

NAFTA Stand Clarifies RCP's Differences With MIM

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Many around the world believe that there is no difference between MIM and the RCP, USA on the question of the imperialist country working class. Elsewhere we have analyzed the major documents of the RCP, including its program, to demonstrate that this is not true.(1)

Recently, the bourgeois internationalists behind the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the one hand, and the Amerika-first bourgeoisie led by Ross Perot on the other hand, forced the RCP into taking a fairly recognizable and concrete position on NAFTA.

This position is contradictory, but nonetheless it is something for which we can hold the RCP accountable.(2)

The article, "The North American Bloodsuckers Trade Agreement,"(2) starts by tailing after the social-chauvinist opposition to NAFTA, but ends up echoing MIM's line on the labor aristocracy — but only applied to certain "sections" of it rather than the class in its entirety.

THE CONTENDING LINES

When MIM first received J. Sakai's *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat* and H.W. Edwards' *Labor Aristocracy: Mass Base for Social Democracy*, MIM was in a better position to analyze the different lines out there on the labor aristocracy. MIM reviewed four of the major positions in an early issue of MIM Theory:

Position I was that the question did not matter, because line — derived from the proven desires of the international proletariat — was decisive, not social base in North America.

Position II was Sakai's position that there is no Euro-American proletariat.

Position III was H.W. Edwards' position that the majority of workers in the imperialist countries are labor aristocracy, leaving open the possibility of a small Euro-American proletariat.

Position IV was the RCP position. It held that the labor aristocracy was in decline and that hence there was a growing basis for a revolutionary movement in the labor aristocracy. Such a position can be found in some of the writings of Lenin and Zinoviev, while at other times they lambasted the notion that the labor aristocracy is always in decline.

MIM eventually adopted Sakai's position, while applying the truth of position I at certain times and sympathizing with Edwards to the extent of distributing his book. MIM came to conclude that it did not sympathize with position IV.

The RCP expressed its position very clearly by its only bold-faced quotation in the November 1993 article, a quotation from Neal Soss, chief economist of CS First Boston Inc.: "This in a nutshell explains why we can no longer afford to offer a bourgeois lifestyle to our white- and blue-collar proletariat." The RCP then went on to say that "the U.S. imperialists are telling the truth" in this regard.

The RCP then felt freed to take a line at the end of its article somewhat similar to MIM's but only with regard to "sections of U.S. workers." This is all that allowed the RCP to criticize the NAFTA opposition and Ross Perot, even while the beginning of the article tailed after the reformist NAFTA opposition.

The RCP article is in an open state of contradiction. It appears to want to have things both ways, while finally ending up on the side of the labor aristocracy's begging for reformation of its alliance with imperialism:

"For a decade, the U.S. capitalists have demanded 'take-backs' from industrial workers — freezing or lowering wages, shaving benefits, changing work rules ... And the

coming restructuring connected to NAFTA will be used to further 'depress wages' by placing U.S. and Mexican workers in much more direct competition."

So our hearts are supposed to bleed for those workers who have a "bourgeois lifestyle" even by the RCP's own backhanded admission!

Another contradiction is that the RCP has already supposedly set itself apart from the proponents of the "general crisis" approach to everything. Yet here it is echoing the general crisis theorists, who always take one-sided advantage of Lenin's formulation on imperialism to say that the revolution is just around the corner because the labor aristocracy is about to come to its senses, something predicted and proven wrong for most of the years of this century.

Related to this, the RCP seems able to live without the crisis theorists in the following formulation: "[NAFTA] will tremendously intensify the exploitation and suffering of the Mexican people." The general crisis theorists usually hold that

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imperialism cannot deepen its penetration of the world and has reached its end, so here is a hopeful sign from the RCP. It at least recognizes that the imperialists are expanding or deepening their penetration.

Yet how can this happen while the imperialists also decrease the bourgeois lifestyle of Euro-American workers? The RCP implies that somehow the U.S. imperialists will cut back on both the Euro-American workers and the Mexican workers, while it admits that the exploitation of the Mexican workers will increase and thereby make more surplus-value available for redistribution in the First World.

