

Two views: RYM-II vs. YSA

Is socialist campaign in Atlanta un-Leninist?

Since it took control of the SDS national office, the Weatherman, or RYM I, faction has gone so far out that other groups in SDS begin to look good in comparison. For that reason, some remaining SDSers are expressing the hope that maybe RYM II, now contending for control might offer an alternative.

But an examination of the politics of RYM II, we feel, will show that it shares the same ultra-left premises which sent RYM I into orbit. Or, to put it another way, what's wrong with RYM I is essentially an advanced stage of the ultra-left disease that afflicts RYM II.

An example of this is to be found, we think, in the refusal of the Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM II) to support the mayoralty campaign of the Socialist Workers Party in that city.

The candidacy of Linda Jenness represents the first socialist campaign in Atlanta, at least in contemporary history. It has brought socialist ideas to a wide number of people—a worthy accomplishment anywhere, and certainly so in the south.

Even though they succeeded in keeping her off the ballot on a technicality, the rulers of Atlanta have been compelled to concede that the Jenness campaign has been an effective one. (Her victorious fight to force them to lower the candidates' filing fee is testimony to that.)

One would expect that any serious revolutionary group in Atlanta would have jumped at the chance to join in on such a campaign.

This is particularly so, since nothing would have stopped them from using the Marxist method of giving critical support to another socialist tendency with which they have disagreements.

That is, RYM II could have gone to the people of Atlanta and said in effect: "We disagree with the SWP on this, that and the other question. But they are running as socialists and we think it important to pile up the biggest possible socialist vote. For that reason—keeping in mind our political differences with them—we urge you to vote SWP."

Instead, Atlanta's RYM II chose to find contrived or petty reasons to justify refusing to get behind a revolutionary candidate. Such politics lead only to sterile isolation.

We publish here the open letter of the Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement explaining its refusal to support the Jenness campaign and the reply issued by the Atlanta Young Socialist Alliance. (Points emphasized are as in the original.)

An Open Letter to the Linda Jenness Campaign:

The Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement, as a socialist organization, cannot support the Linda Jenness Socialist Workers Party campaign for mayor of Atlanta. We find the manner in which the campaign has been conducted to be in fundamental contradic-

tion with some of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. We feel that the basis of these contradictions lies in the analysis of the Socialist Workers Party: an organization which puts no faith in the people; an unprincipled, opportunist, Trotskyite organization.

How do we, as communists, participate in bourgeois elections? Do we attempt to reinforce the myth that the needs of the people can be met through the bourgeois electoral process? Do we run to lose, as an "agitational campaign"? Do we hide the fact that we are communists? Do we opportunistically raise slogans which, in practice, breed racism?

We believe that to do any of the above is unprincipled. The primary job of a communist is to raise the consciousness of the people to the recognition that a socialist revolution is the only way in which the people's needs can be met. Only when the people demonstrate their real strength will the bourgeoisie grant reforms which meet their needs. These reforms are stop-gaps set up by the ruling class in an attempt to halt the tide of revolution. But the stop-gap of the velvet glove will be replaced by that of the mailed fist when the ruling class recognizes that the former will not work.

It is through struggling for the people, not through participation in bourgeois elections, that a communist party legitimizes itself in the eyes of the people. When a party's only mass work is around campaigns for election to bourgeois offices (as is that of the SWP) that party cannot call itself a Marxist-Leninist vanguard organization. A party's main work must be centered around organization of the working people to struggle for socialism. Elections are only one tool to be used in organizing the people—they must not be the primary tool.

ARYM is not, in principle, opposed to communists running candidates for bourgeois offices. These campaigns, however, should not be "agitational" campaigns. They must be campaigns to meet the needs of the people through struggles for just reforms. You don't serve the people by failure—a communist fights to win. Campaigns must be run with the recognition that: 1) only socialism, can, in the end, meet the needs of the people; 2) mass struggle, not elections, is the only road to socialism; 3) a communist official can heighten (sic) the contradictions of capitalism by fighting for reforms which are against the interest of the bourgeoisie and are in the interest of the people. Communists should always raise these points when running for office. They should run openly as communists and attack anti-communism. In her campaign literature, speaking engagements, etc., Linda Jenness has not fought anti-communism.

