

# DETROIT REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT RECORDS

BOX 12 OF 16

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FLAMES REPLY FROM THE  
GUARDIAN

Weather the flames!  
Irwin Silber

"Nature abhors a vacuum," wrote Spinoza almost 300 years ago. To which he might have added—as does politics.

The political vacuum on the U.S. left today is caused by the absence of a genuine Marxist-Leninist party of the working class.

It is not necessary for the precise nature of this vacuum to be understood in order for its effects to be felt. There are many—veteran socialists, experienced radicals with long histories of militant struggle, young activists who came to political maturity in the 1960s—who know that something's missing.

They have no confidence in the Communist party, seeing in that organization's sycophantic relationship with the Soviet Union a hopelessly compromised politics. They also remain dubious about the CPUSA's twin strategies of "detente" and "peaceful transition to socialism" as offering any hope for revolutionary change in the U.S.

They likewise have no confidence in the Socialist Workers party or any of the various Trotskyist sects, seeing that the political tie that binds the various Trotskyist groupings remains—as it always has been—support for socialism everywhere in the world except where it exists. Even the commendable role played by the SWP in the antiwar movement of the 1960's was inevitably compromised by the Trotskyists' ideological rigidity which ultimately found them opposing the PRG's 7-point peace plan and the cease-fire agreement of last year.

And yet, the need for a party of socialism in America is felt.

It is probably inevitable, therefore, that many well-intentioned individuals should put forth ideas designed to forge "a bold new strategy which has as its aim the taking of control of every economic, social and political institution now controlled by the ruling class."

The quotation is from a document by noted radical lawyer Arthur Kinoy which appears in the December 1973 issue of "Liberation" magazine. The document itself is an edited version of a much longer statement that Kinoy has been circulating on the left for more than a year.

#### MASS PARTY OR VANGUARD PARTY

Reduced to its essentials, Kinoy's proposal is for "a permanent mass-based party of the people." He explicitly poses such a party as an alternative to a Leninist "vanguard" party, organized on the principles of democratic centralism, and based on the conception of the working class—and the industrial proletariat in particular—as the leading force in the revolutionary struggle.

While judiciously borrowing concepts here and there from both Lenin and Mao, Kinoy is really advancing an idea that has more in common with utopian and anarchistic ideas of socialism than with anything resembling the scientific socialism that must be the starting point for any serious revolutionary movement. A similar view—strikingly consistent with Kinoy's in many particulars—is put forward by two leading members of the New American Movement (NAM), Frank Ackerman and Harry C. Boyte, in a recently published NAM pamphlet, "Revolution and Democracy."

Both Kinoy and NAM argue, essentially, that the Leninist party, while possibly suitable to the political conditions in czarist Russia, is a form that does not correspond to present-day American realities. In one form or another, both see the "hierarchical" and centralized structure of a Leninist party incompatible with their vision of a socialist organization.

Equally important, both Kinoy and NAM argue against the leading role of the working class in the revolutionary process. While neither goes as far as Weatherman or other third world romanticizers in writing off the "white working class" as hopelessly reactionary, they firmly adhere to a kind of egalitarianism of the oppressed which, in practice, is bound to lead either to petty bourgeois domination of their movement or a tailing after spontaneous eruptions of militancy.

Kinoy calls for "an alliance of all the oppressed classes, nations, groups of people" in which, from time to time, "one or another of the oppressed groups will assume leadership." Kinoy's view has, if nothing else, the virtue of candor. Ackerman and Boyte "solve" the problem by defining virtually everyone in America as being part of the working class and arguing that the idea of an "industrial proletariat" playing the leading role is some dogmatic incantation from the past. "The working class," they write, "consists of people who must work for a living, under conditions dictated by the capitalist system, and of people who are directly dependent upon those who must work." This definition is about the neatest ideological trick of the week, eliminating the petty bourgeoisie as a class with a stroke of the pen and thereby improving considerably on Marx who only saw the eventual and relatively gradual disappearance of that class.

Despite a considerable amount of brave talk on all sides about fresh new ideas, creative thinking, bold strategies and concrete examination of American realities, there is really very little that is new in any of these theses. Marx and Lenin argued against earlier versions of these essentially utopian views in their own time.

While Ackerman and Boyte have attempted to define the petty bourgeoisie out of existence, their strategy for socialism—and Kinoy's—clearly demonstrate that the petty bourgeoisie is alive and while not so well, is trying to assert its domination over the working class movement.

