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FORWARD MOTION

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Over the last year, progressives have followed with dismay Israel's accelerated drive for West Bank territory--seizing land, launching new settlements, violently suppressing resistance. With reports almost weekly of a school closed here, a teenaged protester shot and killed there, West Bank mayors maimed by terrorists, the Begin government ever more hardline, it seemed the situation could grow no worse. Then in late spring, presumably to further outflank Palestinian West Bank resistance, the Israelis invaded Lebanon. After a summer of fierce fighting and especially after wave upon wave of Israeli bombing of civilian targets, the PLO withdrew. Again the situation seemed to have reached a low point, only to be followed by the installation of the Phalangists in power and brutal massacres in two disarmed Palestinian encampments. For the first time, opinion polls show U.S. public sentiment running against Israeli aggression, and progressives have sought to organize an American response to these events. In this issue of Forward Motion, we offer two comments on the current Mideast situation drafted with the help of comrades who have been involved in some of these efforts.

The news about this country's economic crisis has also largely been of the bad-to-worse type. "Meanwhile, Polo is In..." gives voice to some of the social conflict beneath the surface of continuing gloomy unemployment statistics. We reprinted a famous drawing from the 1890's depression this article called to mind. As the U.S. people seek ways to cope and begin to resist, there is a lot of talk about coalition-building. The LA CAPS sum-up gives a realistic picture of what these efforts are often like today, what some of the problems are, and what can be accomplished.

Rounding out this issue is a book review and a short story. The review concerns the critical issue of national communism in socialist movements. And, encouraged by our last issue's short story offering, a friend sent in this account of life and work in the post office today.

--Forward Motion staff

Massacre In Lebanon

Shatila and Sabra. Now we add two more names, these Palestinian camps in Lebanon, to the list of cold-blooded massacres carried out in this century. And this is not the first time Palestinians have made this list. If you recognize the names of Dier Yassin or Kfar Kassem, you know that the Palestinian people have already faced equally cruel massacres as part of the terrible experience of being driven from their homeland by the Israelis.

Dier Yassin. Here, on April 8, 1948, the International Red Cross confirmed reports that the Zionist group Irgun Zvei Leumi had slaughtered two hundred and fifty-four Palestinian men, women and children. Many people do not remember these murders, but Menachim Begin certainly does. Begin, leader of the Irgun terrorist group that carried out the slaughter, boasted of it in his book, The Revolt: The Story of Irgun.

In Jerusalem, as elsewhere, we were the first to pass from the defensive to the offensive...Jewish forces proceeded to advance through Haifa like a knife through butter. The Arabs began to flee in panic shouting "Dier Yassin!" (P. 165.)

Kfar Kassem. At this Palestinian village close to Israel's border with Jordan, another massacre took place on the eve of the 1956 Suez invasion. At 4:30 that afternoon, Israeli army forces announced a curfew to take effect one half hour later. Between 5 and 6 that evening, Israeli soldiers rounded up villagers returning from work unaware of the order. The Israelis murdered thirty-seven people. The oldest was 66, the youngest was eight. Later, the Israeli government fined the commander of the Kfar Kassem operation: one Israeli penny--for thirty-seven Palestinian lives.

But there is no need to go back in history to find out how little the Israeli leadership thinks of Palestinian lives. Three months before the Shatila and Sabra massacres, Prime Minister Begin called the Palestinians "two legged beasts" in an address to the Israeli Knesset. And then he went ahead with his orders to saturate West Lebanon with napalm and phosphorous and

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fragmentation bombs that left thousands of Arabs dead and wounded and hundreds of thousands homeless. Thousands more are now "detained" in prison camps.

With this in mind, do the massacres at Shatila and Sabra really seem so shocking, so illogical or unexpected? Once the Palestinian troops had withdrawn, the Israelis sent in the Phalangists--the Lebanese fascists, with their long-expressed murderous intentions toward the Palestinians. Is it so hard to believe that the Israeli army supplied the Phalangists with arms and maps, shot flares for their allies to massacre by, and stood by passively while the cart-loads of bodies were dragged from the camps?

In the Phalangists, the Israelis have chosen for allies a political movement which took the name of and modeled itself on the Spanish Fascists of the 1930s. And in invading Lebanon this time, Israeli leaders spoke repeatedly of "cleaning out" or "mopping up" Palestinian people's resistance--just the phrases used to justify the reign of terror against civilians in Vietnam a few years ago.

* * * *

The modern world has brought us grim experience with total violence toward a people simply because of their race or religion or nationality. After a people's rights have been denied, after they have been driven from their land, out of their homes and businesses, and confined to camps; after a propaganda campaign has depicted this people as less than human--if after all this, freedom fighters still seek their freedom, what is left in the arsenal of aggression? White European cavalry officers understood this in America when they handed out blankets infested with small pox to wipe out Indian tribes. The German Nazis knew this; they called the genocide of the Jews the "final solution."

The Israelis in turn have learned how deep you have to go to eradicate the fight for freedom. Like all invading armies, they looted. They not only used cluster bombs against civilians, they destroyed civilian hospitals. And once Israeli troops entered West Beirut, they tore down signs bearing the name Palestine where it appeared on public buildings. They broke into the Institute for Palestinian Studies, a major cultural and research center, and carried off 25,000 books from its library.

What do we make of a military effort directed not just at defeating an opposing army, but at the people itself? What do we make of an invader who seeks to obliterate a people's culture, its very name?

The stark truth is that until the Israeli government acknowledges the Palestinians' right to exist alongside Jews, with a national homeland they can call their own, the Israelis will find no solution to the problem of four and a half million Palestinian people other than a war of annihilation against that people. We in the United States, especially American Jews, have a responsibility to speak out. Israel could not maintain itself from one year to the next except for the steady flow of financial aid from the U.S. government and North American Jews. And no government other than the South Vietnamese has received as much military assistance as Israel. The U.S. may rebuke the

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Israelis now, but as long as U.S. support continues unabated, as long as the U.S. continues to arm Israel for its war against the Palestinians, we can expect U.S. bullets to be used in murderous rampages like those at Shatila and Sabra.

--September 1982

Forward Motion staff and friends

CAN JUDAISM SURVIVE?

Since its beginnings, the idea of Zionism has always been linked to the question of the survival of the Jews.

Zionism never became real for the masses of Jews until the Holocaust. After the diaspora (or dispersions) of the fourth century, only 2-3% of the world's Jews lived in Palestine.

The rest scattered. There are Jews on every continent, of every color, of many cultures and nationalities.

Out of being a separate subculture in every society they lived in, never being the dominant force in any government, relying on the written word and oral tradition to keep memories and values alive, a uniquely Jewish culture, independent of national boundaries, evolved.

The Holocaust dealt that culture a profound shock. The wave of European Jewish refugees that swept into Palestine in the 1930s and especially the 1940s was not composed of joyful and willing pilgrims making a long awaited homecoming.

The refugees were people who had seen their homes and families disappear forever. They had seen the people they had been raised to revere as models of ethical conduct and dignity reduced to an absolute degradation from which their principles couldn't save them. They had seen everything they had ever thought they understood about rationality and decency and the ways it could be possible for one human being to treat another burned to ashes in the ovens of

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Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

This was a generation that had decided that the world is divided into two kinds of beings--hunters and hares, oppressors and victims. They had decided that they were NEVER AGAIN going to be victims.

It was this generation that colonized Palestine.

The justifications the colonizers and their supporters provided and provide today have never had much to do with a frustrated Jewish national identity, a desire to return to a fondly remembered homeland. Such arguments are for scholars.

The reason I have heard over and over in my education as a Jew is that we simply needed a safe place where there couldn't be any more pogroms, any more Nazis.

Of course there was a big problem with the territory chosen to become this haven--and everybody knew what it was. THERE WERE ALREADY PEOPLE LIVING THERE.

At the time of the UN partition of Palestine in 1947, Jewish immigrants were still less than half of the population. The indigenous Palestinian people who resisted the breakup of their land--which would have saddled them with a neighbor who had frank designs on the whole territory--were driven out.

Since then Israel has adopted a policy of unremitting expansion.

During the Six Day War, which Israel had provoked by initiating a series of border clashes with Syria, the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Gaza Strip, and parts of the Sinai peninsula were taken over by Israel.

Arabs in the occupied territories are treated much as Jews were treated in the ghettos of Europe. Their villages are destroyed. They are forced by government programs out of their homes and into Israel to work at menial jobs. Their educational institutions are repressed. They are subject to seizure, indefinite imprisonment and extended interrogations which feature the use of dogs, burnings and electrical devices designed for torture. (Someone had to order those devices built and installed, so somewhere there is a policy, not just regrettable mistakes and questionable incidents.)

Israel has pursued the Palestinians into Lebanon which it has invaded on and off since 1969, creating a huge Lebanese population in the refugee camps.

Now we see the invasion of Beirut. We see the spectacle of Jews dropping cluster bombs and phosphorous on civilian populations. We see 100,000 homes destroyed.

And we are to be persuaded that the commission of these atrocities serves the causes of Jewish survival.

Banal as it is, one cannot help but compare the systematic campaign of

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dispersal and obliteration that Israel is waging against the Palestinians with those which have been waged against the Jews for centuries.

When one becomes one's enemy, then one is defeated utterly. When you adopt the behavior of those who sought to destroy you, then they have won, they are walking around in your skin and you are dead.

