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July 1983

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# ***FORWARD MOTION***

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A Marxist Newsletter  
organized by the  
Proletarian Unity League



focuses on important benchmarks. Two are from the Black movement in the United States -- Harold Washington's election as Mayor of Chicago and the latest affirmative action case to receive national attention in the Supreme Court. We also include two further perspectives on the long struggle for national liberation worldwide. R. T. Sims reviews the treatment of non-Russian nationalities in the early years of the Soviet Union, a record with continuing importance for our struggle. This article is a revised version of a speech recently given in New York, and expands on ideas the author presented in an earlier FM book review. And "Dancing" comments in verse on Third World liberation today.

Also in this issue is the first of what we hope will be a regular feature: study guides on current political and theoretical issues. This first set is the beginning of a current internal PUL study exploring issues of the crisis of Marxism and socialism. (If you have trouble locating the suggested readings, send us \$1 per article and we will send you a zerox.)

Rounding out this issue is a talk by a union activist at a recent Labor Notes conference in Boston. The Labor Notes network has grown significantly over the last two years. Conferences in several cities have been important forums for exchanging practical experiences such the talk here. They also have provided opportunities for contact among unionists seeking new programmatic directions for labor.

Finally, friends from the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters group review PUL's Lesbian and Gay Exclusion. Because the pamphlet takes up the political tradition RWH once represented, readers should find this review of special interest.

--FM editors

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Twenty years ago this August, the Black freedom struggle converged on Washington D.C. The demands were straightforward -- civil rights and voting rights -- but democracy for all has never been a straightforward matter here in America. The years that followed brought hard-won progress, and this August 27 we will mark that historic turning point.

A national New Coalition of Conscience of the Black movement has called for a new March on Washington on August 27th. A massive march will "reaffirm the Dream" Dr. Martin Luther King spoke of that day twenty years ago. Over the summer, community activists, church leaders, union progressives and others will be hiring the buses, circulating the flyers, and rallying the troops. We excerpt from one local flyer here. The hard work has already begun and we hope all our readers are taking part!

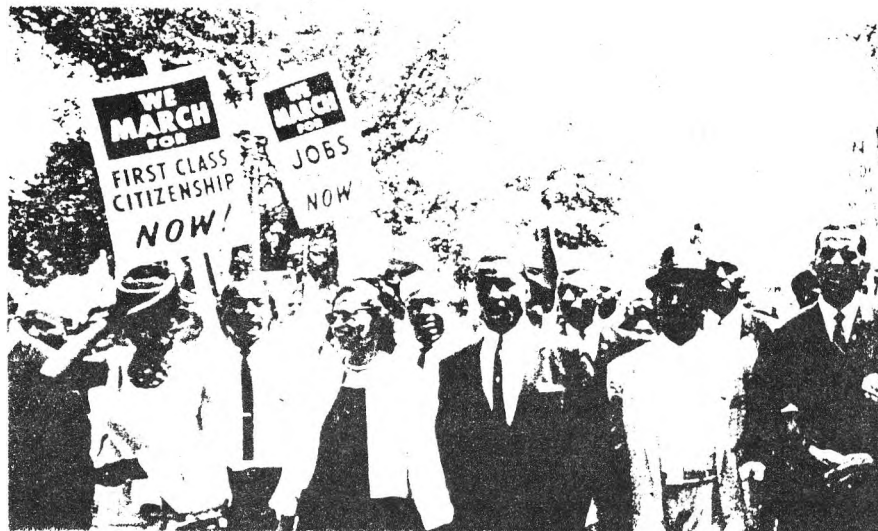
Unity for the struggle today will be on everyone's minds August 27th. And building for the march these summer months should be a time for taking stock of where the movement stands and what lies ahead. This issue of Forward Motion



# March On Washington --

## August 27

ON THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HISTORIC MARCH ON WASHINGTON, BRING TOGETHER A NEW, MASSIVE MARCH ON WASHINGTON! MARCH FOR JOBS, PEACE, AND FREEDOM!



For workers of color the Reagan administration has been a disaster. The working poor have been forced to make the choice between either a low paying job which may not support them and their families or welfare which may barely support them and their families. Social programs have been cut, denying us needed employment assistance, disability payments, food stamps -- the list could go on and on. All of these cuts in the name of reducing the Federal budget, yet the administration insists on pressing for increased military expenditures, such as the MX missile which they themselves already realize to be useless. And to add insult to injury, the Reagan administration insists on pumping millions of dollars into a government in El Salvador which the people of that country do not want, in a virtual repeat of the steps which led up to the U.S.'s involvement in Vietnam.

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The Reagan administration is rolling back the gains of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. It has actively taken the stand of agencies which oppose affirmative action court orders, such as in the New Orleans Police Department. It promotes tax credits for people with children in private schools, nothing less than a tax credit for the rich or for those who wish to get their children away from ours. Official support for a re-segregated educational system comes at the same time that we are told that there is not enough money to aid the public school systems of this country.

The Reagan Administration would also have us blame other workers of color, the immigrant workers for the loss of "American jobs," when, in fact, Reagan's financial policies have encouraged large companies to buy smaller companies or go abroad rather than invest in new competitive technology and the retraining of the U.S. worker.

In times like these, people of color have marched before and have achieved some gains. In 1941, A. Philip Randolph, leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, organized the "March on Washington Movement" to demand that defense industries open up their jobs to Blacks. The Roosevelt administration issued an executive order to open up those jobs just a short time before the scheduled march, to avoid thousands of Afro-Americans marching on the capital. In 1963, in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, a coalition of minority organizations and individuals from minority communities and organized labor, marched on the capital to demand the passage of civil rights and voting laws. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a direct result of thousands of people taking to the streets.

In 1983, we must march again. We must march in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the 1963 march, but we must mainly march because the situation facing our peoples is critical. A change in federal policies can ease our situation, but such a change will only come if those in power must deal with hundreds of thousands of very angry people!

If you are sick and tired of looking at an empty wallet, march on August 27th; if you are sick and tired of your children facing madness every day rather than a useful education, then march; if you want peace for yourself and your children, justice for all, and full equality for people of color, then you owe it to yourself and your community to march on August 27th.

--Prepared for a minority unionists group which is part of the coalition building for the March on Washington.



Dan Wasserman  
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# The Boston Police and Firefighters Case

Boston's struggle to desegregate its schools attracted national attention in the 1970's. Less well known has been the struggle to desegregate its public employee workforce. Less well known until this past year, that is. The Boston Police and Firefighter Case (officially, NAACP vs. BEECHER) brought wide attention to the struggle Boston's Black and Latin communities especially have waged for access to jobs in these departments -- and to the modifications in union seniority systems sometimes necessary to ensure that progress.

In this recently decided case, the US Supreme Court added to the series of critical affirmative action/civil rights cases of the last several years, allowing democratic rights gains in Boston to stand. The Court decided not to review a lower court ruling upholding superseniority protection of Boston minority police and firefighters. Admittedly, the grounds were narrow -- that the laid-off white employees had already been rehired. Even so, the background and importance of this controversial case ensure that this issue will come up in other affirmative action battles in the future.

In the early 1970's, both minority police officers and firefighters in Boston took the City to court over racial discrimination. At the time, the police department was less than 2 1/2 % minority and the fire department was less than 1%. In both cases, minority police and firefighters successfully argued that the city discriminated in hiring, testing, promotion, and other policies. Revisions in departmental procedures were ordered.

Enforcement of these changes coupled with minority persistence produced an improved situation during the 1970's. By 1980, minority percentages had grown to almost 12% in the police department and 15% in the fire department.

Then came the post-Prop 2 1/2 fiscal crunch in Boston. How much of this fiscal crisis was real and how much could have been avoided is another matter, but the mayor decided that a substantial layoff of police and firefighters was necessary to ease the financial pressures. The city turned to the state civil service regulations to determine the order of layoffs. This statute requires

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strict seniority in layoffs. (Interestingly, this Massachusetts state law already has one major limitation on strict seniority--veteran's preference--including ABSOLUTE preference for disabled veterans in any layoff situation.)

