S. D. S. And Black Self-Determination

Passing a resolution shining throughout with pure libertarianism and marred by only a few traces of Marxism, the recent Students for a Democratic Society convention in Austin, Texas committed themselves wholeheartedly to the support of the radical Black Panther Party and other black revolutionary groups who have as their purpose the abolition of the American State.

The text of the resolution began: "The sharpest struggles in the world today are those of the oppressed nations against imperialism and for national liberation. Within this country the sharpest struggle is that of the black colony for its liberation..." it might have added, of course, that as long as the American Leviathan exists most of us, even the Caucasians, will be enslaved; but it is true that, due to such brutes as the racist white police, far more oppression is executed upon the Negro community.

The Panthers were looked upon by the resolution as the most promising liberators of the blacks. Certainly, now that Negroes everywhere are rejecting the statist failacies of the NAACP and other conservative groups and embracing the demands for total freedom, as exemplified by heroes like Rap Brown, the Panthers offer much potential as an organizing body in the struggle to unshackle the chains that Big White Brother has imposed. As long as it confines itself to freeing people from political power while not imposing its own rule, the Black People's (Panther) Army, which is "to be used not only in the defense of the black community but also for its liberation," may be most important.

Though one or two socialist fallacies blemish the logic of the document, it is made clear that the abolition of the State is the primary and ultimate goal. "The demand for self-determination becomes the most basic demand of the oppressed colony." Self-determination, taken to its logical conclusion, means the right of every single individual to be free of all political power, i.e., anarchism. Thus it is quite ironic that the U.S. Government, which holds millions in bondage everywhere, pays lip service to the right of self-determination (remember LBJ's sophisms wherein he pleaded for the self-determination of the South Vietnamese).

Reactionary nationalism, the type of nationalism best exemplified by Hitler and encompassing the Führers of all nation-states in history, is totally rejected, while the completely different revolutionary nationalism, which means simply the uniting of individuals to throw off colonial tyranny, is applauded. As Panther leader G. M. Murray made clear, "We must destroy all cultural nationalism, because it is reactionary and has become a tool of Richard Milhous Nixon and all the U.S. power structure which divides the poor and oppressed, and is used by the greasy-slick black bourgeoisie to exploit black people in the ghetto."

Everywhere the convention demanded a go hand-in-hand with SDS in "its commitment to join with the Black Panther Party and other black revolutionary groups in the fight against white national chauvinism and white supremacy."

The right of every individual to be free of any nation-state in general, and the U.S. despotism in particular, must be actively supported.

(Notes for the full text of the SDS resolution, see New Left Notes, April 4, 1969, p. 3.)

Stephen Halbrook

EDITOR'S COMMENT:

The Panthers And Black Liberation

While I do not want to detract from Mr. Halbrook's excellent article, and while I realize that the great majority of revolutionary anarcho-capitalists are highly enthusiastic about the Black Panthers and their potential for leading a black liberation movement, I must record my serious reservations about the value of the Panthers.

The Panthers are victims to the grubby viruses: (1) their enormous ability to upset and aggravate the white police, simply by going around armed and in uniform---the supposed Constitutional privilege of every free American but apparently to be denied to radical militant blacks; (2) their considerable capacity for organizing black youth; and (3) excellent black nationalist ideas---particularly in emphasizing a black nation with their own land in such areas as the Black Belt of the South---as expressed in some writings of Eldridge Cleaver.

But there are growing offsetting tendencies so serious as to call the overall merit of the Panthers into grave question. In the first place, there are increasing tendencies for the Panthers to abandon black nationalism almost completely for the Old Left virus of black-white Marxist working-class action in the bolshevik way. No longer are we seeing the integration of Marxist rhetoric into the Panther material, but an unfortunate eagerness to reach out and make alliances with white radicals, thereby contradicting the whole point of black power, which is to develop separate black movements resulting in black national self-determination. Even tactically, the original idea was to have alliances between strong, independent black and white radical movements; neither the Panthers nor the white radical movements have grown sufficiently to validate any sort of alliance now, even as a tactic. The most absurd example of this was the decision of the Peace and Freedom Party last year to nominate Eldridge Cleaver for President---a ridiculous decision for both the white and black movements since it involved a supposed black nationalist running for President of a white Republic---the U.S.A. It makes black nationalist sense to run candidates from Harlem or Watts; but not for Senators or Presidents from predominantly white constituencies. The question then arises: are the Panthers really black nationalists?

The second big reservation comes from the increasingly thuggish and Stalinoid tendencies in the Panther movement: viz. (1) the inexcusable pulling of a gun by the Panthers on SNCC leader James Forman, a fellow revolutionary black-nationalist, at a protest in Washington and go hand-in-hand with SDS in its commitment to join with the Black Panther Party and other black revolutionary groups. Pulling a gun on the State enemy is one thing; pulling a gun on fellow revolutionaries is quite another, and cannot be condoned in any way. Eldridge Cleaver's reported statement that Forman should have been shot because his strategic views make him "objectively counter-revolutionary" was the whole affair in an even more grisly light. (2) The equally inexcusable pulling of a gun by the Panther leader on the Peace and Freedom Party leaders in New York to force those veteran bootlickers of the Panthers to withdraw their duly nominated candidate for the Senate, the pacifist David McReynolds, in order to leave the line blank and allow the Panthers to secretly support the black nationalist Herman Ferguson, who ran a predictably poor race for the Senate on the competing Freedom and Peace party ticket. (3) The outrageous and vicious attack on black revolutionary columnist Julius Lester by Kathleen Cleaver in the Guardian of May 3 for his tactical disagreement with the SDS resolution on the Panthers. This article, devoid of analysis and long on snarling invective, was in the worst tradition of Stalinism's Billingsgate, in those days often preparatory to a Stalinist purge.

All this means that we should, at the very least, withdraw our enthusiasm from the Panthers. In any event, it is the responsibility of whites to build the white movement, and to concentrate our time and energies therefore on white rather than black affairs.