From the beginning, Israel has been linked to colonialism. First Britain, then the United States have been the economic and political supports for Israel. We can see the price the U.S. demands in the Israeli foreign policy. Israel has run U.S. guns to the dictators of El Salvador and South Africa, to Somoza and, incredibly, to the anti-semitic regime of Argentina.

When Jews give aid to the torturers of Jews, how is that survival? When the children of ghetto-dwellers give aid to the apartheid regime of South Africa, how is that survival? When the descendants of the Maccabees, who withstood the invasion of the greatest power of their world, become the foreign occupier that a whole population rises up to cast out, how is that survival?

This question of how the meaning of being a Jew can survive this kind of consciousness is especially poignant for Jews in the United States.

Most of us are white. We live in a country where every institution without exception gives privileges to white people. It has been said that in the U.S. people of color ARE the Jews.

So what are we? When Jews first came to this country we were leaders and fighters in the great movements for social change. Many of the heroes of the labor movement--many of the women of the first garment strikes, for instance--were Jews.

Now we see a split in the political and ethical consciousness of North American Jews. Instead of the shirtwaist strikers we see Jewish women like Bobbie Fieldler and Roberta Weintraub leading racist segregationist groups.

The influence of Zionism, with its disregard for the human rights of the dispossessed Palestinians has aided to this confusion. The consciousness which can condone the strangling of a child's intellect in the public schools of Los Angeles is that which can find an excuse for the slaughter of the children of Lebanon.

Political solutions to the Mideast crisis have been proposed. The PLO program calls for a democratic secular state where Jews, Palestinians, and Christians could live together. Lately the PLO has signaled its willingness to consider two separate states.

If any political solution is to be reached at all, Israel must abandon the Zionist idea that the desperate need of one group of people justifies the elimination of another.

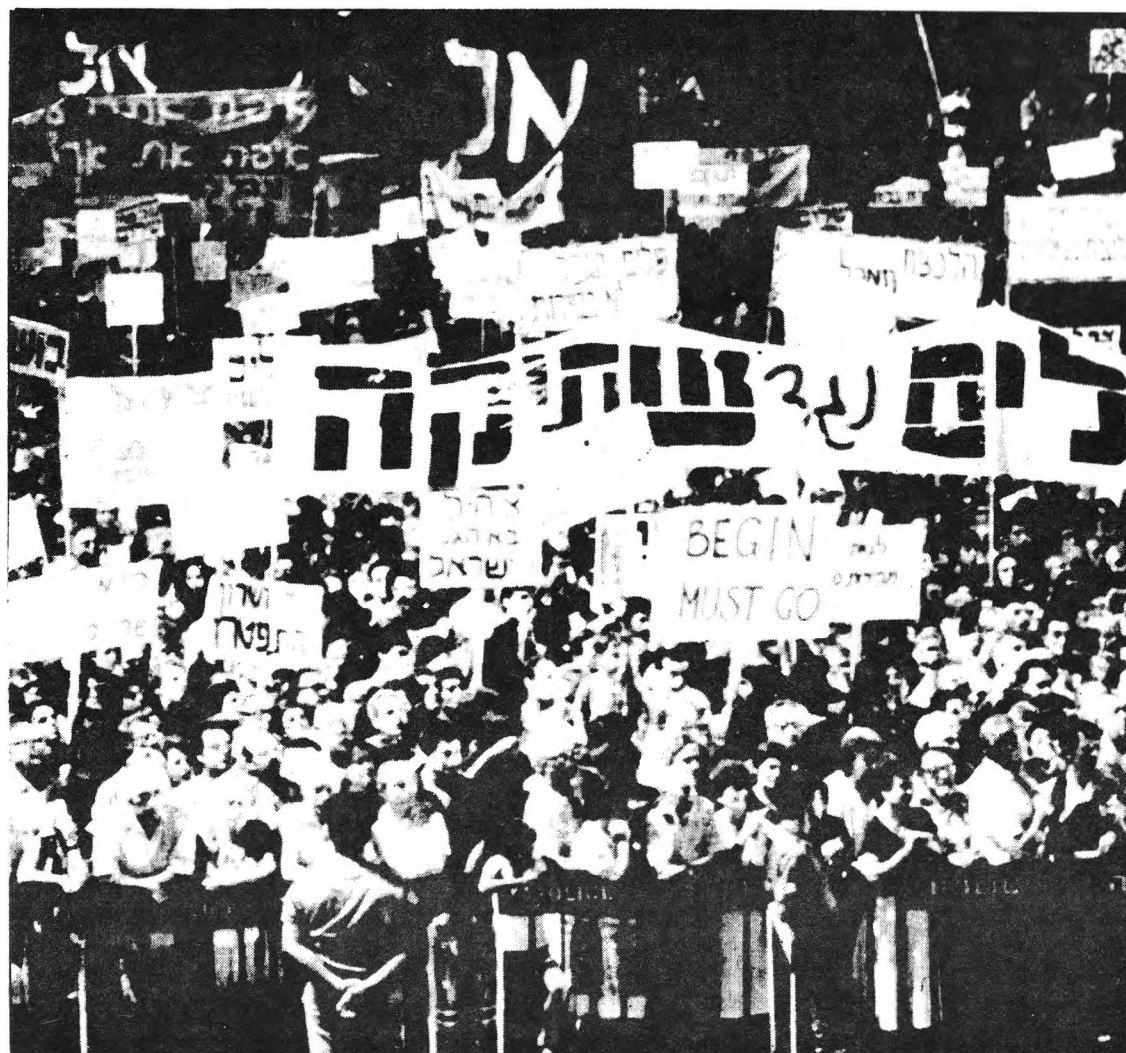
There must be a return to the understanding that the choices do not come

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down to the role of oppressor or victim. Maybe the key to what kept Jewishness alive for centuries without national boundaries or armies is the search for that third alternative.

--Robin Poldolsky

(Speech given at Los Angeles feminist forum on the invasion of Lebanon, August 18, 1982.)



Hope for survival: an estimated 400,000 Israelis rallied against the Beirut massacre and called on Begin and Sharon to resign. (UPI photo)

Labor Tries New Coalitions In The Reagan Era

The L.A. Coalition Against Plant Shutdowns

In the Spring of 1980, Los Angeles was losing its automobile industry. Ford's Pico Rivera plant was in the process of shutting down, and GM South Gate was threatening to close. UAW members at the South Gate and Pico Rivera locals responded by initiating the Los Angeles Coalition to Stop Plant Closings (CAPS).

The Coalition was unique for our city in that it brought together, at least initially, representatives of most of the organized Left as well as quite a few local unions. URW, USWA, ILWU and UE locals--some of which had significant Left influence--got involved as did to a lesser extent OCAW, AFT, SEIU, AFSCME, UFCWA, IAM, IBEW, UTU, IBT. The Watts NAACP chapter, La Raza Unida Party, the Black Employees Association, the NLG and ACLU, and religious organizations and individuals also participated. Instructors sent whole classes from the UCLA Planning Department and Labor Center.

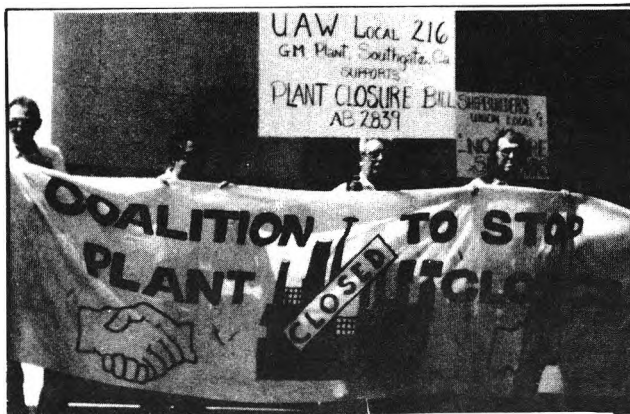
A number of things favored the development of the Coalition and its work. Plant closings catch supposedly responsible corporate leaders with their pants down. The unilateral, underhanded approach most U.S. corporations have taken to factory shutdowns; their refusal to look at how their decisions affect the workers and communities involved; the sheer numbers of factories that have closed their doors in communities where they were a major employer: all these things arouse anger and a sense of betrayal, as well as anxiety and feelings of desperation among the people touched by this experience. The Coalition to Stop Plant Closings offers a way for people to fight back by joining in a movement to regulate corporate decisionmaking on plant closings and promote viable economic alternatives. While big business denounces any attempt to regulate plant closings, they are hard put to come up with any palatable alternatives to alleviate the suffering they have created. Thus the corporations are morally vulnerable on the plant closings issue. Progressive community--especially religious--groups are drawn to the issue on humanitarian grounds. They see what happens to their communities and congregations when neighborhoods and families are disrupted by long-term unemployment.

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The backbone of the plant closings movement has been the trade unions. The success of the Republicans in the 1980 elections demanded that labor reassert its credibility as a movement dedicated to economic and social justice. Reagan's charge that organized labor did not represent its members pushed national union leaderships to establish some new links to their nominal constituencies. Solidarity Day signaled a loosening up of the political climate in the labor movement. This greater openness has been felt as much or more at the local level as at the national level. Today labor leaders give greater emphasis to anti-corporate politics, show greater interest in labor developing its own legislative agenda, and are more willing to experiment with some forms of rank and file mobilization.