Layoffs under these provisions would have almost totally eliminated Black and Latin police officers and firefighters. Years of struggle and progress would have been wiped out. Not only would the gains of affirmative action be severely set back, but once again Boston's oppressed nationality communities would be more vulnerable to the treatment accorded them by an almost entirely white police and firefighting force.

To protect their gains, the minority police and firefighters, assisted by the NAACP, went back to federal court. They argued that the intent of the earlier decisions -- to desegregate the two departments -- should be preserved through the layoffs, even though the earlier court case had not said anything specific about layoffs. They again won their case: the court said any layoffs would have to be carried out in a way that preserved minority employment percentages. When the city went along, the police and firefighters union appealed the decisions all the way to the Supreme Court. Their argument: seniority ought to prevail over affirmative action and desegregation of the municipal departments.

### NEW DEBATE WITHIN THE LABOR MOVEMENT

This case set off a raging debate within the labor movement -- once again a choice between two important principles, seniority and affirmative action. But this case had an added twist.

The police and firefighter unions, the AFL-CIO, the Justice Department (that friend of labor), and others argued for strict seniority so loudly and with such vengence that it seemed the idea of affirmative action should be denied all future legitimacy in the ranks of labor.

In Boston in 1980, layoffs were coming, one way or another. The only question was who and why. The police and firefighter unions and their supporters insisted that the issue was, should "innocent" white workers who have accumulated seniority be "punished" for their employer's discriminatory practices.

Posed in this way, the question is not only loaded but wrong.

The real question is whether we can remedy past effects of discrimination and segregation, even where we have to alter the principles of seniority to do so. Another way to look at the issue is, when choices must be made as to who is going to lose his or her job, a white or an oppressed nationality worker, who will it be? Organized labor, when pushed, has shown some flexibility on affirmative action in hiring and upgrading. But here we are not talking about who gets the opportunity to advance and who stays in place: we are talking about who takes the loss, including possibly permanent loss of a job. Not an easy situation. But in these situations, the unions almost always have supported seniority and favored the white worker.



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In the past, the AFL-CIO as well as the Justice Department supported affirmative action, at least as it came up in certain legal cases. In the Weber case, the labor federation supported a collective bargaining agreement provision negotiated by the Steelworkers to get minorities into the skilled trades in a plant where they had been denied access over the years. The agreed on method was a one-to-one hiring program to operate until a certain proportion of the skilled trades were minority. No one got pushed out of a position they already had and no one lost a job. Seniority was altered -- a minority worker with less time than a white worker might get into the craft first -- and many within the ranks of labor opposed this plan. But it was acceptable enough to the AFL-CIO leadership to gain its public support. Similarly for the Justice Department.

Why the change of heart in the Boston case? For one thing, as economic conditions worsen, organized labor's willingness to consider sharing the burden equitably declines. In addition, today there is a demonstrable attack on the oppressed nationalities in every sphere of life. Under Reagan, pressures have mounted on busing plans, voting rights, etc. as well as affirmative action.

Even so, the AFL-CIO position on superseniority has not been uniformly supported throughout the labor movement. Labor progressives did support the minority police and firefighters' struggle. Some, like the National Education Association, one of the largest unions in the country, were bold enough to say so.

(Ironically, now the NEA finds itself under direct attack from the Reagan administration over its defense of seniority (years of service) and training as the basis of teachers' pay. Despite the battering teachers unions in cities facing desegregation have brought upon themselves in recent years, the NEA may find itself in a stronger position against Reagan's demagogic merit pay proposals precisely because of their position on the Beecher case. Their defense of seniority will appear more principled to many parents and legislators.)

Many progressives unfortunately were too timid to do anything for this struggle. Progressives face a lot of pressure in the labor movement today, and may be less willing to stand up for what many rationalized as one more affirmative action case. But in this first critical test over actual jobs and not just job opportunities, progressive support should have been more forthcoming.

### THE STATE OF THE STRUGGLE

The Beecher case shows there are still strong expressions of resistance and struggle in the Black movement. The Supreme Court's reluctance to get involved in the case may reflect this continuing political force. The case may have seemed too hot to handle.

The case also highlights the limits of union progressivism today. The inability of organized labor to rally support for cases like this one, even when someone else has taken the initial steps, helps explain the elusiveness

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of deep political unity in US labor.

Finally, the case showed how workers' jobs can be used as a political football given this disunity and the weakness of the progressive camp. Many political commentators wondered if Mayor White chose to lay off police and firefighters in order to generate the political pressure to bring more state money into the city. Some activists have noted that the city was unable to get money from the legislature until the federal appeals court ruled that the city had to use an affirmative action layoff system. No sooner had the appeals court ruled in a way that promised disproportionate white layoffs then the state legislature passed a funding bill to bail out the city of Boston. The bill not only gave the city more money, but it also put all laid off police and firefighters back to work. And it added a novel provision that these laid off police and firefighters could never again be laid off for financial reasons. Coincidence? Not likely.

This type of case is happening in many cities across the country. Inside and outside the labor movement activists will face a choice. And so long as hard times continue, affirmative action will mean superseniority in layoffs as often as it means job opportunities. We have to strengthen our stand.

--Claire N  
June 1983



# Looking At The Harold Washington Victory

The continuing soap opera being played out by the Chicago Board of Aldermen and the new Mayor shows that there is not going to be an easy resolution to problems which reached a (temporary) climax in Harold Washington's narrow victory April 12. But it does seem pretty clear that electoral business is not about to proceed as usual any time in the near future, either in Chicago or nationally. Chicago is an enormous, patronage-ridden city and throbs with its own contradictions and problems, but the Washington campaign also symbolizes changes and issues of national resonance and import. National Republican Party leaders know this; the horde of Democratic presidential hopefuls making their appearance for Washington (once the primary was over) demonstrated this; and Black political activists are moving on it. Some implications:

1. We can anticipate more of a two party system in the urban North. Just as the Republican party drew new strength from white conservatives' response to active Black participation in the Democratic Party in the South in the sixties, Washington's election gave a transfusion to Chicago Republicans. The Democratic Party has dominated urban politics across the country for decades. In most cities the Democratic hold is still strengthened by one or another remnant of patronage politics.

Even so, an observer had only to see the high-school kids in white working class Chicago neighborhoods with their Epton buttons and placards to know that their commitment to the Democratic Party is only skin-deep. Patronage protected their fathers', or uncles' or cousins' jobs; Washington was carried forward by a movement of (heavily unemployed) Black people seeking a measure of political power. The collision between these two forces has



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undoubtedly jarred loose the traditional Democratic grip on Chicago's white-working class vote. The newly reconstituted white populists of the Republican Party will likely try to jump up and down on Democratic fingers.

2. The backbone as well as the front lines of the movement for independent political action today is the Black liberation movement -- and not just in Chicago, but nationally. In Chicago, commentators like Vernon Jarrett and Washington himself have pointed out that certain Black wards on the South side of the city have become truly independent (though Democratic) strongholds. Nationally, Black (and to a lesser extent, Latino) people have been registering to vote in great numbers -- as Democrats. In Chicago, Black community organizations like Chicago Black United Communities and the Chicago Black United Front have decided that the Democratic Party is their most viable field of operations. Judging by Black voter turnout, most Black people agree.

Third party theorists and activists are presumably assessing the impact of this movement toward and within the Democratic Party just as closely as Black political activists considering a presidential candidacy within the Democratic Party. It is too soon to predict how this trend will play itself out, especially if the white working class shift into the Republican Party -- or at least their willingness to vote Republican -- continues.

