

WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!

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## From the history of the Party: The ACWM(ML) and the resistance movement

*Below is the main speech from the MLP's May Day meeting in Chicago on April 29. It has been edited for publication.*

Comrades and friends,

This May Day we are also celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the American Communist Workers Movement (Marxist-Leninist), or ACWM(ML). This organization was one of the predecessors of the Marxist-Leninist Party. The ACWM(ML) had many revolutionary features. Tonight I want to concentrate on the resistance movement. Many of the things that the ACWM(ML) learned in that struggle are what continue to guide us today. When we fight the racist skinheads, when we fight the reactionary anti-abortion movement, when we fight police attacks, when we develop picket line struggles and other fights in the workplace, there are lessons from the resistance struggles of the ACWM(ML).

In 1970 ACWM(ML) waged a struggle against Vice-President Agnew, a major spokesman for the policies of the Nixon administration. He stood for going all out to suppress the mass movements. And in 1970 ACWM(ML) waged a struggle against a prominent group of reactionaries, the so-called "hard-hat movement." They were the brainchild of the Nixon-Agnew administration. They were promoted by the media and the politicians just as the racists and reactionaries are being promoted today.

### The bourgeoisie responds to the mass movement

In 1970 the bourgeoisie was beset by rising revolutionary struggle. Despite hundreds of thousands of troops, massive bombings and severe repression, US imperialism was losing in Indochina. Millions of youth had poured into the streets at home to protest this war. The Black masses were in rebellion. The working class was on the move. Wildcat strikes broke out among postal workers, auto workers, truck drivers and others.

The government was intent on suppressing this movement. Thousands of activists were jailed. The FBI and red squads were working overtime spying on and trying to disrupt the movement. The police forces murdered black

activists like Fred Hampton of the Black Panther Party. They shot Fred Hampton in his sleep. Students were gunned down at Kent State and Jackson State universities and other places. The army suppressed the postal strike. The national guard suppressed the Teamsters' strike. Yet this wasn't enough. The bourgeoisie and the Nixon-Agnew government wanted to create a backlash against the masses. They wanted a fascist mass movement to aid them in suppressing the fighting masses.

Vice-President Agnew, in fact, was the main mouthpiece for doing this. He slandered protesters as "criminally insane," and an "effete corps of impudent snobs."

Listen to what Agnew said after the shootings at Kent State in May 1970

"We cannot afford to be divided or deceived by the decadent thinking of a few young people. We can, however, afford to separate them from our society -- with no

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# The ACWM(ML) and the resistance movement

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more regret than we should feel over discarding rotten apples from a barrel."

## The "silent majority"

Nixon and Agnew often spoke of the "Silent Majority." This was supposedly the great mass of good god-fearing patriots who supported everything the White House did. They talked of the ones you don't see because the movement makes so much noise. Of course, it would be more accurate to have called this the "Imaginary Majority." Nixon eventually proved to be the most unpopular president in U.S. history. However, Nixon and Agnew claimed there was a "Silent Majority." This supposed majority was fed up with radicals and would come out against the protesters. When Nixon and Agnew worked to build up a fascist mass movement, the hard hat movement, it was to be the physical manifestation of the so-called "silent majority."

## The hard-hat movement

The first "hard-hat" action took place in New York City. They viciously attacked an anti-war demonstration. These so-called hard-hats were mostly police and businessmen dressed up in construction workers' helmets, or hard-hats. There were however a number of rank and file workers there. The construction capitalists threatened the loss of a day's wages if they didn't go. And the sold-out leaders of the construction unions backed this up, and themselves organized to get workers there. They hoped to suck the workers into a fight with the students and youth. A reactionary section of the construction workers did attack demonstrators. However, our comrades talked to construction workers later. Many of them said that they were brought there under false pretenses.

The liberals and various sections of the left wrung their hands and promoted an atmosphere of fear about these forces. They preached hysteria that "workers" were coming out against students.

