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July–August 1987

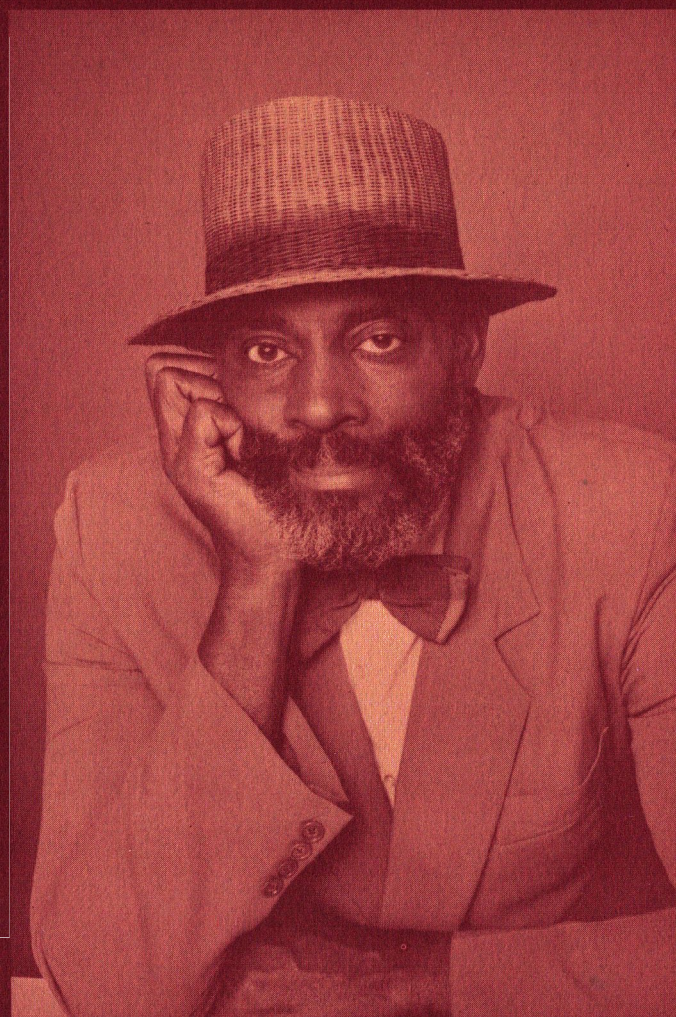
A Socialist Magazine

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*Interview with*

**Bernice Reagon**

**Music to Help  
the Movement  
Carry On**



*Interview with*

**Mel King**

**Rainbow Politics  
from the Grassroots  
On Up**



Forward Motion

July–August 1987  
Vol 6., No. 4

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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.

In this Issue

In this issue of FM, veteran Boston activist Mel King speaks with us about his proposal for precinct-based Committees for the Development of the Rainbow. At first glance, this focus might seem a bit out of step with the times. National elections are a year off, and the big push is for Congressional, state and national organization. But King's concern with organizing the base of the movement is far-reaching. It reflects his virtually unique experience as a long-time elected official (Massachusetts State Representative) still part of the grass-roots social movements. And three times in recent years (twice for mayor, and last year for Congress), King's campaigns have been the focus of vital electoral movements that challenged if not transformed the structure of Boston politics.

This FM also features an interview with singer and cultural leader Bernice Reagon of Sweet Honey in the Rock. She and King are social activists working in very different contexts, but they share similar concerns for the political and cultural development of the Black community. Both also see this emerging politics and culture remarkably intertwined.

What is the context for this concern? The 1980s—the Reagan years—have been years of political suffocation for progressives. The Black community, along with minorities generally, have been particularly pressed. Yet the Black movement has managed to regroup sufficiently to provide the strongest rallying point for whatever resistance there has been to Reaganism. Win or lose, recent electoral campaigns have are more directly expressed the demands of active Black communities. Black activists and leaders are more on the inside—speaking more as acknowledged leaders of the entire progressive bloc in which they have always played such a vital part. For King and Reagon, this regroupment has been from a still consolidating Black base. Reagon's interviewer, Khandiz Ayofemi Stowe, aptly summarizes this theme as "ways to survive coalition politics in the eighties."

If the concerns are valid, so are Reagon and King's parallel focus on the music and arts and on generational traditions and youth. Reagon states unequivocally that progressive artists "are responsible for the emotional, spiritual and cultural shape the progressives are in." The Black movement has long understood this relation: Reagon lists one of her past leadership roles in the Civil Rights Movement as "song leader." And Mel King is still very much the old South End youth worker when he speaks of laying down neighborhood-based cultural foundations for the next generation in the Black community.

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## Forward Motion

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### ...In this issue

FM has tried to express this relationship of politics and culture today—in the type of “close to the ground” political reporting we feature, and in the poetry and reviews we solicit. We see this as a rebuilding time, a time in which the virtual collapse of left-wing mass leadership in the 1970s still limits the level and staying-power of mass resistance. Contrast this with, say, the Palestinian movement. There a generation of activists and leaders, however barbarically repressed and at times politically divided, have found continuing strength in a liberation tradition and culture. And as student demonstrations and other events on the West Bank this past year have shown, that spirit is passing on to a new generation. Much the same could be said for South Africa or Ireland.

Today there are encouraging signs of revitalization and new boldness in a number of social movements in the United States. But, as Bernice Reagon observes, “coalition work is stressful” compared to the reaffirmation possible in one’s own group. This may be a general observation, but it seems an acute comment on our state of affairs today. We are still seeking a common progressive agenda and the seasoned, well-rooted left-wing core historically necessary to hold it together. For this reason, we take great pleasure in presenting the work of those like Bernice Reagon and Mel King whose emphasis on survival and empowerment at the base is integral to that process.

Along these same lines, Locomotion offers yet another celebration of rebellious youth and rock & roll—this time under assault from the Madison Avenue-ization of popular music. Also, it will be five years this fall since the U.S. invaded Grenada. Don Rojas, former leader of the New Jewel Movement and Grenadian cabinet minister, offers a commentary on the very difficult rebuilding process now underway there.

Our editorial on “AIDS, Gay Pride, and U.S. Politics,” written in the after-glow of this year’s Gay Pride Day, is the prelude to what we hope will be a fuller look at this issue later this year. Finally, please see new poetry by Philippine activist Mila Aguilar, a critical look at Mike Dukakis, offered in the public service, and two reviews—of Jack Holland’s *The American Connection* (on American support for Irish freedom) and Mike Davis’ study of U.S. labor, *Prisoners of the American Dream*.

You may also notice the absence of “Changing Conditions.” Our columnists are discouraged by the difficulty of being timely when dealing with a production schedule such as ours, and may give up the enterprise unless there is a hue and cry from FM readers. Drop us a line.

**Correction:** In our last issue, an editorial oversight led us to describe as recent, the photograph of a crowd gathering around a toppled statue of Stalin. The photo is from the struggle in Hungary, 1956.

## Editorial

# AIDS, Gay Pride, and U.S. Politics

It was six years ago that the first AIDS case was documented in the U.S. Since then the statistics—and the social and political ramifications—have exploded.

Gains won by a militant lesbian and gay movement in the 1970’s are being eroded as the AIDS crisis produces an hysterical reaction among much of the U.S. population. The right wing has wasted no opportunity to use ignorance to its advantage, proclaiming that AIDS is God’s wrath on gays for their “sinful” ways. But even on the defensive, the lesbian and gay movement has on occasion held the line against right wing attacks. Lesbians and gays and others recently defeated a LaRouche-sponsored referendum in California which would have led to the quarantine of AIDS victims—and who knows where from there.

Most Americans are still not conscious of the full global dimensions of the disease. While tens of thousands are afflicted in the U.S., millions are threatened in Africa. An amazingly high percentage of the people in Lusaka, Zambia, carry an AIDS virus. Some studies have suggested that within five years, millions of people on the African continent could die from AIDS.

Yet that fact is a secondary item in the U.S. media, as catastrophes in Africa usually are. To the extent that AIDS in Africa gets any attention at all, it is often as the object of blame for the spread of AIDS to the West.

The popular belief in the United States has been that AIDS is a gay white male disease, and it is certainly true that gay men have borne the brunt of this epidemic. Less known is the fact that 40% of its victims have been people of color, gay and straight.

As long as this plague was confined to gays and people of color, U.S. authorities barely lifted a finger to battle it. Reporters for major U.S. dailies have alluded to the chuckles of officials in the Reagan administration when the subject of AIDS would come up. Now that AIDS is spreading into the “general populace,” it’s a new ball game. The cof-

fers have opened a bit and, though still inadequate, funding for AIDS research is increasing.

Policy makers in Washington have once again confirmed their anti-gay and racist bigotry by letting this major epidemic go unchecked for so long. Even Surgeon General Koop and the U.S. medical establishment, hardly a bastion of U.S. progressivism, have broken ranks to strongly criticize the inaction of the Reagan administration.

While our anger is mainly directed against the Reagan administration, with all the racists and right wing and religious fanatics that it houses, we progressives must also look at our own work and ask whether we haven’t allowed the lesbian and gay community to shoulder almost the entire burden of this crisis.

There are those on the Left who in the not-too-distant past held positions as homophobic as any on the Right. Ultimately, those left organizations who held that gay people were “perverse” and “decadent” found themselves isolated within the broader progressive movement in this country. Even today, there are those who barely acknowledge there is an AIDS crisis, and ignore its main victims—gay people.

As this editorial is written, the gay and lesbian community and its friends are observing gay and lesbian Pride Week. In this sixth year of AIDS, anti-gay violence is on the upswing, gay rights legislation is being rolled back in many places, and there have been Supreme Court setbacks as well as a refusal by liberal Massachusetts to allow gays as foster parents. Meanwhile, the body count rises steadily.

But lesbians and gays are fighting back, and we hope with an expanding united front of allies. The lesbian and gay movement is building for a massive National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights on October 11. *Forward Motion* urges the largest possible turnout to rock Washington.

*Forward Motion Collective*



## Life in Dukakis' Massachusetts

All over New England, retail businesses and fast food chains are doing everything they can to attract new workers. Burger joints are offering hourly rates of as much as \$6.25. Bradlees and Stop & Shop are even busing cashiers and grocery baggers to jobs in other cities, and paying them for their travel time.

Are Bradlees and Stop & Shop the wave of the future? Maybe, if Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis becomes our next president. In Massachusetts, unemployment has hit record lows (3.1% in January 1987), and the Duke is claiming credit. If only to overcome his image as a competent, moral, but rather bland politician, Dukakis' strategy is to convince people that he worked a miracle in Massachusetts and can do it again for the entire nation.

Massachusetts' dependence on Reagan's military build-up takes some of the luster off its economic turnaround. And as a new booklet by the Boston-based Women for Economic Justice shows, the gains have been lop-sided at best. "Not everyone in Massachusetts has had an equal share in the economic 'miracle,'" the 20-page publication begins. "The title we have chosen for this booklet, *Beyond Growth: The Underside of the Economic Miracle in Massachusetts*, suggests precisely that." Well worth reading, the pamphlet arms activists and advocates with plenty of evidence for countering Dukakis' claims.

*Beyond Growth* gets at the state's seamy side. For example, it's true that overall unemployment had dropped by nearly half since October 1983, when it was 6.9%. But most new jobs in the state have been in wholesale and retail trade and the service sector—relatively low-paid, low-skill occupations.

Probably the most popular part of Dukakis' economic agenda (little else has been made explicit in his presidential campaign) involves welfare reform. His Employment and Training Choices Program (ET) is touted to have lopped thousands of "undeserving" single mothers off the welfare rolls and placed them back where they should be, working for pay. While ET has helped many women find paid jobs, the Department of Public Welfare discovered that over 40% of the program's first 25,000 graduates still live in

poverty. Since more than half of all ET placements are in low-paid clerical, sales or service jobs, and 45% of ET graduates were placed in jobs which provided no health coverage, it is not surprising that at the time of the DPW analysis, a third of the 25,000 graduates were no longer employed. Also, 3,000 left their jobs because of the impossibility of locating stable, affordable daycare.

The problem with ET is that getting a job does not ensure self-sufficiency, especially when that job is underpaid and only semi-skilled. But Dukakis (along with a host of welfare reformers on Capitol Hill) insists that the solution to poverty is to kick people into the workforce. Unfortunately, ET demonstrates otherwise. After all, once you have a job, you then have to deal with all the other injustices wrought by the marketplace like sexism, racism, lower wages for "female" jobs, and health and safety hazards.