3. Not only was the election a touchstone for the sentiments of the "white ethnic working class vote," but it also was a real test of how far liberals are willing to go today away from the cynicism and corruption of local politics as usual. Instead of seizing upon the chance for reform and a measure of independence, many white liberals took the relatively minor questions raised about Washington's tax problems as a welcome excuse to sit out the election, or defect altogether.

These last two points show that the election poses an important question to white left-wing and progressive activists as well: what role will they play in building politics independent of the perpetual reliance on political exclusion of people of color? The Washington election was the first chance many white activists had to take a stand, and to do real work, in a situation where leadership really came from the liberation struggle of Black people.

These three points only begin to talk about the issues and consequences of the new Chicago politics. I hope we can continue this discussion, drawing on other experiences this election year.

--Peggy Baker  
May 1983





# Winning On The Shop Floor

If you were a new steward in my local, you might pick up the union "Leadership Manual" and read the following:

Stewards are the overseers of the contract and defenders of workers' rights. In many ways, they are like a legal counsel, with aggrieved workers as their clients. The grievance procedure, with avenues of appeals, is the workers' court of justice.

That's true enough, as far as it goes. Anyone who's been a steward finds that you do have to be like a lawyer in a lot of ways. You need to be thoroughly familiar with the contract, know all the facts of a case, negotiate, compromise, appeal to the next step of the grievance procedure.

But you also know that being like a lawyer is not enough. It's not enough to win against management, and it's not enough to build unionism among the people you represent. The key is getting to where people don't just see you, the steward, as "the union," but to where they see the union as their own organization.

Before I talk about some of my ideas about doing this, I want to give you a little background about my local. There are a number of things about it that are pretty favorable to stewards being able to organize and involve the membership.

(1) We have a pretty militant union tradition, which goes back to the UE days before the IUE came in during McCarthyism. This has been changing though, as the UE activists who built the union have retired and a lot of the younger workers are uninterested or alienated from the union.

(2) We have the contractual right to strike over grievances. (For example, in the last few months our local has seen two small strikes: one 3-day strike of one building over piecework payment problems; another over

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foremen doing work belonging to union members.) Strikes like these aren't as frequent as they used to be, but they're still an important weapon that we have.

(3) Our local has a pretty democratic structure, with all stewards and officers elected, and a lot of elected committees. A lot of interest in the union can be generated at election time, and potentially a lot of new people can run for these positions as a way of getting active in the union.

I have also had the good fortune to work under an executive board member who was a militant shop floor organizer when he was a steward, and who encourages his stewards to organize and not just be like lawyers. Not all the stewards there are so lucky.

So, what have I been able to do that goes beyond the "steward as lawyer" approach? When I first became steward, I found that I did have to operate mainly like a legal counsel or representative. My area had a very weak union presence, and there was a strong tendency for people to make their own private deals with the company. What I had to do was go pretty much patiently case by case, argue grievances as best I could when people came to me or when I saw problems myself. I didn't win a lot of things in those days at Step 1 (the first step of the grievance procedure) because the company had no reason to settle things with me there.

But gradually, working with some of the other stewards and active people in the area, we built up some union presence and activity. Today we can win more things at Step 1, and management in the area doesn't totally ignore the contract like they used to. This is not mainly because of any great skills the stewards have as negotiators, but because the people are more organized.

Here are some of the ways I think we got people more organized:

(1) First, I think it makes a difference how you use the grievance procedure. I don't believe that the steward should just set herself up as the expert. Say someone comes to you with a simple case about division of overtime. You could say to that person, "OK, I'll take care of it," go in, settle it right away, and be a hero. Or, you could show the person where the contract covers division of overtime, tell him to go up to the foreman and say he is in violation of that part of the contract, and come back and get you if the foreman doesn't change his mind. This second approach is obviously showing the person that the union is made up of people in the shop who enforce the contract on the shop floor.

(2) We learned ways to organize things so that people can see the power of group actions. When a problem comes up, we try to find ways to bring the affected people together to work out solutions and tactics. We might call a group meeting to discuss how to respond to a new system of measuring productivity. We might bring people together to work on group grievances, such as a harassment case or a rate case on a particular group of machines. We called one group meeting of pieceworkers to take a strike vote, which helped us solve a few of our piecework payment problems. We've used tactics like overtime bans, petitions and brief work stoppages. None of these tactics are



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particularly new or different, but we've found that group efforts like these go a long way to building a sense of unity and power on the shop floor.

(3) It's important to try to develop new people as activists and leaders. I try to notice people's particular interests and what they get active in. Some people are interested in political action, so I'll try to get them involved in, say, work around plant-closing legislation. Some people were into the Solidarity Day march, so I'll talk to them about going to the August March on Washington (which I hear the AFL-CIO is endorsing.) Some people you can always count on to harrass a foreman when you need them to. Some people like to organize social events. The point is to bring new people into all this activity, since we're all painfully aware of how much the labor movement needs new rank and file activists.

(4) Finally, the stewards themselves need to be organized. We try to have weekly meetings of the stewards in my jurisdiction to keep track of what's going on and to make sure we're all working in the same direction.

There's been some effort in the past few years to activate our Steward's Council--which consists of all the stewards in the local. I think it's a big help in winning on the shop floor when the stewards have some power over the grievance procedure and over policy decisions in the local. Our Stewards' Council tends to be a militant, progressive force when it does get together and vote on things. There is, of course, some disagreement among our union officials about how much power the stewards should have. But so far the efforts to organize a strong Stewards' Council haven't been that successful.

Getting back to the "steward as lawyer" approach for a minute. One of the biggest weaknesses of that approach is that it tends to prevent people from breaking new ground, or organizing around new issues. Often the company likes to get stewards bogged down with discipline cases, and there's a lot of pressure within the union to simply enforce existing agreements. We are supposed to live within the contract at all costs, while the company goes around violating it all the time.

But there has been organizing around some new issues in the local in recent years. Some of the most innovative organizing has been around women's issues, such as sexual harrassment, pregnancy disability, job training, and discriminatory wage rates. In fact, I would say that organizing around these issues has done more to increase membership participation and activity than any other issues in the local in recent years. I think one reason we've been successful here is because there's also a sense of motion around these issues outside the union because of the women's movement; but, unfortunately, you can't say the same thing about some of the more economic issues we're faced with.

There's also the new issue of automation. The company has plans to eliminate about one-half its blue collar work force by 1990 through automation. Sometimes I think that our response to this is going to make or break our union in the next ten years. Yet many stewards' and members' attitudes are, this is happening, but there's nothing we can do about it. The IUE obtained some job security language in our last contract, and our

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Stewards' Council has initiated a local conference on automation. But we are far from having a strategy, and in most cases we're pretty far from organizing the membership around this issue.

So those are a few ideas I have about organizing the membership and winning on the shop floor. Whenever I find myself getting cynical about trying to get other people active, I just think about what the company is doing. I think that part of American corporations' offensive against the labor movement is the new quality circles--employee involvement groups--whatever you want to call them. We're getting some of these now. The companies can get people to go into these circles as a place to talk about not only increasing productivity, but also about their working conditions, health and safety, union-management relations. To me, that says unions aren't doing their job. If unions can't find ways to tap the creativity and energy of their members, we won't really have too much hope for revitalizing the labor movement in the 1980s.

--Jenny Helmick  
May 1983



## Dancing

The moon draws out  
my secret blood,  
Rain aches my tooth and knee.  
In El Salvador,  
I am shot.  
In Teheran, I am dragged naked and raped  
through the streets.  
In Beirut, I am burned.  
In Johannesburg, my skin is pulled  
away.  
In South Dakota, I am thrown into a  
cell and forced to drink  
my own vomit.  
In Palestine,  
2000 years ago,  
they nailed me to a cross.  
In Guatemala, a priest wearing a cross  
hears my last words  
before I am butchered.  
Sometimes, our cries become music.  
Sometimes, we dance over the quicksand,  
moving so quickly  
so quickly,  
the suck of the swampwater  
can't claim us.  
Dancing, we will fight and we will win.  
Though we be an army of the dead, we  
will go on, we will not vanish.  
Dancing, we will fight and we will win.