While it is correct to call for "Black Control of Black Communities" it is objectively racist to call for "Community Control of Those Institutions Which Affect Your Life." The white mother country already controls the entire non-socialist world. We don't organize white people as whites we organize them as workers, for socialism, not community control (syndicalism). Black people, on the other hand, because of their colonial oppression, must be granted control of their communities.

Marxist-Leninist theory holds that the working class is the agent of socialist revolution. Therefore, all communist campaigns must be directed primarily at the working people, uniting all who can be united around proletarian politics. The ideology of the Jenness campaign is clearly shown by ob-



serving those sectors in which she has been conducting her campaign. She has made no organized attempt to reach the working people. She has spoken before Kiwanis Clubs, the Unitarian Church, the National Council of Jewish Women, etc.—she has not attempted to organize mass meetings for working people, to speak before trade union meetings, etc. She has not conducted a working class—a communist—campaign.

We hold that the Jenness campaign is not a communist campaign and has acted in an objectively opportunist and racist manner. We cannot support such (sic) a campaign. We call on all those who are truly (sic) interested in serving the people to join with us in our struggles against American Imperialism and for the building of a proletarian socialist movement in America.

Dare to struggle, dare to win,
The Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement

YSA reply.

A few weeks ago the Atlanta Young Socialist Alliance issued an appeal to several radical youth organizations, including the Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement, to support Linda Jenness, Socialist Workers Party candidate for mayor of Atlanta in the city elections on Oct. 7.

The Movement for a Democratic Society discussed the question and decided to endorse "the candidacy of Linda Jenness for mayor of Atlanta, while in no way adopting or endorsing the platform and policies of the SWP or the YSA as a whole." The Atlanta Revolutionary Youth Movement (ARYM), however, responded with "An Open Letter to the Linda Jenness Campaign" outlining their reasons for not supporting it.

You indicate that you are not in principle opposed to running candidates in bourgeois elections, but only in the manner in which the SWP carries this policy out. You find the "manner in which the campaign has been conducted to be in fundamental contradiction with some of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism," and that the basis for this deviation from revolutionary principles flows from the SWP's lack of "faith in the people," its "opportunism," and its "objective racism."

To back up these charges you raise a number of specific arguments. The first is that the SWP campaign has supposedly served to reinforce the myth that the needs of the people can be met through the bourgeois electoral process." The SWP does this, you contend, by making electoral work its "only mass work."

We agree that to totally concentrate on electoral activity or to create illusions that revolutionary change is possible through bourgeois elections would be a serious error. However, your assertion that the SWP is guilty of this error flies in the face of well-known facts. In her campaign speeches, Linda Jenness has never indicated that she expected the points in her election

platform to come about without a mass revolutionary struggle. On the contrary she emphasizes the need for and supports mass actions of the working class, the black community and students, and has often used her speaking engagements to publicize such actions.

Although we agree that electoral activity is always subordinate to the direct action of the masses, we feel that you underestimate the gains that revolutionary socialists can make by running in elections. It can be an effective means of reaching thousands of new people with socialist ideas and winning them to the revolutionary socialist movement, of demonstrating in practice the kinds of campaigns mass parties of the black community and the labor movement can run, and of struggling for just reforms.

In Atlanta as well as many other cities, the SWP has been an important builder of and participant in actions against the imperialist war in Vietnam, and has carried out this activity during the election campaign. The SWP in Atlanta has participated in demonstrations called by black tenants protesting against the bureaucratic control of the Atlanta Housing Authority and in demonstrations against the recent hike in bus fares.

If election campaigns are the "only mass work" carried out by the SWP, then does ARYM expect that the SWP will fold up after October 7 or at least go into hibernation until the next elections come along? You could not be more wrong. The post-election period will see a stronger SWP organization in Atlanta which, among many activities, will be throwing considerable energy into building mass actions against the imperialist war in Vietnam.

The second argument against support to the SWP campaign is that it has been a pure-and-simple "agitational" campaign (apparently you mean educational), rather than a campaign that projects the perspective of winning, and "meets the needs of people" by involving itself "in struggles for just reform."

