

So dis is da Left?!

Fifth Estate production staff

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In recent weeks, Detroit has seen the disruption of several union meetings and of demonstrations by a group called the National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC). The NCLC began as a faction of SDS and surfaced nationally around the time of the SDS 1969 Convention.

For the last two years NCLC has participated in strike support coalitions around the country. Some local union members remember them for their tendency to subject unionists to long, theoretical speeches in return for NCLC strike support.

Local Disruptions

The recent disruptions, however, indicate a change in the NCLC's tactics. Here is a sampling of local incidents:

- On Saturday, May 5, about 15 NCLC members barged into a room at Wayne State University's Center Building where members of the Young Socialist Alliance were waiting for the start of a YSA conference. The intruders were armed with clubs, claw hammers and num-chums. The NCLC people were chased off by 30 conference participants. One paraplegic YSA member was hospitalized, as was one member of the Socialist Workers' Party. At least four members of NCLC went to the hospital.
- On Saturday, April 14, ten NCLC members, some reportedly with pipes as weapons, disrupted a meeting of the largely black nurses' union at Childrens' Hospital, demanding that the nurses take sides in a national NCLC attempt to take over the National Welfare Rights Organization. When the nurses refused, the NCLC did not allow the meeting to continue.
- On Saturday, April 28, about 15 NCLC members attempted to disrupt a meeting of municipal employees at the Local 26 Hall (garbage workers) at 106 Selden. They were shouting from the floor, but were greatly outnumbered at the meeting (again, by mostly black workers) and were shouted at and booed from the hall.
- Before the anti-STRESS demonstration on April 28, six NCLC members threatened members of the Socialist Workers' Party who were passing out literature, telling one person that he would be in the hospital before the end of the day. Though they shouted at the leafleters only inches from their noses, the NCLC stopped short of violence. They also left the scene before the main body of the demonstration showed up.

“Operation Mop-Up”

Why is the National Caucus of Labor Committees engaging in this disruption of demonstrations and meetings? The NCLC contended, in an interview with The Fifth Estate, that it is out to destroy the Communist Party U.S.A.

and any groups which defend it. This campaign to destroy the CP is termed "operation mop-up" by New Solidarity, the NCLC newspaper. The paper predicts that a short campaign of two to six weeks will be sufficient to bury the Communist Party.

Why would the NCLC, which claims to be a Leftist group, want to destroy the Communist Party?

NU-WRO

According to Chris Martinson of the NCLC, the reason is that the Communist Party is preventing the building of the National Unemployed-Welfare Rights Organization (NU-WRO). The NCLC has a special interest in the NU-WRO because the NCLC sponsored the founding of the NU-WRO. "The National Unemployed-Welfare Rights Organization is the only organization of the working class in this country," according to Martinson.

The NU-WRO split off from the National Welfare Rights Organization in March of this year. On March 31, the NU-WRO held its founding convention in Philadelphia. Members of the National Welfare Rights Organization (including members of the Communist Party) picketed the convention because they felt that the meeting would confuse and split the welfare recipients' movement, according to a Communist Party spokesman.

This picketing of the convention was the only hostile act of the Communist Party against NU-WRO that Martinson of the NCLC could recall. Basically, the NCLC condemns the Communist Party and its youth group, the Young Workers' Liberation League (YWLL), for "sitting on the fence" and not supporting the newly-formed NU-WRO.

Even though the Communist Party has done nothing since the founding convention, Martinson stated, "if they had the chance, they would kill everyone in our organization, so we have to get them first."

"Getting" the Communist Party

As an early indication of their tactics in "getting" the Communist Party, members of the NCLC attacked a meeting in Buffalo, N.Y. on April 19. One Young Workers' Liberation League member received a broken arm and another received a broken leg. On April 11, NCLC members with sticks and lead pipes attacked a Young Workers' Liberation League office at Temple University in Philadelphia. Eight YWLL members went to the hospital, three with broken noses. Other incidents have occurred in Boston, Seattle and New York City. In New York, on April 23, members of the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) defended a Communist Party speaker at Columbia University against an attack by NCLC members.

CP—History of Betrayal

NCLC's anger at the CP is not without base. The CP is associated with a history of tragic betrayal from Stalin's terror to the French Communist Party's sell-out of Paris students and workers in 1968. The Communist Party in the U.S. is a collection of nostalgic liberals engaged in promoting a series of opportunistic "front groups." It is not wrong to question the cash-bought power of the CP in this country's Left, nor is the CP free of a history of goon tactics.

The Communist Party used violence against the NCLC last summer in incidents in New York City and in Chicago. In Chicago, NCLC members were beaten by CP members and thrown out of a July 1, 1972 meeting of the Trade Unionists for Action and Democracy. (The FE condemned this attack in an article last summer.)

NCLC—"The Vanguard?"

Some independent Detroit movement people express disapproval of NCLC's violent tactics while they say that they generally agree with NCLC's theoretical positions. This is indicative of the sloppy political thinking of the

movement today. Tactics flow from strategic positions. The case of NCLC is no different from any other. If you disagree with their tactics you have to try to find their political errors.

NCLC's politics boil down to two elements. On the one hand NCLC has been predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism for as long as NCLC has existed. Every few months they up their estimate of the date for this collapse.

This view of the economy leads NCLC to call for the destruction of the Communist Party. The NCLC reasoning is that, since revolutionary crisis is just around the corner, it wants no other contenders for the position of leading the revolution. It wants to eliminate the competition before the crisis matures.

This apocalyptic vision of the collapse of capitalism also leads NCLC to take itself super-seriously. It accounts for the arrogant presumption in the NCLC statement, that having practically destroyed the CP, it has the "awful responsibility of hegemony (leadership) over the working class."

