

Movement Opportunists on May 1st

Upholding Spontaneity and Denouncing Revolution

May First has had its impact everywhere. Within the "left" in this country many have had their heads turned to seriously weigh the significance of this action by class-conscious workers, while others—the opportunists of various stripes, from the old revisionist "Communist" Party USA to the CPML (*The Call*) and the Trotskyites—have turned the pages of their papers into breeding broods for continued attacks on what occurred that day.

How could they do otherwise? May First had become a major social question, especially among the more class-conscious workers. It became clear, even from the attacks on TV and the press, that International Workers Day had been put on the map in this country as *the* revolutionary day of the working class at the head of all those oppressed. And since it is the special role of these opportunists to throw dust in the eyes of the advanced class-conscious force, they, like the bourgeoisie, had to respond, and their response has been revealing.

Unable to deny the overall social effect of the May First actions, they turned their attention first to the quantity at the marches and actually outdid the

"official" media and police counts for lies and distortions. These included everything from wild claims that the RCP had projected there would be "50,000 marchers" and then their fantasy headcount of "in total around 600 people, with most marches drawing only 35-50 people" (*Unity*, May 9, newspaper of the "League of Revolutionary Struggle," a cousin of *The Call*) to equally ludicrous charges that the RCP was planning a "general strike of workers and students" (this appeared both in *The Call*, and in the paper of the Hawaii Union of Socialists). It was very clear that, in 1980, the Party's call was not for a general strike, for which the conditions are not now ripe, but for marches and actions by an advanced, but still relatively small section of the workers, whose influence could be (and was) great. All in all, these opportunists' distortions were a rather obvious, shallow and self-exposing attempt to defy reality and make May Day appear insignificant, to say that it didn't count.

These transparent attempts to bury revolutionary May Day are just that, transparent. But if we dig a little deeper into these attacks, we will find the political line and outlook that guides them. And it is this *line* that is most

significant about such assaults, just as the revolutionary line of the RCP, transformed into a material force on May First, was the determining and most important thing about those actions.

For this reason, while we have examined and will examine the opportunist antics of others, it is perhaps most informative to look at and analyze the polemic of the "League of Revolutionary Struggle (M-L)" against May Day in the May 9 issue of its paper *Unity*. This group is in the same general pro-China revisionist camp as the CPML, but in this case it spells out more clearly and explicitly than most the political basis of the attacks by all these reformist opportunists.

You can tell right off that *Unity* is a bit more sober and conscious about its opportunism than some. The title of their article, "Is the RCP Crazy? Or is There a Method to Their Madness?", is itself obviously directed against any "quick dismissal" of the significance of the Revolutionary Communist Party on the part of *Unity*'s fellow opportunists. This won't work, they say. In fact they go even further and reveal the extent to which they are consciously serving the cause of the U.S. bourgeoisie going into

this period of crisis and, especially, war when they warn, "Nevertheless, the RCP will not simply disappear. Certainly some of their members will become discouraged at their isolation. But the worsening economic situation and the real growing danger of war create conditions that can be taken advantage of by the RCP."

Of course, most opportunist lingo requires some translation, but this is fairly clear. The predictions of desertion are really old-hat for these opportunists, who for years have been predicting (wishing for) the imminent collapse of the RCP, which has instead only grown in strength and influence. Much more interesting than this is their rather open warning—not just to fellow opportunists, but actually to the U.S. bourgeoisie itself—Watch out, the RCP could mean trouble ahead! The point here is not to "take comfort" in this recognition of the Party's influence and potential influence. The point is to grasp what these opportunists are most concerned about—that in the context of mounting war preparations and crisis, there will be a force—the RCP—gaining influence among the masses by continually educating them that the war

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they have to fight is not one wrapped in the red, white and blue, fighting worker against worker for the preservation of this system, but instead is a revolutionary war as part of one international struggle against these and all imperialists. These opportunists (social chauvinists) have cast their lot with the imperialists for the coming war and are most concerned about this threat. From this stems all their vile little attacks on May First and the Party.