In the Coalition to Stop Plant Closings, labor leaders find an organizing project they can work with to meet the demands of their members for economic relief. Right-of-center labor leaders feel betrayed by the big companies which shut their doors even when they are making a profit, which have long-term investment strategies but don't tell the unions anything until the last possible moment, which go to the media with a briefcase full of sob stories about their troubles. But the anti-corporatism of many mainstream labor leaders is often pretty confused and limited, and their goal is often to reestablish closer cooperation between labor and management. They see that they need to organize today against the corporations in order that they be taken seriously once again. Populist in outlook, many think that with a reassertion of labor's rights and needs that the worst corporate greed and excesses can be brought under control. Thus, while living with the Coalition's anti-corporate politics, mainline labor's support for plant closings legislation often goes along with support for a variety of politically questionable campaigns to Buy American and to erect steep import quotas. But within the plant closings movement the Left--in and through organizations like CAPS--can promote a more consistent brand of anti-corporate politics.

The Activities of L.A. CAPS



The activities of the Coalition centered on building itself as a viable organization, educating the public, supporting any workers facing a closure, and supporting state legislation on the issue of plant closings. Members formed committees on Education, Publicity, Legislation and Mass Action. The Mass Action committee took responsibility for the first major action of the Coalition, a demonstration in South Gate which drew 450 people on Labor Day, 1980.

(Prior to this, the biggest public gatherings in South Gate, a largely working class part of southeast L.A., have been the annual Azalea Day parade.)

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In the first year or so after this demonstration, no clear focus for the Coalition's work emerged. The legislative session was over, and our monthly educationals, while moderately successful, didn't give anyone work to get involved in. We undertook a variety of different projects, including production of pamphlets on the Coalition, an Early Warning Signals manual for workers, work with the governor's commission on the issue and a push to get the state to help retrain workers, support work for GE workers 90 miles away in Ontario (the company eventually shut down a profitable factory which was the third largest employer in this city), work with a Steelworkers local and the plant management at Bethelhem to forestall a closing there, a fundraising showing of a one-man play about Woody Guthrie, a speakers bureau, moving showings. There were also proposals for a newsletter and suggestions to work with locals at several additional plants targetted for shutdown or to reopen one which had closed, but none of these projects got off the ground.

Then Church and Society, through its very capable representative to the Coalition, initiated a project backed by liberal and church money which significantly redirected the Coalition: the Western International Conference on Economic Dislocation. Held in November 1981, it was endorsed by 80 groups and brought together over 550 people from unions, religious groups, academia and government, and community organizations from throughout the state, from Oregon and Washington, and from other southwestern states, as well as a delegation of unionists from Mexico. The three day conference in L.A. discussed plant closings, capital flight, runaways, U.S.-Mexico labor issues, technology and the work force and other issues of economic dislocation now severely affecting communities in the region.

The CAPS gained a new lease on life following this highly successful conference. Mainly at the instigation of people from the Bay Area Plant Closures Project a follow-up meeting was organized. The result was the birth of a loose statewide network of coalitions and activists, plans for quarterly statewide meetings, the selection of four co-chairs from around the state and a high level of enthusiasm for the work which was tempered by an almost-realistic appreciation of the size of the job. Though attendance at the conference was disproportionately from Northern California, still the turnout gave L.A. organizers enough confidence in the potential for the movement and enough new contacts to set about building up the Coalition. Also enough money was generated at the conference to pay for phones, an office and some expenses. Grant money paid for staff for a while.

During the Winter and Spring, L.A. CAPS raised money for the besieged GE-Ontario workers, did an outreach/training program which drew in new union participation and expanded the core of Coalition organizers, and conducted an energetic campaign in support of plant closings legislation sponsored by the State Federation of Labor. In addition statewide steering committee meetings were held in Salinas in February and in Sacramento in May which brought in new participation from laid-off Salinas rubber workers and from Libby-Owens-Ford glass workers who had been laid off when the GM Fremont plant shut. The May meeting also planned for the legislative hearings on the State Federation legislation in June. These statewide meetings were very important in boosting morale, in expanding the statewide resources and in ensuring communication and skills sharing. The Bay Area Project was very important in

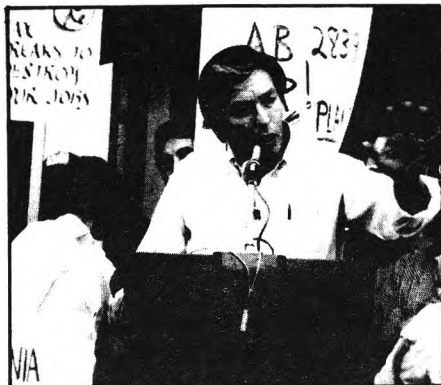
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sustaining the statewide work, including the lobbying. The political climate in the North is more progressive and supportive and the Bay Area has a larger pool of activists to draw on than L.A. They also had more experience in dealing with shutdowns, including Mack Truck (UAW) and Colgate-Palmolive (ILWU), had closer contact with the State Federation's lobbying resources, and were closer to the state capital in Sacramento.

The Legislative Campaign

At the initiative of socialists on staff, the California State Federation introduced comprehensive legislation in 1982. Modeled on bills introduced in Oregon, where it fell just one vote short of passage, and Ohio, the proposal would have required advance notice requirements for plant shutdowns according to plant size, good faith bargaining with both employee representatives and community groups, the opening of books of plants planning to close, and company-funded replacement of lost tax benefits for the community. Maxine Waters, a dynamic, Black, independent-minded L.A. Democrat carried the bill in the Assembly. Her district had seen every major employer in the area shut down and move out--Firestone, Goodyear and then South Gate. Jack Henning, the State Federation President, relied for much of his information and lobbying effort on his progressive staff. The IAM's California Conference of Machinists had a full-time lobbyist who worked very hard for the bill's passage. Left-wing activists from the Plant Closings Coalition went into the campaign with limited legislative and lobbying experience.

The big showdown came at the June hearings. Many of us never thought the legislation would get even this far. We went all out to get people to these hearings. One hundred and fifty people rode buses up from southern California, including cannery workers on lay-off in San Diego, steelworkers on strike and layoff from the L.A. area, laid off and retired autoworkers, a couple of brave Teamsters, garment workers, and many others. Many were rank and filers who were told to go by their unions, weren't too sure what the issue was when they first got up there, but wound up fascinated by the legislative process. Many others were those directly affected by plant closings. Timberworkers came down from the redwood country complete with chainsaws and bushy red beards and scared the wits out of the manufacturers' lobbyists. Longshoremen, Teamsters



Pete Beltran, President, UAW Local 645.



Mary McDaniels, President, UE Ontario, testifies before the hearing.



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and Machinists from the Bay Area chartered buses. Teamster busdrivers simply parked their buses and sat in on the hearings.

Nervous legislators had originally planned to torpedo the hearings, since they didn't want a vote taken on the measure. But union members packed the hearing room and sat patiently through two hours of legislative maneuvering, and basically intimidated the legislators into hearing the bill. Over two hours of testimony were heard, which was unprecedented considering the bill had been through a round of hearings already; but no one was willing to be the one to shut the speakers up. Jack Henning gave us all a thrill when he described the bill as the product of a real rank and file movement. Religious leaders spoke about the tolls taken on their congregations. Mary McDaniel, president of the UE local at GE's shutdown Ontario plant, received a spontaneous standing ovation and drew tears from many listeners as she told of GE workers' experiences. She warned the legislators that political change was inevitable to stop these outrages, and the legislators could choose whether they were going to make the change or be its target.

Going into the day's hearings, organizers had been convinced that they did not have the votes to carry the bill out of committee. During the hearings, a couple of legislators began to waver, and Jack Henning began looking for ways to keep from having the committee vote on the spot. Coalition members and workers in the hearing room, aware of the massive effort it had taken to mobilize for the hearings, were reluctant to allow a postponement and wanted legislators to go on record. Finally, rather than call for a vote, Henning proposed that the matter be referred to subcommittee for "cleaning up". Shouts of "Take the Vote, Take the Vote" could be heard, and there was some confusion among organizers who had not anticipated the maneuver. (No one else had either--Henning apparently made up this parliamentary procedure right then.) Henning, Waters, one other key legislator, the Coalition's lobbyists, and Pete Beltran, an insurgent UAW Local President caucused heatedly just outside the hearing room. Beltran and the Coalition's representatives argued for a vote, demanding that committee members go on record for or against labor. Henning scoffed, saying it didn't matter whether the Democrats voted for the bill or not, since they would get COPE and CAP endorsements regardless. Waters, though visibly torn, was not willing to break with Henning at this point and finally agreed to the unusual committee referral. When the compromise was announced, boos and chants of "We'll Be Back" went up from the crowd.

Time was to show that demanding a vote at that point was tactically the right thing to do. The subcommittee referral defused the issue and strung it out over the summer. Then there was another even more inconclusive committee vote at a time when CAPS and the statewide network couldn't mount a big mobilization to keep the heat on the legislators. Also, by then the bill was so diluted that few people had much enthusiasm for it. The June hearings, the back room caucus, and the slow death of the legislation--at least for 1982--showed how far the movement had come in a short time, and how much farther it still has to go.

Some Accomplishments

To date, CAPS, as part of the statewide movement against plant closings, can point to a number of accomplishments.