Like any "vanguard party" NCLC presumes to "lead the working class" and like most vanguard parties historically, NCLC is willing to expend a large part of its energy attempting to exterminate any other pretenders to the mantle of "vanguard party."

Capitalism in Tight Squeeze

We don't think capitalism will collapse in the next few months, like NCLC does. It will, however, go through recurrent phases of economic tightening over the next decade, which will oppress both workers and unemployed and will provide great opportunities for mass education. The economic tightening will occur for several reasons.

- U.S. imperialism is gradually being beaten back by the peoples of the third world and will lose access to the outside raw materials, energy sources, cheap labor and captive markets that make U.S. imperialism possible.
- Two other capitalist power centers are becoming more and more powerful—Japan and the Common Market. Japan and Germany are competing with the U.S. economy with the advantage of newer, more efficient factories. Their products are increasingly invading U.S. markets, making the capitalists here more and more desperate for markets for their products. The U.S. ruling class is now resorting to protectionism to keep out foreign products. This will force working people here to pay higher prices for everything, since foreign products will be more expensive and domestic manufacturers will therefore be free to raise their prices. All the while, relative wage levels are being depressed. The decline of the U.S. dollar is a good barometer of the gradually developing crisis in world capitalism.

The second element in NCLC's politics is the phrase "unite the class." By this NCLC means something very different from the position, which the Fifth Estate production staff takes, that racism and sexism tend to divide working people and are therefore reactionary.

For us this means that these evils must be resisted by everyone and that the struggles against these attitudes must be backed by all those most injured by them, namely, by non-whites and by women. We also believe that these struggles must take place within the context of the overall struggle of working people against the capitalist system.

For the NCLC, the phrase "unite the class" means that any struggle which tends to particularize the energies of the working class is reactionary. The NCLC views the black movement and the women's movement as, at best, diversionary. All community control struggles are seen as reactionary because, in addition to diverting energy from the overall struggle of the working class (as led by the NCLC), they tend to be bought off by OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity, a U.S. government agency—archive editors] and the Ford Foundation.

The NCLC is correct in some of its criticism of the New Left, which saw revolution as a mysterious chemical reaction between all of the particular "movements" of the '60s (that is, the women's, black, anti-war, workers' and the gay movements). Too little thought in the New Left went into answering the question of how these movements together will produce revolutionary ferment and how these movements will come under the leadership of the working class.

The Fifth Estate production staff believes that all of these movements, while not revolutionary in themselves, have had great positive effects in liberating the minds of some sectors of the population and in laying the groundwork for building the socialist consciousness.

The NCLC is wrong in offering the National Unemployed-Welfare Rights Organization as the “only” alternative to the strategies they criticize. By definition, unemployed and welfare recipients are not at the point of production (though many of them still form part of the reserve labor force). How then is the NU-WRO the “only organization of the working class...?”

It is a telling fact that in Detroit, at least, the very people NCLC wants to win over, organizations of welfare recipients, reject NCLC completely. A group called West Side Mothers is the largest such organization in this city. In an interview with the Fifth Estate they had this to say: “We hate them (NCLC). They tried to sneak into our meetings as fake welfare recipients. They have been loud and threatening, but they haven’t done anything yet. We think they look at us as if we were chumps.”

Why Welfare Organizing?

NCLC is on a welfare organizing drive partly because it has failed in its attempt to approach the workers in the factories through its “strike support coalitions.” NCLC members have tried to dictate to the workers from the outside, showing contempt and scorn for organizing attempts inside the plants. The NCLC feels that factory organizing automatically leads to “trade union consciousness,” or a mentality which demands only less hours and more money, forgetting that capitalism is the main evil. Trade union consciousness is indeed a pitfall of organizing inside the plant, but the NCLC tries to convince workers of this by merely calling them “chumps” and “fools” if they don’t agree. As a result, NCLC is not taken seriously inside any major plant in this country.

The NCLC has such a stereotyped view of workers that they fail to see the variety in the working class in this country. The American working people, with their varied occupational, geographic, ethnic backgrounds and a history of individualism, are not about to submit to the leadership of a tiny vanguard party. To convince people of anything, organizers must work on a local level with national coordination to build awareness of the nature of capitalism. Any organizing of workers will have to take place both at the point of production and in the community.

Workers will relate best to people who deal directly with the problems which slap them in the face every day. This is why The Fifth Estate carries news of local insurgent caucuses and organizing attempts in factories around this city. We want to help spread the news and coordinate these activities.

A virtually unanimous alliance of local political organizations has condemned NCLC’s tactics of disruption and violence and has taken steps to form a joint defense coalition.

The Fifth Estate production staff supports the right of political groups to hold their meetings without fear of violent disruption and to make their decisions through a vote of their members, not through intimidation by NCLC “defense squads.” We will help defend any local left group or welfare group which comes under attack by NCLC.

sidebar

The following is a statement circulated and signed by political groups at Wayne State’s campus:

We condemn the physical attacks by members of the NCLC against members of the Communist Party and Young Workers Liberation League. We believe that organizations and individuals have the right to organize and express their opinions without the threat of physical violence. We are opposed to violence as a means of resolving political differences in the radical and student movement. We oppose and reject the hooliganism of NCLC.

Signed,

Young Socialist Alliance

Young Workers Liberation League

Youth Against War and Fascism

International Socialists

Workers League
Frank Brough, Student Mobilization Committee
Irene Gorgoz, Wayne Women's Liberation
WSU Gay Liberation Front
Chris Wilde, May 5th Price Hike Committee
Jim Rosen, Chairman, WSU Student-Faculty Council (S-FC)
Jim Smith, Chairman, S-FC Community Education Committee
Leonard Winogrova, Chairman, S-FC
Commuting Students Committee
South End Newspaper Editors
John Zupan, Pres., WSU American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees



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