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FORWARD MOTION

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May, 1982

Dear friend,

Affirmative action is a labor issue that some union activists still have trouble talking about and many have trouble acting on. In addition to employer resistance and traditional union hostility, activists now face a national administration more committed than ever to scuttling effective affirmative action. Reagan's key civil rights spokesperson, Assistant Attorney General William Reynolds, has made clear the new administration's opposition even to voluntary affirmative action training programs. Arguing that the Supreme Court had been wrong in the Brian Weber case, Reynolds stated, "By elevating the rights of groups over the rights of individuals, racial and sexual preferences are at war with the American ideal of equal opportunity for each person." So here is what equal rights activists now face--a direct challenge to affirmative action... in the name of equal opportunity.

More companies are now balking at any kind of systematic goals or quotas in hiring or promotion. In this environment, how can progress still be made? In this issue of Forward Motion, a participant in a small, local committee

outlines elements of a practical approach. She shows how this group has been trying to overcome both union opposition to affirmative actions as well as skepticism on the possibility of union reform today among some oppressed nationality community organizations. We think you will find this report interesting and invite you to send us your experiences dealing with this struggle.

This issue also includes two speeches given recently by PUL members, one at a Malcolm X memorial meeting focusing on Black independent politics and the other to a Philadelphia conference on the international situation sponsored by the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters group. You will also find a short article on what is wrong with the "anti-family" labels so often thrown up against gay rights struggles today. This is excerpted from a forthcoming ULP pamphlet on gay rights and the communist Left (See ad in back.)

Finally, "Reds" is one of a small number of recent Hollywood movies raising a curtain on progressive struggles and as such has attracted much comment on the Left. Here the film is reviewed from a vantage point which has not gotten that much attention--how its producers treat the female lead, Louise Bryant.

* * *

With this issue, we are experimenting with a new format and we would like to know what you think. Forward Motion overall is still in a settling-in stage, with plenty of room for improvement. But we think we have another solid collection of articles here, bringing us midway through our first year. So now comes the time for some plain talk: we need your subscription. We want to thank those who have subscribed. It is not just the contribution--though we certainly need it--but also the expression of support.

If you get this newsletter and find it useful but you haven't yet subscribed, please take a moment to send us \$10 for a year. You will find a slip to use inside. I wish I could tell you it is tax deductible or that you get a free atlas with every sub. I can't. So you will just have to judge by what you read. Chances are you subscribe to or read other magazines and publications, but I would venture to say that Forward Motion helps fill a gap. With your support now, we will continue to do so.

Thanks.

--Jonathan H. for the editors

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Affirmative Action In The 1980s

Among union members, workers, and students there are those of us who are concerned about maintaining the gains made in minority employment through affirmative action programs in the 1970's. Those gains are threatened by the new period of economic recession and a right-wing government in power. For example, under Reagan, the amount of federal funds an institution gets with the requirement of coming up with affirmative action hiring goals has risen from \$50,000 to \$1,000,000. That means that before, there were 17,000 institutions that had to comply with equal employment opportunity guidelines; now, there are only 4,000.

There are few examples of successful fights for affirmative action in one workplace, and yet we are isolated from each other, confined to struggling in our own particular area. This doesn't work. We need a new city-wide strategy--we need a new coalition for affirmative action.

UNION MEMBERS FOR JOBS AND EQUALITY

Last spring, when the Proposition 21/2 layoffs began, the way the choice was posed to union members was: either you're for affirmative action, OR you're for union seniority, and never the twain shall meet. The assumption was that minorities are for affirmative action, whites are for seniority, and the two groups are in direct opposition.

Union Members for Jobs and Equality is a group of mainly minority union members from around the city who wanted BOTH affirmative action and seniority, and who knew that the two principles are not mutually exclusive. In fact, both are necessary. At a time when both Civil Rights and union rights are under attack, we tried to bring unions and minority groups into a working relationship so they could unite to fight off those attacks.

In the minority community, we spoke at two Affirmative Action conferences attended mainly by black compliance officers, at a NAACP rally against the school cuts, and at a meeting to save Roxbury High School from closing. There,

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we made several arguments:

1) Affirmative Action ALONE does not protect you. It says minorities as a group must have jobs, but doesn't say anything about you as an individual. You may be hired today, fired tomorrow, and replaced with another black face the next, and affirmative action will not have been violated.

2) Turning to the employer to guarantee equal rights, just because the union is recalcitrant, is no solution. We reminded people that Civil Rights legislation was no "gift"--people had to walk, people had to boycott, people were beaten, people died to get these laws. In the case of the City of Boston, in 1970 only 2% of public workers were minority people. And then it took court suits to force the city to begin to hire minority firefighters, police, teachers. If the city had been an equal employment opportunity employer twenty years ago, seniority in layoffs would not affect minorities disproportionately.

3) Unions are being busted, and anti-labor legislation is in the works, and these things hurt ALL working people. Because of discrimination, there is 40% more cancer in blacks than in whites that is caused by unsafe working conditions. While cuts in Occupational Health and Safety regulations hurt all workers, it is especially bad for minority workers. The sub-minimum wage for youth would hurt minority youth, since twice as many black youth than white are looking for work. Even though unions are not taking the best stand about the layoffs, it doesn't make sense to join government's attack on the unions and target them as the main enemy; in fact, we should ally with the unions in their fight to save OSHA and against the sub-minimum wage.

People in the minority community didn't run right out and take their union president for lunch as a result of our arguments. But we made some headway against just going after the unions on affirmative action.

We also spoke to union groups. We were able to get a meeting with the district director of AFSCME in Massachusetts, we spoke at a Coalition to Save Boston meeting attended by heads of several public employee locals (at one of their news conferences), and we introduced and argued for a Resolution on Affirmative Action at the AFSCME Convention. With them, we used several arguments.

1) Unions are under attack. Our ranks are decimated, our work contracted out, and lack of funds is cited as the reason for contract take-backs. And now, conflict within our ranks threatens to divide and weaken us. To heal the division caused by the disproportionate impact of the layoffs on minorities if strict seniority is followed, the union must take positive steps to give minority members fair representation. They must give up "strict seniority" as the layoff method, since it means that the percentage of minorities in the workforce would drop back to the 1970 2% level--and that's not offering any protection to minority members.

2) Seniority is NOT a sacred principle. Veterans have always had preference in hiring and are last to be laid off. The principle to be defended is fair and equal treatment for all employees. management, decides what

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method should be used.

3) The burden of proof is on the unions in terms of uniting the union membership. Minorities look to the union for support. But if they don't get it from the union, they'll look elsewhere-- to the courts, (and the unions themselves may be sued for discrimination and lack of fair representation), or to the management. Either recourse hurts the union. We said, if unions don't defend equality, minorities will not defend the unions!

Once again, the union leaders didn't immediately demand that no minorities be laid off, but then, they did get the message. They know it's a concern that will come up again and again. And it will--as we continue to push for constructive seniority in layoffs. If at the time of layoff, an employer does not meet affirmative action goals in terms of the percentage of minorities in the workforce, or if by laying off a minority worker the goal would not continue to be met, then the non-minority male with the least amount of seniority would be laid off first. We tried not to take the extreme (though not unreasonable!) view that NO minorities should be laid off; we did not say that more gains should be made in minority hiring which has not nearly come up to equality with whites; we only asked that prior gains not be taken back, and that minority percentages in the workforce hold steady in this period of cutbacks.

STRATEGY IN THE FIGHT FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Minority people and whites have different roles to play in the fight for affirmative action.

Where minorities are active within the union, minority caucuses are necessary. It is impossible to have any voice as an individual when you are a single minority member in a mostly white union. Being in an organized caucus magnifies that voice by more than the numbers of people in the caucus; organization always increases your clout.

But even a caucus is limited in what it can do: by definition, a minority group within the union is in a minority and can be outvoted. The example of the Boston Teachers Union, Police, and Firefighters all show this.