(1) The movement has pushed both labor leaders and rank and file activists to go beyond their shop floor organizing and individual contract negotiations to develop an economic program and a legislative strategy to deal with corporate flight. While progressive economists, together with the IAM, took the lead in formulating economic program and strategy, the CAPS movement has tried to evaluate these proposals independently. Moreover the Coalition has taken the lead in popularizing this program among the rank and file and at the community level. The 1982 legislative campaign showed that this kind of organizing could really make a difference.

(2) The movement has made trade unionists across the state and region more aware of contractual language they can win against plant closures (through penalizing the company by means of severance pay, commitments against shipping out production, etc.) and how to gain some leverage in concessions bargaining. The leadership of unions like the UE which organized workers at GE-Ontario have been very important here.

(3) Diverse forces are working together that have not worked together in the past. The movement is diverse politically, in that a spectrum of Left-wing activists are working with each other and with more middle of the road people from the labor movement. The L.A. CAPS made the difficult transition from a Left-dominated to a Left-Center coalition with the endorsement of the County AFL-CIO and most major active unions in town, including the important UAW regional office. The movement is diverse organizationally, in that labor is working alongside religious, academic and community leaders on more than a one-shot deal. And the movement is diverse geographically, in that a real statewide organization (with regional ties) has been built around this issue; an organization which has been able to assert itself in the California Assembly as a political force.

(4) Both through legislation and by other means, the issue of plant closings has been brought to the public attention and kept in the spotlight, and the potential for publicity continues to be there. 60 Minutes had a segment last January on Ge-Ontario, PBS aired a documentary on unemployed timber workers, newspapers gave close coverage to the legislative campaign, and there are ongoing requests for speakers by labor, community and religious organizations around the state. Audiences have been very receptive to speakers, panels and workshops on the topic of plant closings. Thus the Left has had the opportunity-- in a mass way--to open discussion about the rights of labor and the rights of labor, the use of political power to control private capital, including nationalization, the internationalization of capital, and other issues.

Some Problems

There are several problems that Coalition organizers have come up against, only some of which were we able to deal with effectively.

One key problem has been to maintain and enhance the organizational diversity of the Coalition and prevent it from becoming thoroughly labor-dominated. Historically, U.S. labor has only been willing to cooperate with other social movements if it was firmly in the driver's seat. That is still the case today for the most part. The AFL-CIO would rather have a narrower--and, yes--a less effective campaign but maintain firm political control of it, than build a broader, more effective movement but have to share decisionmaking and power on a co-equal basis with other movements.

Left activists in the Coalition saw the problem, although some thought it was more or less of a problem than others. But we did not always have the political experience or depth to actually go beyond the classic form of a labor plus everybody else coalition. Having worked hard to gain some necessary legitimacy through the endorsement and participation of county and state labor federations, Left-wing Coalition members had difficulty gaining, maintaining or winning new community involvement, especially from oppressed nationality organizations whose suspicions of organized labor run deep. This, in turn, weakened the Left's position within the plant closings movement, since we lacked political support in certain struggles with Right-of-center union leaders.

Church involvement in the Coalition's work has proved to be pretty important, as it has been recently in other places and around other issues. The struggle to keep the Youngstown steel plants open was led by religious activists; and, of course, the churches have been very active in the nuclear freeze movement, and on Central American issues. It was essential that churches come into the Coalition and the movement in their own right, not just as a back-up to organized labor. This was one thing that made the Economic Dislocation Conference so successful.

We have only just begun to learn about church infrastructures and protocols. We are slowly becoming familiar with the ideological bent of some white church activists. While they are willing to struggle within the political arena, they are reluctant to become or appear partisan. Some religious activists are prone to an even-handed, idealistic approach and like to think it is possible to significantly change the behavior of certain classes. We need to develop effective ways to win church activists to a more politically consistent anti-corporate stand. We also need to find ways to do grass roots outreach with and through the churches.

Whatever the Left's shortcomings in working with representatives of largely white church organizations, the bigger challenge is to build ties with the churches in the Black and Latin communities. (The problem of relations with the Catholic Church in the Latin community is a major question that needs to be looked at separately some other time.) These days the churches are some

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of the best organized community-based groups. They have credibility, a political orientation, some financial resources, and might reasonably be expected to be interested in the issue of plant closings. But with the Black churches, as with Black organizations in general, the Left did not develop an approach which was able to consistently address the particularly devastating effects of plant closings on oppressed nationality workers and communities. To date the plant closings movement has not begun to tap the political energies and determination of Black people for economic and social justice.

There are several things we need to start doing differently. For one thing, the Left needs to develop new organizational forms independent of labor's bureaucracy, a different style of work, and its own connections with community leaders and activists. We can't simply wait around griping that organized labor isn't doing anything. The fact is that left to their own devices most union staffers are consistently lousy at even the most minimal things like making sure that conference panels are not totally white. Only a strong and relatively independent movement whose behavior is distinguishable from organized labor's more unsavory white supremacist history, will gain credibility with oppressed nationality people.

To get further than just a foot in the door, however, we need to pay attention to a program that will speak to the particular concerns of oppressed nationality communities for jobs, job training, and redevelopment. We also need a better sense of the political debate over program going on within the Black and Latin communities. To be effective, we need to know who is working to change things and in what direction. We have to flesh out an approach that compliments the thinking of progressive community leaders and activists. For example, the enterprise zone proposal is a form of concessions bargaining aimed at minority communities, with jobs as a specific trade-off against working conditions, wages, and everything else. (New Jersey just passed a statewide enterprise zone law.) This is a case where Right-wing economists were able to come up with a program for Capital and sell it on the basis of specific conditions, both objective and subjective, within the minority communities. There is support in L.A. among some Black politicians and community leaders for the enterprise zone on the grounds that it's coming whether they like it or not, and they want a piece of the action. (It also fits in somewhat with the "economic counter-offensive" line of the Urban League and Jesse Jackson.) We have to take all this into account when approaching Black community organizations and leaders around the issue of plant closings and economic redevelopment.

Another set of problems relate to contradictions that existed among the union forces in the Coalition. Here the Left handled itself somewhat better.

From the start we knew that to be effective, the Coalition had to gain the support of union locals and county and state labor councils. In addition to overcoming some labor people's aversion to working in such a politically and organizationally diverse coalition, there were the usual intra- and inter-union rivalries to be dealt with. For example, initially the County Federation would not endorse the Coalition because the powerful UAW Region 6 Director opposed it. Why? Because Local 216 at GM which had been instrumental in initiating the Coalition was also instrumental in opposing the

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Director in the last election. Only later with the success of the November conference and the weakening of the opposition in Local 216 was this overcome. At a more basic level, some locals-- even where they had endorsed the Coalition--were afraid to work with it when their plant was threatened. They feared that militance and the possibility that management would view the Coalition as "outside interference" would jeopardize their chances of negotiating severance benefits.

But having gained some support and legitimacy, there was a strong pull on the Left to be sucked into the orbit of the union leadership and staff, especially as we became more involved in the legislative campaign. It took a clear idea of what we were trying to do and who we were dealing with to keep plugging away at developing the Coalition's ties to the rank and file. Our experience showed that progressive staff--however helpful and well-placed--has room to operate only as long as there is rank and file support. It may seem paradoxical, but the more the Coalition took an independent stand vis-a-vis the State Federation President on any particular tactical question, the less the sympathetic staff person could do to help us. He became more of a threat to the leadership--and therefore more vulnerable himself; after all, he was hired by the leadership. As long as there is any tendency to rely on union staffers to lead the charge, the Coalition's independence will perpetually be threatened by politics internal to various organizations over which we can have little control.

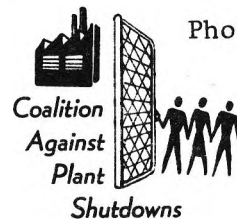


official labor machinery and the COPE and CAP committees. But we need to be working now to improve our knowledge of the legislative process so that we can work out an independent tactical line. Ultimately we need to figure out when or whether to expand legislative lobbying into direct electoral work.