--Elaine H.

## The Soviet Union and Oppressed Nationalities

Studies of the Soviet Union and its class character (socialist, state capitalist, etc.) very often touch on economic questions, or questions concerning the class composition of the ruling Party, with very little attention going to Soviet policy on ending national oppression in Russia, "the prison house of nations," as it was known. This attention gap is especially peculiar given both the numbers of different nationalities inside Soviet borders as well as the importance the early Bolsheviks gave the national question.

Ignoring Soviet nationalities policies amounts to a "blindspot" on the part of many Marxists and others on the Left. The national question becomes "that other issue" rather than an integral part of any discussion of current Soviet policy or the evolution of the Soviet State. This article will raise certain questions concerning the evolution of the early Soviet nationalities policy and its relation to current Soviet policies. Without a knowledge of Russian, or the countless other languages found in the USSR, I am at the disadvantage of being forced to use English language material. But even from this material -- some sympathetic to the current regime in the USSR -- we can get an important impression of the evolution of the national question from the October Socialist Revolution (1917) to the present.

### CAPITALISM, THE NATIONAL QUESTION, AND CHAUVINISM

Peoples have been oppressed, empires have existed and injustice flourished before the rise of capitalism. Capitalism inherited various forms of national oppression and "racial hatred," but it also grew partly based on the growth and development of these social relations. Under capitalism, national oppression and chauvinism help perpetuate the basic inequalities of capitalism as well as constantly reinforce the capitalist idea that survival depends on competition. The failure of a working class to oppose national oppression and chauvinism wherever it shows its ugly head leads to a united front of the working class from the dominant nationality with the capitalists against the nationally oppressed. In Azania (South Africa), for example, a



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largely unionized white working class which excludes African workers from its ranks generally unites with the white ruling class to suppress African strivings for national freedom, power and dignity. Neutrality on the part of the white worker favors whichever side is the stronger at the time. But in Azania there is no neutrality.

The situation in Azania is a gross and glaring example of white subservience and support of national oppression. National oppression and chauvinism need not always be so glaring, though it can be equally as important. Consider in this country what have been called "micro-aggressions." There are many different forms of micro-aggression, but the basic idea is that there are practices which are instilled in all people in situations where national oppression exists. Many of these practices go unnoticed to the untrained eye, but they are very real and extremely important in teaching all the people of that society who dominates and who does not. One example can be found when a Black man and a white man are approaching each other on a street. Watch who is supposed to get out of the way of the other. True, a Black man will not always get out of the way of a white, but there is a specific role which the Black man, in that case, is supposed to fulfill. He is supposed to move. And if he does not, very often the white man will bump into the Black. If you were to stop either of these two people immediately after the incident and ask them about it, neither would probably be aware of the dynamics which just took place. This is just one small example. U.S. society has countless examples of micro-aggressions. If you think about it, the reader could probably make his or her own list.

"Micro-aggressions," as with other nationally oppressive practices, will not go away unless they are consciously rooted out. They are not directly determined by whether companies are owned individually, as in the U.S., or by the State, as in the Soviet Union. These social relations are rooted in hundreds of years of practice and experience. Without a continuous effort to root them out, the hundreds of years of historical experience will overcome the best of intentions. And if these practices are not rooted out, one people will tend to rule, and others to serve; let alone the other roles which are inherent in capitalist society.

### EARLY SOVIET VIEWS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Within the Russian Soviet Democratic Labor Party (Bolshevik), later known as the Russian Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, several different views on handling the national question clashed. All of these views developed over time, and some views definitely shifted, but the central divisions in the Party revolved around the following camps.

(1) "The right of the working majority of each nation to self-determination." This view was very popular within the Bolshevik Party and was embraced by N. Bukharin, the Bolshevik economist Preobrazhensky, Trotsky and, for awhile, Joseph Stalin. The basic view began with the notion that the separation of nations was basically a backward idea, but that in view of years of national distrust it was sometimes necessary. (NOTE: it should be added that some of the individuals in this camp openly held the view for some time that the right to national self-determination was impossible in the era of

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imperialism.) Members of this camp felt that socialism basically resolved the national question but that where necessary, separation should be permitted if it is the will of the workers. This view undercut the basic notion of self-determination since there are many cases where backward forced have led national movements, especially in situations where the working class is not the majority, or where it is itself divided. Bukharin's basic theory was a problem since it really did not guide how to deal with national movements led by bourgeois or feudal elements. It essentially denied the fact that those forces could, at certain points, express the "national will."

(2) "Soviet State-ism." This may not be the most accurate way to describe this particular line, but it will serve the purposes of this paper. The basic thrust of this view was that all national questions within the borders of the USSR were subordinate to the interests of the Soviet State. This position came to be identified more and more with Stalin. Soviet State-ism as a practice was very contradictory. Stalin himself was an oppressed nationality from the nation of Georgia in the southern part of the former Russian Empire. He was very aware of forms of national oppression and chauvinism. In the early days of the Soviet revolution, the Soviet State-ist position led to a variety of practices, including vehement opposition to anti-Semitism as well as opposition to the view among many Russian workers that the Soviet revolution was a "Russian affair." The Soviet State-ist position placed more emphasis, at least originally, on national equality than the actual process of national separation. The Soviet State-ist position was definitely ambiguous as you will note from the following statement from Stalin:

Of course, the border regions of Russia, the nations and races which inhabit these regions, possess, as all other nations do, the inalienable right to secede from Russia, and if any of these nations decided by a majority to secede from Russia, as was the case with Finland in 1917, Russia, presumably, would be obliged to take note of the fact and sanction the secession. But the question here is not about the rights of nations, which are unquestionable, but about the interests of the masses of the people both in the center and in the border regions...And the interests of the masses render the demand for the secession of the border regions at the present stage of the revolution a profoundly counter-revolutionary one. (1 -- Note: numbered footnotes at end.)

(3) "Right to National Self-Determination up to and including the Right to Secession"/"All-round struggle against national privilege." This was the position which can best be identified with Lenin. Many people have assumed or believed that the positions held by Lenin and Stalin on the national question were identical. This is not the case, though Stalin did borrow from Lenin, and Lenin's views were at times contradictory. But in my view, Lenin's strengths far outweighed his weaknesses on this and other matters.

Lenin expressed some of his most important views on the national question during World War I when he struggled against other revolutionary Social Democrats such as Rosa Luxembourg and N. Bukharin. These comrades were so disgusted with Social Democratic support for the war in many countries that



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they opposed national self-determination, and national movements for that matter. Lenin stressed the importance of the national question in view of the national distrust which people of the oppressed nations and colonial world had for the nations and workers of the West. He also argued the revolutionary significance which these movements had in the struggle against imperialism. He stressed that the fight against imperialism had to be carried out by the unity of the workers of the West in alliance with the peoples of the oppressed nations and colonial world.

Overall one could say that Lenin's approach to the national question was more flexible than that taken by Stalin, and in many ways, much more conscious of national distrust than Stalin. The dramatic differences between Stalin and Lenin on this matter can be found in some notes written by Lenin shortly before his death. In "The Question of Nationalities or 'Autonomisation'" Lenin made the famous statement,

It would be unpardonable opportunism if, on the eve of the debut of the East, just as it is awakening, we undermined our prestige with its peoples, even if only by the slightest crudity or injustice towards our own non-Russian nationalities. (2)

Lenin refers here to his different stance from Stalin's toward a series of questions. These included disagreement which the Communist Party of Georgia had with a plan for a federation in that region (Stalin attempted to "resolve" the problem via "administrative methods," i.e., force, rather than persuasion). Lenin also believed that a State structure for the new Soviet formation should represent the unity of independent socialist republics, thus the name, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, rather than a name reflecting a federation of autonomous republics within Russia (Stalin's view). Despite the fact that the name Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was adopted, much of the essence of Stalin's view of internal relations was also adopted. Lenin's death cut off his struggle on this entire area of policy.