To practice capitulation to the U.S. bourgeoisie tomorrow, in the context of war, requires practicing reformism and economism, tailing and worshipping the spontaneous struggle of the masses today—and blasting all those who refuse to “gaze with awe on the posterior of the proletariat,” as the Russian revolutionary leader Lenin put it. So it is here that *Unity* and their like—which includes practically every single opportunist phony “leftist” group—concentrates their fire today. This is what lies behind all the charges against the RCP and its Chairman Bob Avakian for “anarchism,” “ultra-leftism” and “left idealism.” Let them speak for themselves on this question. “The RCP sees that the task today is to emphasize ‘propaganda work’ to attract to the RCP the ‘advanced’ elements who already hate the system, and to alert the masses to the upcoming world apocalypse... thus the RCP believes that dealing with the immediate concerns of the masses is inconsequential as compared to spreading the word, by whatever way possible, about the RCP’s views on war and revolution.”

To this indictment the RCP gladly pleads “Innocent, as charged!” It is both a dangerous illusion and an outright crime for these groups to propagate that the class-conscious working class should force its head down to the day-to-day concerns when we are right in the midst of the stormy seas of the worldwide struggle and when the prospects of world war and revolution are both on the horizon. And then to call this ostrich-style activity “communist” or “revolutionary”! This is in stark opposition not only to the RCP but to Lenin, for one, who in preparing for the Russian revolution spoke directly against this line and contrasted it with “diverting the spontaneous struggle of the masses.”

This is the difference between the RCP and opportunists like *Unity* and it is the basis for all their wild and frenzied attacks on May Day. As Chairman Bob Avakian put it in a “Talk” in *RW* No. 49, “It’s basically a question of whether you are going to be seeking to link up with the class-conscious proletariat and give political expression to its sentiments and on that basis try to influence the working class and its movements, or are you going to go to the average workers and try to subordinate yourself to their understanding and backward tendencies.”

It is exactly with this backward outlook that the *Unity* article takes another valiant stab at attacking revolution and upholding the “American midstream” when it claims that “the RCP is attracting elements who are anarchistically inclined and isolated from the actual struggles of the masses” which translates into “down for revolution, and not into scrambling for some position in the ‘labor movement.’” Lenin, in denouncing the social chauvinists of his time, spoke exactly to this point: “Of course, the counter-revolutionary philistines cry out ‘anarchism!’, just as the opportunist Eduard David cried ‘anarchism’ when he denounced Karl Liebknecht (a German internationalist in World War I—*RW*). In Germany, only those leaders seem to have remained honest socialists whom the opportunists revile as anarchists.” (“Collapse of the Second International”)

Yes, *Unity*, the RCP certainly sees the raising of class-consciousness and directing the workers’ sights to the broad political questions of the day as crucial to preparing for the armed seizure of the fortress of U.S. imperialism by the working class at the head of a united front. And even as much as you bleat about “concern for the masses’ immediate needs,” what else but the victorious resolution of the question of what class holds state power could possibly put the working class in a position to fundamentally deal with the needs of the masses, both here and internationally? Reformism is not “more realistic” or even, in the final analysis, “more concrete” than revolution; it is a dangerous illusion.

And when *Unity* cynically refers to the RCP as working to “alert the masses to the upcoming world apocalypse,” this is just another self-exposure along the same lines and a perfect illustration of Lenin’s description of the opportunists of his time as having “a fear of sharp turns and a disbelief in them” (from “The Collapse of the Second International,” *Collected Works*, volume 21). These opportunists vacillate between believing that today’s relative calm will go on apace with no dramatic shifts in the situation or in the mood of the masses or, when they do get a glimmer of the upheavals on the horizon, they panic and view it as “the upcoming world apocalypse.”

