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Motion Forward Motion Forward Motion



## Two Decades of the Irish Struggle

Interview

**Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey**



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Dear friends,

One of Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey's major themes in this month's featured interview is the growing internationalism of the Irish movement. As she recounts, Irish nationalism revived in the late 'sixties in direct analogy to the U.S. Civil Rights movement and it grew in the 1970s to increasingly recognize common ground with other peoples around the world seeking independence and liberation. To a great extent it is from England that the West learned the "habit of empire," and it is against Ireland that England developed its methods of political and cultural domination. It is a habit and tradition which our own President Reagan seeks to continue and enhance, despite the slow tilt of the world away from imperialism and toward national freedom and justice.

In the "Black and Green" forum speech which occasioned her recent visit to Boston, Ms. Devlin-McAliskey included in her comparisons a reference to the Palestinians. "We

share with the Palestinians the history of being driven off our own lands and somebody walking in saying, "Well, now that *we* are here, forget about the history. This is our state, move you on!" And if the anti-Irish stereotyping and cultural onslaught up through the end of the nineteenth century helped ensure their displacement, it has surely been paralleled today by the cultural war against the Palestinians, and by extension, all Arab peoples (well-documented, for example, in Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine*).

Given this background, it makes a sad sense that it was with Reagan's bombing raids against Libya that the Democratic opposition to Reagan's global mission finally collapsed. In Reagan's first term, there was little mass movement to stay his hand against Central America. Still, after the debacle of harbor mining and Contra comics, counter pressures—or at least hesitations—within U.S. ruling circles partly checked the Reagan offensive. Invasion of Grenada followed, but its supposed defense of democracy met with enough skepticism in the United States to fail to establish the precedent.

Three years and various public relations triumphs later—SDI, empty summits, the deposing of Marcos and Duvalier, maneuvering against Nicaragua and El Salvador—Reagan saw his opening in striking at Libya. Administration propagandizing on its democratic goals has never been brasher, and its claims for the right to undertake unilateral (vis-a-vis both allies and its loyal domestic opposition) action against terrorism has never met with as little challenge.

In our Introduction to our last *FM* (April-May), in the aftermath of Mrs. Aquino gaining power in the Philippines, we called attention to the emerging *flexibility* Reagan has brought to ruling class international policy. Here we want to emphasize the strength with which these policies are now asserted.

None of these shifts are writ in stone (or even law). But without a revival of a domestic peace movement on a much more mass scale than now exists, it is hard to see how we will stave off some kind of disaster in Central America in the next few years. Yes, the Contras appear to be in trouble in Nicaragua, but U.S. ruling class determination to act rather than compromise seems to steadily grow. Though we have a long way

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to go, we can take heart from the student and other scattered denunciations of the Libya raids, from the new escalation of anti-apartheid organizing, and from last month's formation of a national Rainbow Coalition (Jesse Jackson was one of the few national political leaders to protest the bombings).

We can also take heart from the growth and changes in the Irish national movement. Here is one movement in the West which did not fade in the 1970s, is moving into mainstream and electoral politics without shedding its revolutionary national aspirations, and which, as mentioned above, has managed in this era of Reagan and Thatcher to gain a mass hearing for internationalism and world justice. We hope you will enjoy the interview and the forums excerpts which follow.

The continuing Hormel meatpackers strike centering in Austin, Minnesota, is becoming a source of inspiration here in the United States. A report in *FM* last fall (October-November, 1985) described the distinctive efforts underway in that strike to build solidarity and alliances with other struggles. This *FM* updates that struggle, indicating both the growing stakes for the strikers, whose international has cut them off, and the expanding impact the Hormel conflict is having in the labor movement and beyond.

Also in this issue, a report on a new dimension of the fight for reproductive rights—the effort by the New Right to smother women's rights in the so-called fetal viability issue. We also have a second report from a recent West Coast labor delegation to El Salvador, this time reporting on the conditions and the struggle among women political prisoners there.

What makes it possible for people to persevere in these difficult struggles? Two personal comments grapple with the fade out of so many revolutionary activists in recent years. Both draw from experiences in the Communist Party, Marxist-Leninist, one of the major new communist groups of the 1970s. They offer at times complementary and at times differing conclusions. We hope they make for interesting reading as part of the "Working for Socialism" series which we started last year and hope to continue from time to time.

Finally, a new feature for *FM*—a sports commentary on Howard Cosell's new autobiography.

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### **The cover illustration appeared in Ireland: Voices for Withdrawal published by Information on Ireland.**

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*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 Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey**

# **Two Decades of the Irish Struggle**

### **Introduction**

The present-day Nationalist struggle in the north of Ireland began in the late 1960's and continues to this day. This new Irish movement has gone through dramatic changes—from a non-violent civil rights and constitutionalist struggle to a revolutionary nationalist one. During this time, support for the traditional voice of the Nationalist, Catholic population, the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP), eroded. Larger and larger sectors of the Nationalist community concluded that equality can only be gained in the context of the reunification of Ireland and not by constitutionalist efforts within the present northern Irish regime. Significantly, the Nationalist movement in the north, lead by Sinn Fein, has increasingly turned toward socialist politics and identified its struggle with other national liberation movements around the world.

Not coincidentally, the recognition of the nature of the state in northern Ireland has also led to a better understanding of the role of the Republic of Ireland in the south in the Irish struggle today. From its inception—and many Irish-Americans still do not realize this—the southern Irish state has not only compromised the freedom of the north, but also the sovereignty of the Irish Republic itself. The political leadership of the Republic of Ireland has submitted to a junior partnership with Britain, both economically and politically. Of late, its leaders have opened the floodgates and allowed western capital to eat it up, bit by bit. Today the Irish economy suffers under a great weight. Unemployment is truly massive and inflation is causing severe hardship. Ireland's economic troubles make the potential for political upheaval great. Already there is widespread discontent with the government's handling of Ireland's economic troubles.

The political, social and economic implications of Irish unification have not gone unnoticed by the ruling circles of Britain or the Irish Republic. Unification would have a tremendously radicalizing affect on Irish society and politics. Garrett Fitzgerald, prime minister of the Republic, already has his hands full without a radicalized Nationalist northern population being incorporated into southern Ireland. Such a development would dramatically alter the political balance in the south. The Nationalist community, owing no loyalties to status quo politics in the south, would drive Irish politics to the Left. Surely one must wonder whether the Irish government seeks the removal of a border which



in actuality protects its own power. In a similar way, as is discussed below, Britain is most concerned that an “unreliable” and “unmanageable” united, democratic Ireland, experimenting with unfriendly ideologies and social systems, does not come into existence.

Against this backdrop, we have the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the stated aim of which is to bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict in northern Ireland. Signed early this year, it is a new initiative on the part of Great Britain to insure that northern Ireland remains British. This itself is business as usual. The new and more ominous development comes from the direct role that both the Irish Republic and the U.S. will now play. Hailed as a “Promise of Peace” by Britain and the Irish Republic, the agreement would more accurately be described as a mutual security pact between the Irish government and Great Britain to facilitate cross-border intelligence between northern Ireland and the Republic. It grants the Republic an ill-defined role in matters affecting the Catholic minority in the north. Underwriting the agreement is \$250 million U.S. dollars (\$50 million dollars a year for five years), pushed through the Congress for unspecified purposes by House Speaker Tip O’Neill. A supplementary extradition treaty, introduced by the Reagan administration at Britain’s behest, rounds out this new initiative to stem the growth of an increasingly socialist and revolutionary nationalist movement on the western flank of NATO.

Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey recently toured the U.S. to speak on the current situation in Ireland and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. She offered a very different interpretation of contemporary Irish politics and the agreement than that of the U.S. media, U.S. political leaders (including mainstream Irish-American leaders), and representatives of the Irish Republic. It is our privilege to bring FM readers this interview with Ms. Devlin-McAliskey, one of the truly inspirational Irish freedom fighters of our day.

Ms. Devlin-McAliskey began her day in Boston with a press conference at the state capitol, sharing the podium with Mel King, State Rep. Byron Rushing, and other local political leaders. Later in the evening, she was a featured speaker at a “Black and Green” forum, a Saint Patrick’s day activity jointly sponsored by the Boston Rainbow Coalition and the Irish American Human Rights Association. It was standing room only, testimony to the new vigor and influence of progressive politics in Boston. (Excerpts from the forum are interspersed throughout the interview.)

Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey is, for Americans, probably the best known advocate of the Nationalist cause in northern Ireland. For one thing, she is one of the few leaders allowed to enter the United States. She has been outspoken in her identification of the struggle in the north of Ireland with liberation movements around the world, in particular the Black freedom struggle here in the U.S. As a young student leader in the civil rights marches of the late 1960s in Belfast and Derry, and as the youngest representative ever elected to the British Parliament, her path from non-violent civil rights activism to revolutionary socialism has paralleled that of a generation of northern Irish activists. Hers is a generation which sought peaceful reforms through “proper channels” only to find there were no such channels.

In addition to addressing the issue of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the interview which follows includes discussion of social and economic privilege, electoral politics, and the women’s movement within the Irish context. We thank Ms. Devlin-McAliskey for taking time out from a busy schedule to give us this interview which is sure to be of great interest to *Forward Motion* readers. For more background on the present-day Irish struggle, see the October-November 1985 issue of *Forward Motion*, “The Irish Republican Movement Today.”

—Seamus Flaherty

**FM: In the late 1960’s, the Irish civil rights movement in the six counties of northern Ireland addressed systematic discrimination against the Catholic population. But, to avoid enflaming the Unionist population, they stopped short of raising the demand for national sovereignty. In hindsight, how successful was it to address civil rights issues without connecting it to the issue of sovereignty?**

**Devlin:** At the time, it seemed like a good idea. But if you look at what happened, it is clear that position couldn’t last long. The first demonstration of the civil rights movement, on August 24th, 1968, limited its demands to a platform everyone could agree on: equality of the vote, equality of housing opportunity, equality of employment opportunity. It was a basic three point program. But by August 9th, 1969, which was just a year later, the people themselves had already moved from demanding civil rights to questioning the legitimacy of the state and raising the national question.

As a young person who went along on the first demonstration because it was in my area, my distinct memory was that none of the civil rights speeches mentioned nationalism. And at the end of the demonstration, we sang the civil rights anthem, “We Shall Overcome,” for which very few people knew the words. But then, after we got through with “We Shall Overcome,” in the absence of direction from the platform, almost spontaneously, the crowd began to sing “A Nation Once Again” [an Irish nationalist song—ed.]. But it took a while for the leaders of the civil rights movement to come to terms with, or even acknowledge, the people’s instinctive understanding which proved to be correct.

There were a lot of forces that influenced the developing civil rights movement at that time. For instance, although there was institutionalized discrimination, we—as part of the United Kingdom—also benefited from the introduction of the British welfare state. Starting in 1947, we had the introduction of free education. And by the early 1960’s, we had created, for the first time, a layer of Catholic intelligentsia; people who had gone through the universities, had qualifications to come into the labor force at a certain level, such as doctors, teachers and professors. The movement actually started with them. The Civil Rights Association, which existed four years before the first demonstration, was a movement made up essentially of middle class and professional Catholics and liberal trade unionists who were trying to correct an imbalance in society as they saw it. And they didn’t have any great nationalist consciousness.



Another force at play was the great economic boom within Britain in the early 1960's. As a result of this, there was a fairly dramatic increase in the overall standard of living and job opportunities in Ireland which, almost without exception, passed Catholics by. Therefore, the 1960's saw a growing social and economic gap between our conditions and the conditions of the Loyalist population.

Superimposed on all of that was the Black civil rights movement which we witnessed on international television. The people of northern Ireland instinctively identified with the Black civil rights movement; many of our marches were very consciously and deliberately modeled after marches here in the United States. For instance, on the students' long march from Belfast to Derry, they carried banners which were identical to those carried on the Selma March, and they met an identical fate.

So those three things coming together were what produced the civil rights movement. But such was the nature of the state that as soon as we raised the demand for reform at all, the Unionist reaction was as if we had demanded the end of the state. Very rapidly we came to the kernel of the problem, impelled towards it by the reality of the situation. It wasn't really a conscious decision to move from one position to another. We asked for votes, and we came up against the realization that the state cannot accommodate that kind of democracy. There are very clear parallels here with the situation in South Africa where the state also cannot afford to grant equality.

**Long before Gerry Adams and others were old enough to be heroes of the national movement, people in the Nationalist and Catholic communities in northern Ireland knew almost every speech that Martin Luther King made and knew almost every speech Malcolm X made. Not because they thought it was the intellectually liberal thing to do. It was because they needed to know and those people were the only articulation of what our people needed.**

*Bernadette Devlin, Boston "Black and Green" Forum*

**FM: Have there been any inroads made into Unionist privilege since the period of the civil rights movement?**

**Devlin:** Well, the British have created a government-sponsored agency called the Fair Employment Agency. It was initially set up to document improvements in various sectors of employment. But consistently its research and statistics show that there have been no inroads made at all, in any sector of employment. The position of the Catholic community remains almost exactly where it was in 1968; that is true across the board from banking and hospital jobs to the construction industry.

