

Motion Forward Motion Forward Motion



The Philippine Revolution and the Left

Interview with E. San Juan, Jr.

The Prospects for Democracy in the Philippines

The Philippine Revolution and the Left 4*Interview with E. San Juan, Jr.***The Prospects for Democracy in the Phillipines 12***Charles Sarkis***The Black Family:****Wake Up and Smell the Coffee 27***Candice S. Cason***Lift Every Voice 32***V. Morris***Boston School Bus Drivers Stand Firm 34***An Interview***Six Months of Struggle in Mexico:****A Balance Sheet 45***Francisco Miguel Mantilla***The New Campus Right Wing:****William F. Buckley in Iowa 53***Joe Iosbaker***Review: Another Look at The Color Purple 56***Lucy Marx***Dear friends,**

United States foreign policy is in its most tumultuous phase since Reagan took office. Most dramatically, the U.S. played a major role in removing long-time brutal dictator and U.S. ally Ferdinand Marcos from power in the Philippines. Almost simultaneously, it helped ease out Haiti's Duvalier. And there has been talk of a possible shift in policy against Chile's Pinochet as well. On the other hand, the Nicaragua Contra aid issue is alive once again, as is aid to Jonas Savimbi's UNITA group in Angola. Despite growing pressure, the administration has made only the most begrudging feints against South African apartheid. And later this spring, Reagan, with his SDI ("Star Wars") cold war strategy, will have to respond to Gorbachev's fairly sweeping disarmament proposals.

You might say that Reagan's foreign policy in the second term is beginning to resemble the confusion of Jimmy Carter's policies. Or rather, what appeared on the surface to be his personal confusion. From Carter's human rights agenda and Panama Canal

Treaty to his own stepped-up counter-insurgency in Central America and Rapid Deployment Force for the Middle East, Carter was seeking a more flexible and more effective defense of U.S. global interests. But consensus among the U.S. elite on balancing the Third World against the Soviet Union was hard to come by, leading to one media-driven policy disaster after another.

The phrase "media-driven" refers to the fact that the Reagan administration has endured as bad or worse indignities and disasters abroad--bombings, kidnappings, international isolation in the U.N., the World Court and other bodies--with much less consequence. In part, Reagan started out with stronger personal and more ideological support as he thrashed around pretty ineffectively for his first few years. But as he has moved to assert a more unified and effective ruling class foreign policy, he has edged into a more complicated pattern and has come up against some of the same contradictions Carter faced.

During recent events in the Philippines, the Reagan administration displayed a dramatic and uncharacteristic flexibility. In our February issue, we commented on the possibility that U.S. strategy could seek "a military coup by U.S.-allied officers to remove him" (see editors' note to "New Right Propaganda Offensive Against Filipino Revolutionaries"). In this issue, we continue our examination of recent events in the Philippines. Both the interview with Filipino activist E. San Juan, Jr. and Charles Sarkis' article assess the costs of the Filipino Left's misestimation of that country's ruling class' divisions and U.S. intentions toward them.

Here at home the U.S. Left remains in an extremely weak position to influence U.S. foreign policy. As FM goes to press, the continuing efforts of Reagan to provide military aid to the "contras" in Nicaragua highlights this painfully well. The Right remains well-organized and well-positioned to affect policy under Reagan. Despite numerous polls showing majority sentiment in the U.S. against more U.S. aid or involvement against the Nicaraguan government, Congress appears sure to up the military ante in some form or another this year. Open red-baiting of Democratic liberals and moderates has been part of the campaign. Looked at alongside the rest of the pattern of foreign policy moves, however, it has less to do with the old-style McCarthyite extremism it has been compared to than with the resurgence of that even older tradition of the U.S. Imperial Prerogative--what has come to be known as "Ramboism". If the Left is going to become more effective against this trend, we need to understand it better. And then we have to figure out ways to lay bare the anti-democratic spirit behind it.

This issue of FM also takes a look at recent political developments in Mexico and the role of the Left there. Turning our attention to the home front, Candice Cason examines the recent renewed debate over conditions in and affecting the Black family in the United States. We also look at a student confrontation with noted right-winger

William F. Buckley, the post-invasion Grenada, and further discussion of the recent movie, *The Color Purple*. Finally, we present an in-depth interview with three leaders of Boston's school bus drivers' union, fresh from a long and difficult but ultimately successful defense of their contract and their union in the past year. ■

Cover: President Corazon Aquino meets with two of the Communist leaders who were freed from prison by her Government. Jose Mario Sison, right, founded the Communist Part of the Philippines; Bernabe Buscayno is said to have been leader of the New People's Army. Illustration by Miok

Forward Motion is a magazine of socialist opinion and advocacy. We say socialist opinion because each FM presents analyses of important organizing work and reviews of political and cultural trends. We say socialist advocacy because FM is dedicated to a new left-wing presence in U.S. politics, and to making Marxism an essential component of that presence. We share these purposes with other journals, but we seek for FM a practical vantage point from within the unions, the Black and other freedom struggles, the women's movement, the student, anti-war, and gay liberation movements, and other struggles. We also emphasize building working people's unity as a political force for social change, particularly through challenging the historical pattern of white supremacy and national oppression in the capitalist domination of this country.

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Interview with E. San Juan, Jr.

The Philippine Revolution and the Left

The following interview was conducted in the wake of Ferdinand Marcos' fraudulent election, the mass campaign against him which followed, and his subsequent flight from the Philippines. E. San Juan, Jr., is a leading Filipino activist in the United States, member of Friends of the Filipino People, and author of Crisis in the Philippines: The Making of a Revolution, published this year by Bergin & Garvey. Tom Goodkind conducted the interview for Forward Motion.

FM: Could you give a general description for our readers of the major forces on the Left in the Philippines today?

San Juan: There are two aspects of the Left in the Philippines. One is the underground movement which consists of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army, both of which are members of the National Democratic Front. The other is the legal movement of sectoral organizations which operate mainly in the urban areas—in Manila. BAYAN—the New People's Alliance—is the largest and probably the most significant coalition of legal groups. It acts like an umbrella group for all the sectoral organizations of women, the church, workers, peasants, students, and other groups which are legal.

FM: Is that pretty much it?

San Juan: Yes. There are other groups which have not been incorporated into BAYAN. There are the Moro or Muslim organizations mainly led by the Moro National Liberation Front based mostly in Mindanao in the South. There are approximately six million Muslims in the Philippines. And there are the Igorot mountain people in the North. Those two groups as far as I know have not been fully incorporated into the coalition.

FM: That's interesting. Perhaps later we can hear about what relation these two national minorities have had to recent events.

San Juan: Probably some will argue with me that these national minorities are represented by certain individuals in the coalition. But as far as I know these organizations have not been formally incorporated into the coalition.

FM: Recognizing that there are many differences within the Left, what did the Left—in particular, the Communist Party—do during the short pre-election period and the election itself?

San Juan: The official position of the Party was to boycott the election. It considered the election an imperialist tactic to save Marcos, split the Left, broaden the base of the regime and win over the disaffected elite opposition in order to maintain U.S. hegemony. That position influenced the sectoral organizations which also adopted more or less the same position.

FM: Did BAYAN adopt that position?

San Juan: Yes. They were for total boycott. Now there were independent Left personalities—in particular Jose Maria Sison—the founder of the party, who disagreed with the total boycott position.

FM: Did he make that public?

San Juan: Yes. He gave an interview in December in which he criticized what I would say was the abstentionist position of the boycott. But his criticism was not heeded. So as far as I know the Left consistently took the total boycott position up until the end.

FM: So there weren't significant sections of the Left which rejected that position?

San Juan: Well, as I wrote in the *Guardian*, the leading personalities of BAYAN resigned from the coalition in order to support Cory Aquino in the campaign. So there were significant numbers of individuals—nationalists and democrats—in the sectoral organizations who took exception to the boycott position and worked with Cory Aquino.

FM: Do you think the Communist Party expected the U.S. to jettison Marcos in the way it did? Or do you think that was a surprise to them?

San Juan: No. I think there was a suspicion—and, in fact, a kind of considered analysis—that the U.S. was trying to persuade Marcos to give way to another fraction of the elite. And, in fact, it was quite well known by the Left that since 1985—and in fact even earlier than that—the U.S. government was trying to find an alternative or a substitute for Marcos. Of course, when some kind of move towards the elections was being considered, it was Salvador Laurel who was the most—shall we say visible—candidate for the position. Cory Aquino, before the November announcement of the snap election had not yet made a decision to run for president. So the Left in a sense knew that the Reagan administration had plans to replace Marcos. But the exact substitute or the exact manner in which this transition to another member of the elite would occur was not yet fully understood.

FM: It would have been difficult to predict.

San Juan: Yes. I think even in November it was difficult. Of course, as you know, until the end President Reagan sided with Marcos. Even after the fraud in the elections had already been publicized.

FM: But despite knowing or suspecting that the U.S. was going to try to push for some kind of change, the Left felt that the Philippine people had no stake in that change or in the struggle over that change? They just saw it pretty much as a struggle among different ruling class factions?

San Juan: Yes. I think that it was the main analysis that the election would be a game or some kind of contest as to which of the factions of the ruling classes would take

the helm or would replace Marcos. I think that analysis implied that there was no room for Left activity or that there was no meaning or sense for the Left to participate in the electoral process. I think the attitude of abstentionism and resigning oneself to the expected outcome of the election was the dominant policy of the Left.

FM: What did the Left do after the election in the time before Lt. General Fidel V. Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile made their move?

San Juan: Well as far as I can gather they were preparing for joining Mrs. Aquino's call for civil disobedience and nationwide strikes should she lose the election. I think this call for a nationwide strike occurred on February 16th. And I think the sectoral organizations were sympathetic to making an alliance with Aquino in carrying out these mass actions after Marcos' inauguration on February 25th. But the revolt of Enrile and Ramos occurred on the 21st.

FM: It pre-empted that.

San Juan: Yes. So that the whole situation changed completely. And in the four days—21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th—the mass action that they were anticipating had already happened in the occupation of Camp Crame—the military camp—and the thousands of people surrounding the camp to obstruct the Marcos attack.

FM: Did the Left participate in that action?

San Juan: Individuals participated but not any groups that were identified with the boycott.

FM: Because they opposed the act?

San Juan: I think one perception was, again, that this was part of the U.S. plan to replace Marcos with disgruntled members of his party. They thought this was just another tactic of the U.S. imperialists to replace Marcos.

FM: Did the fact that the Left was prepared to engage in united action with Aquino around civil disobedience and the general strike—did that represent any change of policy from the boycott position or was that seen as basically consistent with the boycott position?

San Juan: I think the Left felt that without their participation Cory Aquino would not be able to successfully launch her nationwide strike. They were positioning themselves to become visible in these mass actions. They did not feel that they should come out to support Enrile and Ramos because these two were closely identified with the Marcos regime. However when Cory Aquino called for people to support them, individuals came out to join the mass rallies and demonstrations around the military camp.

FM: Let me shift a little bit to the countryside. What were—if any—the effects of the Aquino victory in the countryside. I noticed in your *Guardian* article you referred to the "festival of the urban masses."

San Juan: Yes. That action really involved the city people. According to the reports so far in the media, nothing much has happened in the countryside. The New People's Army is still continuing some sporadic attacks on the military. Some cadres of the New People's Army stated that they will, for the moment, emphasize political consolidation of the ranks and also recruit more guerrillas. I think it is a holding position right now

in view of the fact that the Aquino government plans to offer a cease-fire to the New People's Army and the Communist Party.

FM: Do you think that might be accepted?

San Juan: There is no position announced yet but I believe that they will think about it and make their own counter-proposal.

FM: What do you think the Aquino government's ability is to carry out meaningful land reform in the countryside? Can you tell?

San Juan: I suppose that the liberal democrats in the Aquino cabinet and the nationalist advisors will draw up a program of land reform which will try to go beyond what Marcos did. However, the fact is that some of the forces supporting Aquino are also identified with landlord classes. There will indeed be conflict within the government over the implementation of such a land reform program. I feel that the program will, of course, be announced with great fanfare. But I believe it will be sabotaged and diluted when it comes to its actual implementation.

FM: Do you think it is likely to be accompanied by some kind of program of military pacification in the countryside or do you think the government will wait before trying that?

San Juan: Well definitely, if the cease-fire offer fails, the offensive against the New People's Army will intensify. It will probably consist of a military campaign to suppress the insurgency combined with peaceful or pacification measures: some reforms in the tenancy relations, reforms in the wages of rural workers and such things. Such reforms would diminish the suffering of the peasants in the countryside. But whether these pacification measures would succeed is, I think, another question.

FM: It appears that the boycott position of the Left was in error. Can you assess how much damage it did and what steps are necessary to repair the damage. Also, how likely is it that those steps will be taken? And is there any kind of recognition that this position might have been a mistake?

San Juan: I think the boycott position really stemmed from a miscalculation by the Left. I think the Left overestimated its strength in the city and also the level of mass consciousness. They felt that by calling for the boycott people would undertake other actions, none of which had been spelled out, which would provide an outlet for energies that were not released by the election. There is a tendency in the leadership to employ sectarian methods in dealing with the liberal democrats and other sympathetic allies in the united front. This tendency I think was dominant throughout the period of the election.

As far as I know, there has been no attempt to rectify this error. In fact some cadres of the sectoral organizations claim that their position has been vindicated by the events that we have witnessed in the last few weeks.

FM: On what basis vindicated?

San Juan: They feel that the Marcos forces are still present in the Aquino government and that the government will still be dominated basically by the elite as represented

by Enrile, Ramos, Laurel and other wealthy business people who are followers of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank scheme of development. I think some of these Left leaders see only one side of the Aquino government.

FM: What do you think the other side of the government is?

San Juan: I think we have seen this other side in President Aquino's fulfillment of her campaign pledge to release political prisoners. So far the liberal democrats in the government have been able to have their say against General Ramos and Prime Minister Enrile. The release of Jose Maria Sison (a veteran CPP leader) and Commander Buscayno (otherwise known as Commander Dante), the head of the New People's Army, as well as two other Communist Party activists, was vigorously opposed by Minister Enrile and General Ramos—and the United States government. But President Aquino and her advisors won this round. If you look at it dialectically, there are several aspects to the present regime. And which aspect becomes dominant is determined by the mass sentiment which surfaced in the last two or three months, and of course, the strength of the popular forces at present.

The Aquino government has declared itself a revolutionary government so it will be able to depose the Marcos-dominated National Assembly or Parliament and reorganize all the institutions in which the Marcos people are still strong. I think this is in preparation for implementing drastic reforms to overhaul the state apparatus, the bureaucracy, the military, the judiciary, and other extensions of the state. There is also going to be a constitutional convention in order to draft a new constitution that would replace the Marcos constitution. I think this move indicates that the progressive forces seem to be influential in the Aquino government.

FM: Do you think the constitutional convention, for example, is the type of activity in which the Left should be involved?

San Juan: Well, there is a precedent for this. The Left participated in the constitutional convention in 1971. In fact, the constitution that was then about to be placed before the people in a plebescite was opposed by Marcos. One of the reasons for the declaration of martial law in 1972 was precisely to check the nationalist constitution that was then being drafted. I think that this opportunity for the Left to participate in the constitutional convention—in the drafting of a new constitution—would be a means of again reaching the masses; of ideological propaganda and education that hopefully would rectify some of the sectarian and dogmatic mistakes committed in the past. This would also give an opportunity for the Left to determine to what extent it can function within the limits of liberal democracy.

FM: Do you expect the Communist Party to be legalized?

San Juan: President Aquino said that it will be legalized if the New People's Army and the Party renounce violence and I think that will never happen. If it is not legalized by President Aquino's decree, the constitution that will be adopted will have to have some kind of general statement making it possible for all political parties to operate legally. At present, there is a law against the Communist Party. It is illegal and membership in the Communist Party is punishable by law. So that law has to be superseded

or cancelled by the new constitution. That may or may not allow the Communist Party to exist legally.

FM: Do you have any sense of how likely the Left's participation in something like this constitutional convention is? Looking towards other types of activities that might help the Left repair some of the damage done by the sectarian errors, do you think they will move in that direction or not?

San Juan: Well, that can only happen if there is really a sincere move to rectify those policies and make some changes in the leadership. It will really be a test of the Party's capacity to change tactics, assess its own performance especially in the united front in the cities, and also to try to develop the other face of the revolutionary process which should complement armed struggle—that is, the ideological and political struggle to win the middle elements in the cities. I think that part of the revolutionary process has been neglected for the simple and understandable reason that during the Marcos regime—under authoritarian rule—it was difficult to operate legally. The emphasis since 1972 was on armed struggle. Everything else was secondary. I think this should be corrected and modified with the changed conditions when liberal democracy will allow a greater latitude and space for legal political struggle.

FM: Is the demand for removal of U.S. bases a mass demand right now? What is the current popularity of the U.S. government?

