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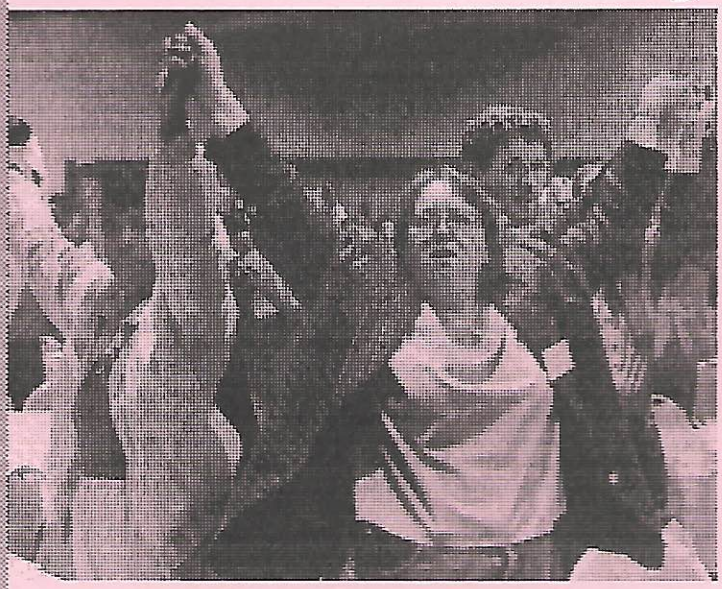
Solidarity Forever!



Labor Notes Conference, 1993
First-hand reports by Melanie Benson, Bill Breihan, Frank Lovell, Vera Wigglesworth, and Stan Yasaitis

Clinton Administration Begins Campaign to Curb Organized Labor
by Dave Riehle

Left: Participants at 1993 Labor Notes Conference singing "Solidarity Forever"

Also: Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party
by Paul Le Blanc

The Carnage in Bosnia and the "New World Order"
by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

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Who We Are

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism is published by an independent collective of U.S. socialists who are in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International, a worldwide organization of revolutionary socialists.

Supporters of this magazine may be involved in different socialist groups and/or in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. These include unions and other labor organizations, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. military intervention, gay and lesbian rights campaigns, civil liberties and human rights efforts. We support similar activities in all countries and participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies. Many of our activities are advanced through collaboration with other supporters of the Fourth International in countries around the world.

What we have in common is our commitment to the Fourth International's critical-minded and revolutionary Marxism, which in the twentieth century is represented by such figures as V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Leon Trotsky. We also identify with the tradition of American Trotskyism represented by James P. Cannon and others. We favor the creation of a revolutionary working-class party, which can only emerge through the conscious efforts of many who are involved in the struggles of working people and the oppressed and who are dedicated to revolutionary socialist perspectives.

Through this magazine we seek to clarify the history, theory and program of the Fourth International and the American Trotskyist tradition, discussing their application to the class struggle internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class, establishing a working people's democracy and socialist society based on human need instead of private greed, in which the free development of each person becomes possible.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism is independent of any political organization. Not all U.S. revolutionaries who identify with the Fourth International are in a common organization. Not all of them participate in the publication of this journal. Supporters of this magazine are committed to comradely discussion and debate as well as practical political cooperation which can facilitate eventual organizational unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States. At the same time, we want to help promote a broad recomposition of a class-conscious working class movement and, within this, a revolutionary socialist regroupment, in which perspectives of revolutionary Marxism, the Fourth International, and American Trotskyism will play a vital role.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism will publish materials generally consistent with these perspectives, although it will seek to offer *discussion articles* providing different points of view within the revolutionary socialist spectrum. Signed articles do not necessarily express the views of anyone other than the author.

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The Carnage in Bosnia and the "New World Order"

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

The *New York Times* reported May 9 that President Clinton was postponing his threats to bomb Serbian positions in Bosnia and Herzegovina because he had not yet won Congressional approval and because "he has just begun to prepare the American public for the possibility."

Not that any good could come from U.S. military intervention against the chauvinists fighting for a Greater Serbia, who are now the main aggressive force in the crisis of ex-Yugoslavia, as was pointed out in the February 1993 resolution of the Fourth International (see box). U.S. intervention would only serve the interests of the giant corporations and financial groups that in fact dominate the U.S. government. Such intervention would not benefit working people, whether in the U.S. or in former Yugoslavia.

The U.S. government's reluctance to attack the Serbs has nothing to do with convincing Congress or the American people. For more than a year, the U.S. media has been filled with horrifying pictures and reports from the regions that are being "ethnically cleansed" by the Serbian proto-fascists under the command of Radko Mladic (a former commander of the Yugoslav army) and Radovan Karadzic (who during World War II fought with the Chetniks — royalist and anti-Communist Serbian guerrillas who collaborated with the fascists). The American people are well aware that a virtual holocaust of our time is going on. Meanwhile, the mighty U.S. government, its tool, the UN Security Council, and the NATO forces of West European capital have found it in their interest to do little except prevent Bosnians from getting arms to defend themselves.

Diplomats of the Western powers and UN officials have rightly stated that both Karadzic and Mladic and a number of other prominent Serbian leaders — including Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic — should be tried for war crimes. (The U.S. government has similar charges against it on several counts, not the least is for organizing, arming, funding, and training the Contras, who committed atrocities against the Nicaraguan people.) Milosevic is the architect and chief force behind the Serbian chauvinist aggression. (See *BIDOM* No. 104.) The Serbian forces have carried out mass murder of civilians, systematic rape, and ethnic cleansing policies against Muslims and Croats and even against uncooperative Serbs in Bosnian regions. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Bosnians have been killed and many more wounded, and over 1.5 million people have been made refugees, with the numbers growing daily. Large regions of Bosnia-Herzegovina have been depopulated and destroyed.