**FM: What about foreign companies – particularly United States companies – that are investing in Northern Ireland?**

**Devlin:** The pattern remains almost the same. What differs is simply the sophistication of the argument in defense of the situation. The method of creating employment in

Ireland is very single-minded. There is very little attempt to create a self-sufficient, internal economy. Instead, almost everything we have, from labor to natural resources, is sold to multinational companies. These companies are attracted to Ireland with high financial incentives. Ireland will even build a factory for them. So the argument we hear now is that foreign companies—American companies—do not consciously discriminate against Catholics. They just come where the factory is built, and the factory is always built in a Loyalist area. The argument, then, is that the factory is built in an area with "suitable skills." So, you end up with exactly the same situation. The only difference is that people do not say, "We don't employ Catholics." They say, "We don't employ unskilled workers." Or they say they employ the people who live around the factory. It is not *their* fault, they say, that Catholics are unskilled and the people who live in the surrounding area are Loyalists. "It's a pity, but it's not our problem."

So, the situation remains exactly as it was. It is impossible for young Catholic working class people to acquire any work skills at all because there is no work. They just cannot get on the bottom rung of the ladder, particularly during an economic recession when there is plenty of unemployed skilled labor available, which is traditionally Loyalist labor.

This has created momentum around the McBride principles [a set of principles which call for the implementation of affirmative action programs by U.S. companies based in northern Ireland to end discrimination against Catholics in employment—ed.] What we have now is the British government saying that the McBride principles are illegal because they promote discrimination. You see, according to the British, they have a very equitable system which makes discrimination illegal, and the affirmative action embodied in the McBride principles would be discriminating in favor of Catholics. So it is a kind of a Catch-22.

**FM: For years in the United States some political activists have said that you shouldn't directly target the oppression Afro-Americans face, but that instead you should find common struggles between white and Black workers that will unite everybody. Typically these are economic struggles – higher wages, things like that. Do any progressives in Ireland take a similar position?**

**Devlin:** That position is taken up most strongly by the Workers Party. To my mind, it is totally unrealistic. In theory, we have many things in common with the Loyalist workers, but they don't see it that way. You cannot unite with Protestant workers if the only terms on which they will unite are that you agree there is nothing wrong with the relationship between Protestant and Catholic. To put it in the American context, it is like agreeing to unite and fight, Black and white together, when the price for that agreement is that Black people pretend there is no such thing as racism. That is the price exacted of us. We must pretend that there is no such thing as Loyalist racism against us and no such thing as the differential of discrimination and privilege against us. We are being asked to abandon any aspiration to the ultimate resolution of British domination of the country. You can't actually build unity on that basis, except on the most limited terms, for very short term gains. And even here, we generally end up with an



even wider gap, because *they* benefit from the unity and *we* are just where we were when we started.



Randy Goodman

Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey addresses the "Black and Green" Forum in Boston.

**FM: How has the Workers Party implemented that line—in trade union struggles or elsewhere?**

**Devlin:** They are a small organization nationally and almost irrelevant in the north. They have not been able to persuade many Catholic or Protestant workers to join around this theory of unity of the working class. Instead they do attract certain elements of earnest young radicals from the universities. But since there is nobody to work out their theory in practice, they are confined mainly to a propagandistic approach. This has led them increasingly, over the past fifteen years, to a situation where most of their rhetoric and propaganda is directed against the national struggle. According to them, the national struggle in the Catholic community bears almost total responsibility for their lack of ability to unite the Protestant and Catholic workers.

As I say, in the north they have become irrelevant. But in the south they have a pretty strong influence on the trade union movement, and their influence there is equally reactionary. They have prevented the trade union movement from actively taking on the question of affirmative action and dealing with repression against the Catholic com-

munity, since—they claim—these issues divide the workers. So, they have effectively limited the trade union movement to demanding more work for everybody. And by now, they are openly pro-imperialist.

**FM: Let's go to the other end of the spectrum. Often in the U.S., the media suggests that if the British withdrew, there would be massacres, pogroms, exterminations. What position have organizations like Sinn Fein taken on this, and what do you think would happen if the British got out?**

**Devlin:** That projection is not accepted by Sinn Fein or by many of us. It implies that Britain's role in the conflict is neutral; that they are the honest brokers between two warring communities. The reality is that they are the star players on the other team. So if the scenario were true that we live with the threat of civil war, then the position of the Catholic community is basically that our chances of surviving that war would be infinitely better *without* the British army. There is no confidence among Catholics that the British army would defend us in the event of violent mass upheaval against our community. The British would go for the swiftest, surest return to stability which would be to wipe out the Catholic opposition and re-entrench the Unionist power block.

On the other hand, there is very little evidence that the Loyalists, once deprived of their star player, would embrace a civil war situation. The Loyalists, to a certain degree, have a split personality. They have a national identity crisis in that they are British, but they know they are not the same as other British. They are very aware that as soon as Britain withdraws, their relative position in society dramatically alters. In the presence of Britain, they are the majority within the artificial state. In the absence of Britain, they are a national minority on the island of Ireland. They know that. As a national minority with only thirteen percent of the national community, there is no way they would want to take on a battle they could never win. History has borne this out in other countries. When push comes to shove and the end of the era has come, the privileged minority has always managed to do well in the next situation. Put at its simplest, when the Loyalists know the game is up, we believe they will behave like Ian Smith. They will say: all previous statements are inoperable. And they will immediately start insuring that they don't lose their jobs, their land, their minority rights.

On our part, there will be no attempt to tell these people to leave. The only thing we would want to take from them is privilege. For many of the Loyalists, that margin of privilege is so small that their objective conditions would actually be improved in the new situation. For the first time since the creation of the state, the divisions within the Loyalist community itself would become dramatically clear. They are the only people in Ireland that have no class consciousness at all because the state maintains that monolithic unity of the Loyalist factory owner and Loyalist worker, the Loyalist welfare recipient with the Loyalist government administrator, and they all see themselves as one unit.

**FM: You have pointed out that the British army is now the main defender of Unionist privilege. It makes sense that the Unionists want to maintain the British presence. But why are the British so interested in maintaining**



### Protestant privilege. Or for that matter, why is the United States defending this privilege?

**Devlin:** There is not actually a conscious attempt by the British to maintain that imbalance. In fact, many of the multinationals have realized that the situation has to be modernized. The problem is that the state they have created cannot be maintained by any other system. It is an artificial state created in violence whose existence depends on the way it is organized. So it is the other way around: the British have a vested interest in keeping the internal workings of the state the way they are because it is the only way the state can survive.



Why are they interested in maintaining the artificial state? One, it is an historical hang-over. When we say that, people often say, "No, that can't be right. That doesn't happen. You're dealing with a rational government here." But I think the Malvinas crisis very clearly demonstrated how irrational the British can be. I mean, people were sent halfway around the world to claim something without anybody in England saying, "How come? How come a small piece from the other side of the world is ours?" In the middle of 1985, a radicalized labor movement couldn't even say that. The British response was: "Of course, it is ours. The whole world was ours, and all these inferior people, bit by bit, took it from us. Well, we've still got some of it left and we're not being pushed back any further." This mentality of a declining empire is one problem.

But there is a more sophisticated and modern problem, as well. You can compare it to the paranoia America has about Cuba, Nicaragua, and Central America. Too many Americans are quite prepared to endorse the idea that these small countries trying to improve and organize their own internal systems so that people can live and eat and educate themselves constitute a threat to the biggest land mass and the most powerful nation on the earth. Try to imagine the paranoia if Cuba and Nicaragua were the same size as the United States. Paranoia explains Britain's position as well. If they were to pull out of Ireland, a radical ideology might win out. The Irish people might decide they're tired of the way the system runs because it doesn't feed people. They might say: "We think we'll try something else."

Of course, these irrational fears do have a rational base. Ireland has always had a

very strong neutral tradition. We are not in NATO. We have never fought a war with any other country in the world except Britain. The perception is that we are not pulling our weight in the East/West conflict; we are not doing our bit for Western defense. We have peculiar attitudes on the nuclear arms race; therefore we are not a safe people to have around. So, it would be a threat to Western democracy to have us govern ourselves even though all we actually want to do is reorganize our economy in such a way that four and a half million people on a very small island can live basically simple lives.

### FM: What is your sense of the British Left's attitude toward Ireland?

**Devlin:** It has changed dramatically since the hunger strike. Before 1981, only small groups of the revolutionary Left were working in coalition with small sections of the Irish community in Britain to support the Irish struggle. But now a very strong movement in the left of the British Labor Party is pushing to support Irish self-determination, partly in opposition to the increasing use of oppression and force by the British in governing northern Ireland. This movement has its own momentum and is not representative of the leadership level. So, the battle inside the Labor Party still goes on, but it's a lot stronger and healthier than it was. For instance, Ken Livingston, the Chairman of the Greater London Council, has come to Ireland and has invited Gerry Adams [a leader in the Sinn Fein—ed.] to speak in London. And a number of other members of the left within the Labor Party, like Tony Benn, have openly identified themselves with the movement in Ireland.

The biggest problem for the British Left is that they do not understand how much they themselves are tainted with imperialist consciousness. A lot of them will support the end of militarization and repression and human rights violations, but they *still* cannot see the relationship between their country and ours as an imperialist relationship, and that holds many of them back. The question of Ireland causes them great heart-searching and agony, and still they tend to make impossible demands on us. They set

**The state of northern Ireland was created in violence against the democratic wishes of the Irish people and into it were coerced our people. We were transformed overnight from part of the national majority within Ireland to a national minority within an artificial state. And from the day and hour that state was created, we had no political, no economic, and no social rights in it. And so we come right up-to-date in our analogy with our Black brothers and sisters. We are aware, and more aware than most, that all things are relative and that the humiliation and the degradation and the suffering and the amount of death and bloodshed in our country is infinitely less than that suffered by our Black brothers and sisters in South Africa. But the principle is exactly the same. The difference is a matter of degree, but the principle is exactly the same.**

*Bernadette Devlin, Boston "Black and Green" Forum*



conditions which we must fulfill in order for them to support us—like there will be no violence and no soldiers killed. Of course, there is no doubt that that would make it easier for them. But that decision does not lie in our hands. Only the IRA and the other armed groups could make that decision.

Basically what these British supporters are asking us to do is stand up and accept violence, to keep on getting killed ourselves so that it will be easier for the British to understand our situation. That pre-supposes a conscience on the part of the oppressor: if enough of us stood up and got killed and didn't do anything about it, the people who are killing us would become ashamed and stop. It reminds me of what Nelson Mandela said when he was asked: "Do you renounce violence?" He answered: "Do you?"

Still, as I say, the movement in support of British withdrawal and for national self-determination is certainly growing as people's understanding of the imperialist relationship deepens.

**FM: What happened during the hunger strikes? Do you think that triggered this change?**

**Devlin:** Well, I think many British people realized that their government didn't have a conscience. The basic issues that provoked the hunger strike were the rights of prisoners. Prisoners who had previously had political status, called "special category prisoners," lost a number of basic rights like the right to wear their own clothing and freedom of association with fellow political prisoners including sister prisoners in the women's prison. They lost the right to organize education within the prison—language, history, and cultural classes as well as teaching basic work skills to other prisoners. In 1976, the British decided these rights should go. So, they reclassified the political prisoners as simple criminals and put them in the mainstream of the prison system.

The prisoners began a campaign in response, demanding the return of their previous rights plus the rights that were taken away as punishment for their protest—like the right of communication with their families, by letter and by visit. This campaign went on from 1976 to 1980. Since the prisoners refused to wear the prison uniform, and they had no clothes, we ended up with several hundred naked prisoners. There were young men who served the entire term of their prison sentence naked, as long as six years without clothes. Prison privileges continued to be reduced, so that by 1980, when they embarked on the hunger strike, prisoners were housed three to a cell, without clothes, without beds or chairs or tables, without access to any reading or writing material. Ultimately they were not allowed to leave the cell to wash or to use the toilet unless they wore the prison uniform.

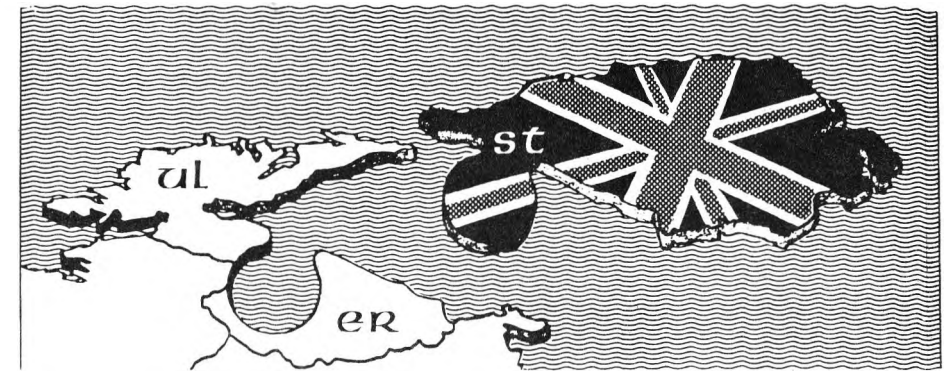
So, by 1980, people had lived for a year in their own excreta and the conditions had become so intolerable that the choice for the prisoners was to end the protest and accept criminalization or launch a do-or-die effort. They embarked on a hunger strike, and ten men—one after another—died. They starved for an average of sixty-six days. The shortest was forty-one; the longest surviving prisoner lived seventy-four days without food. But one after another, ten of them died because the British government wouldn't give them the right to wear their own clothing.