In order to prepare to seize the opportunities that will arise as a revolutionary situation does ripen, we see our main activity today as revolutionary agitation, political exposure of events that cut to the heart of this system. It is certainly not the kind of head down “activity” that *Unity* and others stand for. But also, it is not only, or mainly, “propaganda work,” as *Unity* claims, though such work which involves explaining many ideas, and their interrelationships, is very important today—although it is always fully understood by only a handful of people compared to those whom agitation will reach. Our central task today is most vividly expressed in the slogan of Mao Tsetung that states, “Create public opinion... seize power.” It is this timely

topical exposure of events here and internationally that is key to develop the class consciousness of the proletariat, to train them to respond to all forms of oppression here and around the world from the revolutionary point of view of the class-conscious international proletariat.

These themes struck up by *Unity* are very common themes in the history of the communist movement. They have been constantly advanced by opportunists who whine about “close organic contact with the mass struggle” or “linking up with and leading the actual struggles of the masses,” or “leading the day to day struggle for the immediate needs of the masses,” etc. All this amounts to is economist catchphrases for uniting with where the mainstream of the working class is at and being enamored with the slightest ripple of movement. And as we said above, the bottom line around all the criticisms of May Day and the praising of spontaneity is this: whether or not they will capitulate to the bourgeoisie in World War 3. In the talk by Bob Avakian cited earlier, this road to hell is clearly outlined. “Because anybody that takes the line of tailing after the masses at this point can do nothing else—I don’t care what your intentions are—once you decide that’s going to be your program there is no question of where you will end up, you will capitulate, you will throw away the red flag and pick up the red, white and blue rag of plunder and oppression.”

“If you just go along and link up with the masses where they are at and concentrate on the trade union struggle, then when war comes along, even if you try to make the transition from the trade union to the international arena and attempt to promote proletarian internationalism and revolutionary defeatism, the workers will answer you in bourgeois trade unionist terms—listen, of course we have to fight these guys for better conditions and so on, but after all, this is our country and we are not even going to be able to talk about improving it if we don’t go out and win this war. In other words, the logic of that trade unionist ideology would propel people not toward revolutionary defeatism but non-revolutionary, counter-revolutionary defeatism towards your own bourgeoisie in the war—a stand of defending the country and not seizing the opportunity, taking advantage of the defeats of our bourgeoisie to overthrow it.”

This corporate merger of social-chauvinism and reformist economism is what marks *Unity*’s attack on May First, and what gives that attack extra virulence. For this same reason, while groups like *Unity* are today pitifully insignificant and non-influential, social-democratic groups (perhaps, but not necessarily, including *Unity* or *The Call*) will be increasingly promoted by the bourgeoisie itself. Especially with their preparations for war mounting, and their much felt need to ensure a “loyal” working class to fight for them, the U.S. imperialists are beginning to sense the need to give a bit of a shot in the arm to social-democratic forces. They must be brought in to play their part in keeping the working class movement safely confined to a patriotic treadmill. This kind of movement is needed by the imperialists precisely when they begin to really feel the heat from a truly revolutionary one. It was revolutionary May Day that got put on the map in 1980, and that is worrisome to the imperialists, given what they have in store for the masses in the period ahead. So part of their response, in Chicago for example, was to promote a little social democracy on May First with articles in the *Chicago Tribune* and TV coverage complete with “expert labor historians” to invoke the “fine traditions of May Day and of the labor movement.” All of a sudden, a dose of great “concern for the working man”—great concern, that is, to hit back with every available weapon at the class-conscious section of workers that made some history on May First. This means not only relying on clubs and guns and jails, but also the “spokesmen for labor” who may even talk about “class struggle” and “socialism” while sticking the workers’ noses to the grindstone of the “proud” and *American* tradition of “labor’s fight” for another dime on the dollar and another five-minute break.

It is for positions like these in the service of the war machine of U.S. imperialism that forces with the line of *Unity* will be contending—all in direct response and opposition to the revolutionary section of the working class that took an internationalist stand on May First. This is why, in response to the salvos fired on May First, and to the sharpening objective situation, the noises coming from these opportunists sound less and less like revolution and more and more like the national anthem.

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