San Juan: Well, actually, the main way the Left miscalculated in the last two or three months was that they felt that mass consciousness had already reached an anti-imperialist level. In reality, I think that the people really hated the Marcos dictatorship, but the connection between the Marcos dictatorship and U.S. imperialism was not really deeply absorbed yet. I think the demand for the withdrawal of U.S. bases has not yet penetrated all the sectors of society. And I think it won't be considered yet a demand that a majority would be able to support.

FM: Do you think the U.S. government is seen by most people as having helped rid the country of Marcos?

San Juan: Yes. I think the urban masses—in particular the upper middle class and the business elite—seem to appreciate the help that the Reagan administration gave to Enrile and Ramos in particular. I think it is publicly known that the U.S. helped militarily in supporting the Ramos-Enrile forces. But in some sectors they still are critical of President Reagan's earlier attitude of stubbornly supporting Marcos.

FM: And I imagine the scandal over all the national treasures and all the money could fly in the face of Reagan.

San Juan: Yes. Right now there is an opportunity for the national democratic forces to seize. The Aquino government is really serious in pursuing the wealth that Marcos took with him as well as all the investments and money that he had siphoned off from the government which are now invested in land and in businesses in the United States and in bank accounts everywhere. If that can be publicized as an act in which the U.S. government was an accomplice, I think the sentiment of anti-imperialism can be aroused. But I don't know now, exactly, what publicity is being done around this issue.



"I am the president. They are not going to drive me out, because the people are behind me."

—Ferdinand Marcos

FM: The Munro article in *Commentary*, which you responded to in our last issue of *FM*, was almost entirely a collection of unsubstantiated accusations. But do you have any sense of whether there has been any kind of a militarist error in the NPA's work in the countryside? For example, has there been killing of civilians and that sort of thing?

San Juan: Well there are reports of civilians who were considered informers or pro-Marcos agents of the government being killed or punished. That is, I think, correct. But is there a policy to terrorize the civilian population? I think this is an invention of the reactionaries. The campaign of the New People's Army in the countryside is a political campaign. The guerrillas engage in political, ideological and educational work. They help the peasants plant. They teach acupuncture and health care. They organize the women. In short, the New People Army's is a political arm. It does engage in political work. Now it is possible there are some tendencies among some of the units to concentrate on military affairs so that the political aspect of the work might be neglected. But in general I don't think there is a pronounced militarist tendency.

FM: I would like to get back to something you mentioned right at the beginning. The Moro people and you mentioned another oppressed minority.

San Juan: Yes. The Igorot. The term Igorots embraces about one million people from tribal groups of different ethnic make-ups in the North. And they have been struggling for so long.

FM: Do you think their struggles and the struggle of the Moro people are likely to increase now or play some kind of role in events?

San Juan: It depends on what President Aquino's government will do to improve the

lives of these people. In the North, the Igorots took up arms because the Marcos regime, with the help of the IMF and the World Bank, was planning to build five hydroelectric power plants that would flood their homes. So they were really threatened. Their whole livelihood, their homes; their reason for existence because they see their lives as closely attached to the land in which they live. There was justice in their struggle. The New People's Army gave leadership and helped organize the Igorot tribes.

In the south the Moro struggle has a longer history and a much more gifted intellectual leadership than in the north. The MNLF (the Moro National Liberation Front) has the support of practically all the Islamic nations. The Moros constitute a much more formidable force because their experience in armed combat goes back all the way to the '50s and, if you like, to the period in the first decades of the 1900s when they resisted U.S. military campaigns against them.

I heard recently that the leader of the MNLF—Nur Mifuari—extended his support to Mrs. Aquino during the election. So what that means I don't know. But every government in the Philippines has to appoint some representative of the Moro people to the cabinet. I think someone is going to be appointed soon to represent the Moro people in the Aquino cabinet. I think that in the past there has been some collaboration between the New People's Army and the Moro National Liberation Front in the southern Philippines. I think the MNLF will continue to carry their arms until there is some understanding that they will be given a say in the government or in the governing of those regions where they are a majority.

FM: Is there anything you would like to add?

San Juan: I would add that we cannot yet conclude anything about the Aquino government simply on the basis of the class composition of the members of the cabinet. I think that the direction of the government will depend also on the mass movement of the popular forces in the cities and also the strength and activity of the New People's Army and the revolutionary cadres. It is a complex situation as in many places undergoing revolutionary transformation.

I would also emphasize the role that the U.S. progressives could play—and I think *Forward Motion* is already doing that—working against the U.S. government's political and military intervention in the Philippines. That would be a most important contribution to our struggle in much the same way as we are all opposing aid to the contras in Nicaragua.

FM: I wonder if there is any way to get President Aquino to make some simple statement about how there is no analogy between Nicaragua and the Philippines.

San Juan: It's funny you say that. One of the slogans in the Philippines during these recent demonstrations was "Yesterday Nicaragua, Tomorrow the Philippines." But, of course, the slogan is coming from exactly the opposite direction from which Reagan is looking at things. The progressive forces in the Philippines look up to the Nicaraguan revolution as one example of third world peoples trying to free themselves from U.S. imperialist domination.

FM: Thank you.

The Prospects for Democracy in the Philippines

by Charles Sarkis

When the people take to the streets, they teach everyone politics. Whether they can stay there and eventually own the streets depends which side learns the most from fast-changing events. The Filipino people took to the streets in the last two months, and in the process they gave a lot of people an education. To understand what lessons we should learn, we need to review why Marcos fell. Only then can we assess the roles of different actors in the Philippines crisis, and the prospects for democracy in the Philippines.

Why Marcos Fell

The first and foremost reason why Marcos fell and Corazon Aquino gained the presidency in the way she did was due to the insurgency led by the New People's Army (NPA) and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). To demonstrate the importance of the insurgency, we need only to take a careful look at U.S. television coverage of these events.

The Philippine elections presented many good dramatic elements for American television: an aging despot opposed by an avenging widow; contrasts in the resources each marshalled; candidates and supporters who spoke English; the huge and to some degree unexpected turnouts for Aquino; violence and minor sub-plots involving provincial warlords on the one side and well-spoken advocates of good government on the other. But good drama does not explain why for over a month, the Philippine election was the second biggest story in the U.S. media, right behind the explosion of the space shuttle.

There are many equally good dramas in the Third World. Here are a few of my candidates. There is the attempt by tiny Nicaragua to hold off all the resources of a U.S. elite determined to crush it. This drama offers us film clips of over-stuffed Miami exiles, C.I.A. operatives, campesinos working for a new life, Sandinistas from various social backgrounds trying to cope with a strangled economy, psychopathic killers swigging wine in Honduran contra camps and cynical U.S. opinion-makers trying to dress up counter-revolution in the clothes of democracy. The new book by Washington Post

reporter Christopher Dickey, *With the Contras*, despite its mainstream biases about both the Sandinistas and traditional U.S. benevolent intentions in Latin America, shows that Nicaragua could make great *Nightlines* with Ted Koppel. Or how about the investigations by the Argentinian government of the torture murders of 10,000 people? It could feature unarmed mothers and grandmothers searching for their children, military chiefs as venal as Marcos and Fabian Ver, secret prisons, rivers literally turning red with blood, people dropped to their death from helicopters. *The Official Story*, the Argentinian film about kidnapped children, gives us just a hint of the blockbuster mini-series potential of the Argentinian disappearances. But there's an even better candidate out there, one that has most of what the Philippine election did: cruel tyrants, unexpectedly gigantic mass demonstrations, unarmed people facing the army, contrasts between resources, people speaking English on all sides, even a woman with a nice nickname campaigning against the butchers who have taken away her husband. Yes, it's Winnie Mandela and people power in South Africa.

The reason the media do not give saturation coverage to these equally riveting stories is not that they lack human interest angles. The absence of coverage is not even because of the U.S. role in supporting the military that carried out the atrocities. As the election in the Philippines showed, the U.S. government and media are capable of dramatizing struggle against a long-time U.S. dependent as if the U.S. was only faintly involved. We could do the same with Argentina or even South Africa (Nicaragua would admittedly not work so well). The Philippines elections looked like the Iowa primaries on U.S. television because they were partly a staged event in the first place. In the phrase of Edward Herman and Frank Brodhead, the Philippines elections were **demonstration elections**, "elections oriented to influencing the home (U.S.) population" (*Demonstration Elections*, p. 1).

Demonstration Elections With a Difference

The Philippines elections had many of the attributes of demonstration elections. From start to finish they were designed with the U.S. public in mind. They were first announced by Marcos on U.S. television, in answer to a question raised by Reagan journalist George Will on the David Brinkley show. U.S. television attempted to stage its own television debate between Marcos and Aquino, and at every stage of the elections Aquino or her supporters and Marcos were summoned up on U.S. public or network television. U.S. congresspeople felt duty-bound to comment about how the elections were going. Of course there were the standard U.S.-government appointed observers sent to monitor the elections and report back to the administration on whether it deserved the U.S. seal of approval. To find this amount of coverage of a foreign election, you would have to go back to U.S. media coverage of the first demonstration election in El Salvador in 1982.

As an aside: frankly some of the media questioning stirred sympathy for Marcos among some of us long-time Marcos-haters. Here's a man who has served U.S. multinational

corporations and many U.S. administrations with as much devotion as any other dictator in the Evil U.S. Empire. He is accustomed to being treated by the U.S. media with the subservience and fawning admiration that U.S. strategic goals require--the kind now shown to Salvadoran, South Korean, Taiwanese, Honduran or Guatemalan government officials. After all these years of media treatment on the order of *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*, suddenly he is interrupted by U.S. anchorpersons, his answers are received with obvious scepticism, and embarrassing questions are asked. The suggestion is even made by Tom Brokaw of NBC (and perhaps by others) that he should have a medical examination performed by an "independent" group of doctors in order to respond to U.S. reports about his ill-health. This is a humiliating request to make of the leader of a supposedly sovereign nation.

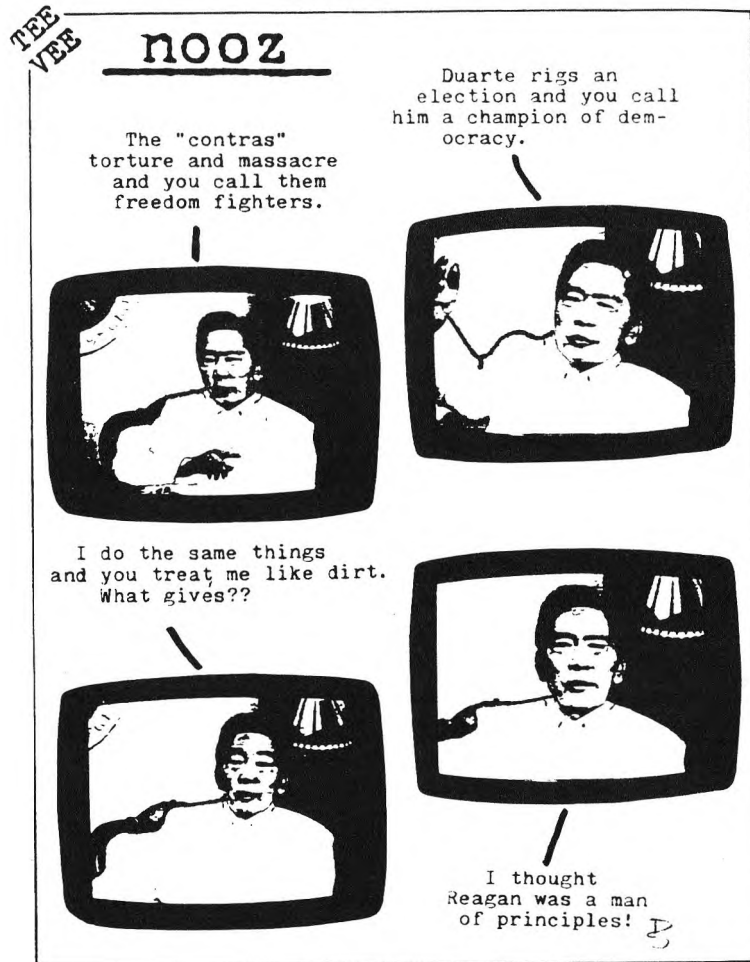
Demonstration elections have one major purpose: "the point of planning, publicizing and holding demonstration elections is to *buy time* for military pacification." (Herman and Brodhead, p. 181). But the Philippines presented one major difference with most demonstration elections. It was called by Marcos to respond to U.S. pressure, and stage-managed by him, not by the U.S.

Now here is what makes Marcos an interesting dictator. No matter how out of touch Marcos often seemed on U.S. television, he knows a lot about how the U.S. deals with puppets. He knew that if the U.S. decided he had lost control, he could be replaced. After all, he was surrounded by police trained by the U.S., military leaders trained by the U.S., moderate bourgeois politicians responsive to the U.S. (Many, like Aquino and her late husband, had been comparatively well-received exiles in the U.S., with university jobs, kept on the shelf in case they were needed). To convince the U.S. government that he could hold on and get the insurgency under control, Marcos realized that he had to stage a demonstration election aimed at the U.S. population. The U.S. public would receive an election as democratic if it resembled other demonstration elections they had watched on TV before. Then the Reagan administration could sell stepped-up aid to Marcos to the country, and the U.S. could not easily dump Marcos (support a coup against him, for instance) on the grounds that someone should come in and hold elections.

This tactic held risks for Marcos, which are obvious now that he is gone but also inherent in his maneuver. By its nature, a *demonstration election that is not being stage-managed by the U.S. may look less than democratic to the U.S. media and public*. We have had more practice at them and we know how to package them. By comparison to some demonstration elections (El Salvador's, to take an obvious example) the Philippines election was almost democratic: moderate bourgeois opposition newspapers existed; some legal room existed for leftist political parties (Bayan in the Philippines); fewer members of the opposition political party were assassinated, etc.

The U.S., however, had been trying to pressure Marcos for reforms in the military and, to a lesser extent, in the economy. It was felt that this would make the military better at counter-insurgency and increase the bourgeois and middle-class base for determined counter-insurgency warfare. It was natural that when Marcos called the election

in response to this pressure, the U.S. would use the election to continue to prod Marcos. The U.S. could hold out the threat of finding it an undemocratic election in order to get him to make additional changes. Further, the U.S. ruling class had developed divisions over how radical a change was needed in the Philippines to rebuild the counter-insurgency and for how much longer Marcos could play an effective role in this strategy. There were divisions between the State Department and the White House, divisions in Congress and elsewhere. They were highlighted by CIA director William Casey's and Paul Laxalt's trips to the Philippines last year, visits designed to assess whether Marcos could fit in with U. S. counter-insurgency planning.



This is why the media had felt free to interrogate Marcos and question the elections with such abandon. This is why suddenly, after all these years, the U.S. Army declassified

its own refutations of Marcos' claim to have fought a guerrilla war against the Japanese during World War II. And this is why the facts of Marcos and his cronies colossal looting of the Filipino economy, long established by anti-Marcos forces in the U.S. and elsewhere, began to find their way into the establishment media. What made the election interesting was that the same demonstration election was being used by two different forces, the Marcos dictatorship and its U.S. partners, for two allied but differing purposes, each trying to pressure the other.

Their purposes were allied in that *for both the Marcos regime and the U.S. administration, the election was a means of buying time for military pacification*. For Marcos, it was buying time from the U.S. to get better results at military pacification. For the U.S., it was buying time to squeeze out a few more benefits from Marcos' rule. This is why the determinant place of the insurgency in the entire chain of events cannot be lost from view. But because the purposes of Marcos and the U.S. were also different, it created a political space for action by the moderate bourgeois opposition and by the Filipino people.

The second major reason why Marcos fell was this mass action of the Filipinos. The masses do make history. The Filipino people displayed enormous courage in the election campaign, during the election itself, and particularly in the period following the elections.

But let us understand that the contradictions between the U.S. and Marcos in the elections created the space for non-violent mass action. The Filipino people are courageous, but they are no more courageous than any other people in the world. If you shoot directly into any crowd for more than two minutes, it will disperse and it will not reassemble any time soon. If the Guatemalan masses have not recently taken to the streets in the numbers that the Filipinos did we can't say it is because they are less courageous. The U.S. government does not provide the political shield to allow the Guatemalans or the Salvadorans or the Koreans or the Chileans mass action on that scale. So the third major factor in the fall of Marcos was U.S. intervention: ideological, political and even military.

The full role of U.S. intervention in the Philippines events will not be known for some time, and usually in such instances never emerges completely. We do know that once Marcos had announced the elections, U.S. Ambassador Bosworth called all the top Filipino bourgeois politicians acceptable to the U.S. to his offices and told them to field one candidate, not to make U.S. bases a campaign issue, and not to propose legalization of the Communist Party if they wanted U.S. support, which in this case meant relative protection from repression. We do know that over the course of the campaign, Cory Aquino developed a reported "good relationship" with Bosworth. We also know that in the post-election days leading up to the defection of Defense Minister (and Harvard Law graduate) Juan Enrile and U.S. favorite (and West Point graduate) General Fidel Ramos, the U.S. increased contacts with both sides.

