

B E W A R E L I B E R A L U N I O N B U S T E R S !

New York City has long been faced with an immense financial crisis. While corporations rake in millions of dollars, the City government has been unable to "find" the money to provide adequate public services. Liberal Mayor Lindsay has attempted to meet this crisis in part by trying to break the power of the public employee unions. From the Sanitationmen's strike (when Lindsay tried to call in the National Guard as scabs) to the current UFT strike, Lindsay has made it clear that he intends to break the unions. The Lindsay administration has fought a long war to legitimize the Taylor Law, which prohibits strikes by public employees, on the grounds that such strikes endanger the "public interest". The teachers' strike has provided him with his most potent weapon so far, as the growing liberal sentiment against the strike has reinforced the spectre of the self-interested unions as enemies of the general public.

"Community Control" Fraud

The City's financial crisis has hit the school system this year, a year in which the City has actually made the first cut in the school budget in many years. So all of a sudden Lindsay, whose cops maintain the daily oppression of the black ghetto, suddenly comes out for black "community control"--actually a new experiment in school decentralization funded by such "community-minded" organizations as the Federal government's Office of Economic Opportunity and the Ford Foundation. The concept of "the community" masks the question of who in the community controls the schools, and for what purpose. The real interests of black workers and their children are not geographic or even simply racial, but above all class, and as such are basically counterposed to the destruction of the teachers' union which, if successful, will only strengthen the hand of the bosses and the capitalist politicians who serve them against all unions in the city.

The demand for "community control" lacking a specific class content is even dangerous in some situations. The same group of people can be radical or reactionary depending on what aspect of their lives they are mobilized for. The same group of "ethnic" white workers who if approached on the job as workers will carry out a militant strike along with their black fellow workers can also, if approached as residents of their community, be capable of firing every black teacher in their district. We must recognize what classless "local control" could mean not only for teachers of "the other" race but also for rebels, radicals and "reds" of every stripe who will find themselves with only a broken union incapable of protecting their jobs in the aftermath of the substantial Wallace vote.

In Ocean Hill-Brownsville, "community control" has meant the appointment of a \$30,000-a-year black administrator, Rhody McCoy, who was given a high degree of administrative autonomy, although he had no particular connection with the black population in the district. One of McCoy's first acts was to dismiss without due process a number of union leaders at J.H.S. 271. When 250 teachers walked out in protest, they were "transferred", after which non-union replacements were hired. This sparked the current dispute.

Were it not for the complicating racial factor, the central issue of union busting would be clear. But the City has created a heavy smoke-

screen by crying: the black ghetto children must be educated, we are helping by encouraging community control, and this racist union stands in the way. Using these arguments and some government-paid "anti-poverty" workers, Lindsay has swept the black community sentiment heavily against the union and has encouraged union-busting, school break-ins, etc.

Replace UFT Leadership

Unfortunately the Shanker leadership has played into Lindsay's hands by taking a purely "business union" approach to defend itself, remaining indifferent to the general needs of the oppressed and exploited black population. Much of the union's propaganda has catered to conservatism and racial fears, with talk of "mob rule" and "extremism". This has exacerbated the racial division between the union and the black working people, thereby preventing a real solution to the crisis. The union's present rotten course of seeking help at higher levels of government (including an appeal to Rockefeller, who inspired the "community control" experiment, and requests for "protection" by the racist New York City police) can lead only to further alienation from the black population and disaster for the union.