#### AGAINST SECRET ORGANIZATION

To argue, as do Ackerman and Boyte, that a "secret" organization is not necessary—that is, a revolutionary organization many of whose members will not be publicly identifiable—because of the existence of bourgeois democracy, is to betray a pathetic ignorance of the realities of working class life in America. How long do they think "open communists" will survive in factories where both the companies and the labor bureaucrats are anxious to have them removed? How much time will such "open communists" have to develop their ties with their fellow-workers before being fired?

And if the leadership of the party is always to be elected openly and be publicly identified, how many factory workers will actually serve in the political leadership of such a movement? This petty bourgeois compulsion for "democracy" and egalitarianism leads inexorably to an organization in which the leading roles and positions of power would, in fact, be turned over to those not so directly involved in the daily class struggle at the point of production.

Abstract moralizing against hierarchy stems from the individualistic petty bourgeois world outlook which, in essence, fears the genuine democracy of working class rule. Non-hierarchical structures lend themselves to the more subtle, but nonetheless equally effective, control by an elite. The struggle for inner-party democracy will go on at all times but must always be tempered with the necessity to forge a militant and effective fighting force of the working class.

Similarly with Kinoy's party of all the oppressed in which each group will rise to leadership at different times. In practice, once again, this means leaving the party structure in the hands of those who are best equipped by reason of education, technical expertise and relatively secure income to dominate the organization's affairs.

But this isn't simply a matter of the class position of the party's leading cadre. The need for the working class to lead is based on the social practice, concrete experience and relation of the workers to the means of production. These are the factors which make the working class the only consistent source of revolutionary ideology, because it is only the working class—and particularly that sector that produces the society's surplus value and whose work is the most highly socialized—whose own best interests always correspond to the complete and irrevocable defeat of capital.

# Winston stresses need for ideological struggle

## Article II

Henry Winston, Communist Party chairman, told the recent meeting of the Party's Central Committee and National Council that so-called Marxist-Leninist organizations are coming into being precisely "to throw mud into the eyes of the masses searching for answers."

He stressed the importance of the ideological struggle at this moment in helping the masses to find "a way out of the barbarity of a system revealed in Watergate."

In this regard, he characterized the reports of Gus Hall and Roscoe Proctor as "basic documents that set the course for our Party for a long period of time."

### Directed groupings

Winston observed: We are not the only ones who recognize the mass anger in the land — the necessity for something new. I call to your attention the sprouting of so-called Marxist-Leninist organizations which is the response of directed groupings to try to stem the march of masses moving in the direction of our Party. I deliberately say 'directed groupings' who are coming into being precisely to throw mud into the eyes of masses searching for answers. I believe if one looks at the Guardian or the Call on the West Coast, one will find such 'directed groupings'!

Stokely Carmichael is now a Marxist-Leninist but his concept of Marxism-Leninism is that it is an instrument. It is not a body of ideology. It is not political economy. It is not socialism. It is not philosophy. It's an instrument which can be used, not for class purposes, not for seizing power by the class, but for the purposes of a nationalist direction. This robs Marxism of its soul, of its internationalism.

"Stokely Carmichael, who has a certain popularity, a certain prestige, is now out there actively fighting to divert the movement which is rejecting... policies of yesterday and searching for policies which would correspond to the advancement of the interests of Black people, the interests of the class.

### A meeting of 80

Some 80 people met in New York to discuss an eight-page document which lays the foundation for what is called a discussion to found a new vanguard party. But as always will be the case among such groups and groupings, even before they got started they were split three or four different ways. At least three lines of development became discernible.

The initiator of the New York meeting argued for a vanguard party and about that we'll talk a little bit later — others said we do not need a vanguard, but a broad people's party. And still a third position which is we don't need a broad people's party, we need a socialist assembly, a mechanism through which people who are socially inclined can come, discuss, debate and perhaps a bulletin issued.

Now comrades, it would be a mistake if we did not understand that what is involved here is a flanking to derail masses from finding correct paths of struggle.

This is bringing forward old garbage dressed up to make it look like new. But what we are dealing with in essence fundamentally is right social democracy covered up with left demagoguery, left rhetoric.

Lenin faced this question with the Mensheviks some 70 to 75 years ago. But he said of the Mensheviks that they expressed their attitude toward the Party, toward Bolshevism, toward class power of the working class openly. They supported the idea, the concept, that Lenin advanced of what is a Party — the essence of that Party, the cornerstone of that Party — democratic centralism.