Although we do not know the exact sequence of events yet, Washington was extremely concerned the post-election stalemate would go on too long and lead to a

radicalization of the Aquino people. So the U.S. acted to put an end to it. When Philip Habib went to the Philippines in mid-February, the Reagan administration sought "to have the Habib mission look passive, but does not want to reveal that he is setting the stage for something more." ("Habib Mission: U.S. Aim is Complex," *New York Times*, February 19, 1986). Habib went both to "prompt... Marcos to fashion his own succession" and to "get the point across to Corazon Aquino ...that Washington would not like the issue of who rules to be settled in the streets." (Ibid) The embassy or Habib must have assured Enrile and Ramos that the U.S. would not oppose their defection. The U.S. may very well have uncovered the evidence that Marcos was moving to arrest Enrile and Ramos insofar as that information played a precipitating role. We also know that in the critical hours after their "rebellion" the U.S. provided logistical and communications support to both sides and that the rebel officers acted in coordination with the U.S. embassy. For example, the Filipino Air Force, which was the first branch of the service to go over to Enrile and Ramos, flew jet fighters into Clark Air Force base in order to prevent Marcos from using them against the defectors. Also the U.S. refueled the American-made helicopter gunships that were so useful to the defectors in outmaneuvering the Marcos loyalists at its bases [NBC News, March 2, 1986]. The U.S. also exerted other pressures on Marcos to prevent his putting down the officers' rebellion, and eventually brokered the deal that got him to Hawaii with the promise from Aquino that the Philippines would not seek the extradition of the man who ordered her husband killed.

Two major factors then created the opening in which the Filipino masses could express their twenty-year hatred of Marcos' rule: the insurgency and U.S. intervention. As the voice of this popular revulsion, the traditional propertied elite chose two of their own: Cory Aquino and Salvador Laurel. The fall of Marcos represents a great victory for the Filipino people and, to hear the U.S. elite tell it, for the Reagan administration. In fact the results for the Reagan administration are more complicated than that. Before addressing the balance-sheet for the Reagan administration, we need to look at the situation for the Left.

The Mistakes of the Left

There are three main points about where the flight of Marcos leaves the Left in the Philippines. First, despite what the U.S. media says, the Left gains by the collapse of a government intimately tied to the U.S., repressing most mass organizations, and ruling by cruel terror. The victory of Aquino opens up great opportunities for the Marxist Left and all progressives in the Philippines. Second, it is nonetheless true that the Left has not gained the political stature from the flight of Marcos that observers would have expected, given that the Left had the most distinguished record in the twenty-year struggle against Marcos. The main fault for this lies not with U.S. intervention, but with the Marxist Left itself, and the policies it adopted towards the elections.

Third, if the Marxist Left does not correct its analysis and policies, figure out how it arrived at such a mistaken strategy and adopt a better approach to the post-Marcos

situation, the Marxist Left may find itself in very big trouble. Filipinos on every point of the political spectrum have been lectured, cajoled, threatened, interrogated, and dictated to by U.S. spokespersons and the U.S. media for the last several months. The last thing the Filipino Left needs is a lecture from North American leftists steeped in the arrogance of our national culture. But defeats for the Left in the Philippines will bring defeats for U.S. progressives. The mistakes of the Left in the Philippines are similar to our own. Many socialists in the U.S., placed in the unfamiliar situation the Filipino Left was in, would have made the same blunders.

The major organizations of the Marxist-aligned Left in the Philippines consist in the illegal Communist Party of the Philippines, the illegal National Democratic Front in which the CPP has a major role, the KMU (May First Union) trade union confederation, and Bayan, a legal, mass left-wing party routinely accused of having communist influence. When Aquino declared her candidacy in December, Bayan held talks with the Aquino forces in which they offered to give their support for her candidacy in exchange for concessions in her platform. But they set the terms for their support impossibly high for Aquino. Among the fifteen demands presented were major, substantive land reform; closing of U.S. bases immediately; the renegotiation or abrogation of foreign and International Monetary Fund loans; the repeal of unequal treaties and other laws limiting Filipino sovereignty; and the nationalization of basic and strategic industries.

Cory Aquino is a woman of great personal courage, apparent integrity, and because of her husband's imprisonment, exile and eventual murder by Marcos obviously not likely to compromise with Marcos. But she is also a scion of the traditional U.S.-oriented big land-owners and the candidate of the bourgeois opposition. She could never have agreed to such a thorough-going left-wing program. More importantly, she was the candidate in a demonstration election called by Marcos to pressure and assuage the U.S., but used by the U.S. to pressure Marcos. If she had adopted such a radical program, the U.S. would have withdrawn its protection. A more pliable U.S. tool like Salvador Laurel would have run (remember the negotiations between the Laurel and Aquino forces resulting in a unified ticket brokered by the U.S.), and her allies and herself would have been open to much worse physical repression by Marcos which the United States would have regarded benevolently.

The Marxist-oriented Left may have simply overestimated its own strength and decided to use the negotiations with Aquino as a maneuver to expose her bourgeois politics. The majority in Bayan had a mistaken analysis of U.S. policy (see below), and may have thought that Aquino had more room for maneuver than she did. Regardless, the demands were impossible to meet.

Then the Left compounded its error. Socialists can argue about the wisdom of directly supporting Aquino in the elections, given her capitalist and sovereignty-compromising program. But rather than calling for an anti-Marcos' vote, which would obviously have supported Aquino, the majority in Bayan called for a boycott of the elections. It viewed the elections as an essentially "meaningless contest between local reactionaries," as Walden Bello, co-director of the Philippine Support Committee stated in a *Guardian*

article (February 5, 1986). It reasoned that no dictator had ever called stage-managed elections and then allowed himself to be voted out of office. In their book, Herman and Brodhead also say that "in a state of armed conflict and military rule, elections are won by those possessing the most bullets and controlling the electoral machinery." (p. ix) This is quite true and it was borne out by the elections: Marcos committed sophisticated, computer-aided fraud and stole the vote. But as applied to the Philippines, it ignores the unusual nature of this particular demonstration election and the tug of war between the U.S. and Marcos over it.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO BY WENDY MAEDA

Mila Aguilar, the Filipino activist and poet, upon her release from a political detention center on February 27th. She is greeted by Sister Josephine.

The Marxist Left in the Philippines assumed that U.S. policy had too little flexibility and that the U.S. would continue to back Marcos no matter what happened in the country. A rejuvenated Marcos would certainly have represented the first choice of the U.S.,

and it was Reagan's personal choice, perhaps even up to the minute Marcos fled. (Marcos attempted to speak directly with Reagan before boarding the plane, and Reagan aides reportedly were relieved when he did not get through because of concern over what Reagan might have instinctively done. This may indicate that they kept Marcos from contact with Reagan in the closing hours [NBC News, March 2, 1986]. But large sections of both the U.S. military establishment and the U.S. political elite had lost confidence in Marcos' ability to take the steps necessary--including military reform and rural pacification measures--to beat the insurgency back to manageable levels. The days were winding down to a precious few for Ferdinand Marcos before he called the elections. Especially once the electoral campaign got underway and the U.S. saw that Marcos did not have the *political* resources to run a convincing demonstration election, U.S. leaders had decided that Marcos had to go. In the last issue of *Forward Motion*, written before the election, we argued that "getting Marcos out is the first U.S. priority. The U.S. would prefer to eliminate him through nominally democratic means, but if that does not prove possible we can look for a military coup by U.S.-allied officers to remove him." (p. 45). A leading section of the Marxist-oriented Left in the Philippines may not have recognized this fact. Perhaps worse, they underestimated the electric effect on the masses of Filipinos of being able to demonstrate and campaign openly against Marcos.

The boycott position cost the Left heavily even before the election. Filipino author E. San Juan, Jr. wrote that before the Bayan decision, "its leading independent personalities--Tanada, Padilla, Diokno, Roces, etc.--had for some time (long before Aquino's decision to run) exerted considerable influence on her." San Juan attributed Aquino's early, more progressive statements about U.S. bases and possible communist participation in her government to their influence. But after the Bayan decision, "Bayan leaders with dogmatist tendencies... [withdrew] influence on Aquino. And this in turn allowed the reactionary right to fill the space that the movement could have used to reach the masses of people...and advance the formation of a genuine national-popular historic bloc during the electoral farce." (*Guardian*, February 19, 1986). Prominent Bayan members with links to Aquino then took leaves from Bayan, and San Juan noted that their departure "may spell the political demise of this otherwise noteworthy attempt to form a really genuine coalition." Prior to the election, he predicted that this ultra-left position had "set the struggle back many years."

The boycott position seemed an uncharacteristically dogmatist approach for forces aligned with the Communist Party of the Philippines. The party has distinguished itself among the world's revolutionary movements, and especially among all the revolutionary movements that emerged from the 1960's, for its creative approach to the geographical, cultural and political realities of its country. (See especially two publications by Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution* and the striking *Specific Characteristics of People's War in the Philippines*). The boycott view was not adopted without significant opposition within the Left, and the debate over it revealed some potentially serious divisions in the CPP. In a December 26 interview, Jose Maria Sison--one of the founders

of the CPP and one of the four alleged communists the Aquino government treated separately from other political prisoners--opposed the total boycott and according to San Juan called for greater flexibility in tactics and active intervention in the elections. A majority in the Marxist-aligned Left ignored his advice. In general the debate among European communists and socialists in the past decade over issues of democracy, socialism, and constructing hegemonic strategies in capitalist democracies has been as much a symptom of the Marxist Left's troubles as it has been a way forward. But some good in clarifying socialist strategy has come from that debate. It is unfortunate that the Filipino Left was politically and ideologically unprepared to act when semi-democratic opportunities presented themselves.

It is an irony of the boycott decision that those supporting it argued that through the elections the U.S. sought "to split or deepen the split between the elite opposition and the mass-based nationalist opposition" in an effort "to isolate the latter" (Bello, *Guardian*, February 5, 1986). The fact is that the majority of the Left then proceeded to follow the course that would help the Reagan administration attain just this objective. In an article written after Marcos' fall, San Juan observed that "throughout the few days of the festival' of the urban masses, the National Democratic Movement seems to have been completely marginalized." (*Guardian*, March 5, 1986).

A Mixed Bag for Washington

The Reagan administration demonstrated the flexibility in the crisis that the Left lacked. Washington had decided that Marcos had to go, and when Washington decides that one of its stooges has to leave, it has confidence that he will. But how he went, the political process set in motion, was almost as important to the administration as getting rid of him. An article in the *New York Times* that appeared right before the election and contained information obviously given to the *Times* by high administration sources revealed with unusual clarity ruling class objectives. The administration expected Marcos to win the rigged elections, but also spoke with assurance that Marcos would leave. *Times* reporter Leslie Gelb summarized their belief that "the real tests will come this year, or next year at the latest, when they say they expect Mr. Marcos to be gone because of his health." (January 26, 1986) Top policy planners also had a clear preference in the election: "if most of them had their way, Mr. Marcos would win a election that was not too unfair and then quickly step aside in favor of his Vice Presidential candidate, Arturo Tolentino." In a 1984 National Security memorandum signed by Reagan, the administration stated its strategic goal of preparing a "peaceful" and "eventual" transition to a successor government.

But "peaceful transitions" are code-words for imperialist planners: they mean transitions in which the people play no part, in which the masses do not speak up or demonstrate, since those situations often lead to radicalization of the people. Peaceful transitions do not mean bloodless ones necessarily. The *Times* article refers to "more serious approaches" to influencing Marcos that were discussed "in recent months" in the Philippines, and to "talk of exploring possibilities for a military coup" which the *Times*

report hastily assures its readers "never got very far." Top administration policy makers "had little enthusiasm for Mrs. Aquino's leadership skills" and expressed concern about her comments during the campaign calling for a referendum on whether to extend the base agreement.

When too much of the fraud behind the elections came out, when Regan's early comments about fraud on both sides, about the wonderful two-party system in the Philippines and about the need for the Aquino forces to work together with Marcos failed to have any effect on the people around Aquino or on the rest of the U.S. elite, the administration began to see its worst fears realized. Rather than accepting her defeat (an acceptance that probably would have cost her the presidency for all time, since the U.S. could have then engineered a transition to Tolentino--or better--to a pliable candidate with opposition credentials like Salvador Laurel), Aquino called for demonstrations, boycotts and a nation-wide strike against the regime. This mobilization represented the chief worry of U.S. planners before the election, namely the "radicalization of Philippine politics...moderates either being made irrelevant or drawn toward alliance with the Communists" (January 26, 1986).



Lt. General Fidel V. Ramos and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile announce their break with President Ferdinand Marcos.

The U.S. then realized it had to pre-empt mass mobilization, and shortly thereafter Enrile and Ramos acted. Agilely adapting to the anti-Marcos movement, the administration tried to pretend that the results were what they wanted all along, and the media loyally allowed those claims to stand. But the habits of propping up a dictatorship die hard, and after having gotten some agreement from Aquino on protecting Marcos the Reagan administration immediately botched his departure. Five administrations have known for twenty years that Marcos and his clique have stolen everything but the copper pipes. The scale of this plunder is unbelievable. Combined, it may come near to the total Philippine foreign debt, and even by the most conservative estimates, it would

take care of the interest on the debt, a substantial part of the principal, and International Monetary Fund pressures for the next several years. The Reagan administration took no steps to distance itself from this potentially explosive situation, and allowed Marcos to bring along any of his fellow thieves he wanted and all the loot two U.S. cargo planes could carry. This group now has shelter at the U.S. taxpayers' expense in Hawaii. The money and jewels on the planes are a smidgen of the total theft. But symbolically this cargo, the U.S. troops that worked to transport it and the U.S. role as receiver of stolen property will keep the issue before the Filipino and U.S. publics. Coming from an administration comfortable with large-scale corruption and in a rush to pre-empt the mass movement, the blunder was an understandable one. But it will keep the ties between the U.S. and Marcos in the forefront, and may develop into an important contradiction with the Aquino government.

In the next year we can expect several things from Washington. First, the administration will look for a gigantic increase in aid to the Philippines, much of it marked for their loyal friends in the military who served them so well in the present crisis. Before the election, Reagan already had sought almost a doubling of aid to the Philippines (from \$55 million to \$102 million) to a man still being described as "a friend and an ally," Ferdinand Marcos. Second, we should watch to see if a change in ambassadors occurs. The present ambassador, Bosworth, reportedly has good relations with Aquino. If Aquino and the New People's Army do reach a cease-fire, then Bosworth will more likely stay on to pressure her while the U.S. seeks to shape army personnel and tactics through its military aid mission. If the U.S. can get Aquino to give them a freer rein, then important counter-insurgency figures need to head up the U.S. embassy. Third, we must watch closely for greater involvement of the U.S. military. Unlike countries such as El Salvador, the Philippines has two huge U.S. permanent military bases, and the activities of U.S. forces already in place are more difficult to monitor than the dispatch of troops to a foreign country. Enrile and Ramos both favor the borrowing of U.S. "special forces" troops and of U.S. logistical supply in the counter-insurgency war.

The Aquino Government and the People

The direction of the Aquino government depends on a number of circumstances, including what the Left does over the next few months. But whatever the scenario, the insurgency and the still strong position of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the National Democratic Front, and allied groups, particularly in the rural areas, will remain the focus.

We can rule out two possible futures for the Philippines and the situation of the Left. The first is that the balance of forces remains where it is now. The communist-allied Left is too strong, the U.S. military and economic interests are too big, and the landed oligarchy has too powerful a position in the countryside for this to occur. The Reagan administration wants a government in the Philippines that will effectively attack the power of the Left. Marcos allies and the landed oligarchy will resist the dismantling of bureaucratic

capitalism, any significant land reform, and the establishment of a bourgeois democratic system of power by the Aquino government. And despite steps taken, bureaucratic capitalism has a powerful basis of support in the army. The Aquino government can try to compromise with bureaucratic capitalism and the oligarchy but it will then risk a radicalization of "people's power," a rise in the Left, and a permanent threat of military coup. Or the Aquino government can try to increase its mass base by developing a land reform program, ward off the U.S. threat to Filipino democracy and Filipino capitalism by curbing U.S. state and monopoly prerogatives, and revive the Filipino economy by favoring Filipino private capital. For the Aquino government, each course carries risks.

The second possibility we can rule out for the long term is that the Aquino government tries to develop a standard bourgeois democratic system and admits the Communist Party of the Philippines into that system as an opposition party, like the communist party in many capitalist democracies. It is not possible for a country whose sovereignty is as compromised as that of the Philippines, with a semi-feudal oligarchy entrenched in many provinces, to allow as powerful a communist party as that of the Philippines to participate meaningfully in a constitutional democratic system. We know the Philippines is not France, but it is not pre-1970 Chile or Peru either. A period of democratic participation may occur, but it will not represent a long-term solution for U.S. interests, for the oligarchy's interests, or for bureaucratic capitalist interests.

