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SPARTACIST-WEST

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Panthers

Re-birth of the Pop Front

The Panthers' "National Conference for a United Front Against Fascism" was designed to create unity and an alliance with liberals. It launched the alliance, but it sowed more disillusionment and dis-unity than anything else.

EXCLUSIONS

Attendance at the conference dwindled drastically during the weekend, and there was a marked lack of enthusiasm on the final day. Physical exclusions of PL, Spartacist, ISC, and Workers League marred the sessions, and Womens Liberation supporters were harassed on the floor. Adherents of the right wing of SDS—those who excluded PL at the recent SDS conference in Chicago—were used as finger men on the floor to expel dissidents. They also physically attacked Spartacist League members on the street outside the conference for handing out leaflets protesting their exclusion

What lay behind this exclusionism? It did not grow out of thin air; nor was it due, as the Panthers claimed, to a previous history of dispute with PL, since this was in no way the case with the other groups excluded. The exclusion of Spartacist was based solely on the contents of a leaflet which Spartacist supporters had been handing out at the opening session Friday evening. The leaflet, entitled, "The Panthers and the Popular Front", accused the Panthers of adopting the old Stalinist political line of calling for class collaboration with the liberal bourgeoisie. Their substitution of muscle tactics for ideological debate is because of this; it simply confirms our analysis.

The conference was a clear appeal for an alliance with liberals on the basis of mutual support for the reformist "community control of police" demand.

This rightward turn on the part of the Panthers is a sharp one, but it flows from their brief, turbulent history and contains lessons

for all militants. In their advocacy of armed self-defense, the Panthers took too much responsibility for direct confrontation with the pigs onto their own shoulders. Snatching up the simplistic Maoist slogan, "power flows from the barrel of a gun," they saw radicalism as simply a matter of picking up the gun, without reference to the readiness of the movement and ignoring the primacy of political struggle.

Power in capitalist society flows from the social relations of capitalism, such as the relation between landlord and tenant and between capitalist and worker. This power is maintained by the ability of the educational system, mass media and other propaganda to hide these basic exploitative relations and divert the peoples' attention from their true oppressors. It is also maintained by the family, and finally by the armed repressive forces, which are a last resort.

The movement must be based directly on the central, social contradictions—on the class struggle itself—before it can effectively "pick up the gun" against the ruling class. Armed self-defense must be an immediate demand, but it must be conducted by masses of tenants in struggle with their landlords, or masses of workers in a militant strike, not by a small handful of individual radicals aggressively confronting the police.

ADVENTURISM

The Panthers have been bold, militant and courageous, but their adventurism has now revealed an opposite side of political reformism. Because the police attacks have decimated the Panther leadership, and because the Party has lacked a stable, consistent ideology, the Panthers have desparately turned to an expedient which only seems to offer strength and stability: alliance with liberals and with the CP, which has money and lawyers.

This policy is the same with which the

CP itself has sold out struggle after struggle of the American working class. Their alliance with the liberal wing of the ruling class under FDR culminated in their support for the imperialist World War II, which has given us the "American Century" and present U.S. empire. The same alliance caused the CP to sell out an entire period of Black struggle under their leadership in the South, because one of FDR's conditions was support for racist Southern Democrats!

It was this history of betrayal that produced the present-day CP, an organization which has consistently supported the most right-wing, reformist leaders of the Black struggle as against militant elements like the Panthers. They called Malcolm X "reactionary" for trying to "disrupt" the work of M. L. King and Roy Wilkins!

BANNED LEAFLET

Read the analysis that the Panthers couldn't deal with or respond to politically in "The Panthers and the Popular Front" leaflet, still available.

from:

BAY AREA SPARTACIST LEAGUE

Box 852 Main P. O.

Berkeley, Cal. 94701. Phone: 525-5243

This is no "united front" at all, but a popular front, very similar to those with which the CP's of Europe and America sold out the working class and entered capitalist governments in the thirties. The use of extensive quotes from Dimitroff—chief Stalinist spokesman at the time—is significant.

The purpose of a united front, as understood by Lenin and Trotsky, was to show the masses of workers in the non-communist workers' parties the necessity of Communist leadership, by showing them that only the Communists were willing to resolutely carry forth the struggle against the ruling class. In a common front with the other workers' organizations, the Communists could work closely with the rank-and-file to "set the base against the top", meaning to demonstrate to the social-democratic workers the treachery of the social-democratic leadership. The slogan of the front was "march separately, strike together," meaning that all parties in the front cooperated against the common enemy, but none were subordinated politically either to each other or to a common organization.