Ultimately, what came out of that protest was a reform of the whole British prison system. The issue was resolved by allowing *all* prisoners in British prisons to wear their own clothes. They sort of de-uniformed the entire prison system. This is like every other progressive prison reform in British history; they have all been won by Irish Republicans.

But more important, for a lot of people, the hunger strike destroyed the myth of Britain as the honest broker and peace keeper. People in Britain were shocked that their government would actually allow people to starve to death in prison rather than make what seemed to be humanitarian concessions over the nature of the prison administration. What shook them up was the realization that a basic human right was so closely identified with a challenge to the British right of supremacy. They became aware that in order to win the right for human treatment of prisoners you had to end British domination in Ireland.

The hunger strike changed the preception in Ireland, too. Many people who became active around that issue realized through their experience what they were dealing with. In fact, when we started off, we misjudged the British government ourselves. We didn't realize, and I don't think the prisoners themselves realized at the beginning, that the British government saw the issue of clothing as symbolic of the *whole* issue. The hunger strike crystallized in people's minds the nature of the struggle they were in and the nature of the government they were dealing with.

This was also one of the periods when we had massive support from the south. Support from the south is like support from the United States; it ebbs and flows almost exclusively on an emotional basis. We got support at the time of internment without trial, at the time of Bloody Sunday, whenever there are massive spates of sectarian assassination. People are motivated at these times to do something. During the hunger strike, the organization throughout the south was crucial and dramatic. It changed the perspective of many people in the south.



We had a massive demonstraton in Dublin and something like sixty percent of my hometown in the north travelled there. That's just an indication. We visibly demonstrated the support of the majority of Irish people for our position. We tapped every decent



human resource. There were hundreds and thousands of people who spent every day of every week for a year and a half mobilizing and organizing. We split the country. Every organization—feminist organizations, sporting organizations, charitable organizations, political institutions—all split on the issue of the hunger strike; whether prisoners should be allowed to wear their own clothing or whether to do so was to recognize the right of Irish independence, which was basically the way the British posed it.

To have lived through that period was an important lesson for us, and it was why Sinn Fein developed so dramatically afterwards. To my mind, one of the most fundamental lessons we had to learn was just how little power we had. We had no power, no authority in the organized labor force. We had no power in the administration. We had masses and masses of bodies and demonstrably the majority opinion, and yet we did not have the power to shut down the country. We had walkouts in almost every industry in the south, but we couldn't call a general strike.

I am a level-headed, long-term political activist, and still I think that the day Bobby Sands died we should have burned down the whole thing. Men died because we could not translate beyond a certain point. People learned after that that there was an awful lot of work to be done. We had to get into organized labor and we had to be able to do more than simply demonstrate. Sinn Fein changed its attitude towards participation in the electoral process, for example, on the basis of what we learned then. And the sovereign state also changed its attitude towards us because they saw the rising groundswell.

**FM: What has happened to groups like Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Socialist Party since the hunger strike?**

**Devlin:** During that period we amassed a whole layer of new people into activity, and after the hunger strike, almost all of it went into Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein became a deeper, more open, more radical organization. Part of the effect of this was the depletion of the relatively smaller groups.

The history of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), for instance, is a sad one. In 1973 and 1974 the IRSP was formed to fill a vacuum. Some of the best people were in that organization, and I think it represented a necessary development which changed history. But because things moved on and the organization did not develop, its fate was to become organizationally irrelevant. There are some practical reasons. Sinn Fein was already a much bigger organization, and people who got active found more room for working there. Also, the political differences between Sinn Fein and the IRSP were not fundamental issues of principle, particularly as Sinn Fein rapidly radicalized. Young people who became radicalized and active and who wanted to join an anti-imperialist organization which supported armed struggle would naturally be drawn to the bigger of the organizations, the differences between which they couldn't figure out. They went to Sinn Fein.

Also it doesn't make sense that the Irish National Liberation Army [the IRSP's military wing-ed.] has a separate existence as an army. One of the biggest difficulties within any struggle is two armies. The INLA feels the need to prove the validity of its separate

existence on the basis of having a more revolutionary way of shooting soldiers, and this has forced them to take bigger gambles and risk the arrest of more of their members. It has also left their organization open to going drastically wrong and losing even more public support. And so the tendency in the IRSP has been to look inward to see what they have done wrong in order to save themselves. As a result they have become even more isolated and more readily picked up by the cops. Ninety percent of their membership must now be in prison, and it is difficult to see how they will survive as a group. But it is also very, very difficult for an organization that has such a large percentage of their people killed or in prison to make an objective political assessment that there is no reason for their separate existence. So they exist.

But basically, the main thrust of political development within the anti-imperialist movement is Sinn Fein. This poses questions for organizations like IRSP and Peoples' Democracy (PD) and independent people like myself who are still outside Sinn Fein but within the movement.

**We share with the Native Americans of this country a history of genocide . . . During the 1840s when what is referred to as the "Great Hunger"—the Great Famine of Ireland—took place . . . many people came to America fleeing starvation. People . . . have a visual image of a famine, that is, a country without food. The fact is . . . there was never a famine in Ireland. How could there be a famine in a land where it never stops raining but never rains hard enough to wash the soil away? There was one crop, and one crop only, that failed in Ireland and that was the potato crop. The corn grew, the wheat grew, the oats grew. We continued to grow flax and make linen in the fledgling mills of the '40s . . . Our people died because by British law in Ireland the native Irish population was not allowed to eat any crop they grew except the potato . . .**

*Bernadette Devlin, Boston "Black and Green" Forum*

**FM: You have been very involved in electoral politics in Ireland. How would you compare your position and Sinn Fein's on involvement in this arena?**

**Devlin:** I have spent a long time arguing against Sinn Fein's position that because they were cheated in the election of 1918, they should not participate in elections. We have to realize that people's illusions about the electoral process are very strong in our country. For instance, otherwise sane people actually ask me: "Do you intend to get back in politics?" What they really mean is: "Do you intend to run for office?" They still see "real" politics as exclusively working through the electoral institutions.

Now, I believe it is tactically correct to use elections as a weapon in the struggle. But there is a dialectic, if you like, or a dilemma. We cannot give the impression that we believe freedom is secured through what the British call the "democratic process." There is always a danger that people get lost in that process. My argument with Sinn Fein is always: you can't blame the democratic process, or what the British call the democratic



process, if our people get lost in it. Our people have to be politically aware of what it is so that they *don't* get lost in it; so that they don't ultimately believe the way forward is to get a parliamentary majority. They must be made aware that if we had a parliamentary majority, the British would send in the army as they did in 1918 and destroy it.

Sinn Fein is very lucky because their history and their instincts carry them through where they might lack overt political consciousness about the structures of power and the state. Sinn Fein is a very young movement. Their electoral representatives can be distinguished from the other politicians just by sight because these kids come off the street. They swagger into office in their jeans and leather jackets and instinctively they know where they are: they are in the hall of the enemy. They didn't come in to play ball. They came in to say: "Look how far we've gotten! Now what are you gonna do?" They know exactly where they are and where their real political power comes from. The tangible benefit of going into the hall of the enemy is that they can bring home to people a better idea of what we're dealing with. For example, when the Sinn Fein representatives were elected to the 26th District Council, their representatives walked into the council chambers and the Unionists actually disinfected everything they touched!

**FM: I'd like to ask you if the move towards greater participation in the electoral arena represents a shift away from armed struggle?**

**Devlin:** No. The old guard of the movement and some of the young militants feared this because their history says that is where they lost out before. Every constitutional organization in southern Ireland today, with the exception of the breakaway Progressive Democrats (which is a misnomer since it represents a move to the right), and every constitutional organization in the Nationalist community in northern Ireland is an offshoot from the original Sinn Fein which was created in 1901-1902. And every one of them finally got sucked into constitutional politics. That's the fear: where goes the ballot box goes the sellout.

But Sinn Fein's remarkable success in the electoral arena is based on these young kids' ability to go into the electoral arena without apology and without conceding the armed struggle. And by holding the armalite [a rifle—ed.] in one hand and the ballot box in the other, as they say, they have been able to win majority support among the Catholic workers in the north. What frightens the political administration most is exactly this: that the Nationalist population in the working class and amongst the poor is perfectly capable of taking the electoral process and the armed struggle hand-in-hand. So I don't see any real danger of Sinn Fein, by using the electoral process, getting sucked into a belief that the ultimate solution is constitutional politics.

**FM: Was part of the move towards electoral politics based on an assessment that the armed struggle wasn't moving forward?**

**Devlin:** No. I think it was based on a realization that you could not have a simple military victory over the British army. A small group of people, no matter how dedicated and correct, could not win freedom and *donate* it to everybody else. There still is a tendency within Sinn Fein to see the armed struggle as the central part of the struggle. But now there is an awareness that they are building a political movement: it is not just

a question of getting more and more military volunteers. People must be armed with more than simply weapons. I think that is what the electoral path really represents.

**FM: Shall we move on to talk about the current situation? In the press conference earlier today, you talked a good deal about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. How would you explain the Unionists' negative response?**

**Devlin:** The Unionist response to the Anglo-Irish Agreement is irrational. The Unionists see it as the end of their world, and in some respects they are right. It is the end of their central role in determining Ireland's future. Their historic usefulness has basically been superceded. The British now have better ways to secure their goals than depending solely on the Ulster Unionists. Northern Protestants have been fed a diet of prejudice, intolerance and racism and they believed it. Now the people who fed it to them have found a better way of getting what they want so they are prepared to just ride over these people's prejudices. What really offends the Unionists is any conception that allows for equality of citizenship for us. The Unionists find it inconceivable that the British government would actually turn around and contemplate an equal position in northern society for Catholics. They believe they have been betrayed. Everything within their lives is about to fall apart and therefore their response is basically irrational.

The agreement is not against their interests. But the British are having a hard time explaining to the Loyalists that the best way to insure their privileged position within society is to play this new ball game. The Loyalist response has been to say, "No way. This new ball game means that we have to stop kicking free men around. Well, that can't be right. We have always believed that our stability and our position depended upon kicking them around. Now you tell us it depends on stopping." This way of thinking is what is pushing the Loyalists further to the right.

**FM: In 1974 the Protestant workers struck and were successful in achieving their goals. Why were they successful in 1974 and yet it doesn't look like they are going to be successful now?**

**Devlin:** A basic problem facing them is the deepening economic recession and the large numbers of people in the Protestant community who were working back in 1974 but who are unemployed now. There is a dilemma for those who still have work as to whether they should sacrifice their own individual jobs for this venture or not.

The single greatest source of employment is the British shipyard which, without the British government's subsidies, would fall apart. The British government basically said that if there was any messing about the shipyard would be closed down. People who were already out of work said, "So what." People who were working in the shipyard divided. Some of them said, "Let's hang on to what we have got here and find some other way," while others came out.

There was a significant difference between the recent one day strike and the all-out strike of 1974. The Loyalists are still perfectly capable, if they want, of pulling an all-out strike and of staying out until the state comes down around their ears. But the one day strike, unlike the earlier strike, depended much more heavily on intimidation; not only against us, but against the Protestant work force itself, to prevent them from going



into work. The Loyalist workers are on the brink and caught in their own contradictions. If they pull an all-out strike now and threaten the stability of the state in that way, they are not quite sure whether this time the British might let the state collapse. So, on the one hand, they know they have the power and ability to paralyze the north. On the other hand, this time they fear it would work but the British would say, "OK. You just brought your own state down. Now where are you going?" They are really caught in a dilemma.



Republican News

**Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Prime Minister Garrett Fitzgerald of the Republic of Ireland find common ground.**

The problem for us is that the way out of that dilemma is to attack the Catholic community; to just let off steam through a series of sectarian assassinations. I think the British policy is to try and contain the Loyalist attacks while letting things move in that direction for awhile until such time as they can tangibly demonstrate that the Anglo-Irish Agreement does not threaten the Loyalist position in Ireland.

**FM: What has been the response to the agreement by progressives and Nationalists in Ireland?**

**Devlin:** The Social Democrats are not all in favor of the agreement even though the Social Democrat and Labor Party was instrumental in bringing it about. Many of the rank and file are not happy with the agreement, but they are willing to give it a chance to see if it works. That section of the working class community which votes for and supports Sinn Fein is totally opposed to the agreement, but they are also hypnotized by the Unionists to some extent. Here is an agreement which they can see is against our interests and will do us great harm. And here are the Unionists screaming blue murder that this agreement is good for us. This situation has created a temporary paralysis which extends, to some extent, to Sinn Fein. It has been very difficult for people like myself to argue that we ought to be bringing this agreement down while so many people are saying that what is bad for the Unionists must be good for us. We have had this problem before with almost every agreement that has come up. The problem is, if we don't get moving quickly, this agreement will become the single biggest threat there has ever been to us. We plan to work extremely hard against this agreement because its fundamental purpose is to head off the struggle.