Three other possibilities do exist. The first is that the influence of the CPP shrinks markedly over the short term. This could happen for the reasons it did in Thailand, where a big insurgency was decimated over a few years through the combination of major divisions in the communist party leadership, a sclerotic and commandist party leadership structure, a skillful amnesty program offered by the government, some steps towards land reform, and the confusion caused by complex regional politics. Both the Aquino government and the U.S. will attempt to aggravate whatever divisions of opinion do exist in the CPP, and to portray a faction of it as pro-Soviet and brutal. A collapse like the Thai one is unlikely in the Philippines because the communist party has received no noticeable aid from any foreign source, and has a tradition of outstanding theoretical and political independence. It has relied on its own people and resources, and in the past shown great ability to adapt to its particular circumstances. Given the huge U.S. economic and military presence, and all the support the U.S. has extended Marcos over the years, it is unlikely that large numbers of guerrillas will decide that the advent of bourgeois democracy changes everything in the Philippines. One thing to watch will be whether the sophisticated approach to politics and the Filipino reality represented by former communist leaders like Sison gets reintegrated into the leading councils of the CPP.

The second possibility is that the counter-insurgency resumes relatively soon. Enrile and Ramos hold powerful positions as Defense Minister and commander of the armed forces respectively. Both are dedicated to wiping out communist influence, and the U.S. has not gone to the trouble of easing out an *ineffective* military pacification in order to have no military pacification. The counter-insurgency might resume because of militarist

errors of the Left, the weakness of the Aquino forces in the face of U.S. pressure and the alliance of the oligarchy and bureaucratic capitalism, or a combination of the two. It is not the most likely scenario, however.

The third possibility is that the U.S., the oligarchy and Marcos' bureaucratic capitalist allies cannot quickly create the *political* conditions for a renewal of the counter-insurgency war, and so resort to other methods to create those conditions. Having jumped aboard the Aquino train at the last possible moment, the U.S. now is trying to hijack it. Even before it openly withdrew from Marcos, the U.S. pressed the Aquino forces for reconciliation with the Marcos' power elite. Here the U.S. policy makers find themselves in a difficult position. They recognize that parts of the old Marcos system of crony capitalism must be dismantled, and that a mild land reform package must accompany vigorous counter-insurgency war. But they want a united Filipino ruling class coalition in order to pursue war against the Left, and equally important, in order to help sustain a political consensus in the U.S. for intervention in the Philippines. (The sustaining of ideological and political support in the U.S. forms a key part of the Reagan administration doctrine of "low-intensity conflict"). To adopt a major land reform program or move against the entrenched positions of the Marcos' power elite threatens the Filipino ruling class coalition.

Aquino's government shares this dilemma, but because it represents a coalition of private capitalist, land-owning interests and populist middle-class sectors, it faces different risks than the Reagan administration. The Marcos bureaucratic capitalists, the oligarchy and their allies in the army pose a continual danger to the Aquino government. Not to act against them would demoralize the popular movement that swept Aquino into power, would not satisfy the Marcos right-wing anyway, and would leave the government at the mercy of the U.S. and the army. The indications are that the Aquino government will try to alter the balance of power in the Filipino ruling class, particularly through the pursuit of the stolen wealth of Marcos and his cronies, and through the declaration of a "revolutionary government" wielding extraordinary powers. The purpose of such a government would be to break up the power structure Marcos built up over twenty years, which currently includes the judicial system, most local government bureaucracies, and numerous other state and state capitalist institutions.

How far the government takes such measures will tell us whether it is determined to develop a standard capitalist democratic system of government or whether it reaches an arrangement with the Marcos-aligned factions. The immediate issues will be pursuit of the wealth accumulated by members of the Marcos administration; prosecution of other Marcos supporters for crimes committed during the Marcos era--political murders, for example--or a decision to back down and grant some informal amnesty; making good on early promises to disarm the private armies that many provincial bosses and land-owners field; and the development of an independent land-reform program. These actions would substantially weaken the power of the Marcos' right-wing and the oligarchy, and threaten U.S. interests. They would also threaten the current Aquino coalition government itself. To take a small example, Marcos' former Defense Minister Enrile is

known to have built up a fortune of his own under Marcos, and too much attention to Marcos' looting could reach Enrile.

The likely reaction would be lessened U.S. economic aid, including through the international economic agencies the U.S. controls. The investment climate would suffer, economic difficulties would multiply, and a spiral of violence would develop. We would also witness the growth of something like death squads in the countryside. These would have secret U.S. sponsorship, and they would be aimed at attacking the cadre infrastructure of the Communist Party of the Philippines and mass popular organizations in the rural areas, much like the repression of the South Vietnamese Vietminh cadres in the late 1950's or the ORDEN organized killings in El Salvador in the late 1960's and 1970's. The Left's position of critical support to the Aquino government would be increasingly threatened. If the Aquino government took vigorous action against the paramilitary groups, it would incur the risk of military coup. Not to would open the way to a renewal of the armed struggle.

Speculative as it sounds, a version of the last scenario is the most likely of the three. If the Marxist-aligned Left can adopt a sophisticated approach to the Aquino government, it stands to expand its influence in the relatively short term. The obstacles to significant land reform, to the democratization of political life and to the recovery of full national sovereignty in the Philippines are very great. The Left will need all the ties, alliances and influence it can develop for the counter-insurgency war Pentagon officials are now debating.

For the moment, the world has a victory to savor, the downfall of one of its most despicable and tyrannical ruling couples. In the U.S., the solidarity movements have some new weapons, courtesy of the Reagan administration. The arguments that the media finally turned against Marcos, the justifications for U.S. action against him, and the exposure of his staged elections can serve us well in the struggle against the U.S. wars in Central America. They can also serve in the struggle against the most barbaric system of government in the world, the South African regime. The Reagan administration does not feel compelled to abandon its ally there because so far the South Africans have handled the terror against the people relatively well. But their time for hurried packing and U.S. transport also approaches.

March 7, 1986

The Black Family:

Wake Up and Smell the Coffee!

by Candice S. Cason

The Bill Moyers documentary, "The Vanishing Family—Crisis in Black America," which aired in January of 1986, opened even wider the debate which has been raging for the last 20 years over the health of the Black family. Three aspects of Black family life have been at issue in this debate: the number of Black households headed by women, the number of children born out of wedlock, and the number of Black families receiving some form of public assistance.

The Negro Family: The Case for National Action, written by Daniel Patrick Moynihan and published in 1965 by the U.S. Department of Labor, began the debate. Moynihan then and Moyers now both received criticism for their focus on the pathology and maladaptive behavior of the Black family and Black community, for their failure to give major acknowledgement to the existence of thriving, successful black families, and for their failure to clearly identify the difficulties that many black families face as the difficulties that poor people face.

The Census Bureau and the National Center for Health Statistics estimated in 1982 that 47% of all Black families were headed by women, 55% of Black children were born to unmarried mothers, 33% of all Black families were living below the poverty line, and 55% of Black families headed by women were living below the poverty line. In 1970, 30.6% of all Black families were headed by women, and 30% of all Black families lived below the poverty line. There has been a tendency to look at these and other figures and make the assessment that the Black family is a poor family because Black women are heading households.

Another way to assess these figures is: a) the Black family is not in good economic shape; and 2) the Black family of the 1980's is different from the Black family of the 1970's and before. The second assessment assumes no direct, causal relationship between households headed by women and poor households. It may be true that the large number of households headed by women is directly responsible for the higher rate of poverty in the Black community. This article will ask readers to consider the possibility that the link between households headed by women and poor households exists, but is not explained by the "weakness" of Black women or the "irresponsibility" of Black men.

A series entitled "Breakup of the Black Family Imperils Gains of Decades" was published in the *New York Times* in November of 1983. The Black family to which the

article referred was the traditional two-parent family. Judith Cummings, author of the article, asserted that "the correlation and poverty and the breakdown in family structure is unmistakable." She indicated that in 1982, women earned significantly less than men (\$7,700 vs. \$15,300), that Black men earned significantly less than white men (\$10,500 vs. \$15,900), and that Black male unemployment or employment in low-paying jobs may discourage Black men from assuming responsibility for a family. Cummings addressed the controversy around "culture of poverty" theories, which assert dependence on public aid can engender the development of values which downgrade economic self-reliance. She contrasted conservative and liberal views on the impact of public assistance programs on the Black family. Finally, she compared levels of sexual activity and pregnancy among Black and white adolescents and discussed the conservative view that teenagers become pregnant so as to become eligible for public assistance and leave home. Sexual pressures exerted by the media were mentioned, as were prohibitions in the Black community against abortion.

I wrote a letter of response to the *New York Times*, which the newspaper published, challenging the notion of the "traditional Black family structure." I questioned whether that tradition really had been allowed to take root, given that Black families were split up during slavery and often separated during the Black migrations from rural to urban areas which began in the early 1900's and which accelerated following World War II. I suggested that the rise of the single parent Black family might represent a return to a more familiar lifestyle for a people with a history of non-traditional (single parent and extended family) lifestyles.

Following publication of that letter, a friend advised me to read *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, by Herbert Gutman. Gutman studied the birth and marriage records of Black populations in South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Louisiana and New York between 1750 and 1925 and concluded that the traditional two-parent family was the norm to which Black people aspired, and which the majority of Black families achieved. He discussed the slave sexual practice of childbirth before marriage, and indicated that to some extent, procreation by slave parents was insurance against separation of mother, father and children. He discussed the importance of the Black extended family in providing children with a sense of family, community and identity which was critical for Black survival of those harsh times.

Based on Gutman's research, I was wrong in my assertion that two-parent families often were disallowed from forming or were split up during slavery. I would contend, though, that the family norm against which Cummings', Moyers', and Moynihan's Black family is measured is inappropriate.

The notion of a normal lifestyle for a traditional two-parent, three generational family is based on a bourgeois ideal. In that ideal, the young adult leaves home, marries, has children (which s/he can comfortably support, educate and socialize), perhaps gets divorced, becomes a grandparent, ages and eventually dies. It is assumed that this adult life cycle spans 40 to 70 years, and that death comes between 60 and 90 years of age. In the poor family, which is socially, psychologically and economically stressed, this

lifecycle is shortened considerably. Poor families are more likely than other families to suffer from premature loss of family members through death, imprisonment, poor health, removal by the state (the slavemaster, during slavery), or drug addiction. Since the family is a dynamic system which, as a whole entity, is unavoidably affected by the actions of and interactions between its parts, loss of one family member requires other family members to take over the responsibilities of that lost member, whether or not they are prepared to do so. This tendency to early loss of family members shortens the lifecycle of the poor family. Fernando Colon, in "The Lifecycle of the Multiproblem Poor Family," correctly asserts that poor people leave home, marry, become parents, divorce, have grandchildren, age and die earlier than other people. This pattern existed during slavery when, as Gutman points out, girls commonly had children by age 19, and this pattern exists today.

Black people in America historically have been poor. As recently as 1959, nearly 50% of all Black families lived below the poverty level. According to Census Bureau statistics, from 1959 to 1982 the percentage of Black households headed by women whose members lived below the poverty line was never less than 48%. That "low" was recorded directly prior to the Reagan presidency. Yet, the post World War II economic situation of Black families is an improvement over the economic situation of Black families before World War II. As poverty tends to shorten the normal lifecycle, and as the Black population is a poor population, one can postulate that Black people, on the whole, tend to move rapidly through the stages of adult life.

The average life expectancy for individuals in the US has shown a tremendous increase in the last 40 years. According to *Southern Exposure* magazine, in 1947 average life expectancy for whites was 59 years; for Blacks it was 45 years. Current life expectancy for whites is in the high 60's and for Blacks it is in the high 50's. While both groups can expect to live longer, there remains a gap.

The advances of technology, the increase in life expectancy and the bourgeois ideal of the adult life cycle have led this country to make assumptions about what the average person can accomplish in his or her lifetime. The media pays a great deal of attention to people who, in their 40's, 50's and 60's, launch into a second or third career. Magazines and talk shows oriented towards women are particularly guilty of this, as they regularly feature women who have gone from parenting to college to law school, or from parenting to starting a business, or from parenting to clerical work to the executive suite. The expectation expressed by the media is not just that women work, but that they have a job to which they are devoted, or a career.

A shortened lifecycle is not adaptive in a world which assumes a long and productive life. Rapid movement from independence to parenthood to grandparenthood, particularly when grandparenthood involves regular responsibility for grandchildren (as is often the case with poor families) is not conducive to involvement in long-term training for a long-term job or career. Early parenthood generally corresponds to a postponement or forfeiture of job training and pursuit of a career. Yet, poor people are not going to stop having children, just as rich people are not; Black people are not going to stop

procreating, just as white people are not going to stop procreating. And it is doubtful that any population in the U.S. is going to turn back the clock on early sexual experimentation and involvement. The cat is out of the bag; young people know about sex earlier and face greater pressure from peers and from the media to be sexually involved with people they date.



Rachel Burger/cpf

This combination of factors raises the possibility that, for the welfare poor or working poor Black population, which is large, and in particular for the Black woman, single parenthood is adaptive for modern times. To bypass marriage and therefore divorce is to bypass two potentially stressful, energy-depleting stages of adult life. To delay marriage, to opt not to marry the 16 or 18 or even 20 year-old father of one's child, instead choosing another partner later in life whose maturity is more conducive to a stable marriage, may be to give oneself the time, space and peace of mind, even as a parent, to get that job training, launch that career. I have seen it happen on many occasions, through involvement with older Black women college students, and through involvement with Black single women parents of school-age children. Most of these people received some sort of public assistance early into parenthood, and struggled to get the

training and work experience that would allow them financial independence and greater financial rewards than public assistance ever would allow.

Americans should consider the possibility that Black women and the Black community are a vanguard. The number of single white women parents are rising steadily. Divorce rates are skyrocketing among all sectors of the U.S. population. Women are learning to handle parenthood on their own.

Instead of wishing for the good old days when women kept their skirts pulled down, the U.S. should institute wide-ranging and early sex education and encourage the use of contraceptives by adolescents through education, removal of the stigma of contraceptive use, advertisement of existing parental planning clinics and development of greater numbers of those clinics. Instead of pining away for the times when women knew their place was in the home (which was not generally the case for Black women, anyway), the U.S. should extend its job training programs, extend its academic scholarship and school loan programs, and remove the stigma of receiving public assistance on a conditional and time-limited basis while new mothers get on their feet. Instead of dreaming about the times when white men held all (not just most) of the higher paying jobs, and people of color and women accepted their lot as low-paid employees, the U.S. should strengthen Affirmative Action laws and monitoring of their implementation, so as to expand job opportunities available to Black and other men of color and all women. Instead of fantasizing about the return of the two-parent, two-child family where the woman can afford to stay home with the kids, the U.S. should expand its funding of public daycare services and require that corporations of a particular size use their own financial resources to open daycare facilities at their various plants and offices. And instead of focusing on times when every self-contained family inhabited a self-contained house or apartment and drove a self-contained car, U.S. corporations and the U.S. government should in their laws and regulations governing purchase and rental recognize that, with increasing urbanization and the high cost of living, members of biological extended families as well as unrelated "extended families" regularly share living space and transportation, as well as other resources.

Black family poverty and single parenthood are related, but the cause of both is a system which, after 210 years, continues the practice of, "A place for everyone; everyone in their place." Where family life is concerned, America needs to see the trends for what they are and plan for them. Wake up and smell the coffee!

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Lift Every Voice

Grenada Revisted

by V. Morris

Lift Every Voice is a regular Forward Motion column. Its title is taken from the Black National Anthem which James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1927 and which has served to unify and inspire African Americans since that time. In the spirit of this anthem the column will comment on issues of concern to the Black Liberation Movement in its broadest conception and will be authored by individual activists in the Black community. We hope it will provoke discussion and action.

Three years ago, in September of 1983, my new husband and I visited Grenada for our post-wedding get-away, a.k.a. honeymoon. We thought no setting could be so perfect as that beautiful island for reflecting on our commitment to each other and to oppressed people. We talked with Grenadians active in the "revo" (revolutionary process) who seemed sober in their assessment of the difficult task of economically developing their country and politically educating the population.

There was no hint of retreating from the lofty ideals of the New Jewel Movement which came to power in 1979 after overthrowing the dictatorship of Eric Gairy, nor was there public knowledge of the serious infighting going on in the top levels of government. We thought the biggest problem facing the left in Grenada was the race to show economic improvements in the life of the average Grenadian despite the squeeze the country was under from the United States and falling world prices for agricultural products—the main exports from the island. We visited the construction site of the nearly completed international airport with a Grenadian friend. We discussed development models and Grenada's attempt to combine capitalist and cooperative models with significant Cuban aid and manpower. And we returned to the U.S. refreshed, inspired and energized.