After the Stalinist degeneration of the Russian Revolution, this concept was distorted to serve the diplomatic interests of the new bureaucratic ruling elite in Russia. It

became an alliance with the liberal wing of the ruling class through the liberal parties for the sake of neutralizing as many countries as possible in the diplomatic alignment against Germany. Wherever possible, Communists entered capitalist governments with these liberal parties. In return for cabinet posts and favors to the Soviet Union, they were willing to sell out and actively crush entire periods of class struggle, such as in Spain in 1936.

The Panthers' willingness to silence with force those who have always supported them, while joining together with those who never have; their denunciations as "reactionaries" and "fascists" those who are critical from the left; these things can mean only one thing: the Panthers are on the road of a popular front betrayal.

The Panther conference was not well received on the left; there has been much criticism. Interestingly, the SWP was among the few groups to criticize the political content of the conference from the right, which was quite an achievement in opportunism and reformism for a group which is supposedly Trotskyist when the group under attack is allied with the most right-wing Stalinists of all! The Militant of 15 August carried an article by Elizabeth Barnes saying that the Panthers were departing from revolutionary nationalism because they were too concerned with denouncing black capitalism and black racism!

DIS HONEST REPORTING

There is worse to report about the SWP, however. In covering the exclusions of those who criticized the conference, The Militant's reporting was more dishonest than the Stalinist Peoples World! They said that Spartacist and the ISC had their literature tables banned for selling Trotskyist literature, but that the YSA table, also selling Trotskyist literature, was for some unknown reason allowed to remain. Actually, Spartacist was thrown out because we criticized the Panthers' popular front at that conference, while the SWP criticized merely the concept of the popular front in a series of Militant articles. In fact, they were apparently prepared to endorse this popular front, since they had a speaker lined up on one of the panels who only pulled out when the exclusions and bullying got too rough!

Furthermore, Spartacist didn't merely "have its literature table banned"; we were physically thrown out, threatened, abused, and made to stand up against a pillar while our pockets were searched, names taken,

and notes seized and destroyed. As if this weren't enough dishonest reporting, the article goes on to claim that after we were "banned", they offered to put our literature on their table. This is an outright lie. No such offer was ever made.

The Panther popular front conference was a defeat for the whole left, since the Panthers are the only Black nationalist group, revolutionary or otherwise, which has not been bought off, remains militant, and is aware that the struggle of class against class is paramount. Because of this, they were uniquely prepared to lead black working people both as workers, and as a specially oppressed minority.

FREE BOBBY SEALE!

Panther Chairman Bobby Seale was arrested by the FBI on 19 August in one of the most vicious frame-ups of Panther leaders to date. It was part of a conscious plan of the ruling class to crush Panthers. Seale was charged with flight to avoid prosecution for a charge of which he was never informed!

SEND MONEY to:
Black Panther Party
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SAIGON INSURRECTION, cont'd.

ment at Poulo Condor. Ta-thu-Thau, also released from Poulo Condor, had gone to Tonkin province to help organize assistance to the famine-stricken areas. He was murdered by supporters of Ho-chi-Minh, on his way back, in Central Annam.

In this atmosphere of Vietminh terror, the workers' militia of the Go-vap tramway depot, some 60 strong, participated in the insurrection, on their own initiative. The 400 workers and employees of the Tramway Company were well known for their militancy and independent frame of mind.

All those insurgents who did not rally immediately to the Vietminh flag were denounced by the Vietminh as traitors. Workers who didn't identify with the "patriotic cause" were called "saboteurs" and "reactionaries". The Southern CGT was presided over by the arch-stalinist Hoaang-don Van. Its function was to control the workers of the Saigon-Cholon area, by nominating their "representatives" for them, from above. In this atmosphere of violent ideological totalitarianism the workers of the Go-vap Tramway depot, although affiliated to the Southern CGT,

refused the label of Cong-nhan cuu-quoc (Workers Saviours of the Fatherland). They wanted to remain a proletarian militia. They rejected the Vietminh flag (yellow star on red background), saying they would continue their fight under the red flag, the flag of their own class emancipation. The tramwaymen organized themselves in combat groups of 11 men under elected leaders—under the overall command of Tran dinh Minh, a young Trotskyist from the North who had published a social novel in Hanoi (under the pseudonym of Nguyen hai Au) and who had come South to participate in the struggle.