**FM: What are the implications when you say, "if we don't get moving quickly"?**

**Devlin:** If the Anglo-Irish Agreement is allowed to take root, Ireland's many internal contradictions will ultimately lead to its self-destruction. The biggest problem with it, to my mind, is the American intervention and the American funding. Fifty million dollars is a lot of money in an Irish context. We may end up fighting on more fronts than we can handle so we will end up fighting on the most immediate fronts.

I firmly believe, from my knowledge of America, that we are not getting fifty million dollars without ties. If fifty million dollars is coming for a job program, what kinds of jobs are we getting? Do we get to make cardboard boxes? Do we put in parts for nuclear warheads? And will that lead to a situation where people argue that we have to limit our neutrality and join NATO because we can't be trusted to make these things if we are not in NATO?

There is no doubt that without a massive injection of finance from somewhere, southern Ireland can not head off for very much longer the growing anger of its own population on the economic front. We may find ourselves arguing politically against an agreement that, on the face of it, is providing employment in the south of Ireland. And that makes the work of building support in the south of Ireland a great deal more difficult. Basically we are in danger of being undercut in the south of Ireland before we have a sufficiently strong political base in the north to challenge back. The agreement just makes our work longer and harder and more complicated.



Buy yourself a country. I think that is really what Reagan is about. Two hundred and fifty million dollars [fifty million dollars a year for five years—ed.] is very cheap to buy a puppet state in the middle of Western Europe.

**In the south of Ireland the gap between the poor and the wealthy is growing. And right across the border in the north of Ireland the poor are organizing and growing strong. If Garrett Fitzgerald isn't very careful, very soon they will be organizing and growing strong in the south. So you have got to buy them off. The two hundred and fifty million dollars of American money is serving no purpose in Ireland except to prop up Garrett Fitzgerald and prop up the partition state in the north.**

*Bernadette Devlin, Boston "Black and Green" Forum*

**FM: To shift a bit . . . In the last ten or fifteen years, there has been mention in the press of a women's movement in Ireland, although the reports are very inconsistent. I am curious as to what exactly exists and what its relationship is to the Nationalist movement?**

**Devlin:** A women's movement exists. Ireland is a very backward country in many ways. I think what demonstrates that most clearly is the anti-amendment campaign [the anti-abortion amendment campaign—ed.]. The campaign took place in southern Ireland in a situation where abortion has always been illegal and there was no popular movement afoot to change that. There is not a single representative in the Irish Parliament in favor of legalizing abortion—not one. It is doubtful if a single elected representative in Ireland would argue in favor of legalizing abortion.

So abortion is illegal and with no prospect of that position being altered. But abortion is a reality of southern Irish life. It is just that it is relatively easy to move to England to have an abortion either within the national welfare state or to pay for it out-of-pocket. But the forces of the Catholic Church, the Moral Rearmament mob, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and all those people saw a potential threat that at some time in the future abortion might be legalized. So they sought to make it unconstitutional and they were successful in getting an amendment passed. The difference is that when abortion was simply illegal, it required a majority vote of Dail Eireann—the Parliament of Ireland—to reverse the law. But now that abortion is unconstitutional, reversal requires the referendum support of two-thirds of the population.

The anti-amendment campaign was one of the roughest campaigns that I have ever fought. The intimidation of people was incredible. Now the women's movement was very active in the campaign, and those of us who were anti-imperialists were among the very active. But there were sections of the women's movement in the south who did not want us to participate in that campaign because they thought we brought with us the national question. In fact, we were only allowed to speak in the border counties

nearest the north.

The feminist movement in Ireland is split on the national question to the extent that there are sections of the women's movement in northern and southern Ireland who will not support the campaign in opposition to the strip searching of women political prisoners. They just won't touch it. The thrust of the women's movement therefore is confined to the issue of women's rights in the north and the issue of women's rights in the south. And the price for unity on those issues is to not raise imperialism and the national question. So people like myself find ourselves in a position where we are active in the anti-amendment campaign, and we are active in the campaign for women's rights with our sisters, and then we are active in the Republican movement and the anti-imperialist movement without those sisters. Many of them will actively oppose us in that particular sphere.



**Relatives and supporters of women republican prisoners marching to Armagh Jail on International Women's Day 1983.**

Personally, I think that the best feminists in Ireland are those who grew out of the anti-imperialist movement in the north. They are the people who don't get confused. They are the people who know exactly where they stand on women's rights. Sinn Fein is now the only organization of any size in Ireland that supports a woman's right to choose. The Social Democrats don't support this right, Fine Gael doesn't, and the Labor Party doesn't. Nobody does except Sinn Fein. It has essentially been the Sinn Fein women who, within their organization, have fought for and secured many of the women's centers within the ghettos. Originally they were community advice centers which Sinn Fein funded. The women in Sinn Fein saw the need for women's centers as such and transformed them.



So we have all kinds of problems. We have feminists who will not help the women's centers because the women's centers are run by anti-imperialists. (And, of course, we have the opposite problem as well.) We have women who unite around the woman question but who differ on all other things and to some extent that division holds us all back. Some feminists simply want women's rights within the present system and they have no conception that that is not possible.

**FM: Is the pro-choice position of Sinn Fein for the north and the south?**

**Devlin:** Yes. A national position was taken at their last hour dash [the annual General Meeting of Sinn Fein—ed.] last year.

**FM: Was Sinn Fein active in the anti-amendment campaign?**

**Bernadette:** No. They sat the anti-amendment campaign out because they had no confidence that they could win a majority of the organization to an anti-amendment position. Many of us criticized them because we felt they should have raised it anyway and fought the battle. In the end the issue was, of course, debated in the organization even though pragmatically they sat out the campaign. So that from the time of the referendum to the time of their last hour dash their position was eventually developed and clarified. I think that Gerry Adams was right that if he had pushed a pro-choice position during the amendment campaign there would not have been majority support. So a lot of internal education and debate and argument went on in the intervening years to change that.

But that raises another question for the feminist movement. How does it relate to the fact that Sinn Fein is the only national political organization with a progressive position on women. Why then is the feminist movement overall in opposition to Sinn Fein?

**FM: Is this causing a crisis within the women's movement?**

**Devlin:** To date they are successfully avoiding it, but I think it will ultimately cause a crisis because it is preventing the building of a coherent national women's movement.

**FM: My final question is what can Irish-Americans do to support the struggle in northern Ireland?**

**Devlin:** There is much to do since anything is an improvement on nothing. Our basic problem on this continent is lack of knowledge. It is tragic that seventeen years into the struggle people do not know the reality of northern Ireland. I think once we begin to bring that reality home the rest will fit into place. People will see that Ireland is part of an international struggle that is being fought in many places over exactly the same principles and for exactly the same goals as other progressives struggles in the U.S. and in other countries. The next logical step, when people are aware of what is happening, is the building of links with other people on this continent who are fighting for those principles. Our most powerful way forward is to begin to draw those experiences together.

In the specific context of Ireland, a practical thing that people can do is to explain exactly what the aid agreement is. An aid bill can go through Congress so quickly that before most people in America are even aware of it the American government will have earmarked the money and sent over the first installment. I suppose initially that means we get the word out to where people are: through the Irish-American community where

they have the information on Ireland but don't understand the relevance of the political issues at stake; and to other people who see the relevance but don't have the information on Ireland.

This could have a tremendous impact on the continent. I think that the interest of Irish-Americans in Ireland could be a great force for radicalizing and opening the minds of the forty million Americans of Irish ancestry to the principles of justice and the struggle against oppression. They could make a very strong contribution to the resolution of problems in which this country is more directly involved like Central America and South Africa. I think that we are moving in that direction but it is slow, painstaking work because of the difficulty in putting down roots and because of the ebb and flow of interest in Ireland, even among Irish-Americans. So it is also important that we explain Ireland to that section of the American community that is already sympathetic to the principles at stake in our struggle but who are not that familiar with the Irish struggle per se. It is a big task.

**FM: Thank you very much for taking the time to do this interview.**



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## The State of Labor Hormel: Labor's Selma?

by Joe Alley

*Joe Alley is a Midwest labor activist.*

"... Trade unionists of that era (50 years ago) developed approaches attuned to their situation which caught the allegiance of a generation of workers, and organized labor experienced a period of remarkable growth." (AFL-CIO Committee on the Evolution of Work, "The Changing Situation Of Workers And Their Unions," February, 1985)

Back in 1974, meatpackers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin fought an eighteen month battle against efforts by eight local packinghouse companies to break their union. The strike was bitterly fought, but eventually the combined power of the companies and the courts spelled defeat for the strikers, and a vote of the scabs decertified the union. (Interestingly, the lawyer for the companies was a man named Pat Brigden, whose spot in this infamous Milwaukee consulting firm has since been taken over by one Tom Krukowski—Hormel's current legal counsel.)

In many ways, the struggle marked the beginning of a major employer offensive designed to radically restructure the meatpacking industry. Since that time, at least 12% of meatpackers have lost their jobs, wages have actually slid backwards as two-tier wage structures have been widely implemented, productivity has risen while on-the-job injuries have skyrocketed, and economic power has been further concentrated in the hands of a few giants like Armour, IBP and Hormel. All this has brought back strong visions of Upton Sinclair's *Jungle*.

Eleven years after the Milwaukee strike, Hormel Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota, was fed up with having to take one after another round of concessions from a highly profitable company and decided to draw the line. Frustrated by a lack of support from the International union, the local membership recognized they must mainly do it on their own.

After a year-long corporate campaign and a strike that is now in its ninth month, few would disagree that P-9's fight is having an impact far beyond the tiny town of Austin. Rank and file support has come from around the country to an extent unheard of in recent labor times. Farmers, many who share common roots and a similar plight as P-9, have given strong moral and material support to P-9ers—giving new hope to the concept of a farm-labor alliance. Jesse Jackson, in town last month to lend support to P-9, declared that as Selma was to the civil rights movement in the 60's, so will Austin be to the labor movement of the 80's.

Given this situation, could anything be more indicative of the sad state of this country's organized labor movement than the public attacks launched against P-9 by leaders of the UFCW [United Food and Commercial Workers—ed.] and most of the AFL-CIO hierarchy?

What's the rap against P-9? According to his International, Local president Jim Guyette is really Jim Jones leading the rank and file toward a mass suicide. The UFCW also claims that the Local is simply adopting a go-it-alone approach and pursuing narrow self-interest at the cost of solidarity among Hormel workers. And finally, the International claims that P-9 has sold its very soul to the devil by bringing in an "outsider" named Ray Rogers to help organize the struggle. [For a rundown of these charges, see the opinion piece by a UFCW staffer printed in the *March Labor Notes*—ed.]

Several questions have to be asked at this point. One is the seemingly simple question of whether P-9 should be supported. (Unfortunately, at least one left-wing group, the Communist Party, has joined in the character assassination against P-9, pretty much echoing the line of the International.) Second, are we seeing the repeat of the same scenario played out in the earlier Milwaukee strike and so many other times—a militant local fighting valiantly but unsuccessfully in the face of impossible odds? Or are sections of labor finally developing the ability to fight back against a major corporate offensive? Third, what does P-9's struggle tell us about the nature of labor's struggle in the coming years? It has become extremely fashionable these days to talk of the de-industrialization of America and the rise of the service sector. Many unions, including the UFCW, are putting a very large part of their efforts toward organizing this sector, often with very favorable results. Yet P-9's fight has taken place in one of the most depressed and hard hit industries. Is this likely to continue or are we just seeing an isolated case, a sort of last hurrah?

These questions are being widely debated among labor activists. More importantly, they are being played out in the world of practical politics. It doesn't seem to be an overstatement to say that the answers will help determine the future direction of the labor movement in this country.

### Where There Is Oppression, There Is Resistance

Though born in 1933 during a sit-down strike, P-9 has had a relatively stable and harmonious relationship with George Hormel and family. The current strike is the first since 1933. What led up to it? In 1978, Hormel threatened to leave Austin unless the workers agreed to help finance—to the tune of \$20 million—a new and modernized plant in Austin. Taking this threat seriously, the Local voted to do this and also gave away the right to strike for the next seven years. In 1981, the company came back seeking more concessions—this time a wage freeze for the duration of the next contract. The union took this to mean until 1985 or until wages were increased in the rest of the industry. (The International had guaranteed this.) Hormel, however, had other ideas. In 1984, despite the fact that the Austin plant had become the most productive and



profitable plant in the industry, Hormel demanded further wage cuts of \$2.44 an hour throughout the entire chain.

From that point on, P-9 members became determined to launch a fight against these concessions. They elected new leadership pledged to fight, and they started to map out some serious plans to stop the endless spiral of concessions.

They hired labor consultant Ray Rogers to direct a corporate campaign against Hormel, and the P-9 membership voted to pay extra dues in order to fund it. They painstakingly put together a strategy and an organization that would certainly be necessary to take on a mighty giant like Hormel.

