy into... a premature confrontation with the central institution of the capitalist state rather than attempting to carry out the increasingly necessary task of linking up with and building a working class movement which can confront the entire capitalist system which causes war."

## OPPORTUNITY...

a separate nation is manifested in some important ways now and will be more so in the future. In the black plebiscite demanded by the Black Panthers there are two choices, for American citizenship or national independence. How does this express the interests of black working people and unemployed? Both alternatives are equally unreal to them. Their interests are much better expressed in the Panthers' ten point program, which calls for jobs, housing, an immediate end to police brutality, etc. Yet these things are not necessarily the demands of a separate nation, but rather of a specially oppressed group within a society which requires a thorough revolutionary transformation.

## REVOLUTIONARY INTEGRATION

Hopefully, this contradiction will be resolved in the direction of revolutionary integrationism and a deepening representation of the interests of black working people. This should culminate in the call for a Freedom-Labor Party. Such a party would in no way short change the special struggle of Blacks against discrimination, but would attempt to unite this struggle with the anti-capitalist struggles of all workers, of whatever race or nationality.

This problem, as well as the Panthers' relationship with the PFP, will have to be worked out in the course of the struggle. The latter will prove especially troublesome as the PFP degenerates, although the

PFP attitude toward the Panthers may remain healthy longer than its attitude on other questions, since the Panther coalition represents about the only claim the PFP has to any segment representing the masses in the U.S. At the same time, the PFP sees the Panthers as a movement separate and apart from itself, as somebody else's struggle to applaud from the sidelines, as they view the NLF of Vietnam, but not to imitate by developing a similar revolutionary anti-capitalist, as well as anti-racist, program for its own struggle.

## PANTHER CANDIDATES

In the immediate period, however, the PFP affords ballot status to the Panther candidates (Huey Newton for Congress, 7th CD; Bobby Seale for Assembly, 17th AD; and Kathleen Cleaver for Assembly, 18th AD), who should be supported over and above the need to separate from the reformist PFP, since the Panthers are in the vanguard of all those seeking revolutionary transformation of society, and the campaigns are being conducted on the basis of the Panther program and organization.

# SPARTACIST

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