

Terrorism and Communism

"We are bound, naturally, by ties of open moral solidarity to Grynspan and not to his 'democratic' jailers, or the Stalinist slanderers, who need Grynspan's corpse to prop up, even if only partially and indirectly, the verdicts of Moscow's justice. . . .

"People come cheap who are capable only of fulminating against injustice and bestiality. But those who, like Grynspan, are able to act as well as conceive, sacrificing their own lives if need be, are the precious leaven of mankind."

—L. Trotsky, "For Grynspan,"
February 1939

While this country's recent rightward drift has not as yet exploded into, the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War-McCarthy period, there has been a growing apprehension among radicals that the atmosphere of repression, skillfully manipulated by bourgeois demagogues, will not easily or lightly be dissipated. Judging from that earlier period, we can expect a section of the left to respond to the repression by "conservatizing" itself—toning down its propaganda and emasculating its politics, throwing itself into a paranoid posture and attempting to convince the public that it is really perfectly respectable. The Panthers' "United Front Against Fascism" Conference showed this tendency: their militant and sometimes adventurist policies having drawn to them the full brunt of hysterical, murderous reaction, the Panthers sought to protect themselves by flirting with political subordination to left-talking politicians, white-guilt liberals and the Communist Party. That this strategy is incapable of defending the movement is shown by the continuing nationwide repression against the Panther leadership and cadres.

New Left Evolution

Such "conservatizing" of the left has happened before. Indeed, what used to be called the "New Left" originated in large part out of a healthy revulsion against what the young radicals properly excoriated as a betrayal: the conservative, de-revolutionized Communist Party. Nor has this been confined to the Stalinist side of the fence. The ex-Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party demonstrated their panic-stricken lack of revolutionary fiber with their telegram of "condolences" to the widow Kennedy at the time of the 1963 assassination in Dallas (cf. SPARTACIST #1 for a review of the left press' reaction) and have in the years since become merely a left-talking, reformist formation of the same genre as the CP. Now, some of the same "New Left" activists, frustrated by the seeming omnipotence

of the forces of repression and despairing of the potential of the working class or the organizations which profess to speak in its name, have turned to a policy of individual activism, attempting to substitute their own dedication for a conscious working-class movement. This has resulted in recent months in a wave of threats, bombings and sabotage intended to terrorize the ruling class and the bourgeois state.

The roots of this mood, whose most prominent exponent apart from some individuals marginally connected to the Black Panthers is the Weatherman grouping, can be traced to both the old "New Left" and to pacifism. Weatherman is quite incapable of explaining *how* its confrontations and street actions can precipitate any change in the present relationship of social forces. Rather, their tactics are directed toward demonstrating their hatred of this society and their commitment to destroy it; thus they strike out, largely at symbols, in the only way they can imagine. The pacifists call this middle-class ethical, apolitical approach to political questions "bearing moral witness," but no matter what it is called it merely demonstrates the activists' lack of a political program. In its essence it constitutes a denial of Leninism, which is a projection of *the road to power* for the working class, a programmatic guide to action whose purpose is not to embody subjective satisfactions but to rip capitalist society up by the roots and substitute workers' control of a new social order.

The left-wing terrorists are, then, an integral part of the radical movement whose orientation is dramatically counterposed to that of revolutionary socialism. They are objectively anti-Leninist, destructive and self-destructive. Like any other radical but not genuinely Marxist grouping (the CP, SWP, Workers League, Progressive Labor) they are no more than this. But it is necessary to understand also that *they are no less*. The response of the vast majority of the ostensibly revolutionary organizations to the terrorists has been frighteningly lacking in basic solidarist impulse, a complex of outright gutlessness and infantile sectarianism which bodes ill for the left's ability to fight back by political means against ruling-class repression.

Another CP Sellout

As might be expected, the Communist Party stands at the forefront of the left's distorted reaction. Writing in the 15 April issue of the *Daily World* Charlene Mitchell, CP presidential candidate in the 1968 national elections,

quotes Lenin as the alleged authority for the CP's vicious attitude toward the confrontationists in an article "Terror and Armed Battle Play into Nixon's Hands." Mrs. Mitchell quotes Lenin:

"Is there not the danger of rupturing the contact between the revolutionary organizations and the disunited masses of the discontented, the protesting, and the disposed to struggle, who are weak precisely because they are disunited? Yet it is this contact that is the sole guarantee of our success."

