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THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY 1960-1988

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VOLUME 1: THE SIXTIES
A POLITICAL MEMOIR

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2005

BARRY SHEPPARD

 *resistance books*

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Farrell Dobbs (1907-83), worker organizer and leader, revolutionary politician, central leader of the Socialist Workers Party. Selfless, incorruptible, fair-minded and warm human being and friend.

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been. As part of a broad shift toward subordination to the Democratic Party, NOW refused to support the action and red-baited it as an SWP affair. While SWP and YSA women were the backbone of WONAAC, it had an important component of independent feminists in its leadership. But the red-baiting had an effect on the size of the demonstration.

The struggle of the United Farm Workers to organize the largely Mexican and Filipino workforce in the California fields heated up in 1973. The growers resisted with court injunctions limiting picketing, which the UFWA rejected. There were mass arrests of workers as a result. Another weapon in the growers' arsenal was the corrupt leadership of the Teamsters union. The growers encouraged and allowed the Teamsters to sign up farm workers on the basis of sweetheart deals with the growers, and the union chiefs sent goons to attack UFWA workers.

The UFWA stepped up its call for a boycott of table grapes from California. This struggle struck a chord in the tens of thousands of young people who had been radicalized in the fight against the war and racism. All the significant tendencies in the radical movement supported the boycott.

Wages were still frozen under Nixon's decree, but — surprise! — prices weren't. A brief struggle erupted in 1973 over the soaring price of meat when housewives organized to call for a boycott to drive the prices down. In San Francisco, unions organized a labor demonstration around the issue. Nat Weinstein was one of the organizers of the effort. I went to San Francisco to discuss the issue with Nat.

The United Labor Action Committee, representing the most progressive unions in the Bay Area, organized the demonstration, which was held on April 26. The official slogans were "Smash these chains: Highest price rises in history! Wage Controls! Five Million Unemployed! Unequal taxes that favor the rich! \$8 billion cutback in health and social service programs!" Between 3,000 and 5,000 participated, mostly workers.

Early in 1973 a group that came out of SDS called the National Caucus of Labor Committees, led by Lyndon LaRouche, decided that it was going to violently crush the Communist Party, in what they publicly called "operation mop-up." They accused the CP of obstructing their effort to take over the National Welfare Rights Organization. They had trained themselves in the use of special clubs called nunchakus, made of two pieces of wood connected by a swivel. The swivel gave a terrific swing to the outer piece of wood, which could do more damage than a solid club. They trained to use other weapons as well.

Their first attack on April 11 targeted supporters of the Young Workers Liberation League, the youth group of the CP, at Temple University in Philadelphia. The surprise

attack with clubs and pipes injured a number of people. *The Militant* ran an editorial calling for repudiation of the NCLC campaign. We called for a united defense of all organizations attacked by the NCLC, and were successful in winning broad support on the left and from civil libertarians to denounce the NCLC.[§]

Even with their own supporters under a potentially deadly attack, the Communist Party responded in a divisive way. The *Daily World*, the CP paper, tried to link the NCLC to "Trotskyites."

On April 23, the NCLC attacked a meeting held at Columbia University to hear candidates for Mayor of New York City. On the speakers platform were a Democratic contender, CP candidate Rasheed Storey and Joanna Misnik, who was speaking for Norman Oliver, the SWP candidate. About 60 NCLC supporters armed with nunchakus and other clubs, and brass knuckles, charged the platform. SWP and YSA members, as well as CP members and Columbia students defended the candidates.

The defenders had to break off chair legs in order to defend the people on the platform, whom the NCLC thugs were trying to reach. They were after Storey in particular. SWP and YSA members, who outnumbered the CP supporters at the

[§] LaRouche had been a member of the SWP. He was among the sectarians repelled by the party's identification with the Cuban revolution and Malcolm X. He was expelled by the New York branch for being a member of Tim Wohlforth's Workers League — the US section of the split from the Fourth International led by Gerry Healy in 1963 — after the Wohlforth grouping left the party in 1964. Prior to his expulsion, I discussed this charge with LaRouche and he admitted being a member of the Workers League. The expulsion seemed to be basically okay with him.

When Ethel and I were in the process of moving to New York in the summer of 1961, I went down from Boston a number of times to search for work. On one of these occasions, I was billeted at LaRouche's apartment, where he lived with his companion.

LaRouche told me he was a "time study" person. If true, this meant he was hired by capitalists to figure out how to speed up workers. I thought this was not an occupation that a socialist should be involved in. However, during the next five years or so before he was expelled, he was never hired in that capacity. He was supported serially by the women who lived with him.

After he left the Workers League, in the later 1960s, he joined SDS and formed a group within it, the National Caucus of Labor Committees. This ultra-sectarian group developed a fanatical hostility to Black demands for affirmative action hiring in the construction industry, which it described as a fascist plot against white construction workers and working-class unity. It was as leader of the NCLC that LaRouche moved to the far right.

