

progressive labor & community control

by Lucy St. John

In the last two articles we dealt with Progressive Labor's practice of containment of the struggles of the trade union movement on the economic level, of their refusal to pose the objectively necessary task of the political struggle against capitalism within the working class.

The basis of this is PL's inability to relate Marxist theory to the struggles of the working class. PL replaces the Marxist understanding of the strategic struggle for political power with tactics, with what works best at this moment. This is pragmatism. It is this method which leads PL to see struggles of the trade unions, the students, the Negroes isolated and only at their present level rather than seeing these struggles as a part of a whole system with the resolution to the crisis being one rather than many.

It is the resolution of this crisis, a political struggle for power, which unites these struggles. Rather than fighting to raise the struggles to the general-political level PL adapts in each area to the present level of struggle, to the specific demands. For PL it is a matter of black power, student power, and bread and butter in the trade unions. The very conception of these struggles in this way keeps these struggles isolated.

anti-capitalist

Marxists understand that these struggles are part of a general struggle against the capitalist system which creates the ills and that the only solution is through the struggle of the working class for power. Marxists begin with this understanding, with a class analysis. PL does not begin with this but with impressions of particular problems at the present moment. Thus their solutions to the particular problems are solutions at this moment within the system - basically they are reformist solutions. This can be clearly seen in PL's demand for 'community control' as a solution to the problems of the ghetto.

schools

PL begins with the recognition of the rotten schools in the ghettos. They see that the cause of these conditions is the result of the policies of the ruling class through the Board of Education. But their solution is not one of a political struggle to get rid of the source of the problem, the ruling class, but one of replacing the Board of Education with smaller organizations within the present system. PL says, 'We need community control because the big Board of NO-Education has been the big roadblock to all progress in the last ten years. Good people have been fighting hard, but the Board is tying all our good ideas up in knots. But, if every neighborhood knew that its school was really controlled by people right in the neighborhood, the misleaders

couldn't fool us with their double talk and phony plans.' In other words the solution to the problem lies in replacing the bad guys with 'good people' who live in the neighborhood.

But who are these 'good people' and what is their program? Exactly who is going to exercise control? What is going to be the political perspective of those who control? PL sees it as a vague coalition not based on class but on the good intentions of the participants. Control is to be exercised by working class parents who live in the community, by 'community organizations that are concerned with public education,' by teachers who 'sincerely put the children first,' and by 'forward thinking groups.' PL gives no content or program to what community control will be except that it will be democratic and that through this democratic control 'pressure' will be applied until it 'blows the lid off the city and its Board of Education.'

PL's solution to the problems of the ghettos through democratic control by 'forward-thinking' people is the most reactionary form of utopian reformism. It is just unreal. The fact that the people who live in the community control it does not solve the basic problem of the cause of the problem, the capitalist system. Capitalism by its very nature does not contain within it the solution to the crisis. As long as production is organized around profit rather than need there will be no money to wipe out the ghettos, much less the ghetto schools.

Democratic control is meaningless unless it is tied to a struggle, a political struggle, to get rid of the system which creates the rotten conditions. This demand raised separate from the struggle for power is based on the assumption that the solution to the problem can be gotten within the system.

class

There is another problem with the concept of community control. That is what class controls, what ideology controls. Marxists understand that the emancipation of the whole society can come only through the instrument of the working class under the leadership of a vanguard party of the working class. The party is the only force which contains the program for the coming to power of the working class.

It is this very concept that PL seeks to reject in its proposal for a force to fight the ruling class made up of 'forward thinkers' and without a working class program. PL has returned to Menshevism like so many other revisionists. PL seems to recognize at least unconsciously this problem and seeks to solve it by posing the conception that working class control is equal to working class



CARMICHAEL: 'MARX IS A HONKIE'

people having a voice within the capitalist system.

ideology

PL assumes that working class ideology, Marxism, is an inherent part of the nature of being working class. This of course is a ridiculous concept. In the first place working class ideology can only come from the Marxist party. If it were otherwise the working class would have come to power spontaneously long ago by the very fact they were workers. We might even say on this basis that the Democratic party has established socialism, since workers participate in the electoral process.

The concept of workers control is a class program for state power and that democratic control by the working class can only be exercised in its interests within a workers state.

This rejection by PL of a class analysis of fight for a working class program - this adaptation to the reformist struggle leaves PL supporting a form participated in by the working class organizationally but containing a bourgeois program. In its coalition with 'progressive' forces in the ghetto, in its failure to differentiate between a working class ideology and bourgeois ideology, it finds itself at the mercy of bourgeois ideology unable to pose the alternative of the independence of the working class. Since PL sees the ghetto as all working class and all progressive, it finds itself siding with the reactionary ideology of black nationalism. It is paralyzed when it finds the working class under the leadership of this anti-working class ideology.

teachers

This is very clearly seen in the teachers strike. It is hard cold fact that Lindsay and the City were able to enlist the support of the working class parents under the leadership of the black nationalists during the teachers strike to cross the picket lines and drive a further wedge between the teachers and these parents. But PL with its support to 'black liberation' cannot admit this. Rather they make a most unbelievable contention about 'the complete failure of Lindsay and the Board of Education to bust the strike by using the parents as volunteers by urging the parents to send their children to school.' They conclude that the 'ruling class was unable to enlist the working class parents in an anti-class action.'