In addition to providing a picture of what Dukakonomics has really meant for Massachusetts, *Beyond Growth* takes some first steps towards defining a progressive economic agenda. When Dukakis introduced his workfare proposal during his first term as Governor ten years ago, he aroused an effective alliance between welfare recipients and those who work but are still poor. Dukakis' rapid rise to national stature shows such coalitions are still needed to challenge the myth that hard work alone is sufficient to bring economic stability and success.

If the Duke makes it to the White House, and there are plenty of people in Massachusetts who hope he won't (gay men and lesbians are outraged that his foster care policy excludes them from the "acceptable" list), we will have to step up our efforts at creating a progressive agenda. Too bad there's no miracle worker on our side.

by Karin Aguilar—San Juan

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Karin Aguilar—San Juan is an editor of *Dollars & Sense*, a progressive economics magazine for non-economists. She co-authored *Beyond Growth*.... Copies are available for \$4.00 each, or \$3.00 for 10 or more. Write to Women for Economic Justice, 145 Tremont St., Suite 607, Boston, MA 02111.

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Interview

with

Mel King

Rainbow Politics

## From the Grass Roots On Up



Mel King's activism spans almost three decades. Representing Boston's multi-racial, multi-ethnic (and pre-gentrified) South End in the Massachusetts House of Representatives for many years, King was often almost alone among elected leaders raising and supporting issues of racial discrimination, adequate housing, jobs for community residents, women's and gay rights, freedom for South Africa, and other progressive causes.

In 1979, King stunned the white political establishment by finishing a strong third in that year's mayoral race. Defeating incumbent Kevin White soundly among Black voters, King demonstrated the Black community's heightened self-organization and consciousness.

Four years later in 1983, King made a second run. He set up an impressive field organization; electrified the Black community, which registered voters in numbers Boston had never seen before; and pulled together the bulk of Boston's Asian and Latino communities and progressive white voters. King emerged victorious from the preliminary election to face white populist and (eventual victor) Ray Flynn.

It was Mel King who, in organizing that second mayoral campaign, coined the phrase "Rainbow Coalition" for this multi-racial progressive electoral movement.

More recently, King ran for Congress in Massachusetts' Eighth District (to succeed the retiring Tip O'Neil). He was also involved in the unsuccessful referendum to form a separate city of Mandela in Boston's predominantly minority areas.

Forward Motion correspondent Bill Fletcher spoke with Mel King about these and other issues, and we are happy to be able to share King's ideas and experiences with FM readers. A second installment of this interview is in the works for later this year.

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Bill Fletcher, Jr., is an associate editor of *Forward Motion*. He worked on labor outreach for Mel King's campaigns, and currently is involved in the Labor for Jackson effort.

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FM: Six months have passed since the Eighth Congressional District race. Looking back on it with 20/20 hindsight, do you think it was the right decision to run?

King: Well, as the song goes, I'm six months older and deeper in debt. I've got \$50,000 in debts to pay off and I have a ways to go. But if you asked me would I run again for the same seat, my answer would be "yes."

There are really two dimensions to the question you ask. There is the mechanics and the finances of running for office, and then there is the politics of running for office. Financially, we started out without very much money. In past campaigns we had done pretty well without having money to start out; but we knew that this was not the optimal situation. A survey we did indicated support for my running for this seat and we got commitments for close to \$30,000. We figured that we had that kind of cash to work with even though the money wasn't in hand. The problem was that there were delays in getting into the race and actually going after that money. As a result, by the time we came around many of the people we were counting on were picked up by other candidates. Another reason why some of our financial support did not materialize was that the field of candidates grew to the point that some people became doubtful of our ability to wage a viable campaign.

Having said all this, people should realize that we did end up raising several hundred thousand dollars for the campaign. But our timing was bad. One thing that would have helped overcome our late entry would have been to use some money in the very beginning on some media that would have established in people's mind that we had a viable campaign going.

These mechanics aside, on strictly political grounds I'm glad I did run. Of course, you have to believe that you can win and try to develop a campaign on that basis. But, talking as a person of color, I believe in being in every race we can. I believe in promoting an agenda that reflects not only the communities of color, but working class people who are shut out from having full access to the system. I think we have to begin to change the nature of political debate that is going on today. A campaign that deals with the necessity of a minimum living wage of \$8.00 an hour; a campaign that says that day care ought to be available to all people across the country; a campaign bent on changing the fact that 40-45 million people in this country don't have any kind of health insurance; a campaign that will really deal with the AIDS epidemic; campaigns like this which get people involved and capture their minds and hearts are really necessary. I believe a well thought out campaign can reach people who will relate to these issues and not get

sucked into a racist approach to politics.

FM: In the period when you were deciding whether or not to run, I had the impression that you were, in some ways, a reluctant candidate. Was that a misconception?

King: That was a misconception. I am never a reluctant candidate. Once I say I am going to run, I am running. I wouldn't run if I was reluctant. But there were some questions of political strategy that needed to be worked through before I could run. Perhaps the biggest one was the issue of whether to run as an Independent or in the Democratic primary. I thought about and studied that for a long time. I thought that the odds would be in my favor to run when the field was the largest. That was the way things worked out when I ran for Mayor in 1983. Obviously it didn't turn out that way. [King came in a strong second in a crowded primary field, but ran far behind Ray Flynn in the runoff—Ed.]

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*I believe in being in every race we can. I believe in promoting an agenda that reflects not only the communities of color, but working class people who are shut out from having full access to the system.*

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Another calculation that was off was that we thought we would do better in Cambridge—particularly the communities of color in Cambridge and Boston—than we actually did. In some precincts we did very well but overall we got nowhere near the vote that I had thought we would based on the polling we did. Again, I think that a large part of the problem was that we waited too long to enter the race. People who heard about my campaign when we were still getting organized were excited and interested in the beginning. But when nothing happened as soon as they thought it should have, we lost some of them.

One of the main reasons for this delay was how long it took me to come up with somebody to manage the campaign. If there was anything which pulled me towards not running it was difficulties in solving this problem.

FM: I remember that this was a very lengthy and controversial process. What was the reason for that?

King: I wish I knew. There were people I wanted as my campaign manager who wouldn't do it and some who couldn't do it. I thought it was important to get somebody who had been involved in a campaign where there was a lot of vitality and a win. [King's manager, Barry Weisberg, came to the campaign from Harold Washington's successful first run for Mayor of Chicago—Ed.] I was concerned about carrying over baggage from the mayoral campaign that had held us back. But, in hindsight, I see that I went against one of the things that I think is really important in politics: to go with your strengths and deal with and accentuate the positive while trying to eliminate the negative. What we accomplished in the mayoral campaign was really phenomenal in a lot of ways. Even though we only got a third of the vote in the finals, you have to remember that a lot of people never even thought we would get into the primaries. We were able to make some things happen in that race. We really excited a community and we did it with very little money. I think many people's negative feelings about losing the mayoral race made it difficult for them to appreciate the many strengths of that campaign. Instead of looking at what we had built in that campaign and trying to bring people into that structure and frame of reference, while trying to work on the areas where we had problems, I opted for starting out fresh. So even though I think we made a good choice for the position, it took some time to build support and structure with someone new in charge.

FM: How do you evaluate the Joe Kennedy factor? If

Kennedy had not run, do you think your chances would have been significantly better?

King: Yes, I think it would have made a difference. As well as we did with fundraising, we would have done a lot more. People would have seen "winability" in ways that they didn't, given Kennedy's presence. And if there is one thing we never did demonstrate, it was winability.

## Elections and Community Organization

FM: One of the issues during the campaign was that some people felt that the Rainbow image was being downplayed. In particular, when you announced your candidacy many people were surprised by the red, white and blue symbolism and the absence of the Rainbow image. What do you think about that now?

King: I must admit that I was surprised myself when I walked into the room and the Rainbow banner wasn't up there. I hadn't thought about making sure it was there since, as you know, it was always at other events. I believe it should have been there and we should have had a much more prominent, visible Rainbow connection. But we tried to make that happen. If you look at our buttons and things, you can see how the T-shirt motif reflected the diversity in the district. [Campaign T-shirts were printed in all the languages spoken in the District—Ed.]

At the same time, I will say that I pushed for the red, white and blue because I firmly believe that we need to make the flag and those colors stand for what we believe is the ideal of America. We should not hand those symbols



King's 1983 mayoral run brought out many new voters and electrified the Black community.



over to the moral majority folks and militarists. So I wore a flag and I wore a rainbow with the idea of getting people to see that the America we stood for was different: one that championed the politics of inclusion; one that provided health care for all its citizens; one that insured that its people breathed clean air. I think we tried to integrate the two images.

**FM:** Did you, in choosing to run, expect that your campaign would help to build the presence of the Rainbow Coalition in the Eighth Congressional District?

**King:** Yes. And it did. Unquestionably in Cambridge we expected to and did. There is some wonderful stuff going on in Waltham as a result of the campaign. There is a little bit of work in Watertown and Somerville. I don't think I have ever been involved in a campaign that did not leave some organizing and some organization behind.

*It is very hard to sustain a model of working together and looking out that all the issues are being dealt with in the absence of a campaign.*

**FM:** That is true. The Boston People's Organization (BPO) developed out of your 1979 mayoral campaign, and out of your 1983 mayoral race came the Rainbow Coalition. Have you found it difficult to transform an electoral campaign into an ongoing political organization?

**King:** Yes. You try to build a coalition around a single purpose—to get the power of a particular elected office. Towards this end you pull together people from different organizations and with different interests. During the campaign, everyone is on a honeymoon. But after the campaign is over, people look up and say, "Oh, well, I really have to get to work on this issue; that's really my issue." It is very hard to sustain a model of working together and looking out that all the issues are being dealt with in the absence of a campaign.

But I think that a major problem with sustaining organizations like the BPO and the Rainbow Coalition has been that they have not run their own candidates or begun a movement for some kind of independent party, or both. We have been supporting people for elected office who are not members of these organizations. This means they have no incentive to join these organizations. It also detracts

from the image of the organization as a group that can make things happen.

On the other hand, there have been positive achievements—both electoral and non-electoral—that were by-products of the work of groups like the Boston People's Organization. The campaign against Proposition 2 1/2 and for district representation were very positive. Support for some good candidates for City Council has meant that the Council is more representative today than it has been in the past. But one of the weakest aspects of these organizations has been that people of color have not seized these organizations as vehicles for moving the rest of the city to support issues that would make a positive impact. This is unfortunate and we need to figure out a way to make that happen.

### Organizing the Precincts

**FM:** Yes, that is a problem that has plagued many activists. For example, your 1983 mayoral campaign inspired Boston's Black community and really helped to break the siege mentality that the community had been feeling since busing. The Black community got mobilized in the course of the campaign, yet after the election people dropped away from the Rainbow. Many of the Black activists went on to form Blacks for Empowerment [a Boston Black community organization that formed out of King's 1983 campaign—Ed.] but that organization was not able to survive either. It is surprising to me that the community achieves a certain level of organization in the course of a campaign and then people decide to drop away rather than to protect and enhance the community's political position through an ongoing organization.

**King:** It has always mystified me as well. Somehow, between the Black Political Task Force [an independent political committee of Black elected officials and other electoral activists in Massachusetts—Ed.], the Rainbow Coalition and Blacks for Empowerment things never really came together. But it is not only the Black community where we are up against this problem. If you look at the Latino community there has not been that much movement there either. The only community of color that really stayed on the move after the campaign was the Asian community, driven by the struggle against police brutality.

I felt my responsibility after the 1983 campaign was to deal with the issue of land development in Roxbury. And so we organized the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Association (GRNA). I had to go to Blacks for Empowerment and urge people to get involved. There has been some move-

Boston's Asian community remained mobilized after King's 1983 campaign to pursue struggles against police brutality.



Wendy Maeda/Boston Globe

ment around this issue, but it still has not commanded the kind of energy we need to see coming out of the Black community. It is interesting to note, by the way, how the notion of community control of development has begun to catch on with people in other parts of the city.

**FM:** Do you think that the Rainbow Coalition as it exists today as an ongoing political organization rather than as an electoral campaign apparatus is—as the commercial goes—slightly ahead of its time?

**King:** Oh, I don't think anything is ahead of its time. People are always telling me that I am ahead of my time, but I don't think that is the case. I'm here now. I have some ideas. The question is how do we organize: how do we understand what needs to happen and how do we work to make it happen?

I think the Rainbow is crucial. But we really need to get the leadership in the Black community together. I have a plan which I think is a must, not only for Boston, but for Black communities around the country. We need to have a precinct organizing campaign to form what I call Committees for the Development of the Rainbow (CDRs). I believe such an approach can lead to the kind of organized development approach that is needed in these communities. We must start with the strengths that people have—and we do have strengths—but care has to be taken around specific geographical areas. I think this precinct model can work. I think the resources are there to make it work.

