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VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

Published monthly by independent revolutionary socialists

Editors: Harry Turner, Hugh Fredricks

P. O. Box 67, Peck Slip Station, New York, N. Y. 10038

Vol. 1, No. 1 Price 10¢ (\$1.00 per year) Labor donated June 1969

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WHY WE PUBLISH

We are Marxists, Leninists and Trotskyists. We consider these terms to be interchangeable and synonymous with the designation, revolutionary socialist, which appears on our masthead. Our newsletter has come into being because of our differences on the most fundamental questions with every other organization on the left, including those using identical labels to describe themselves.

Our newsletter will make clear what we mean by these terms, what we consider to be their essential content, and in what respects we differ from others. We intend to present our politics, our strategic and tactical differences, our conception of what is to be done, in polemic against these others, sharply differentiating ourselves in the process.

The Leninist Party

Our efforts are essentially directed toward the construction of an American section of the international Leninist vanguard party. History continues to prove through negative examples, as in May-June 1968, in France, that without such a party, a successful working class revolution is not possible.

A party of the Bolshevik type must be able to withstand the ideological pressure of the bourgeoisie in all its guises. Its practice must be based on Marxist theory as a revolutionary continuity, on its hard-won theoretical conquests, in contradistinction to opportunists, making "practical" adaptations to empirically-

viewed reality, and abstentionists taking refuge in sectarian slogan-mongering. Only on this foundation, can Marxist theory be further enriched and not debased.

We believe that no organization in this country is presently following a path which can lead toward the building of this party.

We believe that the movement of and within classes in the U.S. can only be understood within the context of the world capitalist system, and under the impact of its developing crisis.

We reject national narrowness, a myopic concentration on "our own" back-yard, and intend to base ourselves upon the lessons learned from the struggles of the international working class.

In addition, and expressing the identity of working class international and national interests, history has presented the American working class with the most revolutionary of all revolutionary tasks, to paraphrase Lenin, the overthrow of the keystone of world capitalism, of the world imperialist system.

Similarly, a successful revolution in Europe, where the objective factors favoring such a devel-

opment are maturing, at enormous speed, will interact with and can hasten the American revolution. The resolution of the crisis of leadership and the construction of the Leninist party cannot, therefore, be posed apart from its international construction.

Philosophical Method

We proceed from a general outlook, a world-view at the same time that we recognize, in Lenin's phrase, that "the concrete examination of concrete questions" is the "heart of Marxism". We will attempt to give necessary concreteness to our understanding, by incorporating, in Trotsky's words, a sufficient "combination of abstractions" to correspond "to the laws of motion of given phenomena".

Our philosophical method is the materialist dialectic, the method of Marxism. Briefly stated, we understand by this, a dynamic view of phenomena, of development, an outlook which seeks to comprehend the antagonistic movement of aspects of the whole, and which sees this movement as an interaction, interpenetration and transformation of each aspect into its opposite.

We believe that the Marxist method, consistently applied, alone makes possible a correct understanding of reality. However, the "telling" of dialectical laws like the beads of a rosary, does not ensure anyone from descending into metaphysical and eclectic practice, of adopting, in deed, the empiricist methods of the bourgeoisie. We will have a great deal more to say to this point at another time.

The American Working Class

The construction of a Leninist party in the U.S. demands that, in fighting to unite the working class around a revolutionary program, we correctly appraise and

deal with its division on racial lines; that we intervene and attempt to give direction to the sharpening struggles now taking place in trade union, campus and anti-war arenas, involving black and white workers, militants and radicals. Our newsletter will critically evaluate the politics of organizations such as the Socialist Workers Party, Communist Party, Progressive Labor, Workers League, etc., in these and other areas.

Inevitably, the most fundamental Marxist propositions will have to be reviewed. An examination of the Negro question requires the exploration of a wide range of subjects, e.g., black nationalism and white chauvinism in the context of the national question, exploitation and super-exploitation, trade union work and the labor party in the context of Trotsky's transitional program, the state of the American economy in the context of the world market, etc. We propose to expose and refute the tendentious manipulation and vulgarization of Marxist theory in these and other areas, by so-called and would-be Trotskyists.

Our understanding of the Negro question was concisely formulated in the statement which accompanied our pamphlet Spartacist League Split, as follows:

"The minority [subsequently ousted from the Spartacist League] understood that the present winning of black workers meant, not only rooting the party in the most exploited sector of the class but also, the acquisition of future leadership for the class as a whole; that a vital stage in the process of building the party was now at hand, with the radicalization of black workers; that the struggle against the special oppression of black workers, led to the winning of black and white workers to socialist consciousness;

that, conversely, neither black nor white workers could acquire this consciousness without an uncompromising struggle against

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white chauvinism and its mirror image, black nationalism.

"We believe these insights to be increasingly valid today, and necessary to the construction of a party of the Leninist type in the U.S."