(4) "National Communism": Perhaps one of the least known trends in the Bolshevik Party was that referred to as "national communism." Prominent representatives of this trend included the Volga Tatar, Mir-Said Sultan Galiev, and the Ukrainians, Serhii Mazlakh and Vasyl' Shakrai. National communism was not the simple unity of nationalism and communism. This trend instead developed among a variety of oppressed nationality Marxists who were attempting to liberate their nations and people from feudal, capitalist and imperialist oppression. This does not mean that every oppressed nationality communist was also a national communist.

The national communists believed in the necessity not just for self-determination but for complete independence. This meant independence in the form of separate communist parties, separate military units, and completely separate nations. (NOTE: Lenin believed in and fought for the idea of one party for all of the former Russian Empire, with local branches. This is one of the contradictory elements of Lenin's thought since it was not always clear what this meant when it came to policy decisions in independent republics.)

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The national communist approach in part reflected how few of the people of each oppressed nation lived outside their national-territorial homelands -- less than 1% at that time. Many national communists played a prominent role in the People's Commissariat of Nationalities and in other structures of the Soviet Party and State. The national communist trend did not appear to have much influence, however, at the top echelons of either Party or State. For the most part their ideas were opposed and avoided, though as a trend the national communists did exert enough pressure to be periodically addressed (3).

### THE VICTORY OF 'SOVIET STATE-ISM' AND ITS EVOLUTION

The victory of Stalin in the internal struggle in the CPSU(B) was also a victory for Soviet State-ism. Had Stalin and his allies lost their struggle to Trotsky or Bukharin, Soviet State-ism may still have become victorious, though it may have looked somewhat different.

As mentioned earlier, Great Russian chauvinism was exhibited early in the Soviet revolution in the form of treating the revolution as a Russian affair. A glaring example of this was the experience of the Tashkent Soviet where Russian workers in an oppressed nationality region (what was then referred to as Turkestan) refused to ally with the native population and attempted to continue the historic domination of Russians over oppressed nationalities. By taking actions against the chauvinism of the Tashkent Soviet (which at least one study described as directly sparking a revolt of oppressed nationalities as a result of their colonialism) the Bolsheviks were able to win local allies to the cause of socialism from among the oppressed nationalities.

Impressive accomplishments were carried out in the early years. These included the struggle against Great Russian chauvinism and localized chauvinism (certain oppressed nationalities which considered themselves to be the "natural leaders" of other oppressed nationalities), including anti-Semitism. Anti-Jewish oppression and chauvinism was particularly strong in Russia, and in areas such as the Ukraine (specifically among the peasantry). There was a raising of awareness of this as a problem which had to be combatted.

One of the interesting approaches of the Bolsheviks to the oppression of Jews was the Birobidzhan experiment. Stalin, for example, in his theoretical works prior to the revolution struggled intensely against the idea that Jews in the Russian Empire constituted an oppressed nation as such. Rather, he held, and the Party did as well, that they constituted a national minority which was entitled to full equality. After the revolution, however, it became clear that there was a national consciousness and sentiment among Jews in favor of land and a national territory. Differences existed among Jewish communists as to the best solution, but a project of settlement was offered in the late 1920s of an area called Birobidzhan. The aim was to establish a Jewish autonomous republic within the USSR. Despite the fact that between 20,000-40,000 Jews migrated to that region over a 5-10 year period, the project failed, in part because the area was not well-suited for agriculture. (Birobidzhan is located in Siberia, north of Manchuria.) The massive migration to the region, despite its many problems, pointed to the Bolsheviks awareness of a genuine sentiment which had to be addressed (4).



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In the 1920's the area of Turkestan was divided into several republics. Referred to as "national-territorial delimitation," this policy was curious in that it both created national homelands for some peoples who were not themselves nations, while dividing up or diffusing the Pan-Turkic sentiment which was prevalent in the area. In keeping with the policy of promoting national development of different peoples, written languages were developed in many cases where no such thing previously existed (6).

Soviet State-ism in general, and some of the policies noted above in particular, had another, decidedly more negative side. Toward the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s, the problems mounted and became more indicative of Soviet nationalities policy. In the process of national-territorial delimitation, for example, the "creation" of written languages often meant the move away from Arabic, first to Latin and later to Cyrillic. The historic connections which existed between what is today called Soviet Central Asia (Turkestan) and the peoples of the rest of the Middle East were, at best, damaged. While immediately after the 1917 revolution one Soviet objective had been to influence the views of the people of the colonial world via the USSR's internal practices -- a view shared by both Lenin and Sultan-Galiev, though from somewhat different perspectives -- the shift in the written language made communication and contact that much more difficult. The language policy seems to have been intended to focus the attention of Soviet Central Asia more on the European part of the USSR than on the non-Soviet Middle East.

Attention to nationalities issues increased during the later 1920s over economic planning. The idea of the so-called socialist division of labor (which is popularly used by the USSR today in its relations with nations under its influence) arose to describe what the internal Soviet formation should look like. Essentially the idea was for different nations and regions to develop or produce specific items, generally based on what they were "good" at producing.

An example was the forcing of cotton cultivation in the 1930s in Uzbekistan (formerly part of Turkestan, now Soviet Central Asia -- author.) In this Republic the area under cotton cultivation increased from 423,000 hectares in 1913 to 946,000 hectares in 1937, in 1937, while the cereal growing area decreased from 1,521,000 hectares to 1,362,200 hectares over the same period. One of the results of this policy was to make Uzbekistan increasingly dependent on external grain supplies and this caused widespread discontent in the Republic. (7)

With greater attention paid to building the economy of the entire USSR, whether for "good" reasons or "bad", the actual decisions on planning were taken out of the hands of the people of the individual republics. During the 1920s, many more oppressed nationality cadres were trained to administer affairs and lead the struggle for socialism in their own homelands, but the major decisions affecting these individual republics were being made centrally. In other words, they were being made in Moscow. Thus, while a serious attempt was underway to cope with the attempts by the capitalist powers to undermine the Soviet government, Soviet State-ism began to dove-tail

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with Great Russian chauvinism -- it was basically the Russians who were making the decisions for the entire state.

### BACK TOWARD CAPITALISM AND CHAUVINISM

The domination of a Soviet State-ist view in the Soviet Communist Party and government led to some very bizarre practices. Many observers agree that the 1930s was a critical period for the Soviet Union. At the same time, very little is mentioned as to what actually took place with regard to the national question. Several significant points will be mentioned below which have a direct bearing on the character of the Soviet state and the direction in which it was headed beginning during that period.

During the 1920s, the Soviet Party agreed on the danger to the progress of internal development of socialist construction in the USSR posed by Great Russian chauvinism. Lenin (and later the Party leadership) pointed out the damaging effects of such chauvinism and its counter-revolutionary character. While local nationalism was often criticized, it was never given the prominence which the struggle against Great Russian chauvinism was accorded.

Toward the end of the 1920s and into the 1930s this changed. An even-handedness toward the "twin dangers" began to creep into Soviet literature (8). Stalin, for example, in a report in 1934, completely avoids the question of which danger was greater by stating that it must be determined by a concrete examination (9). While it is, of course, possible that a pro-imperialist movement can arise, Stalin's ambiguity in this article and other places during the same period betrayed a softening of the struggle against Great Russian chauvinism. Local leaders of parties of the non-Russian republics were increasingly coming under fire for disruptive activity, i.e., activity which ran counter to the objectives of the Party leadership in which they did not play much of a role. The ambiguity in this and other articles signifies a shift toward the view that local nationalism was the main danger.