Expanding on this, Mrs. Mitchell repudiates terror tactics and counterposes the proposals of the CP-controlled Emergency Conference to Defend the Right of the Black Panther Party to Exist. She writes:

"The proposals of the Emergency Conference that tens of thousands of people demonstrate in New Haven for the freedom of Black Panther leader Bobby Seale and that one million signatures on petitions demanding a stop to U.S. genocidal practices be presented to the United Nations, will if realized, be a tremendous advance of the struggle for black liberation, peace and human dignity."

Elsewhere in her article she argues against so-called "retaliation" by Black people, stating that self-defense *invariably* is useless or dangerous. This carries the unstated corollary that the oppressed must rely on racist cops, liberal politicians, the Democratic Party and the bourgeois courts. It should be clear from Mitchell's article that "terror and armed battle" play not so much into "Nixon's hands" as into the hands of the CP and other sellouts, revisionists, opportunists and fakers who point to the "excesses" of a section of the radical movement as a foil to preach pacifism, social peace and *faith in the U.N.*! It is precisely the 40-year history of betrayals by social patriots and liberal lackeys like the CP which has driven the radical youth, in revulsion, to impatiently abandon Marxism along with the fake-Marxists.

Lenin on Terrorism

Mrs. Mitchell has, along with all the rest, the colossal effrontery to claim communist authority for this wretched betrayal; she drags in the icon of Lenin as a stick to beat Weatherman! But what Lenin in reality thought about terrorism does not so easily blend into the CP recipe for supporting liberalism. So Mrs. Mitchell does not bother pointing out that what she has quoted was ripped out of context in order to diametrically twist the meaning. In the *same paragraph* (from "Where to Begin?") as the quoted excerpt, Lenin in

1901 had said:

"In principle we have never rejected, and cannot reject, terror. Terror is one of the forms of military action that may be perfectly suitable or even essential at a definite juncture in the battle, given a definite state of the troops and the existence of definite conditions. . . . [But we] declare emphatically that under the present conditions such a means of struggle is inopportune and unsuitable; that it diverts the most active fighters from their real task, the task which is most important from the standpoint of the interests of the movement as a whole; and that it disorganizes the forces, not of the government, but the revolution."

Further, the lines immediately following Mrs. Mitchell's quote hardly reinforce her view:

"Far be it from us to deny the significance of heroic individual blows, but it is our duty to sound a vigorous warning against becoming infatuated with terror, against taking it to be the chief and basic means of struggle, as so many people strongly incline to do at present. Terror can never be a regular military operation; at best it can only serve as one of the methods employed in a decisive assault."

The spirit of what Lenin really thought about heroic individualism is a million miles removed from the "peaceful coexistence with capitalism" road offered militants by the CP. It is not Lenin preaching social peace, warning against self-defense, trotting out cute hints that violence serves the capitalists, organizing phony and pointless petitions to that decomposing gimcrack of pious bourgeois unity, the U.N. Lenin clearly opposes terrorism from a *strategic* point of view; it is wrong in the long run because outside a revolutionary situation it is only one more *diversion* from political struggle. Lenin opposes left-wing terrorism because it is *not revolutionary enough*. As against individualistic diversions he offers not mealy-mouthed platitudes or liberalism but the construction and organization of the revolutionary party. Lenin's thought, in its context, would have served Mitchell admirably as a polemic against adventurism—if that was really what she wanted. But she was forced to truncate and distort Lenin's statement because honest consideration of what Lenin wrote shows he opposed isolated acts of terrorism from a *revolutionary*, not a "respectable" standpoint. The pious liberals whom Mrs. Mitchell fears will be alienated by terrorism would certainly be equally horrified by Leninism!

SWP Red-Baiting

The central weakness of groups like Weatherman is that, while its adherents are *subjectively* revolutionary, objectively they lack even the rudiments of a revolutionary program. However

the revisionists deny them even the subjective intent. In this regard, the response of the Socialist Workers Party-Young Socialist Alliance is similar to the CP's. After nearly a year of exotica-baiting and heaping ridicule on Weatherman (cf. "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows—or Anything Else" in the October 1969 *Young Socialist*) the SWP has finally surfaced a hard, definitive position: George Novack's "Marxism vs. Neo-Anarchist Terrorism" in the June 1970 *International Socialist Review*. Despite its title the article has nothing in common with Marxism; the view it states is qualitatively indistinguishable from the CPUSA.