## The real sentiment of the masses

ACWM(ML) knew better. It had faith in the masses. It was in touch with workers in the factories and knew their hatred for Nixon and Agnew. It was in touch with the students and knew their fighting spirit. All through that spring of 1970 it had confronted the very same reactionaries who made up the hard hats. They tried to keep our

comrades from distributing in the working class communities of Cleveland. The comrades successfully mobilized the masses to confront these reactionaries and protect the distribution. The comrades knew that the workers despised these reactionaries and would support a fight. It did not kowtow to the "hard hats" or the fear-mongering of the opportunists.

No. It stood up to the Nixon-Agnew administration. It boldly called on the masses to fight back. The comrades organized a demonstration against Agnew in June 1970. And in July 1970 it organized to break up a hard hat demonstration.

Now comrades, at the time, Agnew was a well-promoted spokesman of the bourgeoisie. ACWM(ML)'s action helped to expose him as a fascist buffoon. He became increasingly discredited. In fact, he became such a target of the hatred of the masses that he became a burden to the bourgeoisie. He later had to resign from the Vice-presidency in disgrace. And the work of ACWM(ML) against the hard hats was very successful. They broke up the hard-hat march in Cleveland. They exposed the hard hats as not so powerful after all. Other activists took up confrontation of the hard hats. This smashed this attempt to build a reactionary mass movement.

So what are the lessons from the struggle against Agnew and the "hard-hats?"

## Class analysis

First, the importance of class analysis.

Now ACWM(ML) was not just fighting in the dark. It followed what it called action with analysis. In the struggle twenty years ago against Agnew and the hard hats, ACWM(ML) had a class analysis of these forces. They recognized Agnew as a spokesman for the capitalists and the government, a spokesman for reaction against the masses. ACWM(ML) followed politics. They saw the connection between Nixon-Agnew and the "hard-hats." They knew that the hard hats were capitalists, cops and reactionaries.

ACWM(ML) carried out a widespread agitation against the Nixon-Agnew administration. It exposed the hard hats and their attacks on the progressive movement among the masses.

ACWM(ML) knew the sentiment of the workers against these reactionaries. And it properly judged the mood of the masses for a fight. It judged that this fight could advance the mass movement.

The MLP learns from these traditions. It sees the need for class analysis. It brings the class questions to workers.

It judges the mood of the masses and organizes the workers to fight reaction.

### Oppose reformism in front of the masses

The second lesson is the necessity of exposing and fighting reformism before the masses.

Twenty years ago the ACWM(ML) saw the need to expose the opportunists. It carried out what it called mass democracy. That is, it stood for explaining among the masses what to do. It stood for exposing the sabotaging role of the opportunists right among the masses. This is absolutely necessary to organize the masses for action.

When Agnew was to visit Cleveland in June of 1970, the ACWM(ML) called for protests. Slogans against Agnew were spray painted on walls and bridge overpasses. Thousands of leaflets exposing Agnew as a mouthpiece of capitalist reaction and calling for a demonstration against him were printed and distributed. These leaflets were distributed to factory gates, in the working class communities and on the campuses. And as I mentioned before, "hard hat" reactionaries tried to stop the distribution in some of the communities. The comrades organized the working masses to oppose these reactionaries and defend the distribution. All this made the bourgeoisie and the opportunists quite upset. A representative of the Student Mobilization Committee expressed concern in the bourgeois press about the plans for this demonstration.

Now SMC was a major organization of the period. It organized some of the biggest marches on Washington. So this was a lot of pressure.

However, ACWM(ML) judged forces by their politics and not their numbers or influence or their press connections. The SMC had opportunist politics. The SMC was wrong.

So ACWM(ML) went ahead and did widescale work among the masses, explaining the need to fight Agnew. And it worked right among the activists to expose the opportunists who were hampering mass action. ACWM(ML) worked to influence the activists, including those under the influence of the opportunists.

The weekend of the demonstration the pacifists of the SMC and SWP (the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party) were holding a conference in Cleveland. ACWM(ML) went to this conference and urged the activists to participate in the action.