**FM:** There are some activists in the Black community who

want to proceed with another Mandela campaign [a campaign which called for the secession of the overwhelmingly Black neighborhoods from the city of Boston—Ed.]. Your approach goes in a somewhat different direction, although with some similar goals. Let's talk more about this idea of CDRs and what has led you to believe that this is the direction that things should move in.

**King:** I think that what I am proposing could get us to Mandela the minute we decided we wanted to move on that proposal. Mandela is a state of mind. The concept of community control rests on the belief that people have a right to exercise control over their turf. And that means taking some responsibility for the creation of structures and programs to improve the quality of life for people in those communities. That is in the mind. People have to believe that they can make it happen. People have to believe they are deserving of such an environment or nothing will change. So to even get a positive vote around taking over will only come when people believe that they can make something positive happen for themselves. [The Mandela proposal was voted down two to one in the predominantly Black wards voting on the referendum—Ed.] My thesis is that there are two struggles: one for the land and the other for the mind. If you win the struggle for the mind, you get the land.

Why the approach I have proposed? One of the major complaints that comes out of the communities of color, and particularly from Black people in this city, is that there is not a plan for change that people understand and identify with. And this is because the leadership in the com-



munity is not together. With my plan, leadership has to step aside or become part of making it happen.

To make CDRs manageable, you need to take a small enough geographical area. I like the political designation of the precinct because you are talking about power, and you want to make sure that you are organized in a way to enhance that power. In each precinct, you would ask a community agency to help organize the precinct development corporation. Within that corporation, there would be a secretariat who would work on specific issues that need addressing in that community: health care, infant mortality, etc. How would we work on those things? We would have a score board that would analyze the state of the health of the community, the job situation, a sense of what the skills are in that community, etc.

Information is key. Those who are better informed of their condition are better able to do something about it. Why is it that precincts 1 and 2 in Roxbury have an infant mortality rate of 8 per thousand whereas precincts 3 and 4 in Mattapan don't? Everybody can ask a question. Everybody can recognize a problem and ask why it exists and then try to figure out what we do about it whether it be employment, education, illiteracy, or voter registration. Who owns the land in that precinct? Is it the city or some private developer? What is happening to that land and what should happen to it?

It would be great if we could get the various churches to say that they will each develop several precincts into a community development corporation. If we could get thirty-five or forty of them going, we could pull together an Association of Black Directors. We could get people from the Community Development Corporations (CDCs) to take advantage of these groups. We could involve people from the community health centers. We have resources. We need to organize those resources.

Let's take my favorite work—youth work. Precinct 1 might decide to focus on a youth development approach and come up with the idea of developing a band. We get people raising money; we get some instruments; we get the kids outfits for the band. Look at the relationships we develop between the adults and the young people in the community. Look at the caring that grows. Then people in precincts 3 and 4 see the energy being generated and they decide to do the same thing. Then you get a meeting between the youth workers from these different precincts with the heads of the YMCA, YWCA, Aswalos House, Roxbury Boys' Club. You have all these youth workers who are in direct contact with all those young people sitting in a room talking about the children and their needs and their

issues and planning events and activities for them. Out of it you get a big band competition at Franklin Field where all these bands get together. Lots of resources exist to help. There are students at Berklee School of Music and the New England Conservatory. We have the Black Achievers. We have all this Black talent around, people who could come and work with a group of kids. Or the focus for youth development could be organizing sports teams: bowling, soccer, whatever.

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*My thesis is that there are two struggles: one for the land and the other for the mind. If you win the struggle for the mind, you get the land.*

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I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about from my own experience. Today we have a juvenile court in Roxbury where kids are getting better attention than they used to get when they were being sent downtown. This came about because there were some youth workers who used to meet at either the Y or the Boys' Club (I can't remember which) and just talk and talk. I was in the legislature at the time and I asked people what they wanted to work on. And this group said we needed to do something about how our young people were getting done in when they went to court. So we worked out a plan to get the juvenile jurisdiction back into Roxbury and we got Julius Houston as the judge. This came about directly as a result of getting together thirty or forty youth workers.

We worry about teenage pregnancy. Well, teenagers get pregnant because there aren't enough adults working with these kids and encouraging them to set some goals. We could really make things happen if we could organize Black achievers to work with kids in their precincts: hold meetings, help them to earn money, having dances and picnics, organize trips. I know these kinds of things helped me in my life. With all due respect to how great my parents were, it was exposure to a whole range of people and ideas and events that really made a difference. We have to build that kind of vitality back into our community's life. We have the people to do it. But you need a coordinating group to help pull things together.

Or take economic development. We have to look at the reality of the employment situation and get more people organized. We have a lot of people who need to be orga-

**By organizing at the precinct level, King believes the Black community can better mobilize its resources and bring new energy and focus to the lives of its young people.**



Suzanne Kreiter/Boston Globe

nized into unions because many of the jobs that are available to people right now are service jobs. These jobs are often non-union and pay very little. We also need to see what other jobs can be created. That includes looking at what kind of business development needs to take place within the community itself. So we need some political education. And we need to look at alternative approaches to economic development. What about cooperatives: cooperative housing or cooperative stores? They have been tried and there have been some problems with them, but there are those that have worked.

**FM:** Are you just talking about Boston or is this a national vision? And who do you see initiating this kind of organizing? Should the Rainbow Coalition be involved?

**King:** I see a combination of different groups getting involved. The Rainbow Coalition certainly, because it exists all over the country. But I also feel it is very important for a group like the Congressional Black Caucus to understand the significance of this approach. I have met with [Detroit Rep. John] Conyers and he was interested in having me come and address the Caucus as a whole. Locally, I think the Black Political Task Force should be involved. I know some people get skittish about involving elected officials. But to me, an elected official who helps to develop a viable delivery mechanism of people caring for each other on their block and in their community will be in office forever. I think that some of the church leaders ought to get involved as well.

**FM:** I'd like to turn to another subject. It looks pretty

likely that Jesse Jackson is going to be running for president in 1988. You were the Massachusetts coordinator for his campaign in 1984. Do you think that he should run again?

**King:** I believe he should run. I also believe that all the people who want him to run need to set up a structure to organize the campaign in their community. They have to be prepared to do this—in some instances—on his behalf, and with real zealousness. There is no question that he articulates the hope, the pain, the desire for change that large numbers of people in this country share. I would like to see him zero in on a few very crucial issues.

**FM:** Such as?

**King:** Full employment. Health care. Our health care system is just a disgrace. Housing. Youth development. I'd like to see him pushing a program like the Future Corps where we would give young people an opportunity to get a full college education by putting in two years of public service of a non-military nature. I think Jackson speaks to the youth better than any of the other candidates. I think he could play a major role as president in bringing to the youth of this country a strong value orientation and a spirituality and a lifestyle that would have broad appeal. But he has to get out onto the streets. He has to be bold about the need to cut the military budget. In the past I have been very impressed with his ability to talk about foreign policy in a way that makes the possibility of peace and cuts in the military seem within reach. But it will take some bold, bold, bold initiatives.



**FM:** Right now Jackson is doing well in the polls. But what if he doesn't win?

**King:** Well, I think that will be the country's loss! But even if he doesn't win, he can't lose. And when he runs, we can't lose. I would rather he run as an Independent or start up a new party. I say that even though I ran in the Democratic primary for the Eighth Congressional seat. He is going to do well in the Democratic primary. But I'd like to have people able to go in and vote for him in November. If there was a way for him to head up a new party so that he could go head-to-head with any of these other candidates, I would like to see it happen. I think that is what he needs to do.

**FM:** What do you think is the biggest obstacle he faces?

**King:** Getting organized soon.

**FM:** The media has been giving a lot of attention to what they describe as the "Jackson mainstream." What do you make of it?

**King:** Well, I am not sure what they mean by that. If they mean that he is out there trying to bring the farmers and organized labor together with the communities of color so that people can get decent wages and protect the farm land—right on!

**FM:** Thank you for the interview. ■

## Interview with Bernice Reagon

## Sweet Honey in the Rock Music to Help the Movement Carry On

*Bernice Johnson Reagon wants to make sure that being a Black woman is not a fatal disease: she doesn't want to die from it. To that end, she has been a civil rights and social activist and cultural performer since 1962. Bernice Reagon is the Director of the Program in Black American Culture at the Smithsonian Performing Arts Center. She is also the founding member of Sweet Honey in the Rock, an a capella ensemble of Black women that has been performing traditional and contemporary Black American songs since 1973. Their music addresses issues ranging from anti-racism and feminism to anti-nuclear protest.*

*Reagon describes herself as a carrier: "the old treasures pass through me from my grandmothers and grandfathers, and I pass them on to you." She made a lifetime commitment, since she was a member of the original SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) Freedom Singers, to always be a freedom singer, because she "...witnessed and participated in the wedding of music and political struggle; where songs served to bind segments of the Black community together in jails and on the marches, where songs provided the necessary strength to help demonstrators endure abuse and continue, where songs articulated for the masses of people what their struggle was all about." She also organized the Harambee Singers of Atlanta, Georgia.*

*Recently, I had an opportunity to interview Bernice Johnson Reagon about her views on the role of the cultural performer in progressive politics and ways to survive coalition politics in the eighties.*

**Stowe:** I have noticed that *Sweet Honey in the Rock* appeals to a broad base of people in various communities. Usually events happen for the women's community or the Black community, but when you come to a *Sweet Honey* concert, you see church people, progressive political folk,

*Khandiz Ayofemi Stowe has been trying to synthesize her creative energies and political beliefs for twenty years. She has performed as an actress and musician with the National Black Theatre in New York City. During the past eighteen months, she has been writing an autobiographical collection of short stories. She has also given benefit readings in the Los Angeles area (where she lives) in support of Black History Month at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, the Lapis Outreach Project of the Alcoholism Center for Women, and the Women's History Month Program at California State University at Northridge.*



the women's community, everyone. How do you account for the fact that you so consistently reach such a wide group of people and maintain such a broad base of support?

**Reagon:** It was not conscious on my part. I started the group, and the group structure is basically my work. My initial concern was to satisfy my needs. But this group has taught me that when I do satisfy my needs, I also satisfy a lot of other people's needs at the same time.

I think it was very important that I went through the Civil Rights Movement. My development as an artist occurred because of my experience as a singer and a cultural programmer in the Civil Rights Movement. I was the program coordinator in the Albany Movement and I was a song leader.

Operating out of the Black American tradition of song on the community level means that your songs have to reflect what is going on in your life. Some of the songs *Sweet Honey* does have been passed to us; they are a way of acknowledging our forefathers and foremothers. Then there are those songs which are our personal statements; they are our analysis and expression of how we feel. Sometimes they address a specific political issue, such as militarism or children. Sometimes they are people songs, like "Seven Principles." Sometimes they are love songs. Human beings are very complex.

*Sweet Honey* started a workshop in Washington, D.C. about six years ago. It grew out of my belief that the only way to establish that you know something is to teach it to someone else. If you aren't teaching it to someone else, there is no evidence that you really know it. After we worked in that workshop for four years, I told the participants that they were going to have to start singing on their own. They became the group *In Process*. They are still around and are better now than they were when we were working with them. I have never actually sat in a *Sweet Honey* concert, so I don't know what people experience. But when I went to the *In Process* concert last summer, I had a feeling it was similar. They opened with traditional songs; then they sang about South Africa; then they sang women's love songs; then they sang songs that address different issues. It was like somebody punching different buttons in my experience.

You can go to a concert with a love ballad singer, and you can really enjoy that concert. The basic topic is being in love or falling out of love or whatever. Or you can go to another concert where all of the songs are about the revolution. Or you can go to another concert where all the songs are sacred, about some area of worship. But there is

something deeply moving about feeling a wave of affirmation as the evening unfolds. That is what I experienced at the *In Process* concert.

When I began *Sweet Honey*, I knew nothing about this. People often tell us that they have not had an experience like this anywhere else. They find themselves dealing with what the music is saying and their minds are working all during the concert because of the different issues raised in the songs. That is very exciting to me.

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*What is important is that you have people struggling together on the local level to in some way nurture the progressive energy in their community.*

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**Stowe:** After thirteen years of being out here affecting people's lives, helping them to think and look at issues, how would you assess the impact of *Sweet Honey*?

**Reagon:** I was in Columbus, Ohio a while ago, and two women came into a store to buy *Sweet Honey* albums because they wanted to use our material in their group, an a capella Black women's group. After a concert in Philadelphia, four women in a group came up and talked to us. We got letters from a group of sixteen women in New Orleans. There were three groups out of Seattle that we met at the Vancouver Folk Festival. Now these groups sometimes used instruments, but they all did this incredibly intense heavy harmony. This kind of music would not have been possible before *Sweet Honey*.