During the corporate campaign, while P-9 members still worked, hundreds of thousands of leaflets were distributed in Austin, other parts of Minnesota including the Twin Cities, and to most other meatpacking plants throughout the midwest. Hundreds of workers joined on roving picket lines outside of many First Bank outlets, protesting the Bank's strong connections with the Hormel Company. A support network was developed within the Local to allow P-9 to be relatively self-sufficient in the event they had to strike. The union hall became a center for everything from food collection, to a clothing distribution center, to a headquarters for roving picketers. All of this was made possible only through the incredibly strong participation of P-9 members. Weekly and eventually daily meetings of hundreds of members were typical. The level of organization, participation, and understanding of the members developed to such an extent that even a union official who was hostile to P-9's struggle had to say, "If only we had a hundred locals just like them."

### The International Responds

P-9's planned fight did not fit the International's blueprints (if, in fact, they had any), and the Local and the International were on a giant collision course. Claiming that P-9 was committing mass suicide and would take the rest of the industry with them, the International cut off support for the strike, tried to blackmail P-9 members into signing up with the company to return to work (sometime), and other extreme measures.

On a basic level, progressives have to ask: even if P-9 is heading down a road to another Jonestown, should the International be forcing open their mouths so the company can pour down the poisoned Kool-Aid? The question that often gets lost in the debate is what would have happened if the International had instead thrown their weight behind the strike. Even as late as December, had the International followed through on their promise to sanction roving pickets at other Hormel plants, chances are very good that Hormel could have been beaten.

In its defense, the International says the fight-back should be built in this way: start at the lower rungs of the meatpacking industry, places like Armour or IBP where workers earn the \$6-8 range. Organize these folks and only then can the wages of the entire industry be brought back up and the national pattern restored. By contrast, P-9's view has been, if the most profitable company in the industry can push through concessions

among already organized workers virtually everywhere in the country, it's not feasible to talk abstractly of raising the bottom up.

While there is obvious merit and justice to the International's perspective over the longer run, if *right now* the company can break the workers at their strongest link, won't this only push down industry standards further? To ignore the uneven development of things is to get into wishful thinking of one sort or another. A quick look at the International's campaign against Armour is proof of that. You didn't hear about it, you say? That's because it has never materialized.

Hormel is a highly profitable company and the P-9 local was ready to fight. The choice was clear: either support their efforts to fight back, or try to drag them down. The International chose the latter and thereby performed some of the worst treachery ever committed against a local by its own parent union.



### "Better To Die On Your Feet Than Live On Your Knees"

As you walk into the Austin labor center, the above slogan stares you right in the face. It reflects the spirit of P-9 and their internal unity. Often it is P-9ers who boost the spirits of their supporters. They do this not because they are sure they will win,



but because they know their cause is just and that they had no other choice. One of the P-9 leaders is fond of repeating a quote that says "Our beginning never knows our end." It is a recognition that P-9 may or may not win, but, more importantly, that you can't fail to try for fear of what may happen down the road.

It seems likely that P-9 will continue to fight, not giving in short of victory regardless of whether any one else continues the fight with them. This is especially true of the foreseeable future because the other Hormel contracts expire in the fall. But regardless of the outcome, it is important to begin to analyze what new conditions the fight is creating. Has it, as the International charges, put the workers on the retreat and strengthened the company's hand? Or has it made conditions much more favorable to fight back. This can be looked at on several different levels.

**1) Within the meatpacking industry, P-9's fight has definitely strengthened those who stand for more militant struggle and greater democracy.**

At one of the first rallies, nearby local P-6 had a sign that said: "P-9 Proud: P-6 Poor." Oscar-Mayer workers in Madison, forced by their local president to cross a picket line set up by Oscar-Mayer workers in Oklahoma, elected new leadership to the executive board that has built support for P-9 and ordered their president to not publicly attack P-9. Local P-40 of Cudahy, Wisconsin, voted overwhelmingly to put their dues in escrow until the International rescinds the strike. And as many people already know, nearly 500 Hormel workers in Ottumwa, Iowa, and about 50 more in Fremont, Nebraska, refused to cross P-9's picket lines. This act of solidarity in which people were willing to sacrifice their jobs is almost unheard of in a time when concessions are becoming the rule and good-paying jobs are increasingly tough to come by. (These workers, in conjunction with P-9, are fighting to get their jobs back. Ottumwa workers just won an important victory when an appeals hearing ruled that they were eligible to get unemployment-entitling 500 to \$2.2 million in back pay.)

A number of other meatpacking locals are also currently being reshaped and revitalized due to P-9's example. However, it is only because these locals have suffered through nearly a decade of turmoil and attacks in the industry that they have rallied around P-9, a far different response than the Milwaukee strike eleven years ago.

**2) P-9 has helped to change the public perception of unions as being "big labor."**

P-9's message comes from America's heartland. And as it has been portrayed on programs such as "Nightline", the fight has unfolded as one for basic human dignity and fair treatment on the job. Given that the media portrayal of unions is generally one of money-grabbing, selfish organizations, P-9 has shown again that unions can be a vital force against corporate greed and callousness.

**3) P-9 has forged a progressive coalition that has been built from the base.**

Hormel's role in South Africa, the Haymarket anniversary, intervention in Central America, the plight of the family farmer—these and other issues have become a regular part of P-9's agenda. For example, as this article goes to press, P-9 is bringing in a leader of the trade union movement in South Africa to speak to the Local. And in the wake

of Jesse Jackson's recent visit, the Local has been distributing thousands of Rainbow Coalition buttons and promoting Jackson. In fact, in the work that they are doing and the ways they have gone about doing it, P-9 has really embodied the concept of building a rainbow coalition from the ground up. The old saying that in times of heavy struggle, people make dramatic leaps in their consciousness has never been truer.

**A Fight For All Of Labor**

It would be hard to argue that the concession trend in key industries such as meatpacking has not had a big effect on the entire labor movement. Wage increases are at an all time low, 1.7 million jobs have been lost in the goods producing sector of the economy, and the overall rate of unionization has now dropped under 19%. Much of the response to this has been a concerted effort by unions to organize the service sector. While the UFCW has had largescale successes organizing new retail and service unions, they haven't made much of a dent in non-union meatpacking plants.

While some unions make a bit of headway in some service sectors, it would be wrong for several reasons to write off the industrial sector. Struggles like what P-9 is going through could very well spring up elsewhere. Heavy industry (manufacturing, mining, and construction) still accounts for 29% of the GNP—a figure nearly as high as thirty years ago. Even though the percentage has gone down, the overall number of industrial workers has increased by four million since the post-war period. And with the growth of non-union jobs in every major industry, the potential for organizing surely exists. Like P-9, many unions are finding their backs against the wall and are looking for new solutions and answers in order to fight back. Many new tactics and approaches will come out of this, and if cooperation and solidarity among union locals actually grows, we could see a whole new ballgame.

Developments in the Hormel strike belie the UFCW International claim that P-9 is heading toward suicide. If anyone is headed on a suicidal track, it is clearly the International, which has staked its reputation on seeing P-9 fail and now faces a rank and file revolt. Win or lose, P-9 is showing that a strong and heroic fight can win widespread support.



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## New Reproductive Rights Debate

# Back Into the Arena of Sexual Politics

by Liz Hill

*This article is based on a speech given by the author at a forum on reproductive technology held recently in Boston. Liz Hill is a member of the Reproductive Rights National Network.*

"Fetal viability" is a term that has assumed a growing importance in the reproductive rights debate. The technology is being developed that will enable doctors to preserve the fetus outside the mother's womb at an earlier and earlier age. Today, very few fetuses under twenty-seven weeks old are able to survive. As technology advances, however, we are going to find that many more fetuses will be able to be preserved outside of the womb at a very, very young age--into the second, and even the first trimester. These medical advances will be of great benefit to women giving birth to premature infants.

At the same time, the changing nature of fetal viability is going to have a big impact on a woman's right to choose abortion. This is because the grounds on which the Supreme Court legalized abortion in the Roe v. Wade decision were very weak. We need to take a closer look at this decision.

### Roe v. Wade: What Rights Does It Uphold?

The Roe v. Wade decision does not give women an absolute right to abortion. Perhaps the best known section of this decision states: "The right of privacy is construed to be broad enough to encompass the woman's decision to choose whether or not to terminate a pregnancy." But the right to privacy is not a right to abortion.

The concept of privacy used in the Roe v. Wade decision is a classically liberal concept of privacy. This concept equates privacy with lack of government intervention. It assumes that areas of life into which the government does not intrude are areas of life in which individuals operate freely. As a result, this exact same definition of privacy was used in the court decision (Harris v. McRea) which upheld the right of the govern-

ment to cut off Medicaid funding for abortions--the famous Hyde Amendment. Using this concept of privacy, the Supreme Court went from saying that the government had a duty *not* to intervene in a woman's decision to have an abortion to saying that the government had absolutely no responsibility to intervene in the women's choice to have an abortion. In other words, the state had no duty at all to come up with government funding that would enable this supposed right to be a reality for the majority of women. It is very important, therefore, that we not defend abortion only as a "privacy" issue. That type of defense can undermine arguments urging government funding for abortions and has the potential to seriously divide the reproductive rights movement.

If Roe v. Wade is not really framed in terms of a woman's right to abortion, then what is its framework? The real basis of the Roe v. Wade decision is not the right to abortion and it is not privacy. Roe v. Wade is framed in terms of fetal viability. Fetal viability is, in turn, tied to the state of medical technology which has progressed quite a ways since 1973. Fetal viability is the basis for the trimester constraints. The reason that it is illegal to have an abortion in the third trimester (the last three months of pregnancy) is because it is medically possible to keep alive a fetus born after six months in the womb. The state presumed to have an interest in a potentially viable fetus. Because of that interest, the state has the right to intervene in a woman's decision to choose an abortion in the last three months of pregnancy. As the age of fetal viability gets lower and lower, the government will be able to intervene at an ever earlier stage in pregnancy. The question arises: what kind of government interventions are likely to be introduced given that our right to abortion is conditional on the viability of the fetus?



### Will Caesarean Section Become the Only Legal Abortion?

Obviously, the Right-to-Life movement (RTL) could continue to argue that abortion should simply be illegal. Even more probably, however, is that the fetal viability issue will be used to change the types of abortions available to women. The simplest forms of abortion--dilation and curettage (D&C) and the evacuation method are the methods that are easiest for the woman involved. They can be done on an out-patient basis and



the time for recovery is very short. These are also the kinds of abortions that destroy the fetus. If an abortion is performed via D & C or evacuation, there is no possibility of that fetus being able to survive outside of the womb because the process destroys the fetus.

If a conservative political trend prevails, we can foresee a time when only abortions that preserve the fetus in a viable state will be legal. Although such abortions are euphemistically called "mini-caesareans," they are really caesarean sections. They involve cutting the woman open and removing the fetus from the uterus. Such a process is serious surgery. It is surgery that would have to be performed in a hospital. It requires a longer time for recovery. This surgery would take a woman away from her family, and if she was a single mother, that would be a problem. It would take her out of work, and if she was living from pay check to pay check like many women are, that would also be a problem. If mini-caesareans were the only kind of legal abortions available, very serious questions about access to abortion would again arise. How many women would be forced to carry the fetus to term? How many other women would be forced into unsafe back-alley abortions? If this is allowed to happen, we will be back in the days when only the rich could afford to control their bodies.

Concern for fetal viability also has an impact on women's right to choose or refuse pre-natal testing and to choose or to refuse different types of medical procedures. Court cases on this have already occurred. This is not an abstract issue. In the University of Colorado hospital, there was a case of a woman who refused to follow her doctor's advice to have a C-section. She was afraid of the surgery. This was not an irrational woman. This was a woman who was certified by a psychiatrist to be rational. She was forced to go to a judicial hearing in front of the Colorado juvenile court. The court found the fetus to be a dependent and neglected child within the meaning of the Colorado Children's Code. The court ordered the doctor to perform the C-section. This woman was ordered to submit to surgery. There was also a case in Georgia where another doctor recommended that a woman have a C-section. He considered the C-section to be "medically necessary" and advantageous to the fetus. The woman refused to follow the recommendation and stated her wish to attempt a vaginal delivery. This woman was also forced to go to court and here too, the Georgia Supreme Court ordered her to submit to surgery. In this case, the woman went on to deliver vaginally.

### Progressive Response

It is important to realize that these fetal viability arguments are not going to be raised "way down the line." The technology may only be available widely in the future, but the arguments are being used against women's right to choice now. It is important for progressive activists to be aware of what challenges to a woman's right to choose lie ahead. But to be effective in defeating these challenges we must understand the flaws inherent in the arguments used against us and be able to expose them.

It is an insult that there is so much concern over unborn fetuses when there are children

already born into this world who get no concern at all. You don't see a mass movement in this country to save children who are suffering from malnutrition. We have an infant mortality rate that is continuing to rise, both in the country as a whole and in this state, and yet people have remained fairly apathetic. The Right-to-Lifers are not organizing to save children. What the RTL movement advocates is more a right to *birth* than a right to life. Once children are born, they are largely on their own. The RTL is not in the business of fighting for food stamps, low-cost housing, or any of a number of things that could provide children with a genuine "right to life."

It is also important to ask what future is envisioned by the people who use fetal viability as a barrier to choice. They do, in fact, have a vision. Bernard Nathanson, who was at one time a pro-choice activist and has now become a spokesman for the RTL has this to say about their vision: "The abortion of the future then, will consist simply of early detection of the fetus, removal of it from the unwilling mother, and transfer into either a life-support system or reimplantation into an eager and willing recipient."