The idea behind Union Members for Jobs and Equality is that minority people everywhere must support each other in order to win anything these days. In particular, minority union members must support each other across union lines. Though non-union membership in UMJE is not sought since our main concern is with problems of employment, we also try to build community support for affirmative action in jobs. For example, in the Housing Inspection Department, 90 inspectors were working before the layoffs; 12 were black. Eight of these twelve lost their jobs. For 8 black people to win their jobs back is pretty difficult. We have done and are planning to do several things to help their discrimination suit against the City and Civil Service: we tried to bring people to their hearings to let the City and their Union know that this case is being looked at by a lot more than 8 black people. We brought along an NAACP lawyer just to ensure that the union lawyer would be pressured to raise discrimination as an issue in the layoffs, which he was not

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originally planning to do. Now, we are trying to get support from the people in the community who will suffer as a result of their layoff: tenants groups and community action groups, as well as Black politicians like Yancey and Jean McGuire, all of whom would be helpful in pressuring the City and the court to rule in their favor.

What about the role of white people? White progressive trade unionists often try to start campaigns about affirmative action in their shops. Their main activity often is trying to recruit minority people to their organizations; but usually, minorities don't join and the committees end up being largely white. Because they start with the premise that they can't fight for affirmative action without first recruiting lots of minority people, they end up wondering, "Why don't they stand up for their rights?" "Why don't they fight for themselves?" "What are we doing raising affirmative action if minorities themselves are not?" Sometimes, they end up throwing up their hands and giving up the project. If white groups spent more time talking about how concretely to fight racism than in talking about why minorities don't join them, maybe something different would happen.

Don't expect minorities to join white initiatives, and here are some reasons why. First of all, it's not true that minorities don't stand up for their rights. They ARE fighting racism every day in every aspect of their lives, not just on the job. They may see a different arena of struggle as more important. Their tactics may differ from yours. Let's face it: minorities CAN'T back out of the struggle against discrimination because they live it. Whites can and do back out. Secondly, minorities may feel that to fight for affirmative action within the unions is futile. This is not defeatist. It is realistic, and based on knowledge that the history of unions in America is a racist history. Third, minorities often don't trust whites, even those who profess to be anti-racist. Too often, white people tell us what's good for us and what to do about it.

We may not JOIN you, but we will ALLY with you and eventually join with you, if your deeds bear out your words. Affirmative action and an end to racist discrimination does not just benefit minorities, it benefits the white working class as well. If you sincerely believe that to be true, then you will struggle with white people to join the struggle. What are some of the things that can be done?

1) Raise affirmative action in the union. Minorities want to hear people speak on the issue. It is better to know who is against it and why than not to bring it up at all. Put it on the table, in the open, where the issue can be argued about. Don't assume it is so divisive an issue that to talk about it will inflict unhealable wounds on the union body. Not to talk about it just camouflages the wound that already exists, and prevents the cure. Where I work, we had a tense, shouting, impassioned discussion, and it was interesting to all that the proponents and opponents of affirmative action didn't fall along racial lines. First you had a white person say, "Why should I get laid off instead of a minority who hasn't worked here as long as me?" A minority person answered, "Why should I get discriminated against TWICE--once 20 years ago when they refused to hire me, and now when they lay me off first because they discriminated against me back then!" Then a black worker said, "I'm

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against affirmative action. I don't need it. I can compete and win against a white person as an equal." A white person responded, "Affirmative action is not saying you are inferior. It's saying you are equal in ability to whites, but being black has been a handicap in America. Affirmative action just tries to remove the handicap so you can compete as an equal."

2) Write newsletter articles educating people. We wrote about how seniority is not more sacred than unity. We explained constructive seniority which maintains the percentage of whites and minorities in a workforce in a time of lay-offs, and many people are open to that solution.

3) Translate materials into Spanish or whatever language is necessary to allow the full participation of people who do not have English as a first language.

4) Take up discrimination cases. When a white worker wanted to file a grievance against a minority worker who had been promoted and the white worker had more seniority, we defended the minority worker, even though no specific affirmative action language was in the contract.

5) We sponsored a Martin Luther King Day celebration. This union event brought together all kinds of people. We had a moving poem in commemoration of Dr. King written by an older white worker from South Boston read, and this type of thing helps build trust among the races, and lets people know the union wants to educate white workers about Civil Rights and racism.

6) Try to get some contract language about affirmative action. Under Reagan, we are seeing a great weakening of enforcement of equal employment opportunity rules. For example, where before you as an employer would have to hire a certain number of minorities and women, now you will just have to prove you tried to recruit them. We'll have to start getting quotas and timetables in our contracts. Training programs with minority set-asides, and constructive seniority are nice to get, but go after what is realistic in your own situation. This may mean simply making sure affirmative action is still mentioned in the contract. Or, try for a stronger definition. Instead of saying something like "we agree with the concept of affirmative action," say, "We agree that when the effects of any employment practices, regardless of their intent, discriminate against any group of people, specific positive and aggressive measures must be taken to redress the effects of past discrimination, and to eliminate present and future discrimination." Often, minorities lose discrimination cases because the employment practice had no intention of discriminating; a clause like the one above makes it clear that ignorance is no excuse.

7) Get your union to support initiatives that come from the minority community. My local sent a speaker and supporters to a rally called by the NAACP to protest the layoff of black teachers. We didn't say, this rally is not about health care so it doesn't concern us. We didn't say, we didn't see the NAACP at our rally about city cutbacks where we worked so we won't go. We said if the black community sees this as the major issue for that community and if they are asking for support, that's where we will go.

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The future of affirmative action in the '80's is bleak--if we leave it up to government officials, personnel managers, or union bureaucrats. We must now more than ever keep up the fight, by agitating for affirmative action in our communities, be they Black, Asian, Latino, or white, and we must try to move our unions toward alliances with minority groups, and we must try to get the minority community to ally with unions where possible and focus the main fire of their anger on the employees and government. Only in this way, will we defend union rights and civil rights from the right-wing, preserve some of the gains of the 1970's-- and begin to build working class solidarity.

--M. L.

February 1982

(Thanks to the author for permission to print this article. The author also has made available the following questions and answers on affirmative action prepared Summer 1981 in conjunction with the affirmative action work described here.)

Questions And Answers On Affirmative Action Organizing

"AFFIRMATIVE ACTION? I'M AGAINST IT!"

Q: "HOW CAN I TELL SOME MAN WITH 7 YEARS ON THE JOB THAT HE'S GOT TO GO BECAUSE SOMEONE WITH ONLY 2 YEARS WHO IS A MINORITY HAS GOT TO STAY?"

A: If hiring had been fair starting 30 years ago, then lay-offs by straight seniority now would be fair. But hiring practices discriminated against minorities and women. Ten years ago, there were less than 2% minorities in the city's workforce. So how can I tell someone who couldn't get a job 10 years ago because of the color of his skin that now he's got to go because someone who was lucky enough to be white got the job in the first place?

Seniority is not a sacred principle. It is a way to protect workers from favoritism. In other words, it is a method of ensuring fair and equal treatment of workers. Isn't that what a union is for? Now, when that seniority rule means that lay-offs will wipe out minorities and women from the city workforce, we have to find a new method of ensuring that one group of our members do not UNEQUALLY bear the brunt of the crisis. Let's keep the good aspect of seniority and also preserve the gains made by minorities over the last decade by having separate seniority lists for the different races, and keep the same proportion of women and minorities before and after lay-offs.

Q: "I'M BEING LAID OFF BECAUSE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION!"

A: Did a black person hire you? Fire you? Do minorities sit on the committee which decided on Proposition 2 1/2 cuts in the city? Did minorities form Citizens for Limited Taxation that wrote 2 1/2 in a way that would mean huge tax breaks for big business and cuts in service to the poor? Minorities did not cause the economic crisis! They do not cause lay-offs.

Q: "BLACKS WERE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ONCE, BUT NOW THIS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BUSINESS HAS GONE TOO FAR. THE ONLY PEOPLE GET HIRED NOWADAYS ARE BLACKS AND PUERTO RICANS."

A: Affirmative action means that POSITIVE STEPS must be taken to correct a past injustice. And those steps are still necessary. There is 2 times as much unemployment among blacks as whites. In Boston, minorities make up over 30% of the available workforce, but there are only 17% minorities hired by the city, and they are concentrated in Boston City Hospital, in the lowest paying and most unskilled jobs. If you took BCH out of the statistics, there would only be about 6% minorities.

Q: "WHY SHOULD I GET LAID OFF INSTEAD OF A MINORITY WITH LESS SENIORITY? SURE, THERE WAS SLAVERY AND JIM CROW. BUT I HAVE NEVER DISCRIMINATED AGAINST ANYONE, AND SLAVERY WASN'T MY FAULT. WHY SHOULD I PAY FOR MY GRANDFATHER'S MISTAKES?"