The Novack article is replete with dabs and pieces of "Marxist" scholarship: some passing references to Russian revolutionary history, Lenin's struggles against the Narodniki, quotes from Trotsky, and the like. Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, however, who howevermuch fighting against a deterioration of struggle resulting in individual violence nevertheless indicated a sympathetic understanding of its sources, Novack's statement is one more component in the SWP's iconization of Trotsky—doing with him what the CP does with Lenin. Thus, an isolated instance—in this case Trotsky's pamphlet *The Kirov Assassination*—is singled out from a welter of possibilities as the *sine qua non* of Trotskyism. This conveys a general impression which is radically different from the general thrust of Trotsky's attitude, while the corpus as a whole is allowed to moulder quietly in the archives.

The facts surrounding the Kirov assassination are these: Kirov, a leading functionary who was one of Stalin's associates, was assassinated by Nicholaiev in 1934, in surroundings which are still unclear, although it is now believed the GPU was heavily implicated. The assassination gave Stalin a pretext, immediately recognized by Trotsky, to frame up former oppositionists still in the Soviet Union. This began the big blood purges which, over the next half-dozen years, resulted in the root-and-branch extermination of all those individuals remaining of Lenin's Bolshevik party.

Throughout the whole of *The Kirov Assassination* Trotsky is attempting to deflect the axe poised over the neck of the Soviet oppositionists, to head off the clearly intended blood purges. Already, by the time Trotsky set out to write his pamphlet, fifteen members of the so-called "anti-soviet" group headed by Zinoviev had been arrested in connection with the Kirov affair. It was manifest—and this was later to become one of the central props for the staged trials—that in the shooting of Kirov an excuse had presented itself for the physical liquidation of oppositionists, something heretofore lacking. It was

clear that a myth was being promulgated: Stalin was seeking to establish Nicholaiev as, in Trotsky's words, "the terrorist agent of an internal opposition in the party." It is to *destroy* this official myth, to hold up to the ridicule of the world the Stalinist lie that the old Bolsheviks wanted to sabotage and destroy the Soviet Union, that Trotsky finds it imperative at this time to heavily and repetitively underscore those components of Marxists' hostility to terrorism. To single out the writings of this period, as Novack does, in order to imply such was the sum total of Trotsky's views on the subject, is disingenuous, deliberately misleading, and on a par with the Stalinist iconography that what Lenin wrote in heated polemic against Trotsky in 1912 represented for all time, undying and unchangable, his full panoply of views on the man. By so doing, Novack in effect suppressed Trotsky's full views on terrorism.

Trotsky on Terrorism

For example, in February 1939 Trotsky wrote a polemic against the opening of the French trial in which the accused, Herschel Grynzspan, was being tried for shooting a Nazi official in the German Embassy in Paris late in 1938. Trotsky wrote "For Grynzspan: Against the Fascist Pogrom Gangs and Stalinist Scoundrels," from which the following passages are taken:

". . . We Marxists consider the tactic of individual terror inexpedient in the tasks of the liberating struggle of the proletariat as well as oppressed nationalities. A single isolated hero cannot replace the masses. But we understand only too clearly the inevitability of such convulsive acts of despair and vengeance. All our emotions, all our sympathies are with the self-sacrificing avengers even though they have been unable to discover the correct road. Our sympathy becomes intensified because Grynzspan is not a political militant but an inexperienced youth, almost a boy, whose only counsellor was a feeling of indignation. To tear Grynzspan out of the hands of capitalist justice, which is capable of chopping off his head to further serve capitalist diplomacy, is the elementary, immediate task of the international working class!"

"In the moral sense, although not for his mode of action, Grynzspan may serve as an example for every young revolutionist. Our open moral solidarity with Grynzspan gives us an added right to say to all the other would-be Grynzspans, to all those capable of self-sacrifice in the struggle against despotism and bestiality: seek another road! Not the lone avenger can free the oppressed, but only a great revolutionary movement of the masses which will leave no remnant of the entire structure of class exploitation, national oppression and racial persecution."

