On the politics of the Workers World Party

12 October 2000

Dear Editor:

I visit your site usually once a day. I read most of the stories, and since I am also a reader of Workers World, I recognize a lot of the same stories and issues being brought up. One thing about this site that has begun to disturb me is the way you describe the Workers World Party as favoring and supporting the Democratic Party. I do not believe this is true. From everything I've read in their paper, from everything I've heard them speak about, and the way they have a candidate running for office leads me to believe that your allegations are false. The story on your site that most recently caught my attention was the one describing the rally and protest in Philadelphia. The WWP had a large delegation attending this protest, and they intended to do the same thing in Philadelphia as they do in Los Angeles, at the Democratic convention: voice the concerns of the people. I also read your description of the huge rally at Madison Square Garden in support of Mumia Abu-Jamal. To say that they still secretly support the Democrats seems very unfounded. Please explain this to me. If these allegations are false, it seems very odd for a socialist group to turn on another. Is unity not the key to success?

Sincerely,

EG

Dear E,

Thank you for the email message. Your letter raises important issues of political perspective.

You write that you are finding it difficult to grasp how an organization that professes to be socialist is actively involved in the campaign for the defense of political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal, and protests against social inequality, can at the same time promote illusions in the Democratic Party.

Yes, the Workers World Party (WWP) is running its own candidates in the elections, and does not openly call on workers to vote for Al Gore. Nevertheless, it acts to prop up the Democrats. It does this by combining rhetorical denunciations of Gore with support for the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as support for the trade union bureaucracy, which is one of the major pillars of the Democratic Party. The WWP serves to politically disarm workers and youth precisely because its support for the Democrats is somewhat camouflaged by its radical slogans.

A look at the history of this organization helps explain how and why it plays this role. The Workers World Party was founded by Sam Marcy in the early 1960s after he left the Trotskyist movement, with which he had been associated for over two decades. This was during the period of the postwar economic boom, the Cold War and the temporary restabilization of world capitalism. At that time it was necessary for socialists to defend the USSR against imperialism, but without giving any political support to the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy that falsely claimed to speak for socialism. The Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, called on Russian workers to carry through a political revolution to overthrow the Stalinist regime and establish genuine workers' democracy, while defending the nationalized property relations established by the 1917 Revolution.

In the mid-1950s Marcy joined those elements within the Fourth International who began to abandon the struggle against Stalinism, claiming that in order to fight imperialism it was necessary to adapt to the Soviet bureaucracy. He rejected the perspective of international socialism and the revolutionary role of the working class in favor of supporting the bureaucratic regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as the bourgeois nationalist movements and governments in the former colonies. Marcy crossed the political Rubicon in 1956, when he supported the Kremlin's use of Soviet troops to crush the uprising by Hungarian workers, who had organized workers councils in opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Over the past 40 years, the organization founded by Marcy has taken many twists and turns, but this capitulation to bureaucracy and opposition to the political independence of the working class remain the unifying threads in its political activities. Its outlook is dominated by the perspective of protest politics, bourgeois nationalism and political opportunism. It covers up for bureaucracy in the US trade unions as well as abroad. The organization openly backs the dictatorial regime in North Korea and supported the Serbian nationalist government of Slobodan Milosevic.

Its opportunist politics have led it to support black capitalist politicians such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson. When Jackson made his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1988, he was enthusiastically backed by Marcy, who wrote a lengthy article to “theoretically” justify support for a bourgeois politician. Marcy's specialty was the using Marxist phraseology to provide a theoretical gloss for policies that were thoroughly anti-Marxist.

If you carefully examine the statements advanced by WWP representatives at recent rallies, such as the Emergency Conference held in New York on February 19 or the Madison Square Garden rally held May 7 to demand a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, as well as articles in the *Workers World* newspaper, you cannot fail to see their political orientation to the Democratic Party.