The purge of the national communists was an early indication of things to come. These individuals were charged with various crimes, all resulting in arrest and in many cases, execution. The purge of the parties of the republics did not stop with national communists, however. The Communist Party of Tadzhikistan, for example, found in Central Asia, dropped in membership by 10,000 people over the period from 1934-1935, and in some places ceased to exist. Between 1934-1937 most of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaidzhan were liquidated, including many of the founding members who had arisen from the national movement (10). A purge in the Tadzhik Party, closely connected with the elimination of Uzbeki communists Ikramov and Khodzhaev resulted in placing the party under the control of a Russian (11). All in all, the parties of the non-Russian republics were decimated by the purges (purges which were, of course, often connected with generalized purges in the rest of the USSR), losing most of their original leadership. Those who came forward to take over were not the experienced leaders of the 1917 revolution. In many, if not most, cases the second person in command of these parties was a Russian.

The Soviet parties were not the only ones to face purges during the same



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period. One of the most infamous examples of Soviet State-ism and Great Russian chauvinism was the fate of the Polish Communist Party. Virtually the entire leadership of the Polish Party, specifically those who had gone to the USSR in exile to escape persecution by the military dictator of their native land, were eliminated during the purge of 1937-38. Following this purge, the Polish Communist Party, along with the West Ukrainian and West Belorussian parties were dissolved on instructions from the USSR. The official grounds given at the time were that, at least with regard to the Polish Party, they were highly infiltrated (12).

Also during this period the notion of the "Russian Elder Brother" arose to describe the relations between the Russian and non-Russian nationalities. The Russians essentially presented themselves as holding out their hands to insure the "progress" of the non-Russian nationalities. This notion is particularly ironic in that in many of the non-Russian areas forced collectivization was met with very stiff resistance, and it was often left to the Russians to enforce the collectivization policies. The notion of the "Russian Elder Brother" was also closely connected with an important rewriting of the history of the Russian Empire. During the 1920s, the expansion of the Russian Empire was presented as barbaric and colonial. Related to that point was the view that the resistance of the local peoples, even though often led by feudalistic forces was progressive. During the 1930s, this portrayal of history was altered. A new view held that the Russian expansion was progressive in that it brought the non-Russian peoples into the modern world. The resistance to Russian imperial expansion was then described as being basically reactionary! This chauvinist view of Russian and non-Russian history was directly related to the developing overemphasis on the economic side of things: Russian imperial expansion could now be described as economically tying the non-Russian areas into a common Russian economy. This narrow and chauvinist view of history would be analogous to a US leftist describing the near-extirmination of the Native Americans and the seizure of the Southwest as somehow progressive in that it tied these areas together.

Perhaps the most infamous practice carried out relating directly to the national question was the forced expulsion of several nationalities from their original homelands. These nationalities included the Kamyks, Checheentsy, Ingushi, Karachaevtzy, Kurds, Balkartzy, Crimean Tatars, and Volga Germans. The alleged pretext for these World War II expulsions were that these nationalities had not fought sufficiently hard against pro-Nazi collaborators. There are several ironies here. For one, in the first year or so of the Soviet involvement in World War II, several of these nationalities had won praise from the Soviet government for their patriotism and anti-Nazi sentiments. This was specifically true of the Volga Germans. The second irony was that large numbers of Russians and Ukrainians openly collaborated with the Nazi invaders, and it is perhaps only due to Hitler's stupidity and lack of trust that greater numbers of Ukrainians were not enlisted in SS units. Those nationalities which had some form of nation status were deprived of this status and in the case of the Volga Germans, although they were "cleared" of their alleged crimes, they were never given their special status again.

Some may read this and write off these incidents as a series of mistakes. But these "mistakes" were generally not corrected. While a number of

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individual communists and, in some cases, nationalities were cleared of alleged crimes, the basic relation between Russia and the non-Russian nationalities did not change. The period of the 1930s strengthened the relation between Soviet State-ism and Great Russian chauvinism. Further, the practice connected to the new terminology of 1930s (e.g., "socialist division of labor" and "Russian Elder Brother") have moved from the sphere of strictly internal Soviet relations to those between the USSR and other nations around the world. Rather than encouraging true independence, the Soviets have encouraged a breaking with the West -- of nations in the Third World -- in order to become dependent on the USSR. The most glaring and unfortunate example is the decline of Cuba's independence in direct relation to its greater dependence on the Soviet Union.

### BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

More certainly could be said about the development of Soviet nationalities policies, including the practices carried out immediately after World War II in both the USSR and newly liberated Eastern European nations. This paper, however, will end at this juncture.

Reviewing the development of the national question under the Stalin period is important for a number of reasons. Many Marxists, including myself, originally looked to Stalin as the great architect of an advanced view on the national question. Stalin did write a number of very interesting pieces on the national question, some of which were originally important in developing an overall theory on the national question. Yet a number of very serious problems were ignored, problems which Lenin originally struggled against, as well as those in the national communist trend. These questions basically center around the relation between nations under socialism. The evolution of Stalin's line on the national question, what this writer and others have termed "Soviet State-ism," was the evolution of a contradictory theory which eventually dove-tailed with Great Russian chauvinism and came to justify Russian domination over the USSR, and later, the Eastern European nations.

Soviet State-ism amounted to a turning away from Marxist politics on the national question. The growth of Soviet State-ism was the growth of a pro-capitalist view and practice on the relations of nations and peoples in a post-revolutionary society. The steps backward therefore have to be looked at relative to developments in the rest of Soviet society. But reviewing the experience on the national question helps show that retrogression was not limited to one or another sphere; it took place in all fields of activity.

Soviet nationalities policies and practices also bear on one of the main features of the crisis affecting Marxism. It has become fashionable again on the Left to bow before the Soviets and praise their international policies, in the name of proletarian internationalism and anti-imperialism. Marxists of the oppressed nationalities especially should consider the implications of this renewed interest in and support for Soviet foreign policy. If socialism means foreign invasions, if socialism means that one nationality will dominate others in a supposed socialist federation justified as a guarantee of the socialist road, if socialism means the de facto perpetuation of an economic heritage developed by Western imperialism, and if socialism means the enforced

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deportation of oppressed nationalities in the name of fighting imperialism -- if socialism comes to mean all this then we would have to seriously ask ourselves why we should advocate the life-threatening struggle for socialism and national liberation in the USA.

It should be obvious that I do not believe that the USSR follows the socialist road any more than the Reagan administration is committed to equality for oppressed nationalities. Yet activists in the US who struggle for socialism must come to grips with the efforts which have been carried out around the world to bring it into existence. Where socialism has failed or suffered setbacks, we should say so rather than play games with our people's minds. Although we may not have as clear an image of the socialism which we fight for as we might hope, we should certainly be clear on that which socialism is not. It should indeed be a challenge for anyone to demonstrate that socialism means anything less than complete national freedom for those nationalities and nations which have been oppressed by Western imperialism. And complete national freedom cannot mean substituting one imperialism for another.

Thank-you.

--R. T. Sims

(Speech given, New York City, May 1983.)

### FOOTNOTES

1. J. Stalin, "The Policy of the Soviet Government on the National Question in Russia," Marxism and the National-Colonial Question, Proletarian Publishers, pp. 124-25.

2. V. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 36, pp. 610-611.

3. See, for example, various references by Stalin in Marxism and the National-Colonial Question to the alleged antics of Sultan Galiev and the trend of "Sultan Galiyevism."

4. See Bennigsen and Wimbush, Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 26.

5. For more information, see, Chimen Abramsky, "The Bio-Bidzhan Project, 1927-1959," in Lionel Kochan, editor, The Jews in Soviet Russia Since 1917, London: Oxford University Press, 1972.

6. For a sympathetic account of the process of "national-territorial delimitation," see R. Vaidyanath, The Formation of the Soviet Central Asian Republics, New Delhi, India: People's Publishing House, 1967.