(Continued Next Page)

... **TERROR**

Needless to say, there is not a whisper of a word like this anywhere in Novack. This is only consistent: Novack's organization has given up any hope for proletarian revolution and today deliberately blocks the development of revolutionary consciousness, seeking to tie would-be radicals to the labor bureaucrats and the liberal bourgeoisie. When Novack writes that "terrorism is petty-bourgeois liberalism temporarily gone berserk" the only response can be that Novack is Pabloist revisionism going out with a sigh and a whimper, arm in arm with the "sane" liberals.

Further, this same SWP which so one-sidedly condemns the small, isolated, harassed left-wing terrorists here as if they were not even part of the movement also abandons Trotskyism from another angle. It is noteworthy that in those countries where guerillism and other non-proletarian strategies are most prevalent (e.g. Latin America) the SWP and its international collaborators capitulate to their popularity. One hears *nothing* from the SWP and its associates about Lenin's polemics against the Narodniki, about the necessity to counterpose a proletarian strategy and program to guerillism and anarchism *there*, precisely where the ideological battle against petty-bourgeois terrorism is most necessary. In fact it is the vociferously anti-terrorist SWP which seemingly owns the import license and patents of vicarious Guevarism.

"Police Agents"?

As if the SWP-CP disavowal of Marxism were not enough, an atrocity similar in kind was presented by the Progressive Labor-supported SDS. A leaflet advertising an SDS anti-war demonstration on April 15 ("SDS: Mass Action Not Mad Bombings") ends with this harangue:

"We see the way forward as winning masses of students to ally with working people to attack the problems that most people in this country face. We absolutely condemn and have nothing to do with terrorist bombings that only attack and intimidate the people!"

This is all askew. Whatever the consequences of bomb-throwing, these are not "mad bombings" by mentally disturbed people but *political* acts, however ineffective or even dangerous to the movement. It is a gross deception—for people calling themselves radicals—to pretend otherwise. Those courageous, individualistic, disoriented radicals came to their politics in a context—the absence of a strong, truly Leninist revolutionary vanguard party. Had such a party existed, or had the various left tendencies been more interested in laying the roots for one rather than chasing after every petty-bourgeois will-o'-the-wisp ("peace now," Black National-

ism, draft resistance, student power, etc.) many of the current Weathermen would have become dedicated pro-working-class revolutionaries.

Another SDS statement went even further. Regarding the RYM confrontations around the country, culminating in the Chicago actions last fall, a national press release by SDS dated 2 October (reprinted in *New Left Notes'* Moratorium supplement) called the RYM demonstrators cops outright!

"These actions were all the work of a group of police agents and hate-the-people lunatics who walked out of the SDS at the June Convention. . . . The bankers and big business men who run the country are using this clique (led by Mark Rudd) for two purposes. First, to divert people so they won't fight back anymore. Second, to discredit SDS and radical ideas in general. This group's 'Days of Rage' planned for Chicago, Oct. 8-11 is a police trap. . . ."

This disgusting red-baiting can have only one consequence: it disarms the movement in the face of vicious repression aimed at destroying the left. Obviously, the most vocal, thorn-in-the-side confrontationists and terrorists will come first; then, after public opinion has been suitably prepared by the first repressions, all the rest. If there is one thing to be learned from the gutless behavior of the CP during the witchhunt it is that going "respectable" only disarms the left's *supporters*; the bourgeoisie will not be confused in the

least.

It is the responsibility of the ostensible revolutionaries to come to grips with wrong, faulty ideas and defeat them politically—in Trotsky's words, to help them "choose another road"—not to stand by with a "hands off" attitude hoping the cops will purge them from the movement.

Defend the Movement!

What will really aid the movement in fighting repression is not sanctimonious fingerwagging à la Novack or pretended virginity, but vigorous *defense* of those persecuted by the government. For the PL-led SDS to argue that recent violence was aimed against "the people" again denies the political motivation of the activists, who sincerely thought blowing up large corporation offices and police stations was fighting the bourgeoisie. Such actions are indeed naive: they deny the potency of the armed might of the state and the strength of most people's legalistic illusions. It is necessary to explain to would-be terrorists that they are substituting the excitement of courageous individual actions for a much harder task—the radicalization of the American working class. But SDS is more interested in explaining it "has nothing to do with" terroristic activities. Legal defense of all radical activists victimized by the bourgeois state is necessary not only to protect the movement as a whole but also to establish the authority

MARXIST BULLETIN SERIES

No. 1—"In Defense of a Revolutionary Perspective."