This put such pressure on the SMC pacifists that they eventually had to call a march against Agnew. However, they worked to keep it as non-militant and non-oppositional as possible. Fred Halstead, a major leader of the SWP, said that they "would not stand for confrontation." And the leaders of the SMC announced that marshals from the meatcutters' union would be on hand to stop such confrontation. ACWM(ML) went to this march. It mobilized a section of activists to break away and cross the street. The marshals of the pacifist march physically tried to keep the activists from crossing the street. However, they were not

successful. And that section of the demonstration confronted the police and then marched on the hotel where Agnew was speaking.

The bourgeoisie was upset. Security tightened. And some big-wigs of the Republican Party were unable to get in to hear Agnew. This action helped electrify the movement in Cleveland and elsewhere.

### Revolutionary action

Another feature of ACWM(ML)'s practice was revolutionary action.

The ACWM(ML) believed in putting its revolutionary ideas into action. It taught the masses contempt for the state. It taught them to stand up to the reactionaries and the police. It tried to lead the masses to break from legalism and pacifism. It sought to break the masses out of the bounds of what was acceptable and respectable to the bourgeoisie.

We can see this in the action against Agnew. And we see its revolutionary deeds when the so-called "hard hats" announced a march in Cleveland for July, 1970. When the hard hats attacked the anti-war demonstration in New York, sections of the masses fought them. However, the main opportunist and pacifist leaders of the movement preached fear. They talked against the policies of the Nixon administration. They talked against reaction and repression. But they didn't want a fight. They didn't want anything that wasn't respectable in the eyes of the bourgeoisie.

As I said before ACWM(ML) analyzed the necessity and the possibility of fighting the "hard hats". This was important to protect and develop the progressive movements. When the "hard-hats" marched, the ACWM(ML) organized a counter demonstration and marched right into them. This punctured the arrogance of the hard hats and they ran in all directions. The police rushed in to protect them. In the fight that followed five policemen were injured. Several comrades were arrested. Large numbers of Black, white and Puerto Rican working people were there denouncing the police. When the hard hats finally regrouped and marched, the masses all along the route threw stuff at them. Some youth boldly went among them and grabbed their symbol of racism, the confederate flag.

The Cleveland anti-hard hat march was the first time that an organized fight was waged against the "hard hats." It exposed them as reactionaries, not workers. It exposed them as creatures of the Nixon administration, protected by the police. After this, they only managed to organize one or two other things. And at those they were also driven away by the masses. This attempt at a reactionary mass movement saw defeat.

This action was well-considered. The ACWM(ML) had analysis of what the hard hats represented. They did preparation among the masses. And this struggle was in line with the mass current. It was needed at the time.

When ACWM(ML) fought the hard hats the masses were also brought into the struggle.

### Setbacks and errors

The MLP learns from the best of this experience and spirit of the ACWM(ML). This is not to say that the ACWM(ML) did not have its problems. For instance, in the resistance movement, there were some incidents where the struggles were not waged on the same correct basis as in the fight against the hard-hats. There were cases where resistance was carried out in a semi-anarchist way, in isolation from advancing the mass movement. Where the fights with the police and reactionaries were not well-considered. Where the comrades took unnecessary losses.

For instance, some comrades were arrested for denouncing a judge as a fascist during a hearing over a traffic ticket. The ticket was not connected with the comrades' political activity. And the fight did not serve to advance the struggle of the masses. Nevertheless, comrades were jailed for this. And there are other such bad examples.

Now this type of error arose at that time not only from the youthful energy of inexperienced comrades -- who could get carried away in the excitement to lay waste to the capitalists and their police and courts. No, this was not the only source of the problems. This type of mistake also arose because there were theoretical weaknesses which led to inconsistency in some of the work. The youthful ACWM(ML) embraced revolutionary Leninism with enthusiasm, but its knowledge of and experience with Leninism was limited. And so theoretical errors crept in.