Another problem facing the Left was to work out our own legislative strategy as a strong component of our work. Though many of us were inexperienced, the Coalition's lobbying proved to be surprisingly effective. The disarray of the Democrats meant that there was no clear alternative being pushed by the party to counter what we were proposing. This gave the Coalition a lot of room to operate and exposed bigger rifts than we first anticipated in the Democratic Party in the state. However, given the weakness of the Left, much of this goes beyond anything we could control or influence right now. The initiative is still with the

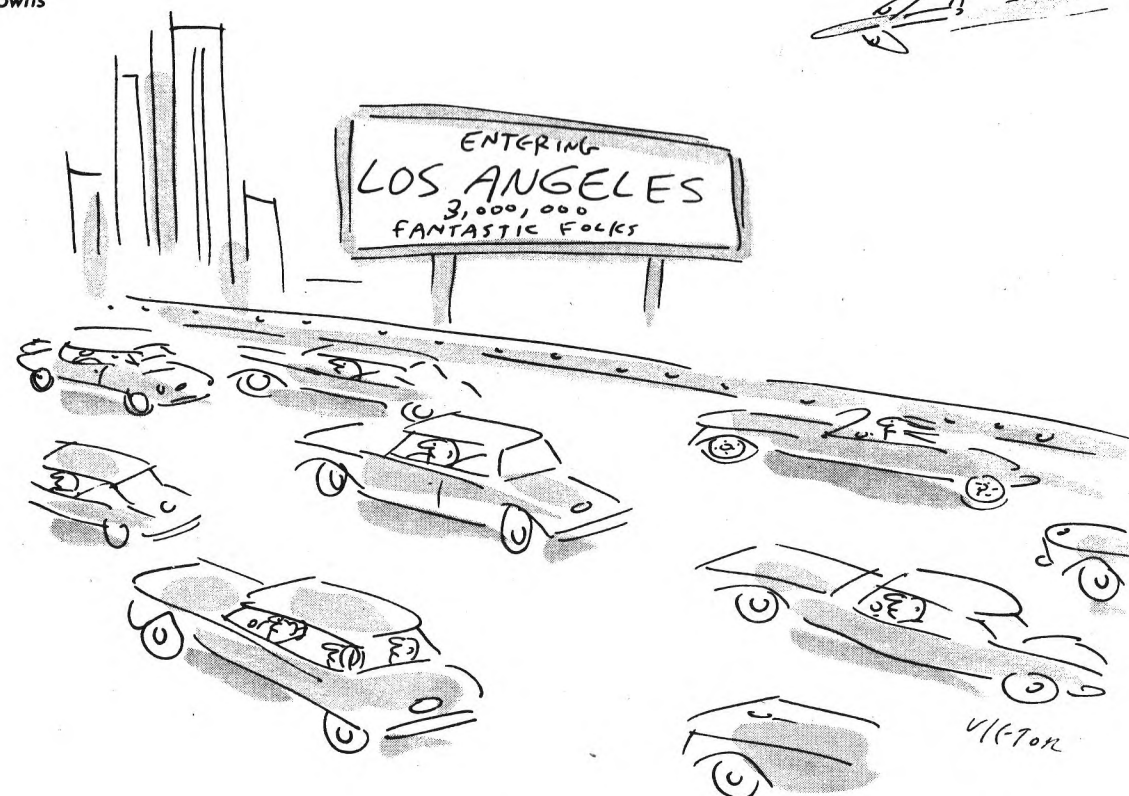
This was one area where we have already locked horns with the union leadership. At the June hearings, State Federation President Henning expressed the official view that Democratic legislators would get COPE/CAP endorsement regardless of how they voted on pro-labor legislation, including ours, and he right for now. The fact is that if the movement is ever to hold the legislature accountable to anyone but the business PACS, it will only be when an independent, progressive mass movement is built around concrete demands. Rank and file lobbying is an important tactic, but once the dramatic impact wears off, lobbying is only effective where the legislators feel it reflects either money or votes, or to some extent, their public image. If the Coalition is to develop significant lobbying abilities, it has to hold the legislators accountable at some point; it has to be able to do something about its friends and enemies in and out of office. (The SDUSA is well aware of this fact. Its solution is to target key jobs in the COPE committees at the county and state levels. But I don't think that's the route we'll want to go.)

Finally, our work in the future needs to better combine a clear vision of what we see as the aims of the movement in the long-term strategic sense with bold, but realistic tactics of what we should be fighting to win today. The plant closings movement offers unique opportunities to do both.



Photos: LACAPS NEWS July 1982

--August 1982
Peggy Baker



Meanwhile, Polo Is In...

A few months ago in Columbus, Ohio, the small map-making business run by Tony and Kay Garza went bankrupt. The savings and loan company foreclosed on their home. Kay was fifty years old and Tony 53, and they had lived in Columbus for thirty years, but they went on the road looking for a new start.

They went first to North Carolina, because everybody knows about the boom in the "Sun Belt." There were no jobs. Finally in July, they wound up back in Texas, where Tony had been born in 1929, when Herbert Hoover's Depression was just getting underway.

There were no jobs in Texas either, though they looked every day for weeks.

On August 13, Tony and Kay Garza stopped looking for work. On that Friday, while Ronald Reagan prepared his latest sales pitch, now for a tax increase, Kay and Tony dropped their dog off with Tony's uncle and got into their '73 Chevy. They drove down Roosevelt Street in San Antonio until they ran out of gas, which wasn't far. Tony got out of the car, opened the trunk, and pulled out a rifle. He returned to the car, and shot his wife and himself in the head.

Tony left a note in his pocket, along with fifty-four cents. The message of Tony Garza, addressed to no one in particular but speaking for millions of Americans went like this:

I have gone as far as I can with our lives. My wife, Kay, and I are hard-working people that have been reduced to beggars almost. We came to San Antonio to work, not to die. But Reagan economics has nothing trickling down to us. I almost cry every time I compare Reagan to Hoover.

Kay and Tony Garza were buried in a Roman Catholic cemetery on a hill on Tuesday, August 17. On that day, unemployment in our country held steady at

19 MEANWHILE, POLO IS IN....

twenty million or so people, many with children whom they cannot feed. Meanwhile, the leaders of our country continue to drink Schweppes, and wear shirts with little alligators, and take their long summer vacations. And in New England, and on estates like Reagan's everywhere, polo is back in style. But behind the noise of the horses and the yachts, above the clink of glasses at the fancy Washington parties, in the silence of the great American heartland, you can still hear the message of Kay and Tony Garza.

--August 19, 1982
Samuel T.



"From the Depths," 1890s drawing

Breaking In

Two miles due west of the Empire State Building there lies the largest automated mail factory in the world, in the midst of what used to be a vast swamp covered with tall grasses and cat tails and crisscrossed by small streams. You can see the factory from the New Jersey Turnpike going south, or Route 1-9 going north or Route 3 going west. It looks the same from any angle; a big blue box sitting on a plot of swamp about the size of three football fields; only the skyline behind it changes. It's not something you would ever go out of your way to see or visit, unless of course you worked there, and the only time you might hear of it and the people who work there is when they go on strike or when a worker gets ground up in the machinery, and even then all you get is a glimpse. I worked there and probably will again as soon as I get straightened out.

Construction of the big blue box began in the spring of 1971 and some thought it would never be finished. For months they pile-driven thirty foot long logs into the briny marsh to find a solid foundation upon which to build. That done, the Army Corps of Engineers discovered another problem with the flammable swamp gas which accumulated under the concrete floor. The growing bubble of gas threatened to blow the structure into the sky unless something was done so they constructed an elaborate system of blowers and ducts to dissipate the dangerous gasses. In spite of everything I may say here, I'm glad it didn't blow up because you can't blame factories or machines for what they do to us or for us, and besides a job is better than no job.

Pat, Tony and I all started there seven years ago. Pat is still there fighting the good fight, Tony will be leaving soon to work with his father-in-law in the real estate business and me, well, I'm just watching the shadows on the wall, taking things day by day, trying to get well. I've been on sick leave for six months.

Pat and Tony were my best friends in high school, years before we started at the post office. We were on the high school relay team together and made it to the state semi-finals in our senior year. Pat ran the first leg, Rich

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the second, Tony the third and I was the anchorman. Things might have worked out better if I had taken the athletic scholarship and gone to a good school like Rich did--he's a lawyer now--but the thought of four more years of running, and heaving my guts up after every race was too big a pill. Besides, Pat and Tony weren't going and I wanted to be with them. Of course I never said that was a reason but Doc says I should express my true feelings and not be ashamed of them. It still feels a little wierd to admit how much I loved those guys.

We spent a lazy summer after graduation, shaping up at A&S Trucking three or four nights a week. In the afternoons we played stickball in the shade of the elevated highway and drank beer on the old piers behind Roosevelt stadium. On the weekends we chased the ladies and made up for a lot of time lost in training. No more practice, no more schoolwork, it was a great summer that went by too quick. In early September, Pat's father told him about a new plant that was opening and how they would be doing alot of hiring. We took the test and over the next six months they hired about four thousand people. Pat, Tony and I were in the first bunch.

On opening day all the new workers sat in the parking lot in our clean blue uniforms and yellow hard hats while the Assistant Post Master General attempted to instill enthusiasm in the new recruits. His words don't exactly stand out in my mind but I remember when the seagull shit on him and I remember that I could see the smokestacks and industrial sprawl of the Kearny refineries to my left and the top of the Empire State Building to my right.

The first year on the job was slow. Mainly the engineers ran the place or tried to get it running. Of course it was boring but we were taking home \$150 a week which was good money in those days and at lunchtime we zoomed out the gate, down the road about 200 yards to Bella's, the closest ginmill, where we sucked up a few beers and smoked a few joints that kept us buzzing for the rest of the afternoon.

For about six months we used dummy parcels instead of real mail. The engineers were like big kids with a new Rube Goldberg contraption: push the button and see what happens. Then tinker around with it, consult the blueprints and push the button again. Half the time we were just sitting around waiting for instructions. God forbid if you should bring a book or radio to pass the time. "The taxpayers aren't paying you to entertain yourselves!" the foremen would shout at us. Back then it seemed like we were in school again, and the foremen were teachers struggling to maintain their authority over the restless, bored students. Of course it wasn't school but old ways of thinking pass on too slowly.

