

ELECTIONS: WHAT GOOD ARE THEY?

23 June--RAIL hosted a debate this evening on elections as a strategy and tactic for liberation with a representative from the Universal African Peoples Organization. In attendance were reps from the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party (A- APRP), the Greens, and a number of unaffiliated persons.

A Missouri RAIL (MORAIL) comrade began the evening with greetings and stressed the importance of unity-struggle-unity as we proceed in debate. MORAIL began the debate saying that "elections in a white-settler state are anything but democratic for the poor and oppressed." The capitalist ruling class sets the agenda: time, candidates, and issues. That's why the oppressed can't get any power through the electoral arena. The ruling class never has and never will give up power via the ballot box.

The UAAOPO comrade expressed agreement with RAIL on a number of points. S/he recognized the value of the Black Panther Party's legacy and Lenin. Also, money and wealth control the electoral process. "It's hard to find anti-imperialist candidates." But s/he argued that circumstances call for using the electoral tactic.

With the recent increased attack on the Black nation, the comrade asserted it's time to "bite, scratch and kick," to fight, quoting Malcolm, "by any means necessary." The comrade called on revolutionaries to "triple your efforts." Having said that, the comrade also understands that true liberation cannot be achieved through bourgeois elections. Nonetheless, s/he is supporting a candidate for circuit attorney in order to combat police brutality.

The A-APRP member agreed with the goal of self-determination and national liberation from white supremacy. But, s/he pointed out, the electoral tactic of working with the Democratic or Republican parties stifles the development of consciousness. It confuses the people, sending the message that the person in office is the problem, rather than the capitalist structure itself. The vanguard must change the message to people's principle's, and the electoral system obscures this message. This is crucial because the masses must take up the banner of revolution; for only the masses can take action and bring about change.

A MORAIL comrade observed that while Blacks have increased their positions in elected offices in Amerika to 10,000, the attack on the internal colonies in Amerika has increased at the same time. RAIL maintains that elections are not an effective avenue for struggle at this time, under these conditions.

A Green Party representative spoke of the poisonous environmental damage that imperialism perpetrates, and advocated ballot initiatives as a tactic to combat it. RAIL sees advancing the struggles of oppressed nations as the best way to save the environment. And in the course of discussion, we learned that this Green Party comrade has supported oppressed nation struggles many times. We all agreed on the importance of building independent media of and for the oppressed, and that in order to win people's democracy, not phony bourgeois democracy, the imperialist white supremacist system must be smashed. Everyone used this opportunity to speak out. And RAIL will continue to provide forums for debate and discussion on issues vital to the oppressed, building public opinion in favor of the oppressed.

MIM adds: It is important to also talk about the correct political line behind the correct strategy. The A-APRP does not support Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the most advanced revolutionary line. Instead they uphold a pseudo-socialist ideology they call Pan-Africanist Nkrumahism-Tureism which includes support for many revisionist and non-revolutionary regimes. While we agree with the A-APRP on the question of elections as a strategy for overthrowing imperialism, we do not agree on what is the most effective strategy for overthrowing imperialism or on what is genuine socialism.

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A-APRP Responds

MIM,

It is wrong to believe that one culture possesses alone all the moral, spiritual, social, or intellectual values which exist. To believe that truth only exists in ones own racial or cultural milieu is utopian. Human discoveries, intellectual powers and the development of knowledge aren't restricted to anyone in particular. They are the result of a chain of universal discoveries ... and developments...

—Ahmet Seku Ture

It is incorrect to say that the All-African People's Revolutionary Party "upholds a pseudo-socialist ideology" (MIM Notes 118 July 15, 1996). What is Marxism-Leninism-Maoism? It speaks to working people's conditions as seen by Marx, Lenin (euros) and Chairman Mao (Asian).

African people are survivors of colonialism and chattel slavery. Along with class exploits people of color must deal with white supremacy and racism. Nkrumahist-Tureist Pan-Africanism in short is the ideology necessary for African people to deal with the conditions unique to African people.

