

Lessons of Class Struggle Around July 4th

Build On Advances Won in Battle

The July 4th demonstration called by the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition represented an important, an historic step in building the revolutionary struggle of the working class. The demonstration reflected the growing struggle of the working class at the same time as it pointed to the future of our struggle, of uniting our fight into an overall revolutionary class struggle which will take aim squarely at the source of the oppression and injustice in society—the capitalist system of wage slavery and the rule of the bourgeoisie.

The demonstration has given rise to important questions both among the workers and others who participated and the many who supported the actions but were unable to attend them. What was the nature of the struggle around the Bicentennial? What are the lessons to be drawn from the toe-to-toe struggle with the capitalists during the four days of activities? What is the relationship between the July 4th demonstration and the other struggles the working class and masses of people are engaged in? These are important questions to be answered in order to advance off the victory won in Philadelphia.

The Battle of the Bicentennial was a battle that took place in the political arena, that is, where the positions of different classes in society are concentrated in their political form and where the whole question of the rule, the direction of society, is raised. The stage for this struggle had been set by the capitalists themselves, by what they hoped to use the Bicentennial to accomplish.

The plans called for the Bicentennial to be a grand celebration of the virtues of the American system, of capitalism; at the same time, it was supposed to cover over the class content of that system, the exploitation of the working class by the capitalists, and hide the rule of the exploiters under the cover of "freedom and democracy for all." The rulers wanted to appear to the working class and the public generally as the natural leaders of the country standing above the "divisions" (class conflict) in society, leading the country forward on behalf of all the people, worker and capitalist alike.

Ruling Class Attack

All of this was not simply because the capitalists wanted to have a large crowd at their birthday party. They use patriotism and try to promote "national unity" for very real political purposes: to call on the working class to sacrifice its struggle to the "common interests of the nation" (the profits of the monopolies); to try to create a climate more favorable for their military adventures and war preparations, especially with the experience of the Vietnam War still fresh in peoples' minds; to blunt the effects of the economic and political crisis which causes more and more workers to come into struggle against them and to question their system.

It is because these political goals are crucial to the bourgeoisie's efforts to prop up their rule that they went to such lengths to stop the plans of the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition to turn the Fourth of July into a day of struggle against them.

The cat started to come out of the bag when a Philadelphia newspaper reported that the Senate Internal Security Committee "fears that a well organized demonstration could steal the spotlight from President Ford and other national leaders." But even this was only half the truth. Not only did they fear that the July 4th demonstration would focus public attention (the "spotlight") on the growing struggle of the working class, they feared that the spotlight of class interests would shine on what they were up to with their Bicentennial. Above all, they wanted nothing to shine on the class content of their rule, their domination of society.

What the July 4th demonstration represented was the working class doing battle politically against the very things the capitalists set out to accomplish in their Bicentennial campaign.

When the capitalists first began planning their Bicentennial program back in the early '70s they hoped to make the Bicentennial the official end of the "divisive conflicts" which had rocked the country in the '60s. But the class struggle does not stand still no matter what anyone wishes. Even though the upsurge of the Black liberation struggle has declined since the high tide of the 1960s and the Vietnam War is over, the contradictions of capitalism have compelled millions of workers to struggle. Class consciousness has grown, new working class organization has begun to develop, and the political party of the working class, the Revolutionary Communist Party, has been formed.

The demands and slogans of the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition crystallized and concentrated the

growing struggle, needs and understanding of millions of workers—providing a pole of opposition to the capitalist class. The demand for Jobs or Income Now! concentrated the needs and growing struggle of millions of unemployed and points to the crisis in the system being trumpeted by the Bicentennial. The slogan "We Won't Fight Another Rich Man's War" summed up the experience that many workers gained in the course of Vietnam—that for the U.S. it was an unjust war, a war for profit, a rich man's war—and declared the intention of the working class to fight the capitalists if they drag the people into another war.

The central slogan of the demonstration, "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs," hit hard at the capitalists' Bicentennial lies about the country being built by a partnership of labor and capital; it both exposed the rule of the rich and systematized the demands of the people to do something about it.

What the ruling class was hoping to accomplish with their Bicentennial, and the counter-attack by the working class and the forces grouped around it in the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition, were the political terms of the battle over the Bicentennial. These political purposes, and the nature of the class forces involved, governed the tactics of both the working class and the capitalists.