STALINIST TERROR

At this stage the local Stalinists, under the command of Nguyen dinh Thau, seemed far more concerned at arresting and shooting their left critics—and in fact all whom they saw as potential rivals for the leadership of the movement—than at prosecuting the struggle against the French. Terrorist acts became the rule. They left a deep imprint on the "state-in-embryo" which the maquis was soon to become. The emergence of the Vietminh as the dominant force, in the years to come, was only possible after a lot of peasant and working class blood had been shed.

Refusing to accept the authority of Nguyen dinh Thau, the tramwaymen's militia sought to regroup in the Plaines des Joncs, towards which it had opened a way, fighting meanwhile against the Gurkhas and the French at Loc-giang, Thot-not, and My-hanh. In the Plaines des Joncs the tramwaymen established contact with the poor peasants. And it was here that in a fight against the imperialist forces that Tran dinh Minh got killed, on January 13, 1946. Some 20 other tramway workers had already lost their lives in course of battles waged along the way.

The intolerance of the Vietminh in relation to all independent tendencies, the accusations of treachery combined with threats of murder and the numerical weakness of the tramwaymen's militia eventually forced its Ngoc, Ky, and Huong, a young worker of 14, were stabbed to death by Vietminh bands.

The Saigon explosion reverberated into the countryside and into the more distant provinces. The peasants seized the local officials who had most distinguished themselves by their cruelty or their extorsions, and many were put to death. But in the countryside as in the towns the pretext of popular anger against their exploiters was everywhere used by the Vietminh to settle accounts with potential dissenters.

1945: THE SAIGON INSURRECTION

Document of Betrayal

Final Part

The following is the second half of an article which first appeared in Informations, Correspondance Ouvrieres in France and later in the 27 October 1968 issue of Solidarity, an English anarchist paper. It was written by a militant who participated in the events. The first half of the article appeared in the last issue of Spartacist-West.

The article deals with the events in Saigon in 1945, when the French were trying to reclaim their "Indochina" possessions. The first half documented how the Stalinist Vietminh aided this process by seeking to control and curtail armed resistance under the guise of "negotiations" with the British, who were just stalling to let the French get back in. Nevertheless, insurrectionary moods were spreading.

The occupation forces feverishly searched the whole center of the town. This didn't prevent the insurgents from setting fire to various important buildings (such as the Manufactured Rubber Company) and to warehouses. During the night of September 23-24, guerillas attacked the port without respite. The following day revolutionary groups openly paraded in the rue de Verdun and marched up the boulevard de la Somme, converging on the market place, which they later burned down. In Saigon there was neither water nor electricity. Supplies were breaking down. Each day the French sought to extend the area under their control, while various armed groups organized themselves as guerillas in the periphery of the city.

The Vietminh Committee produced a leaflet: "The French... seem to take pleasure in murdering our people. There is only one answer: a food blockade". While seeking to "starve out" the French (a futile hope as British ships controlled the access to the harbor) the Vietminh clung to its hope of starting negotiations with the British. Talks with Gracy did in fact start... and a truce was announced on October 1st. On October 5 General Leclerc, head of the French expeditionary force, arrived. His mission was to "restore order", to "build a strong Indochina within the French Union". He landed his troops. The commandos of the battleship "Triumphant" paraded down the rue Catinat. The hated tricolor again fluttered from various windows.

The "negotiations" between the Vietminh and the British continued. The only result was that British and Japanese troops are allowed "free and unmolested passage" through zones occupied by the insurgents. The Vietminh Committee, continuing its policy of appeasement toward the imperialist allies, had

consciously taken this decision. The Gurkhas and the Japanese moved out further detachments and occupied more strategic points in the periphery of Saigon. On October 12 French troops, supported by Gurkhas, launched a general attack towards the northeast. The miserable peasant huts burned from Thi-nghê to Tan-binh. The encirclement of the town by the rebels was gradually being broken, in desperate fighting.

The Vietminh would not tolerate any tendency that dared formulate the least criticism of it. It dealt with such tendencies by physically liquidating them. The militants of the Trotskyist group "La Lutte" (The Struggle) were the first victims of the Stalinist terror, despite their proclamations of "critical support to the Vietminh government". Gathered in a temple in the Thu-duc area, and while preparing the armed struggle against the French on the Gia-dinh front, they were surrounded one morning by the Vietminh, arrested and interned shortly afterwards at Ben-suc, in the province of Thu-dau-mot. There they were all shot—together with some 30 other prisoners—at the approach of the French troops. Among those murdered was Tran van Thach, onetime municipal councilor for Saigon, elected in 1933 on a stalino-trotskyist (sic) list and released a few weeks earlier from the Penal settle-

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