Africa began civilization. Present in that civilization was communalism, which communism is based on. We are happy to see people embrace these ideas to fit the cultural contexts of every land mass and people world wide.

We are scientific socialists. We are comrades in the worldwide struggle to end exploitation of one person by another person.

Ready for the Revolution.

— Party Militant, August, 1996

MIM Responds: This letter denies the universal aspects of Maoism: the necessity of revolutionary armed struggle, the theory of Protracted People's

War in semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries, and the continuation of class struggle under socialism. This only corroborates MIM's assessment of the A-APRP in MIM Notes 118, which criticized the A-APRP for cheerleading for all sorts of revisionist and non-revolutionary movements, such as the state-capitalist regimes in the ex-USSR and Cuba and Yasser Arafat's PLO.(1)

Revolutionary anti-imperialist movements which do not fully understand the necessity of armed struggle run the risk of capitulating to the enemy like the PLO or FMLN in El Salvador. National liberation movements which do not understand the necessity of continuous revolution and the development of socialism run the risk of becoming neo-colonies (this is a particularly pressing question in the case of Eritrea).

Socialist movements which do not understand that class struggle continues under socialism run the risk of capitalist restoration, which can lead to state capitalism (as in the ex-USSR and China) or neocolonial domination (as in the case of Cuba during the 70s and 80s).(2)

But the letter goes even further than just denying the correctness of Maoism; it implies that because Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin were European and Mao was Chinese, they have nothing to say to Black revolutionaries, African revolutionaries, Mohawk revolutionaries, or Mexican revolutionaries. This is an unscientific standpoint which judges what is said by who is saying it. The hydrogen atom has one electron, regardless of whether Margaret Thatcher or Kwame Nkrumah says so. The science of revolution demands that we investigate the content of what is said and test it against reality before accepting or rejecting it — we cannot afford the luxury of making ad hominem arguments. The letter's flippant dismissal of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism as the narrow view of a few individuals is a sign of laziness and lack of investigation.

For one thing, Mao himself went to great lengths to explain that the universal aspects of theory have to be creatively applied to concrete reality of every

society, e.g. it wouldn't do just to copy the Bolsheviks tactics in the Chinese countryside. MIM has written extensively about this, and reprints an anti-dogmatist quote from Mao on page two of every MIM Notes and MIM Theory.

Furthermore: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Marxist-Leninists and Maoists led the two most successful struggles for socialism the world has seen so far and at one point led more than one-third of all the people on the planet towards communism. The experience of the Chinese revolution alone encompassed several nationalities and many different concrete situations, from land reform and guerrilla warfare in the countryside to strikes and rebellion in the cities.

Revolutionaries in India, Azania, Vietnam, Eritrea, Turkey, Peru, and the Philippines have studied and used Mao Zedong's theories to lead successful anti-imperialist struggles. The combined practice and thought of these revolutionaries from many societies assure that Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is indeed not the property of one "racial" or cultural milieu (that is, cultural atmosphere).

MIM has more unity with the Ture quote at the beginning of the letter than with the letter writer. Ture recognizes that scientific truth exists, and encourages people to learn from other cultures in order to master it. The letter writer turns Ture on his head and essentially argues that African revolutionaries cannot learn from "euros" or "Asians."

Notes:

1. "African Liberation Day 1995" pamphlet, published by the A-APRP.
2. See MIM Theory 4 for a review of how Soviet social imperialism came to dominate Cuba and see MIM Theory 10 for an essay describing how the Soviet social imperialists used the Cuban military as a tool to strengthen their control of Angola.

MIM Theory wants to publish debate over theory and practice. If you're reading this, shouldn't you either be working with MIM or writing us with your criticisms?

tions in society and build a secular revolutionary movement, a movement without religious bias which can unite all the oppressed. Religious people who believe that the anti-imperialist revolution is wholly a secular matter and are convinced of or open to the efficacy of the Maoist path towards that revolution can and should work with and join RAIL.

POLICY

1. MIM comrades uphold dialectical materialism and the slogan, "the masses make history," both of which were at the heart of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Members have a duty to propagate the scientific outlook of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, which includes appropriately combating religious ideology.