A few weeks later stunning news came of the house arrest of Grenadian Prime Minister Maurice Bishop. Later news reports described his assassination along with that of scores of others. This tragedy was apparently the result of political infighting among the country's Marxist leadership. Taking advantage of Grenada at its weakest, President Reagan ordered U.S. troops to invade this tiny island of 94,000 people to restore "democracy" and to return Grenada to the grip of U.S. imperialism. The invasion was the highest level of military aggression taken by the U.S. since the end of the Viet Nam war. It tested the strength of the U.S. peace movement versus the right wing hawks and saw little or no organized opposition. The path was now clear for a more aggressive foreign policy and increased chauvinism at home.

President Reagan's February 1986 visit to Grenada brought back to me these good and bad memories. It also reminded me of the unfinished analysis of the Grenada experience that must be done by progressive Afro-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans now that the initial pain and shock have subsided. Was the Grenadian revolution premature? What form of government structure was appropriate? Why was the leadership group secretive about its Marxist organization and orientation and what effect did that secrecy have? Was people's democracy practiced? Should elections have been held? What development alternatives are there for the individual, small Caribbean islands? Why was the U.S. Black community's response to the violation of Grenada's sovereignty so weak? What can be done to support the progressive groups that continue their anti-imperialist organizing in Grenada? The list of questions is endless yet answering even one of them would be a profound contribution to the arsenal of oppressed people.

Grenada's "liberation" has been very costly. The U.S. military invaders carried out such a frenzied search for non-existent Cuban soldiers that many civilians were needlessly injured and killed. For example, they "mistakenly" bombed a mental hospital. The unemployment rate which had dropped down to fourteen percent during the Maurice Bishop administration now stands at forty to forty-five percent. Prostitution, which had been all but eliminated, rose sharply with the occupation by U.S. soldiers. Cooperative agricultural/fishing ventures, which had increased the self-esteem and economic power of Grenadian workers, have been dismantled to pave the way for U.S.-based investment. Few foreign companies have taken up this offer and so the island is in even worse economic straits. According to Anselm De Bourg, president of the Commercial and Industrial Workers Union of Grenada, the sole foreign industrial project since the invasion was a toy factory which operated for only a few months in 1984. It was non-union and paid very low wages. Right now De Bourg and other unionists are facing a harsh anti-labor offensive consisting of arbitrary firings and lay-offs, the roll-back of wages and benefits and efforts to weaken or break the unions.

Meanwhile, Reagan has proposed his solutions to the island's problems: a cut in U.S. aid and the economic incentive of a tax haven for U.S. firms in the Caribbean basin. He has also proposed a loosening of import quotas on some textiles produced in the Caribbean—a proposal geared to benefit U.S. textile firms more than the Caribbean nations since the goods must use U.S. woven and cut fabric while the host countries provide only cheap unskilled labor. Reagan's contribution to the present underdevelopment of Grenada was graphically brought home when U.S. Air Force jets—just a few days before his visit—flew in foreign wood to build the podium from which he would speak of the joys of native free enterprise.

While in Grenada, Reagan went to the now completed international airport and laid a wreath there at a memorial to the nineteen U.S. servicemen who died during the 1983 invasion. Some of the servicemen injured and killed were Black. The high proportion of Blacks in the U.S. fighting forces and their use in bolstering U.S. hegemony over peoples of color is a final incentive for us to take seriously the tragedy of Grenada. Grenada in its days of hope and in its days of reversal is still our challenge. ■

FM Interview

Boston School Bus Drivers Stand Firm

Introduction

The recent strike by the Boston school bus drivers union--United Steel Workers, Local 8751--was the fifth strike in its nine year history. The union organized in 1977 as bus-ing for desegregation began its fourth year. Unique for its integrated leadership and membership, the union was stubbornly resisted by a series of conservative School Committees allied with private bus companies under contract to provide transportation to school children for profit.

School bus drivers have insisted on having a say, not only in wages and benefits, but also issues of safety, and other conditions under which transportation is provided. While the union has always sought alliances with the parents and other area unions, the School Committee has used the courts to assault the drivers' efforts. Each strike was declared illegal, and jailings, firings and fines have become an integral part of the collective bargaining stance of the School Committee and private companies which employ the drivers.

Nevertheless, the union has maintained a militant and progressive stance throughout its history. Not only has it succeeded in each strike, but it maintains powerful control over conditions in the bus yards and on the buses. It has also consistently taken stands against racism, sexism and U.S. intervention abroad.

The 1986 contract battle caught the union somewhat off guard. During the previous Spring 1985, the drivers won a job guarantee from the School Committee that insured all drivers their jobs and seniority rights when the School Committee brought in a new bus company for the 1985-86 school year. In the Fall of 1986, working for the new company without a contract, the drivers won a battle against the School Committee which had refused due process to fourteen drivers fired for having alleged criminal records in their past. In October, after the "fired drivers" issue was settled, the School Department refused to sign a contract with the union unless fourteen concessions were accepted by the union. These concessions included longstanding rights such as: adequate time to do daily safety checks; rights for part-time drivers; training and promotional rights for drivers of non-bus (van) vehicles who get lower pay; and a driver-management committee that reviews driver accidents.

The union first assumed that the School Department would back off these concession demands, but they didn't. The strike succeeded in reversing all the concession demands. Also, the company agreed to up their contribution toward medical premiums and to establish a pension plan for the union, the monies for which would not be bargained for until the 1987 contract.

Since the strike, the union has been strengthened by the many new rank-and-file leaders who have stepped forward. The company continues to take a repressive stance towards the union and the arena of battle has shifted back to the shop floor. Meanwhile, the union has begun to prepare for contract '87, including rebuilding strained ties to the parents and offering solidarity to other area union struggles.

--Gene Bruskin, steward in USWA 8751 and writer for *The Labor Page*, a Boston area labor newspaper.

Editor's Note: What follows is an edited version of an interview with three USWA 8751 activists--Gene Bruskin, Luis Rios and Garry Merchison. Luis and Garry served as picket captains and Garry is also a steward. Bill Fletcher conducted the interview for *Forward Motion*.

Bill: The media presented a very anti-union picture of the events leading up to the strike in January. Could you give your version of the events that led you to go out?

Gene: The whole problem started last winter. We found out that the ARA bus company--a national, for-profit service corporation under contract at that time to provide transportation for Boston school children--was either going to skip town or get thrown out because of bad service. For about the seventh time since the union got organized in 1978, we didn't know whether we were going to be working the next year. We went to the School Committee in good faith and said, "Look. All we want next year is our jobs and our present contract." You see we had another year to go on our contract. They said "No" to the jobs and "No" to the contract.

All last Spring we were down at the School Committee, fighting and pressuring them in every way we could: with demonstrations, mail campaigns, leaflets to the parents, press conferences, threats, everything. Finally on June 20th the School Committee backed off and said they would give us our jobs next year no matter which bus company came in. But they said we had to make five changes in the work rules in our present contract before they would sign it. Some of them were big changes. They wanted to take away our bidding rights, for example. We negotiated those changes and we got them to compromise in a way we could live with. Even though we weren't happy, we figured that we had our jobs and we would get the contract when the new company came in.

Then right before school started in the Fall, they announced that thirty-seven people were going to be fired for allegedly having criminal records. Most of them were not even going to get a hearing. We had just finished fighting over the work rules. We thought we were done. So then we said, "Oh, hell. We are not going to negotiate this contract until you put these people back to work." Well we got most of the people back to work

immediately and hearings for all of them. And then the School Department turned around and demanded fourteen concessions. And that's when we began to feel that there was never going to be an end to this. They were just going to take, take take. They kept saying they would bargain, but no real bargaining was going on.

Bill: What do you think led them to feel that they could demand these concessions back in October?

Garry: We had called a strike and backed down three times. So they didn't take us seriously. We had called off the strikes out of a sense of responsibility to the kids and their parents. But we were getting the shaft. We had been working on good faith for those four or five months without a contract. But we couldn't keep it up when we weren't getting any positive results.

Bill: Yes, I remember that there had been a couple of times when people thought you were going out on strike.

Garry: They made us feel like we were a bunch of kids getting their bluff called. Each time we backed off because of our commitment to the kids and their parents.

Bill: What kind of work did you do before you went on strike to try to get support from the parents?

Luis: We were in touch with the parents through individual contacts, mass leafletting and the Citywide Parents Councils. And we had advised them that we were negotiating in good faith with the School Department and the company but that things didn't look too good. We originally gave them a deadline of January 2nd or so and said that if things didn't look good by then we were going to go on strike.

Garry: We had a couple of people who were in contact with several special needs parents. We had some good support from a lot of special needs parents. But when the strike started the news media exploited the whole issue. The majority of special needs parents were presented in the news as being against us, but I don't think they were.

At a special needs parents meeting I attended a lot of criticisms were directed at the School Department and the bus companies. Special needs parents had fought to get the ARA out of Boston and had succeeded. But now there are two different companies providing transportation and one of the companies still has, I think, seventeen management employees from the old ARA, including the general manager. So what is the point of getting rid of the company if you still have the same staff?

Bill: Were you able to follow through on your commitment to the kids and their parents during the strike?

Garry: At our strike taskforce meetings we tried to come up with ways to help the parents, especially the parents of special needs kids. Laval Wilson [Boston's new black Boston Superintendent of Schools--ed.] had announced the schools would be opened and that kids would have to take the "T" to school. Now I drive special needs kids. And there is no possible way that their parents can take them on the "T." One kid goes to school over in East Boston and one goes to school over in Charlestown.

One idea we tossed around was for about ten or fifteen drivers, with their own cars, to try to help some of the parents out who really needed assistance. But the point was

made that the driver would be at fault if an accident occurred and could be sued for everything he had. The individual driver would be taking the same responsibility as the bus company and we just couldn't afford to do that. Not at that time and I don't think ever.

Gene: We had a lot of discussion about what we could do to help the parent situation. One idea we came up with was to serve as a coordinating center where parents needing transportation could have connected up with each other. But we were struggling to survive ourselves. We had so much shit coming down on us and it was all we could do to keep ourselves together, coordinate the picket lines, etc.

Historically our union has really gone out of its way to work with the parents. One of the issues the union got organized around was the safety issue. In 1978, we brought parents into the yard at 5 o'clock in the morning with TV cameras to film the bald tires and all the broken windows. Ever since then we have fought for monitors on the buses and the right to refuse to drive an unsafe bus.

Now, of course, the parents are never happy with a strike because that means they don't get a ride for their kid. But in our previous strikes, the parents had usually gone public and demanded that both parties sit down at the table. They would criticize both parties and say, "Sit down and negotiate." And this was always what we wanted. But this time we were hurt because the School Department and the media had started up this criminal driver campaign last year. That issue had put us on the defensive and we never really recovered from that bad image. The parents were much less receptive to us this time around because of that. Before the strike we tried to go to some of their meetings and we couldn't get to speak.

We lost this one in terms of the parents. But we won in terms of the union. We realize we have a lot of rebuilding of ties to do in order to get our union back in touch with the parents. I think most people in the union recognize this as a top priority for us.

Bill: Do you feel that there was a concerted effort by the media to discredit your union?

All: Definitely.

Luis: It got to the point that we all decided that if we were going to say something to the media it was going to be a short thirty second statement. Because every time we gave them a long statement they cut it off.

Bill: A few months before you all went on strike, Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Workers here in Boston was on the verge of going on strike. [See the Feb.-March 1986 issue of *FM* for a look at that contract struggle--ed.] In my opinion they got some pretty good press. Then you all go on strike and the media came down on you like white on rice. What do you think was the reason for the difference?

Garry: Laval Wilson. I think he is not only trying to bust our union, but he is trying to bust desegregation. He is trying to do stuff that Spillane [the former Boston school superintendent--ed.] couldn't do. I don't want to make it sound like racism, but Spillane was white and this man is Black and so what better person can you get to bust desegregation than a Black.



USWA Local 8751

Pickets demonstrate outside Superintendent Laval Wilson's home.

I'm glad he came after us because we made our point that we weren't going to eat his dirt. Whatever his next move is, it is going to be treacherous. The man was up to no good as far as I am concerned. He played treacherous games throughout the whole strike and the media helped him a lot.

Luis: To tell you the truth, we were not really ready for the strike. Sure, we went out there and we stuck together. Like one big family we got out there and we said, "If we lose, we all lose together and if we win, we all win together." But we did not know what was coming up. If we had we could have worked together ahead of time with the media. For months before their strike deadline Local 26 was working on the issues. And that is why they had the media on their side most of the time.

Gene: Our union hadn't been on strike for six years. And there was new leadership and there were some problems. We had to deal with some very complicated issues last year with the job security threat and then the summary firing of thirty-seven drivers with alleged criminal records. And then came all the concession demands. The membership was reeling. We weren't exactly sure for awhile what was going on. We weren't a solid, well-prepared unit. It wasn't until the shit really hit the fan on January 2nd that we really pulled together. Once we pulled together there was no stopping us. But if we had pulled together in November it would have been a different story. We learned that lesson this time and we are already thinking about next year.

Bill: I'll get back to that in a second. But first I wanted to get to something else. Wilson is Black, as you pointed out. But your union is about fifty percent minority or more?

Garry: Yes, definitely. I'd say about seventy-five percent minority.

Bill: Do you feel that what you went through this past year, first around the issue of the fired drivers and then with the media coming down on you during the strike has anything to do with the racial make-up of your union?

Luis: I'm not ready to make a statement like that. I think the problem was more that we should have worked together with the media before the strike. It's hard to know.

Gene: You could never prove it. But there was a way in which we were so downgraded. We were so disrespected for this whole last year.

Luis: We were in the headlines way before the strike. "The colored driver on drugs." "The colored driver snatches somebody's pocketbook." When Laval Wilson came in, I guess people were kind of expecting, "OK. This is the man that will put a stop to this."

Garry: Most everyone on the School Committee hid behind Wilson. I'd be on the picket line by 4:30 AM every day and I would be on that line until 4:00 PM. As soon as I'd get home I'd turn on the television and the first thing I'd hear from people on the School Committee was "I'm behind Wilson 100%." When I'd go to a meeting, all I'd hear was "I'm behind Wilson 100%." The only one who was up front was Joe Casper [a school committeeman from South Boston known for his racist views--ed.]. Casper will tell you, "I don't care for Blacks." "I don't care for bus drivers." "I don't want anything to do with bus drivers." I respect him for that because he lets you know how he feels. But the rest of them are two-faced.

Bill: Were there any School Committee members that you thought really pulled for you?

Garry: No. When the strike first started we had no support at all. The only time when we got four supporters was when Laval Wilson started talking about cutting school transportation. When the Black school committee people saw that Wilson was going to start messing with desegregation that's when we got those four Black votes. Otherwise everyone was standing behind Wilson 100%.

Gene: I think that's true. The School Committee stood back and let him do his thing. But when it came down to whether or not they were going to agree to having us replaced, at that point both because of desegregation and also just because of some kind of commitment to the people, the Black committee members came over.

But, again, in this case I think that some of the responsibility falls on the union. For instance, last year when the School Committee voted that we couldn't get our jobs guaranteed with the new bus company we lobbied them. We went down every day buttonholing them. One or two people in every office. We had phone calls coming in there from parents. We had a mass drive among the parents and they were signing slips committing themselves to the union and calling in support of our jobs. But this time around we didn't deal with the School Committee at all. We didn't talk to them. We didn't lobby them. And they were getting all their information from Wilson. Of course, they could have called us up too.

Luis: I thought it was one of our mistakes that we didn't work together with the School Committee. We will never make that mistake again.

Gene: The other thing is that the School Committee had an election this year and it is now more conservative than it was last year. It was conservative last year, but there were one or two changes that have made it even worse. Like one of the guys from Allston/Brighton that voted with us last year was replaced by another right-winger. So the actual mixture of the School Committee is nine people who are pretty much on the Right and four Black School Committee people who--while not all the same politically--are all better than the rest of them. The nine other ones are not a great group.

Bill: When you finally went out on strike in January the union really did seem to be very together. How do you account for that?

Garry: I really don't think the strike was organized from the beginning. We just weren't prepared for it. But in the crisis people knew what they had to do. And there was no other alternative. We either went for broke or let this man pick and pick and pick and keep taking everything out of our contract. I think people knew what the consequences would have been if we had said, "Well, let's go back to work and give them another two months,"

I'd be the first to admit that I didn't know we were going to be that strong. I thought we were going to go out and people were going to start crossing the picket line and then we were going to be up the creek. But I'll tell you something. Every morning I was there and I saw people out there who would stay out of work when it was below thirty degrees. These same people were out on the picket lines when it was five degrees below. And that's the God's honest truth. They were out there yelling in car windows and yelling at whoever passed by.

Luis: We were all fed up. We said, "It's time for us to get this contract settled." How long were we going to wait for a contract? It was four months already. We had been negotiating in good faith. So we thought that by Christmas we would work something out. Then we realized that that wasn't going to happen. That they were not even going to consider the fact that it was Christmas. Or maybe they did consider it, but from a different perspective. I think the School Committee's strategy was that with Christmas coming, we'd have all these bills pouring in and nobody would want to go out on strike.