A: So you agree that slavery was wrong and discrimination is wrong? Well, discrimination still goes on. It's true that it is not just YOUR problem, it is a social problem that individuals can't solve by simply not being racists themselves. Affirmative action came about because RULES enforceable by the government were necessary to make employers move toward equal treatment of minorities and women. You didn't create the problem, but it IS a problem! By doing nothing, the problem continues. If you know discrimination is wrong, then join the struggle for equality and become a part of the solution.

In America, it has been a handicap to be black. Affirmative action does not give blacks an advantage now. It just tries to remove the handicap. It's like blacks have been running a race with 100 pound weights on their backs. Take the weight of discriminastgion off and let them compete as equals.

Q: "WELL, I'M FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHTS. BUT WE CAN'T TALK ABOUT IT IN THE UNION RIGHT NOW, IT'S TOO DIVISIVE AN ISSUE."

A: Discrimination, the unequal treatment of one group of our fellow union members is what is dividing us.

The union was aware of affirmative action when it was begun. Support for it is written into the contract. We have to discuss what that principle means now in a period of lay-offs. It would be wrong to say it's OK for minorities and women to be hired in good times, but that they should be the first to go when hard times come. That would not be promoting equality of our membership.

Q: "I'D HELP, BUT MINORITIES DON'T HELP THEMSELVES. WHY DON'T THEY GET MORE INVOLVED IN THE UNION?"

A: It's hard to expect minorities to get excited about joining the union when the union says they don't care if all minorities get laid off. If we don't show minorities that we will fight for equality, they will not trust the union. Now, more than ever, the unions need the unity of their members, white and black, male and female, young and old, in order to fight the lay-offs and to put the burden of the cuts where it really belongs-- on the high paid politicians and administrators who overload the city budget and provide no service to the community. It is unions that have discriminated against minorities, not minorities that have refused to become part of the union. Now the burden is on the union to win them into the union movement. And it is essential for the unions now to win the support of their minority members. Remember--UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL!



The Old And The New

I'm going to present here a very broad overview of some of our international perspectives, with the understanding that these are not set in stone: our group is currently engaged in a process of summation of our work, and what I'm going to say does not yet represent a full synthesis of the discussion we'll be having in the coming months.

The first question for a group with our background--that is, coming out of the so-called "Maoist" section of the 1970s communist Left--is this: have communists been all wet about the Soviet Union? We say, no. The events of the past several years have confirmed rather than contradicted the view that the Soviet Union is an aggressive, expansionist superpower engaged in a strategic offensive to redive the world. From the Soviet role in Angola's civil war to its bankrolling of Vietnamese domination over Indochina; from its invasion of Afghanistan to sponsorship of an outright military dictatorship in Poland; from the attempted suppression of the Eritrean people's liberation struggle to the embarrassment of a nuclear-armed submarine aground in Swedish waters, the Soviet Union has sought to improve its strategic deployment throughout the world. Its enormous military build-up has continued unabated and--thanks to Reagan--still without much negative international publicity. This is not to say that there are no ebbs and flows in the Soviet strategic offensive, or that Soviet imperialism does not have major vulnerabilities which will cause it to suffer many setbacks. But the Soviet threat to world peace is being demonstrated month by month, and we've been right to speak to the Left and the U.S. people about it. Future events are bound to bring this threat more and more into the open, and we should not back off from this position today.

How we respond to the Soviet threat is one of the two or three really critical questions for the U.S. Left and for Marxists within it. Everyone knows that the Right-wing is growing today, while the organized Left on the whole is not--certainly not to the same extent, anyway. Many on the Left feel that in order to fight the Right, it is necessary to downplay the Soviet threat, on the grounds that whatever this administration supports, we should condemn. A lot of people have used this argument to condone or at least remain

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silent on--the suppression of democracy in Poland. But this is suicide, pure and simple. It's true that Reagan's international policies are so awful that they are pushing many progressive people in the U.S. and elsewhere in this direction. But apologizing for Soviet aggression promises irrelevance for the U.S. Left. If the Left cannot develop a popular approach to Soviet ambitions for world hegemony, an approach which not only dissociates the Left from that drive but puts us at the forefront of opposition to it, an approach which unites with the U.S. people's legitimate hatred of Russian expansionism, then you can kiss this Left goodbye, because the Right will clobber us.

This is not just a defensive question for the U.S. Left: The Left has to be asking more than how it will cover itself; we have to ask how we can begin to challenge the Right. The Right in this country has several vulnerable points and one of them has to do with international matters. Simply put, the Right is unable to fashion a foreign policy which can actually stop Soviet expansion. The great political weakness of Right-wing policy on international affairs is not simply that it is dangerous, though it is, but that it cannot achieve its stated aims: stopping the Soviet drive and reasserting U.S. hegemony. In fact, in many cases the policy of the Right establishes conditions conducive to the expansion of Soviet influence.

To go into battle against the Right without taking advantage of this vulnerability would be a big mistake. Of course, only from within a common anti-Soviet framework does the vulnerability of this point really stand out. If you don't see a Soviet threat at all you won't recognize the Right's weakness in this area. It is no accident that foreign affairs has so far been the most muddled area of the Reagan administration's policy (though its domestic economic policy may be catching up). Rhetoric has far outstripped the administration's ability to act, given contradictions with U.S. Second World allies, resistance from the Third World, divisions within the U.S. ruling class, and lack of popular support at home. It is significant that, at a time when Reagan's domestic economic program was enjoying widespread popular



support, the mail against his El Salvador policy was running 10 to 1 opposed. The Left cannot afford to pass up this opportunity to drive a wedge between the Right and some of its mainstream constituency, but it needs an alternative anti-Soviet program.

Then there's liberalism. A revival of liberalism, including a Democratic recovery of the presidency in 1984, cannot be counted out. Nevertheless, liberalism's current disarray is another reason why the Left will have to get it together on the Soviet Union. A vacuum has appeared on the U.S. political scene, one which the Left must try to fill. The rise of the Right has proven liberalism's vulnerability on domestic issues, but this vulnerability has appeared on international questions as well.

Some on the Left argue that the main weakness of liberal approaches to the international arena can be found in its stance toward Third World national liberation struggles. After all, Kennedy was the architect of the Vietnam war and the so-called Alliance for Progress in Latin America. Liberal responses to Third World struggles for independence have ranged from outright opposition to the most inconsistent kind of support. But the liberals' response to declining U.S. power in the world includes a new willingness to renegotiate relations with both Second and Third World countries. Renegotiation of all kinds of political relations is possible, so long as the door remains open to unrestricted economic penetration. In other words, a slogan like "support national liberation," while we stand for it, does not yet target the main foreign policy weakness of today's disoriented liberals.

This weakness, which has been exploited to such advantage by the rising Right wing, has more to do with its relation to the ascendant superpower, Soviet imperialism. Throughout most tendencies within liberalism runs the following notion: a peaceful re-division of the world with the USSR can and must be achieved at all costs; such a division alone will allow the U.S. to re-establish the unhindered economic penetration of its own legitimate sphere



of influence, while the Soviets plunder theirs. This re-division of legitimate spheres of influence can be negotiated with the Soviets who, mainly concerned with holding on to what they have (like Eastern Europe), have already assumed a defensive--not an offensive--posture.

This vain hope for peaceful partition is ultimately the viewpoint of appeasement. On two points at least, it is bound to run into a lot of trouble (and already has). It grants the Soviets the right to do whatever they want in their "own" sphere of influence (thus we should not "provoke" the Soviets by overly protesting martial law in Poland or poison gas in Afghanistan). And this hope does not come to terms with the accumulating evidence of a Soviet military buildup and global offensive. The Right has already profited from liberalism's slow uptake on Soviet designs, but it is not too late for the Left to do so.

From a strategic point of view, we believe the world's peoples today need a united front against superpower hegemonism and war. World war represents the greatest immediate threat to social progress and revolution throughout the world, and it is the contention between the U.S. and the USSR in their pursuit of global hegemony that eventually will lead to the outbreak of that war.

The USSR has an objective interest in an aggressive redivision of world influence. While it has achieved military parity with the U.S., it does not yet have the holdings to show for it; a redivision is therefore inevitable. Furthermore, the Soviet Union--again for certain objective reasons--favors military means of penetration, domination and control over spheres of influence, in contrast to the economic means favored by important fractions of U.S. capital.