We will, of course, attempt to convince our readers of the validity of these conclusions.

The Newsletter

A measure of the seriousness of the SL was its delivery of something between a semi-annual and an annual, in place of its promised bi-monthly Spartacist. We do not intend to follow its example. Our immediate goals, reflecting our serious intentions, while modest are firm. As our masthead states, we have committed ourselves to the production of a monthly newsletter. We begin as a four-page mimeographed publication. As we gain in strength, we hope to expand in size, volume and frequency. We also hope to improve our format in the process.

We invite our readers to contribute their thoughts, suggestions, criticisms and disagreements. We will print and reply to these contributions within the limits imposed by available space.

Organization

We do not intend to restrict ourselves to the role of commentator. We hope that our newsletter will also function as an organizer, will be, in effect, in Lenin's phrase, the scaffolding of an organization which can help build the vanguard party in the US. We are, therefore, also planning regular weekly meetings, initially in New York City, beginning in June which will further discuss and debate the issues

raised in our newsletter.

We begin, in effect, at the beginning, as a discussion group. It is our hope that agreement on principle and program will be forged, so that a democratic-centralist organization will emerge from the circle. We look forward, however, to immediate involvement in current struggles, to the extent that agreement within the group can be reached. We invite all those interested in such discussion to contact us.

We stated in our preface to Spartacist League Split, that:

"The post-World War upsurge of world capitalism and the development of deformed workers states, produced incredible theoretical confusion and shattered the world movement of Trotskyism. The sharpening of the contradictions of capitalism in the United States and on a world scale, the beginning of the economic downturn, heralds the beginning of greater clarity. The ebb in the revolutionary socialist movement, as seen by its fractionation into small circles, will, in the coming period, be reversed, as objective circumstances make clear the programmatic basis for its reconstruction. And this demands discussion, debate and a principled unity in action by those who see themselves as revolutionary socialists."

Our approaches have nothing in common with "re-groupment", the unity of the swamp, the unity of diverse groups on the least principled common denominator, and adhering to the cardinal rule, "No criticism! Live and let live." No! Ours will be a unity achieved through struggle for a principled program. "Discussion, debate and a principled unity in action", are all aspects of this struggle, and will be the hallmark of our newsletter.

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NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

Introduction

"Leninism", it seems, is all the rage these days among the divers groups, on and off campus, who present themselves as revolutionists. The right-wing Stalinists, Maoists, "New Left" neo-Narodnik adventurers, and the "Trotskyist" formations, all justify their differing policies in Lenin's name!

Citations from the works of the leading contributors to Marxist theory, regardless of their pertinence, are used to mask opportunist adaptations. Sophistry and eclecticism can then pass as Marxism among the politically naive.

The CP is cynically encouraging every separatist and anti-working class demand by black cultural nationalists in the name of "Marxism-Leninism". In so doing, it has inadvertently promoted a black nationalist current in its own ranks, which is attempting to refurbish its old "Black Belt" separatist theory, and apply it to every black ghetto in the US. The CP is now busily engaged in putting out the fire with appropriate quotations from Lenin on the national question.

The SWP and WW attack PLP for its recent change of line, and demand unconditional support for every black nationalist demand, on the basis of the categorical right of nations to self-determination. PLP justifies its opposition to black nationalism by calling all nationalism reactionary, considers the black struggle to be "national in form and working class in content" (a paraphrase of Stalin's counter-revolutionary dictum that the USSR is "national in form and socialist in content"), and calls for a struggle against the special oppression and super-exploitation of black workers.

The WL and SL find themselves in substantial agreement on the Negro question, despite their

other differences. Both agree that "Trotsky was wrong" on the Negro question, and that black workers are not super-exploited.

The WL's Bulletin has presented several articles counterposing Lenin to Trotsky on the national question. In reviewing the recently republished Revolutionary Silhouettes by Lunacharsky, Tim Wohlforth rejects the evaluation of Lenin as failing to comprehend that Lenin's "primacy" over Trotsky lay in his mastery of the dialectical method. Lunacharsky's critical if flattering portrait of Trotsky is accepted, however, without question. Wohlforth is convinced that Trotsky "never fully overcame" his early tendency to function as an isolated "individualist", brilliant intellectual though he may have been. How this "weakness" of Trotsky was manifested concretely is not stated. One can only assume that this remark is an oblique reference to Trotsky's position on the Negro question, as neither the WL nor Wohlforth have ever made known other differences with him.

Obviously, our critical evaluation of the politics of the aforementioned organizations, and our own position on the Negro question, can only be fully understood if clarity is first achieved on the national question. Involving as it does relations to one's "own" national state, which in capitalist countries, usually acts as an oppressor of other nations and national minorities, this question has always had the greatest significance for Marxists.

(to be continued)

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VANGUARD NEWSLETTER

SPARTACIST LEAGUE SPLIT

The struggle of an ousted minority for revolutionary politics.

Price \$1.00