What kind of future is this?! A procedure such as Nathanson envisions is extremely intimidating. The thought of having such an operation will cause a lot of women to reject abortion altogether. Also, the technology will cost a lot of money to use. Is Medicaid going to provide for this technology? Will this very "advanced" technology be widely available?

It is not enough, however, to argue that the "fetal viability" argument is flawed because it is impractical. To argue against this concern based on women's economic position and society's lack of concern for children implies that the answer to the problem is Medicaid, perfect contraception, and support for childraising. But if society were geared so that Bernard Nathanson's proposal was an option for all women, that would still not be a reason to outlaw D&C and evacuation abortions.

Nathanson's proposal implies that women have an obligation to allow and nurture any life conceived in them, an implication that has more to do with old values than with new technology. To quote Ellen Willis, a *Village Voice* correspondent, "However much . . . [the RTL] want to believe their opposition to abortion is simply saving life, they are shoring up a particular sexual culture whose rules are stacked against women."

The most important thing to understand about the fetal viability argument is that it is really a disguise for something else. It disguises a very old set of assumptions about women, namely that women do not have the right to live for themselves. At worst, this assumption implies that women are cows or broodmares, obligated to reproduce the race. At "best" it implies that women are vehicles of higher destiny who are selfish if they are unwilling to carry a potential Jesus Christ to term.

If Bernard Nathanson's vision becomes a possibility, a tremendous amount of pressure will be brought to bear on women who refuse to accept it. One can easily envision the RTL saying "Why are women so unwilling? All they have to do is go through a few months of pregnancy, an operation that probably won't kill them, and then give up the child for adoption. Why are they so selfish, it's such a little sacrifice!"

Once again women are instructed to sacrifice and deny themselves for others. The



RTL believes that women are always ready to be mothers, if only conditions are right. If only technology could make pregnancy easier, surely women would choose motherhood instead of abortion. Substitute "society" for "technology" and one arrives at Bernard Law's line on abortion. Cardinal Law believes that women are coerced into having abortions by economic injustice and social pressure and lack of social support for children. He portrays women as victims of abortion, forced to defer their true dream of motherhood.



The "fetal viability" issue must be moved off the grounds of abstract right-to-life and back into the arena of sexual politics. Although women are victimized by economic injustice, and although there are certainly women who would not have had abortions if they could have realistically raised a child, it hardly alleviates that victimization to deny women yet another option. Our goal is to broaden our choices, not further restrict them. For that reason it is most important that abortion continue to be placed in the context of women's right to sexual freedom and reproductive choice. If we lose sight of our own vision of the future, we will find ourselves once again mired in a debate that our future depends on whether women will be free to make our own choices, or whether those choices will be made for us by others.

For further information you can write to R2N2, PO Box 686, Jamaica Plain MA 02130.

## Ilopango Is Another Trench In The Revolution

by Robert Johnson

*The inspiring story of the struggle to liberate the political prisoners section of Ilopango, the women's prison in San Salvador, is told, for the most part, here for the first time. It is presented in the form of a running narrative of a two hour visit to Ilopango by an international delegation of trade unionists. The film and tape which were used to record the visit had to be smuggled out of the prison.*

While the main purpose of our visit to El Salvador is to be a delegation of observers at the convention of the National Federation of Salvadoran Workers, FENASTRAS, we feel that it is important to get some sense of other aspects of political life in El Salvador. Fourteen of the observers to the FENASTRAS convention decide to visit the women's prison in San Salvador—Ilopango. Three of the FENASTRAS people will assist in this journey. As FENASTRAS is a trade union organization, the prison visit should provide a decided change of pace.

### How To Get Into Ilopango

Some members of the delegation have letters from their congresspeople asking for permission to investigate conditions in El Salvador. We hope that the letters will enable us to gain entry to the prison. One of our translators stuffs two rolls of film in her bra because we are told that the prisoners will give us a camera once we get inside. We also have medical supplies in our purses and knapsacks.

We reach the heavily guarded prison gate and show the guards our letters. This time the gringo letters are stronger than their guns, and we enter. Our cameras and passports must be left at the prison gate. It is not a good feeling. In El Salvador, when you give up your passport you give up your best protection from the dictatorship—something that identifies you as a Yankee.

### The Liberated Area In Ilopango

As we move into the political prisoner section of Ilopango, we are immediately struck by the sense of freedom and the relaxed atmosphere. Slogans supporting the FMLN and the Sandinistas of Nicaragua adorn the walls. By contrast our FENASTRAS sisters

and brothers had instructed us not to discuss FENASTRAS, the FMLN, or any other political matter outside the FENASTRAS convention because it is simply too dangerous. Within the political prisoners' section of the prison there are no guards and the prisoners are not confined to small cells.

We are led to a well-kept room where we are informed that the Committee of Political Prisoners of El Salvador (COPPEs) will meet with us. A translator, picture-taker, and spokesperson are designated by our group. A high quality Canon 35mm camera appears. Film is loaded and tape machines are set up.

### **The Executive Committee Of COPPEs**

A young woman enters. We exchange greetings and identify ourselves. Reyna is nineteen years old and a member of the executive committee of COPPEs. She goes on to say, "The job of COPPEs is to create a fifth front, another trench in the revolution within the prison walls. COPPEs salutes FENASTRAS during this anniversary of working class struggle." These statements seem at first to be overblown.

Soon a second woman carrying a baby enters with a distinct limp. Maria is in her early 20's. She indicates that women who are captured are routinely tortured in the secret prisons of El Salvador. "The 'lucky' ones make it to Ilopango." Currently there are sixty-eight women in the political prisoner section at Ilopango. Half of them have been raped. Most come from the zones of conflict. They have no right to an attorney; they have no idea when they will be set free. Confessions are obtained by torture and/or threatening family members. One fifteen year old girl was raped by four soldiers when arrested as an FMLN sympathizer. She remains in jail because she has refused to sign a confession.

### **Daily Life In The Prison**

Maria goes on to describe daily life in the prison. COPPEs has established commissions on health, food distribution, building improvements, finances and on other aspects of daily life. They get their food raw and prepare it themselves. Currently they do not get enough food. No food is provided for the twenty-two children living in the prison with their mothers. The "common" (as opposed to political) prisoners must pay for their own food. Infiltrators are sent into the prison by the government and relations with guards are bad. All prisoners must pay for their own drugs, and health care in the prison is minimal. There is no pediatrician, and if there is an emergency one must fight to get a child to a doctor.

Reyna explains that COPPEs is in favor of dialogue and warns that a U.S. invasion will create a regional conflict. "We have not been brainwashed and when we get back we will take up arms with the FMLN. Here the war may last longer than the Vietnam War and we are prepared for that."

Maria states that the unique conditions at the prison are the result of intense struggle

since 1980. Among other things, there has been a fifty-six day hunger strike, a successful campaign to expose and rid the prison of three corrupt officials (including the director of the prison and of the prison system), and an armed confrontation which included the taking of seventeen hostages. The political prisoners and their children have created a cooperative society in the bowels of the dictatorship. A strong and clear statement is being made about what this revolution is. A trench, yes. But it is also a beacon; a beacon for the people of El Salvador.



Robert Johnson

**Two members of the COPPEs Executive Committee: Reyna de Carmen Flores is on the right; Maria Ophelia Lopes Maraquin is on the left.**

### **Why Duarte Maintains This Facade Of Human Rights**

In order to maintain the flow of U.S. dollars for the military death machine in El Salvador, Duarte must hold up a facade of human rights. Maria tells us, as did the labor and church people we spoke to in El Salvador, that Duarte's regime would not last six months without Yankee military and financial aid. But the facade of democracy will only be used when Duarte has no other choice. Thus it is only through intense struggle



that COPPES has been able to create the conditions that currently exist within the prison. Maria is emphatic when she states that most FMLN women cadre who are captured never live to "enjoy" Ilopango.

### **Maria Tells Her Story**

Maria proceeds to tell her own story. She was apprehended January 4, 1985 while participating in FMLN activities—"carrying out the homilies of Oscar Romero, bringing life to the humble people of El Salvador." Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" is blaring in the next room. The baby wakes up. Everybody smiles.

As soon as Maria was arrested she was beaten. A plastic bag was put over her head in order to suffocate her. "Where are your safe houses? Who are your comrades?" Maria indicated that she would talk. The bag was removed. She told a phony story and the soldiers knew it. Her head was put back in the bag. Finally the bag was removed and she could not speak. She was raped by two soldiers. Her beatings continued. She told her code name but now states, "I made up my mind not to turn in a single companero, not to betray anyone. Our duty as leaders is to stand up to the enemy and fight for our rights." She spent a total of eight days at the National Police Headquarters and says she did not give any more information.

### **COPPES Takes Hostages**

On the morning of February 21, 1985 the guards threatened to enter the political prisoner section in order to remove one of the prisoners. The prisoners would resist. The international press and the Committee of the Mothers' of the Disappeared were called and assembled at the front gate. The soldiers attacked and COPPES retaliated by taking over the dining hall and seventeen hostages. (Maria smiles an aside. "We were never going to hurt them.") COPPES blocked the door with a refrigerator and a fire fight ensued. A helicopter landed on the roof of the prison. The women held on. Maria was badly wounded at 9AM but was given no medical attention until late in the afternoon when COPPES traded the hostages for the right to have the wounded taken out the front gate by the Red Cross in full view of the press and international observers. The military had wanted them taken out the back. Because of the press and the international observers the military backed off.

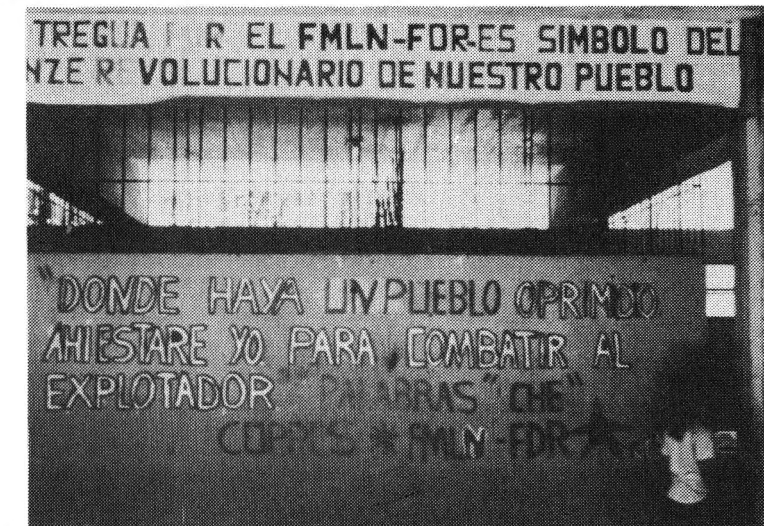
### **El Salvador Will Be The Tomb Of The Gringo Invader**

Maria spent three months in the hospital undergoing three operations on her leg. Soon after coming to the hospital she discovered she was pregnant. Because she was a victim of rape and had undergone many X-rays she requested an abortion. The request was denied. The baby was born healthy and normal. Maria says "Because my baby has survived these trials intact she will be a good guerrilla."

Lastly Maria states, "The struggle of COPPES is on behalf of all oppressed peoples

in Central America. Our spirit remains high. Victory here may take longer than it did in Vietnam—we are prepared for that. If the U.S. invades then the war will quickly become regional and El Salvador will be the tomb of the gringo invader."

Our FENASTRAS guides indicate that they must take us back to the FENASTRAS convention for security reasons of their own. We present the medical supplies and purchase handicrafts made by the political prisoners and say goodbye. The jitney ride back to the hotel provides much time for thought.



Robert Johnson

There are political slogans painted all around the prison. This one, from Che, says, "Where there is an oppressed people I will be there to combat the exploiter."

### **Solidarity Confronts Us**

COPPES has created a beacon in San Salvador which speaks in a day-to-day fashion to what the freedom-fighters of El Salvador are struggling for. The women political prisoners have put their lives on the line to establish a self-reliant communal society. This inspiring example is not lost on the people of El Salvador who suffer under a dictatorship fueled by our dollars.

North Americans should understand this beacon as another indication of the determination of the people of El Salvador to liberate themselves from U.S. imperialism. With the resurgence of the Salvadoran labor movement (over one hundred strikes this year) and of the mass movement generally, it is becoming clear that the Duarte regime will not be able to maintain control without massive U.S. involvement. The women political prisoners of Ilopango sharply remind us of our responsibilities to stand in solidarity with the people of El Salvador.

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# Working for Socialism The Path of Resistance

by Steve Camera

The idea for this article was born while watching the movie "The River." For those of you who haven't seen it, it presents a farm family's struggle against a big landholder who wants to dam their river and flood the valley for hydroelectric power.

There are many heroic scenes in "The River." Sissy Spacek single-handedly manages the farm, turning down the lure of an easier life with the landholder. Her husband earns extra money as a scab and learns he is on the wrong side. But the movie doesn't celebrate the farmers' victory. It celebrates their struggle. The worth of the farmers' resistance isn't dependent on their victory, which the movie doesn't guarantee. Their struggle has inherent worth. It's a "better" way of living.