Whether these groups become national is not the issue. What is important is that you have people struggling together on the local level to in some way nurture the progressive energy in their community. That is what I think progressive artists are responsible for. We are responsible for the emotional, spiritual, and cultural shape the progressives are in. That feeding needs to be constant: it needs to come from music, from dance, from poetry, from song, from the visual arts. It should be everywhere!

There is always a problem when women perform this role, because people will say it doesn't exist if we do it. They discount it. We have to insist that it is really happening, and it is different.

The other thing about *Sweet Honey* is that we don't operate out of a star syndrome. We operate from the tradition of gospel groups. These groups are in it for the long



Sweet Honey in the Rock

haul: the *Dixie Hummingbirds* of Philadelphia have been together fifty-five years; the *Harmonizing Four* of Richmond, Virginia have been together fifty-six years; the *Stars of Faith* from Philadelphia have been together a long time; the *Barrett Sisters* have been together twenty-seven years. These groups are principally community groups. They meet once a week and rehearse, then they sing on the weekend. The same for us. Today is Sunday, and we are doing a concert. Tomorrow is Monday, and we will be back on our jobs.

You have to look at the difference between this approach to performing and the way the popular music industry forces groups to go from hit to hit to hit. If you don't have a hit, you feel like you're down. If you do have a hit, you're on top of the world. In the pop field, you usually have a group together anywhere from five to eight years before they get their first hit.

On the other hand, ours is not benefit work. We are a professional group, and we get paid for what we do. The money we earn really makes a financial contribution to maintaining the homes of the women you see on stage. In fact, most of the benefit work we do is in Washington, D.C. because that is the only place where we can afford to do it.

**Stowe:** You talk about being in there for the long haul and yet you also have to show up for work on Monday mornings. What gives you the strength to stay so focused over the long haul?

**Reagon:** It is not easy. There are some problems with the way we do things. For one thing, there is no room for breaking down. "Oughta Be a Woman" is a song about women like my mother who never took vacations. In the course of a day, my mother had to be in four different "heads". We know that women can operate out of that complexity. We are socialized to perform more than one job. Yet we hope that this generation of Black women will teach each other to relax, to do stress release, to do movement and exercise, to take vacations.

I don't think it is easy. There is nothing easy about what we do. But when people ask me how I hang in, I try to think about what it would be like if I wasn't in *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, and it is not a pleasant thought. I can't think of an alternative. I meet with this group of women twice a week every week. On the weekends we go some place and sing together. Even if I disregard the singing, I feel that to meet three times a week with a group of women who don't even share the same lifestyle but who will fight to the death for the right for you to live the life you want is a powerful, empowering experience! Whatever



it costs me to do that is worth it.

Clearly, *Sweet Honey* is a coalition group. It took me some years to figure it out, but every year I get a little better at understanding what it is that *Sweet Honey* does for me and what it is that I have to get from other places. If you can clear that problem up, you can hang in there for a long time. At least, that is my thought for now.

**Stowe:** What do you suggest for people who are working in coalitions so that they can take care of themselves and survive for the long haul?

**Reagon:** I think one important thing is that you have to have your own group. You join a coalition because you have some common interests and common issues with a group of people. Usually there are cultural or racial or lifestyle conflicts that let you know you are not at home. So there is some stress. Coalition work is stressful and does not reaffirm you in the same way that you would be reaffirmed if you were meeting with people from your own group. You cannot go to the coalition looking for the nurturing you usually get from your own group, but a lot of people try to do that. I know of interracial situations where Black people go there actually looking for white people not to be racist or looking for their identity as Black people to be affirmed by the group. Since that generally is not the case, many times we pull out of the group. The opposite is also true: white people come into the same groups and look for a welcome because they have decided to come into a group with Blacks or Asians or Hispanics which does not usually happen.

I think that most people who are active and progressive on issues have to belong to a number of organizations. These organizations ought to reflect in different ways who you are as a basic unit. Some of these organizations or efforts can be coalitions. But you have to keep a balance between them in order to continue the work for a long

time.

I am talking right now about living, not organizing to revolutionize the world. I am talking about staying alive. Even in your own house if you are lucky enough to have a house), or in your family, you may find yourself having to be in a coalition. You run into trouble when you want your partner to give you something you need that your partner is not going to give you. A lot of times you have to analyze the situation, if it's a coalition effort, and realize that the part of you that needs to be nurtured and nourished has to be taken care of someplace else.

**Stowe:** So few people really recognize that point.

**Reagon:** We are not a society that is socialized to do coalition work. Most human beings in our society have no skills or tolerance for being under that kind of stress. I tell people that if you are under incredible stress, you are probably doing something very right and courageous. But there are some things you have to be sure you are getting in other places. Most of us are socialized so that if things feel uncomfortable, we think we have to stop doing them. But other sources say you won't grow unless you go through some stretching. You have to be willing to endure some clashes for development to happen. The engine of a car only works because there is an explosion. Discomfort is not always a sign that you are in the wrong place. You may actually be in a very important period of growth and development.

**Stowe:** What do you want people to say about Bernice Reagon when your work is finished?

**Reagon:** I really don't care. I try to live so that when I finish with this minute, you can have it, it's yours.

**Stowe:** Thank you for this interview. We have a lot to learn from your experience. ■

## LOCOMOTION

## Rock's Advertising Connection

by Dennis O'Neil

Recently a lot of people have been making bent-out-of-shape noises because of this Nike commercial on teevee which uses the Beatles' song "Revolution" on the sound track. It's sacrilege, the complaint goes, these are the *Beatles*, rock and roll's greatest deities, being prostituted for commercial purposes. I'm not particularly sympathetic. "Revolution" was a piece of shit from jump street, an ideological attack on the rising tide of revolutionary struggle that was flooding the entire world in 1968. They wanna use the damn thing to sell sneakers, it's okay with me. (Mind you, I shall get *extremely* cranky if I ever switch on the tube and find, say, Preparation H being peddled to the strains of Lennon's "Imagine," one of the best vision-of-socialism works the popular culture has ever offered.)

The hooraw stirred up in the media by the Nike ad highlighted the intimate connection between rock & roll and Madison Avenue which has developed in recent years. It's hard to name a product, from mini-vans to panty shields, that isn't being peddled to a rock beat. The most common tunes are '60s era hits, chosen to appeal to the aging baby boom generation and latch on to our disposable income (such as it is). On the other side, corporations have taken to sponsoring bands and concerts to promote their products. (Budweiser is reportedly bankrolling twenty-one separate groups.) One of the unheralded service industries which has developed under Reaganomics consists of middleman outfits which connect artists and sponsors. RockBill, the king, has been challenged recently by *Rolling Stone*, which now publishes an industry newsletter called *Marketing Through Music*.

Just to emphasize how fast this has all happened, it was only six years ago that the Rolling Stones (whose "Street Fighting Man" was the answer to "Revolution" in the late '60s) were the first major band to have a tour with corporate sponsorship. Hell, Run/DMC announced on 1984's "Rock Box," "Calvin Klein's no friend of mine/ Don't want nobody's name on my behind," while last year's *Raising Hell* featured a cut called "My Adi-

Dennis O'Neil is rock music critic for *Forward Motion*.



das." I hope they gouged Adidas good, at least.

One factor accelerating this process is the rise to prominence of music videos and MTV and its clones. Videos themselves are essentially an advertising medium: their purpose is to sell records. Further, they tie a song to a *particular* set of images, which may have only a remote or random relationship with the content of the song. The more that people get used to music presented in this form, the easier it is to tie a given song to any message.

The heavy hand of video and television in the world of rock & roll is an indication that the rock/advertising connection is a symptom of a more general development. The fact is that rock & roll has become much more thoroughly integrated into the everyday workings of American monopoly capitalism than it was even a decade ago. This is not to say that rock ever existed as some alternative cultural institution outside the realm of the commodity. It's just that rock & roll is now an essential part of all cultural production in the U.S., from the most mass, television, to high culture, like modern dance.

The majority of the population is now made up of those who hit adolescence in the thirty-plus years since Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Little Richard and the rest roared out of nowhere onto the radio. The results can be seen in the mass media. Every newspaper has a rock columnist or three. *Newsweek* sells a lot more copies when Bruce Springsteen is on the cover than when Margaret Thatcher is. Rock stars are a crucial ingredient for *People*, *US*, and similar newspaper features and television shows. Let's face it—Boy George is more interesting than Meryl Streep.

Another symptom of the mainstreamization of rock is the attempts, mainly pathetic, by politicians to associate themselves with it. Reagan's 1984 effort to claim affinity with Springsteen was pretty bizarre, but so far the cake goes to N.J. Sen. Bradley who professed his profound admiration for the immortal "Buddy Holiday." (He probably thinks highly of Bill Holly and the Comets, too. Sheesh.)

So what's going to happen? Will rock & roll simply be absorbed into the American cultural mainstream and be reduced to a better way to sell gasoline, sunscreen, fast food and other petroleum byproducts?

Could be. The enormous cooptive power of the American capitalist system should not be underestimated. At the same time there are some factors which mitigate against it.

One is the principled stand taken by many artists against the buying out of rock & roll by the advertising agencies. Bruce Springsteen refused an \$11,000,000 offer by Chrysler to use his music in a commercial. Michael Stipe of R.E.M. ripped down Miller banners at a Milwaukee

## How Many of These Sixties Hits Will Appear in a Commercial by the End of the Decade?

THE BEATLES: ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE  
THE MONKEES: DAYDREAM BELIEVER  
THE WHO: I CAN SEE FOR MILES  
CREAM: CROSSROADS  
BIG BROTHER & THE HOLDING COMPANY: BALL & CHAIN  
THE ROLLING STONES: GIMME SHELTER  
THE TROGGS: WILD THING  
THE DOORS: LIGHT MY FIRE  
THE JEFFERSON AIRPLANE: WHITE RABBIT  
THE BEATLES: I AM THE WALRUS  
BOB DYLAN: THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'  
BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD: FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH  
THE MAMAS & PAPAS: CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'  
BARRY McGUIRE: EVE OF DESTRUCTION  
THE WHO: MY GENERATION  
MARVIN GAYE: I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE  
CREAM: SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE  
THE BEATLES: TWIST & SHOUT  
CHAMBERS BROTHERS: TIME HAS COME TODAY  
STEPPENWOLF: BORN TO BE WILD  
BEN E. KING: STAND BY ME  
CIRCUS MAXIMUS: THE WIND  
IRON BUTTERFLY: IN-A-GADDA-DA-VIDA  
THE FOUR TOPS: I CAN'T HELP MYSELF  
THE BEATLES: HEY JUDE  
SIMON & GARFUNKEL: SOUNDS OF SILENCE  
THE HOLLIES: BUS STOP  
THE TEMPTATIONS: MY GIRL  
THE SEARCHERS: NEEDLES & PINS  
THE ZOMBIES: SHE'S NOT THERE  
THE BEATLES: IN MY LIFE  
THE ROLLING STONES: SATISFACTION  
BOB DYLAN: LIKE A ROLLING STONE  
CROSBY STILLS & NASH: SUITE JUDY BLUE EYES  
THE BEATLES: I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND  
PROCOL HARUM: WHITER SHADE OF PALE  
JIMI HENDRIX: PURPLE HAZE  
THE ROLLING STONES: SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL  
ARLO GUTHRIE: ALICE  
THE BEACH BOYS: SURFING  
THE MONKEES: MR. MONKEY  
THE RASCALS: GOOD LOVIN'  
BIG BROTHER & THE HOLDING COMPANY: PIECE OF MY HEART  
THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS: YOU'VE LOST THAT LOVIN' FEELIN'  
THE BEATLES: STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER  
THE TURTLES: HAPPY TOGETHER

SPENCER DAVIS GROUP: GIMME SOME LOVIN'  
THE JEFFERSON AIRPLANE: SOMEBODY TO LOVE  
THE BYRDS: TURN TURN TURN  
THE ROLLING STONES: LET'S SPEND THE NIGHT TOGETHER  
BOB DYLAN: POSITIVELY 4TH STREET  
VANILLA FUDGE: YOU KEEP ME HANGIN' ON  
THE ROLLING STONES: YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT  
THE RASCALS: GROOVIN'  
OTIS REDDING: DOCK OF THE BAY  
THE BEATLES: SHE LOVES YOU  
THE DOORS: WHEN THE MUSIC'S OVER  
THE BEATLES: YESTERDAY  
LED ZEPPELIN: WHOLE LOTTA LOVE  
GRAND FUNK: I'M YOUR CAPTAIN  
ARTHUR BROWN: FIRE  
CREAM: WHITE ROOM  
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL: BAD MOON RISING  
THE DOORS: HELLO I LOVE YOU  
THE WHO: PINBALL WIZARD  
THE ROLLING STONES: MONKEY MAN  
PROCOL HARUM: CONQUISTADOR  
TRAFFIC: DEAR MR. FANTASY  
THE BEATLES: DAY TRIPPER  
THE ROLLING STONES: JUMPING JACK FLASH  
BOB DYLAN: RAINY DAY WOMAN  
JIMI HENDRIX: ALL ALONG THE WATCHTOWER  
LED ZEPPELIN: RAMBLE ON  
THE ROLLING STONES: WILD HORSES  
TOMMY JAMES: CRIMSON & CLOVER  
THE McCOYS: HANG ON SLOOPY  
LED ZEPPELIN: HEARTBREAKER/LIVING LOVING MAID  
DONOVAN: SUNSHINE SUPERMAN  
CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL: PROUD MARY  
THE DOORS: BREAK ON THROUGH  
SIMON & GARFUNKEL: BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER  
THE BYRDS: EIGHT MILES HIGH  
LED ZEPPELIN: DAZED & CONFUSED  
THE WHO: KIDS ARE ALRIGHT  
JIMI HENDRIX: FIRE  
THE BEATLES: SGT. PEPPER  
CANNED HEAT: ON THE ROAD AGAIN  
PAUL REVERE & THE RAIDERS: KICKS  
SURFARIS: WIPE OUT  
THE ROLLING STONES: MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPER  
DEEP PURPLE: HUSH  
JIMI HENDRIX: THE WIND CRIES MARY

Folks: of course, this list is outrageous! (a) it is ridiculously white; (b) it is too mainstream; and (c) where is "Ninety-Six Tears" by 7 and the Mysterians? —Dennis

from the Dr. Pepper "Top 60 of the 60's" Contest

concert and told the audience, "I wouldn't drink Miller if they paid me." This upholding of the anti-establishment spirit of rock is a fine thing, but many musicians find they need the money to survive as performers and many don't even own the rights to their old music. Michael Jackson bought up the whole Beatles catalog several years back—he's the one who sold "Revolution" to Nike.

More important, rock & roll as a cultural form still contains powerful, built-in elements of alienation from and rebellion against the mainstream of capitalist culture. Tens of millions of Americans got a taste of this during this year's Grammy awards. Amid the shallow, glitzy, televised hoopla, Mick Hucknall, lead vocalist for the fine English band Simply Red, sang an impassioned live version of "Money's Too Tight to Mention," (originally done by American soul artists the Valentine Brothers) which snarled venom at Reagan, Thatcher and the misery their economic policies cause. You won't see anything like that on the Oscars, folks.

Much of the built-in character of rock & roll's oppositional stance comes from who makes it. The music is, after all, most closely associated with two social groups, the Afro-American nation and young people in general, who have sharp and deep-seated contradictions with this society. No music that maintains these social roots can be fully integrated into the mainstream.

In fact, even as big capital plays a more powerful role in the upper levels of the "music biz," a whole nother tier of small commodity production and exchange has been created. Inspired more than anything else by the punk explosion of the 1970s, literally thousands of records and takes each year are released by small and independent record labels or the artists themselves. Once in awhile one will claw its way up the charts. On the whole, though, the chasm between the different subcultures that make up this lower tier and the mainstream hardly seems to be narrowing. One thing this means is that it's harder work than it's ever been to keep up with the good new stuff, because a lot of it never shows up on the radio, on eMpTyV or in the mainstream press.

So far, rock & roll's unique characteristics among mass cultural forms have kept it alive and growing, despite a number of what you might call "near death experiences." If rock is to escape suffocation in the smothering embrace of capital, the next steps are being forged right now in some apartment building basement or suburban garage or back country VFW hall—or maybe in some Azanian township or South American shanty town. Who knows? Keep your ears open and hope, eh? ■





from original woodcut by H. Yost

## Rebuilding the Movement Grenada and the Caribbean

by Don Rojas

When the Grenadian revolution collapsed in October 1983, it was devastating for a lot of us who had been actively involved in its leadership. Many of us believed, pessimistically, that it was a set-back of many, many years; we were very demoralized. But the situation has actually developed much more positively than we thought it would.

Within a year after the invasion of Grenada, we were able to launch the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, an organization recognized, even by the forces of domination in our country, as a serious factor in Grenadian politics. We print a weekly newspaper, *In These Times*, which provides the only consistent voice against the neocolonial regime. We think our popularity among the people is on the rise, and we are preparing to play an active role in an intensified national liberation struggle in the next year or two. In addition, we have become very active regionally in strengthening links with fraternal parties in the Caribbean and Central America.

We named our party after Maurice Bishop whom we recognized as our most outstanding national hero, both as tribute to his memory and also as a symbol of the continuity of the revolution. But we have also used this time to draw some political lessons from our experiences in the New Jewel Movement in the hopes of finding and correcting errors (not unique to the Grenadian situation) of dogmatism and sectarianism.

### Learning Lessons

Perhaps the most fundamental lesson we learned was about the nature of a vanguard party, that the party is *not* the revolution. We have taken a lesson from the Sandinistas on this. And we have also learned from them how not to deliberately provoke the class enemy into aggression against the revolution.

The following article is based on a discussion last fall with former Grenadian Minister of Culture, Don Rojas. Rojas was a member of the New Jewel Movement (NJM) which led the revolutionary government of Grenada from March 13, 1979 until its overthrow by US invasion in October, 1983. He is currently the representative to Havana of the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, a Grenadian anti-imperialist party launched by former NJM members on May 29, 1984, the date when Maurice Bishop would have turned forty had he not been assassinated.

At this point, we are well aware that we cannot afford to conduct ourselves in a sectarian manner. So we are working very hard to reach out to the broadest possible patriotic and anti-imperialist forces within the country to involve them in the revolutionary process. We have made it clear that we are not going to reject from our party any Grenadian patriots—people who love their country even if they do not think of themselves as socialists or communists. The bottom line for us is that people oppose the American invasion. We say it is contradictory to be patriotic and at the same time to support the imperialist invasion. If you oppose the invasion, if you supported the programs of the people's revolutionary government, if you accept our program which is essentially a continuation of the program of the New Jewel Movement, there's a place for you in our party. If you're willing to engage in anti-imperialist practice and struggle, then you don't have to declare yourself communist or socialist to be a member of the revolution.

At the same time, we carry out an extensive program of political education among our members and supporters through our newspaper, *In These Times*. We try to make our people more aware of the ongoing struggles of fraternal peoples around the world, with a lot of emphasis on education about the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. In fact, we have been very successful in a Free Nelson Mandela campaign in Grenada carried out by our youth organization. They have gathered thousands of signatures and also raised modest amounts of money which we have contributed to the South African ANC comrades.

### Organizing in Grenada

As far as the organizational work of our party, we are now consolidating local branches in each of the parishes in the country, so that we can build up our structure from the grass roots. This year we are going to launch a new mass youth organization under the political guidance of the patriotic movement. They will function semi-autonomously but they will be under our political guidance.

In general, we think we have registered modest but very significant successes in keeping alive the struggle of the Grenadian people and the legacy of the revolution. A concrete example of this occurred last year on October 19th, the anniversary of the massacre of Bishop and many other innocent Grenadians. Of course this is a very important date for us, so we organized a rally in the heart of Saint George's market square area. We declared it a national day of mourning, not only for Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement leaders who were killed but also for the ordinary young Grenadian soldiers, young patriots who gave their lives in defense of their country during the invasion. These were the ones who fought as opposed to those jokers who call themselves the revolutionary military, none of whom were wounded, much less killed during the war.

In any case, we were able to mobilize over two thousand Grenadian patriots. In the present situation of occupation, that is not a bad turnout. We demanded that the government declare October 19th as a national day of mourning. Of course, they have not chosen to do that, but instead have declared October 25th, the day of the invasion, Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day! By comparison, the



The New Jewel Movement sought to expand popular democracy through parish council meetings such as this one. The Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement hopes to build up its organization along similar lines.



ruling party, the party with state power, the party with access to all the resources of the state, organized a similar rally in the same place in the market square one week after ours, and they got no more than five hundred people. That, I think, gives you some indication of how the public sentiment and the mood in Grenada has shifted dramatically in the last three years. You won't see this reflected in reports in the bourgeois press, of course. But these are the realities. Which opens up all kinds of new prospects for us, our party and the progressive movement in general.

Nineteen eighty-seven is going to be a rough year for the puppet regime, not only through our efforts, but also because the class contradictions are really intensifying at a rapid pace. For instance, the government is in a head-to-head battle with the union that represents public workers. In its austerity program, the International Monetary Fund has demanded that the government cut back fifty percent of civil service, so half of all government employees are going to be laid off in 1987. This will have a devastating economic impact on the country—per capita far more devastating than what has occurred in Jamaica. But the union that represents government workers has not taken this sitting down. They are fighting: they threatened to strike; they have demanded not just an end to cutbacks, but significant wage increases owed them for three years.

There is also the struggle around guaranteeing the right to work of the Grenadian students who study in Cuba, particularly the doctors. We have graduated ten Grenadian doctors and two dentists last year in Cuba and none of them are working. They have been denied employment by the government. They have also been denied licenses to practice medicine privately. Our party is part of the struggle around this.



Free West Indian

As far as how we carry out these struggles, we function above ground. We have declared ourselves openly to the people as an anti-imperialist organization. We deliberately

chose to do this, first, to neutralize the anti-progressive and anti-communist propaganda that the Left only functions in conspiratorial and clandestine ways. And, second, we want to take advantage of the democratic movement that has had to come about as a result of the invasion.

Reagan preaches that he invaded Grenada to restore democracy and to restore political pluralism. So we take full advantage of that. Which is not to say we are free from harassment. Pressure is brought down on our heads all the time: our party paper is confiscated; some of our leaders are not allowed to travel outside of the country; other leaders are framed for conspiracies, such as the recent arrest of some party members for allegedly conspiring to ship Cuban arms into the country. This is routine.

We also have a policy of carrying out the struggle on all fronts, parliamentary and extra-parliamentary. We don't have a presence in the parliament now although we did contest the last elections. We won 5% of the vote in spite of the fact that many of our potential supporters, thousands in fact, were not on the voter registration lists because they were members of the army or members of the militia or the youth organization that had been detained shortly after the invasion and had been released on condition that they would not participate in any political activity. They couldn't vote. But, nonetheless, we participated. We don't dismiss any options.

### Regional Politics

Over the past several years we have also been part of an historic process of unifying progressive forces in the Caribbean and Central America. In 1984, thirty-two political parties and organizations from all across the Caribbean and Central America met in Cuba and issued a joint declaration affirming their commitment to work together against U.S. aggression in the region, and we have been meeting regularly ever since. To understand why it has been so difficult to get to this point, you have to remember how long the Caribbean and Central American peoples were kept isolated from each other by the policies of various European colonial powers. For instance, even though the majority of us came from the same source, linguistic barriers divided us into French-speaking, Dutch-speaking, English-speaking, and Spanish-speaking peoples. And if you take a quick look at what's going on in the Caribbean region right now, you will also begin to understand how difficult this process still is because of the complex and uneven development of the Left forces.

In Jamaica, for example, there is a resurgence of the



Wide World Photos



Caribbean Contact



Wide World Photos

Caribbean conservatives: left, Jamaica's former Prime Minister Edward Seaga; center, Tom Adams of Barbados; right, Eugenia Charles, Prime Minister of Dominica.

moderate Left, the social democratic forces represented by Michael Manley and the People's National Party (PNP). They have shown a remarkable comeback; they inflicted a crushing defeat on Seaga's Jamaica Labor Party in the last election. But the party to the left of the PNP, the Workers' Party of Jamaica, which calls itself a communist party, suffered its greatest setback in the same election. So this was a setback at least for the communist left in Jamaica.

Similarly, in Barbados, social democracy received a big boost early in 1986 with the victory of Errol Barrow's Democratic Labor Party and the crushing defeat of the conservatives. This was especially gratifying for us since Tom Adams is one of the most outspoken supporters of the American invasion of Grenada. It was the worst defeat in the history of Barbados. So, it is fair to chalk this up as a victory of the Left, a shift to the left in Barbados, in support of a social democratic party. Barrow is very popular and it seems likely will remain in power for awhile and will presumably be able to resist pressure from Washington to moderate his anti-American rhetoric. He has taken a very progressive position on the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). His position is that if you want the CBI to benefit Caribbean people you have to open up the American market to all of our exports without any protectionist restrictions. Of course it won't work, but it's principled. No other leader in the region has been that forceful. Furthermore, the Democratic Labor Party is a member of the Socialist International. From time to time, they declare their vigorous opposition to American attempts to militarize the region; they support the Contadora efforts in Central America although they are not close to the Nicaraguans; they are open to exploring relations with Cuba. So that is a

positive development.

[Note: Sadly, since Rojas' talk, Errol Barrow died June 1, 1987, of a heart attack. Barrow had governed Barbados in its early years of independence and then returned to office only last year, with his party virtually sweeping the Assembly elections—Ed.]

But on the other hand, in Trinidad there's been a setback for progressives with the recent elections. The party which had been in power for thirty years was removed in a massive defeat last year. This was the only party in power since Trinidad got limited independence from Britain, the party that took Trinidad to full constitutional independence in 1962. And unfortunately a rightist party defeated them last year. I think the best way of explaining this is that the voters of Trinidad were not so much voting for a right-wing program as they were voting out a government that was corrupt and a mismanaged economy. The government's position on the Grenadian invasion was good, and the majority of the people supported them on that. But their record in other areas was really quite dismal.

In general, I think the situation in Trinidad reflects the deepening social and economic crisis in the Caribbean which is forcing people to look for alternatives. Unfortunately, in Trinidad as well as in other parts of the region, the Left has not organized itself into a viable alternative. This again is characteristic of a kind of individualism and sectarian politics conspicuous on the Left. When Left-wing and progressive parties hardly talk to each other and refuse to be part of the same movement, that's nonsense. What happens? They run candidates for elections and get less than 1% of the vote. It is especially unfortunate in a situation where the people are looking for an alternative



that is in their interests and the Left is the only force that could provide that alternative. That was the situation in Trinidad and is a danger in the entire Caribbean region.

The French-speaking countries also have problems of their own. They are involved in a pro-independence movement. The Left is relatively weak still. However, there is a good possibility that in Dominica, Eugenia Charles could be voted out of office in the next couple of years [Charles was one of the Caribbean leaders who apparently invited Reagan to invade Grenada—Ed.] Then there's Haiti. Right now Haitian politics are in a kind of limbo. I don't think that Haiti can be returned to the rule of the Right to the degree that it was under Duvalier. But, although some of the contending forces are parties of the Left, unfortunately, from what we understand, they are again pretty badly divided by sectarianism. What is clear, though, is that the masses of people have tasted freedom, and it tastes good, and they are not going to relinquish it. The challenge is to give the mass movement direction.

### Repercussions of Contragate in the Caribbean

On top of all this, we have to add the U.S. situation, in particular the Contragate scandal. It has, of course, exposed the inner workings of the U.S. rightists' organization in the military and the administration and has shown how corrupt they are. In our region, it has severely undermined the credibility of the Reagan administration even among government employees closely allied to it. Reagan's closest supporters in the Caribbean are embarrassed enough that they have had to either keep quiet or find obscure ways of criticizing the Reagan government. Even right-leaning people have been forced to write editorials critical of Oliver North and Reagan. [North, by the way, was the master-

mind behind the U.S. invasion of Grenada—Ed.]

As far as what effect this will have on U.S. policy towards the Caribbean in the future, there are essentially two schools of thought, both of which—in our opinion—have credibility. One view is that, as the scandal deepens, it will further tie the hands of the U.S. rightists to the point where they will be forced to ease up some of the pressure they've been putting on the Sandinistas, giving them more space and time. The other school of thought, however, says that as the scandal deepens, the U.S. will attempt more militaristic action to turn attention away from the scandal. This is certainly possible and shouldn't be dismissed. For instance, I read in the *New York Times* that Eliot Abrams is already calling for stepped-up military pressure on the Sandinistas, arguing that it is the only way to bring them to the bargaining table and force them to compromise. So they could pull any kind of crazy stunt, not just increasing support of the Contras, but trying to pull off some kind of spectacular military sabotage. They might also look at trying to establish a beachhead within Nicaraguan territory itself. They might direct the Contras to seize a town or a couple of villages in Nicaragua, declare that to be a liberated zone, recognize the Contras as the legitimate government, and call on Nicaraguans to support this government.

All of these scenarios are possible, and we should keep our eyes open. But in spite of what the U.S. government does, we are convinced that the Nicaraguan people will continue to support the revolution. They are going to defend it with their lives. We are convinced of that. And the implications for the rest of Central America and the rest of the continent are enormous. That flame could spread rapidly to other countries. So, we are moving into some potentially explosive situations in 1987 as a result of Contragate. ■

## Working For A Living

by Mila Aguilar

This drudgery's too much  
for the pittance it pays.  
Plastic wallets cost  
a fortune nowadays.  
And they break at the seams  
too soon. *Let me just  
Create! I cry.*

Middling scholars abound  
parading mediocrity around  
their narrow sanctimonious ground.  
What's there left to debate?  
All argument's been laid.  
*Why can't I just create?  
I incredulously cry.*

Yesmen say cheese  
to all the passing geese,  
imitating the waddling  
of their farty wide asses.  
Who wouldn't take hashish.  
*As for me, let me just create,  
I cry. Let me create!  
I categorically cry.*

*Let me create  
in another dimension  
the anguish of this  
quite common tension  
between work and  
love of life,  
between life and  
love of work.  
Let me assemble  
all the minds  
that ever assembled  
last generation's  
greatest minds.  
Let me weld  
in iron  
all the seams  
in the cracked logic  
of today's minions.  
Let me build  
tomorrow's  
mental monuments.  
(Let me  
play havoc  
on the petty leavings  
of all those  
waddling geese.)  
As to the middling  
and the yesmen,  
leave them to their wont—  
let them rot.*

*Filipino activist and poet Mila Aguilar is a regular contributor to Forward Motion*

August 22, 1986

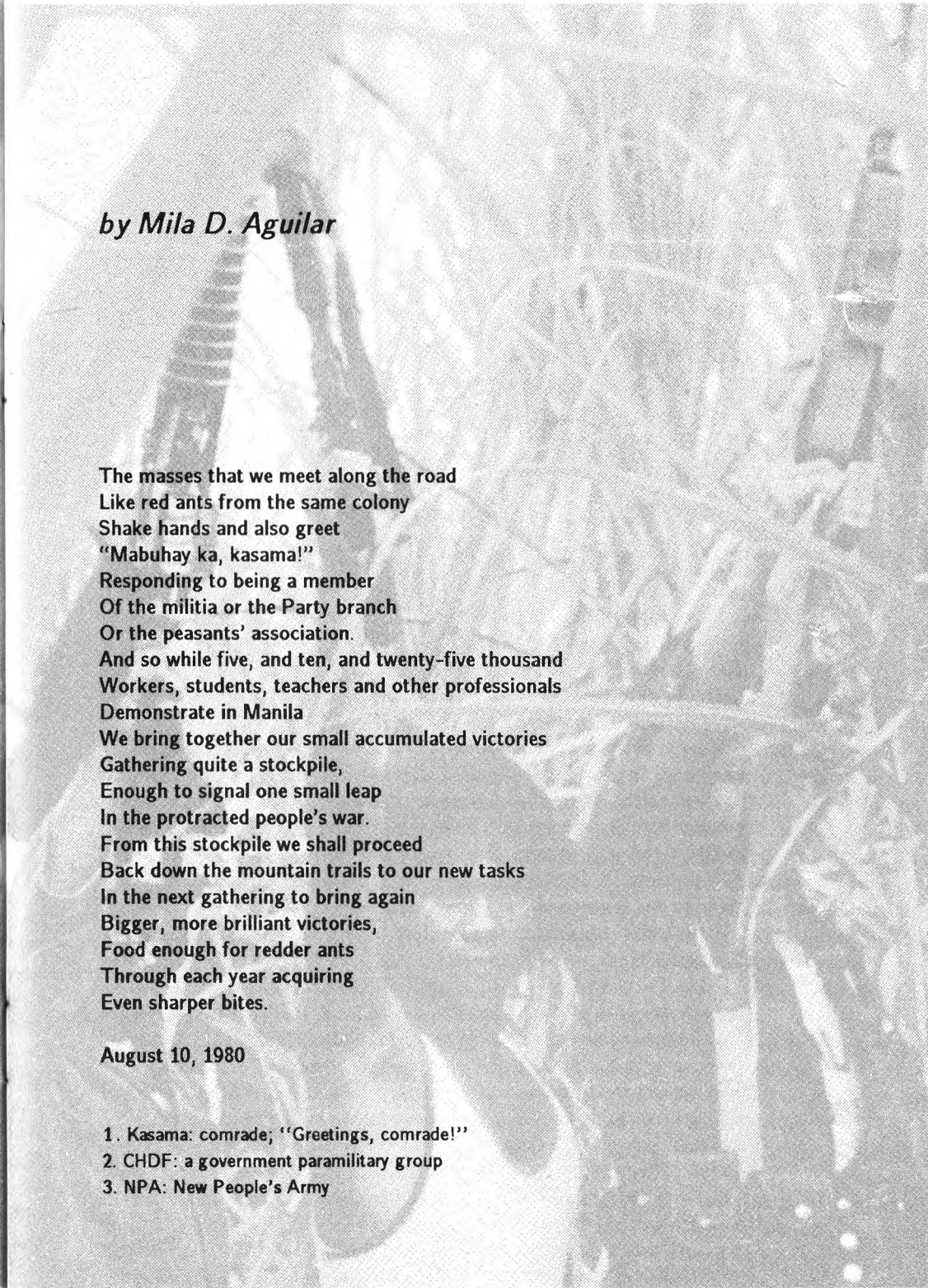




## Like Red Ants

Like red ants from many corners of the land  
We gather,  
Lightly carrying loads  
Of small but brilliant victories  
On our backs.  
Like little red ants with sharpened bite  
Jubilantly we shake hands  
As we meet,  
Greeting "Mabuhay ka, kasama!"<sup>1</sup>  
On the trail,  
Up the little colony  
We've built.  
One tells of how, in Samar,  
Some uniformed CHDF,<sup>2</sup>  
Overpowering a comrade after a heavy fight,  
His hands already on the comrade's neck  
Suddenly withdraws to surrender  
Himself and his M-16  
Upon being authoritatively told by a militia member,  
"That's an NPA<sup>3</sup> you're killing."  
In Cagayan how comrades  
Seized our second M-60;  
In another region a lieutenant killed  
At first volley.  
From all the filling food we bring  
To stock up further on our rich experiences  
How deeply we have taken root among the masses,  
How wide now is our expanse.

*by Mila D. Aguilar*



The masses that we meet along the road  
Like red ants from the same colony  
Shake hands and also greet  
"Mabuhay ka, kasama!"  
Responding to being a member  
Of the militia or the Party branch  
Or the peasants' association.  
And so while five, and ten, and twenty-five thousand  
Workers, students, teachers and other professionals  
Demonstrate in Manila  
We bring together our small accumulated victories  
Gathering quite a stockpile,  
Enough to signal one small leap  
In the protracted people's war.  
From this stockpile we shall proceed  
Back down the mountain trails to our new tasks  
In the next gathering to bring again  
Bigger, more brilliant victories,  
Food enough for redder ants  
Through each year acquiring  
Even sharper bites.

August 10, 1980

1. Kasama: comrade; "Greetings, comrade!"
2. CHDF: a government paramilitary group
3. NPA: New People's Army



## BOOK REVIEW

*Prisoners of the  
American Dream*

by Mike Davis

(Verso, 1986)

## Understanding American Labor's Prison

by Mike Conan

*Prisoners of the American Dream* by Mike Davis is an attempt to understand why socialist organizing in the U.S. is so difficult. The first half of the book is an insightful overview of the history of the U.S. labor movement. Davis focuses on the intersection of class forces at specific historical conjunctures that led to defeat for the U.S. working class. He pays particular attention to the cumulative impact of those defeats in setting the limits for subsequent struggles. The second half of the book examines the relationship between the political and economic changes that have led to our current situation.

Most of *Prisoners of the American Dream* originally appeared as articles in the London-based *New Left Review*, where Mike Davis has been described as the "token" American on the editorial collective. Originally from southern California, Davis was a long-term activist in the anti-war and civil rights movements. He worked as a teamster and a meat cutter before moving to England. Davis recently returned to live in southern California and is currently at work on a new book about California.

Given Davis' connection to *New Left Review*, it's not surprising that his analysis tends towards the structuralist or Althusserian school defended by Perry Anderson, an editor of *NLR*. For a while now, Anderson has been engaged in a debate with the eminent British labor historian E.P. Thompson over methods of historiography. Briefly put, Anderson strives for a "science of history" that exposes structures of class oppression in order to derive a political strategy for the present. Thompson tends to be more subjective, particular, even romantic, focusing more on the day-to-day lives of the working class than on the structures of oppression. Thompson argues that the "working class made itself as much as it was made." It is not necessary to take sides in this debate to note that most U.S. labor history has been written in the Thompson mode and therefore Davis' more structural approach is refreshing.

*Prisoners of the American Dream* came out in 1986 and has been

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Diego Rivera mural shows Marx bearing his forecast of class struggle in the United States. Below him, Engels faces Daniel de Leon, Eugene Debs and William Haywood. Understanding the relative lack of political development of the U.S. working class remains an important task for the left.

widely available in paperback for some time now. Since this review can discuss only a few of the points Davis raises in this remarkable book, I would strongly encourage anyone interested in the situation of labor and socialist organizing in the US to get a hold of the book and read it yourself.

### U.S. Labor's Historical Weakness

From the time of Marx and Engels to the present, progressive theorists have been concerned with the relative lack of political development of the U.S. working class. Compared to its European, Canadian, or Australian counterparts, the U.S. working class has had a more difficult time developing independent instruments of political power. Not only are traditional labor or social democratic parties absent, but even U.S. trade unions have generally limited themselves to business unionism. Over the years, the reasons put forward to explain this situation have ranged from varieties of American exceptionalism to mechanical versions of the bribed working class theory. Davis

postulates racism and nativism (in the 19th century) as key in the repeated defeat of the U.S. working people. Davis identifies white supremacy not only as an ideology that divides the class but also as an integral component of bourgeois rule in the U.S.

Throughout this book Davis stresses the historical relationship between class struggles and democratic struggles. In Europe, working class institutions developed in the context of ongoing democratic struggles—whether in traditional bourgeois revolutions as in France or in the fight for political rights as in the English Chartist movement. The U.S. situation was much more ambiguous and complex. On the one hand, formal democratic rights for white male workers came relatively early and required a relatively low level of popular struggle to achieve them. But at the same time, the U.S. was founded on the twin pillars of slavery for Afro-Americans and genocide for Native Americans. These laid the basis for relative political, and to a lesser extent, economic, privileges for white males almost from the outset. The political privileges were based on the decision to limit slavery to Black Americans. The economic privileges originated from both the illusion and the reality of "free" land in the West. These "free" lands were, of course, genocidally expropriated from their Native American inhabitants.

The working class, as a whole, has not been able to overcome the burden of these relative advantages. Davis examines the failure of labor abolitionism, labor populism and Debsian socialism to address this fundamental contradiction. Although these were certainly all key episodes in the history of the U.S. working class and Davis' analysis of them is illuminating, Davis neglects to mention the crushing of Reconstruction as a pivotal point in the development of the working class. The failure of the labor movement to provide any substantial support to Afro-Americans in their struggle for democratic rights in the face of overt racist terror and virtual re-enslavement may well have been the decisive defeat for the U.S. working class as a whole in its history.

Nevertheless, Davis does a detailed and convincing job of tracing the impact of racism and nativism in producing a uniquely stratified working class in the U.S. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the class was stratified in terms of race, nationality, immigrant status and ethnicity. The U.S. ruling class has not only been able to manipulate these divisions to defeat the working class; it has also been able to use the fact of these defeats to create new structures of dominance.



## New Deal and Democratic Struggles

Perhaps most intriguing is Davis' view of the New Deal and its immediate aftermath in the 40's and 50's. Much of the early success of the CIO was based on popular demands for democracy. For instance, the second generation immigrants who lived and worked in the mill towns of the Ohio Valley faced a corrupt local constabulary in league with company police who enforced an overt class dictatorship. While the key demand in "little Siberia" was for the right to organize as workers, under these conditions this was inextricably linked to the rights to speak, assemble, and vote.

If the successes of the New Deal upsurge were linked to democratic struggles, so were the failures. Davis makes it very clear just how white supremacist the hallowed New Deal coalition was. He sketches four parts of that coalition. The first was a fraction of the capitalist class whose corporations were capital intensive and were therefore less concerned about labor costs, as, for example, the oil industry. The second component was the traditional big city Democratic political machines which saw New Deal programs as desperately needed sources of graft and patronage. A third group was the Democratic "Solid South." The courthouse gangs that made up this group were the active agents of race terror on a mass scale.

The fourth component was the newly organized industrial working class under the leadership of the CIO and, to some extent, the Communist Party. The decision to ally with the New Deal to further the organization of mass production industry was in effect a decision to abandon Afro-Americans who were still, in the main, agricultural workers. It is probably not coincidence that the CP's decision to consolidate its alliance with the New Deal occurred at about the same time that they capitulated on the question of self-determination for the Black nation. While the New Deal era can be seen as succeeding in overcoming ethnic divisions in the industrial working class, it reconfirmed and reemphasized divisions in the class based on national oppression.

## Labor Divides Up

This failure to deal with white supremacy once again set the terms for the legitimization and subordination of the labor movement in the 1940's and 1950's. The terms of this deal between labor and the ruling class eventually set the scene for the full-scale attacks on the U.S. labor movement that we are witnessing today.

Briefly stated, the terms of the deal resulted in an in-

stitutionalizing of the split in the U.S. working class. The labor movement agreed to purge itself of leftists. This meant exposing and firing individual leftists whether they were union leaders or rank-and-file activists. It also meant isolating consolidated left unions like the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). Labor gave up the right to strike during the life of a contract. Shop floor grievances became enmeshed in a bureaucratic grievance procedure. Labor also supported U.S. cold war foreign policy, and frequently, as in the case of the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD), it acted as an agent of U.S. imperialism. Last and most important, labor stopped organizing. In particular, this meant not organizing the most oppressive sectors—service and agriculture—as well as not organizing the most oppressed sections—the South and the Southwest.

*By the persistent application of racist privileges, significant sections of the rank and file were led into the belief that national oppression was in their interest.*

In return, the capitalist state recognized the "legitimacy" of unions through the series of labor laws initiated by the National Labor Relations Act. Automatic wage increases were linked to rising productivity and cost of living. These automatic pay raises soon established a substantial pay differential between the organized and unorganized sectors of the working class.

By the mid-1950's the bifurcation of the working class was institutionalized. Because the organized sectors of the class were overwhelmingly white and male, itself a consequence of the earlier defeats that Davis describes, national and gender divisions were also institutionalized.

## Labor's Crisis

Perhaps the biggest chicken that came home to roost was the issue of the South where so many of these contradictions converged. By the 1970's, almost half of the country's productive resources had been shifted to what we now call the Sunbelt—the South and Southwest. As a result of enormous government subsidies over twenty-five years, the whole region has been developed as a low wage,

non-union, labor-intensive bastion for the most right wing sections of the U.S. capitalist class.

As the location of the oppressed Black and Chicano nations, the Sunbelt was the focus of the most significant democratic upsurge in this century—the civil rights movement. Imagine the impact of the civil rights movement of the late 50's and early 60's had it been linked to a Sunbelt-wide union organizing campaign. This opportunity was lost not just because the unions didn't have the type of leadership that could seize the opportunity. More important, by the persistent application of racist privileges, significant sections of the rank and file were led into the belief that national oppression was in their interest. White racism is principally a method of political control exercised over the white working class.

By the late 1970's these divisions in the working class had grown so pronounced that the U.S. labor movement as a whole was vulnerable to the systematic attack launched on it by U.S. capital. Interestingly enough, this onslaught was begun with the complicity of a Democratic president and Congress. The defeat of the on-site picketing bill in 1977 was not so much decisive in and of itself as it was indicative of a new alignment of class forces that sought to drastically shift the parameters of political and class struggle to the right.

## The Mass Production Economy

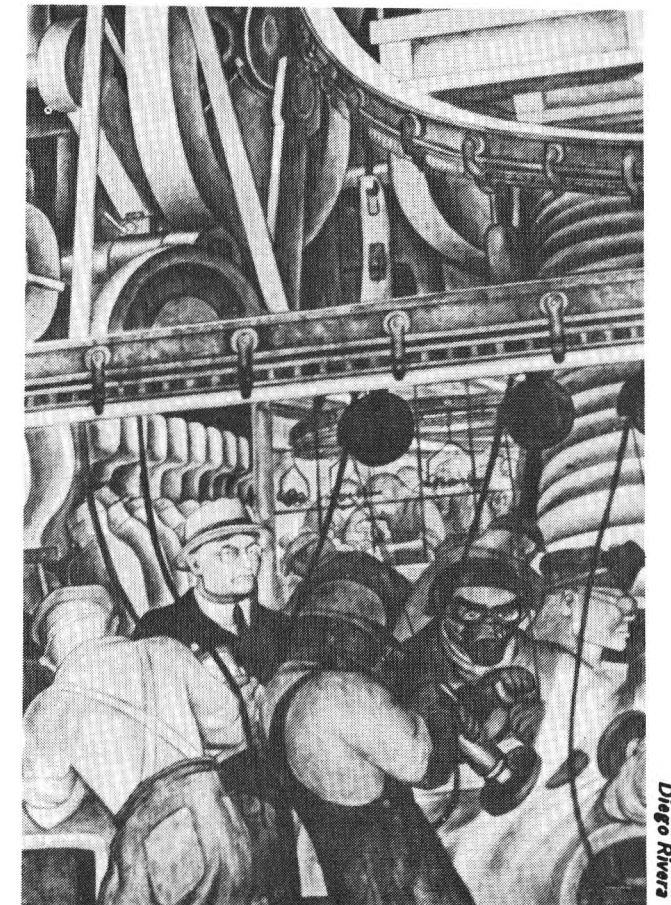
Davis' second section is dedicated to an analysis of the origins and trajectory of this new alignment of class forces that has set the terms of popular struggle in the current period. This new alignment of class forces is a function of a shift in the characteristic mode of capital accumulation. Davis uses the term "Fordism" to describe the process of capital accumulation that was dominant from the end of World War II until the mid-1970's. The name derives from Henry Ford's insight that it was in his interest to pay his workers well enough for them to be able to buy his cars. In general, Fordism describes an accumulation regime wherein a sector of the working class is paid sufficiently well to absorb the supply of mass production industry. An enormous domestic mass market emerged as a result of this approach.

It was this internal market that provided the impetus for the global expansion of U.S. imperialism. Unlike British imperialism which depended on world trade hegemony, U.S. imperialism has manifested itself more through the export of capital and control of capital markets. But Fordism came unglued when the market began to get sat-

urated. For example, automobile production which had expanded at a rate of 7 or 8% per year through the 50's and 60's has declined to a current 1 or 2%. Earlier, people were buying their first cars, while nowadays people buy to replace their old ones.

Faced with the problem of producing more than the market could absorb, U.S. capital tried to expand the market. This could be accomplished either by expanding Fordism globally to include elements of the Third World or by bolstering the domestic market by raising the general standard of living.

Both of these approaches were tried and both were notable failures. The notion of third world Fordism was blown apart in the jungles of Vietnam along with a lot of other liberal illusions. At home, the war on poverty, even though in reality it was not a transfer of incomes between classes but rather within the working class, fell prey to the old problem of racism. This time it was enacted by a new player on the class scene—a petit bourgeois stratum composed of managers, professionals, engineers, new en-



Diego Rivera



trepreneurs and rentiers. This class, new as a mass phenomenon, generated a new accumulation regime which Davis calls "overconsumptionism."

Overconsumptionism is based on this new mass middle stratum consuming an ever larger portion of social production. As opposed to Fordism, which grew on mass production, the possibility of more craft and custom-made products appeals to the more "refined" tastes of the petit bourgeoisie. So we can see smaller, more labor intensive production with a particular emphasis on the service sector. The profile of the working class is changing more as a pre-condition than as a consequence of these new conditions. On the one hand, the loss of so many unionized mass production jobs has led to a more general immiseration for the class. On the other hand, the differential effects of a decade of inflation have reinforced national and gender divisions.



'I used to feel guilty about being affluent, but over time, with help, I've come to accept it, and now . . . I just love it.'

The politics of the "revanchist middle strata" first emerged in the tax revolt that started in California and then swept the country in the mid-1970's. In alliance with Sunbelt capital, often individually owned and virulently right wing, the new middle class made up the mass base of Reaganism.

In his first term, Reagan's program of smashing labor and rolling back the civil rights gains of the 1960's intensi-

fied even further the struggle between the haves and have-nots in this country.