Mayor Rizzo had sworn that this demonstration would not take place in Philadelphia on that day, and he and other servants of the capitalists worked day and night for months to try to make this threat a reality. First they tried a stone wall of silence and defiance against the requests for permits. But when the Coalition took the demands out to the masses, the authorities switched to what became their main line of attack—to brand the Coalition as terrorists, to demand 15,000 federal troops to prevent the demonstration and to try to scare off workers from attending. Politically, the capitalists sought to portray the demonstration as something alien to the masses of people, as an action of malcontents determined to vent their personal frustrations against the system. They wanted the Coalition to appear as frustrated rebels in search of a cause, and hell-bent on provoking a violent confrontation on July 4th.

But try as they would, they could not change the fact that the slogans and demands of the Coalition did in fact speak to millions of people and struck a responsive cord. The capitalists were also caught in the contradictions of what they were trying to use the Bicentennial to accomplish. Here they were telling the American people of the 200th anniversary of "liberty and justice for all," of democracy, of the right of everyone to have their say and at the same time trying to prevent, to ban, a demonstration in the midst of this festival of deceit. Unless they were able to win the masses of people over to the lie about the Coalition seeking only a confrontation they would pay too

high a price by banning the demonstration.

They tried to trap the Coalition into responding to their outrageous denials of permits in a way they could characterize as a small foolish group of militants. But when the Coalition instead went deeper and deeper among the masses of people in Philadelphia and cities around the country exposing this as another abuse on top of countless abuses workers face, they were unable to pull off their charade. A federal judge was forced to issue a ruling which allowed a demonstration on the 4th although severely restricting other activities of the Coalition and refusing to allow the march to go to downtown Philadelphia, center of the Bicentennial hoopla.

This was the situation when the advance guard of five hundred arrived in Philadelphia after completing a highly successful demonstration for Jobs or Income on the steps of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. The authorities were unable to prevent the beginnings of the demonstrations, at the same time they were far from reconciled to their defeat and went all-out to try to manufacture an incident that would prevent the demonstration on the Fourth, to try to divide off the Coalition from the masses of people and to try to fan contradictions between working people of different nationalities in hopes of preventing a display of the unity of the working class on the Fourth.

Toe-to-Toe struggle

Thus the first three days of demonstrations in Philly were of utmost importance. It was a complex situation that required the working class forces to be firm in principle, to keep a good handle on the main purpose of the July 4th demonstration, and based on this and a correct assessment of the tactics of the enemy, to know when to advance and when to retreat—when to block a punch and when to throw one.

This was not simply a slugfest between a small number of advanced fighters and the government. Their role was crucial, but would only be successful if it spoke to the feelings and needs of broad masses.

The essence of the toe-to-toe struggle in Philadelphia was pitting the strength of the forces of the working class—the tight unity around a demonstration that represented the struggle, demands, and growing understanding of millions—against the weakness of the capitalists—that they are a small handful of exploiters who must mask their rule as being the "will of the people" and that their own ranks are deeply divided.

For three days virtually all the actions that took place were done without permits (which the city authorities continually refused to issue). Yet because the targets of the actions were carefully chosen to bring out the demands and the class character of the demonstration, the capitalists were politically unable

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West Coast & Hawaii

On July 4th in San Francisco and Honolulu, workers joined by veterans, youth and students marshalled their forces in marches held in solidarity with the Philadelphia demonstration.

In San Francisco the crowd of 400 included farmworkers who had come from Salinas and over a hundred people from Los Angeles. To the beat of a drum corps of youths they marched to Golden Gate Park where the ruling class was holding its local Bicentennial show.

For weeks before posters, mobile billboards (people holding banners over highway overpasses as motorists honked support), car caravans and a cultural event on the night of July 3 had spread the word. 2000 signed the Jobs or Income petition during mobilizations on each of three consecutive Saturdays. Thousands of dollars were pledged at a Prairie Fire concert to send delegates to Philly and more was raised in shops.

The march itself received enthusiastic support along the route and in the park, and cheers went up at the rally as reports came in about the Philly action.

Hawaii, too, sent representatives to Philly and organized a July 4th support action. About 120, including workers from Hawaii's major industries marched through Honolulu on the very route where the capitalists would be staging their parade one half hour later.

Earlier a tent city of the unemployed had been set up right in the plaza of the State Capitol. This and other actions were part of the tit-for-tat struggle necessary in Hawaii, as in Philly, to hold the demonstration.

Build...

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to move to suppress them. For example, when the Coalition held a picket line at City Hall in support of Philadelphia city workers who have been fighting attempts to make them pick between a wage freeze and layoffs, an aide to Rizzo was heard to ask the Mayor "why don't you do something about them?" Rizzo replied, "there is nothing I can do."