## The Path of Resistance: A Better Way of Living

This theme has a profound meaning for me. It reminds me that I am a lifelong socialist not just because I fight for socialism as a goal. I'm also a socialist because a life of resistance and struggle against the degradation of capitalism is a more honest, more human life than one of compromise and compliance.

Some years back, I used to exchange a misunderstanding with friends on the left. We were in this struggle, we agreed, for our own material gain. Yes, this was true. The working class has the power to remake society in such a way that our own material position would be improved in the long run. Certainly a less warlike society, for instance, is in everyone's interest, just about. So we should help bring this about. Therefore, we were involved in the struggle.

Perhaps this material motivation is enough to sustain years of sacrifice if, as in El Salvador, you face severe repression and literally have nothing to lose but your chains. Perhaps it's enough to sustain socialist activity if, as many of my friends once believed, the new society is imminent. But it isn't enough under conditions of bourgeois democracy, with a largely depoliticized citizenry, when the new society is far away.

For those of us who have retained our socialist commitment, who still put politics above career, there is clearly a moral question involved. There is a sense of justice continually reawakened somehow. There is a need for purpose to face the alienation of this society. These things, along with the goal of a socialist society, are my motivations to continue.

This may be no big revelation, but I wonder if recent Marxist and revolutionary organizations have directly addressed this moral motivation to struggle in their efforts to recruit

and hold activists. In my experience, they haven't. I've been aware that people can change dramatically in the process of gaining political consciousness. The meek can become assertive. The druggies can get clean. The depressed can discover meaning and enthusiasm for life. But I always considered these results to be by-products, not one of the goals of becoming a socialist, and in the 1970s, I saw little effort to directly encourage, reward, or praise these changes in people's lifestyle.

What is the connection between the goals of different organizations and the lifestyle of its adherents? An organization such as the DSA, while highly critical of the U.S. system, is inevitably a part of its fabric. It seeks to make the system better. Under bourgeois democracy, its supporters are able to find niches where they can be rewarded with professional success and/or money, and still feel they are doing progressive things. When you seek "to lay hold of existing state structures," you can experience the rewards of those structures.

A revolutionary organization faces a different problem. It seeks a total transformation of society, an overturning of the old order, a raising of the bottom up. It seeks a fundamentally more advanced and thorough democracy. Its members, then, can't "fit in," can't as easily find niches where traditional rewards and political rewards combine. How does a revolutionary organization sustain its members' lives? How does it continue a grass roots approach that emphasizes popular democracy? What sustains the sacrifice of craft or professional success, class prerogatives, material gain, or being always on the margin economically?

I know the traditional answer: change the class base of the organization because the working class is not as aware of the problem of sacrificing "class prerogatives" as the middle class. That's true. But two sobering realities undermine this simple solution.

First, it is a real and serious sacrifice for American workers in 1986 to consider giving up the hope of material advancement and promotion, in whichever way it is traditionally defined. This is true of the most energetic, brightest folks, the leaders, those who are often the first to be attracted to our struggle. In my shop, scores of indigenous, progressive activists disappeared over the years as they found ways to get less demanding jobs elsewhere or advanced to the technical union within the plant.

Second, to change the class base of an organization requires long-term sacrifice and commitment from existing activists, many of whom must abandon class prerogatives. So back to square one.

This dilemma points to the need for a revolutionary socialist organization to have both a goal worth fighting for and a socialist lifestyle worth living. A rewarding lifestyle quickly becomes hollow if commitment to the goal wanes. We have seen many of our friends become sufficiently disillusioned with socialism as it exists to abandon the struggle. On the other hand, a credible goal can't compel long-term allegiance when the only experience is sacrifice and bourgeois society beckons with alternatives.

## A Fresh Look at the Religious Left

One emerging development should help us explore this dilemma further: the emerging



dialogue between the religious and secular left, here and abroad. Any contact with the anti-intervention or sanctuary movements here or with the revolutionary movements in Latin America will show the tremendous energy focused through these channels. Although Marxist theory has not caught up yet, publications like *Monthly Review* have covered this topic extensively. A special "Religion and the Left" issue (July-August, 1984) was sprinkled with quotes such as this:

And some religious leaders in Nicaragua asked us why [just] strategic alliance, why only strategic alliance; why not speak of unity between Marxist-Leninists and Christians? I don't know what the imperialists think about this, but I'm absolutely convinced the formula is highly explosive.

—Fidel Castro, *Granma*, 1980

How does this dialogue offer new insight into maintaining revolutionary commitment in bourgeois society? The religious left has emphasized a moral life more than a clear goal; humility and service more than power; and the plight of victims more than class struggle. We don't want to jump over to that perspective. But aren't these dualities that should be preserved? Specifically, how can we learn from them?

Many Christian activists in Latin America have pursued grass roots work as avidly as any Maoist. The goal is conscientization for them, class consciousness for us. But work at the grass roots requires dealing with individualist attitudes about success, fulfillment, money, prestige, power. Grass roots work does not offer the traditional rewards. The Marxist-Leninist movement did recognize this problem. It attacked "individualism" and "careerism." But we weren't so successful, obviously, in sustaining the grass roots, collectivist approach, despite vicious ideological assaults on careerism (often by budding careerists).

Why? First, because we emphasized discipline to the exclusion of social support and criticism to the exclusion of love. Second, because we emphasized the political goals of the struggle to the exclusion of support for a life of struggle. Some women comrades have suggested that these errors were part of sexist practices.

We need to directly and openly embrace the appeal of a moral, meaningful life, allied with concrete, scientific political analysis. Our motivations are part spiritual. We seek a meaning for our lives. It is this appeal of a meaningful life that has allowed organized religion to snatch more than one potential recruit away from us.

Socialist organizations, as they develop, must think about, develop literature on, discuss, hold conferences on, develop social practice on how to live a meaningful socialist life. We don't have to worship God. Our attitude can be one of humility before the people.

We can learn from the emphasis of the religious left on concern for the victim in the short run, rather than simply as a part of a long-term class struggle. The spiritual life of progressive religious people is often supplemented by service in places like Rosie's Place [a shelter for homeless women living in the Boston area—ed.]. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. In fact, it would be a very good thing if it were combined with political analysis and discussion and other political activity. It would be a way to promote humility and a deeper gut understanding of what we are fighting for and against. Especially for youth, political analysis has more relevance when it springs from concerns of the heart.

I recall a young, college activist in the CYO [the Communist Youth Organization of the CPML—ed.]. When he first moved to Boston, the way he expressed his social concern was to hang out with street people on Sunday morning and buy them breakfast. Of course, when he got involved with the CYO, he abandoned this "utopian" practice for "scientific" political work. Several years later, he was burnt out. Maybe we too arbitrarily defined what was utopian and what was scientific.

We can combine the spirit of a Rosie's Place volunteer with our political analysis through a "serve the people" orientation. We aren't social workers, but neither are we an administrative vanguard. We serve the people politically.

We exercise leadership through persuasion and education, through example. We promote the people, not ourselves. We promote the leadership of people's organizations at all stages. We train new leaders. We prefer that popular organizations produce leaders who are won to socialism rather than taking over these organizations ourselves. When we do assume office in mass organizations, our priority is mass politicization, so that people can participate fully in making their history.

Here is what Gustavo Gutierrez says in *A Theology of Liberation*:

We believe that social transformation is not simply a revolution for the people, but that the people themselves, especially farmers and working men [sic] exploited and unjustly kept in the background, must take part in their own liberation . . . However, existing structures block popular participation and marginalize the great majorities, depriving them of channels for expression of their demands. Consequently the Church feels compelled to address itself directly to the oppressed—instead of appealing to the oppressors—calling on them to assume control of their own destiny. (Orbis, 1983)

## Winning Over A New Generation

What is our traditional approach to building organization? We seek unity on political line. "Do you agree with me about the labor bureaucracy?", etc. This is an important process, but perhaps there is another way to leaven this bread. Let's ask who lives a revolutionary life. Who has chosen a life of resistance to bourgeois society, and what is the source of their commitment? How do we gather these revolutionary folks together?

The roots of today's Marxist-Leninists lie principally in the student, anti-war and civil rights movements of the late 60's and early 70's. Our discovery of Marxism cemented our moral outrage into a coherent world view and ongoing opposition to capitalism. But many of us made a moral choice of resistance before our Marxist analysis gelled. In fact, it was this earlier moral choice which made us natural recruits to Marxist analysis. But there are others, also having made a moral choice, friendly to Marxist analysis, who have cemented their opposition in different ways, such as through liberation theology. I have found many of these folks quite close to the passion of my life.

Think about our difference with the DSA—at least with the leadership. Of course, we have political differences. But there is another difference which touches just as deeply; that is their lack of a grass roots approach. They don't mobilize people at the grass roots for fundamental change. They aren't concerned with stimulating a change at the grass

roots in consciousness. They have made peace personally with the system. It is an organization of intellectuals. If you refer back to the Gutierrez quote, you will see that although the political concept is not necessarily Marxist, it is revolutionary and definitely to the left of social democracy.

We have, in recent years, become very sophisticated at political organizing, tactics and strategy in the mass struggle. But as many of us have moved further chronologically from our point of political awakening, our understanding of this process has sometimes eroded. How do we stimulate the process of political awakening? How can we nurture it?

New activists are coming forward from new struggles: from labor fightbacks, such as P-9, unemployment and plant closings battles, from the farmers' movement, from Rainbow politics. These new activists, often working class, often revolutionary-minded but non-Marxist, are beginning to take the leap into a life of resistance. They feel an exhilaration and liberation personally that we can understand. Yes, we want to provide them with Marxist analysis. But if we cut these new activists off from the spiritual roots of their discovery, they will wither, as have so many past comrades.

With the goal of organizing these new activists into a reconstituted revolutionary left, isn't there a clear need for dialogue with the religious left? Can't we blend a sophisticated Marxist political analysis with a frank recognition of the spiritual and moral choices we have made and hope others will make in the future? After all, we are not cold tacticians and technicians. We stand for a vision, a new society, a new humanity. We must be called upon to fight for it and live it at the same time.

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## Working for Socialism Looking Back at the CPML

### An Interview with Don Smith

*In the June-July 1985 issue of Forward Motion we began an interview with Don Smith, an Afro-American ex-member of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (CPML), one of the 1970's communist organizations. Here he shares with us some of his experiences as a Black member of the CPML, the collapse of that organization, and his reflections about why the collapse happened.*

### Being Black in the CPML

We had an Afro-American Commission in the CPML. At first the commission wasn't working right. I don't think there were enough comrades on it that really knew anything about the Afro-American situation. You can get a commission, and you can put a title on it, and put the people on it, but if they are not astute about what they're supposed to do, you're not going to have anything. Later we got comrades on the commission who were very, very astute, and that's when the commission really started meaning something.

We really got a perspective on what the Black movement in the sixties and seventies was all about. We got some knowledge on how some Black progressives turned into Marxist-Leninists; found out how a lot of these Black organizations dissolved, and why; learned a lot about Black culture and how much it means to Black folks; about how you have to integrate cultural work into your communist work.

And then, too, we had some older comrades that took you way back, like Harry Haywood [a Black communist leader and author of *Negro Liberation* and *Black Bolshevik*-ed.] I didn't get to meet him more than three or four times, but when I did I could listen to him all night long. He had all these papers from the thirties and forties; I mean they were old and mildewed. You could ask him almost anything—about Russia, about being down South trying to hook up with the farmworkers, about organizing unions. People listened to him. When I met him he was eighty or eighty-one, but he could tell you things. He remembered. He was clear. When I looked at that guy, I just said that I was going to do this forever.

Later, there were also a few members of the Central Committee who were Black. At first they seemed to have things in hand. But when the organization started falling apart, you started to get complaints from these people. So there had to be *something* going on. You don't just cry when there's nothing going on.

Personally, as a Black member of the CPML, I really didn't have many problems. But I know there were a lot of problems, particularly in the South. I remember one



time particularly when I went to Atlanta and met some of the Black comrades there. This one brother wrote some good poetry, but he spoke of things like “crackers.” (You know the way Black folks used to write poetry.) And he submitted a few poems to the *Call* [the newspaper of the CPML—ed.] The poems weren’t printed because of those words. He didn’t like that too much. And when I read some of his poems, I didn’t like it too much either.



Harry Haywood inspired many younger members of the CPML.

I always tried to remember that you couldn’t look at the CPML like it was the *end* of what we were fighting for. The fact was that all these white folk came with all their bull shit. They had a lot of the remnants of their class background, their nationality background, all that stuff. Once you commit yourself to being a Marxist-Leninist, that doesn’t dissolve. They had a saying in the CPML about it taking seven years to do away

with your petit-bourgeois background. But to a large extent, it would take *seventy* years for some of those people to get rid of that crap. I always felt that being a Black person, we understood those folks more than they understood us. People would say things around you like you weren’t there. That’s the history of Black folks. Or they could say one thing and a lot of times you could look at them and *know* what they were thinking. They didn’t have to turn red or anything like that.

When the organization started falling apart, the comrades on the Afro-American Commission were still trying to get out the correct line on the national question. Most of us thought that something was going to be salvaged. That’s what we were fighting for. I know that when the CPML was falling apart, some of the best papers came from the Afro-American Commission.