The initiator of the New York meeting of the 80 does not do this. He develops his ideas in a different way. His fight against the Party is a fight against a leadership which is distorting, as he put it, Marxism-Leninism, and therefore concludes that we need a new vanguard.

And what is the concept of that vanguard? It is not the Leninist concept of ideology, the concept basic to Marxism-Leninism

— the working class, the leading role of the working class, etc. But to the leader of the 80, as you heard, vanguard now becomes transformed into 'people' into a 'people's party.'

### What is vanguard

This is not vanguard. Vanguard is a science. It is Marxism. It is Leninism. And you will note all the way through these seven or eight pages, he says Marxism-not Leninism. But Marxism can be anything. A thousand different varieties of Marxism. But Leninism is Marxism in the present period of struggle and vanguard has meaning only if it is guided by Marxist-Leninist science. This is rejected by the leader of the 80. He considers vanguard as meaning a renunciation, a falsely put argument of domination by Communists of other organizations, vanguard dominated. He reduces vanguard to domination.

It is not, it has not been the policy of our Party to dominate other existing organizations. Communists work for a living and

are to be found in trade unions. Communists are indefatigable battlers for civil liberties, and will be found in civil liberties organizations. Communists are in the forefront of the battle for peace and will be found in peace organizations. Communists are determined fighters for the basic interests of youth and will be found in youth organizations.

Communists wherever they will be found will fight to advance their ideology to the end of helping to resolve not only the particular problem, but the general problems of the class as well.

"But I think that it is fallacious kind of thing to say that these masses have no place to go. It is true to say that they're not yet ready to come and be members of the Communist Party. But their forward motion, the forward movement, will eventually lead them in that direction.

We listened to Gus Hall's report. He spoke about anti-monopoly movement, he spoke about a movement which can be furthered by development of independent political action.

Gus Hall talked about preparing the groundwork, the conditions for these masses breaking away from the two-party system. There's some place to go. And that place to go is in this direction and not in the direction proposed by Arthur Kinoy, which is a direction against this anti-monopoly movement, a direction against independent political action.

And so if Bolshevism had to fight historically against social democracy in general, today in the U.S. under circumstances when masses are in motion, the bourgeoisie will not remain silent or idle in trying to spread their ideas and practices in any guise that will help to maintain a safe rear. This we can never forget. All the more reasons why there should be a mass fight for the ideology of our Party, a mass fight in which the Party as a whole participates. That is why the decisions of our Party must become the decisions of every single individual within the Party.

(To be continued)

Note: This article is the second part of a three part series. Parts one and three do not concern themselves with the Proposed mass

# Reply to Silber on vanguard or mass party

The following contribution to the Radical Forum is written in response to Irwin Silber's "Fan the Flames" column (Guardian, Jan. 16) on the question of a mass party or a vanguard party for the people's movement. The reply is written by Frank Ackerman and Harry C. Boyte, leaders of the New American Movement and co-authors of an article entitled "Revolution and Democracy." The article, which appears in the latest issue of Socialist Revolution, was criticized in Silber's column.

By HARRY BOYTE and FRANK ACKERMAN

Irwin Silber's criticisms of our article, "Revolution and Democracy," are puzzling and disturbing. He presents serious misrepresentations of our views, as well as shallow readings of Marx and the lessons of the socialist tradition. We wish to respond to Silber on two central issues: the nature of the working class and its motivations, and the nature of the party.

Silber quotes our definition of the working class, "people who must work for a living, under conditions dictated by the capitalist system, and people who are directly dependent upon those who must work," and comments that "this definition is about the neatest ideological trick of the week, eliminating the petty bourgeoisie as a class with a stroke of the pen and thereby improving considerably on Marx. . . ." Silber's comment is nonsense on two counts. First, we never denied the existence of the petty bourgeoisie. We defined it, discussed its size and noted its gradual decline over time, just as Marx predicted. Second, our definition of the working class corresponds closely to "classical" Marxism. More importantly, it also makes sense in terms of present-day American reality.

We do elaborate the "classic" definition of the working class to include workers who do not produce surplus value but are essential to the functioning of modern capitalism (such as housewives and state employees). But with this exception, our position is remarkably close to that given by Engels: "By proletariat (we mean) the class of modern wage laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor power in order to live."