The fact that this tactic did not break the picket lines is not because the city did not enlist the support of working class parents against teachers, because they did, but because the teachers fighting for their class interests held out. PL even goes so far as to attack the teachers for fighting along class interests, for fighting 'to get more money for teachers.'

problem

Progressive Labor of course opposes 'reactionary' black nationalists and favors 'progressive' ones. In this sense they are a bit more discriminating than the SWP which wholeheart-

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BLACK MUSLIMS WELCOMED THESE AMERICAN NAZI PARTY MEMBERS TO RALLY

by Fred Calhoun

NEW YORK-- Recent events have made it clearer than ever that the SSEU (welfare workers) has no future as an independent union and that it must complete a merger with Local 371 (an AFSCME local in DC 37 which represents supervisory personnel). The results of the recent election for union officers can only be seen as a vote of no-confidence for the newly-elected Morgenstern leadership. Only fifty-five percent of the 6,500 members bothered to vote, with the Morgenstern slate receiving about 2,000 votes. Literally hundreds and hundreds of those who voted, cast ballots for write-in candidates, real or imaginary, in disgust with the whole election.

positive

On the positive side was the over 500 votes cast for Dennis Cribben, some 20% of the vote, who was running for treasurer as an independent candidate. He campaigned on a program for the union to begin to organize now to win a successful contract in 1969, for merger with 371 around a program to unite the city labor movement in a fight against the anti-strike Taylor Law and the city's Office of Collective Bargaining, and for the trade unions in New York to run their own candidate in '69 against Lindsay as the first step in the formation of a labor party.

What was clear to the majority of the ranks was that the Morgenstern slate was simply the continuation of the discredited Mage leadership. Morgenstern and company

OPPOSITION SCORES SSEU ELECTION GAIN

based their appeal on their 'experience' and tried as hard as possible to avoid any serious discussion of the issues at hand. What did come out, however, sounded exactly like Mage's perspective: reliance upon political 'friends of labor' like Badillo and slumlord Sutton, and deals with labor bureaucrats like DeLury of the sanitationmen, who did everything he could to sell out last summer's SSEU strike.

Morgenstern has made it clear that he has no solutions for the problems of the SSEU, that he has no idea how to win a better contract in '69, that he has no perspective for leading the SSEU into a merged local with 371 or leading a struggle against the labor bureaucracy who will strenuously oppose the uniting of the ranks of city labor. At this time we warn SSEU members: Morgenstern is the greatest impediment to a merger with 371 insofar as he has no program to carry this out.

militant?

Nor can we ignore the role of the other organized factions in the SSEU. The Militant caucus, who ran four candidates headed by Lyndon Henry also received over 500 votes. They based their campaign on an appeal to trade union militancy. As they were able to point out the sell-out qualities of the past and present leadership, they were

able to create a certain support from the hundreds of workers who were disgusted with the union's lack of direction. But they themselves had absolutely no program to go beyond the Morgensterns and Mages -- except vague promises of more militancy and being tougher on scabs.

Furthermore, they call for the continued isolation of the SSEU from the city labor movement -- thus leaving the SSEU vulnerable to any and all attacks from the city administration. With all their radical sloganeering, this group can only serve as the left cover for bureaucrats like Morgenstern; they can expose him, but they are incapable of leading a fight against him.

bankrupt

The election clearly revealed the bankruptcy of the Rank and File Committee. Having long decided that they did not wish to be responsible for the running of the SSEU in the coming period, this group, far and away the largest and best organized 'opposition' in the union, refused to run a slate against the leadership, then did everything in their power to turn the election into a farce, assuring the smallest possible turn-out of votes. In other words, the Rank and File Committee approach was if you can't win, wreck, demoralize.

This is an extremely dangerous and reactionary policy.



NEW PRESIDENT MARTY MORGENSTERN ADDRESSES TRAINEES

In the first place it is not based on the objective needs of the workers in the department but rather on the inability of the Rank and File Committee leadership to pose an alternative. This policy leads to demoralization and destruction of the ability of the workers to fight.

While they have recently come out in favor of merger with 371 -- sensing a strong push by much of the membership for this -- they refused to support Cribben, who was the only candidate calling for merger.

It is clear that demoralization is rampant in the SSEU. The Morgenstern leadership can pose no alternative, no answer as to how the caseworkers are to get out of this bind. It cannot even come close to a decision on the question of affiliation.

Unfortunately for welfare staff, the city administration is not so indecisive as Morgenstern. The new commissioner, Goldberg, is only

warming up for the real offensive -- to completely eliminate the 60 caseload, to reduce real wages, to institute 'experimental programs' in order to introduce speedup and job freezes for all staff in the department. We can say that the city intends to abolish the conception of trade unionism in the welfare department.