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7. Robert Conquest, editor, Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967, p. 122.

8. See, for example, E.H. Carr, Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929, Vol. II, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1971, pp. 392-398 where Carr discusses the response of the Soviet Party to the growth of anti-semitism.

9. "Deviations Towards Nationalism," in Marxism and the National-Colonial Question, pp. 403-405.

10. See Bennigsen and Wimbush, p. 92.

11. See Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, Russia and Nationalism in Central Asia: The Case of Tadzhikistan, Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1970, pp. 40-41.

12. See M.K. Dziwianowski, The Communist Party of Poland, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp. 149-151; see also Roy Medvedev, Let History Judge, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, pp. 219-220.



## Study Guide

# Using What We Have To Get What We Need

"Every Marxist trend is today in some form of crisis..."

The crisis of Marxism is an opportunity for revolutionary Marxists to break out of their isolation. The crisis of Marxism is an opportunity for creative thinking and creative mass action...

In the coming period, we resolve to organize study of the crisis of Marxism, with a focus first on those aspects of the crisis of marxism that most directly affect our political work and secondarily on the relevance of Lenin's work today..." (From PUL Resolution on the Crisis of Marxism, see Forward Motion, II:2.)

As much as possible we want to use this newsletter to allow other people to join in and help us out in this study. This issue introduces the study with a set of questions on problems and prospects of the U.S. Left. The three suggested articles all contain arguments for specific focuses for the revolutionary left, the Black movement, and the broad left respectively. They also contain overviews of the situation facing the several lefts, and important theoretical and strategic assumptions. We suggest discussion mainly on the broad picture the articles present rather than the specific proposals. Those proposals ought to be considered separately.

READINGS: International Socialists, "The Period and the Tasks of the Revolutionary Left," pp. 3-7.

Oba Simba T'Shaka, "Make the Past Serve the Present: Strategies for Black Liberation," Black Scholar, Jan/Feb 1983, pp 21-32, 35-37.

Stanley Aronowitz, "Remaking the American Left", Part I, Socialist Review #67, pp 9-20, 25-29, 39-45 top, 47 bot.-49. (Optional: Part II, Socialist Review #69, pp. 7-14, 16-17, 22-23, 25-26, 34-35, 39-41.)

Optional: Charles Sarkis, What Went Wrong, New York: ULP, 1982. Introduction, pp 18-24.

1. What does the US Left look like today? What is growing, what is dying out? Where is the left a political force in the mass movements? What political impact does the Left have?

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Aronowitz says that "the American left...has, since the 1920's, functioned as the left wing of progressivism" (I: 14). He also says that the American Marxist left "has frequently operated as 'cadre for the popular movement, but rarely as 'socialists'" (I:11). Does this seem accurate to you? What is the relationship of the US Marxist Left to progressivism: vanguard of progressivism, parasite on proressivism, shielded by the liberal Democrats, coopted by progressivism?

2. Would you agree that "The massive shift to the right renders a distinctively 'socialist' mass politics impossible" (II: 7)? Do you see any movement or arena of struggle where this statement needs qualification?

3. Looking down the road to the next ten to fifteen years, we will be working to create new ideological, political and organizational conditions for the US Left. Should our goal be a small party that mainly acts as "cadre for the popular movement"? Or should our goal be a party doing distinctively socialist mass politics -- a distinctively socialist party active on a mass scale?

What political conditions about the cuntry would lead you to one or the other choice? What are the implications of each position for our work?

4. Countries like Britain, West Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Australia, and others have had large labor parties and very small communist parties. These communist parties have a significant working class membership and very important roles in the trade union apparatus, and this gives them influence in the labor movement far greater than their often non-existent electoral role. Is either part of this a model for what could exist in the United States? Why or why not?

What implication does the existence of the Afro-American and Chicano peoples within the US borders have for the application of this model?

\* \* \* \*

Second discussion: Supplementary reading: Ira Kipnis, The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912, New York: Monthly Review, 1972. pp 130-34, 272-88.

1. All three articles give little attention to the chronic weaknesses of the US lefts compared to other countries. The first two articles are short, but Aronowitz's is a major statement from the left-wing tendency of the organized democratic socialists. Look at I:12. We have in the past put major emphasis on the historic weakness of US Marxists. How important is this question anyway for an overview which hopes to rise to the level of the strategic?

2. Aronowitz and others on the Left look back to the turn of the century Socialist Party as a time of genuine mass socialist influence. Aronowitz applauds the SP's multi-tendency diversity compared to the more typical, and in his view less successful "ideologically-oriented movements."

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Let's imagine that a giant time capsule was discovered tomorrow in Union Square, New York City. Out of it marched the old Socialist Party, just as it existed around 1910. Out of it marched "Marxists, guild socialists, Christian socialists and the remnants of nineteenth century utopians."

A quick decision has to be made or it's possible they will go on marching into the Hudson and over to France. It's summertime and many people have reasons for not showing up for meetings. You have to decide:

Is it possible to expand the Socialist Party by including a big section of the Black Left?

Is it possible to expand the Socialist Party by including a big section of the Chicano left?

Is it possible to expand the Socialist Party by including a big section of the socialist feminists?

Does the reality of white-supremacist national oppression necessitate a different politics than characterized the old Socialist Party?

4. You are having trouble deciding what to do about the old S.P. You grab a handful of recent articles from the left. You read "If the 70's left us one positive point from which to start, it is the trade union left that has stuck it out into the 1980's" (IS, p. 4). "Despite the failure of Reagan's economic policies, neoconservatism retains its political force because of its onslaught on social gains, particularly those won by women and gay people." (SA, II:7).

How would you summarize the legacy of the 1970's left? How would you summarize neo-conservatism's target?

4. Still looking through those articles, you read, "In the radical upsurge of the 1960's, the left...became the most reliable white allies of militant blacks..." (Aronowitz, I: 14). And, "the militant and black caucuses organized to combat complacent trade-union leadership are now compelled to mute their criticisms while workers gains suffer corporate and government attack" (Aronowitz, II: 7).

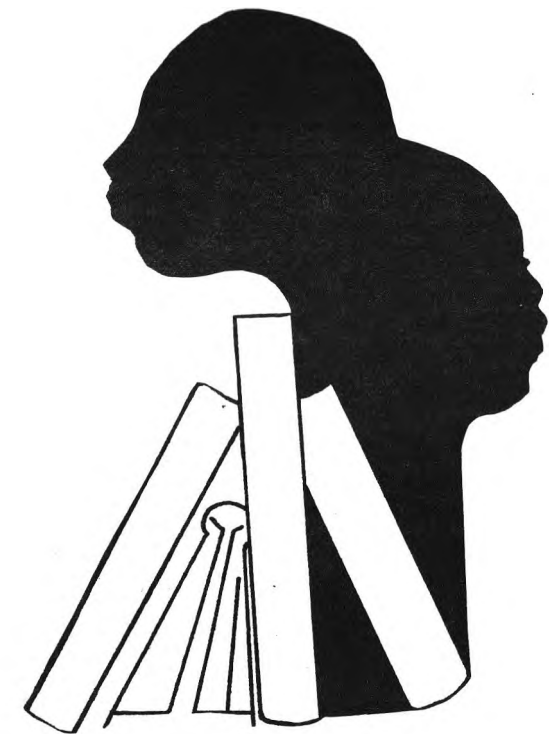
T'Shaka says, "Dogmatic Marxism saw the Black Liberation struggle as a workers struggle. In their analysis, a workers struggle meant that the Black Liberation Movement had to be subordinated to the movement of the white left" (p. 25). Also, "Historically, periods of economic contraction are periods where blacks lose out to whites in the competition for fewer jobs. Reforms granted during the period of an expanding economy are taken back during the contracting period" (p. 34). And, "In a contracting period, reformists' demands should be linked up with a call for political independence and definition of our long range objective in the heat of political struggle" (p. 35).