The U.S. Imperialists, on the other hand, have a certain objective interest in the status quo. This does not mean the U.S. will not seek to penetrate Soviet spheres of influence--usually through economic means--when it sees the opportunity. But it does not have an interest in an aggressive redivision of the world.

Today we can discern a split in U.S. imperialist interests. U.S. imperialism needs to reassert its worldwide hegemony. But it also needs to stop Soviet encroachment on its spheres of influence. Insofar as the U.S. emphasizes its hegemonism, it remains a target of the united front against hegemonism and war. Given the policies of the current administration, U.S. imperialism is definitely a target--along with the USSR--of that united front.

But these two sets of imperialist interests run in contradiction out there in the real world, and this contradiction is an objective one: it exists, and it will intensify, independently of whatever administration holds the reins of government. The harder U.S. imperialism tries to reassert its hegemony, the weaker becomes its struggle against Soviet encroachment. At a minimum, U.S. hegemonism destroys the possibility of the types of political alliances necessary to stop Soviet expansion.

This contradiction dominates the foreign policy arena for the U.S. government today and will for the foreseeable future. Some sections of the

U.S. ruling class are becoming dimly aware of it, while most remain blind to it. But even among those blindly pursuing one or the other pole of imperialist interests, their debates are structured by this contradiction. That is how we should understand, for example, the struggles within the Reagan administration between the so-called multilateralists and unilateralists.

One way to think about some of our most pressing internationalist tasks is this: to carry the reform struggle into this sphere, to enter the arena of foreign policy in order to work on this contradiction, to make this contradiction more apparent to the U.S. people, and to popularize an alternative foreign policy. A progressive (though not socialist) foreign policy would advocate resistance to Soviet aggression while demonstrating how U.S. hegemonism undercuts that resistance.

From the point of view of the interests of the world's peoples, Reagan's foreign policy certainly seems the worst possible, short perhaps of outright backstabbing appeasement. The effects of that policy on the millions of people fighting against U.S. imperialism and its allies for freedom, independence, liberation, economic justice, and socialism are readily apparent. Sometimes less apparent, however, are the effects of the Reagan policy on the Soviet drive for global hegemony. Far from containing it, Reagan has effectively opened one door after another to the Soviets. His European nuclear policy, his support for South Africa, his coddling of Israel, his attempt to play off Taiwan against China, and his support for reaction in Central America are some of the most obvious examples. As far as we can see, in no case has the Reagan foreign policy had any significant negative effect on Soviet expansionism; and in a number of cases, in its headlong rush to re-establish U.S. hegemony, it has actually aided the Soviets.

The events today in Central America represent in many ways a condensation of this current reality. Long oppressed peoples seek to rid themselves of U.S.-backed regimes, while at the same time the intransigence of the U.S. government actually strengthens the Soviets' ability to penetrate the movements of these peoples. Consider the sad news of Nicaragua turning away a delegation from Solidarity and supporting martial law in Poland. It is tragic that the Nicaraguans are so menaced by U.S. imperialism that they can't find their way to a non-aligned policy, and instead find it necessary to cast their lot with a Soviet-sponsored military dictatorship. There is a real danger in Central America and elsewhere that the Reagan policy will drive one liberation movement after another towards the Soviet Union.

The main contradictions of our time are a combination of new and old: old struggles against U.S. imperialism, for example, and new struggles against the USSR. U.S. ruling class difficulties in coming to grips with a new world situation are bound to cause great dissension within that class, between the U.S. and its allies, and among the U.S. people. We have to be part of that struggle. U.S. Marxists and the Left as a whole are not a significant enough social force to directly influence the U.S. bourgeoisie through some sort of alliance with it, and in any case U.S. capital will never carry out a progressive policy towards the Third World. We have to help build an independent mass movement, including working to influence what already exist as mass movements. Doing this will mean finding the right balance between the

new and the old, and this will take some experimentation. We'd like to close by pointing to something which is definitely part of the new, and which demands our attention.

The nuclear disarmament movement, especially with the current Freeze campaign, has emerged as a genuine nationwide mass movement. Based largely in the middle strata, it is no less a mass movement for that. Freeze resolutions have already been approved by 250 town meetings and 23 city councils, and more than 500,000 Californians have signed a petition to put the proposal on the ballot. According to the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign clearinghouse, the movement is active in 43 states and 279 congressional districts, and more than 20,000 people are actively working for the campaign.

In one sense, this new mass movement is a direct response to Reagan, and we should build it as part of the broad anti-Reagan struggle which is likely to take shape over the next two years. At the same time, the disarmament movement represents the first real mass response to something which goes beyond the current policies of this reactionary administration, a response to what is bound to become the major international issue of the decade: the threat of world war. It is because this danger is real and has become palpable to people that a mass movement has been born. That movement is the first form that mass sentiment against world war is taking in the U.S. and Europe. For those Marxists who advocate the construction of a united front against war and hegemonism, the disarmament movement will be a critical--perhaps the critical--place to start building one. The disarmament movement needs Marxists; it needs them to help clarify the relation between disarmament and world war and between world war and politics; and it needs them to help organize the people and develop a mass political orientation. But we need the disarmament movement at least as much: it has a great deal to teach us about political work in the '80s, about combining different forms of struggle, working with various strata, speaking to a mass audience about the danger of war, and popularizing a progressive, democratic anti-Soviet approach. The opportunity is there for Marxism to become a real current within this movement, though not, of course, overnight. At the least, we can finally begin to make the "united front against war and hegemonism" more than just a polemical phrase.

Thank you.

--prepared by Samuel T.
April, 1982



Boom, Boom, Boom ... everybody loves a charade

Black Independent Political Action

(Note: the following article is excerpted from a speech given by a member of PUL at a commemoration last February of the death of Malcolm X in 1965.)

Good evening, brothers and sisters and thank you for coming. We gather together this evening to commemorate the life and cause of a fallen champion. We gather together this evening, almost 17 years to the day that life ceased for Malcolm X--El Hajj Malik El-Shabazz--one of the greatest human beings of this century. But our gathering should not be a time for mourning and tears; it should be a moment in time when we can smile in remembering the humor of brother Malcolm; a moment when we can remember his words and consider his views. But most importantly it should be an opportunity for us to relight the torch of struggle which he carried until his demise. Tonight we gather for all these reasons, but most importantly in order to use the light of Malcolm's inspiration to consider the situation which faces us--as a people--today in 1982. As activists in the Black Liberation Movement we must use opportunities such as this one to work out new directions. Whether we work in factories or hospitals; whether we are community activists or students, there are many issues affecting the Black Liberation Movement which confront us daily. One of these issues we wish to speak on tonight is the issue of independent Black political action and coalition politics.

Malcolm X and the Organization of Afro-American Unity emphasized that Black people, as an oppressed people, as a people denied that fundamental right of national self-determination, had the right and duty to defend ourselves and press forward our struggle "...by any means necessary..." Now, the slogan "...by any means necessary..." has been repeated perhaps millions of times since Malcolm's passing, but it is often not taken to heart. Even a brief reading of his speeches shows that he was speaking of tactical flexibility and a commitment to principle. The principle was obviously the freedom of our people and the ending of all oppression and tyranny. At the same time, as his mentioning of the "ballot or the bullet" showed; as his speaking of the necessity for voter registration/education and armed

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self-defense showed, Malcolm X believed that we should use all paths open to us in pressing forward our struggle.

And so today, February 20, 1982, we gather to remember brother Malcolm. Our discussion will focus on two aspects of that which Malcolm spoke of: Black unity and independent Black political action. We should never lose sight of the fact that Malcolm focused the greater part of his work and attention on the issue of Black unity. It is no accident that he chose the name for his organization to be "the Organization of Afro-American Unity." The OAAU was to champion the

cause of Black unity: a unity of African-Americans regardless of religion, political persuasion or class--a unity in favor of our freedom from white supremacist oppression. He was talking of a real united front; a notion which recognized and legitimized differences among our people, but at the same time offered us all an opportunity to fight for our people's liberation. Do we have a real united front of the Afro-American people today? Do we still need one?

