

WHICH ROAD FOR TYLER'S FREEDOM ?

The militant march and rally of thousands of Gary Tyler supporters in New Orleans on July 24 was a good example of relying on the masses of poor and working people as the main force to free political prisoners such as Gary Tyler. The success of the mass actions that were held, however, only came as a result of a struggle between two opposing views of how to struggle for reforms such as freedom for Gary Tyler and other political prisoners.

The approach advocated by the Trotskyite Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and a minority of people in the New Orleans Defense Committee, such as the opportunist Walter Collins, had to be defeated in order for the July 24 action to be successful.

These opportunists did everything they could to narrow the scope of the actions. A brief review of their stand on a few questions leading up to the march will go a long way in exposing the counter-revolutionary essence of their political views.

From the beginning, the SWP, along with Collins, questioned the "advisability" of a march. Their opposition was put forth on the grounds that there "might" not be an official permit. Later, they raised the fear that there might be a "confrontation" with the Ku Klux Klan. The opportunists tried to cover their tails by pleading "concern" for the masses' safety. This is the same tactic they used in sabotaging the April 24 march in Boston against segregation.

In actuality, they were trying to make the march "respectable" to the bourgeoisie and were scared to death of class struggle. These reformists feared most that Tyler's

case would be linked in people's minds with the struggles of the millions of other working people suffering under capitalism.

This became clear when the SWP brazenly opposed having any revolutionary speakers, such as Ron Carter (who eventually spoke for the Southwide Coalition). According to SWP's opportunist logic, in order to have a "wider appeal," all the speakers would have to be "non-revolutionary." They proposed instead that the speakers be exclusively local clergymen and bourgeois politicians. They even went so far as to suggest that the head of the state AFL-CIO, a labor aristocrat and known enemy of Afro-American and working-class people, be a principal speaker at the rally.

With regard to political slogans for the march, the SWP opposed demands such as "Self-Determination for the Afro-American Nation" and "Full Democratic Rights for Black People." When the SWP's opposition to the slogan concerning democratic rights was made known in a New Orleans Defense Committee meeting, participants burst into unbelieving laughter as the SWP representative sat shamefacedly silent, his organization's line glaringly exposed.

Walter Collins, for his part, has used his position as chairman of the New Orleans Committee to attempt to bolster his allies in the SWP and their fellow Trotskyites in the International Socialists in their attempts to represent the Tyler defense in other cities such as Atlanta, Houston, Boston, etc. But, "Flowers fall off, do what one may," and as the buses rolled in from across the South and actions occurred simultaneously



SOUTHWIDE COALITION—was the main force in the July 24 demonstration. (Call Photo)

in cities across the country, the Trotskyites were conspicuously absent. Even in New Orleans, the SWP presence was pitifully weak. Collins refused to even participate in the march through downtown New Orleans.

In struggling against the opportunists, representatives of the October League, the Fightback and a majority of other forces in the New Orleans Committee refuted their arguments forcefully in word and deed. For example, regarding a permit for the march, it was pointed out that the ruling class (which runs the city government) would only give their "permission" to a revolutionary action if they knew the people were determined to march anyway, with or without their "permission."

As for a "confrontation" with the Klan, it is well known that the Klan has been cowardly, confronting only individuals and small groups of Black people for years, and that the main assurance against a confrontation with these reactionaries is a policy of mass revolutionary action combined with self-defense by any means necessary. The cowardly Klan, faced with a mass militant

demonstration of thousands, failed to show up anywhere near the rally and march.

The opportunist argument of only having "non-revolutionary" speakers and slogans in order to get "wider appeal" was also refuted. Those speeches which were best received were those such as Carter's, which pointed to the imperialist system itself as the cause of all national oppression and linked the struggle to free Gary Tyler to the need for the revolutionary overthrow of the imperialist system and to the demand for Afro-American self-determination.

The struggle against opportunism in the defense efforts for Gary Tyler has laid the basis for re-structuring the New Orleans Defense Committee as well as for greater coordination of national efforts. The July 24 actions for Tyler's freedom provide a correct model for the future direction of all defense efforts. Gary Tyler himself voiced this perspective when he wrote in support of the July 24th demonstrations that "I am convinced that mass demonstrations involving thousands of people are necessary to win my freedom."