

Those who have opposed our position have argued that class unity can best be built by finding areas where Black and white workers can unite and avoiding those where they can't. A similar view that I have heard is that we should develop our program in such a way that we emphasize building relations with white workers even if we have to de-emphasize racially touchy issues or make compromises in such areas as seniority and busing.

The tenuousness of these ideas can be demonstrated historically. So long as there is inequality, Third World people will band together and confront white supremacy and whites will tend to pull back - wiping out any unity that is not firmly grounded in equality. Contemporary struggles over housing integration, equal education, layoffs, discriminatory job classifications are examples. While white workers may agree to work with other Third World workers on things of mutual interest, they have tended in the past to cast these things aside when struggle over issues involving equality are raised.

In this context, many white leftists have argued that it is incorrect to use the term privilege to describe the relative position of whites to Third World people. There have been two arguments put forth. One is that privilege is a metaphysical concept because it fails to examine the relationship of race and class. Similarly it has been argued that Black demands are not necessarily class demands. Since 95% of Black people are proletarians, it is hard to understand the point. Demands that will benefit the masses of Black, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Native American and Asian peoples who are living in the U.S. are proletarian demands. And there is nothing metaphysical about the fact that Third World peoples have the worst jobs, lowest incomes, poorest housing, education and health care. Further, this argument overlooks something noted earlier - that the struggle against white supremacy is an integral part of the class struggle generally.

Another argument along the same lines is that such things as the right to unionize, seniority, decent wages are the product of class struggle and thus can't be termed privileges. The refusal to admit that the status of white workers relative to Third World workers is a privileged status represents a white blindspot. Such things as the right to unionize, seniority, and decent wages have a dialectical property in the context of white supremacy. When these things were won, they were at the same time *both* advances in the class struggle and fetters on that struggle. They were fetters because they failed to deal with or even reinforced white supremacy. Our position would contend that this fetter side of the contradiction has been the dominant one historically.

To illustrate further what I mean by a fetter, let's look at these "products of class struggle" from the dominant side of the contradiction - which is the side most Third World people look at it from. The right to unionize becomes the right to exclude Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Native Americans and Asians from certain unions. The right to seniority becomes the right to use seniority to maintain Third World people in the worst and lowest paying jobs or to condemn them to no job at all. The right to decent wages becomes the right of white workers to have higher wages and better living standards than people who are not white. The failure to look at the development of the working class from this perspective has historically been the most glaring weakness in much of the white left which stems from a white chauvinist perspective.

The fact that white workers have hegemony in unions can use seniority to keep their jobs when Third World people lose theirs, have higher wages, better housing, school and health care, encompasses a privileged status. The use of the term privilege is a recognition that the Third World side of the contradiction is dominant. And so long as this is the case there can be no unified class struggle. Why is this? Because white workers rightfully see that equality means losing their relative advantage and their relative advantage is the essence of white supremacy. It gives whites an edge over Third World people in terms of material advantage and social status - an edge that will not be given up without a struggle.

This does not mean that we are out to smash seniority per se. What we do seek are policies that will make seniority work equally for all workers. Nor are we out to force white workers to accept indecent wages. Rather we seek to destroy wage differentials based on race - *whatever that takes*.

To assume that whites will give up their privileged status without a struggle is incorrect. The Boston and Louisville Busing struggles demonstrate that. On the other hand, to assume that in the course of a struggle, whites will always be recalcitrant or submit only through bribes or trickery is an anti-working class stance in the sense that it assumes that white workers are incapable of seeing the gains of equality in terms of class solidarity, class confrontation, and the isolation of reactionary elements in the class. Of course, our program is not an easy one to follow, but that is the nature of a revolutionary movement. Third World workers will confront white workers as they have in the past and are doing right now. For our part, we should actively encourage that confrontation and at the same time work to be in the best position to support the demands and needs of Third World workers to the white workers we are relating to.

I want to stress that our position is *a* positive program for class struggle capable of striking a critical blow to bourgeois hegemony. It is not (as it has often been characterized) a moralistic position that exhorts white workers to stop being racist. It assumes that the resolution of this critical contradiction within the working class can best be dealt with as that contradiction is heightened. It assumes that a resolution in favor of equality is a critical blow to the ruling class and hence is a crucial strategic dimension of class struggle generally. Strategies that seek to minimize this contradiction are self defeating because only through a program that is firmly grounded in equality can a stable working class unity be achieved. Such strategies are ultimately anti-working class because they hinder rather than advance the class struggle.

Expanded Remarks

by Noel Ignatin

It was raised that our position as expressed by Dave means attacking the white workers. We believe that the fight against white supremacy is in the interests of the working class, including white workers. If anyone disagrees, that person should speak up.

