

Dead-End Rally Spares Enemy

The best that can be said of the Philadelphia demonstration by the July 4th Coalition is that it came and went. Organized mainly by the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (political supporters of the Weather Underground) and some others, including various Trotskyites, this "protest" turned out to be little more than just another Bicentennial event, leaving behind little unity, little understanding, little organization and more than a little confusion among some people who really wanted to take on some of the crimes of the capitalist system.

The march and rally in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park drew 12-15,000 people. There were few workers there and even more important, they played no organized role. Still, many people came to demand Free Puerto Rico—the only demand that gave the demonstration any unity or political character at all. Others, including a very large self-proclaimed "gay contingent," came to parade around whatever pleased them.

What it all came down to was one big mess, complaining at everything and hitting at nothing. "A Bicentennial without colonies. . .End forced Sterilization! Vote Socialist Workers. . .Down with *Apartheid*. . . Ho, ho, homosexual, sodomy laws are ineffectual. . ."—these were among the dozens of chants and banners that came bobbing into the picnic-like atmosphere of Fairmount Park. Instead of pointing the finger of blame at the capitalists and their system, the overall effect of this mixed bag was to provide ammunition for the capitalists' claims that anyone who protests against them must be a bunch of chronic malcontents and weirdos.

For the most part, groups and individuals saw the events as an opportunity to push whatever issues they were concerned about. This was the way the rally organizers planned it to be, because they themselves were there to push their particular demands, with no concern for how to develop a united movement of the masses in their millions against the capitalists. This is why they were so willing to have banners for sexual

degeneracy fly side by side with their own.

The political thrust of the event was to let the capitalists off the hook. Even the most "serious" demands called on the system to reform itself—as if the colonial oppression of Puerto Rico and the rest of what the imperialists do could be eliminated without getting the rich off our backs, since their very existence and rule depends on such things. This is the political meaning of the main slogan "For a Bicentennial Without Colonies."

Even as an attempt to build a reformist movement, the event had little success, because its smorgasboard approach brought no basis for any further organization or struggle. About all that was accomplished was that the rally's main groups got their names and their "causes" in the papers.

Loyal Opposition

The basic weakness of the demonstration became clear in the sharp contrast between how the authorities accepted it as a "loyal opposition" to the Bicentennial and the attacks they launched on the Rich Off Our Backs—July 4th Coalition from the beginning. While the city and federal courts did everything possible to prevent the Rich Off Our Backs march, the other was granted permits with little difficulty.

Both marches had a lot of cops around—along the Rich Off Our Backs route they lined the streets in riot formation, posted snipers on the rooftops and tailed the march with busloads of riot police to try to scare people away from the march. At the other rally in Fairmount Park, they rolled up police water trucks to make sure the crowd was comfortable, to prove their "reasonableness" to people willing to give the system a chance.

Afterwards, the July 4th Coalition's rally was cheerfully summed up in the ruling class media, like the *Chicago Tribune*, which reported, "The exuberant peaceful nature of the protest, however, appeared more as propaganda for America's free-enterprising, free-talking system, and in that sense was a tribute to the spirit of the Bicentennial." They had a different opinion of the spirit and aims of the Rich Off Our Backs demonstration, however. Noting the workers taking part, the discipline and determination and three major slogans aiming straight at the ruling class, the *Tribune* nervously concluded that it had been "a portent of the type of confrontations that may await Americans [meaning the ruling class] in the country's third century."

This is the essence of the difference between the two actions. One looked to the past and to itself, and while it brought out many who will surely take up the fight, this demonstration led people back, away from building what must be built. The other pointed to the source of our misery and towards the future. While the thousand and one abuses the capitalists heap on the people every day constantly breed anger and resistance, only the growing workers movement can bring together and focus these battles into a powerful storm of struggle that will one day get rid of this class of capitalist exploiters. ■