For example, the ACWM(ML) thought that Mao Zedong Thought was the continuation of Marxism-Leninism, and was the banner of anti-revisionist struggle, and so it upheld this with its characteristic fervor. In fact, it interpreted Maoism in the light of its understanding of Marxism-Leninism, but still this error had its effects. The Chinese revisionists used the language of Leninism to combine a whole eclectic brew of social-democratic reformism and liberalism with anarchist theories. And some of these harmful theories affected the ACWM(ML).

Now comrades, I should point out that the Maoism that affected the ACWM(ML) did not come directly from the Chinese. For one thing, the Chinese revisionists scorned the ACWM(ML) and refused to talk to it precisely because of its opposition to neo-revisionism. But the ACWM(ML) was particularly influenced by one wing of the Canadian Maoists, namely, by the Communist Party of Canada (ML).

Now the CPC(ML) talked a lot about building the Party and about the necessity for revolutionary theory, a revolutionary theory that was to be inseparably connected to practice. They talked about revolutionary agitation, and they waged a number of fights against the bourgeoisie. And they denounced revisionism and neo-revisionism. The ACWM(ML) was impressed by all this. But underneath, the CPC(ML) embraced Maoist policy -- combining all sorts of reformist practices and petty-bourgeois nationalism with

semi-anarchist phrasemongering.

At the beginning of the 1970's, CPC(ML)'s line on the working class movement emphasized the semi-anarchist tendency. And this affected the ACWM(ML) too. In fact, the CPC(ML) helped to form an anarchist faction inside the ACWM(ML) which nearly destroyed it. In the spring of 1971 this struggle came to a head. The ACWM(ML) defended itself and some of the anarchists split away. But the theoretical roots of the problem were not cleared out, and a new anarchist faction formed inside the ACWM(ML) with the assistance of the CPC(ML).

But even when it espoused some of the gibberish of the CPC(ML), the ACWM(ML) stayed close to the masses, continued to take part in the major reformist-led demonstrations and to fight for a militant stand in the reformist conferences. But the anarchist faction that was formed sneered at the mass movement. It had anarchist sneers against the "day-to-day struggle", against the fights for partial demands, against "leading strikes", against "sinking deep roots" among the masses. It even ridiculed forming "militant contingents" in reformist-led demonstrations.

Of course, the anarchist faction could not stay apart from all such work, or it would not have survived in the ACWM(ML). But it distorted this work and set forward confused and disorienting theories that disrupted consistent work and that combined anarchist standing aside from some things with rightist stands towards some other mass phenomena. In opposition to the straightforward Leninist conception of taking part in the mass movements, and finding the ways to fight the reformist domination and lead the movements forward, the anarchist faction might advocate that it was simply the fight for the right to organize or to disseminate revolutionary theory that should be supported. And instead of analyzing the actual political and economic issues that were being fought over, struggles had to be twisted to fit this scheme. Or it put forward as the general method the organization of what it called "leading [i.e. exemplary] struggles" to inspire the masses.

It distorted the summation of the fight against the reactionary hard-hat movement, essentially calling it a struggle for political power by a small band. In fact the battle against the hard hats was a struggle launched by the Marxist-Leninists to organize the masses to smash a fascist mass movement. It was a struggle based on a careful class analysis, based on a careful assessment of the fighting mood of the masses, based on mobilizing a definite section of the masses to support and participate. It was a struggle in the course of which the Marxist-Leninists did clear cut propaganda for proletarian revolution and also did inspire the masses with their fighting spirit, but it was not a fight for political power. Instead of seeing this, the anarchist faction promoted it as a detached fight having nothing to do with the mass movement or the mood of the masses, but rather more like some inspirational action by a handful.

This anarchist faction did great damage to the ACWM(ML), and to the Central Organization of U.S. Marxist-Leninists that followed the ACWM(ML). And the

Maoist theories that the anarchist faction got from the CPC(ML) are one of the sources for some of deviations in the resistance movement. In 1974, there was a sharp fight in the COUSML against the anarchist faction. Many of its theories were repudiated. A major and deep-going rectification was carried out on matters of ideology, of practical organizing, and of organizational methods. From this struggle, the COUSML marched forward.

There would be other struggles. A reformist faction, which turned out also to be fostered by the leadership of CPC(ML), was fought the next year. After that, a major deepening of theoretical clarity took place while fighting against the social-chauvinism and "three worldism" of the neo-revisionist forces. It led to the repudiation of Maoism and laid a firm foundation for the further theoretical work of the Marxist-Leninist Party.

### **This experience and the movement today**

Today, the question of building a resistance movement lies before the progressive masses.

Today, as in 1970, the capitalists are intent on building reactionary movements to attack the masses. The Grand Wizard of the KKK David Duke gets elected. The murderous skinheads organize. And why? The bourgeoisie wants to smash up the gains of the anti-racist struggles of the 1960's. And they want to organize the youth for reaction, racism and militarism.

And let us look at the anti-abortion fanatics.

Women won the right to decide whether to have an abortion through the mass struggles of the 1960's and early 70's. Whether one is personally for or against abortions, one must support women's right to choose. However, the holy crusaders of the anti-abortion movement get official sponsorship. Why? The bourgeoisie wants to turn back the clock on this hard-won democratic right. And they want to build a reactionary movement to support the capitalist offensive of impoverishment, racism and militarism.

The newspapers, television, the politicians, and religious leaders are all supporting the anti-abortion movement. They give it extensive press coverage and many of these reactionaries even claim that it shows the true will of the masses. Reagan, don't vomit, compared it to the civil rights movement. They promote it as a powerful movement. Supposedly no one can stand up to it. And this is not unlike what the bourgeoisie was saying about the hard-hat movement in 1970.

The fight for women's rights demands that we fight these forces. Building a progressive movement demands opposing these reactionaries. And in organizing this fight there are many things to learn from the experience of the ACWM(ML).

### **The masses are the bulwark against reaction**

The ACWM(ML) taught us something: have faith in the working class! Go among the masses, rely on them and

organize them. ACWM(ML) showed the need for class analysis; it showed the need to bring the class issues before the masses. It showed the need to judge the mood of the masses and to organize to advance the mass movement.

The MLP has analyzed the reactionary nature of the anti-abortion movement and its aim to organize against the rights of women. We see that it is a movement for all-round reaction. In the pages of the **Workers' Advocate** and in local leaflets the MLP carries out a wide agitation on these issues. We know the workers in the factories and their hatred of these reactionaries. We have met the students on the campuses and know their anger. We organize for the masses to confront these reactionaries. And we know that we can draw more and more of the masses into this fight. Rather than repel the workers, this will only repel the bourgeoisie and its admirers.

However, there are those who oppose confronting the reactionaries. There are those who don't want to do anything not acceptable to the bourgeoisie.

The bourgeois feminists of NOW and others are on their knees before the anti-abortionists. They tail the bourgeois propaganda that this is a movement of the masses, that it is a backlash from the liberal excesses of the 60's. Just as it was in 1970 -- this is fear-mongering to hold back the masses.

All across the country, the NOW higher ups have done their best to prevent confrontation. They don't want masses of angry people going after the holy hypocrites of Operation Rescue. Michigan NOW went so far as to issue a statement denouncing pro-choice activists for confronting Operation Rescue at the clinics. It called this "deplorable." It said that the activists who fought Operation Rescue "do not represent the pro-choice movement."

### **Oppose reformism!**

The ACWM(ML) taught us the importance of exposing and fighting reformism before the masses. Today too the MLP sees that, to build the resistance movement, we have to oppose the opportunists. We have to go among the masses and explain what to do. We have to expose the sabotaging role of the opportunists right among the masses.

The MLP works hard to explain among the masses the necessity of fighting the reactionaries. It too organizes mass debates against the opportunists. It works to advance the resistance movement.