In all honesty we have to say that the type of united front about which Malcolm spoke does not exist. There are organizations such as the National Black United Front and the National Black Independent Political Party which are making extremely valuable contributions towards building broad Black unity, but at this time such unity has not taken any long-term organizational form. Do we need a broad united front? Can anyone possibly ask that question with any degree of seriousness? Of course we do, and very badly indeed. Seventeen years ago the U.S. economy was growing. In addition, the power of the Black Liberation Movement forced sections of the ruling class to cower. But this is no longer true today. Reaganomics spells the end of countless programs which the masses came to take for granted. Reaganomics means stagnation and increased misery for the masses of our people. In addition, the decline in our movement's strength has offered our enemies tremendous opportunities to slice away at us. First pinpricks, and later stabs. Our standard of living is being cut away and our political rights are under attack. Ten years ago many of our people would never have conceived of an orchestrated attack on laws such as the Voting Rights Act--the type of attack which we are now witnessing. Only the broad unity of our people will be able to offer the kind of resistance capable of blunting the current offensive; and only the broad unity of all oppressed and exploited peoples in the U.S. will be capable of turning our current retreat into a counter-offensive. A broad, genuine united front of all Afro-Americans is not only a good idea, brothers and sisters-- it is a necessity!



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The cause of Black unity and independent Black political action go together quite naturally. What we mean by independent political action includes the recognition among activist forces in the Black Liberation Movement that they must sit down and talk with other trends and tendencies within our movement. This is a preliminary sign of independence in that it recognizes that as a people we have our own specific concerns which we believe must be addressed by society as well as by other activists. Independent political action also means the movement in the direction of a breaking of bonds with the established capitalist parties. In other words, the dependence which our people have had on the Democratic Party must be brought to an end. We must point out to our people that Democratic Party liberalism is collapsing. The tenuous alliance called the "New Deal Coalition" is on the rocks. Most importantly, however, Democratic Party liberalism never truly worked for us. In preparing my remarks I reviewed Malcolm X's December 1964 "Address in Harlem with Mrs. Fannie Lou Hammer." Mrs. Hammer was on tour promoting the cause of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and attempting to win support for a blocking of the seating of Mississippi's five segregationist representatives. You may remember or have heard that Black Mississippi activists, many of who believed in the Democratic Party, developed the Freedom Democratic Party to represent the people of Mississippi at the Democratic National Convention (a counter to the official, pro-segregation Democrats). Although their cause was just--and this point is illustrated quite well by Malcolm--in the end the Democratic Party leadership refused to seat the Freedom Democratic Party delegation.

More recently, in the flurry to fight Reaganomics--a just fight I must add--many people forget that the cuts in social service programs and aid did not begin when Ronny rode into the White House. The drift to the Right could be seen coming much earlier. And today, when you hear many liberals talking about the "new realism," WATCH OUT! The essence of this is a call for accommodation to Reaganomics and a demand that "you'all are going to have to curb your demands." Depending on the Democratic Party will make it extremely difficult to fight the current offensive against the masses' standard of living and democratic rights.

We are not calling for some sort of new political purism. There are and will remain many activist sisters and brothers working in the Democratic Party, and we should work with them. There will also be situations such as the Al Green campaign for mayor of Houston, Texas where a very progressive Black was running within the Democratic primary. It was important and correct for folks to be working within his campaign. At the same time we as progressive Black activists must begin moving our people in the direction of independent politics. This does not mean isolated or sectarian politics. We will need allies among other sectors of the population. There are progressive forces active out there attempting to chart a new path and we should certainly work with them. But when we say independent, we mean independent of the "machines" and the old-line politics of the Democratic Party. We mean that Black activists must create opportunities to work together and struggle out some of the key points of program. Eventually, when the idea has matured and makes sense in the real world, that is among the masses, independent political action will take on more of an organizational form and a trend of thought.

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Tendencies in the direction of independent Black political action have been developing for some time. In one sense, the Afro-American movement has seen efforts in this direction since the moment we were brought to these shores. But more recently, there have been efforts such as the Black Power Conferences, the Atlanta 1970 founding of the Congress of African Peoples, some of the better work of the Black Panther Party, the Black United Fronts of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the 1972 Gary, Indiana Black Political Convention which resulted in the formation of the National Black Political Assembly. Each of these efforts showed a striving for an independent Black political role. During the mid-1970s, many of these efforts ebbed, but by the late 1970s, in large part sparked by the exemplary work of the New York Black United Front and the United League of Mississippi, Black United Front movements began to surface in many large and medium-sized cities. As the articles we distributed showed ("A Brief Summation of Electoral Action and the Philadelphia Black United Front," by Bill Epton and "Notes on Building a Black United Front," by Saladin Muhammad), in the Philadelphia BUF a conscious effort was made to enter the electoral arena. This work was also done in New York; Cairo, Illinois; Portland, Oregon; and Houston. One of the most important features of this work was the attempt to develop an independent, progressive platform, as well as create broad alliances with other like-minded progressive peoples. Much of this work culminated in the June 1980 founding of the National Black United Front. Another sector of the Black Liberation Movement, folks working around the National Black Political Assembly, were also carrying out efforts toward independent politics. This effort culminated in the November 1980 founding of the National Black Independent Political Party. While both of these efforts are important in their own right, they each represent the strengths and weaknesses of the left-progressive section of the Black Liberation Movement. Each effort has mobilized hundreds of activists from across the United States. At the same time, there is no clear political reason why both efforts are not working more closely together. And one definite weakness of both efforts has been the lack of a programmatic thrust to give internal cohesion and overall direction to these motions.

As an organization, we--the PUL--believe very strongly in the necessity to support these efforts. They are efforts which are beginning to crystalize independent Black political action and third-party politics as well. At the same time, we have a responsibility--and here I mean all progressive activists in the Black Liberation Movement--to push for a greater working unity between the two formations and hopefully an eventual organizational unification. There will be no blue-print for how to bring about such unity. It may involve agitating within the NBUF and the NBIPP for greater unity. It may involve affiliating local Black mass organizations with both groupings (simultaneously) as a sign that--at least at this point--we will not be forced to choose between the two formations. These are the types of issues and options which we hope to address in the discussion period.

Experience in the Black United Front here has pointed out a number of things relevant to this discussion, points which many of us have probably already considered. The real type of united front for which Malcolm agitated, cannot be proclaimed into existence. An individual cannot just start referring to a community coalition as the Black United Front. We believe that while it is incumbent upon all of us to support the work of the NBUF and NBIPP, we also

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think that broad united fronts will be localized and--at this time--short-lived. We had hoped to see the NBUF broaden to include more center-type folks, but for a variety of reasons this is not possible at this time. Yet real, material Black unity can be built between so-called "moderate" Black organizations and more left-wing groups in the struggle against our oppressor (struggles around specific issues, electoral campaigns). Black communists, left-wing Black nationalists and other progressive Black activists cannot proclaim THE FRONT and demand that people join us. We must find ways of working with each other, as well as with the more conservative forces within our movement.

This basic point is true about independent political action as well. It would be foolhardy to refuse to work with someone or some groups because they are in or tied to the Democratic Party. Independent political action is an orientation to which we must win other forces in our community--win through principled struggle. Where independent political action can take a practical form such as the Blackwell campaign in Philly or anti-Koch initiatives in New York City (including the Barbaro campaign), this is excellent and it is something we should build on. This orientation also includes the necessity to ally with other oppressed peoples in the United States while not compromising our integrity; while never forgetting our own agenda.

Independent Black political action is a transition step. This does not mean that it is an unprincipled maneuver. It means that we--as communists--believe that the fundamental ills of this society will not be cured without the radical transformation of all that exists today; in other words, without socialist revolution. We do not believe that capitalism can solve its basic problems; we do not believe that Black people and other oppressed nationalities will be free until and unless this evil, parasitic system is brought to an end. Nor will the exploitation of all workers end without terminating capitalism.

Such a transformation will only happen if the masses of people want it to happen and if they believe that it can happen. The rampant cynicism in our communities, the psychological depression (let alone the economic depression), and the loss of hope have to be overcome in order that progress is made. These attitudes or views cannot be corrected or changed by shouting about socialism. And they certainly will not change by attempting to restore hope in this declining system. At this point people have to see, once again, that they can do things; that they can move mountains, force out Presidents, curb or blunt the cuts--that they can and should change their own environment. An emphasis on independent Black political action is one step in this process.