The union started signing people up. Pat got involved and signed up more than anyone else so they appointed him chief steward. His job was made a lot easier because management was too concerned with getting the plant in running order to bother interfering. Pat's foreman was a decent but pathetic specimen who always thought he was dying of something. He already had twenty-five years in the New York City post office before he took the foreman job in Jersey to boost up his pension. He was terrified that he wouldn't make it to retirement. It was a regular thing for him to rush to the medical office

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claiming he was having a heart attack. Once he told us he was dying of cancer. It was always a false alarm but if you didn't know him you would think from the way he looked that he was dying of something. His skin, the color of uncooked dough, looked as if it had been pasted on his brittle frame. He had long skinny feet, legs and arms to match and a cylindrical, bony little torso. "Hey Rigormortis," we teased him, "feeling better today?" But he wasn't a bad guy and he gave Pat a lot of breaks to do union work, in the beginning at least.

By the second year the machines were running smoother and the "live" mail came in like an avalanche. Then it went to the unloading docks where the Mailhandlers pulled sacks and parcels from the trailers and dumped them on conveyors. There was no getting ahead of the work. As soon as you finished one you started another. The conveyors carried the parcels to the clerk keyers who sat for hours in front of a little keyboard like a push button phone and "keyed" the first three numbers of the zip code. I was a keyer and not a very good one I'm proud to say. They wanted us to key 60 parcels a minute all day long. After being keyed, each parcel or sack was then automatically slid onto a tray on the "carousel" which was a large oval track about 100 yards long and forty yards wide. The trays were pulled along to their destination like little cable cars by a chain in the track of the carousel. The trays carried the parcels to the chute corresponding to the zip code where it dropped the mail onto a slide at the end of which was another clerk who sacked it out or changed the label and pushed it onto another conveyor. Out it went to the outbound loading docks on the other side of the building.



GLOBE PHOTO BY JOHN BLANDING

23 BREAKING IN

There were other jobs like rewrap and manual sort but the carousels were their centerpiece of this engineering marvel. There were four of them in groups of two, stacked up one on top of another. Carousel was our name for them, actually they were known as Parcel Sorting Machines or PSM's. They were big and noisy. With their conveyor belts going every which way and steel girders and crossbeams all painted green, we called it a jungle; only there was no sunlight, not even a window, and the only things that grew were a few ulcers and lots of hangovers. It was a jungle with special noises, the clickety-clack of the trays on the track, the hum of a thousand electric motors, the thumping of trays dropping their load and the piercing hiss of pressurized air.

The monotony of the job was bad enough but the noise made it impossible to talk to anyone unless they were right alongside you. Of course the industrial engineers had set it up so that there was no one along side you. "Let the machine work and end once and for all the loafing and goldbricking which is a worker's natural inclination," that was their philosophy. You were surrounded by people in this huge factory but most of the day you were alone with your thoughts and dreams and the mail went by and you moved your fingers and a part of your brain and hands were working without thinking about it. You thought about sex, about the weekend, you sang as loud as you wanted because no one really heard it above the noise, and you looked for every chance to break the monotony of it. A damaged parcel meant getting off the stool, taking it off the conveyor and carefully mending it as if it were your own. An address in semi-literate script called for in-depth study and possibly even consultation with co-workers with whom you shared the chance to think and exchange opinions on whether the zip was 73201 or 13201.

The machines gave off heat as well as noise and it made me sleepy. I would try to get a relief man to cover while I went to the john which was always full of cigarette smoke and people arguing about Reggie Jackson or Martin vs. Steinbrenner, etc., etc. Then there were the ones who never talked like Orson who just smoked and paced and never looked at anyone. Every time he finished his cigarette he would wash his hands and leave the water running. He spent his 12 minute break with his head under the faucet. Orson loved to see water run, or at least know that it was running somewhere. Once he got the key to the porter's room and turned on all the water and locked the door behind him. But management put up with Orson's quirks. After all, he was one of their most productive keyers and there was nothing in the job description that said you had to be able to communicate with your co-workers.

I thought we were moving a lot of mail but the industrial engineers in Washington weren't satisfied. You'd see them walking around in suits and white hard hats, always looking at the machines, as if they ran by themselves. They never acknowledged the worker, not a word, not a pat on the back, not even a nod. The "white hats," we called them, were concerned, however, and in the beginning of the third year they passed this concern down through all the proper channels. Production figures were down 30% from what they had planned. The Assistant Postmaster General blamed the building manager, the building manager blamed the tour superintendents, the tour supers blamed the supervisors and the supervisors blamed the foremen who blamed us.

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Overtime had been up until then on a voluntary basis. Now it was mandatory. We worked 60 hours a week; on weekends, on Christmas and Thanksgiving Day. You needed a doctor's note to get a day off. The foremen timed all bathroom breaks and stepoffs. Disciplinary actions quadrupled. Lunches and breaks were split so half the crew went to lunch while the other half worked. They never turned those machines off and they never stopped unloading trucks. The mail couldn't be processed fast enough but that didn't stop them from jamming it into every crevice. When the system was full they put the mail on skids until there was hardly room to walk. They just wanted to get the mail out of the building and they weren't too particular where it ended up. Foremen and supervisors became experts at falsifying production figures while the tour supers made believe they didn't see what was going on.

Pat was a keyer but he spent most of his time running around filing grievances, arguing with management and dodging falling parcels and sacks. In between the two sets of carousels was an aisle about 15 feet wide. He could look up and see the sackout clerks nearly buried in mail on both sides of the aisle. The first tier was about 20 feet off the ground, the second was about 15 above that. There was a railing so nobody had fallen off so far but that didn't stop 60 pound boxes of books which all too frequently came zooming down the slide and through the railing for the long drop down. It wasn't only books, there were boxes of machine parts, fruit, bowling balls, boxes of live bees. Once a dozen or so metal cannisters came crashing down the slide and up over the railing. Pat stepped out of the way but not before a fine gray dust was splattered over him and the immediate area. He picked up one of the busted cannisters and read: "THE REMAINS OF JOSEPH P. HOUSE". The porter came up and swept up the mess, refilled the cannisters and sent them off to re-wrap. You couldn't tell whose ashes were whose so they got all mixed up. But every time Pat asked the tour supers to put up protective netting he got the same answer; "It's on order, you just make sure everyone is wearing their hard hats." One worker was bending over the water cooler for a drink when smack! A box of books hit him in the back of the head, driving the water spigot through his upper lip and front teeth and knocked him unconscious. He got a three day suspension for being out of his work area without permission. Of course the union beat it but that was management's way of dealing with the accident rate; blame the worker. The poor guy still suffers from dizzy spells.

Tony worked on the sackout on the top level above the tour supers' office. He started dropping boxes down on top of the office at least three times a week. Actually he didn't drop it himself. He would line up a row of boxes with a nice heavy one on the end and wait til another box sent it home. The tour supers suspected it was intentional but they could never catch anyone in particular. God knows they tried, hiding up in the catwalks or behind girders, but the people started bringing in whistles. Whenever anyone spotted management snooping around, they blew the whistle. It was our early warning system.

The protective netting was finally installed but it was cheap and soon it was full of holes and people were still hurt by falling parcels. Gradually it dawned on me that I wasn't a teenager anymore, that the post office was not like school, that work was no passing stage and that aside from raising a

family and dying there was no foreseeable difference between the present and the future. If the thought alone of 40 more years there depressed me, how would I feel after living them? But then how could I walk away from \$200 a week, after taxes.

By the fourth year I was becoming a serious drinker. Joints and beers for lunch carried me through the afternoon but what about the morning? I started meeting Walter from re-wrap for the early bird special at Bella's; two boiled eggs and the "beverage of your choice" for \$1.50. The place had a good crowd at 7AM and it wasn't the eggs drawing them in. Some people get excited when they drink, I got numb. After a few drinks it didn't bother me when Stankiewicz, my foreman, timed my bathroom breaks and complained if I took more than five minutes. It didn't bother me that he was petty, cruel, and vindictive because I stopped listening. I still had to look at him, although I tried to turn away whenever I saw him coming. He always wore white patent leather shoes, white pants and a Hawaiian print shirt. His hair was white, his body and hands were thick and heavy and his arms were tattooed. He had beady little German shepherd eyes that stared dumbly off into space while he solemnly warned you of some petty infraction. Drinking didn't stop me from hating him though. I hated going to work. I hated keying and sacking out and re-wrap. I resented every exertion and every new technique to increase production. It hadn't been this way in the beginning but now I knew that they didn't care about me, I was just a number. All they cared about was covering their asses and meeting some production figures, on paper, that some asshole industrial engineer worked out, on paper. The mail was hurt, the people were hurt but as long as it looked good on paper they were content. I hated the "white hats." I hated their clip boards and stop watches and smugness. I hated the ritual five minute safety talk and "rule for the day."

"The rule for today," Stankiewicz drawled on, "is rule number 122, tripping hazards. Many employees have the bad habit of leaving string and plastic strapping on the floor causing their co-workers to trip and injure themselves. Anyone failing to properly dispose of said items will be liable for disciplinary action."

What about the boxes falling on people, I say to myself. Why do we have to go blind keying in such bad lighting. Why did management dismantle safety devices that were built into the machinery. Why is there no oxygen available for the heart attack cases. I had learned that arguing with them as an individual was a waste of time. You had to do something drastic or someone had to be seriously hurt before they would pay attention.