We went on strike to see justice done. And once we went out we felt we were on the right track. Even when the judge ruled that our strike was illegal and he cut our picket lines to six guys per line per gate we kept on. We knew we were on the right track and we were doing the right thing.

Gene: There are some people like me who have been involved in the union for a long time. This old leadership was somewhat tired and discouraged because we had had to fight so many times. And that is one of the reasons that the preparation didn't get done right. Up until the strike things were still being pretty much led by the old leadership. When the strike hit, the new leadership joined in and people like Garry and Luis here became key people, running the whole picket line. This was something new. You guys had just begun to be active in the union. And that began happening all over the yard as new people came forward. It might have been that if you guys weren't out there--if it was just me and people like me--Wilson and others would have said, "Oh, it's just

the same old people." And people in the union would have let us do the work. But there was something about you guys being out there. Other people began to think, "Well, gee, if Garry is out there maybe I should be out there too." It became clear that it was not just the same handful of people organizing this thing.

Even though we had economic demands on the table and everybody wanted a good contract and a raise that we never got this year, the bottom line was the issue of respect. And the more Wilson attacked us the more we came together.

Luis: You could see we were together on the picket lines. The police were stationed out there. And some of them would say, "You can't chant until a certain hour." We would get there at four o'clock in the morning but we couldn't chant because of the neighbors. So I'd bring a radio every morning. I have this giant radio. That would get everybody motivated. It used to keep everybody marching around in the circle. People would be dancing at five o'clock in the morning. And people driving by would say, "Boy, something good must be happening over there."

When they would hit us, we would counterattack. We would go at things from a different angle. Like when the judge said there could only be six picketers in the line. Fine. We had six on a line and six at a gate. But that didn't mean that we couldn't have thirty or forty cars lined up with people in them. So when six got cold, six more went out. They tried to break our lines several times. And I think we had one or two scabs. Maybe one and a half. One guy came back on the picket lines. He had just been confused.

Bill: One of the most controversial things in the strike was the intervention by Mayor Flynn. He was attacked by Wilson for intervening and heavily criticized by the media. Was Flynn any help to you? Do you think that he helped resolve the strike, or was it PR, or what?

Luis: We helped resolve the strike. We went along, that's all. We thought that his proposal could have been much better but were not in a position to reject it because he was the only one who stuck his neck out for us. We saw that open door and we went for it. Otherwise the next thing that Laval Wilson would have done after he finished criticizing the mayor would have been to criticize us if we had rejected Flynn's proposal. That was the only open door that we saw so we had to go through it, no matter what.

But the members were the ones who decided to go back to work. If the membership had voted not to accept the proposal, we would have gone back to the picket line. We felt that on our own we were already accomplishing a lot. That weekend the judge lifted the injunction which made the strike legal, and things were looking really good on our side. Then, while we were negotiating that Saturday, Wilson announced that he wanted to bring in the National Guard to drive the buses. And we said, "Gee, how far can this thing go?" So it was good that the mayor jumped in.

Gene: It's similar to what has happened in other strikes. The judge starts out like he wants to kill us; you know, put us in jail and such. But at a certain point the judge has to change his strategy because he is killing himself. The buses aren't rolling, we are getting deeper and deeper into the strike, and the drivers aren't budging no matter

how much intimidation is coming down. So the judge will turn on the companies and the School Committee.

I think Flynn did a good thing and I like the way he did it. He did it by really standing up for us as people and as workers. But I think the reason he did it is because of what we did. He realized that if he didn't turn that corner and school opened after Martin Luther King's birthday and they tried to replace us, we would fight for our lives. It would have been war. Flynn came into office as a pro-labor mayor and he couldn't, I don't think, stand that kind of confrontation. Plus I think he was jealous of the fact that Wilson was getting more credit than him and had gained so much authority without him. Flynn wanted to re-establish his own power. So he had a lot of his own reasons for intervening. It was not just for the workers' sake. But that was a turning point for us.

Luis: Here is an example of what we were up against trying to bargain with Laval Wilson and the role Flynn played. There was this new proposal for an attendance bonus. The way it would work was that if you were on time for two months without missing a day, you would get a \$100 bonus. Wilson's proposal was that if Gene here is the shop steward and he is going to represent me in some grievance, he would lose a day out of his attendance record, but I wouldn't lose one. He would forfeit his \$100 bonus. This is a great way to break the union. Because there is going to come a time when Gene here is going to say, "Gee, Luis, I can't afford to miss out on my bonus by going out to represent you. You'll have to find yourself another steward." And Wilson knows this. Now Mayor Flynn was more in good faith. His proposal said that if a shop steward was out on union business he would still be entitled to keep his attendance record clear.

Flynn must have had a lot of pressure from parents. They must have been calling him saying, "Hey, what are you doing? You are the mayor and you can't let our children's education be disrupted this way."

Bill: All in all, would you say this was a victory for your union?

Luis: Oh, yes. If we hadn't gone out, we wouldn't have a contract right now. We didn't get a pension plan, it's true. But the reason we put a pension plan on the table in the first place was because they had already demanded fourteen concession. So we needed something to come back with. So we came back with demands for 100% medical coverage and a pension plan. We didn't get a pension plan, but at least we got a start. There's always another contract coming up in which we can add something to that pension plan.

Bill: What else did you win?

Gene: Well all fourteen concessions they demanded were thrown out. Also, our contract used to expire in the summertime which was a bad time for us. Now it is going to expire September 1st. Also, during the period of four months when we were working without a contract, a number of grievances piled up--thirty-eight I think. They originally said they wouldn't date the contract September 1st unless we dropped all these grievances. And we got that overturned as well.

Luis: We gained respect. And we got a contract. They didn't want to give us a contract and we got it. So we made out.

Garry: I feel differently. We ended with the same contract as we had before plus 100 % medical coverage. That's all. The victory would have been a pension plan.

I would like to stay on this job. And there are people like Gene who have worked as bus drivers for ten years. But everybody out there nowadays has got a pension plan. When they retire they have something to fall back on. I don't want to be out there collecting five cents on cans and bottles to survive when I retire. The whole time we were out on strike, I was listening to all these parents and these people in suits and ties coming down on us. And I was thinking, "I bet that if I walked up to any one of them and asked them if *they* are covered by a pension plan the majority of them would say they were." This is going to be my third year driving a bus. But if we don't get any pension plan, I'm going to have to do some thinking about staying on. Because it doesn't make much sense for me to work all my life and end up with just social security. Reagan will probably have done away with it by the time I get old.

Bill: So you think the union was defeated or that it was a stalemate?

Garry: Well, I wouldn't say we were defeated exactly. We won a lot more respect than we had before and that's very important. I think we accomplished a lot. But for me the main point was the benefits and the pension plan.

Gene: We will get it next year.

I think Garry is right in the sense that the pension plan meant a lot to people. We got the cake without any icing. The pension plan was what was really going to make it sweet. But we need to step back and look at what is happening to unions everywhere today. There are cases where companies have put fourteen concessions on the table and the unions have fought and ended up back at work with the fourteen concessions in their contract. That is what is happening to the Teamsters Union and to the Steel Workers out in the Midwest, and to people all over the country. In our situation, they put those concessions on the table and we defeated them and we turned some of them into improvements. So if you measure what we achieved against the climate in the country today, then I say it is a victory. It was a tremendous victory in the sense that the union got stronger and we defeated the concessions. Real justice would have included the pension plan. But the climate is so against justice these days that a victory is very different now from what it was ten years ago.

Bill: What other lessons did you learn from this whole experience?

Luis: We learned how to work together. We learned that when all of us are united we are strong no matter what the opposition is. But it also taught us the need to be prepared...to start working ahead of time.

Garry: In a crisis we pulled together very quickly. There wasn't a lot of "No" over here and "Yes" over there. Everyone listened. Normally, it is hard to get control at one of our union meetings. But during the strike people really paid attention. Several times you could hear a pin drop.

I also feel that now the bus company understands that they can't walk all over our people.

Gene: For awhile a lot of people were feeling like nobody in the union gave a damn

and that if nobody was willing to show any courage everyone might as well just look out for their own ass. You start feeling this person is an ass-licker, this person is a lazy bastard and so on. Then all of a sudden, at the right time and in the right situation people came forward and went out in the streets and were ready to fight. This strike really restored my faith in the people.

I think in general we have to be reminded that even when it doesn't look like the people are ready to move that there is a big part of them that is ready. You have to figure out how to turn that little notch somewhere that unleashes that positive energy. Just because they aren't doing anything doesn't mean that they wouldn't like to or they don't care. Recent events in Haiti seem to bring this lesson home to us. And that certainly is what happened in our union.

Bill: So where does the union go from here?

Luis: We have to start preparing for our next contract in September of 1987. We know it is not going to be a piece of cake. We already know what to expect from Mr. Wilson and he knows what to expect from us.

Garry: What's in store for us? In the past, we didn't stay on top of things the way we should have. With this strike we realized that. We can't afford to neglect the School Committee. We definitely can't afford to neglect Wilson. We have to stay on this guy's case. Otherwise whatever statements he makes will be taken as the truth.

We need to get parents and the public at large to realize that it is the bus drivers who really make the school transportation system work. A responsible bus company is important, of course. But we carry an awful lot of responsibility. People don't realize what we have to deal with every day. We have to deal with all those whackos driving out there. Anyone who has ever driven during rush hour in Boston knows what I'm talking about. If you hit someone, that jeopardizes your job. If you get stopped by a cop and get a ticket, the bus company doesn't pay that. If you are out sick for two weeks, you don't get paid for that. We put up with a lot of things that parents don't realize.

Gene: We need to figure out how to get a high level of participation in the union on a daily basis. Not at the same level as during the strike, of course. But if we can keep people involved we can really have a fantastic union. We know now that we've got the people. And we have seen what we can do. I think that is the big challenge. That includes doing our PR work, trying to reach all the parents. I also think our union has a lot of solidarity to pay back. We got a lot of support on the picket lines every day: from other unions; from every socialist organization in the city; from parents and all kinds of people. I think that when we are called on we have to pay that back.

Bill: Thank you all very much.

A Balance Sheet:

Six Months of Struggle in Mexico

by **Francisco Miguel Mantilla**

The author is a Mexican revolutionary activist and intellectual, currently living in Mexico City. The article is translated from the Spanish original.

Halfway through the six-year term of President Miguel de la Madrid, the Mexican government confronts the most serious social and political discontent since 1968. Unlike 1968, however, the present situation is aggravated by the worst economic crisis since the 1910 Revolution. Despite its famous capacity for political control and repression, its skill at negotiation and maneuvering, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) regime has experienced a quickening erosion of its ability to govern the country.

Within the ranks of the PRI (the ruling party), conflicts have surfaced among the pressure groups and special interests that make up its political base. In recent years, a group of technocrats has become installed in the party leadership. This group has little political experience and few connections with either the Mexican people at the grassroots or with the old-line party bosses and trade union bureaucrats who used to control the Party. This has been a source of considerable friction.

The technocrats, with a neo-liberal ideology and abrasive style of governing, have antagonized not only the Party regulars but also key parts of the bourgeoisie outside the PRI and sectors of the middle classes. Meanwhile, revelations of shocking corruption, reaching right up to the office of President, have badly hurt the PRI's standing among the working classes.

As the PRI's ability to govern has been called into question, it has come under increasing attack from two directions. The strongest challenge to date has come from important sectors of the ruling class, represented politically by the National Action Party (PAN). This, the oldest conservative party in Mexico, has strong middle class and some broader popular support. The other challenge—less well-organized and publicized—comes from the working classes. Here the anti-PRI struggles are influenced by the Mexican Left.

Business Dissatisfaction with the PRI

Some observers find it hard to understand why the big Mexican capitalists would rebel against the PRI. After all, the bourgeoisie has received subsidy after subsidy—exemption from taxes, free construction of the infrastructure, etc. Certainly it is true that the bourgeoisie, and especially its monopoly sector, has been pampered by the State. Nevertheless, the same State has demanded, in return, unconditional political support for the PRI. That is to say, the PRI has allowed the participation of prominent individual industrialists, or even groups of capitalists within the PRI structure. But the PRI has not allowed the bourgeoisie to express themselves politically or run for office with any credibility by means of PAN, the PDM (Mexican Democratic Party) or independent business groupings. This political monopolization by the State and its party has been accepted by the bourgeoisie for more than half a century. In practice it has helped promote political stability while safeguarding their class interests. Today, this understanding between the big capitalists and the PRI has begun to crumble.

At the root of the new contradictions between the State and very important ruling class sectors is the evident failure of the model of capitalist reproduction imposed on the Mexican economy since the 1940s. One of the main pillars of this model has been state participation in capital formation and state intervention in strategic branches of the economy—generation of electricity, steel, mining, railroads, communications, fishing, manufacturing, tourism, etc. By means of this role in the economy, the State has been able to maintain political alliances. It has had a “social contract” with the trade union bureaucracy—historically an important part of the PRI—and also with a large sector of the working class. Here the combination of relatively high pay and job security, apathy and repression has caused this sector to cede their independence to the State.

As long as economic growth (the so-called “Mexican Miracle”) continued, handcuffing parts of the working class and balancing the forces of the different pro-capitalist factions, the PRI state and the bourgeoisie enjoyed a long honeymoon. In the course of this ongoing romance, PRI politicians became industrialists, with the help of corruption. And many industrialists became PRI politicians, using official corruption to expand their businesses. Given current rhetoric, it is important to note that the capitalists were hardly the “innocent victims” of corruption—they tolerated it, accepted it, and sought it out.

So despite what the PAN would have us believe, the thrust of Big Business' attack on the “political class” is not to stop corruption in high places—something from which they have benefitted in many ways. Rather, it is a criticism of the existing method of rule. A major sector of Mexican capital seeks a dramatic restructuring of Mexico's political economy in this period of profound economic crisis. They have no more use for a government based on a “social contract” among trade union and rural bureaucrats, petit-bourgeois professionals and political bosses. Bourgeois forces outside of, and even inside of the PRI want to change the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which established the “sovereignty of the State in the interests of the Nation.” They want to redefine the

rules of the political game. Their program includes a role for the PAN in government, even closer alignment with the U.S. in foreign affairs than exists today, and economic policies which will boost profits and capital expansion through the kind of exploitation and subjugation known in Mexico during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz.

The PAN is only one of the dissident Mexican bourgeoisie's options. As a class, capitalists are more pragmatic than doctrinaire—a doctrinaire bourgeoisie could never maintain hegemony. So while they use the PAN, they are also maneuvering with and inside the PRI. They exert pressure through the mass media—most of which they own—and make use of all their various connections and contacts. There is not always unity on when to attack the PRI, when to negotiate with it; when to back the PAN quietly, when to take over the leadership of the PAN, etc. As a result, powerful employer groups, such as ALFA or VITRO, both based in Monterrey, have differences with each other. But these differences are tactical. They serve a single strategic objective: to destroy without a trace the type of State that was created from the 1910 Revolution. They wish to eliminate the role of the central government in the economy, to end free secular public education and other services, to marginalize the trade union and agrarian bureaucracies and to crush the progressive and revolutionary forces.



The PRI Political Monopoly

An important aspect of the current situation is that the PAN does have significant support among the middle classes and popular sectors.

The PAN's main social base is conservative, religious (Catholic) and petit-bourgeois. It was founded in 1939 with the help of Monterrey capitalists. For many years, it was barely able to play the role of symbolic opposition to the PRI. The PAN's strongest support has come from four regions: (a) the Yucatan, a state with a majority Indian population, whose ruling class, of Spanish origin, have called themselves "la casta divina"—the divine caste; (b) the state of Puebla, historically the stronghold of Catholic conservatism; (c) certain petit-bourgeois sections of Mexico City; and (d) above all in the North of Mexico. It is in this last region that the PAN has grown most visibly in the past few years. Various factors explain this situation.

First of all, there is the question of the centralization of Mexico. Even though the North played a key role in the Mexican revolution, and Northern politicians were in power from 1917 to 1934, Mexico City continued to dominate the life of the nation politically, economically and culturally. This pattern of centralization has continued up to the present, and become institutionalized in a variety of ways.

For instance, the President of Mexico essentially *appoints* the state governors by choosing the PRI candidates. (There hasn't been a non-PRI governor since 1929.) He also chooses the majority of the Senators and many Deputies, the head of the PRI legislative delegation, the chief of the Senate and the President of the PRI. He appoints the head of the Army, the cabinet, the "Regent" of Mexico City (there is no mayor and no mayoral elections). Thus, state and even municipal functions are organized to serve the central authority, not to meet the particular needs of local constituents of any class.

Obsessive centralization of power has hurt the economic development of the provinces. Paradoxically, it has also caused problems for its supposed beneficiary—Mexico City—where all the ills of the country are pathologically concentrated. (Twenty-three percent of Mexico's population is crammed into a thousandth of its territory, along with fifty percent of the nation's industry, seventy-five percent of its commerce, sixty percent of its university students, etc. It has become the most populous city in the world, and also one of the most polluted, most violent and conflicted, with tremendous levels of unemployment.) But centralization has deprived the provinces of Mexico—above all in the North—more directly and visibly. And this is one of the reasons for the current repudiation of the PRI.