### Labor Prospects Today

The Jesse Jackson campaign in 1984 was one of the first signs of the most oppressed sectors beginning to find ways to fight back on a national scale. The Rainbow Coalition, far from a purely working class force, included elements of the Black bourgeoisie as well as some white, traditionally progressive middle forces. Nevertheless, the thrust of its rhetoric and program was an appeal to the multi-national working class by important elements of the Black Liberation Movement.

Davis saves his sharpest polemical sallies for the AFL-CIO, those in the Democratic Socialists of America and others who try to transform the Democratic Party into what he calls a charade of social democracy. Although Davis sees the Rainbow as *the* progressive development of the 1980's, he sees no future in a Democratic Party that is already being taken over by neo-liberals. For Davis, neo-liberals like Hart, Gephardt, and Bradley are just the overconsumptionist flip side of the Republican neo-conservatives like Kemp.

Without a rapid break-up of this overconsumptionist regime, Davis sees much tougher times ahead. He posits a sort of three circles of Hell scenario. The ruling class and their new middle strata associates would occupy the privileged inner-circle, defended from the outer circles by the police, army, and the ever-increasing ranks of private police. The second circle would include the working class, increasingly divided, alienated and immiserated. The last circle would be illegal immigrants from Latin America and Asia. Constantly subject to police terror and deportation, this group would work for almost nothing.

As a strategy to counter this possibility, Davis urges the U.S. left to abandon its unrequited affair with the Democratic Party and turn its attention to the "mobilization of the radical possibilities in the Black—and perhaps Hispanic—working class." According to Davis, the principal political task facing the U.S. left is to address the contradictions within the working class as a whole, within the trade union movement, and within the Left itself that are a direct consequence of the maintenance of white privileges.

Although a multi-national Left has a key role to play in this project, it can only be effectively realized in alliance with the Black Liberation Movement and other oppressed nationality movements. The Rainbow Coalition has the

potential to be the first institutional vehicle of that alliance.

I described *Prisoners of the American Dream* as a remarkable book, but it is not a perfect one. Davis' most glaring error is his consistent inability to adequately incorporate the struggle for women's liberation into his analysis. For a book that attempts to present a synthesis of the structures of class oppression and the class' attempts at resistance, this is a major failing.

In addition, the way Davis pays attention to the structural limits imposed on class and political struggles can often obscure the possibility for revolutionary breakthroughs. The people do fight back, and they usually do it in the most unexpected ways and at the most unlikely times.

Last, Davis focuses so sharply on the working class and its relation to the national movements that he can lose track of the cultural and political phenomena occurring in society as a whole, such as the women's movement, gay rights movement, environmental and peace movements. Part of the reason for these omissions may derive from Davis' analytical method mentioned earlier. More likely, though, the book's genesis as a series of articles may have unduly restricted its scope.

Regardless, this is an important book. It represents a significant step in understanding the origins and material basis of our current nightmarish political and economic situation. For the prisoners to escape, they must first understand the prison. ■



## BOOK REVIEW

### *The American Connection: U.S. Guns, Money, and Influence in Northern Ireland*

by Jack Holland

(Viking, 1987)

## Reshaping the Irish—American Connection

by Bill Nevins

On May 9, 1987 Mel King, the most well-known Black political activist in Massachusetts, stood before an exclusively white audience at the Lowell Hilton and said,

I think that it's important that we understand that there is only one struggle, a struggle against the oppression and injustice that comes from, ironically, the same source. It is the same source that profited off slavery, that supports the South African government, and that continues to oppress the people of Northern Ireland. That source is the leadership and the government of England.

Mel King received a standing ovation. He was speaking as an honored guest of the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAI), founded in 1970 and today the primary American organization providing material aid to families of Northern Ireland political prisoners. In many respects this banquet was a typical Irish-American fundraiser, with roast beef, a country & western band, ties and gowns, immigrant brogues and Gaelic catch-phrases, and of course both the collection baskets and solemn invocations of Ireland's heroic dead. (Only the night before, in the Irish Republican Army's heaviest single-action loss in decades, eight IRA guerrillas had died in a surprise confrontation with British commandos.) Yet King's presence distinguished this from earlier NORAI events and perhaps signaled a dawning awareness among U.S. supporters of the Irish Republican cause that solidarity with progressive activism domestically and links across racial and ethnic lines are essential to any hope of success.

Such a realistic attitude among Irish-nationalist sympathizers in America is long overdue, as Jack Holland ably demonstrates in his fine new book, *The American Connection: U.S. Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland*. Holland demonstrates how during the two decades since the current Ulster "troubles" began, the U.S. government and its British ally have thwarted the efforts of NORAI and similar organizations to broaden American support for and even understanding of the Irish revolutionary struggle. Certainly not the least effective tactic used

against NORAI (and, not coincidentally, against the Irish-American community generally) has been exacerbation and manipulation of existing racist and reactionary tendencies within urban and suburban "American Irish" working-class enclaves. This tactic has succeeded to the extent that U.S. supporters of Ireland's rebels have found themselves torn by internal divisions, sneered upon by establishment liberals (including high-placed politicians with Irish-sounding surnames), and isolated from the general public and especially from those American minority groups (Black, Hispanic, Native American) who would seem to be logical allies. The time-tested imperialist strategy of divide-and-conquer has been no less successful in the USA than in England's longest-held colonial possession. If British policy in Ireland has been to "criminalize" the Republican Movement, the governmental policy towards NORAI and similar groups here is to push them into the "lunatic fringe" category.

*There is perhaps a dawning awareness among U.S. supporters of the Irish Republican cause that solidarity with progressive activism domestically and links across racial and ethnic lines are essential to any hope of success.*

Jack Holland, Belfast-born and of mixed Catholic and Protestant heritage, trained in classical history at both Irish and English universities. He has proven himself well-qualified to examine the workings of modern counter-insurgency propaganda techniques. His previous non-fiction includes *Too Long a Sacrifice* (Penguin, 1982), the best introductory history of the current Northern Ireland war. Resident in New York since 1979 but a frequent visitor to Ulster, he writes a weekly analytical column for the New York and Boston *Irish Echo*. Holland is also the author of *The Prisoner's Wife* and *Druid Time*, novels respectively concerning the present-day Irish-British conflict and the ancient wars between native Celts and imperial Roman invaders. In *The American Connection*, he shows himself as astute an observer of the U.S. political whirl as he has been of the continuing lethal storm in his homeland.

Holland's taste for irony and dark humor is apparent in this book. It would be an apt description of Irish history

generally and of the history of American solidarity work in particular to say that one could laugh if it weren't all so sad. In Holland's accounts, articulate leftist-Republican spokespersons sent over to generate enthusiasm for the struggle at times of extreme crisis find themselves alternately buoyed by the moral support of penniless American radicals and ripped-off when denied a share of funds raised by their eloquence at events organized by more "mainstream" Irish-American groups like NORAI. Holland recounts how a California businessman reneged on his promised cash donation to the 1981 hunger-strikers' families after Belfast activist Sean Flynn appeared on a San Francisco speaking platform with Black leaders. "I just don't like niggers!" snapped the Yankee millionaire, leaving Flynn shocked, appalled and in the lurch.

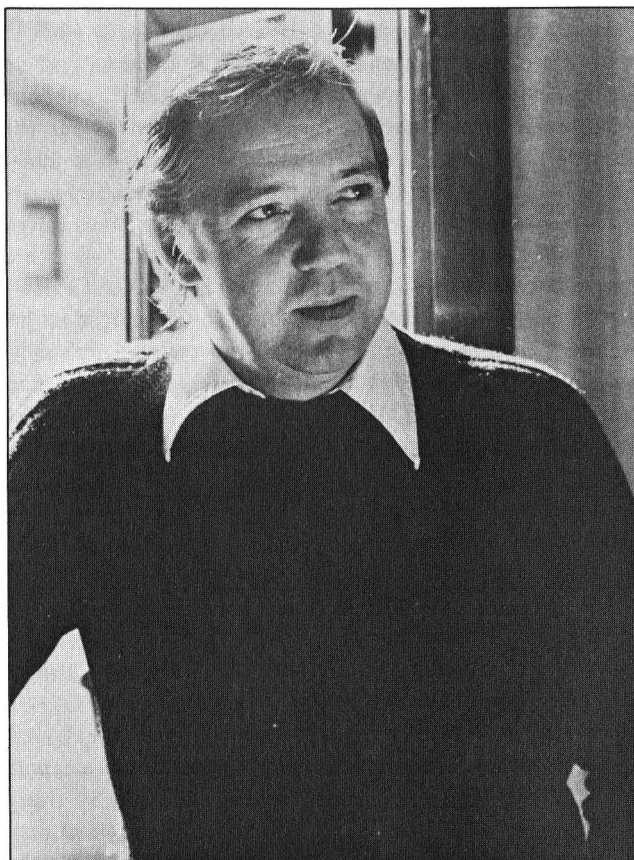
According to Holland, Liz O'Hara, sister of hunger-strike martyr Patrick O'Hara, had to battle both NORAI and its Irish contacts in order that a share of the proceeds of her lucrative 1981 USA speaking tour might benefit the families of O'Hara's overtly-socialist Republican faction, the Irish Republican Socialist Party and the Irish National Liberation Army. In what may be a positive sign, O'Hara shared the speakers' table with Mel King at the recent Lowell NORAI banquet. Assuming that financial support was equitably distributed this time, it would be in sharp contrast to the debilitating red-baiting which Holland correctly diagnoses as a long-standing major illness of the U.S. Irish-support movement.

Surely the most intriguing character portrait in *The American Connection* is that of 72-year-old George Harrison, an Irish immigrant to New York and New Hampshire who for three decades proudly (and of course secretly) served as one of the prime direct suppliers of armaments to Irish Republican guerrillas. Harrison was never a member of NORAI, which according to Holland does not supply either arms or funds to the IRA, but he was a key link in the chain of material support vital to that cause which NORAI espouses. It is ironic, says Holland, in view of the bigotry and political conservatism among NORAI's Irish-American constituency, that Harrison is a lifelong socialist internationalist as familiar on picket lines in front of the South African embassy or marching in support of Puerto Rican political prisoners as he is at demonstrations for British withdrawal from Ireland.

It was through the dedicated and unpaid efforts of anti-imperialist American lawyers and their cleverly-structured anti-CIA defense that Harrison and four co-defendants achieved their 1982 acquittal on U.S. government charges of illegal gun-running. Holland notes the further irony that

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Jack Holland

among Harrison's co-defendants was a NORAID founder, while NORAID itself has long steered clear of support for national liberation struggles other than that in Ireland. This has been in sharp contrast to the Sinn Fein Republican Movement in Ireland, which has developed strong anti-imperialist ties. Holland also recounts how some Irish-American progressives in 1979 formed the smaller, leftist H-Block/Armagh Committee, which came into ideological and financial conflict with NORAID and faded into insignificance in the years following the 1981 hunger strike.

Having shown how NORAID courts the favor of rightist politicians and the financial contributions of reactionary

donors in support of an undeniably anti-imperialist national liberation struggle, Holland documents some of the strange maneuvers to which this contradictory stance has led. These include the censorship of reprinted articles from Irish Republican newspapers deemed "too controversial" for American readers. The Republican Movement's caustic front-page condemnation of the Reagan bombing of Libya which appeared in *An Phoblacht/Republican News* was not reprinted in NORAID's weekly *Irish People*, and certain international-solidarity references in recent speeches by Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams have been conspicuously missing from the texts distributed here by NORAID.

While not condemning NORAID as hopelessly reactionary, Holland suggests that the organization has been woefully short-sighted. He criticizes NORAID's failure to recognize the limitations of exclusive support for one particular revolution and an associated failure to apply the lessons painfully learned in Ireland to the U.S. situation. These, Holland contends, have resulted in tragic missed opportunities and sincere but fruitless efforts on the part of U.S. backers of the Irish rebels. He details the results: IRA fugitives returned by U.S. courts to face British "justice"; a 1986 revised U.S.-U.K. extradition treaty which abolishes the century-old American tradition of providing refuge to Irish rebels; the continuing dissemination by the U.S. media of wildly distorted views of the Irish-British conflict; the American base of support for Ireland's revolution dwindling as the ethnic isolation fostered by NORAID chokes off younger leadership and prevents growth; and American arms-supply lines to the Irish insurgents effectively cut off by 1984.

For all Holland's grim humor, this is not a happy story. But it is one which he tells very skillfully. Certainly *The American Connection* will be controversial, and at the least it contains valuable cautionary lessons for everyone engaged in international solidarity work in the U.S. And as Mel King's presence at the 1987 Lowell NORAID banquet may indicate, perhaps even the Irish-American support movement already has begun to absorb and apply some of those lessons. In any case, everyone interested in recent Irish events should read this book. ■

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