New York Post redbaits transit union

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With the publication October 30 of an editorial provocatively entitled "Communist Underground," the *New York Post* launched a crude McCarthyite-style smear campaign against Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 and its president, Roger Toussaint.

The newspaper, owned by the reactionary international media magnate Rupert Murdoch, has long functioned as a journalistic sewer of right-wing Republican politics, racialist incitement and tabloid sleaze. With its editorial on Local 100, it manages to combine all three.

The ostensible starting point of the editorial is a report that famed singer and actor Harry Belafonte has done a radio commercial supporting the union. Its real aim is to blackguard Local 100's 35,000 members as they enter into contract negotiations. The city is threatening that any attempt on their part to change substandard wages and benefits or alter a draconian disciplinary system will disrupt mass transportation and result in a hefty fare hike for riders.

This is not the first such effort by the *Post*. Earlier this month, the newspaper published an editorial denouncing Toussaint as a "racial demagogue" for using the phrase "plantation mentality" when referring to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. This editorial was itself an attempt at race-baiting against the black union president, who was referring to a system in which New York City transit workers are disciplined at a rate ten times higher than in other mass transit systems. From race-baiting, the *Post* has now turned to red-baiting.

Murdoch's editorialists manage to drag the *World Socialist Web Site* into their noxious stew, citing an article that appeared on the WSWS in their effort to tar Toussaint and the union. The deceitful way in which they utilize material taken from the WSWS only underscores the unscrupulous method underlying the *Post*'s attack.

The WSWS editorial board has fundamental political differences with Toussaint and the New Directions faction of the TWU, which we have spelled out in a number of articles and statements. But whatever our differences, we unconditionally defend them against the kind of witch-hunting attack that has been launched by the *Post*.

The thrust of this diatribe is to brand Harry Belafonte as an "unreconstructed Stalinist" and then, in a series of logical leaps based on guilt by association, apply the same smear to Toussaint and accuse him of seeking to wreck New York City's transit system.

Weaving together half-truths, innuendos and lies, the *Post* employs the method of amalgam—a technique that was favored by Stalin himself in the frame-up and liquidation of his socialist opponents. It likewise was the stock-in-trade of the anticommunist witch-hunters of the 1950s.

Among Belafonte's alleged crimes, according to the *Post*, was delivering a tribute to "executed atom spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg." The paper adds, "wherever Stalinism can still be found, there too is Harry Belafonte."

In point of fact, the *Post* itself opposed the execution of the Rosenbergs and took a stand against McCarthyism in the 1950s. Of course, that was long before Murdoch bought the paper and turned it into a propaganda sheet for the Republican right.

The editorial goes on to accuse Belafonte of having participated in a "World Peace Concert" in East Germany some 15 years ago and of having condemned the Reagan administration's 1983 invasion of Grenada.

"It's hardly surprising that Toussaint and Belafonte are making common cause," the editorial continues. "Toussaint is probably the most radical TWU leader since the late Michael Quill, who was himself a Communist Party member until he broke with the Reds after World War II."

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It is instructive to follow the *Post*'s argumentation. Belafonte is an "unreconstructed Stalinist" because he has opposed anticommunist witch-hunting and US aggression overseas. Toussaint is the head of a union that more than three decades ago was led by a former supporter of the Communist Party. Ergo: Toussaint is also an "unreconstructed Stalinist."

As a final piece of "evidence," the *Post* notes that "Toussaint won control of the local last year in an election won by his New Directions faction—which, according to the *World Socialist Web Site*, was "'founded by radicals who had been members of the Socialist Workers Party.'"

It concludes: "Birds of a feather, it seems to us."

It cannot be excluded that this slanderous editorial was prepared in collaboration with the Transport Workers Union's international bureaucracy. At the TWU national convention last year, a similar red-baiting attack was mounted against Toussaint after he challenged TWU International President Sonny Hall for reelection. The dispute within the bureaucracy erupted after the two factions failed to reach an agreement on the divvying up of posts and perks. In a counterattack by the Hall faction, delegates to the meeting were given a scurrilous pamphlet that included a section entitled "New Directions and Sept. 11: Bin Laden's Friends?"

As for the WSWS article cited by the *Post*, it examined the evolution of the New Directions faction from its founding by veterans of the protest politics of the Socialist Workers Party into a bureaucratic faction that became less and less distinguishable from the official leadership of the union.

In relation to Toussaint, the WSWS article noted that he "did not even join New Directions for his first 10 years as a transit employee," and that those who had created the faction found themselves "unceremoniously discarded" once he gained leadership of the local.

The thrust of the argument made by the WSWS was against the kind of syndicalist opportunism practiced by New Directions. It emphasized the necessity for transit workers and the working class as a whole to adopt an independent political strategy based on the building of a new political party that opposes the financial oligarchy and the economic system that sustains it.

It hardly needs pointing out that Murdoch—a prominent member of that oligarchy—and the *Post* have no interest in the problems that confront transit workers. Their sole aim is to utilize every tool of political reaction—anticommunism, racism and lies—to defend the system that denies these workers decent wages, benefits and basic rights.

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