### Taking Off the Blinders

When the organization started to fall apart, a lot of comrades began questioning all their Marxist-Leninist values. This happened all up and down the line, except for what we called the ultra-left. (I was a part of that group.) They were steadfast.

Now, looking back, after I got an understanding of all the many organizations out there, I’m not sure it was correct to form the CPML and call it the Party. It could have worked out, but it didn’t. We had all these communists running around. If we were all talking about overthrowing the government, why did we have all those different organizations? But the CPML said it had *the* line—the *correct* line. When you are confident that what you are saying is correct, then you can be sure, you can be arrogant. Now, when the CPML started saying “Well, maybe we’re not one hundred percent correct,” a lot of members couldn’t handle that. I mean it had to be all or nothing; either we were all right or we were wrong.

I don’t want to give the impression that when the CPML started dropping its sectarianism, that precipitated the decline of the organization. I guess the decline began when the CPML was formed. But I know for a fact that a lot of comrades couldn’t handle a non-sectarian attitude. No one had said, “We are supposed to be sectarian,” but you could just see how people weren’t sure anymore. When things started opening up, when we could question different ways that we had dealt with other organizations, our folks just couldn’t handle it. The problem was the CPML’s type of Marxist-Leninist training.

People were finding out that things didn’t apply that never had applied in the first place! People were throwing stuff out because they had been so dogmatically adhering to things in the first place. It was like folks had blinders on, and somebody took the blinders off and “Wow!” It was like a Pandora’s box opening up. The thing that amazed me more than anything, the thing that hurt the most, that really let me down and burnt me up the most, was how people that I had trusted and believed in and really admired started throwing all this stuff out the window. It wasn’t a devastating experience but it did teach me some things.

Above all, comrades were not taught that they had to think for themselves. They were not taught that Marxist-Leninists use certain principles. Anybody who calls themselves a Marxist-Leninist has to understand that when they read those books or do all their studying, they are not reading a Bible.

You can't just take that stuff and try to apply all of it, because what Lenin and Mao and all those folks were going through was something entirely different. I don't think the CPML got that across to people. I don't know if it's something that you have to grasp yourself or something that the teacher has to teach. I don't know how I got it right away, but I don't think it was me. When I was recruited I was told this, and it made so much sense to me I knew it had to be that way.

### Understanding American Conditions

A person I respect a lot who was not a communist (but probably should have been) once told me was that you can take a set of circumstances and put it through me and put it through you, and we'll deal with it. But the outcome may not be the same because we are not going to see it the same. So now, if you are talking about countries and diverse peoples where the economies are different, the times are different, everything is different, and people are taking these books and trying to apply what was in them like it was the same—like we were in China or Chile or Russia—well, it just won't work. Marxism is not like that. You can't do it.

People in the CPML used to be able to run you a whole list of things that were going on in China. But they couldn't tell you jack shit about what was going on in America. It was nice that we thought there was a communist country—a true communist country—in the world. And it's still nice to think that. But every time China would change their line on something and you would read it in *Beijing Review*, well the next thing you know you'd see something different in the *Call* or you'd hear something different from the hierarchy. That really wrecked havoc in the organization. I'm sure a lot of people didn't believe in the philosophical value of Marxism-Leninism. They had to see it work, and that's what China represented to them.

I always believed that Marxism-Leninism itself was the thing. I didn't care if it was nowhere in the universe! That stuff was real. When you read that stuff or listened to it, that was it. I'd say "Yeah, this is what I've been looking for." But a lot of people didn't have that. They had to see it working. When things started falling apart they said, "Well, it's not working." So what? It's not the philosophy that is not working. It is the philosophers that are misusing the philosophy.

This is the kind of thing that all the so-called revolutionaries of 1986 have to deal with in themselves. Are they looking at China or Timbuktu or Zimbabwe or any other place for something or are they looking at Marxism-Leninism itself? Philosophically is it real? Is it viable? This is what you have to answer. It's a lost cause if you're looking to China or Russia or some other country for your answers, because this is America and the superstructure that you have to deal with here ain't *nothing* like what those

folks had there. They are talking about dictators and dynasties in China. Well, that ain't nothing like what we've got in America.

America has this peculiar thing; it's got so many poor folks believing that they ain't poor. I haven't ever seen so many starving people say that they weren't starving. I mean how do you deal with that? In those other countries, when people were starving, they knew it. So when Mao or Lenin said, "Are you starving?" they said, "Yeah!" They heard their stomachs growling. They went right along with him.

In the CPML we used to call it "great nation chauvinism" when someone said that America was exceptional. Oh man, you'd get rapped to the ground if you said what I'm saying now. You'd be called an "American exceptionalist." But you've got to deal with this country. You've got Congress, and the Mafia, senators and presidents, mayors and governors. You've got to cut through all that crap to get somebody to admit that they've got it rough.

This is America. It's supposed to be the richest country in the world. But I know that when I was growing up I didn't have it. I'd have blended right in with China or Africa because I was starving. Still, my mother used to tell me "People in China ain't eating this and eating that." And even now we've got poor people voting for Reagan. So, if you're talking about being a revolutionary in America, especially a Marxist-Leninist, this is the kind of stuff you've got to cut through. If you are going to be a fool like the SLA [the Symbionese Liberation Army—ed.], you don't even need a philosophy. You take your machine gun and go ahead and deal. But if you're talking about winning the masses over, you've got to have your shit together!

### Making Revolutionary Organization Work

What has to happen is there have got to be more study groups that deal with concretes about Marxism-Leninism. In order for an organization to be successful it has to study Marxism-Leninism. You have to have study groups on the economy, nationalism, the Hispanic question, the Afro-American question, women, everything. And I don't mean going into these little seminars. You have to make these studies relevant. There has to be give and take. People in these study groups have to be encouraged. You've got to slap them upside the head to make them understand that they have to think for themselves. They can't think that because a person is leading a Marxist-Leninist study group that they know more about Marxism than you do. When you're in these study groups, for the most part you should be on an equal footing. You have to have that attitude. The instructor has to have that attitude and the students—or whatever you want to call them—have to have that attitude too.

And you've got to have seminars on leadership. You've got to demystify leaders. When you are a leader of one of these organizations, that does not make you all-seeing and all-knowing. That doesn't set you up to be revered. Somebody has to run an organization, so you're going to try to pick the best people to lead. What's the criterion? I think the best kind of leader is somebody that brings out the best in the people that they are leading.



One of the main things that made the collapse of the CPML inevitable was the unwillingness of people to take responsibility for their errors. There were people I admired a lot who I saw, in the declining stages of the organization, attack other people. I was at meetings where I saw hate in people's eyes. People were crying: "It's your fault! It's your fault!" They would say that some other person was responsible for the errors that they themselves had carried out. It's like folks were saying, "I was a slave to your ideas," "You hypnotized me," "You brainwashed me." And so, instead of saying, "Well, yes. I made this error. The line was such and such, and I followed the line and I pushed the line," they said "You were responsible for this!"

I know that everything I did, I did willingly. Nobody forced me to do anything. They put out the line. I read it. I studied it. If it was a directive, I hashed it over with my unit. We argued about it and, for the most part, we did what the directive said. Sure, a lot of the stuff turned out to be really off base. But I never, ever, blamed anyone else for what I did willingly, gladly, and probably with more enthusiasm than over half the organization. No, I would feel less than a person if I said that somebody else was responsible for what I did.

What I'm saying is that unless people can say to themselves, "What I did, I did for love," you have got to quit the organization; you've got to abstain; you've got to do something. But you can't go on for years and years doing something you think isn't right. You can't harbor all these reservations, and then, when things come to a head, cast all these aspersions on other people.

That's why organizations have to really study Marxism and get a good grasp of democratic centralism and the role of leaders. But perhaps more important, of the role of a *member* of an organization. How much do you follow the line? I know democratic centralism is supposed to cover the problem. The leaders come and talk to you. But by the time your criticism gets back up, it's been through twenty hands already. And so your beef, your gripe, your idea, what you thought was input got changed, got edited twenty times. I don't know how that can be worked out. But I always thought that it would somehow. We were on a bumpy road and the road would get straightened out. We'd learn from our mistakes.

I guess in any organization, you're going to have to do some things you disagree with. But if you are in an organization and you disagree with two out of three directives that come down; if you try to exercise your rights to voice your opposition and you're not satisfied with the response; then you're in the wrong organization, or you're following the wrong philosophy, or something. But apparently a lot of people didn't have that idea. And it really hurt them. They gave up so much of their lives, and when it became clear that the revolution wasn't about to happen too soon, they couldn't deal with it anymore. So they had to blame somebody for sacrificing so much. But I didn't feel then, and I don't feel now, that I wasted those years.

### **We're Going to Have a Working Class Revolution**

If we're going to have a working class revolution, then we're going to have to have

working class people in it. Now, I know that the U.S. working class is not teeming with revolution. But still, if someone came up to me and said, "Hey, Smittie, we've got this organization here we want you to join. You were a good comrade once and we feel you've still got something left," the first thing I would want to know is what was the composition of the organization. Never mind line and all that stuff. I'd want to know: what was the percentage of working class members? what was the percentage of oppressed nationality members? what was the percentage of women? what type of people were in the leadership? That's more important to me. And if the composition was not there, I'd have to see something concrete about how people were going to change that. I would have to be convinced that people were going to make working with working class people a priority, whether it was in shops, or in community organizations or just on their block. That has to happen.

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## Book Review

# I Never Played the Game

by Joe Alley

As one who grew up in this country both idolizing and being inspired by Muhammad Ali, Howard Cosell has always had a special place in my heart. He had the principle and the guts to stand by Ali when he refused to take his step forward at induction time.

Of course, having been subjected over the years to Cosell's verbal terrorism (his Olympic boxing coverage in 1984 was by far the worst example of blatant pro-American bias I have ever seen), my special spot for Howard has sometimes gotten lost. However, the man who made "telling it like it is" a national slogan is back in a big way with his bestseller, *I Never Played the Game*.

Cosell takes on the sports establishment like no other sports journalist. Greedy owners, corrupt promoters, fast-talking commissioners, TV executives—Cosell takes them all on. Yet Cosell still combines a passion for the game with a basic love for the underdog. In explaining why he dropped off Monday Night Football, Cosell says, "I'm a man of causes and I never had a cause [with Monday Night Football]. My real fulfillment in broadcasting has always come from crusading journalism, fighting for the rights of people such as Jackie Robinson, Muhammad Ali, and Curt Flood. . ."

One of Howard Cosell's major targets is sport purists, many of them ex-jocks who think that sport critics should be treated like political dissidents in Albania. Cosell says about his former co-announcer Frank Gifford: "He thinks the NFL was ordained from Mt. Sinai by Moses to be above all else."

As for the ongoing debate over whether sports and politics mix, I believe Cosell gets it right. He principally attacks the hypocrisy of those like U.S. Olympic officials who have used the Olympics as a forum for years, but start crying when the shoe is on the other foot. Further, Cosell says, let's get realistic. How can you have a hurdler or a sprinter set our foreign policy?

Cosell backs his big words with big actions. His support for Ali was one. So was his decision to quit covering pro boxing because of the awful punishment and poor regulation in the boxing world. He challenged owners and commissioners who moved franchises at their whim. These are the people Cosell labels "gutless carpetbaggers—owners who desert not only fans, but entire communities in their lust for 'greener' pastures." Cosell comes down on the side of the fans, such as those in Baltimore, who "had given their hearts and souls, not to mention their hard-earned money," to support the football franchise that moved to Indianapolis in the middle of the night.

Cosell also attacks concessionary bargaining. He looks at how the owner of the

Philadelphia Eagles, Leonard Tose, blackmailed the city into giving him all sorts of tax and revenue breaks. Cosell asks, "How sick is that? [He] gambles his fortune away, mismanages his team, and what happens? He's rewarded with a sweetheart deal . . . You're going to tell me that Philadelphia doesn't have better uses for its money, like improving its police force, its fire department, its school system, its transit system, its public hospitals? What a sham!"

Cosell puts his faith in the youth of the 60's—who lived through terrible times and learned not to see sports as a panacea. Rather, "they selected an anti-hero in whom they felt they found truth—Muhammad Ali." Cosell's career, more than anything else, was shaped by his relationship with Ali. Many think that Cosell's support for Ali was self-serving, but this attitude is wrong. Cosell championed Ali's cause when it was definitely not popular to do so. In 1966, a draft dodger was a wimp and a punk, and America was having a hard time accepting a proud Black heavyweight champion who wasn't "what the world wanted him to be." Explaining why he had no ill will toward the Vietnamese, Ali's famous words were, "No Vietcong ever called me a nigger." Cosell defended Ali's right to make a living when every city was closing its doors on him. How is it, Cosell asked, that Ali could be stripped of his title before being convicted, yet prisoners like Ron Lyle were being let out of jail in order to fight.

For sports fans and non-sports fans, this book makes for good reading.



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**"If people understood the history of oppression in Ireland they would understand the history of oppression throughout the human race . . . There is not a single weapon of oppression—there is not a means of oppression used by any government in the world against any people—that has not, in the course of history, been used by the British against the Irish."**

*—Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey*