

CAMPUS SPARTACIST

Published by Campus Spartacist Club - labor donated - Sept. 1970

SOCIALISM AND THE TRADE UNIONS

(First of three parts)

The U. S. working class is the most militant and best organized working class in the world. At the same time, it is the most politically backward.

Until recently, most of the Left, especially the New Left, saw only one side of this contradiction--the political backwardness of the American worker. This tendency represented the demoralization of twenty years of cold war and witch-hunt, of apparent capitalist stability and working-class quiescence. And until just a short period ago most of the Left felt that this one-sided picture was reaffirmed with working-class indifference or hostility to the anti-war movement and apparent support for racist, right-wing demagogues like Wallace and Reagen.

The recent strike wave, including the GE strike, the postal, teamster, and railroad wildcats, and massive "illegal" municipal worker strikes, has brought the entire Left face to face with the other side of the contradiction--the combative-ness of the American worker. The impact of this labor upsurge on a Left that is isolated from the labor movement, tiny and splintered, is directly responsible for the demise of the New Left, the split in SDS, the storm in PL. Even SWP-YSA, which has inherited most of the crackpot schemes of the New Left, is forced to give classes in labor history and to reserve, for their token trade unionists, two or three anti-war front seats, still warm from the back-sides of the Dave Dellingers and Sidney Pecks.

The monumental past of American labor, a past of the Wobblies, the rise of the CIO and the post-WWII labor upsurge, clearly illustrates the contradiction between trade union militancy and political backwardness. The rise of the CIO, for example, did not cause the over-

whelming majority of workers to break with Roosevelt or prevent them from supporting an imperialist world war. Nor did the most massive class battles in U. S. labor history prevent the rise of Truman, McCarthy and Meany.

If radicals go on to examine labor history in other countries during the same period they find the same pattern: labor upsurge followed by political defeat. Following WWII, in many countries like France and Italy, the labor upsurge verged on social revolution, but gave way at the critical moment to the restoration of shaky capitalist governments, rotten to the core and without popular support--the "poor relations" of U. S. imperialism.

Where is the current labor upsurge leading? Today we see a repetition of the post-WWII labor cycle, in which each militant strike wave ends with another erosion of paycheck, job and living conditions, and union rights while the government takes practice shots for the day when the imperialists "Bring The War Home."

The contradiction between trade union militancy and political defeat was recognized in the earliest Marxist classics. Engles, in "The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844," writes:

The history of these unions is a long series of defeats of the workingmen, interrupted by a few isolated victories. All these efforts naturally cannot alter the economic law according to which wages are determined by the relation between supply and demand in the labor market. Hence, the Unions remain powerless against all great powers which influence this relation. In a commercial crisis the Union itself must reduce wages or dissolve wholly; and in time of considerable increase in

UNIONIZATION AT UNIVERSITY CO-OP

A significant breakthrough for labor will occur if the current union organizing drive among workers at the university co-op is successful. Here in a largely unorganized southern college town a real base is being built for the possible organization of many businesses, and perhaps the U. T. campus itself.

The co-op ("The Students' Own Store") has long been a scab shop with poor working conditions, poor wages, and few benefits for workers or students. A small group of co-op workers, working since late June, have now signed up a large majority of the workers at the store and are seeking union recognition. Meanwhile, the struggle has spread to other businesses.

Organizers are interested in the recently announced cut in dividends and discounts, meaning a lower rebate or refund for students. The cut was blamed on rising

personnel costs, pilferage, and general inflation.

But wages do not cause prices to rise. It is an old trick of business to raise prices and blame personnel costs, thus creating a price-wage spiral in which prices go ever higher and wages fall farther and farther behind.

Nor is pilferage really to blame. The co-op pilferage figure of 1-1/2 is low compared to many businesses.

The third "culprit," inflation, is real enough but is largely a result of the Vietnam War--something for which students and workers pay enough already in terms of lives and taxes.

Workers and students are being screwed by the co-op management, which meanwhile is taking its "savings" (read profits) and investing them in an expansion fund which will mean even lower discounts and dividends in the future.

DEFENSE VS SECTARIANISM IN HOUSTON

The police assassination of Houston Peoples' Party II leader Carl Hampton is well-known by now. Most radicals, however, are unaware of how seriously sectarianism has damaged the resultant united front defense coalition.

After Hampton's murder, radicals in Houston organized a defense coalition to protect PPII from frame-up, witch-hunt and violence. It is a very broad coalition, including the Univ. of Houston Young Democrats and the student body of all-black Texas Southern Univ., two outfits which, politically, have almost nothing in common with PPII. This reflects the normal situation in defense coalitions. Yet the same article that reported the formation of the coalition also stated that the SWP-YSA had dropped out of the defense because they couldn't support the PPII program. The SWP-YSA had not replied to these accusations, and YSA'ers here in Austin had dropped out of PPII defense work without explanation or provocation.

If these reports were true then the SWP-YSA had committed an amazing sectarian atrocity. If they were false why didn't SWP-YSA refute them?

The Spartacist League has made its own inquiry and turned up another side of

the story. We were told that the SWP-YSA agreed to work with the defense in Houston, but at the first meeting SWP leader Fred Brody was challenged to either endorse the full political program of PPII or get out. Brody refused to endorse and was excluded from the coalition.

By this account, the persons responsible for exclusion are sectarians who consider their personal and political feud with the SWP more important than the defense of PPII. The YDs and TSU students remain in the coalition without challenge.

This stupid and sectarian conduct in the face of the enemy is dangerously wrong, and lies produced to conceal it are unforgivable.

Why couldn't the SWP itself refute these slanders? They won't because in order to do so they would have to reveal that the SWP's reputation among Houston radicals is so foul that even their defense efforts are not wanted.

Of course, none of this excuses the Austin YSA abstention from defense work here. We believe no one in Austin will object to SWP-YSA participation in PPII defense efforts, and the Spartacist League will fight, if necessary, to keep it that way.

On August 28 there was an "administrative hearing" of charges that the Ad Hoc Committee Against the Regent's Rule (AHC) had violated the Regent's Ruling (6.13) which, at the time of the violation, prohibited student organizations from having more than 3 members of the non-campus community at their meetings. If you couldn't attend the hearing, don't feel left out. The "hearing" was purposely held when most students would be away. Further, those students who wanted to attend discovered that the trial was held in the same tiny room where the YSA was tried earlier this summer on the same charges. And they found that the doors were carefully guarded by two plainclothes campus police.

The "administrative hearing" was a replay of the witch-hunt trial of the YSA. Bryce Jordan had as much trouble choosing a "hearing officer" as Nixon had in choosing Supreme Court judges with the exception that in Texas you need no excuse for a "Southern Strategy." At first Jordan designated the "Honorable" Mr. Musslewhite to preside as "hearing officer" and a Mr. Crosson as prosecutor. This was the same Mr. Musslewhite who broke up a YSA class and served as Prosecutor at the YSA trial. When the AHC raised objections about the impartiality of meeting-buster, arch-inquisitor Musslewhite, Jordan replaced him with the "Honorable" Mr. Crosson. Again objections raised, again a shifting of chairs. As in the YSA trial, Musslewhite would prosecute and the "Honorable" Bryce Jordan would preside, insuring that the "administrative hearing" would hear only what the administration wanted to hear.

At the "hearing" some of the alleged non-students were shown to have been admitted to U.T. and classified as students. During the lunch break, Musslewhite, hoping perhaps to unadmit some of these students, engaged Registrar Shipp in a little chat. As Registrar Shipp was a "sequestered" witness, the little chat was a gross violation of trial procedure. In addition, Musslewhite's prime evidence consisted of Dean Franks' claim that the chairman of the AHC June 24 meeting stated that the meeting planned to violate the Regent's Rule. Unfortunate for Dean Franks' credibility, the AHC had a complete tape of its meeting. The tape was played, demonstrating that at no time did the chairman make the alleged statement. Musslewhite's prime piece of evidence was shown to be a prime case of perjury.

Ad Hoc Committee Summary Statement for Aug. 28 "Hearing"

The Regent's Rule (6.13) is an unconstitutional abridgement of the rights to free speech and assembly which has only one purpose: to hamper and remove political opposition, particularly leftist opposition. The rule not only restricts the freedom of leftists, but restricts the freedoms of all who desire interaction with the non-campus community, not to mention restricting the rights of the non-campus community.

Whether the quelling of political opposition is effected by limiting attendance at meetings, by revoking registered organizational status, or by embroiling groups in extensive legal battles, it is a gross example of the coercive, McCarthyite manner in which the Regents feel compelled to operate in order to preserve their standards of "law and order". The Regents would find no reason to censor the ideas to which students and non-students are exposed if they had even elementary confidence in their ability to persuade without coercion. Lacking such confidence, they are forced to resort to crude, anti-democratic measures such as the Regent's Rule, for their own political ends. These ends clearly cannot be proven desirable to the majority of the population through open discussion--this is admitted by the use of such strong-arm tactics--but one might ask what these ends may be. The answer is that Frank Erwin & Co., as flunky U.T. tyrants supported by the class of major property owners, are protecting the interests of this class--higher and higher profits, of which they get their paltry rake-off. This has been demonstrated over the years by such boondoggles as the LBJ Library, stadium expansion, and Hardin's University Village. Erwin cannot allow these facts to be public.

However, Erwin does not include the reaction of those he attempts to keep misinformed when he calculate his tactics. He does not even reckon with the legal system he must claim to support. Knowing that we will quite likely lose in this kangaroo court battle, we are prepared to carry on a battle in the federal courts. Further, we are prepared to mobilize massive public opposition, both on and off campus, to expose the base motivations and ignoble ends that Erwin would prefer to hide, and to smash this Regent's Rule.

the demand for labor, it cannot fix the rate higher than would be reached spontaneously by the competition of the capitalists among themselves.

Lenin also observed:

Trade unions and strike become impotent when, owing to a depression, there is no demand for (labor power). They are unable to remove the conditions which convert labor power into a commodity, and which doom the masses of toilers to poverty and unemployment. ("Another Massacre", 1901.)

The limitations of the trade union struggle arise from the very nature of the trade unions within the wage system, as defensive instruments which, as Lenin describes it in What Is To Be Done?, "Fight the purchasers of labor power over a purely commercial deal." Thus, the power of trade unions is subordinate to the laws of the labor market. Each economic crisis drives workers into the ranks of the unemployed and the weaker members of the bourgeoisie into the ranks of the working

class. And economic crisis that is not resolved by the victory of a working class revolution will be resolved with a weakening, if not the utter destruction, of trade unions.

Moreover, the independent functioning and existence of the trade unions is continually threatened by the control of the capitalist class over the state apparatus. Every repressive function of the state can be transformed into a strike-breaking, union-busting weapon in the service of the bourgeoisie. In critical strikes like the railroad and postal wildcats the entire government, from the President, Congress and court system to the police, militia and army, from the "friends of labor" to its overt enemies, are mobilized to smash the strike, behold the militant leaders and discipline the rank and file. Unions fight a perpetual civil war in a capitalist country for their legality, for their democratic and political rights. Yet, against the full arsenal of political and economic weapons of the capitalists, the unions go into battle with only the single economic weapon of the strike.

(To be continued)

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