The real issue, though, is not what Marx and Engels said but rather the nature of the American working class today. The central question is: what is the relationship between industrial workers and other oppressed groups? Three answers to this question are offered on the left.

Silber, among others, seems to believe that industrial workers alone are the uniquely leading group, who must lead the other non-working-class elements of the revolutionary movement. At the opposite extreme, parts of the 1960's new left dismissed industrial workers as hopelessly bought off by high wages and seemed to suggest that the revolution would be led by movements of alienated youth.

We find both these positions inadequate and present a third position: industrial workers and many other kinds of workers are oppressed by capitalism in fundamentally similar ways; all major sectors of the working class, which includes workers in factories, offices, schools, homes, stores, hospitals, etc., must be actively involved in the revolutionary movement. The question of which group is the "leading" group at a particular time is a complex question, which probably cannot be answered at the level of generality of "industrial vs. clerical workers," for instance.

Corresponding to the differences over the role of industrial workers, there is a long-standing debate over the motivations for revolt, a debate which is crucial for political strategy. On the one hand, many leftists, apparently including Silber, view material hardship and physical suffering as the essential motivation for revolution. On the other hand, much of the new left dismissed questions of poverty and material hardship and presented the revolt against authority, hierarchy and oppressive social relationships as the sole basis for change.

Again we find both approaches unacceptable. The exclusive concern with anti-authoritarianism led the new left into a self-contained world of student and youth politics, within which movements became increasingly exotic and eventually self-destructive.

## OVERREACTED

But in escaping from the isolation of youth politics, much of the left has now totally overreacted to past errors. The leap out of anti-authoritarianism has led back to some of the worst of the old left's authoritarian political style. Furthermore, the exclusive concern with material poverty leads many leftists to a rigid separation of narrowly defined "real politics" from "personal life" and "feelings." Involvement in politics on this basis is often too painful to sustain for long and as a result countless former activists have retreated to extreme forms of privatism and escapism.

To make a revolution in modern America, the left must understand all the forms of capitalist oppression. Capitalism still does not provide material comfort and security for large parts of the working class. We must always be aware of and build strategies around this fact. But we must also recognize that advanced capitalism creates new needs and new forms of oppression. Throughout the post-World War 2 period, the structures

which "reproduce" the working class and generate ideology and knowledge in the society (service work of all kinds, communications, education, etc.) have experienced enormous expansion. This process, along with the commercialization of the society and the break-up of stable communities and neighborhoods, has created powerful new needs: for community, for control in the workplace, for meaningful education and work, for self-expression, etc. Capitalism is unable to meet these needs; just as it is unable to provide material well-being for all. A successful revolution must fuse these strands of discontent.

Silber distorts our views on the nature of the party as well as on the nature of the working class. Noting that we oppose the formation of a secret party on the Bolshevik model, he interprets our position to mean that all the party members will publicly identify themselves as communists at work. Silber then proceeds to accuse us of a "pathetic ignorance of the realities of working class life in America" and asks "how long do they think open communists will survive in factories. . . how much will such open communists have to develop their ties with their fellow workers?" (In passing, it should be noted that Silber's communists must be rather recent arrivals in the working class, who have not had a chance to develop any personal ties with other workers.)

In advocating an openly democratic and publicly socialist party, we never meant that all party members would wear their memberships on their shirtsleeves in the factory. Rather, we proposed that the internal life of the party should be visible to outsiders. There should be public elections and democratic procedures for choosing leadership and making decisions. Of course there are dangers of repression in an open party—though the police have also done fairly well in infiltrating and/or repressing tightly organized, secret left groups. But it is important to remember the costs of a secret party: the inevitable suspicion and distrust aroused by a group which picks its leaders and decides its "lines" behind closed doors; and the much greater danger than in an open party of bureaucracy and of the loss of internal democracy.

The party should be open, not just in its internal structure, but also in its public advocacy of socialism, as much as possible in every sphere of its work. Too often, arguments like Silber's for a secret party have led leftists to hide their politics and drift into what Lenin called "economism," simply organizing around immediate economic grievances without ever raising broader political demands. This is an error under any circumstances but it is especially tragic today.

As the society falls apart, more and more people are looking for total alternatives. This is no time to hide our views. We should be proclaiming the possibility of socialism in America and building a mass socialist party which can lead the revolution. Our work in the New American Movement is oriented to that goal.