While keeping the initiative in their own hands and waging a series of successful actions, the Coalition was careful to try to avoid fighting on unfavorable ground. An example of this was the decision by the Coalition to cancel an evening program in Norris Park, site of the rally on the 4th, when it was clear that the police were trying to provoke a confrontation, well away from the public spotlight, and use a small handful of self-styled community "leaders" to make it appear that the Coalition had no support from the Black and Puerto Rican people who lived in the vicinity.

The capitalists were banking on catching the Coalition "dizzy with success," feeling itself capable of taking any action it pleased and losing sight of the fact that the strength of the Coalition did not lie simply in the numbers of people gathered in Philadelphia, but in what it represented, and the support it had won from working people. They hoped that their outrageous attempts to block and stifle the demonstrations, particularly banning the July 4th march from the center of Philadelphia, would provoke an incident that would have enabled them to recoup the losses they had suffered in the first few days of actions and strengthen their attempts to characterize the demonstrators as crazies and malcontents.

One feature of the demonstration that struck everyone present was the tremendous degree of organization and discipline—in spite of the fact that the capitalists constantly provided obstacles to this. This, too, was a political question.

The militant and disciplined character of the demonstrations was possible only because people had united through discussion and struggle around a working class political line and because the heart and backbone of the demonstration were workers whose position in society, and whose experience in struggle, teaches the importance of organized, collective action. The discipline of the march was the opposite of the discipline the capitalists enforce in their factories and armies—a discipline based on compulsion both open and disguised. Nor was it the bravado of the lumpen proletariat or the romanticism of the petit-bourgeoisie that has often masqueraded as "discipline and organization" in the past. It was possible because the workers and others who were there were bound by a common, voluntary commitment around unified goals and could see that only collective and unified action would defeat the enemy in this battle. And the discipline grew together with the growth of everyone's understanding and sense of purpose.

On Sunday, July 4th, thousands of workers joined by veterans, students and youths, over three thousand in all, marched triumphantly through the streets of Philadelphia and held a rally in Norris Park, where the capitalists had tried to drive the Coalition out in the days before. The success of the march and rally represented the culmination of victory in the Bicentennial battle.

The working class had beaten back every attempt to stop the actions. Rizzo's attempts to portray himself as invincible and all-powerful, capable of suppressing the people's struggles at will, suffered a shattering blow in the eyes of the people of Philadelphia.

High Hopes Deflated

The whole attempt to make Philadelphia the scene of millions of happy wage slaves joining in celebration with their masters flopped. The capitalists' attacks had not gone unanswered. They did not have a free and clear field to spread their poison. The millions of tourists scheduled to appear never showed, as the mood of the people had nothing to do with celebration, and—as the capitalists' threats of federal troops made Philadelphia seem like an unsafe place to bring your children to watch a fireworks display.

In a last ditch effort to keep their Bicentennial from being a near total flop, the capitalists tried to pretend that Philadelphia wasn't even there, focusing attention on the pretty sight of a bunch of old ships sailing up New York's Hudson River, as if it had been scheduled as the center ring of the Bicentennial circus all along. In virtually blacking out what happened in Philadelphia the capitalists threw away years of planning and millions of dollars spent trying to make events in Philadelphia on the 4th a political weapon in their hands. They had met real obstacles in the general sense of disgust among the American people, in the organized action of an advanced section of workers, and in the dog-eat-dog infighting in their own ranks.

The thousands of workers who demonstrated in Philly on the Fourth came to the demonstration from

many different fronts of struggle; from the coal fields of Appalachia to the electronics plants of California; from the garment sweatshops of the East Coast to the auto plants of Michigan. The demonstration brought together workers from around the country...but it represented more than the sum total of the struggles they are involved in in their shops. As pointed out earlier, it was a concentration of the struggle of the working class into political demands representing the interests of the working class as a whole and aimed squarely at the source of all of the oppression and injustice in society—the political rule of the capitalist class.

As workers marched through the streets of Philadelphia, the enthusiasm and sense of purpose was like an electrical charge in the air. Men and women of all nationalities knew that they were united in a common struggle, not only in this particular battle but as members of the same class of wage slaves locked into an ongoing war with the common enemy.

The response of the workers of Philadelphia to the actions of those four days also showed the potential for revolutionary struggle in the working class, and the fact that the huge numbers of workers have no stomach for the way things are going in this country. The slogan "We've Carried the Rich for 200 Years—Let's Get Them Off Our Backs" struck a responsive cord among the masses of workers. And it drew an even stronger response when the class content, the class antagonism behind it was brought out sharply.