The roots of the current impasse can be traced to last year's school strike and the narrow, self-interested approaches of the UFT and the middle-class Black Nationalists who put themselves forward as spokesmen for the "community". At that time the Spartacist League issued a leaflet ("Smash the Taylor Law", 24 Sept. 1967) which criticized both the gratuitous scabbing of Floyd McKissick and H. Rap Brown, which exacerbated the fears of the teachers that black militants would not support their demands for higher wages, and the UFT leadership's continuing indifference to the needs, fears and concerns of the black students and their parents. Under the heading "Support Ghetto Struggles" we warned: "the equally middle-class policy of 'professionalism' advocated by the UFT leadership has held the union largely aloof from many of the past struggles of the ghetto communities, widening the gap between teacher, student and parent. Such a situation [of UFT indifference combined with Black Nationalist calls for 'keeping the schools open'] provides a ready excuse for the development of racist attitudes." We called for a radical alliance of teachers with the doubly oppressed black and Puerto Rican working people and the first steps towards building a labor party to lead united, militant struggle against the liberal union-busters. Without such a radical alliance the situation could only have developed into the present battle--the teachers convinced they will meet with hostility and anti-union attitudes from the black militants and turning increasingly to conservative and even racist appeals in the attempt to find support elsewhere, the parents fed up with the UFT's unconcern with poverty and racism and bewildered by a strike which, if the rationale for the Taylor Law is correct, can be nothing but an act of racism and wanton viciousness on the part of the teachers.

A radical alliance must begin by pointing out that the central problem of black education lies not in the classroom but in the political-economic system of capitalism. The capitalist system needs the product of the ghetto schools not as creative human beings but as a pool of low-skilled and unemployed workers to keep the general wage level down. The Black Nationalists have not seen through the liberal myth that "becoming educated" is the way out of the ghetto for the mass of black and Puerto Rican youth. The black schoolchildren know that they will not find decent employment and a productive, satisfying life in adulthood, and even the most dedicated teachers become cynical

in the face of the bitterness and disinterest of their students who realize that their "education" is a farce. No change in the structure of the school administration can "reform" ghetto education without a revolutionary transformation of the society itself.

"Left-Wing" Scabs

In the liberal arena such figures as Murray Kempton, Jimmy Breslin, the New York Post, the New York Times and CBS News are screaming for the blood of the UFT. The liberal strikebreaking sentiment is not too surprising, since liberals consider the government the primary agent of change and "progress". But even so-called "revolutionary" and "Marxist" groups have been swept along by the liberal "local control" rhetoric. Such groups as Progressive Labor, the Communist Party and the Socialist Workers Party advocate simply crossing the picket line, and thereby busting the union, in order to break a "racist" strike. Even those groupings opposed to the strike should seriously consider the implications of the position that a worker is justified in scabbing whenever he disagrees with his union or does not want to strike, as it destroys the concept of a union as a body which acts together after determining its policies by a vote of the membership. For radicals to advocate scabbing only encourages any inherent racism and anti-radicalism among pro-union workers.

We ask PL and the SWP how they can now support the strikebreaking and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville administrators who justify the transfers of UFT teachers on the grounds that "we don't want any teachers who turned their backs on our children for six weeks" (to cite a statement made by one of McCoy's assistants over nation-wide television)--i.e. by going out on strike in previous UFT actions which the SWP and PL supported! We ask these organizations how they can ignore the blatant anti-union, anti-strike attitude of McCoy and his supporters. These "Marxists" in the SWP and PL are taking the easy way out by labelling the social-democratic UFT leadership as "racist" and washing their hands of the union instead of fighting in the union against Shanker for the correct policies. Serious radicals must ask themselves what New York City's black population will gain by the destruction of the UFT; by the legitimatization of the Taylor Law and the phony, classless rhetoric that strikes are against the "public interest"; by the replacement of UFT teachers by docile, hand-picked teachers who have no weapon of struggle against the Board of Education; by the attempt to direct the anger and frustration of the poor working people of Ocean Hill-Brownsville against the teachers rather than against the system which guarantees the continuation of their oppression.

Militants in the UFT must fight to replace the Shanker leadership and its conservative and dangerous policies of "professionalism", elitism toward other trade union struggles and condescension toward the black working people. The union must recognize the militant parents as their needed allies against the liberal union-busters and must seek a radical alliance of teachers and militant parents and students based on student-teacher-parent control of the schools.

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