Once you go beyond the radical-sounding slogans, what is the content of the WWP's political line? Consistent with its beginnings in the anti-war protest milieu of the 1960s, it makes an appeal to the powers-that-be to change their right-wing political program.

Marxists do not, in principle, oppose the organization of

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demonstrations or other forms of protest. We do, however, oppose the use of such methods to promote a political line that fosters illusions in the trade union bureaucracy and the Democratic Party. At the May 7 Madison Square Garden rally, WWP speaker Larry Holmes did precisely that, declaring that mass action was necessary to force the Democratic and Republican parties to "put a new trial for Mumia on the agenda" of their nominating conventions. It is not difficult to grasp that such a futile perspective, which obscures the class character of these corporate-controlled parties, militates against the development of political class consciousness among working people.

In the United States, a central task of socialists is to fight for the political independence of the working class by unmasking the Democratic Party and exposing those, especially the so-called "lefts" like Jackson, whose main goal is to keep workers tied to this capitalist party.

In the WWP several ideological tendencies of an essentially reactionary character converge. These include the outlook of protest politics, Stalinism, bourgeois nationalism and forms of identity politics such as black nationalism. All of these are hallmarks of what we have often called middle-class radicalism, i.e., a political perspective that reflects the interests not of the working class, but rather of middle class layers that are dissatisfied with their position in capitalist society, but incapable of advancing a genuinely revolutionary opposition to the status quo. In capitalist society, only a program that articulates the independent interests of the working class and fights to establish the unity of the working class and its political independence from all sections of the bourgeoisie—liberal as well as conservative—can provide the basis for a revolutionary socialist movement.

This basic truth was confirmed in the positive in the victory of the working class in the Russian Revolution of 1917, and underscored many times in the negative, with tragic consequences, in the decades that followed. What is the central lesson in understanding the triumph of the October Revolution? It is above all the long and arduous struggle conducted by Lenin and Trotsky for the development of a socialist culture in the working class. This entailed a struggle for principled politics against all those who, in the name of Marxism, subordinated the working class to sections of the liberal bourgeoisie.

The victory in the late 1920s of the Stalinist faction within the Soviet Communist Party over the Marxist opposition, led by Trotsky, set the stage for a counterrevolutionary assault on the Marxist cadre and the Marxist political program that had made possible the establishment of the Soviet Union, and inaugurated a process of political reaction and working class defeats that largely destroyed the socialist political culture that had been built up by previous generations of Marxists. The Fourth International alone, embodied today in the Socialist Equality Party and our co-thinkers in the International Committee of the Fourth International, defended the theoretical and political conquests achieved in the struggle against Stalinism and other forms of bureaucracy in the workers movement.

At the end of your email, you raise the following question: "Is unity not the key to success?" We agree wholeheartedly that it is critical to unify the working class. This is, however, impossible if the basic and irreconcilable antagonism between the working class and its opposite, the capitalist class, is obscured, either through political support for liberal representatives of the capitalist class, support for nationalist programs that help divide the working class along racial lines, the promotion of gender-based politics, or a combination of the above.

As Marxists, we fight against all forms of discrimination and inequality—including those based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation. The struggle over these questions is part and parcel of the defense of democratic rights, which remains a central part of the socialist program. But Marxists defend democratic rights from the standpoint of the independent interests of the working class, seeking always to explain that democratic rights can be defended and extended only through the independent struggle of the working class, based on a strategy to unite working people internationally against the profit system.

If you seriously examine the politics and methods of the Workers World Party you will see that it proceeds in quite the opposite manner.

To learn more about the history and program of our party, the Socialist Equality Party, I would encourage you to read *The Heritage We Defend*, by *WSWS* Editorial Board Chairman David North. You will also find the following article useful: "Obituary: Sam Marcy, an apologist for bureaucracy." http://www.wsws.org/polemics/1998/feb1998/marcy.shtml.

Please feel free to correspond further.

Sincerely,

Helen Halyard,

for the *WSWS* Editorial Board

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

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