In the fifth year we went on strike when management tried to change the working hours. Somehow or other this was going to improve productivity. All the overtime they forced us to work was costing them too much money. They just made an announcement one week before it was to take effect. The 4PM - 12 midnight shift was changed to 7PM - 3:30AM and the 7AM starting time was moved to 11AM. They didn't notify or discuss it with the union which was a violation of the contract. Pat went over to the union office and the local President agreed to back a strike, only it had to be called a lockout since strikes were illegal for postal workers. For 4 days we picketed in an icy January rain. We were soaked, muddy, cold and our voices were hoarse from

chanting but it was better than a holiday. We shut the sucker down. To hell with all their machines and engineers and managers, nothing goes without us. Our moment of triumph was cut short when the court intervened and proposed arbitration. The President agreed but Pat told him that the people should have the final say so. The arbitrators decision came down however, and that was it. We never had a vote on it. It was a compromise but Pat and most of the workers were pissed off that the deal was taken completely out of our hands. Pat criticized the way things were handled at the union meeting and on the work floor but the President put the pressure on him. Pat couldn't win a grievance. The word was out in management that he didn't have the local behind him. The President tried unsuccessfully to get him to resign and Pat almost did. A lot of workers didn't understand what Pat was trying to do. When they saw him they saw the union and they felt they had been sold out. People would come up to Pat and say they wanted to resign from the union which hurt him bad since he had signed most of them up in the first place. Pat was under a lot of pressure; from the union, from management and the workers themselves. He developed these open sores on his back and waist. The doctor told him it was shingles, but he stuck it out and the workers still voted for him at election time and went to him for advice. Other stewards handled the grievances but people weren't as gung ho for the union as they had been.

After the strike Stankiewicz went right back to his old routine and I went back to Bella's. His new pet victim was Caroline who was five months pregnant and had been late or absent a few times because she wasn't feeling well.

"This is not a relief agency Miss Johnson," Stankiewicz would growl, "If you can't do what the job demands then you don't belong here."

"It's Mrs. Johnson," Caroline would answer, "And what you talkin bout, relief agency, I've been working since I was 16 years old."

Caroline wanted to keep working at least another month or two. She needed the money, there was no paid maternity leave there, but Stankie wouldn't let up on her. Once in the afternoon she was in the bathroom for about 15 minutes and Stankie was fuming. He waited at the bathroom door until Caroline walked out, looking tired and uncomfortable.

"You were in there for 18 minutes Miss Johnson. No one gets any special treatment here. Stop off is 5 minutes, if you're sick go to the hospital. I don't need you."

Caroline had had it with him long ago but she couldn't hold it in any longer. "Kiss my black ass," she screamed at him. "I'll take as long as I need to take and don't tell me I need to go to the hospital cause you ain't no doctor."

Stankie usually enjoyed tormenting people but he hated loud scenes on the work floor. "I want to speak to you in the office," he said.

The sackout clerks on the tiers above had begun to notice this scene going on below.

"You call my steward then I'll go to the office," Caroline replied.

"This is a direct order," he said gritting his teeth and waving his finger in her face. "You follow me to the office now!"

"You call my steward and get your fingers outta my face!"

"This is your last chance," he said, waving his finger a few inches from Caroline's nose. "We know how to handle..."

"SHUTUP" Caroline screamed as she smacked his fingers away from her face with one hand and tried to smack him with the other. Stankie grabbed her arms with his big heavy hands and pushed her with enough force to send her sprawling. Tony had seen the whole thing and started to blow his whistle. In less than a minute 20 more whistles joined in.

"She assaulted me! She assaulted me!" Stankie began to shout to no one in particular and he walked off in a hurry to the office looking over his shoulder to see if Caroline was getting up. Everyone stopped working in the immediate area and ran down to Caroline who was still on the floor, sobbing.

"Are you OK?" Tony asked.

"He's sick," Caroline sobbed. "He's gonna pay if my baby is hurt. I'll kill him." Tony and another worker helped her onto a chair and called Pat on the phone and told him to come over right away. Tony came up and told me what happened and I spread the word to the keyers who all stopped working and came downstairs to see what was going on. In a few minutes Stankie was back with the tour superintendent and two security guards.

"What's going on here; anyone out of their job location is going to get written up," the tour super barked, but no one moved.

"One of your foremen just assaulted a pregnant woman," Pat said.

"If my baby is hurt you're gonna pay!" Caroline screamed at Stankie through her sobbing.

"She's hysterical," Stankie mumbled to the tour super, "we better get her out of here," and he stared at Caroline with his dumb German shepherd eyes.

"I'm not moving until I get an ambulance," Caroline said.

"And we're not working until that foreman is off the floor," Pat added pointing to Stankie.

The tour super thought for a moment and turned to one of the guards. "Call an ambulance. As for the rest of you," he looked around at the faces trying to remember them, "you will be in serious trouble if you are not back at your jobs in five minutes." With that he turned to leave and told Stankie to follow him. Pat talked to the other stewards after the tour super left. All agreed that no one should work as long as Stankie was still on the job but

the majority wanted to call up the union office to get the OK. The President refused to back up any job action but he promised to come out to the plant tomorrow.

"The least we can do is slow down," Tony said rather dejectedly. But we had tried that before, I thought to myself and we never could maintain it for long. I ran back up the stairs to my keying station and unscrewed the red globe and loosened the light bulb, put the red globe over it and waited. When everyone was back I reached for the emergency stop cord. This is for Caroline you bastards, I said to myself, and pulled the cord. The carousel stopped but no lights showed. They didn't know where the problem was or who pulled the cord so they didn't know where to reset it. We didn't move a piece of mail for the rest of the day but it didn't erase the shame I felt for myself and co-workers who should have walked out that door with Caroline and it didn't stop Stankiewicz from typing up a notice of removal. It was waiting for her at the guard shack when her husband and the ambulance arrived.

Caroline got her job back with a month's pay but she hasn't been back since. The baby is healthy anyway and Stankie was transferred to another facility for his own safety. No action was taken against him by management. I was depressed about the whole thing, drinking heavily and missing a lot of work but when I saw Pat get down I really got worried because he was never depressed. Tony and I tried to get him to go out to lunch with us. Pat had always done union work on his lunchbreak before the strike but we got him to go out with us a few times. Once we were in Bella's and I was buying, Heinekens and shots of Irish Mist. After the third round I knew we weren't going back to work.

"Come on, screw this place, let's drive down to the shore," I said.

"Yeah, let's blow this place up before we leave. I know some people got a house in Asbury Park, we can crash there for the night," Tony agreed.

"Come on Pat," I said. "It'll be good for your shingles."

Tony looked at me and winked, "We'll kidnap him. Let's throw him in the van and get outta here," he said. We got up to grab Pat but he laughed and came along peacefully.

We zoomed down the parkway listening to Tony's complete set of Bruce Springsteen on tape, smoking herb, drinking beer and blackberry brandy. We must have been riding on automatic pilot because Tony was zonked. We drove right up to the boardwalk and I ran like a madman right into the water with all my clothes on while Tony laughed hysterically on the beach. I lost my shoes in the water and Tony came in with all his clothes on to help me find them. Pat was laying on the sand soaking up the rays when we walked over and dripped on him.

"Come on in," I said, "this is just what the Doctor ordered."

"I didn't bring a bathing suit," Pat replied and added soberly, "You think they'll buy that excuse we called in?"

"Sure," Tony answered with a grin, "anyone can get a flat tire."

"What are you trying to do, ruin the party," I said and slumped down on the sand next to Pat. I don't know if he answered me because I went right to sleep and didn't wake up until it was dark and Tony was shaking me.

"Get up, we're going back." I dragged myself up and into the van and fell right back to sleep. I dreamed that I was a little boy standing in the corner of a hospital room. My grandmother was lying in the bed dying of cancer and my great aunt was talking to her in a musical brogue.

"Arra sure Mary, we had some fine tymes," my aunt said trying to ease a pain the morphine couldn't touch. My grandmother just shook her head. Her eyes were opened wide and I could see how yellow they looked.

"What's that you're after saying," my aunt asked and bent over closer.

"Ah dearie, we never lived," grandma whispered after a small pause.

"Grandma!" I shouted, "Don't say that." I was crying and I said it over and over again but they didn't hear me. The scene faded away and was replaced by a red screen with dots in it like newsprint. It was all around me and I heard a noise like the sound of the ocean when you put a seashell next to you ear but louder. The more I listened the more it sounded like people screaming but there was no one there. I woke up. Tony was asleep. Pat was driving. The sun was coming up, the sky was red. We were passing through Cateret, where the highway rises up 200 feet and then drops down sharply. Northern New Jersey was laid out right in front of us. You could see the planes coming in to land at Newark airport and the Exxon refineries that filled the air with the smell of cat piss. The burnoff towers in the refineries flickered like candles and the sun was coming up from behind the Manhattan skyline.

"How do you feel," Pat asked.

"Lousy," I replied.

"You drink too much you know," he added.

"You worry too much," I retorted not in the mood for any lecture.

"You guys sound like a bunch of old men," Tony said without opening his eyes.

"We can't even tie one on like we used to. It's that damn job, it gets to you after a while." Tony sat up and yawned, "We're like dogs that are being trained to move the mail. First they break you in, let you know who's boss. Then you're just supposed to do whatever they want you to do and be happy with the occasional bone. What a way to live."

"It's not living," I said, "It's just the breaking-in process."