For example, we all know that Operation Rescue has been trying to shut down abortion clinics around the country. The MLP agitates among the masses about the reactionary nature of this group. It explains the necessity to fight its attempts to shut down the clinics. It has participated in several confrontations at the clinics from Boston to Detroit, Chicago, Oakland and Los Angeles. In these and other places the activists have confronted this activity with militant struggle. They block Operation Rescue people from getting to the doors or pull them from the doors.

And this militant resistance takes place in opposition to the activities of the bourgeois leaders of NOW. Take the events at one clinic in Boston this winter when Operation Rescue attempted to shut it down. The MLP and other pro-choice activists went right up to confront Operation Rescue. NOW leaders tried to stop this. Our comrades challenged NOW on why they were doing this. They organized a debate among the activists against this policy of NOW. They started the slogan "Let us move them." It was very popular and sent panic in both the Operation Rescue and NOW circles. NOW consulted with the police, and it formed a human chain in front of Operation Rescue to protect it from the activists. NOW demanded that activists leave the front line of confrontation. It eventually set up a sound system about 100 feet away and began a speak out. They were able to draw people away from the confrontation temporarily. However, more and more of the activists went back to confront Operation Rescue and most of the anti-abortion fanatics eventually left.

The MLP has had similar debates with NOW forces right in the midst of demonstrations and at conferences. This work is important for encouraging the activists to break from the constraints put upon them by these forces.

I want to make it clear that these two stands have a class basis.

The MLP stands for the interests of the working class and poor. It recognizes that the anti-abortion movement is not some spontaneous reaction of the masses. It is directly sponsored by the capitalists and their government. The MLP recognizes that defending the interests of the working class and poor women requires a fight.

NOW, on the other hand, represents the interests of bourgeois women. That is why it opposes militant tactics and wants everything to be oh so legal and peaceful. They frequently show their class stand. For example, Michigan NOW leaders say they oppose cutting the funding for abortions for poor women. However, it is not on the grounds of defending democratic rights or defending the poor. Rather they appeal to bourgeois prejudice against spending money on the poor. They claim that abortions will save money spent to raise children on welfare.

The NOW leaders are trying to keep the movement tame. They want it confined to women of the upper strata and out of the hands of the rebellious working masses. We must expose their sabotaging. We must take the leadership of the movement from their hands.

## Words and deeds

The ACWM(ML) threw itself into revolutionary action; it put its words into deeds.

The MLP takes this to heart.

The MLP knows that we have to organize to confront the holy anti-abortion crusaders. And we are willing to break from and oppose forces like NOW who want to stop and cool down such confrontation. To do this requires putting one's words into deeds. Many comrades have experience at the pro-choice actions -- experience not only with NOW but with the more left-sounding opportunists. These opportunists will say that Operation Rescue has to be confronted, and some may even say a few words against NOW. However, when push does come to shove, they are unwilling to really break with NOW and have militant tactics against Operation Rescue.

Today, just as in 1970, being for revolutionary action means organizing the masses to break from legalism and pacifism. It means organizing the movement to break out of the bounds of what is acceptable and respectable to the bourgeoisie.

I have given examples from the struggle in Boston. In San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit and other cities comrades also face these issues. Of course, this struggle is in its early stages. There are many political and tactical questions to assess and sum up. Our tactics are based on building a revolutionary movement to defeat the reactionaries. Our tactics are based on organizing a revolutionary movement to get rid of capitalism altogether and building socialism.

Comrades,

Twenty years ago a small group of revolutionaries took up the task of building the Marxist-Leninist party of the proletariat. It strove to lead the class struggle. There is much rich experience to learn from in the history of this organization.

As I said comrades around the country are facing the issue of building the resistance movement against the reactionaries. We are coming right up against the anti-abortion fanatics. We are confronting the KKK and skinhead racists. Tonight I have elaborated some of the experience of the ACWM(ML) on building the resistance movement. I hope that this discussion will assist the comrades in building the resistance movement today. ■