"STRATEGY" OF SOCIALISTS

# NOTES ON IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE

In the last issue of *The Western Socialist,* we pointed out that socialists should make no provision for a violent revolution, because a socialist revolution in modern industrial capitalism must be fought and won on the level of ideas. Workers do not have power now because their heads are controlled by pro-capitalist culture and ideology. It is true that the state is an instrument of violent force controlled by the ruling class and used against workers; but the methods of state violence are social, and cannot be set in motion without the voluntary participation of workers. When workers in America and Europe no longer support capitalism, it will be impossible for the ruling class to suppress them, because they will be unable to use the methods of violence: that is, the highways, airports, communications, supplies, armies, and munitions factories. The ruling class have no physical role in production; their whole relationship to the means of production is defined by ownership, and is now dependent on working-class support.

The physical matter of taking power once workers have actually determined to do it need only consist of a series of non-violent acts: electing administrators to organize the labor supply and the industries for socialist production, disbanding the capitalist military machine, replacing managers and foremen who are unable to adjust to a system where they are the servants and not the masters of the people, attending mass meetings to decide local community affairs, etc. The only military resistance that enemies of socialism will be in a position to offer is private individualistic terror, as the means of social violence will have passed into the hands of the workers along with the means of production. To be sure, "Minutemen"-types may run to their private stockpiles of weapons and make fools of themselves by terrorizing a few towns in their immediate vicinity; but, denied access to a supply and communications system, with no continuous base of support among a producing class, and no industries of their own, they would present about as much danger as a roving motorcycle gang whom every community would despise and be prepared to run off the road.

The problem of a socialist revolution is not one of defeating the ruling class military machine, but of defeating their ideas and culture. Since ideology is the key to the whole struggle for both sides, it is ideology, analysis, education, propaganda, and organization to carry out these tasks that a socialist party should be concerned with, not "confrontation," killing "pigs," and planting dynamite. How, then, are socialists to go about defeating ruling class ideas?

We begin with the knowledge that pro-capitalist ideology is objectively false and is an instrument of oppression and exploitation; any control that it can achieve over the oppressed is necessarily temporary, because you can't fool all the people all of the time. It is false, for example, to blame the working class for the pollution of the environment; false that poverty is the "fault" of the poor, or that war is the expression of a natural "instinct to kill" or hold territory; false that capitalism affords "freedom" or "incentive" to workers that would not vastly increase under socialism; false that capitalists as a class serve any kind of indispensable function in human society; false that they earn or deserve what they own; false that our concepts of greed, competition, money, commodities, profit, hierarchy, and morality are innate, instinctual, or part of an unchanging "human nature"; false that capitalism is capable of solving its problems, and false that socialism is impractical, oppressive, or has no regard for "individual freedom."

All the political knowledge which is necessary for the task of overthrowing capitalism, moreover, is simple and accessible to anyone of average intelligence; so simple and so obvious that the ruling class must spend billions of dollars on school systems and propaganda and pass dozens of laws to prevent us from acquiring it. Workers experience capitalism as a frustrating, oppressive, and frequently brutal system. Since the ruling class can do nothing to change that short of handing over their property to the people, what they must do instead is prevent workers from making the connection between personal and general oppression, lie about how well off they are in comparison to what is possible, assign other causes to their misery, and stratify and atomize them by wage and job differentials, discrimination, and ego insecurity. A lie, however, remains a lie.



### THE "STRATEGY" OF THE SOCIALIST

The "strategy" of the socialist, then, assumes that pro-capitalist ideas are lies, and that capitalism must invest billions of dollars in such lies because it can't solve its own problems. The socialist also works on the assumption that, despite their wealth, the ruling class cannot control all the cultural experiences of workers or all the channels of information which reach them. In fact the ruling class are faced with a constant state of resistance: workers fight for more money and better conditions, teachers refuse to brainwash their pupils, students shut down classrooms, clergymen burn draft files, GIs disobey their officers, black people fight the police. Such forms of action can be valuable learning experiences or a necessary defense for the people as a whole; in the total historical context, no resistance to the ruling class is a waste. The socialist, however, plans his resistance with this one specific objective in mind: to make socialists; to spread the materialist world outlook. It is the most important thing he can do, because capitalism cannot finally be overthrown until it is done.

The media available for use by socialists will vary according to the time and place, but generally they always include small-circulation journals, leaflets, forums, meetings, and private conversations. The small-circulation journal provides an opportunity to develop the theory, strategy, and tactics of the movement, criticize incorrect positions, and apply materialist analysis to specific events. It is the center of gravity for the party, even though it may never be read by more than a small fraction of the working class. Socialists are also able to get occasional radio and TV time, primarily because workers as a whole are never so completely controlled by capitalist ideas that they are not curious about the opposing arguments; hence "controversy" is a marketable commodity, and the capitalist media are forced to make concessions to this pressure. As the movement grows, other media possibilities unfold: street demonstrations with socialist themes, guerrilla theater, film, and classroom dialog.

The most important channel of socialist ideology, however, will continue to be written and verbal exchange, Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding; it would be highly difficult, even supposing that workers controlled the stations, to adapt TV to the needs of mass democracy and ideological struggle when it developed as a one-way funnel for commercials and bourgeois culture.

When a large minority of workers are actively engaged in waging struggle for socialism, the forms will diversify according to their particular role in production. Teachers, for example, will learn to apply the materialist world outlook to their own subject matter and openly criticize the capitalist bias in their curriculum. They will also have to fight for conditions in which they can do this. Workers in newspapers who become socialist in outlook will pressure their bosses into removing the pro-capitalist bias from some of their material and influence editorial policy in a direction favorable to socialism.