As communists we also recognize the importance of independent Black political action because we recognize the potential contained within the Black Liberation movement. The Black Liberation Movement, without question, has been the leading mass movement in U.S. history. When it moves, the vibrations are felt throughout the whole of society. As a people we are a tremendous destabilizing force to this system. We are so destabilizing because our oppression is the mortar which holds this monster together. I encourage everyone to read Lerone Bennett's The Shaping of Black America or Dubois' Black Reconstruction to see what I mean from a historical viewpoint. Keeping

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us down keeps this society together. So, when our people move it not only creates vibrations, but a tremendous fear rises within the ruling circles. Independent Black political action means a self-conscious Afro-American movement. It means an Afro-American movement which can be won to recognize that its hopes lie not with capitalism, but with revolution; not with national oppression, but with national self-determination; not with being patronized, but with principled alliances.

I'd like to close by saying this: practically and theoretically we must win the masses of Afro-Americans to Black unity and independent Black political action. We must instill among our people a sense of hope and revolutionary optimism: the kind of optimism which says, not only can we win but we must win. When someone asks us what does independent Black political action mean, we should all answer with five beautiful words--

WE ARE OUR OWN LIBERATORS!

Thank you.

Using Louise: What The Directors Did In REDS

When the directors of REDS decided to make Louise Bryant and the love story between Louise and John Reed such an important part of the movie, they opened up both rich opportunities and a difficult challenge. They took on the responsibility of grappling with the messy question of how comrades and lovers relate to each other in a society where there is tremendous pressure to limit women and make them subservient to men. And they committed themselves to exploring this question through the story of two complex historical figures. How they fell short in this task and how it weakens the movie overall is the subject of this review. Since it is through the character of Louise that I became aware of the problem, this is where I will start.

It was funny. While John Reed came across in the movie as a Romantic hero, larger than life, much more glamorous than the revolutionaries "I have known," there was something about Louise Bryant that made me think I'd met her before; she seemed to be Ms. Everywoman straight out of the liberated 1970s. Here was a woman stultified by the expectations of a conventional marriage and bourgeois respectability. Here she was yearning to break out into the big world but preoccupied with "who she was going to be," and fearful of whether she had it in her to be anything. Here she is attracted to a vision of a new revolutionary society based on equality and the social drama of the people struggling to make it a reality. Here she is torn between her love for a man and her fear of losing herself again in her relationship with him. We see her always on the outskirts of things--the silent one in the midst of the heated political debate of smoke-filled rooms, waiting at her sewing machine and in the hallways of massive buildings for her husband's political work to be done, listening from the kitchen as she makes the coffee, witnessing the contradiction between the minor personal atrocities and the larger political causes for which (supposedly) they are being committed. These are stories straight out of women's consciousness-raising groups.

While there is nothing wrong with borrowing some of the themes of modern sexual politics for the relationship between Bryant and Reed, the mechanical way they dealt with it did make me begin wondering how seriously the movie

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makers were thinking about the issues. The really corny scene of Louise's birthday dinner made me suspect they were not taking it very seriously at all. Remember John Reed, at his most cute and boyish, in the kitchen making a total botch of cooking? Remember Louise Bryant, the loving wife, gagging over the charred ruins and smiling tolerantly at his efforts? Perhaps a decade ago such a scene would have told us something, although I doubt it even then. Today, it is pure sit-com material. For as this scene hardens into cliché, the message is that we women will be stuck forever in the moment where men try and fail to do their part in the kitchen. We will forever celebrate Mother's Day and our birthdays tolerantly gagging on their burnt offerings and shoo them out of the kitchen the following day to scrub the charred pans and do what we do best and what they, in spite of themselves poor dears, will never be able to do--housework. Such a scene in a movie with the pretensions of REDS certainly cheapens it.

Still, if REDS had confined itself to using the character of Louise and her relations with John as an opportunity to repeat some of the most familiar insights of the early women's movement, it might have dulled the movie, but it wouldn't have seriously harmed it. The problem is--it did more than that. I hope I am not being too harsh if I say it seems to me that what the movie did was to use themes from the women's movement to soothe us into accepting what is really unacceptable--in a word, conning us. Behind the fashionably modern rhetoric, the sexual politics of the movie are anything but progressive. Looking closely at the character of Louise Bryant, I found there are three main messages we get about women in society and in revolutionary politics.

MESSAGE NUMBER ONE: Women (even feminist women) express themselves and influence others mainly through their sex. In the first scenes in which we meet Louise, we watch her efforts to break with bourgeois convention not through her work or her politics but by posing nude for a photographer and then by propositioning John Reed to make love on a church lawn. The whole time Louise is interviewing Reed about politics and showing him her work, he doesn't take it seriously at all; her body is far more interesting. Later, she expressed her dissatisfaction with Reed by sleeping with Eugene O'Neill while Reed is off on a political mission; on the way to the Russian revolution, Louise flounces on the train and announces the classic female put down--I will not sleep with you. Her sex is her power.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not a prude. I can appreciate how a little sex can spice up a movie. But I don't see why the directors couldn't have stuck closer to the truth, for there is a true story to refer to. In "real life," Louise Bryant was already strongly committed to socialist politics and the magazine THE MASSES before she got involved with Reed. In real life, John Reed was as much if not more of a sexual libertine than Louise Bryant. There are many accounts of his affair with the socialite Mabel Dodge and incidents like the one in which Louise returned home to find Reed chasing a naked woman around the house. In short, in real life, Reed was neither so defined by the political class struggle outside the bedroom, nor Louise so preoccupied with what went on inside it as the movie would have it. Why, is all I want to know, couldn't the directors have gotten in the sex in a more even-handed way?

MESSAGE NUMBER TWO: Women are not too talented and are likely to make

fools of themselves if they launch out on their own in the world of politics and art. As the movie progresses we get the idea that Reed was right not to take Louise seriously as a writer or a political person. For, in the larger world of politics and art, she is something of a dud. She writes bland, trite articles that he gently tries to improve; she acts atrociously on stage; she gets fired from her job as journalist. Sandwiched between the great dramatist Eugene O'Neill and the impassioned revolutionary, John Reed, Louise Bryant comes across tepid, uninspired, and slightly pathetic. Only under John Reed's patient tutelage is she finally able to grasp some of the actual drama of the Russian Revolution.

Again, I am not looking for some larger-than-life image of crude socialist realism: the thoroughly staunch and strong woman revolutionary. But, the fact is, the movie deviates from the truth in the direction of making Reed more talented and Bryant more incompetent and flakey than either of them were in real life. In real life, Louise was never fired as a journalist. In real life, John Reed also wrote reams of maudlin verse and participated in less than heroic theatrical ventures himself. In real life, one has to wonder if the painfully bad scene we see Louise acting in wasn't at least as much a reflection on the author, Eugene O'Neill, as on the actress Louise Bryant.

Of course, one could argue that Emma Goldman is there to counter this image of the flakey woman. But as depicted in the movie (quite in contradiction with real life), Goldman is a woman stripped to a kind of ascetic, stern, and almost neutered politics. She becomes the exception that proves the rule: the woman who repudiates her sexuality to play hardball with the guys.

MESSAGE NUMBER THREE: Finally (and this is really the consequences of Message One and Message Two) we leave the movie with the lesson that a woman's most profound political contribution and the ticket to finding herself is cleaving to her (revolutionary) man. Louise's real moment of glory is when she desperately follows Reed over the steppes of Finland to his death bed. Emma Goldman's line, when Louise finally arrives in Russia sums it up: "I didn't think you had it in you." To this Louise replies: "Neither did I." But what, exactly, are they talking about? One can only assume that Louise has finally won her revolutionary credentials by following her man with such fanatical loyalty and determination. A moving end to the movie, but again not exactly truthful: Louise did not, it seems, ski across the Finnish steppes and more important, in terms of Louise's life, not at all the true end. For Louise did not find herself through her love for Reed. As one of the commentators (part of the chorus of observers) tells us, Louise Bryant actually died a wino under a bridge in Paris. Now this isn't a movie about Louise, but given that up until now she has played such an important role, it does seem a little unfair to let this information get sprung on us in an aside and not deal with it at all in the narrative. It just adds to my suspicion that the directors were not so interested in Louise, that Louise was being used.

But for what, you have a perfect right to ask, was Louise Bryant being used? I have two answers.

