

## A History of The Progressive Labor Party *(continued)*

# The San Francisco State Strike



Cop gets hit: students' response

Massed students brave the cops during the 1969

### ON STRIKE—SHUT IT DOWN!

From the first day of the strike it was the militancy of minority students that led the struggle. Picket lines had been set up early in the morning but the vast majority of students had gone to class, most not yet won to striking and some just unsure of the seriousness of the call to strike. At noon that day 500 minority students met on campus. The meeting was called by the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), a coalition of all the minority student groups on campus. The majority of the TWLF central committee had no intention, at that point, of organizing a real strike to shut the school. They opened the meeting with a lot of nationalistic rhetoric and then advised all the minority students to go home. One BSU leader had announced to the press that morning that "this strike will not be violent" and the BSU "will not forcefully disrupt the university." However, the right-wing nationalists misestimated three factors: (1) the militancy and seriousness of the rank and file minority students; (2) the potential leadership role of the PLP forces in the TWLF in a mass struggle situation; (3) the presence in their own ranks of some forces who were willing to build a real strike. These three factors merged to turn the meeting around when, after 1½ hours, a black student stood up and spoke out, "The hell with going home! If we're on strike, then let's shut it down!" Immediately we organized ourselves into flying squads of 45 to 60 each and began touring our classes. By mid-afternoon most classes had adjourned and at 4 p.m. the Administration closed the school, cancelling all classes for the rest of the day. The next day a relatively small number (about 25) TAC squad cops marched onto campus and took up position in front of the BSU campus office. About 700 students gathered near them. The cops charged the crowd, seeking out minority students to arrest. They arrested four minority students who had participated in the previous day's action. The cops obviously had planned to get several others but 800-900 students forced them to beat a hasty gun-drawn retreat.

President Smith, a political moderate who had replaced Summerskill, conferred with the Board of Trustees and Mayor Alioto and came up with a tactic they hoped would derail the strike into an endless talkathon: a campus-wide Convocation. "This will let the fever run its course," bragged Alioto prematurely. The strikers then proceeded to turn the Convocation into its opposite: to use the day-long sessions to explain the strike demands and win the so-called "silent majority," at the same time exposing and isolating the racist Administration. During the

"good faith" Convocation, six strike leaders (including three members of PLP) received suspension notices from Smith, two hundred plainclothes cops were deployed on campus, and classes were still in session with the Convo being "optional." Since many students were not attending the Convocation we organized intensive classroom education to go to classes and talk about racism and the demands of the strike. After five days of the Convocation it was clear the Administration was stalling and trying to doubletalk around dealing with the university's racist policies. Thousands began to support the strike. Instead of "the fever running its course" the strength of the strike had doubled. The strike leadership denounced the "strike-breaking Convocation" and minority AND white students walked out. We marched united and 2,000 strong through the campus buildings chanting "On Strike—Shut it Down!"

Smith's "liberal" tactics had failed to break the strike. Thus having failed the Board of Trustees and the rest of the ruling class, he submitted his "resignation." Within hours the Trustees announced the appointment of S. I. Hayakawa, well-known neo-

Hayakawa's first day in office came on Monday, Dec. 2. The strike steering committee had met and made plans to meet Hayakawa's reign of terror with an escalation of the strike. We rallied 4,000 strong in the quad and reiterated our demands and that we would strike until they were met. The ruling class must have begun to believe their own lies about "it's only a small minority" because they had "only" 200 riot police on hand and these pigs were unable to break up the rally of 4,000. The strikers then marched through the campus and shut it down. There were numerous scuffles with the cops but they made no full-scale charge that day because of the tremendous militancy and numbers of the strikers and the relatively "small" number of cops.

The next day, Dec. 3, was to become known as "Bloody Tuesday" throughout the Bay Area. After Monday's victory for the strikers, Hayakawa had over 1,000 cops and state troopers called in from all over Northern California. The strikers, 6,000 strong, again held a mass rally and demonstration at noon in the center of campus. The cops attacked from several sides and a pitched battle ensued in which thousands of strikers fought the racist police forces for over three hours! Dozens of students suffered serious injuries and one striker almost died from the beating he received during this brutal onslaught. But the militant strikers fought back courageously and defended each other under attack. One cop was laid out cold.

supported Hayakawa and called upon him to crush "the rebellion at S.F. State" and use it as an example to students across the country. Gov. Reagan held a special half hour T.V. broadcast in which he promised to use the National Guard if the combined police forces of Northern California were not enough. And Alioto stated "the police will be used to keep the campus open for those who want to go to class even if it's only 1,000 students" (out of 18,000).

In January the strikers switched tactics to mass picketing around the entrance to the school. By now the majority of students honored the lines and supported the strike. Seven hundred to 1,500 picketed every day starting at 7 a.m. There was great unity and militancy on the lines, which made the frequent police charges unable to break the picket lines.

In addition, on January 6, the AFT, representing 300 out of 1,300 faculty, struck over wages, workload, and the right to collective bargaining. The AFT also supported the students' demands. A serious weakness of the AFT leadership was its attempt to impose pacifism on the strike. However, the students had been through the December days and knew that militancy and self-defense in the face of police terror were essential to win the strike. In balance, when the AFT struck, it was a big shot in the arm for the strike, making it easier and more likely for many more students to stay out. January also saw tremendous support contingents come to State from colleges all over Nor-



While press and politicians ranted about a "small minority" closing down the college, thousands on campus and from the community supported attack on San Francisco State racism.

fascist, as acting President.

With their puppet Hayakawa the ruling class dropped the facade of liberalism and "democracy" and moved openly to crush the strike by force and terror. Hayakawa declared he would break the strike "in three days." Rallies on campus were banned. Picketing was banned. It was declared a misdemeanor to be in the campus quad (scene of the strike's demonstrations) and not in class. "I will use as many police as are necessary to restore order," announced the puppet. In addition to all this, Hayakawa issued "inciting to riot" warrants for several strike leaders, including three PLP members.

Similar rallies and demonstrations resulting in confrontations with the police continued through December and the university was effectively stopped from functioning. Only 15-20 per cent of the student body were still attending classes. The daily rallies and confrontations with the cops involved 4-6,000 (of 6-8,000 who were at the school at any one time). The fascist tactics of the Administration not only failed to crush the strike, but in fact we grew in numbers and in our determination to continue fighting.

Many thought Hayakawa to be a madman or a fool. But it was clear he was acting for the ruling class and had their support. The New York Times, in its lead editorial of Dec. 6,

thern California. Black students at S.F. City College organized a support march over 150 strong from that campus to S.F. State. Scores came from Sonoma State, San Jose State, Sacramento State, U.C. Berkeley, etc. Carloads came from as far away as U.C. Santa Barbara and Fresno State. These contingents brought huge banners displaying slogans of solidarity and support. Many had held support rallies on their campuses and helped raise bail funds. This great outpouring of solidarity and support from other campuses was a great boost to the S.F. State strikers and marked a new level of unity and solidarity in struggle for the student movement.