Way Forward

Still, the numbers of workers in the demonstration was small, relative to the millions of workers in this country. It was an advanced action, representing the beginning growth of a revolutionary workers movement in this country and pointing to the future the struggle of the class must and will take. The question remains, what is the relationship between this advanced action and the struggles in which millions are presently involved, that are aimed primarily at individual capitalists and employers associations and not yet consciously directed against the ruling class as a whole and their domination of society.

We must build on the advances won in the Philadelphia demonstration, on the determination shown by the workers who participated and the fact that the demonstration underlined the real and growing discontent of the masses of workers with the way things are.

In all of the struggles the working class is fighting lie the seeds of the revolutionary workers movement, the sprouts of which were felt so forcefully by everyone in the Philadelphia march. This is because all of the struggles of the people are the result of, and hit at, the abuses that spring from the capitalists system.

Our Party Programme sums up the path for the struggle against this when it says "Fighting blow for blow on all fronts, and led by its Party, the working class will develop its movement of today into a revolutionary workers movement that fights exploitation and all oppression in order to end wage-slavery."

Of course the leap from struggles containing the potential of developing into a class conscious revolu-

tionary movement, to the actual revolutionary movement itself requires protracted struggle and work by the Party and class conscious workers. The fact that this development must be organized and led also was shown in the July 4th demonstration. Had there been no previous struggles which were aimed at the capitalist class as a whole, had there been no beginnings of organizations of class conscious workers and, most importantly, had there been no vanguard political party of the working class, the July 4th demonstration could never have happened.

The task confronting the Party and other revolutionary workers in building off the victories of the July 4th action is to go back into the midst of the struggles being waged by the working class and the oppressed masses and to maximize what can be won in the course of every battle. The task is not only maximizing the immediate gains because as long as capitalism exists they will be small and constantly eroded. It is also maximizing the gains in class consciousness and organization for the battles ahead. This means showing how all the abuses and outrages in society stem from the system of wage slavery and the political rule of the bourgeoisie; using every struggle to unite and strengthen the ranks of the working class and deepen the understanding of the workers involved about the nature of capitalism and goals of the working class struggle.

Of key importance in accomplishing these tasks fully is making further advances in building more advanced forms of working class organization. As the *Programme of the RCP* says about these organizations, their "overall role is to apply the single spark method to take up the most important battles that workers are involved in, together with key battles of other sections of the people against the ruling class, mobilize the masses of workers in these struggles and develop them into campaigns of the working class."

The struggle around the Bicentennial was one example of a "campaign of the working class," but it was certainly not the only (or even most typical) type of battle that the working class will mobilize its forces around. In the Battle of the Bicentennial the political nature of the struggle stood out very clearly—because of the nature of the Bicentennial itself as the celebration of the political system in this country and because the fight pitted the forces of the working class directly against the political representatives of the capitalists (the police, Rizzo, the courts, the U.S. Senate, etc.).

But the campaign around the Bicentennial was not taken up as a gimmick to build our movement—it was an actual battle by the working class against a real political offensive by the bourgeoisie. In the future (as was the case in initiating the Bicentennial campaign) the main campaigns of the working class will be determined by the attacks by the ruling class on the masses of people and the struggle against them. The task must be to develop all of these battles into political battles which expose and attack bourgeois rule, building them as component parts of the revolutionary movement of the working class. In this way the victory gained in the Battle of the Bicentennial will be deepened and broadened as the revolutionary struggle of the working class grows. ■



Toe to Toe in Milwaukee

As people in Milwaukee built for the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th demonstration, the capitalists dropped their veil of "democracy" and openly wielded the organized force their rule depends on.

Amid a festive atmosphere, 300-400 people were taking part in a Rich Off Our Backs block party on June 27 to raise money for Philly. Then, as a Coalition member spoke about the demonstration, the police appeared to say that the permit didn't cover political speeches, only music. With this pretext, they returned later in full force, firing tear gas and then charging into the street crowded with families, swinging their clubs. Even people standing on their porches were beaten and dragged off.

Coming just two days before the first buses were scheduled to leave Milwaukee for Philly, it was obvious that the cops were sent to try to stop the growing momentum of the Rich Off Our Backs campaign, to scare off some and tie up others in court. But in fact this attack outraged people even more. A petition went around the neighborhood demanding that charges be dropped against the 33 arrested. People picketed the courthouse and jammed the DA's office (see above photo). Despite the effect of the legal hassles and the intimidation, the Coalition's ties with the people in the neighborhood were deepened and more people took up the Coalition's demands and actively supported the Philly actions.