What would you consider a realistic political strategy for the Black left today? What would you consider a realistic political strategy for the white left today?

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5. "Given the present arrangement, blacks cannot separate the seizure of a handful of states from the seizure of the state itself. Unless the United States breaks up, it will take the same force to achieve 13 to 14 states as it will take to achieve 50" (T'Shaka, p. 32).

Do you agree? What are the implications for the class analysis T'Shaka calls for? What "force" could do this?





## Lesbian and Gay Exclusion: RWH Comments

The publication last year by United Labor Press of Lesbian and Gay Exclusion: the Policy That Dares Not Speak Its Name is a welcome event. By offering insight and clarity where there has been murk and silence, authors Ruth Dubrovsky and Lorna Niles contribute to understanding, and indeed to the honor, of Marxist-Leninists in the United States.

The pamphlet, although short and eminently readable, is comprehensive where it counts most, in debunking the various rationales left organizations have put forward for excluding gay and lesbian revolutionaries from their ranks. The Revolutionary Communist Party, from which the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters split in 1978, both practiced and rationalized an exclusionary policy and frequently promoted homophobic attitudes. This review of Lesbian and Gay Exclusion, which has been discussed and revised in the RWH, can be seen as a belated public repudiation of that position which has not been our line since the time of the split.

Lesbian and Gay Exclusion opens with an analysis of the importance of gay-baiting to the New Right, as a lynchpin of their



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reactionary "pro-family" campaign. This is counterposed to the development of the gay liberation movement since Stonewall. In the face of this contradiction, most communist organizations in the '70s sought to steer clear of gay issues --and gay people-- without public explanation or debate. Lesbian and Gay Exclusion takes on possible defenses for such a stand, using both factual rebuttal and political and ideological analysis.

#### THE CASE

\* Arguments that homosexuality threatens the family as a social institution are shown to be based on the mechanical equating of sexuality and reproduction. (The authors point out that it's good that all sex isn't for reproduction; otherwise, there would be distressingly little sex.)

\* The idea that only those engaged (or likely to be engaged) in heterosexual sexual relationships are able to struggle against male supremacy is carefully dissected.

\* The defense of democratic rights for lesbians and gay men is shown to be in the immediate interest of Marxists as well as a matter of principle.

\* One of the main arguments heard is that the working class and people of the oppressed nationalities are anti-gay. Good evidence on Black sympathy for gay struggles is produced (although the anti-gay positions of many nationalists are not addressed). More important, it is not sufficient for Marxists to simply "cite popular sentiment as justification for their position on an important political or social issue."

\* To those who argue that gay men and lesbians separate themselves from society, the authors reply that to the contrary, it is the oppression they face at the hands of society which produces this separation.

\* There is a long and interesting section demonstrating that playing "follow the leader" to foreign Marxist-Leninists is bankrupt. Historically, many Marxists have upheld gay rights and today communists in a number of countries, it turns out, oppose the practice of lesbian and gay exclusion.

\* Finally, there is the "pseudo-historical materialist pose" that homosexuality is the decadent product of monopoly capitalism on the decline. Various historical evidence is analyzed to debunk this, as subordinate arguments are also dealt with.

There is, however, a problem in the pamphlet's treatment of decadence, which is cavalierly equated with the erroneous idea that U.S. monopoly capitalism is plunging headlong into total collapse. In fact, it's hard not to observe the substantial decay of traditional social values in America over the last two decades. These values are the values of capitalist society, to be sure, and the erosion of some of them, like traditional views of women, is to be welcomed. The erosion of others, like "fair play," or respect for the elderly, is not. This decay of values is a major factor in the mass appeal of the New Right, one the pamphlet underestimates.



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While we cannot afford the "back to the good old days" approach of the reactionaries, we also have to realize that neither the left nor the existing mass movements are now strong enough to offer or generate a coherent alternative set of values. Some of what arises in the vacuum will be unpleasant --views which emphasize serving self at the expense of everything --and everyone-- else.

Lesbian and Gay Exclusion correctly points out that pornography, the purchase of sex and child molestation are "essentially male behaviors by both some straight and some gay men." However, there are certain problems of decadence in the gay community which must be faced. One particularly sharp instance is organizations which defend and promote "man-boy love" yet are viewed by too many gays as a legitimate part of the movement. Such tendencies cannot be an excuse for Marxist-Leninists to shy away; to the contrary, they demand clear and firm opposition within the movement.

In their critique of lesbian and gay exclusion policies, the authors place special emphasis on the failure, the refusal, of Marxist organizations to explain and defend them openly. This, they point out, raises the question of democracy very sharply.

It does great harm for communists to "take actions that many revolutionary, progressive-minded or democratically-inclined people regard as prejudiced, totally arbitrary or pandering to the most backward sentiments and yet...feel no compunction to explain themselves before the people." Such a position confirms preconceived anti-communist ideas about our views of justice and democracy, and the kind of society we aim to build. It also hinders the difficult process of figuring out how revolutionary socialist organizations should function internally.

Our experience in the Revolutionary Communist Party is instructive. A backward position on lesbian and gay issues went hand-in-hand with a contemptuous, self-isolating posture toward the women's movement, (despite struggle on the staff, for example, Revolution (RCP monthly newspaper -- ed.) ignored the abortion rights struggle year after year) and rigid internal discipline heavily laden with sexual puritanism.

#### IDEALISM

Although Lesbian and Gay Exclusion is overwhelmingly materialist and practical in its approach, a tendency toward idealism which crops up once or twice requires comment. The most obvious example is in the section titled "Blaming the Victim." This contains a passage on the damaging effects of the abuse and ridicule prevalent in our culture, the victims including the underweight, the bald, and so on. Of the factors in American society which "help keep the government of the few in power," ethnic jokes and the like represent real problems but are by themselves relatively low on the list.

A more significant manifestation of this tendency is captured in the title of the closing section of the pamphlet, "Come Out of the Closet." The authors argue that

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the way to deal with gay baiting and red-baiting is not to fall all over yourself denying links to homosexuals and communists, but to stand up and expose the name calling for the demagogic attack on the people's forces that it is. It means standing up and saying: "Yes, there are homosexuals (or communists) among us and we are not ashamed of that. As long as they share our cause, we welcome their participation in the struggle."

There is a double problem here. First is the failure to differentiate between the questions of gay-baiting and red-baiting. Second is the proposed answer. Certainly for communists, the correct tactical response to red-baiting in this period is often to treat the charges as irrelevant and divisive and try to shift the ground of debate elsewhere. This is especially true when the charges do not take the convenient form, "There are communists in this and such a huge mass movement," but are much more specific.

The situation is not identical for gay men and lesbians. Here, "coming out of the closet" is one of the most important forms of struggle that have advanced the gay movement thus far. (Incidentally, this approach also refutes in practice one unmentioned argument for exclusion -- that homosexuality makes communists subject to blackmail by police agencies.) At the same time, individuals may, for good personal or political reason, want to conceal their sexual preferences, or reveal them only to close friends and advanced fighters (similar to the way many communists deal with their political views). It would be a mistake to create an atmosphere in which this approach was viewed as somehow failing the revolution. Of course, it is the obligation of straight Marxist-Leninists to respond to specific gay-baiting, whether in a political context or not. Often this can be done by pointing out, "It's nobody's goddam business who so-and-so sleeps with and if it happens to be someone of the same sex, so what?" --forcing gay-baiters to defend their views.

In closing, Lesbian and Gay Exclusion is a real contribution, and it will be even more of one if it shames those Marxist-Leninists who still favor exclusionary policies into a public defense of their position.

--Friends from the RWH

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Lesbian and Gay Exclusion: The Policy that Dares Not Speak Its Name, by Ruth Dubrovsky and Lorna Niles was published by United Labor Press in 1982. It is available for \$2.00 a copy from ULP, P. O. Box 1744, Manhattanville, NY 10027.