2. MIM seeks political unity with those who accept MIM's political leadership, even though they may not agree with MIM's atheist line. MIM encourages religious people who accept that MSG and RAIL are secular organizations and do not seek to propagate religious ideas within them to join MSG and RAIL.

3. Those groups and individuals who believe that religion is a central component of anti-imperialism and agitate for a religious orientation for the anti-imperialist movement should remain separate from MIM and RAIL. MIM and RAIL will work with these groups on mutually acceptable projects, in keeping with existing MIM policy on united-front building. While working on these events MIM will not undertake atheist propaganda unless our allies use the event to carry out religious propaganda.

Notes:

1. See, for example, (A) J. M. Sison, "Sophism of the Christian Social Movement," in: *Struggle for National Democracy*, Quezon City: Progressive Publishers, 1995, pp. 191-202, or (B) Gonzalo, *Interview with Chairman Gonzalo*, Berkeley: CSRP, 1991, pp. 10-12, or (C) K. Marx and F. Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," in: R. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978, p. 492.
2. See, for example, the essay "The Materialist Method" in the pamphlet *What is MIM?* The speeches and writings of Malcolm X, who was both a Muslim and an anti-imperialist, are filled with arguments against "turn the other cheekism."
3. K. Marx, "The German Ideology," in: R. Tucker, pp. 154-155.
4. K. Marx, "Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," in: H. Selsam and H. Martel, eds., *Reader in Marxist Philosophy*, New York: International Publishers, 1984, p. 227.
5. F. Engels, "Anti-Duhring," Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976, p. 410.
6. V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in: H. Selsam and H. Martel, p. 157.
7. F. Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, in: H. Selsam and H. Martel, p. 63.
8. V. I. Lenin, "The Attitude of Workers' Party towards Religion," in: *Selected Works*, v. 11, New York: International Publishers, 1943, p. 666.
9. F. Engels, "Anti-Duhring," pp. 411-412.
10. K. Marx, "Introduction...", p. 227.
11. V. I. Lenin, "Socialism and Religion," in: *Selected Works*, p. 660.

How not to unite with religious-minded anti-imperialists

As we pointed out in the article "Religion and the anti-imperialist movement," MIM and RAIL must unite politically with religious-minded anti-imperialists. But we must do so in a principled manner. We should unite with religious anti-imperialists around a common political understanding, that is, we should unite in the secular sphere. MIM should not attempt to woo religious minded people into working with us by dropping aspects of our materialist line. Indeed, it is our materialist analysis and practice which will draw the best of the religious-minded anti-imperialists to work with us.

Two examples of how not to unite with religious-minded people follow.

The All-African People's Revolutionary Party's pamphlet "African Liberation Day '94: Revolution and Religion are acts of Culture and must be used as Weapons for Liberation" contains a lengthy article defending the A-APRP's belief in the "absolute harmony between revolution and religion." The A-APRP writes:

"Religion is an organized way of way of life which includes a belief system and practice which regulates the behavior and conduct of its followers... The religious principle stems from a universal understanding that human beings should live in peace, harmony, and justice; the purpose of Revolution is to restore peace, harmony, and justice. There is no practical difference between a true servant of God and the People, and the revolutionary who may not believe in God at all."(1)

This is ahistorical sophism which only serves to cloud the masses' minds. The A-APRP essentially defines away the material reality of religion and its development – according to the first sentence quoted above, MIM is a religious organization! Instead of pushing people with religious sentiments who are sympathetic to the plight of the masses towards anti-imperialist politics or scientific socialism (which the A-APRP claims to uphold), this stance flatters them and equates all sorts of religious baggage – from non-violence to outright colonialism – with revolutionary science.