First of all, she was being used to "humanize" the plot. As I said at the

beginning, the directors wanted to portray John Reed as a Romantic hero with a capital R, someone larger than life, better than the rest of us. But for box office sales if for nothing else, it would help if there was also the promise of human emotion, personal interactions, foibles and flaws, something recognizable and accessible to us average moviegoers. And so the directors spliced the modern, middle-class American love story complete with themes from the sexual revolution onto the story of John Reed. They do this without diminishing the larger-than-life Romantic persona of Reed by making Louise the one who has personal doubts and needs, and failures and love affairs. Louise carries the brunt of the "humanizing" of REDS. And, in my estimation, by using Louise this way, the movie ends up weakening the story it tells. It makes Reed somewhat unbelievable as a character and it weakens Bryant to the point where we see her mainly as Reed's foil, where we are willing to have her story subsumed into Reed's.

A second, and perhaps more deeply political reason why the directors used Bryant, I believe, was to launder the politics, to mystify the politics. By mystifying the politics I mean that politics are made less accessible to the average viewer. It becomes essentially jargon. It plays the same role actually that medicine plays in Doctor Kildare. We hear the hero talking; we watch him wave his arms and shout. He obviously knows what he is talking about and cares about it passionately. This knowledge and this caring increases his stature in our eyes. He is a very serious, passionate person. He is involved in very important business. But the very reason we are impressed is that he is talking in such highly specialized language, impenetrable to the layman's ear. In this way, Dr. Kildare consults with a colleague. In this way John Reed debates with the representatives of the Socialist Party or the members of the Comintern. The script writers made the struggles accurate to an informed ear. But to an uninformed ear, they are unintelligible.

How does Louise play a role in making this possible? She, like us, is essentially an outside observer. She must be an outsider to give us our emotional cues. Sometimes, like Louise, we are angry at Reed for his one-track determination (as when we watch him lambast the poor comrade for missing a connection while his wife lies sick). Sometimes we simply feel a little left out like the child while the grown-ups talk politics. And at the crescendo--when Reed stands up to speak to the crowd on the eve of the 1917 revolution we witness John Reed through Louise's eyes, misted with adoration, as we would witness the surgeon performing open-heart surgery through the awed eyes of his nurse or as we would watch the football player on the final dash through the ecstatic eyes of a cheerleader. Louise's typecast role as a woman side-kick allows the directors to distance us from the politics, to give the politics itself a somewhat formulaic role in the movie. It makes the politics palatable, something not understood but not needed to be understood by the average viewer.

Of course, there are reasons for doing this. Attempting to make a movie with such a highly charged political theme was something of a risk. And Beatty was obviously determined not to sacrifice too much of its box office success. The positive result will be that most viewers will have a generally favorable view of leftwing politics, for in a country where the media image of the communist is about as attractive as a people pod in INVASION OF THE BODY

SNATCHERS, a glamorous movie star depicting a communist as a true American hero is certainly a step up. But on the other hand, people will come out of the movie without much of an understanding of what John Reed and Louise Bryant's politics were based on. Capitalism and imperialism, the working class, the bourgeoisie; these concepts will be as mystified as ever, words in the mouths of characters.

I would like to close by referring to another recent political movie, MISSING, a movie that contrasts favorably, in my opinion, with REDS. Here the politics is not mystified, even though it also develops through the developing love and comradeship between a man and woman--(the cross-generation, non-sexual love and uneasy comradeship of the wife and father of a murdered man). The movement of the story is really the political education of the father, and in contrast to Louise's role in REDS, the leading female character's role in MISSING's role is to unfold the political dynamics at work for the leading man and the audience. The audience, like the father, leaves the movie with a political education.

Near the end of the movie, there is an exchange between the father and his daughter-in-law that really parallels the exchange between Louise and Emma Goldman near the end of REDS. The father tells the girl that in effect he was wrong about her, that he has never met someone with as much courage as her. And, unlike in REDS, I found myself wholeheartedly agreeing. What the director has done is to present us originally with a young woman that is easily typed as a feckless, ineffectual innocent. Then through the course of the movie he breaks this stereotype, making us realize that this young, waiflike girl has the doggedness, the political savvy, and the courage to assist in and often lead an older, much more conventionally competent man to unweave the political mystery of her husband and his son's death. This story, as it challenges stereotypes, also leads us to demystify--not mystify--the political forces at work in the movie. In MISSING, politics is no mere backdrop; it is the life-blood of the movie. In this way, refusing to use a stereotyped female lead assisted the director in making a more successful political movie than REDS.

--Nadine M.
April, 1982

All In The Family

(Note: the following is excerpted from the new ULP pamphlet, Lesbian and Gay Exclusion: The Policy that Dares Not Speak Its Name, by Lorna Niles and Ruth Dubrovsky, Spring 1982)

Family life is a deeply felt issue. Families provide a place to go home to, people to care for you, a place to rest. They provide sustenance and support against the ravages of capitalism. In a society that preaches injustice and practices inhumanity, the family can provide a place to teach our children the values and attitudes we want them to learn. But despite some people's desperate hopes and the illusions foisted on them by TV shows and magazines, families cannot provide a haven of total escape. Some social conflicts and injustices attack the family from the outside, some erode it from within.

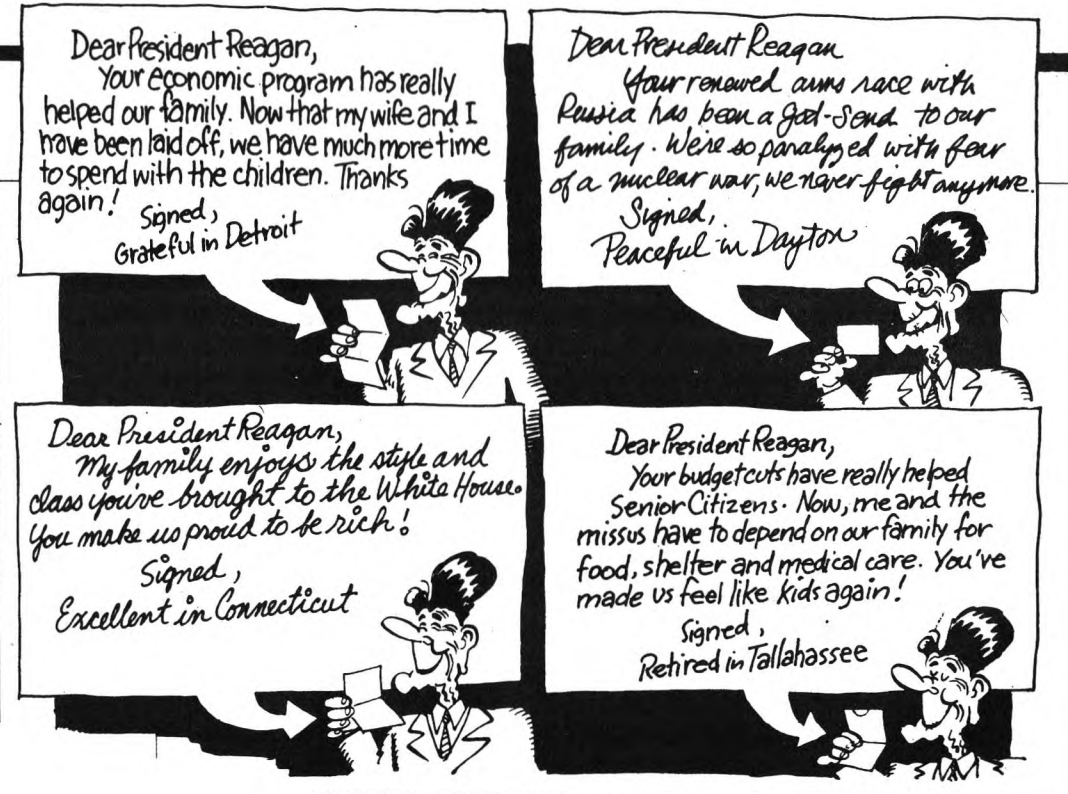
The deepening economic crisis places enormous burdens on families. For most it is increasingly difficult to make ends meet even if both parents can find work. For those who cannot find jobs in a shrinking labor market, unemployment benefits and welfare do not cover family expenses. Food on the table, heat in the winter, a roof over your head--these necessities cannot be taken for granted. Cutbacks in public services will close public hospitals and clinics in many communities making decent health care a luxury most people can't afford. The public education system no longer teaches children to read and even those who can read often find the libraries closed. Day care centers will be closed. Services for the elderly including social security benefits they worked all their lives for will be cut. For the very young and the very old, the dream of a secure, healthy existence is a reality only for the rich.