A Statement of Basic Position by the Revolutionary Tendency. Presented to the June 1962 plenary meeting of the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. (23 pages, mimeographed) 25 cents

No. 2—"The Nature of the Socialist Workers Party—Revolutionary or Centrist?"

Discussion material of the Revolutionary Tendency within the SWP. (73 pages, mimeographed) 50 cents

No. 3—"Relations With Wohlforth-Healy."

Part I—"The Split in the Revolutionary Tendency" (1962). Documents and correspondence on the 1962 rupture by Philips, Wohlforth and Healy of the Minority Tendency of the SWP. (40 pages, mimeographed) 30 cents

Part II—"Wohlforth Against the Revolutionary Tendency" (1963). Documents and correspondence on the political basis for Wohlforth's conniving with the SWP leadership for the expulsion of the RT. (in preparation) 50 cents

Part IV—"Conversations With Wohlforth" (1965). Minutes of the Spartacist-ACFI Unity Negotiating Sessions. (79 pages, mimeographed) one dollar

No. 4—"Expulsion from the Socialist Workers Party."

Documents on the exclusion of the Revolutionary Tendency supporters. Parts I and II. (120 pages total, mimeographed) Each Part 50 cents

No. 5—"For the Materialist Conception of the Negro Question" by R. Fraser. Reprinted from SWP Discussion Bulletin A-30, August 1955. (30 pages, mimeographed) 25 cents

No. 7—"The Leninist Position on Youth-Party Relations."

Documents from the Young Socialist Alliance and Socialist Workers Party, 1957-61. (37 pages, mimeographed) 25 cents

No. 8—"Cuba and Marxist Theory."

Selected Documents on the Cuban Question. (37 pages, mimeographed) 35 cents

(other numbers in preparation)

Order from: SPARTACIST, Box 1377, G.P.O., New York, N.Y. 10001

of the revolutionary left to set the Weatherman followers straight. Individualistic, programless tactics must be politically exposed and counterposed to a Leninist strategy. But all the quotes in the world from Lenin will not convince the radical confrontationists when they appear in the mouths of those who prove themselves more concerned with their own "respectability" than with principled defense of repression's victims.

Through its hypocrisy, PL has managed to hang itself in an exquisite contradiction. It has recently indulged itself in a series of gangster attacks on other radical groups (primarily the SMC and SWP-YSA) in the Boston area. As a point of principle they have resolutely refused to join with other organizations (whom they label "counter-revolutionary") in common struggles against exclusionism and beatings of other organizations on the left. Yet they are quick to repudiate and label as cops any section of the movement which proposes violence against the bourgeoisie. PL-SDS would appear to operate under the general slogan, Violence Within the Workers Movement, But Hands Off the Bourgeoisie! It is not a position calculated to bring much clarity to the necessary political struggle with individualistic-oriented radicals.

PL's shameful conduct toward its political antagonists is symptomatic of the weakness and sectarianism of the left in general. Side by side with the recent fierce intensification of government repression against the left is a catalogue of incidents of right-wing terrorism against radical organizations—threats, beatings, bombings and even murder. Not only legal defense against the government but also physical *self-defense* against the right wing is urgently called for. What is needed are *united fronts* of all radical organizations to protect groups and individuals threatened and victimized by the organized right wing. But a radical movement split apart by rampant sectarianism, blatant exclusionism and scandalous gangsterism does not have the consciousness necessary even to defend against a danger which menaces its very existence.