The A-APRP's attempts to secularize god (or mystify revolutionary science) are similar to arguments made by A. M. Gorky, which Lenin vehemently criticized. According to

Gorky: "God is a complex of those ideas elaborated by the tribe, the nation, mankind, which arouse and organize social sentiments with the purpose of binding the individual to society and of binding animalism [compare this to 'a belief system... which regulates behavior and conduct of its followers']"(2)

Lenin replied:

"[This] is obviously false and reactionary. Like the Christian Socialists (the worst species and worst distortion of 'socialism'), you employ a method which (despite your best intentions) repeats the hocus-pocus of the priests: all that is contained *historically and practically* in the idea of god is removed from it (filth, prejudice, the consecration of ignorance and submissiveness on the one hand and of feudalism and monarchism on the other), and in place of historical and practical reality a nice philistine phrase is inserted into the idea of god (god = 'ideas which arouse and organize social sentiments')."

"You mean to say something 'nice and sweet' by this, to point to 'Truth and Justice' and the like. But this good intention remains your own personal affair, a subjective 'pious wish.' ... By gilding the idea of god, you gilded the chains with which [the reactionary clerics and ideologues] fetter the ignorant workers and muzhiks."(2)

Religion's principal role – especially now, when the revolutionary movement is at an ebb within U.S. borders – is that of an opiate, a pacifier. Christian turn-the-other-cheekism, new age mysticism, and the Nation of Islam's emphasis on individual atonement are examples of the kind religious humbug which teaches people to accept oppression as an unchangeable fact of life and/or turns them inward, away from the struggle for political power.

The sweet-sounding line that "true" religion and socialist revolution are in "absolute harmony" cannot adequately combat these reactionary manifestations of religious thinking, because it denies the truth that religion "is nothing but the fantastic reflection in men's minds of [the] external [material] forces which control their daily life."(3)

Just as this line fails to expose the reactionary politics of religion, it also fails to provide any leadership for religious-minded people who are honestly progressive or revolutionary. For example, the A-APRP praises Martin Luther King for his compassion without criticizing his pacifism and reformism. Praying, dreaming, petitioning, and "moral suasion" will not topple the largest, most brutal military empire history has ever seen. Certainly religious-minded people can contribute to the anti-imperialist movement, but lying to the masses as the A-APRP does by equating revolution with religion leads the movement down an old dead-end.

MIM made a similar mistake in a review of the A-APRP's Kwame Toure. This passage is worth quoting at length because it also contains an accurate assessment of MIM's most fundamental difference with the A-APRP.

"[Toure] believes you should not judge and ideology by its practice, but by its principles alone. He said 'you don't judge Christianity by its practice,' which he concedes has included chattel slavery, so you also should not judge socialism by its practice. Thus he can praise a wide variety of leaders from Castro to Qadafi without defending any particular nation's socialist path. MIM is materialist and does judge both Christianity and socialism on their practice, finding that national liberation is won only with socialism. While MIM is not anti-religious and considers religion on par with other leisure activities, it does not agree that if people would read their Bible then they would act OK."(4)

The mistake here is defining religion solely as a free-time activity. As MIM Notes later pointed out, "while going to a religious service could be a leisure time activity, religion in general is line on mysticism which holds that knowledge or power can be gained from the supernatural. This runs contrary to materialism, the theory that all power and knowledge are gained from the real world."(5)

Imperialism and fascism in the oppressed nations breed spontaneous rebellion and resistance, and many religious individuals and groups take part in this resistance. MIM and RAIL must also struggle to bring these religious people who are not immediately revolutionary into the revolutionary united front. At the same time, MIM must boldly advocate the scientific world outlook, the outlook which firmly recognizes the masses as the makers of history, the only outlook which makes the transformation of this "vale of tears" into an "earthly paradise" possible.

Notes:

1. All-African People's Revolutionary Party. "African Liberation Day '94: Revolution and Religion are acts of Culture and must be used as Weapons for Liberation."
2. V.I. Lenin. "Letters from Lenin to A. M. Gorky." *Selected Works*. New York: International Publishers, 1943. Vol. 11, pp. 678-679.
3. F. Engels. *Anti-Duehring*. Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976. p. 410.
4. MIM Notes 100, May 1995.
5. MIM Notes 103, August 1995.

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