The City's latest campaign is to place the burden of their crisis, the absolute decay of the economy, inability to provide jobs and a decent standard of living reflected in the spiraling welfare rolls on the backs of city workers. The caseworkers more and more are being made to pay for this decay.

The significant vote which Cribben received indicates that there is a consciousness on the part of SSEU members of the need for a fight against the policies of the leadership of an alternative to the destruction of the ability of the SSEU to fight the city.

progressive labor & black power

edly supports anyone who mentions the word 'black'. What this only poses is the real problem--on what basis can you differentiate 'progressive' from 'reactionary' black powerists? Since the only programmatic positions PL seriously poses in the Negro community is 'democratic control' they find that not only is this supported by 'reactionary' black powerists including a good hunk of the Democratic party wardheelers in Harlem and demagogues like Kenyatta who walk through Memphis arm and arm with Rockefeller but this is in fact the official policy of the New York City Administration under the guise of the Bundy Plan.

Then there is the question of anti-imperialism. Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown have been the most outspoken opponents within the Black community of the Vietnam War and support what they and PL call the 'liberation struggle' in the colonial countries unqualifiedly. But both these gentlemen walked across picket lines in the Teacher's Strike and acted as scabs.

We say Carmichael and Brown are enemies of the American working class and extremely hostile to the socialist movement. But let Carmichael speak for himself: 'Marxism only takes into account the economic aspect of the struggle. It cannot help black people because ours is more social, cultural than economic. Besides, Marx was a honkie, and we don't want black people looking up to no white man no matter who he is.'

oppression

The problem is that the black community like the white community has deep class divisions within it. The black workers are oppressed like their white brothers while black middle class and bourgeois elements are not oppressed--discriminated against yes, but not oppressed. These black bourgeois elements fundamentally take their stand with the system of oppression against the oppressed including the oppressed of the same race. These men are 'soul brothers' of the capitalist class and not of the Negro masses. They adapt to racialism precisely to isolate the Negro masses

from the white working class and to maintain their own dominant position within the Negro community. The only way to lead the Negro masses to freedom is around a class program in a fight against the black bourgeois as well as the whole system. Only by posing such a class program, which PL refuses to do, can one distinguish between 'progressive' and 'reactionary'.

unity

Progressive Labor stands for the unity of the black, student and trade union struggles. But unity can only be achieved programmatically. There is no such thing as a program which represents the fundamental interests of more than one class. In the modern period either you unite forces under the leadership of the working class around a program of struggle for the overthrow of capitalism or you unite forces on the basis of a common program which contains the struggles within the capitalist system and thus aids in the preservation of the system.

In the 1930's the Stalinists came up with the program of the 'Popular Front'. The working class, the progressive capitalists, the middle class, the peasantry were all to be united around a reform program within the capitalist system. It could not be otherwise. The liberal capitalists will never join with the working class for the overthrow of their own system but will be happy to have the working class join them to preserve their own system. These 'anti-fascist' alliances in actual practice encouraged the growth of fascism by preventing the working class from struggling independently for its own class program.

We stated then and we state now that the working class must always fight on the basis of its own program for a solution of the crisis of capitalism through a workers government. In the course of such a fight the working class can and must rally other social forces, sections of the middle class, the farmers, sections of the students, the lumpen poor masses. But it rallies such forces on the basis of its program.

alliance

Progressive Labor today follows the same es-

ential program as the Stalinists of the 1930s which led the working class to defeat and contributed to the rise of fascism. Of course they do not openly call for an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie. However they in reality are blocking with this bourgeoisie on the basis of its program in two essential ways.

First within the black community by refusing to raise class demands they limit the struggle programmatically to democratic demands acceptable to the liberal bourgeoisie. They thus form a common front with this bourgeoisie through agents of the bourgeoisie--that is those elements in the black community who not having consciously broken with capitalism represent capitalism ideologically. This of course is not to lay blame on all these elements for PL never seeks to change them to break them from their bourgeois ideology. It carries out this very same method in the student movement and in the trade unions. The student struggles are not seen politically but again as a matter of a block of militants around reform issues. In the trade unions this takes the form of a block over bread and butter issues with trade union militants rather than a political struggle in the unions for a political class alternative to the capitalist parties.

This Popular Frontism is expressed on another level when the question of uniting the black, student and trade union struggles is posed. Around what program should these struggles be pulled together? Since PL refuses to raise class political demands in any sector of the struggle it can only call for unifying these separate struggles around a common reformist program--a program which does not transcend capitalism and thus represents in essence a bloc by PL with the liberal capitalists. So while PL attacks militants for supporting bourgeois politicians like Kennedy and McCarthy in its actual practice in the mass movement its program for the working class, for the Negro, for the student does not transcend the program of the ruling class. This is why in essence Progressive Labor is politically the same as the Communist Party.