

SPARTACIST



SUPPLEMENT

JULY 1971

Against NPAC Pop Fronts:

FOR CLASS ACTION AGAINST THE WAR

The "Spring Offensive" is over, but the Vietnam war drags on. The Mayday Tribe's threat to "Stop the Government" if the government did not stop the war only demonstrated with what ruthless efficiency the government handles radicals who talk about stopping the government but lack any means except wishful thinking. The Mayday Tribe represented merely a new chapter in the conflict of perspectives which has been ingrained in the anti-war movement since its inception: "respectable" reformism vs. petty-bourgeois adventurism. Each outbreak of confrontationism is greeted by a new wave of "we told you so" from the radical-liberal-bourgeois coalition dominated by the astute class-collaborationist maneuvering of the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP). What hypocrisy! For it is precisely the obvious liberalism of the mainstream anti-war movement which has driven the frustrated student protesters in desperation into the ranks of the Mayday Tribe. And as for futility, what has the SWP's much-touted "mass movement" accomplished?—the National Peace Action Coalition (NPAC) "peace action" of April 24 only produced the traffic jam to which the Mayday Tribe aspired. So long as the anti-war movement continues to be circumscribed by these two alternatives—reformism or adventurism—there can be no way forward.

Kent State Revisited

The outraged opposition spontaneously generated last year by the U.S. invasion of Cambodia and the Kent-Jackson State massacres has been completely dissipated. The invasion of Laos earlier this year—an escalation and expansion of the war equal to the Cambodia invasion—produced only scattered protests. The July 2-4 NPAC Convention takes place after the first relatively quiet spring in nearly a decade on college campuses, heretofore the bastion of the anti-war movement. Instead, the campus has become a breeding ground for reactionary cultism (with Campus Crusade for Christ Revivals rivalling anti-war rallies for attendance) and relative political apathy.

The energy of the May 1970 upsurge was dissipated precisely because its lessons have been ignored. The massacres of students took place in the midst of a massive, ascending strike wave representing a radicalization

of the U.S. and international working class unprecedented since World War II. One of the most important episodes of this strike wave was the nationwide teamster wildcat. In Ohio during April-May 1970 twenty thousand teamsters went out. Joining with the trucking owners in calling on right-wing Republican Governor Rhoades to mobilize four thousand National Guardsmen to break the wildcat were "friends of labor," "friends of the peace movement" like Senator Saxbe and Mayor Stokes, and the international "leadership" of the Teamsters, including President Fitzsimmons and Vice-President Harold Gibbons—labor's "representative" on the podium at the April 24 rally in Washington and endorser of this NPAC Convention.

The trucking owners tried to move scab trucks in convoys of five, supported by a massive show of firepower: military helicopters, armored cars and armed Guardsmen literally riding shotgun in each cabin. The teamsters countered by organizing flying-picket squads which massed at terminal gates whenever the owners tried to move scab trucks. The teamsters were able to face down the Guardsmen and defend their strike.

It was from this strike-breaking detail that four hundred Guardsmen were taken and sent to Kent State. Unlike the teamsters, the students put up no resistance. But it was students, not teamsters, who were gunned down. Why? A massacre of teamsters, in the middle of a tense, militant nationwide wildcat by one of the country's strongest unions, would have precipitated a series of nationwide protest and sympathy strikes—a far greater show of social power than all the student strikes, peace crawls and police confrontations combined. In contrast, the massacre of students had little more long-term social impact than starting summer vacation three weeks early on college campuses.

What made the protesting students so vulnerable was precisely the question of brute social power: the teamsters and other organized workers have it; students do not. Likewise, while polls, parades and police confrontations may demonstrate that the overwhelming majority in this country is against the war, no variation or combination of protest politics can force the U.S. ruling

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class out of Indochina. Only a combination of social forces whose consciousness and militancy pose a greater threat to the world hegemony of U.S. imperialism than military defeat in Vietnam can force a halt to the war.