The principle reason the bourgeoisie upholds white supremacy is not the quest for maximum profit in an immediate and direct sense. If it were, the employers would give job preference to the cheapest labor available, Black

labor. No, the aim is political control, the maintenance of the white population's support.

People have characterized our position as calling on whites to "give up" hard won gains, such as union job control. In the first place, the struggles were not waged by those who currently enjoy the benefits. In the second place, the ruling class, when forced to concede reforms, always tries to frame its concessions so as to weaken proletarian solidarity. Such is the case with the seniority system, for example, which was fought for by both Black and white workers, but which now often serves to protect the superior status of whites. In a certain sense, the entire struggle of the working class is aimed at overturning past victories: bourgeois democracy, union dues check-off, compulsory education, etc.

In the third place, it is not a matter for whites of "giving up" the relative advantages they hold over Blacks and other Third World people. The bourgeoisie pursues white workers everywhere with tokens and reminders of superior status, and they cannot be given up, but must be *cast off* through militant struggle. What is the ruling class response to any serious effort by white workers to join Black people in the struggle against white supremacy? Attica is one indication.

The question was raised - why do we give greater weight to the struggle against white supremacy than to other issues that hold back the working class, especially male supremacy? In doing so, we are *not* arguing that Black people are more oppressed than women; no one can know exactly the pain felt by another. Nor are we saying that white supremacy has historically been more important in dividing the working class than male supremacy; a good case can be made to the contrary. The reasoning behind our position is this: *of all the struggles in which a popular victory would fatally weaken U.S. capitalism, the fight against white supremacy is the one with the greatest chance of success.* This is so for several reasons, one of which is sufficient to mention here: its link with the worldwide anti-imperialist movements of the colonial and dependent peoples.

Space limitations prevent an adequate treatment of the practical implications of all this. For now, just three points:

- 1) we should choose to do political work in areas where there are large numbers of Black and other Third World people, because their presence makes it easier to raise, *among whites*, the issue of white supremacy in a way that relates to their experience, rather than as lecturing them.

- 2) we should give priority to those issues which have the greatest potential of immediately and directly involving a fight against white supremacy — not to the total exclusion of other issues, but as *a priority*.

- 3) Alan Chamey listed three political groupings among Black people, and suggested we should work with them all. Significantly, he omitted a fourth tendency — the nationalists. Several years ago, when the Republic of New Africa was peacefully pursuing its work of building the New Communities and organizing support for its projected plebiscite on the status of Black people, it was attacked by officials of the State of Mississippi, which tried to assassinate a number of its citizens and, failing in that, is trying to keep them locked up for

long terms. Since then there have been other repressive acts — yet how many on the white left even know of their case? Judging by the fury of its response to RNA efforts to separate from the U.S., one would have to conclude that since its birth the State of Mississippi has been committed to the goal of integration. We have to seek out nationalist formations and find ways of supporting them and working with them on terms which they find acceptable.

Lastly, as to program. Everyone on the left agrees that the fight for jobs is crucial in the present period. Yet most whites ignore the fact that a major aspect of ruling class policy is to shield the white population, as much as possible from the most severe effects of economic crisis by transferring the burden of inflation and unemployment onto Black and other Third World people inside and outside the U.S. The ruling class is willing to take the risk of further angering the oppressed nationalities because the alternative, of equalizing the burden on the working class as a whole, would have harmful political consequences to continued capitalist rule. We believe that such an understanding as we have outlined above must determine our political response to the present economic situation. This means that the fight against racism is not simply another demand in a long list.

A working class program for this period must have as its central feature the fight for equality of Black, Latin and other Third World people! In terms of specific program relating to the struggle for jobs, we propose the following:

- 1) There are already a number of examples of Black and Third World groups and women resisting ruling class attempts to roll back the affirmative action gains of the 60's. In Fremont, California, Kansas City, Missouri, Fairfield, Alabama and now in Chicago, suits have been filed against management and unions in collusion. We should take steps to bring together these various struggles in a national campaign, using both legal measures and mass action, to maintain and extend affirmative action standards. This must include a specific statement of our willingness to set aside union prerogatives where ever they conflict with equal employment rights.

- 2) We should develop a campaign to expose the trend toward shutting down industry in the inner-city and shifting it to the suburbs, perhaps focussing a national organizing effort on the scheme to "decentralize" the postal system.

- 3) We should organize to defeat the Rodino Bill and its various local versions, and to stop the deportation raids on undocumented workers.

We believe such a program is a vital necessity in order to develop among the working class as a whole the unity and will to fight effectively for useful jobs for all.