Historically, the North of Mexico has had fewer ties with the rest of the country than other regions, including Mexico City. It is a large, relatively underdeveloped, sparsely populated region, set apart by mountains and deserts. These characteristics have contributed to the growth of regional pride, and defiance of centralism—and thus defiance of the PRI. Corruption in the national government and the economic crisis have further fueled this regional chauvinism. And the northern capitalists try to awaken and encourage it as a weapon against the central leaders. (At the same time, they propose moving closer to the U.S.!)

In earlier days, the PAN used to run unknown petit-bourgeois reactionaries for office. But in the last four years, prominent business figures have contested elections in the North. These plantation, shipyard and factory owners, hotel magnates and prominent executives are put forward as the "pride" of the region or city concerned. They are promoted as "self-made men," untainted by PRI corruption, men who "don't need the PRI." (As is often the case, there is a germ of truth in these claims. Capitalism in the North did develop somewhat more independently, and in "purer" forms, as compared to the rest of the country, which was heavily shackled by pre-capitalist institutions and traditions. Also, relatively large middle classes were able to establish themselves.)

Hesitation on the Right

The nationwide elections for Federal Deputies and the gubernatorial contests in Sonora and Nuevo Leon, both of which took place last July, provided an excellent laboratory for measuring the forces and taking the political temperature of Mexico. The PAN received significant vote totals in the states of Mexico, Puebla, Yucatan, San Luis Potosi, Durango, Sinaloa, in the Federal District, and in the belt of towns and cities close to the U.S. border. Voter response and popular mobilization in the North was far from homogenous. In some states, such as Baja California, the PAN vote was fairly low, while in Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo Leon there was constant and massive agitation. Surprisingly, in Sonora, where the PAN was expected to do well, the movement fizzled.

The PRI government recognized the election of about forty PAN Deputies—both those who gained a majority and those assigned to the PAN through proportional representation. All evidence indicates that the PAN actually won much more of the vote. There was scandalous fraud in Nuevo Leon, Coahuila and Sonora, and less spectacular corrupt maneuvering by the PRI in other states.

In this situation, the actual vote totals were perhaps less significant than the reaction of the PAN leaders, on the one hand, and of the Northern PAN voters, on the other. The official PAN response to the government's authoritarianism and dirty tricks was cause for disillusionment for many of the Party's supporters. Apart from the strident but hollow declarations of Adalberto Rosas, candidate for Governor of Sonora, the PAN leadership didn't want to, or didn't know how to make use of the enormous discontent of the people. Actually, in Sonora the population didn't respond to the PAN's appeals to any great extent. But in Nuevo Leon and Coahuila, the PAN rank and file's anger boiled over, out of the control of the Party's leaders. Radical and sometimes violent outbursts resulted, but without a plan of action or solid leadership, the protests gradually dissipated.

What became clear was that the PAN bosses recoiled from the spontaneous radicalization of a significant part of their mass base in the North. Here they had a population that had voted for them, but which was not necessarily right-wing in its overall ideology. In fact, these people displayed definite democratic tendencies. The PAN leadership wanted to triumph using the people's votes, but without real participation, let alone mobilization of radicalized masses. After all, how could a bourgeois reactionary like

Canales Clariond or a right-wing fanatic like Adalberto Rosas permit people to take over government offices? How could they allow crowds to clash with the police while their leaders harped on "law and order"? So the PAN bosses did their best to contain the mass protests.

The authoritarianism and fraud of the PRI on the one side, and the timid, manipulative stance of the PAN on the other side, has contributed heavily to cynicism about elections and party politics among many Mexicans. The most recent elections for municipal office (in the beginning of November in cities in Chiapas, Nuevo Leon and Campeche; on December 1 in Jalisco, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi and Zacatecas) were once again characterized by PRI fraud. They were also characterized by abstentionism running from seventy to ninety percent of the citizens. Dissatisfaction with electoral activity is present in all social classes, but is expressed most strongly among the working classes.

Earthquake Aftermath: Popular Mobilization

Aversion to electoral struggle is stronger in some regions than in others. More importantly, aversion to electoral struggle is not the same thing as total political passivity. The mobilization in the North of Mexico, although contained and manipulated by the PAN, showed clearly how angry at the regime a vast region of the country is, and how willing the people are to take action. Yet perhaps the best illustration of popular resistance, and of the peoples' critical organizational capacity, is the thousands of civil "insurrections" which, in the days after the great earthquake, virtually took over the streets of Mexico City and other urban centers. Particularly notable were the popular mobilizations in Ciudad Lazaro Cardenas (a city of metalworkers), in the state of Michoacan, and, above all, the giant explosion of participation and direct action in the capital.

Once again, the PAN, faced with a sweeping, spontaneous, profoundly human and surprisingly well-organized civil mobilization for the rescue of the victims of the earthquake, showed itself to be inert and incapable of leadership. Turning its back on working among the masses, the PAN did virtually nothing in response to the quake.

Nevertheless, it was the Mexican government which displayed the most complete blindness, rigidity, political sclerosis, purulent insensitivity to human misery and ridiculous authoritarianism. When it did try to take action, the government frequently just got in the way of the people's unofficial rescue efforts. The police again exhibited their inefficiency and corruption. The Army took the prize for cruelty and plunder.

The population of Mexico City (including some individual police and soldiers) reacted to adversity with moving valor and solidarity. In a massive display of creative intelligence and collective spirit, the people outstripped every grouping, institution or party in organizing the rescue effort.

As distinguished writer Carlos Monsivais says, "Civil society took power—for a few moments—in Mexico City." The city was theirs for several days. In fact, it was a sort of immense commune. Children directed traffic and guarded the ruined buildings, arresting looters. Housewives prepared food for the needy, took care of sick people,

transported water, tools and rubble. Men and women climbed among the ruins, saving lives and carrying inert bodies from among the twisted walls and girders. Doctors and nurses treated the wounded and reorganized the hospitals. Engineers and architects directed rescue efforts. Miners, coming from Pachuca and other nearby cities, went into the most perilous places to save lives.

It is difficult for a spontaneous action, no matter how profound, honest and beautiful, to sustain itself for a long time, especially when it is obstructed by the state. It is here that the revolutionary forces have to act to keep alive the flame of organization and conscious mobilization. The Mexican Left, which had not fared well in the electoral struggle, has responded to this new challenge capably and with integrity.

Months after the quake, thousands of people continue to fight to reclaim part of their possessions; for shelter and employment; for government assistance to live and to repay the debts of family members who perished; for abolishing mortgages on shabbily-constructed buildings which collapsed, etc. Revealingly, it is among the working classes that the struggle is being continued most firmly. Various social organizations have sprung forth out of the ruins of the earthquake. Among the most important of these are the Unified Victims' Association (CUD) and the September 19 Independent Seamstress' Union.

The CUD is a group of dispossessed tenants and homeowners, many now living on the street in tents. They are demanding prompt and appropriate reconstruction of their communities. They are pushing for honesty and efficiency on the part of government officials. They insist that the residents themselves should direct the work of rebuilding, not the international relief agencies. The CUD wants the authorities to give priority to reconstruction of schools, hospitals and housing, instead of businesses. They are resisting government plans to disperse long-existing communities. Moreover, the CUD has joined a number of independent unions and opposition parties in demanding that Mexico repudiate the foreign debt. This democratically-run organization is large and active continually in both working class and middle class neighborhoods.

Amid the misfortunes of the earthquake are some favorable signs for a people already hurting from the economic crisis. One of these is surely the upsurge of militancy among the garment workers. As in the U.S., this is one of the most exploited sectors of the Mexican working class, made up largely of women. Now, starting with little organizational experience, and suffering almost inhuman conditions, the seamstresses have forged a large and exemplary independent union.

The earthquake, it seems, was the last straw. Hundreds of the workers died in the rubble of their sweatshops. Many others were injured or trapped alive. Despite their numbers, the garment district's central location and their screams for help, the seamstresses were among the last to be rescued. The first thing the employers did was bring in trucks to haul out their machinery and office safes, leaving behind the dead and those trapped inside. The police helped the bosses get their capital out. The workers were left standing at the foot of the ruins without jobs or legally-mandated compensation. The labor bureaucrats protected the owners, allowing them to violate the law one

more time.

Today the seamstresses no longer believe in the "patroncito"—the good little boss—or in the government. Today they believe in organization, in their own union, in struggle, in taking to the streets. They have raised their left fists and allied with the revolutionaries. The seamstresses have marched down the avenues of Mexico City protesting against the foreign debt, violence and machismo, demanding the democratic reconstruction of the city and independent organization of the workers. And other types of garment workers are joining the struggle.

The Mexican Left is with the CUD and the garment workers. It helps and influences them. The Left's Deputies have placed the CUD and "September 19th" demands before the national legislature. The Left supports the struggles on television and radio, in the press, with legal assistance and in the streets.

Time of Opportunity for the Left

We have seen that in the last year the pace of change in the country has accelerated. In the aftermath of the electoral struggle in July and the earthquake, things are not the same. The PRI political system is seriously weakened. Anger against the government is accumulating. And this discontent is unlikely to fade. The economic crisis is becoming deeper and deeper. The dollar is rising into the clouds. The peso is becoming "argentitized." Unemployment is rising, real wages falling. The standard of living has fallen forty percent in three years. Mexico's ballyhooed entry into the GATT trading agreement will increase the country's dependence on the U.S. Thousands of medium and small businesses are likely to become "uncompetitive." As they close, unemployment and migration northward will increase.

Yet consciousness and organization are not flowering everywhere. Discontent is uneven and uncoordinated. Nor does it always take a progressive form. Up until now, it has been a bourgeois tendency that has had the most success against the PRI at the ballot box.

Where there is organization and mobilization the Left is gaining ground. It remains to be seen whether or not voters will reverse tendencies toward the PAN and apathy, and, with a stronger, more tested Left, will use the electoral process, confident that their victories will be defended. It is to be hoped that the revolutionaries and the Mexican people will interpret the political situation correctly and set the right tasks and that the Mexican Left will conduct itself well in the crisis.

It is also to be hoped that U.S. socialists will better understand their role in Mexico's struggle against North American imperialism—and that they will learn more about Mexico's struggles and come closer to them. This is vital for the future of both countries. One of the many things we share is 3,000 kilometers of border. Thousands and thousands of Mexicans will inevitably cross to the U.S. in coming years, fleeing unemployment and poverty. Hundreds of them will carry with them important lessons of struggle and a spirit of militancy. Without a doubt, these Mexican immigrants will contribute to the resurgence of a powerful revolutionary workers' movement in the U.S. ■

William F. Buckley in Iowa

The New Campus Right Wing

A visit to our campus by noted right-wing ideologue, William F. Buckley, provoked a minor storm of controversy last semester. The incident highlights current political developments on campus, especially the conservative trend among students. It also says a lot about the reproduction of right-wing ideology today as well as about the role of white chauvinism in the present conservative trend. These are all developments the newly emerging progressive student movement needs to understand.

The overall situation on campus is a contradictory one, but the majority of students did vote for Ronald Reagan. Though they weren't voting for his entire program, students basically have bought the self-interest aspect of Reaganism. Real developments in the economy laid the ground for this. The idea is that you get ahead by stepping on others, and there is the potential to make it if you are willing to do just that. The College Republicans have been carefully cultivating this Me-Firstism.

Reaganism, Reaction and Racism in a Liberal Setting

During the spring of 1985, over one hundred schools nationwide took part in an upsurge of student protest against apartheid. Though things have changed a lot, the University of Iowa is still a liberal school with a tradition of progressive activism, and Iowa City witnessed one of the more important and effective of those campus actions. Several hundred people occupied the president's office, one hundred and thirty-seven were arrested, and hundreds protested over a ten day period in a campaign which led to divestment. The progressive movement includes the Central America Solidarity Committee, (one of CISPES's main student chapters), several organizations opposing nuclear war and a core of activist women students who, along with a well-organized women's center, sponsored a "Take Back The Night" march in May which drew over three hundred people.

Contrasted to the growing progressive movement, the main trend on campus is in a conservative direction. Barely one-and-a-half months before the occupation for divestment, a right-center coalition took over the student government in a landslide election from the moderate-liberal grouping which had been dominant for five years. It must be pointed out that the Students First party (what an appropriate name) had to dive to the center in order to win. Organized by the College Republicans, they initially started with a campaign aimed at defunding the Left groups which receive student funds. When this proved too radical a position, they retreated to a good government, pro-student

services platform. Their self-declared non-ideological politics reflected the business school consciousness of the center, and served as a cover for their objectives. They used this to carry out their plan of defunding the Left, starting with the main group on campus, New Wave, the multi-issue, Progressive Student Network affiliate.

In distinction from the explicitly non-ideological politics of the student government, the University of Iowa has seen a growing, organized right-wing presence. The main form this has taken has been the *Campus Review*, a snide and disgusting rag of right-wing commentary. Affiliated with YAF (Young Americans for Freedom—the William F. Buckley initiated group), and with money from a neo-conservative philanthropist and direct mail lists, they print 15,000 of this scandalous, filthy monthly. They drop them free on several campuses across the state. Their positions range from condemning gays as deserving AIDS, to supporting Botha's regime in South Africa, to calling for a wave of Bernard Goetz-like shootings.

To say that the conservative trend is the main development on campus is not to say the campuses have been taken over by the right-wing. Even the local College Republicans think the *Campus Review* is abhorrent on certain issues. What unites them is support for Reagan—and opposition to the Left.

Like most other large, northern, state schools, the University of Iowa is overwhelmingly white, with seven hundred Black students and one hundred Chicano students out of a total student body of 30,000. Budget cuts, a tighter job market, and all the other symptoms of "capitalism in decline" which face students have been accompanied by dropping minority enrollments and a terrible minority student retention rate. A tenuous Afro-American studies program, and precious few minority faculty show further the reality of the University's stance toward minorities. The other side of the picture is a liberal administration which celebrates Martin Luther King's birthday and places Blacks, Latinos and women in key public positions, to cover up their absence in power positions and in the faculty.

Buckley's Visit

Buckley had been brought to campus by the Lecture Committee. This committee consists of several students, faculty, and administrators, all of whom are white, almost all of whom are male. His talk came at a cost to the committee (and the students, from whose tuition comes the committee's money) of \$9,000. This same committee had been approached some time earlier to contribute \$2,000 of a \$5,000 honorarium for a proposed speech by the Rev. Jesse Jackson. In response, one student committee member asked, "Well, if Mr. Jackson really wants to get his message across, why does he need any money at all?"

Buckley's talk, entitled "Reflections on Current Contentions," consisted of one hour of personal anecdotes on questions of the day and half an hour of questions from the audience. He attacked the idea of a nuclear freeze, supported the President's half-baked theories of "supply-side economics," warned about the danger from the Russians, defended the current regime in South Africa, and finally, spent over twenty-five minutes in

an assault on the Rev. Jesse Jackson. (It is interesting to note that, given \$9,000 for a ninety minute speech, Buckley was earning about \$11 per minute. So approximately \$2,500 of that total went to pay for Buckley's attack on the Rev. Jackson.)

Buckley's critique of Jackson included charges that he is soft on communism and terrorism; that Jackson is guilty of exaggeration for such claims as that the infant mortality rate among Black children in Detroit is comparable to that among children in Honduras; and that Jackson is a nationalist (!) and a racist (!) who would be denounced by Martin Luther King were he still alive. When challenged by one of the few progressive folks in the crowd of 1,000-plus white supporters, he continued with an explanation of the plight of Black America. The low point in his talk was when he credited the economic crisis facing Blacks to the failure of the Black family. Discounting racism and poverty as determining factors, he termed the problem "bastardy."

The attitudes and analysis he expressed regarding race in the U.S. are part of a loose collection of theories under the banner of "the Culture of Poverty." Originally associated with Sen. Moynihan of New York, these theories are simply rationalizations for the racism which pervades this system. In brief, they say the oppressed are to blame for their oppression. The idea that unemployment among Black youth approaches fifty percent because of some mysterious quality in their family life is at best ludicrous and at worst outright and blatant racism.

What is most disturbing though, was the warm reception given by the throng of white students. They cheered repeatedly during his talk, and especially during his repeated attacks against Jackson. Black students and faculty were aghast, and in the following weeks, better ties were built between Blacks and progressive whites as discussions of Buckley's visit and the university as a racist institution continued in several meetings, anti-apartheid rallies, in the letters section of the campus paper, and with the movement generally.

Implications

Buckley's comments are more than just heaping insults on top of the injuries Black students have already suffered. It is the role of intellectuals such as Buckley to facilitate reproduction of the racist ideology of this system, mobilizing racist resentment toward affirmative action, social welfare, and other programs. Buckley takes white chauvinism in its crude form and helps shape it, refine it, and gives it an intellectual lustre, as a significant underpinning of an overall reactionary outlook. This is part and parcel of the attacks against the people that Reaganism is all about.