NPAC's Predecessor

The predecessor to this NPAC Convention was last year's "Emergency National Conference Against the Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam War" held in Cleveland over June 19-21. Mayor Stokes, fresh from helping break the teamster strike, officially endorsed the conference and proclaimed June 19-21 as "Peace Action Days." The SWP-dominated conference immediately proposed a demonstration in downtown Cleveland "against Agnew"—a demonstration which any liberal Republican or Democratic hustler like Stokes could solidarize with. SDS, supported in their demand by Progressive Labor and the Spartacist League, counterposed a demonstration in support of the teamster wildcat and against Stokes as well as Agnew. The SWP, predictably, was enraged at the suggestion of anything that might "divide" the peace movement and alienate its "friends" in the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy.

In addition to marching "against Agnew," the conference attempted to reassemble from the wreckage of various Mobilizations, Coalitions, Committees, Conferences, Caucuses, Congresses, Conventions and other concoctions an even newer, broader, more indivisible peace-group-to-end-all-peace-groups—the "National Peace Action Coalition." Although maneuvering in lesser arenas, the SWP has adopted the Communist Parties' proclivity for forming coalitions only to toss them out again when their treachery is no longer of service. Such was the history of the "Spring," "National" and "New" Mobilizations behind which the SWP was the motivating force, and such will be the history of NPAC. NPAC is a Popular Front combining the SWP with the liberal bourgeoisie and Cold Warrior "socialists," through which the SWP can "lead" masses of people and rub shoulders with Vance Hartke and Victor Reuther. The SWP is able to "lead" these masses through the oldest opportunist sleight-of-hand in the world—by adopting the liberal bourgeoisie's program! Capitalist politicians like Hartke know that the real decisions about when and how to "end" the war are made in Wall Street high-rises and Pentagon sub-basements. They come to these conferences as they go to livestock shows and state fairs—to garner votes.

"Mass Actions"

To the accusation that formations like NPAC are Popular Fronts of class collaboration, SWPer Doug Jenness responded:

"If NPAC was watering down its program to get support from capitalist politicians, your charges would be justified. But NPAC follows an entirely different course. It has an independent perspective to unite as many people as possible, regardless of political affiliations or views, in mass actions against the Vietnam War." (*Militant*, 28 May 1970)

And to be sure, the Cleveland "Emergency Conference" dutifully passed a resolution calling for "mass actions." Jenness' statement is perfectly clear—and per-

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Supplement



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fectly meaningless. The SWP wants to "unite" lots of "people" (explicitly regardless of politics) in "mass actions." "Unite" which "people," on the basis of *what program*, in *what kind* of "mass action"? The massacre of a million Indonesian communist workers was a "mass action." So were the Cossack pogroms. So, for that matter, was the October Revolution. The demonstration "against Agnew" and the teamster wildcat were also "mass actions." However, the SWP endorsed the former while one of their spokesmen (Miguel Padilla, at Cleveland) dismissed the latter as "racist and reactionary." Why do the self-proclaimed "Marxists" of the SWP have so much difficulty understanding that society is made up of *classes*, not undifferentiated masses, and that the two primary classes in capitalist society are the bourgeoisie and the working class? It is absurd to talk about having "an independent perspective"; the reformist anti-war movement is deliberately organized as a classless formation, but though it may opt to ignore the class struggle, the class struggle does not ignore it! The middle-class youth who have flocked to the anti-war movement in moral outrage must *choose sides* in the class struggle; they can play no role outside it. The SWP's "independent perspective" in reality means independence from the fight for the international proletarian revolution, in favor of back-handed support to the class enemy of U.S. workers and their class brothers in Indochina.

Let anyone should think that the SWP has gone astray through simple ignorance of these elementary tenets of Marxist analysis, it is instructive to compare the SWP's current politics with its analysis of the way to conduct anti-war struggle at the time of the Korean war, another instance of imperialism's continuing assault on the gains of limited social revolutions abroad expressed militarily. In March 1953 Farrell Dobbs—then and now a principal leader of the SWP—wrote:

"... the most vital place to carry on anti-war agitation and participate in anti-war actions is in the unions where the masses are. We have always en-

visaged the struggle against war as an *extension of the class struggle* onto a higher plane. *The fight against the war can really be effective only to the extent that the workers adopt class-struggle policies in defending their interests. If we are to help this process along we must be in the unions. . . .*" (SWP Internal Bulletin Vol. 15, No. 6, March 1953—our emphasis)

Now this is neither a particularly profound nor a particularly eloquent polemic. It is simply a matter-of-fact statement of an orientation which stands blatantly and diametrically counterposed to the current politics of the SWP. The SWP leaders are not naive would-be revolutionaries ignorant of the theories of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky; they have consciously rejected Trotskyism in favor of a perspective of reformist class collaboration.