LaRouche's so-called "socialism" always struck me as technocratic and hyper-intellectual, with no relationship at all to real workers' struggles anywhere. It seems clear that, in a perverted way, he used what he learned from Trotsky's descriptions and analysis of fascist organizations to build his own fascist group.

meeting, formed a cordon to get him out safely, and Storey thanked them for their help. In the end, the attackers retreated, taking their wounded with them. Six members of the SWP were hurt.

But the meeting was broken up.

I wasn't at the meeting, but following it, Larry Seigle and others who were in the thick of the fight showed up at my apartment to lick their wounds and discuss our response.

In retaliation for the SWP and YSA's role at Columbia, the NCLC announced that we were now targets also. On May 5, in Detroit, they attacked an educational meeting sponsored by the SWP and YSA. This time we were prepared to defend the meeting with a squad of marshals with baseball bats. The NCLC goons were driven off with many casualties on their side. One SWP member, Don Bechler, had to be treated at a hospital. That night, the International Socialists, Workers League and Spartacist League joined us in physically defending an SWP mayoral campaign meeting, and the NCLC didn't attack. A number of groups, including members of the YWLL, agreed to defend a meeting scheduled for our vice presidential candidate, Andrew Pulley, on Detroit's Wayne State University.

The NCLC, apparently despairing of attacking well-defended meetings, decided to go after individuals. They jumped three members of the SWP from behind on a street in New York. They used nunchakus and pipes. Jesse Smith suffered a broken arm and many bruises. Ken Shilman and Rebecca Finch were beaten but not seriously hurt.

The NCLC pulled back from their campaign following this incident.

The NCLC had claimed to be socialist. But their violent campaign against socialist organizations was a strong signal that they were moving far to the right. We began to hear stories of NCLC members recruiting people in bars to "get the commies" before their attacks. The police were very reluctant to arrest any of the thugs, some of whom had an appearance and behavior that led us to suspect they were cops.

In his newspaper, LaRouche publicly attacked the actress Jane Fonda, a favorite target then and now of the far right, for her support to the antiwar movement. They went on a ferocious campaign against struggles to protect the environment. One of their slogans was "feed Jane Fonda to the whales."

The LaRouchites put forward the racist theory that the big majority of Blacks were deformed by drugs that the Rockefeller family had forced on the Black community. LaRouche attacked financial capitalists (bankers) as the source of the ills of modern society, as opposed to the good and productive capitalists. These were adaptations of Hitler's fascist program to American society. From being an ultra-

sectarian socialist, LaRouche had become the leader of a new, small but dangerous fascist group.

The Watergate scandal began to unfold early in 1973. It arose out of a break-in by a group of thugs who were captured while in the Democratic National Committee's offices in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington, D.C. during the 1972 presidential election campaign. Nixon, the victor in that campaign, was eventually proven to have ordered the break-in, looking for anything that could be used against the Democrats in the elections. Nixon was forced to resign in disgrace, and there were more far-reaching results.

The government's dirty tricks against the Black and antiwar movements came to light, such as J. Edgar Hoover's campaign to discredit Martin Luther King. "Cointelpro" (Counter-Intelligence Program) was exposed as a many-year FBI campaign to infiltrate, disrupt, discredit, and victimize dissident groups. Coupled with the government's lying about the Vietnam War revealed in the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate revelations raised public distrust of the government to an unprecedented high.

One morning I suggested to Jack, who had returned from Paris, that perhaps the antiwar movement should file a lawsuit against the government, in order to force release of more information. Jack smiled and urged me to listen to Larry Seigle's report to the Political Committee that afternoon. Larry proposed that the SWP and the YSA sue the government. I was quickly convinced by his argument that if we tried to get all the tendencies in the antiwar movement to file a suit, we would get bogged down in a continual debate over different approaches. A single all-inclusive suit would be unworkable.

The SWP and YSA filed the suit in July 1973 against Nixon and his White House cohorts and other government officials. The suit charged Nixon and others with "illegal acts of blacklisting, harassment, electronic surveillance, burglary, mail tampering, and terrorism against the SWP and YSA, and their members and supporters." Leonard Boudin, the foremost constitutional lawyer in the country, filed the suit. In addition to the SWP and YSA as organizations, there were named plaintiffs, including me, Jack Barnes, Peter Camejo, Farrell Dobbs, Willie Mae Reid, Linda Jenness, Andrew Pulley, Norman Oliver, Evelyn Sell and Morris Starsky. It would take over a decade, but we finally won this suit.

* * *

In the spring of 1972 I worked closely with Wendy Lyons, who was our national antiwar director. We made a number of trips together to talk to leaders of NPAC as