Wohlforth Amok

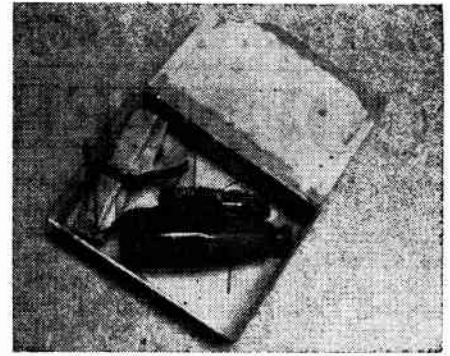
Whenever swinish behavior over and above the norm is to be found on the left, it is a certainty that Wohlforth's Workers League will be there in full wallow. Their characterization of the terrorists was perhaps inevitable; they refer to Weatherman as "... this proto-fascist group of declassed hoodlums." (*Bulletin*, 6 Oct., 1969) It should suffice to say that Wohlforth, as a premature anti-proto-fascist, again places himself on the wrong side of the class line. But the difficulty for Wohlforth

only begins here. Another passage in the same editorial states "... the Panthers are nothing more than a black reflection of Rudd." Since a socialist group is hardly in the habit of supporting or defending fascists, "proto-" or otherwise, obviously they would refuse to defend Weatherman. But the WL has elsewhere (29 July 1969 *Bulletin*) argued that it is a *class* issue to defend the Panthers! According to the Wohlforthites, then, defense of the Black Weathermen (Panthers) is a class issue, whereas defense of the (white) Weathermen would mean support to the class enemy! What this gobbledygook really means is that it is opportunism alone which makes the *Bulletin* come out to defend the Panthers.

But the Wohlforthites are only a grosser example of the acute contradiction which affects the CP, SWP, SDS and PL. All of them defend the Panthers. And none of them state any solidarity at all with groups like Weatherman. Where lies the difference? The Panthers are a large organization, they are Black, and they are *popular* with large segments of the left-liberal bourgeoisie. The Weathermen are small, white and unpopular. The former is supported, the latter not. And the difference is unbridled opportunism. Nothing more.

As with the Panthers, it is the class duty of all radicals and militants to defend Weatherman. Class issues are not dependent upon what is currently popular with the liberals. One may disagree with "outbreaks" tactically; one is bound to advise militants—including Black militants—against adventurism. But this much must be clear: once the battle has been joined, we have a side—the side of the oppressed, outraged and exploited (ghetto "rioters" against the cops, strikers against scabs, the Panthers and Chicago "Conspiracy" against bourgeois "justice") against the ruling class and its state.

In this connection, Marxists would do well to recall Marx's own stand at the time of the Paris Commune. He analyzed the class antagonisms of French society and understood that the emerging French proletariat did not yet have the social force to hold power and rule in its own right, and therefore the Paris Commune rising could be no more than a heroic, tragic episode whose fulfillment could come only later on in another historical epoch. But Marx also understood that his side in this struggle was the side of the embattled French working class and that he would not stand on the sidelines denouncing equally the futile rebellion of the workers and the murderous bourgeois reaction. The Marxists of today must similarly understand that we cannot be neutral or noncommittal in the face of confrontations between the bourgeois



REUBEN'S BOMB: Ultra-rightist mock-up mailed to Texas comrade.

state and those who seek, no matter how gropingly, to struggle against it. In this one respect the ill-advised super-militancy of the Weatherman followers can be likened to the spontaneous, inchoate outbursts of rage against the system and the cops on the part of Black people in the ghettos. Fully though we understand that these Black rebellions cannot, in the absence of a conscious and united proletarian revolution, succeed in overthrowing the capitalist state, we must nonetheless recognize that on the most elemental level of solidarity and defense we stand with the oppressed against their exploiters.

The real crime vis-a-vis terror politics and heroic individualism is that it allows the revolutionary energies of some of the movement's most talented, dedicated people to be channeled into futile and self-destructive actions. It is our job to seek to redirect these energies into genuinely revolutionary directions.

For a Vanguard Party

To terrorist diversions, Lenin counterposed the vanguard party:

"... the immediate task of our party is not to summon all available forces for the attack right now, but to call for the formation of a revolutionary organization capable of uniting all forces and guiding the movement in actual practice and not in name only, that is, an organization ready at any time to support every protest and every outbreak and use it to build up and consolidate the fighting forces suitable for the decisive struggle."

The kind of organization envisioned by Lenin does not now exist in this country, but only some rotting corpses of its former aspirants or pretenders. These serve only to repel genuine revolutionary impulses so that some youth turn in despair toward methods of combatting the bourgeois order "by the deed." To revolutionaries who might be inclined toward such methods we say "seek another road": the construction of the Leninist combat party which can lead the working class in smashing the capitalist order and the bourgeois state. ■