Clear-Cut Choice

Like the national postal strike before it and the recent two-day mini-general strike of New York City public employees, the teamster wildcat produced a clear-cut line-up of class forces. The trucking owners, cops, courts, the bourgeois press and politicians (from the most liberal to the most conservative) stood united as a class and, together with their agents in the unions, the labor bureaucracy, tried to crush the teamster struggle. On the other side of the barricades were the teamsters. The SDS resolution put before the Cleveland "Emergency Conference" a clear-cut, inescapable choice: support the teamsters (which would have forced NPAC to break with capitalist politicians like Stokes and the "lieutenants of capital" within the workers movement like Fitzsimmons and Gibbons); or cement the Popular Front bloc by calling the teamsters simply "racist and reactionary" and demonstrating against

Agnew. The SWP chose the latter course—the course of class collaboration and betrayal.

On the main issue facing the Cleveland conference—class collaboration—the SWP's conduct was unequivocal. Not so that of the pseudo-Trotskyist Workers League (WL) which, in a frenzy of the same opportunist appetite which led it to enthusiastically and virtually uncritically endorse the wretched 1970 SWP electoral campaigns, insisted that the real issue was "Trotskyism vs. Stalinism." By this catchy slogan the WL meant that its main enemy at the conference was PL ("Stalinism") and the SDS motions which posed, in a limited but generally correct way, an anti-liberal, working-class orientation for the anti-war movement. The WL in effect made a bloc with the SWP ("Trotskyism"—but since when is the SWP legitimately Trotskyist?) against opposition *from the left*, thereby endorsing the essence of Stalinism though not the label, for Stalinism—like all varieties of revisionism—is nothing more or less than the abandonment of an international, proletarian and revolutionary perspective in favor of alliances with some wing of the class enemy, precisely the SWP's policy in the anti-war movement! (The WL, which has jumped all over the map on the anti-war question—tail-ending the Popular Front in 1965, offering critical *political* support to the NLF Stalinists and Ho Chi Minh in 1967—recently adopted a new face: calling its own rally on April 24, the WL denounced all those who participated in the "official" rally, thus condemning the mass of anti-war activists for the betrayals of their reformist, social-chauvinist leaders.)

The SWP Rediscovered Workers

The SWP and its succession of front groups have made their choice—class collaboration rather than class struggle. But since the SWP's usefulness to its bourgeois allies depends precisely on its continued ability to lead the would-be radicals among the anti-war protesters into the Popular Front trap, the SWP now needs the left cover of a pseudo-working-class orientation. Many of the more conscious student activists cannot fail to compare the futility of the April 24 "mass action" with the virtual paralysis of New York City caused by a few thousands of militant workers, even despite their sellout leaders. So the SWP is making renewed efforts to develop the facade of a labor base. A call in the June 18 *Militant* for the NPAC Convention announces that NPAC is preparing a series of letters addressed to "various anti-war constituencies." Prominent among these separate-but-equal "constituencies" is "trade unionists," and several union bureaucrats are listed among the sponsors of the Convention.

But a Marxist working-class perspective does not consist of the willingness to orient towards workers (mediated through the class traitors of the labor bureaucracy, to be sure) for the purpose of including them among the various other "constituencies" assembled under the political banner of the liberal bourgeoisie. The empirical reflex of much of the U.S. left, faced with the demonstrated revolutionary aspirations of the working class following the 1968 French upsurge, has been to go where the action is by adopting a simple-minded "workerism" underlaid with the social do-goodism previously characteristic of the New Left's attitude toward the "Third World." In this respect PL-SDS's "tactics"

IT TAKES ONE TO KNOW ONE

In an article on the anti-war movement, veteran anti-communist Michael Harrington evaluated the role of the "Trotskyist" SWP in the single-issue anti-war movement to which it has devoted so much attention since 1965. Discussing the April 24 demonstration, Harrington showed he and his co-thinkers have reason to be grateful to the SWP for the results of its "leadership" in the anti-war movement:

"... to the extent that the Trotskyists [i.e. the SWP] did influence the event, they carried out one of the most remarkable exercises in dupery in our political history: they duped themselves. For they are sworn opponents of the "class collaborationists" in the Kennedy and McCarthy movements and bitter foes of the notion that Democratic Congressmen can end the war—and yet they helped assemble a gigantic audience which demonstrated in favor of just such an approach. What happened was that the Trotskyists, who were organizing the rally at the start and doing their best to attract a reasonably large crowd, so successfully adapted to the position of the masses they were supposed to be manipulating that they did yeoman work pushing views they regard as dangerous and illusory." (Michael Harrington in the *New York Times* magazine, 30 May 1971)

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The Militant

APRIL 24 in Washington, D.C. Hundreds of thousands marched for peace but the war went on.

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of "allying" with workers by showing how much you want to help them is not atypical, and provides yet another excuse for the right wing of the radical movement (perfectly typified by the SWP's Padilla as well as the old New Leftists) to justify dismissal of the working class as the force for revolution because of the false consciousness (racism, patriotism) which simple-minded "workerism" must ignore as a principle.

To the extent that sections of the working class do remain imbued with the ideology of the bourgeoisie, groups like the SWP have only themselves to blame. Workers see their most sophisticated enemies (McCarthy, Lindsay, Hartke) lauded by the supposed "Marxists," cheered on by the labor parasites who serve the bourgeoisie within the workers' own organizations. The sections of the left who recognize the SWP's sellout for what it is must go beyond "workerism" to a program which can break the disastrous unity of anti-war militants with the most self-conscious and dangerous wing of the bourgeoisie, and replace it by a *real* unity—a unity based on a program of international class struggle:

Class Struggle Program

1. *No Liberal Bourgeois Speakers at Anti-War Rallies!* Under the rubric of "non-exclusionism" and "independence" the SWP-NPAC leadership welcomes the class enemy into the anti-war movement. The major activity of the movement's "mass actions" has been to provide both the forum and a captive audience for liberals to do their canvassing. The only real "independence" for the movement is irreconcilable opposition to the class enemy.

2. *For Labor Political Strikes Against the War!* No amount of student strikes and weekend peace crawls can force U.S. imperialism to end the Indochinese war. But a strike by U.S. workers in solidarity with the Indochinese working people could compel the capitalists to face an enemy even more potent than the Vietnamese Revolution—a powerful, organized and conscious working class in struggle for its own class interests in the very citadel of imperialism. The NPAC leadership opposes this perspective because it wants to maintain its alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, trading away the potential of a powerful, working-class-based mass movement in order to win the adherence of "moderates" to a

classless, implicitly pro-capitalist line.

A struggle for this demand means the struggle against the conservative, self-interested labor bureaucracy which mortally fears any class action which would upset its peaceful coexistence with the bosses and their politicians.

3. *Break with the Capitalist Parties—For a Political Party of the Working Class!* The U.S. working class will remain politically trapped until it has built, by struggle against its fake "leaders," its own party. A workers party must have a consistent class program as well as a working-class base. We do not call upon the tested servants of capitalism, the labor bureaucrats, to form this party; we do not seek to pressure them into building a trap for the workers along the lines of the British Labour Party. We must fight *from the beginning* to make the workers party a revolutionary party.

4. *Smash Imperialism—All U.S. Troops Out of Asia Now!* We must expose the pro-imperialist liberals who speak at the invitation of the SWP-NPAC—no negotiations, no timetables! We must make it clear that we want no bourgeois evasions—de-escalation, troop shifts, moratoriums—to interfere with the *defeat* of imperialism in Asia!

5. *Victory to the Indochinese Revolution—No Confidence in Sellout "Leaders" at Home or Abroad!* The SWP-NPAC demands "self-determination" for Vietnam. But for Marxists there is an even higher principle at stake: the class nature of the war. We have a responsibility to take sides. Our commitment to the revolutionary struggle of the Indochinese working people demands that we must give no confidence to the Stalinist traitors who have repeatedly sold out the struggle (from the Geneva Accords to the People's Peace Treaty). All Indochina Must Go Communist! ■

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