It is very difficult to believe that you have been in the city all summer. From the very beginning of the campaign, the SWP has attempted to project the image that it is out to win—and has never admitted defeat in advance. By fighting the exorbitant qualifying fees and winning a partial victory, the SWP demonstrated the seriousness of its election campaign and its ability to play a leading role in a struggle for a just reform. The fight is a good example of how the SWP campaign is not simply just an educational campaign. This issue was particularly good because it helped to expose the lack of democracy in bourgeois elections which is one of the reasons revolutionary socialists run in elections.

The third and least clear argument is that Linda Jenness has not fought "anti-communism." No specific references are cited to back up this charge.

It is a matter of record that the Socialist Workers Party has a long tradition of defending all radical organiza-

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tions from witchhunters, red baiters, and governmental attacks. Linda Jenness is running openly as the candidate of the Socialist Workers Party, and in over 95 percent of the newspaper, radio and television coverage she is clearly referred to as a socialist candidate. On numerous occasions she has strongly expressed her support of the Cuban revolution when asked which country has a government closest to her views. Where then is her "anti-communism?"

The fourth alleged error is that the campaign raises "slogans which in practice breed racism," and the particular example that is singled out is the slogan: "Community Control of Those Institutions Which Affect Your Life." While agreeing with the SWP campaign slogan, "Black Control of Black Communities" on the basis that black people constitute an oppressed nation, you argue that white people should not be organized as whites on a nationalist basis because they are the oppressor nation. Rather they should be organized on a class basis as workers. To do otherwise you contend reinforces racism.

Your line of argument is correct in our opinion and if you will take the time to re-read the SWP election platform you will discover that the slogan in question, "Community Control of the Institutions Which Affect Your Life" is not to be found there. Nor can it be found in any other piece of campaign literature, or in any of Linda Jenness's speeches. You have totally fabricated this slogan and attributed it to the SWP campaign. The election platform reads as follows: "Public Control of the Institutions that Affect Our Lives! Socialize the public utilities, the bus lines, and the chain stores under control of elected worker-consumer committees!"

Socializing service industries and chain stores under the control of worker and consumer committees are working class demands and have nothing in common with the demand that white people control white communities. Similar slogans were raised by the Bolshevik Party in Russia in 1917 and by workers in many countries since.

The fifth accusation leveled against the SWP campaign is that it has not been directed primarily to working people. As proof you cite Linda Jenness' appearances before the "Kiwaniis Clubs, the Unitarians, the National Council of Jewish Women, etc." in order to show what sectors she is really trying to reach. (A lot of hypocrisy can be discerned here in relation to the Unitarian meeting which was a panel on women's

liberation that included a member of ARYM as well as Linda Jenness.)

If ARYM were correct in their accusation that the SWP campaign is not attempting to reach workers with its program this would be a bad mistake. However, it is precisely through this election campaign that we've communicated socialist ideas to more workers, both black and white, than anybody has done in this city for years and years. Linda Jenness, and other spokesmen for the campaign, have been able to obtain considerable radio and television time and newspaper coverage of their socialist views. Unless ARYM believes that most workers do not have TV's and radios or that they do not read, then it is difficult to see how they can say that workers weren't reached with the campaign's ideas. It is true that many meetings at which Linda Jenness has spoken did not have working class audiences. Nonetheless at some of these meetings, especially in high schools and universities, there were young people who were interested in socialist ideas and interested in the campaign.

At other meetings, there were news media that picked up parts of her speeches carrying them to a much wider audience. In addition, she has spoken *directly* to hundreds of workers. When she toured Mead Packaging with other candidates her campaign supporters went along and distributed campaign literature to the workers. Several black workers greeted them with the clenched fist salute. She has spoken to several large meetings in the black community, one of them a mass rally against police brutality. Attempts to set up meetings before members of the UAW and Steelworkers unions were met with a cold response by the bureaucrats.

It is our opinion that the criticisms ARYM has raised against the SWP campaign are false. The evidence that you presented to show how the SWP campaign is "opportunist" and "objectively racist" just does not stand up under examination, and we urge you to reconsider your position. Even if you still find that you have objections to this or that aspect of the campaign, you should consider the possibility of doing as MDS has done: critically supporting Linda Jenness' candidacy on the grounds that she is the only socialist candidate running independently of the capitalist political parties and their policies.

Venceremos
Atlanta Young Socialist Alliance