The RCP says, "But the U.S. government insists 'increased profitability and competitiveness' from this 'dislocation' will eventually mean more prosperity — at least for people in the United States. But the current global restructuring of capital is not about 'trickle down' prosperity."

Here the RCP has had to perform a somersault. On the one hand it said the imperialists are telling the truth about NAFTA. On the other hand, when it comes to telling the U.S. workers what will happen to the extra surplus extracted from the Mexican workers, the imperialists are supposedly telling a lie. This is a common union bargaining tactic — to point to increased profits by the employers, and then demand a share by claiming they haven't gotten any of the increased profits.

Yet even Lenin in his day believed that there is "trickle-down" prosperity. He believed the superprofits trickled into the workers' life in the imperialists countries through a "million" different forms of "bribery." He was quite explicit that the "Great Powers" all set aside some money for such bribery. Speaking of the typical Great Power, Lenin said, "its superprofits most likely amount to about a thousand million. And how this little sop is divided among the labour ministers, 'labour representatives,' (remember Engels's splendid analysis of the term), labour members of war industries committees, labour officials, workers belonging to the narrow craft unions, office employees, [which by themselves are over half of Euro-American workers since the 1980 census —MC5] etc. etc., is a secondary question."(3)

So here we get to the reactionary kernel of the RCP position. According to the RCP, exploitation of the Mexican workers will increase, but that will not mean greater bribery of the Euro-American workers. Unexplained in the article, there will be a greater surplus-value extracted, but not greater bribery. The reason it won't be explained is that it is not based in fact, but in the necessity for the RCP to adopt a bargaining position for the Euro-American labor aristocracy.

Indeed, the RCP's position goes farther as we have already shown. According to the RCP, the surplus-value from the Mexican workers will increase, but the wages of the American workers have already and will continue to decrease! This mythology has already been debunked in MIM Theory 1.

That bargaining position and political tailing of the labor aristocracy caused the RCP to side with one faction of the bourgeoisie against another: "Clearly, everything about

NAFTA is against the interests of oppressed people. Revolutionaries need to expose and oppose NAFTA." Yet NAFTA was a treaty between ruling classes. It was with regard to inter-bourgeois relations. It replaced one set of bourgeois relations with another. If the NAFTA did not pass, the existing set of bourgeois relations, tariffs, etc., would have prevailed. Why did the RCP feel obliged to oppose the NAFTA in particular? The reason is clear: tailing the labor aristocracy leads to reformism — social-democracy and social-chauvinism.

Contrast the RCP stand with the MIM analysis back in its August 1993 issue:

"MIM opposes the effort to 'save' American jobs. Those labor aristocracy jobs are what separates American workers from the cause of the proletariat everywhere. Rather than taking the piecemeal approach to fighting capitalism by opposing various trade agreements such as NAFTA, MIM calls on all anti-imperialists to build public opinion for revolution instead."

The RCP should look a little more seriously at what it said toward the end of its article, when it most sounded like MIM,

The RCP admits that the exploitation of the Mexican workers will increase and make more surplus-value for the First World.

if only for rhetorical purposes, for the purposes of fooling the most oppressed workers in order to use them for labor aristocracy purposes. If there are indeed even substantial "sections" of Euro-American workers using the NAFTA treaty, a treaty to change bourgeois relations, to make a point, then what was the principal responsibility of the RCP vis-a-vis the international proletariat?

What was the peculiar aspect of American workers' situation in comparison with say, the Mexican workers' situation? The RCP concluded that its responsibility was to side with those chauvinist workers by taking a stand on a strictly intra-bourgeois struggle in America.

Notes:

1. Order the "RCP Study Pack" from MIM by sending a \$15 check made out to "MIM Distributors" to P.O. Box 3576, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-3576.
2. "The North American Bloodsuckers Trade Agreement," *Revolutionary Worker* 11/28/93, p. 3.
3. V. I. Lenin, "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism," in John Riddell, ed., *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, Monad Press: New York, 1984, p. 500.