White student activists must call out Buckley and other pseudo-intellectuals who promote similar racist ideas on campuses in the U.S. Confrontations such as these are not only just, they serve to unite Black and other minority students with white progressives. Further, our ability to fight against these ideas among the masses is strengthened, while our understanding of them is deepened.

by Joe Iosbaker

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Another Look at *The Color Purple*

by Lucy Marx

Quite a few people whose opinions I respect have given Spielberg's movie, *The Color Purple*, thumbs-up reviews--including Candice Cason in the last issue of *Forward Motion*. Andrew Kopkind, in *The Nation*, for instance, gave Spielberg's film one of the most glowing reviews he's given in a long time, even describing it as an act of courage and a show of resistance against the Right-wing tide in Hollywood.

Well, Kopkind may be right in seeing *The Color Purple* as the strongest resistance to the Right we can expect out of Hollywood for the time being. The problem is that Spielberg's counter to Right-wing Rambo is Hollywood-style liberalism. And like most of the liberal Democratic rhetoric coming out of Washington, this Hollywood liberalism capitulates to Right-wing assumptions and prejudices about as much as it fights them.

Mainstreaming With Steven Spielberg

One comment Cason made in her review of *The Color Purple* was that there's so little on film about Black people that it was good to see just about anything about Black peoples' lives brought into mainstream movies. And it's certainly true that you couldn't get more mainstream than Steven Spielberg. But despite Spielberg's obvious ability to make a clean sweep of the ratings, he comes to this particular project with three big counts against him.

First of all, Spielberg is about the last film-maker who ought to be making a movie about a book. By his own admission, he doesn't particularly like books. Or at least he hardly ever reads them. The only reason he read this book at all, he says, is because a friend gave it to him and it was short. And, frankly, it shows. Spielberg brings very little sensitivity to his reading of Alice Walker's novel, immediately converting it into his own heavy-handed Hollywood extravaganza.

Second, *The Color Purple* is a novel entirely devoted to human relations, and--again by Spielberg's admission--he's not generally that interested in humans. In fact, he agrees that *The Color Purple* was a challenge to him precisely because it was "about people." Of course human beings do appear in Spielberg movies but it's no coincidence that his most famous character, ET, is *not* one and that most of his humans--such as Indiana Jones--are figures borrowed from old movies and cartoons, and aren't expected to be anything more than stereotype.

Third, *The Color Purple* is told from a Black radical feminist perspective and Steven Spielberg is a white man. Now, of course, this doesn't make the project automatically impossible. John Sayles, for instance, did quite well at recreating certain parts of Black culture in *Brother From Another Planet*. But Spielberg has never shown any particular interest in Black culture or Black peoples' lives. The closest thing to "real life" we get from Spielberg are the snatches of bored, mundane existence in affluent white suburbia--before ET arrives, or the shark comes ashore, or the TV starts to go hay-wire. And though Spielberg has never directly dealt with Black peoples' lives he has managed to compile an especially strong resume when it comes to sexist stereotyping and, particularly, racism. Not that his sexism and racism is particularly mean-spirited. It's the familiar friendly stuff we grew up with in the cartoons and in cowboy and Indian movies, the stuff that Ronald Reagan exudes. Nevertheless the racist Imperial vision implicit in everything from *Gremlins* to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* could be subject for a whole other discussion.

Celie Goes to Disney Land

One thing that always strikes me about Spielberg is that his vision of the world is so movie-centric (or TV-centric). Not only do his characters and his particular version of racist and sexist ideology come right off the screen. His whole world view seems to be completely steeped in the rhythm and moods of TV shows and other movies. It's as if he learned everything he knows from what could fit into the two hours of a Sunday matinee. His movies are nostalgia pieces made vivid by state-of-the-art technology. His odyssey is to recapture the mood and tone of the kiddie show when heroes were heroes, and there was always a happy (maybe a little bitter-sweet but always happy) ending. He even judges his characters by how prepared they are to make the leap into the movie-picture world, how capable they are of believing in the nightmare of the shark, the sweet improbable dream of ET. People who can escape the mundane into the fantasy world of the movies, like the boy in ET, like Indiana Jones are Spielberg's true heroes. Sometimes after a Spielberg movie, I can almost see little Stevie Spielberg coming out of the theatre, shuffling up the incline of sticky pop-corn covered floor wincing at the harsh daylight outside.

So why would Steven Spielberg want to make a movie out of *The Color Purple*? A book. About people. In particular about a Black woman who for most of the story never escapes from the brutality of life in the Deep South. Because, I think, what Spielberg found in Walker's book was something quite different from what she wrote; what he found was a tale that very much suited his own nostalgia for the fantasy life of the Sunday matinee, but this time the matinee when Walt Disney fairy tales were showing.

And actually, if you try reading *The Color Purple* through Spielberg's Sunday matinee eyes, you can see where he got his inspiration. Doesn't Celie have a good bit of Cinderella in her as she slaves uncomplainingly in the cruel Step Mother's kitchen? (Only, in this case, let's make the cruel white step mother into a mean Black husband.) And then

there's Celie as Snow White, waiting for the Prince's magical kiss to open her eyes on life. (Only, here, the Prince's role is taken--somewhat awkwardly, to be sure--by a glamorous Black woman juke joint star.) There are plenty of secondary characters to be dressed up for Disney World as well. There's Celie's sister who can play the part of the fairy god-mother, invisibly watching over Celie, dressed always in white. There's even characters left over, to be made into comic relief light-touch parts, like Harpo the buffoon and his big mama, and the bitchy white lady. If we need to, we can add a part or two--like Shug's dad, the minister--just to give it that real super-sweet Disney flavor. And the "they lived happily ever after" ending suits us perfectly!

And so Steven Spielberg brings us his version of *The Color Purple*: Celie Goes to Disneyland. The people become so exaggerated and stereotyped, we no longer have to deal with them as real people. The whole situation is so reminiscent of what we've already seen at the movies it becomes cozy and comfortable. We can root like kids for the innocent and persecuted Celie and clap like mad when the mean Mr. finally gets his. We can laugh when the buffoon Harpo falls on his face and gets pulled along by the nose by his wife, Sophia. We can hiss at the mean and nasty white lady and feel we're on the virtuous side because who of us could be in any way like her? Yes, when I got up from *The Color Purple* I knew what I should be feeling--that same old Spielberg feeling, of having taken another trip down memory lane, back to the days when we were free and innocent enough to soak in the big, beautiful simple tales of Disneyland...

Liberal Assimilationism--Dressing Up Black Life

But even if most people could agree that Spielberg used *The Color Purple* to create his own Disney extravaganza, with only the dimmest echoes of Alice Walker's novel, that doesn't make the movie necessarily bad. It's certainly fair to ask: What's wrong with this? Why compare the two?

You could say it's high time that stories about Black people are brought into the mainstream, that it's an advance when Black people become our collective heroes and enemies, the whole range of hokey souped-up roles of Disney fantasy. Disneyworld, after all, is a part of our collective culture, Black and white; it may be cornball and poppy, but it belongs to all of us. So why should Black culture be confined to harsh realism and grim political struggle? What's wrong with some black versions of what white people have gotten all along? If the choice is between having the Black child always cast in the role of the second shepherd--or worse yet, the bad angel--in the Christmas play or having a whole remake into the Black nativity, isn't the Black nativity infinitely preferable?

Yes, it certainly is. But I also think it's important to recognize it for what it is: liberal assimilationism. And it seems to be a real trend in media today. In times like this, we ought to agree that liberalism is better than the prevailing conservatism and reaction. (Of course, *The Color Purple* is better than Rambo!) But the same danger exists in culture as it does in politics--of endorsing liberalism too unconditionally because it seems comparatively so much better than what else is out there.

First of all, it's worth noting that this project of remaking white shows into Black shows really is becoming a popular trend in the media today. It may have started with the obvious adaptations--like the Black Nativity and the Black Wizard of Oz. But an even trendier and somewhat less obvious Black remake has only recently hit the TV screen. It's "The Cosby Show"--a Black version of "Leave it To Beaver" for the eighties. This is not the place for a critique of "The Cosby Show," but I do think it helps exemplify this trend in popular culture--the trend whose underlying theme is to promote the possibility and benefits of Black people being assimilated into so-called middle American culture, where very few white people let alone Black people ever get the chance to actually live. The basic message in the case of "The Cosby Show" is: see Black people can and would like to live the most conventional version of white middle class life with just a few attractive idiosyncrasies of their own.

Now, this liberal message isn't all bad. In this case, the Cosbys provide an undoubtedly healthy role model for Black children, and it's got to be good for all those white kids across the country to be adopting this sympathetic Black family as their role model, too.

But there *are* problems with the liberal approach to telling the story of Black life in the United States. "The Cosby Show" does tend to dress up Black life falsely and it avoids the unpleasant confrontations with racism and white supremacy which any Black family in the United States--even the Huxtables--would inevitably face. But more generally, if liberalism is the best we can hope for in popular culture in these drearily conservative days, then we've got to learn how to discriminate between the good and bad that liberalism has to offer.

And in the case of *The Color Purple*, the problems of Spielberg's approach far outweigh his undoubtedly good, liberal intentions. When Spielberg goes back to his childhood pals in Disneyland and recasts them as Black people, he stumbles into many more of liberalism's pitfalls than when Bill Cosby uses his humorous touch to show us a Black version of life behind the white picket fence of middle America.

Drench It in Technicolor

I have to say that some of the problems in Spielberg's movie do reflect weaknesses in Walker's novel. (Unlike most people, I didn't find *The Color Purple* her strongest work.) But the main problem is that Walker's novel does not--despite its utopian ending and its extreme characters--translate into a Disney World story without some very rough spots. Whether or not her novel is entirely successful, it aims at the harsh realism of Black degradation in the United States, the revelatory realism of an Afro-American's odyssey to Africa, and the radical realism of militant feminism and anti-homophobia--a range of vision that Spielberg pretty much entirely misses in his movie.

Walker's book, while confined to the letters written by two characters, manages to convey the universally painful experience of poverty and oppression in the Black South. But in Spielberg's movie poverty is prettified and made quaint. We get rich sweeps of the Southern landscape drenched in purple technicolor. And more unreal yet--within

it, somehow, poor Black farmers like Celie's husband have found their way into what look like old plantation homes, complete with oriental rugs and panelled hallways. Even Harpo and Sophia's ramshackle shack with the leaky roof is more like the cute cottage of the seven dwarfs than like anything out of real life. And the wardrobes! A friend of mine pointed out that, for nearly every scene, Celie wore a new dress. Unfortunately, Quincy Jones' music, full of swelling strings, only adds to the schmaltzy romantic mood.

What is perhaps most surprising of all, in Spielberg's *Deep South* of the 1920's, we get no real impression of Black people working--except for the domestic labor Celie does for her husband. And white supremacy is portrayed as the humorous character disorder of a dizzy white broad. In fact, the music, the house, the clothes, the leisurely domestic pace of life all evoke enough of the mood of that notoriously racist movie, *Gone With The Wind*, to make the whole thing a little unsettling.

Now it's one thing to dress and house the Huxtables in the style of upper middle class professionals. It's an unrepresentative picture of Black life today, but even the most ill-informed and reactionary of us would acknowledge that. *The Color Purple*, on the other hand, makes a pretense of describing a general time and place in history, and the consequence is that Spielberg's movie dresses up Black oppression in a way that encourages us to prettify and forget it. It reinforces what a lot of white people, including Ronald Reagan and his ilk, would like to think Black life in the South was really like.

What about the sub-plot, of Nettie (Celie's sister) in Africa? As Cason rightly pointed out in her review, this part of Walker's novel becomes so banal and aimless that it seems to have no point in the movie at all. Except to show off Nettie's angelic purity, dressed as she is all in white, against the exotic backdrop of "native" Africa. (Spielberg loves spicing his movies up with exotic Third World scenes.) The anti-imperialism of the Africans' struggle, the sense of discovery of an alternative culture and way of life is so diluted it becomes meaningless, and the story turns into the conventional story of the pious missionary, only this time made Black. The invasion of the Third World is so cleaned up that the one confrontation we see between Africans and the western invaders looks about as brutal as a few bull-dozer nudging out the protesters in Peoples' Park.

And what about the lesbianism? There is no way to get rid of the lesbian encounter between Celie and Shug in Walker's novel without abandoning the story all together. And it is, I guess, to Spielberg's credit that he incorporated it into his movie to the degree that he does. But, again, the embrace between these two women is watered down to the point where it loses a large part of the meaning it has in Walker's novel. Among other things, weakening Celie's lesbian coming-out with Shug makes her psychological transformation from a passive, brutalized victim to a self-confident woman seem contrived and unconvincing. Even in Walker's novel, I found the happy ending too abrupt and out of sync with the rest of the book. But in Spielberg's movie, it is the artificial ending to an already artificial story, the saccharin-sweet icing on the too sweet cake. Here, Celie's sudden change of character is about as believable psychologically as Snow White's coming back to life, after the prince's kiss, would be medically.

Which brings us to what is probably the most controversial aspect of all in Spielberg's movie: the way he deals with Walker's radical feminism. In some ways, I think this is where Spielberg is most faithful to the book in mood and message. Perhaps this is because the rhetoric of feminism is at least familiar to Spielberg unlike most of the landscape of Black life in America which seems as foreign and quaint as all his other trips into the Third World. In any case, we all get the message that Celie is doing virtuous battle against her husband's male-supremacist oppression.

Black feminists have been dealing with some of the contradictory issues surrounding Black feminism now for decades. There have been numerous discussions about how to balance the fight for Black women's liberation against the need for solidarity within the collective Black struggle. One thing that does seem clear is that the voice of Black women struggling for their own liberation should not and cannot be silenced by the call to "stand by their men." But when a white man makes a movie about a Black woman fighting for her life against a truly miserable Black man, and makes this movie to sell largely to a white audience, the results are far from positive. Perhaps some other white man in some other circumstances could have done it, but not Steven Spielberg, and not now. Steven Spielberg who turns all his characters into stereotypes anyway, Steven Spielberg who has shown in movie after movie an insensitivity to the most blatant of racist imagery was not the man for the job.

In this movie, the stereotyped portrayal of a number of the Black characters--male and female--borders on the offensive. For instance, Sophia is really nothing more than a parody of the Big Black Mama who slaps her man upside the face and wears the pants in the house. But it's the men who really get it. Harpo is weak and ineffectual, nothing without a woman, and often downright clownish. Celie's father-in-law is a little tyrant of a man. Her father is a child-abuser who snatches the babies he fathers out of his own child's hands and murders them or gives them away. And Celie's husband, of course, is the source of her continuing oppression, jealous of any glimpse of pleasure she might get out of life, incapable of dressing and feeding himself, promiscuous, paranoid and irrationally cruel. All of this really is there in Walker's novel, but as everything else gets prettied up in the movie, this sado-masochistic drama of life in the Black family seems to stand out in isolation, as unexplained as the sado-masochistic relationship between Cinderella and her step mother.

The circumstances surrounding Spielberg's portrayal of Mr. -- on the screen make it particularly unfortunate. Since--as Cason points out--Black people so rarely are allowed roles in Hollywood movies, every part they play bears a heavy burden as representative of Black character in general. This is not Spielberg's "fault" of course; it's a much broader issue of white supremacy in Hollywood. But it creates the context in which the message of *The Color Purple* is received.

It's surely significant that the one other movie about Black people that has gotten a wide audience recently is *A Soldiers' Story*, another story that concentrates entirely on contradictions in the Black community and in particular the contradictions among Black men. The same actor, Adolf Caesar, plays the same role of little dictator. And

the message from this story is similar to the message in *The Color Purple*: What appears to be an act of racism is really the brutality of Black against Black. It's the Black masses themselves who are turning in on themselves in a fit of destruction. And, what other roles has Danny Glover gotten besides Celie's sadistic husband? He got the chance to play the field hand in *Places in the Heart*, another great Black male role--the loyal, meek servant who docilely heads off down the road at the end when his services are no longer needed and the white supremacists come to call. From one extreme to the other, it's not much of a choice.

And as if just to hammer the message home, at almost exactly the same time as *The Color Purple* came out, Daniel Moynahan was issuing his new report on the absence of the Black father and its debilitating effect on Black family life. And Bill Moyers, another good liberal, was documenting the story of the irresponsible male adolescent father on the TV screen. I think the case could surely be made that liberal white males like Steven Spielberg, whether well-intentioned or not, have contributed once again in scape-goating Black men.

Spielberg's movie is socially significant. It is a message from Hollywood that is going to have a far more direct effect on what people think and feel than anything Bill Moyers puts on TV or Daniel Moynahan issues in a report. When Spielberg gives us his Disney version of racism in the Deep South, when he prettifies white supremacy, and confirms what a lot of white people would like to think about Black people and Black life in the South, it matters. This step backward into the good old days of Hollywood fantasy is a step backward it would be better not to take. ■