Shortly thereafter, Pat and Tony convinced me to go up to the "farm" and dry out. That's where I am writing this from. Tony is getting married and will be leaving the post office to work with his father-in-law. Pat is getting together a slate to run against the incumbents in the next union election. If and when I get out of here I'll get involved with the campaign. I still think about that dream I had and the question it posed for my own life. I don't want to end up an old man dying in some hospital feeling like I never lived but how should one live so that your life is not a waste? There is no simple answer but I feel a step in the right direction is to fight against anyone or anything that tries to press you into a little mold, that tries to turn you into a cog in a machine or a pawn in their game. You have to fight to live. Drinking and destroying yourself is just giving up the fight.



Review and Analysis

National Liberation and National Communism

MUSLIM NATIONAL COMMUNISM IN THE SOVIET UNION: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World. By Alexandre A. Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush. University of Chicago Press, 1979. 267 pp.

For many of us who became Marxists and revolutionaries during the 1960s and 1970s, the example of the Soviet Union was far from an attractive alternative to the wretchedness of capitalism in the United States. In fact many activists openly proclaimed opposition to the aims and practices of the Soviet regime at the time. In part in an attempt to condemn the policies followed by Krushchev and then Brezhnev and their associates, many Marxists looked back in time to the "good old days" of the 1920's to 'fourties, when Stalin led the Soviet state.

Many revolutionaries gravitated to the example of that era because those years, in part, were ones of great experimentation and development of new ideas on how a social system should operate. The Soviet Union of the Stalin era was acknowledged by most communists to have been a socialist society and an uncompromising foe of Western imperialism.

Marxist gravitation toward that era had a particularly unhealthy side--an uncritical acceptance of virtually every policy of the Soviet state and party at that time. Today, in part prodded by Soviet expansionism in the last decade, a more detailed examination's of the Soviet Union past and present has opened up on the Left and among progressives.

Two academic scholars, Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, have contributed to this developing debate. Bennigsen and Wimbush both have years of background in Soviet and Middle Eastern studies. Bennigsen is the former Director of Studies at the Ecole des Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales, University of Paris while Wimbush has been a Soviet affairs analyst for the Rand Corporation.

In Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union, Bennigsen and Wimbush offer important insight into one of the most difficult problems faced by the

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Soviet revolutionaries in the early years of the socialist revolution: the oppression of non-Russian nationalities that developed under the old Russian empire. The authors treat the Soviet national questions from the standpoint of a little known tendency called "Muslim national communism." Bennigsen and Wimbush have examined primary source material which can be of great use to those attempting to come to grips with the development of the Soviet social system.

"National Communism" attracted many of the oppressed nationality revolutionaries of the former Russian Empire. As a political tendency it existed both inside and outside the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, including among the Bolsheviks. Though they note certain common characteristics, the authors leave unclear and elusive the dividing line between national communism and, if you will, a communism particular to one's national conditions. For example, the Muslim national communists led by the Volga Tartar Mir-Said Sultan Galiev, a Bolshevik party member, struggled for autonomous, if not outright independent communist parties for the various oppressed nationalities of the former Russian empire now part of the USSR and independent military units. As their view developed, they came out in favor of fully independent socialist nation-states within or outside the USSR. (Note: the authors point out that less than 1% of the people of the oppressed nations lived outside of their national territorial homelands. North American readers should keep this in mind when drawing any analogies to the situation faced by oppressed nationalities in the US. The "dispersion" of Afro-Americans and other oppressed nationalities in the United States is very different from the situation in the former Russian empire.) Also flourishing in the Muslim national communist trend was the idea that the oppressed peoples of the East constituted "proletarian nations" where internal class struggle played a fairly insignificant role compared to the ravages of imperialist oppression.

Many Muslim national communists, as well as national communists in other oppressed nations of the Russian empire, came to hold little hope for or faith in the possibility of a successful socialist revolution in the West. The national communists were uncertain whether a working class which arose under conditions of imperialism and national chauvinism and now ruling under socialism could genuinely come to grips with the necessity for the people of the colonial world to have full and complete self-determination. Many supporters of Muslim national communism endorsed the idea of a "Colonial International" made up exclusively of peoples from what is today called the Third World.

The Bolsheviks initiated many exceptional and precedent-setting policies, including the right of national self-determination for many of the republics of the USSR, challenges to national inequality and chauvinist persecution; development of written languages for many of the oppressed nationalities. Yet by the 1930s a gradual backsliding on these issues could be recognized. The Bolsheviks signaled a sour development in the works by rewriting the history of the Russian empire and its relations with the oppressed nations it subjugated. The Bolsheviks changed their original assessment of the oppressiveness of Russian imperial expansion to a view that this expansion was basically progressive. They argued that expansion united various nationalities and helped advance the so-called backward nationalities. This makes as much

sense as US Marxists defending the capture of the Southwest from Mexico and the defeat of Native Americans as positive because it brought these peoples into the modern world! The new Bolshevik views betrayed not only chauvinism but also a wider drift toward economic determinism throughout Soviet policy.

Bennigsen and Wimbush document the backward slide on the national question through such acts as the expulsion of several nationalities (Kalmyks, Chechentsy, Ingushi, Karachaertsy, Kurds, Balkartsy, Crimean Tartars, and Volga Germans) from their original homelands by the Soviet government. The authorities justified the forced removal with claims that these nationalities fought insufficiently against pro-Nazi collaborators among their own people. In some cases, such as the Volga Germans, these nationalities have not been permitted to this day to return to their homelands and are stilled denied the status of a nation.

If these later steps epitomize the new Soviet policies, the Muslim national communist trend arose earlier, in the first years after the 1917 revolution. Part of their initial attraction lay in warnings of the acute possibilities for the socialist revolution to fail to reach a conclusion or even go backward and as a consequence, take insufficient steps to end oppression of the "border republics" and "smaller nations." The national communists warned of possible retrogression on the part of the Soviet government on the national question.

Some may find these warnings to have been premature. Though intriguing, speculation about past history has real limitations. But the authors argue that a number of the theories and practices of the national communists provided a basis for their isolation from both Russian and oppressed nationality communists sincerely interested in a productive resolution of the national questions. Given the difficulties of the times--imperialist encirclement and outright military intervention on top of Civil War--notions of dividing up Party and State were not going to be very popular among many revolutionaries. Because they were politically isolated, the Muslim national communists' concerns did not get the wide hearing they deserved.

As Bennigsen and Wimbush aptly illustrate, the Muslim national communist trend came to a far from glorious end. Their opponents cannot be said to have defeated them in open debate. Rather they were outflanked organizationally and eventually expelled from the party. Along with countless other oppressed nationality communists not part of this trend, the Muslim national communists were completely eliminated, even vanishing from history records. Soviet practice includes one sad exception: periodically the Soviet authorities will launch campaigns against oppressed nationality nationalism, campaigns targetted against a supposed ideological disease known as "Sultangaliev-ism."

One weaknesses of Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union is that the authors lump together such diverse national leaders as Ahmed Ben Bella (former leader of the Algerian National Liberation Front and the country's first independent government), Libyan leader M. Qaddafi, China's Mao Zedong, and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh because each spoke about a "national" road to socialism in some way. This unfortunate unclarity makes it impossible to

distinguish among revolutionaries trying to apply Marxism to their national conditions (like Mao or Ho), national communists (like Sultan-Galiev or S. Mazlakh or V. Shakhrai of the Ukraine), and nationalists sympathetic to some form of socialism or perhaps just using the idea of socialism (like Ben Bella, the Syrian and Iraqi Bathists). In other words, the authors tend to merge ideological trends which, while sometimes sharing certain common phraseology and views, are really distinct.

Regardless of its weaknesses, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union raises important and provocative issues. Regardless of what the reader concludes about the national communists' views, the subsequent development of the USSR provides food for thought. The domination of the Russians over the USSR; the Brezhnev doctrine of "limited sovereignty" for Eastern bloc countries and others; and the military occupation of Afghanistan all indicate that those in power in Russia have repudiated internationalism.

Muslim National Communism has much relevance for US Marxists. Oppressed nationality leftists face a number of difficulties within the US Left--white chauvinist views and practices concerning the national movements, the right to autonomous forms of organization, certain bizarre internal practices, as well as an often-repeated failure of many white Leftists to appreciate the independent significance of the oppressed nationality movements. These problems have led many revolutionaries to conclude that each nationality within the United States must seek out its own specific "national road to socialism." In the Afro-American movement, a national communist tendency exists and is represented to different degrees by the positions of the African People's Party and the African People's Socialist Party.

National communism and revolutionary nationalism draw strength as tendencies by the often negative experiences many oppressed nationality revolutionaries have had in connection with the white Left. The lack on the part of many white Leftists and communists of a solid and all-round commitment to the struggle against national oppression encourages a view that there must be separate oppressed nationality organizations or parties in order to safeguard the interests of those nationalities. This is not to say that should white leftists redouble their efforts in the struggle against white chauvinism and white supremacy generally that oppressed nationality revolutionaries would abandon any thought of national communism. The appeal of such theories would certainly diminish.

Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union leaves the reader with many unanswered questions. Would a greater presence or representation of oppressed nationalities in the leading bodies of the Soviet party and state have contributed to a better treatment of the national question? Can there be one revolutionary party for what is supposed to be a federation of sovereign socialist republics? These questions go far beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, Bennigsen and Wimbush have made an important contribution to a fuller understanding of the national question and current Soviet policy by showing North American freedom fighters the challenge which awaits us in the struggle for socialism, national equality, and national liberation.

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