But the family is not just under outside attack, it has also changed from within. Some of these changes are positive--the result of women's struggles for equality and liberation. These include women's access to greater opportunities in employment and education, their gains in the struggle to receive equal pay for equal work, their greater access to birth control information and abortion, their growing determination to fight for equality

with men in all spheres of marriage and other relationships, and their increased capacity and willingness to be independent if need be. But capitalist society cannot allow women equality. Male abuse and neglect of women and children continues under capitalism and is intensified by the economic crisis. Under these pressures, it is difficult for families to stay healthy and survive. Statistics on the battery of women, child abuse, and divorce are frightening. People are in trouble and they know it.

In this complex political and social situation, the New Right has done some aggressive and effective organizing. They have claimed the mantle of a "Pro-Life" movement, set themselves up as crusaders who will "Save Our Children" and announced their intention to "protect" the American family. How will they do these things? Their policies reveal that they want to save and protect only a particular kind of family: a white, male-headed, middle-class family in which the wife is subservient to the male breadwinner, and the children are subservient to their parents. The New Right's social program explicitly attacks the rights of women. They work to defeat the ERA. They want to end affirmative action programs that have allowed women greater economic independence. They want to stop sex education in the schools and close birth control clinics. They want books like OUR BODIES, OURSELVES off the shelves of libraries. If teenagers have sex, they want them to "pay" with pregnancy and forced early marriages. They seek a constitutional amendment limiting the right of a woman to choose to terminate an unwanted pregnancy even if her pregnancy originated from rape, incest or will risk her life.

Bob Englehart
The Hartford Courant
Los Angeles Times Syndicate



That the New Right has effectively blocked the drive to pass the ERA and now mounts a credible threat to abortion rights testifies to more than the strength of male supremacy or the profound challenge to the existing order raised by the women's movement. It also testifies to the disorganization of the Left and of progressive politics generally. The Left has elements of a program for women and the family, and that program has a potentially mass appeal. Every poll shows that a majority of the country supports the ERA and a woman's right to choose whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. The New Right campaign against sex education and premarital sex meets indifference and derision among the young. But in the area of gay and lesbian rights, the New Right has both the organizational and financial advantages it has elsewhere and the advantage of a clearly articulated stand on the issue.

New Right organizations such as the Conservative Caucus (TCC), the Committee for Survival of a Free Congress (CSFC), the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority have made gay rights a focal point of their program of domestic social issues. In the last five years, the campaign of the New Right to smash the gay and lesbian rights movement has grown in visibility and organizing clout. New Right groups have launched well-funded campaigns to repeal anti-gay initiatives in Eugene, Oregon; St. Paul, Minnesota; Wichita, Kansas; Dallas, Texas and most notably, Dade County, Florida. In the 1980 senatorial and congressional elections, they viciously attacked liberal candidates like George McGovern in South Dakota and John Culver of Iowa, featuring their real and alleged stands on gay rights as well as other issues. They have developed a hit-list of TV shows and entertainers which they argue portray homosexuals too positively and they are organizing to pressure producers to take these programs off the air.

While supporting New Right legal initiatives to repeal gay rights ordinances and pressure tactics to prevent any discussion of homosexuality, extreme right and fascist groups use them to advocate more extreme remedies. Blaming the fall in the white birth rate and the erosion of white male supremacy on the spread of homosexuality among whites, the Imperial Wizard of the KKK labelled homosexuality part of the "vast conspiracy of communism." The Texas KKK issued a statement that: "the KKK is not embarrassed to admit that we endorse and seek the execution of all homosexuals."

Because of their status in U.S. society, lesbians and gay men have nothing to lose and everything to gain from fighting the New Right offensive. In the U.S. today the basic democratic rights of gay men and lesbians are protected neither by state or federal law nor by custom. Men and women can still lose their jobs because they are homosexuals. They can be denied an apartment or evicted from one because of their sexual preference. They can be refused a mortgage, credit or insurance. They can be thrown out of a motel or restaurant simply because the owner doesn't like homosexuals. In 36 states, they are legally subject to arrest for having sexual relations in the privacy of their own homes. They can be denied custody of their children on the grounds that lesbians and gay men are unfit parents. They are subject to physical attacks merely because they inflame a sexist sense of sexual propriety. In recent years such attacks on Richard Hillsboro, Harvey Milk, and

others have ended in the victim's death. Significantly, the murderers of homosexuals (like the murderers of Blacks and other oppressed nationalities) often escape prosecution, and if brought to trial receive light sentences. Despite these injustices (and in accordance with capitalist tradition) homosexuals, like Blacks, other oppressed nationalities, and women, are often blamed for both the ill treatment meted out to them and other problems in our society. Right-wing politicians rant about "commies and faggots." Right-wing fundamentalist preachers and TV personalities rail against the sinfulness of gays, and a segment of the psychiatric profession pronounces them sick. For a diversity of reasons, many people in the U.S. have strong prejudices against men and women who are homosexual.

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In the late 1970s, a section of the communist left found itself unable to challenge the New Right idea that homosexuality threatens the family in part because they shared many of the New Right's premises. In "No More Gay Resolutions" Marcia Tremmel wrote this about homosexuality: "...whether by word or deed it is an attack upon the family, children and the reproductive process;" "another way in which 'gay' ideology divides the working class is its attack on the family;" and "there should be no encouragement of an idea or practice whose logical extension contradicts the reproduction of human beings." Drop the words "working class" and "ideology" and these statements might as well have come from New Right spokespeople. Anita Bryant called gay rights legislation an "attempt to legitimize a lifestyle that is both perverse and dangerous to the sanctity of the family" and stated that she'd rather see her own children dead than gay. Bruce Nestare, a pro-Proposition Six Republican assemblyman in California, argued that "Either the family means something or it doesn't. The family means--at the bottom line--procreation. It would be the termination of civilization if everyone went that direction [gay]."

Whatever its source, the idea that homosexuality threatens the existence of the family proceeds from a single indisputable biological fact--that sexual relations between two men or two women cannot produce children. We fail to see why the existence of homosexuality threatens the existence of the family. It hasn't in the past; written records prove that families (in many forms) and homosexuality have co-existed for thousands and thousands of years. Nothing suggests it will in the future--unless heterosexuality is so compellingly unattractive that if homosexuality is not suppressed all men and women will choose to live in exclusively homosexual unions and the human race will die out. Statistics from European countries indicate that the elimination of criminal penalties against homosexuality does not effect the birth rate. The vast majority of people are largely heterosexual by inclination and there is no reason to think they won't remain so. The suppression of homosexuality is hardly necessary to ensure this.

The argument is not simply factually wrong, but also based on some wrong premises. The equation of sexuality and reproduction is a reactionary concept, one that makes as explicit as any other the link between anti-gay arguments and a belittling of women's oppression. Thankfully most sex (including heterosexual intercourse) is not for the purpose of reproduction (otherwise, there would not be much sex). Sexual drive and interest in humans differs from

other mammals in that sex is possible, desirable, and pleasurable even when conception is biologically impossible. One of the greatest advances contributing to women's liberation came with the development, spread and legalization of birth control methods, and with the deepening discussion of female sexuality. These advances helped women to choose when and if to have children (and therefore to play a greater role in production and social movements) and to have equal opportunity with men to enjoy sex fully without fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Equating sexuality with reproduction has nothing to do with a democratic or a socialist morality. Such views look backwards to the musty ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, who preached in the Middle Ages that all sex acts not resulting in procreation were "unnatural," and practiced celibacy.

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Despite some people's fears, guaranteeing basic democratic rights to gay people, ending discrimination against them and allowing more open discussion of homosexuality cannot "spread" homosexuality. Conversely, repression cannot eliminate homosexuality. History shows that whether tolerated or repressed homosexuality continues to exist. Socialism can remove the causes of prostitution and pornography and allow for what Engels predicted: relationships based only on "mutual attraction." Socialism can end the ways that capital deforms sexual relationships, and allow for sexual relations free of coercion and free of shame. But socialism cannot "cure" homosexuality, and socialists should not want to try.