Imperialist Powers As Models of Patience

The American public is quite familiar with the Serbian carnage in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In fact, in the face of the well-publicized atrocities by the Serbian forces, the impotent and feeble response of Washington and its allies has been striking. UN humanitarian aid officials, while en route to Muslim villages with vitally needed food and medical supplies, manifest apparently unlimited patience when they are routinely delayed on the road, sometimes for days, by the ceaseless antics of Serbian militiamen. Meanwhile Serbian forces continue to pillage and devastate those for whom the relief is intended: fundamentally unarmed, starving Muslim population centers surrounded by heavily armed Serbian gorillas who regularly bombard homes, schools, and "hospitals" where — for lack of supplies — surgeons must amputate wounded limbs with a carpenter's saw, with no anesthetics, medicines, electricity, or running water. Imperialism's patience is only matched by the U.S. government's cynicism with its "relief" missions: multi-ton crates of food products dropped, often at night, *from 10,000 feet in the air* allegedly intended to help the desperate Bosnian populations under siege!

Contrast Washington's and imperialism's response to the Serbian aggression with its

Editor's Note

The U.S. labor movement is the focus of the present issue, with special emphasis on the reactions of a number of working-class activists (Frank Lovell, Melanie Benson, Bill Breihan, Stan Yasaitis, and Vera Wigglesworth) to the April 1993 *Labor Notes* conference, which represents an insurgent and revitalizing current that is growing in the trade-union movement.

Revitalization and insurgency are badly needed, as indicated in the review by Marilyn Vogt-Downey of a book that describes labor as being "flat on its back." Some detail is offered by Dave Riehle, who provides an invaluable survey of U.S. employer and government assaults on the unions. In his discussion of "Workers' Memorial Day," L.D. Brandley describes how workers' health and safety have been assaulted at the workplace.

In an historical look at trade-union struggles of the 1930s, Jerry Gordon describes how workers of an earlier era effectively fought back. United Farm Workers organizer César Chávez, whose obituary is offered by Tom Barrett, symbolized a similar fight-back spirit in the working class of the 1960s. Naima Washington, reviewing an important new pamphlet produced by Black Workers for Justice, indicates how workers of today intend to do the same.

Our magazine has insisted that working-class struggles are broader than trade-union struggles and that the success of African-American liberation efforts have been central to the forward movement of the working class as a whole. For this reason, we have been running a series of articles debating and clarifying the question of Black nationalism. Roy Rollin's polemic not only criticizes the pro-nationalist views of other writers for this publication but also raises serious questions about how to build a revolutionary movement.

In this issue we are publishing the first part of Paul Le Blanc's discussion on building a revolutionary socialist party in the U.S. (challenging certain aspects of Rollin's views). Under discussion are questions which have concerned *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* for some time: the changing composition of the working class, challenges faced by the labor movement, the historical experience and present state of the U.S. Left, the need for a working-class party, the nature of a revolutionary vanguard party. We look forward to further discussion and debate on all of this in future issues of this magazine.

For a Multi-Ethnic and Sovereign Bosnia-Herzegovina

Resolution of United Secretariat of Fourth International on Bosnia, February 1993

In response to the Geneva negotiations, we reaffirm our defense of a sovereign and multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina. Any plan that ratifies the tearing apart of the republic into territories carved out on an ethnic basis by Serb and Croat nationalists supported by the Belgrade and Zagreb governments cannot bring peace.

The demand to lift the embargo on sending arms to the Bosnian forces is an answer to the main Greater Serbian aggression; it also makes it possible to resist Greater Croatia policies, while mobilizing the mixed populations of the besieged towns, like Sarajevo and Tuzia, who feel themselves to be Bosnians and want to continue to live together, whatever their national origins.

A foreign military intervention would have the opposite logic, escaping any control by the Bosnian populations. It would be counterproductive, reinforcing Greater Serbian nationalism instead of weakening it; it would expand the war instead of putting an end to it. We are therefore against such an intervention while being in favor of sending arms to the Bosnian forces.

This position goes together with active support to political and civil movements that are working for a dialogue among the communities and a free union of democratic and multi-ethnic states. We denounce all policies of exclusion and revenge, whatever their share of responsibility in unleashing this war. This is the political precondition for weakening Greater Serbian nationalism, the most violent and threatening force confronting the diverse communities of the Yugoslav region, [a force] which is using humiliation and rape to impose its "ethnic cleansing."

We support the feminist campaign to demand that rape be included among War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. Our active solidarity with the victims of rape must rely on the independent citizens' movements struggling against the nationalisms in power, in particular Serbian women in the antiwar movement that is opposing Milosevic's policies, and the women attacked by the Croat press as "witches" because they have dared to say that Croats have also raped women.

If the map of Greater Serbia is drawn up by force in the name of Serb self-determination, the war will continue and spread to Kosovo and Macedonia. War will break out again in Croatia if the Serb question there is settled by force in the name of Croat self-determination.

If the logic of ethnic nation-states is not defeated by the logic of the systematic and simultaneous recognition of equal rights for all the peoples divided between several Balkan states, whether Albanians, Serbs, or Croats, war will engulf the Balkans.

response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The U.S. government had little trouble "preparing the American public" for the rapid deployment of half a million U.S. and troops to the region, securing overwhelming backing from the United Nations for U.S./UN intervention; and then launching bombing missions reducing Iraq to ruins and killing 250,000 Iraqis, most of them civilians. All the U.S. government had to do was fabricate Iraqi atrocities against Kuwaitis, publicize Saddam Hussein's crimes against his own people — which the U.S. government had known of and backed for years — and threaten economic reprisals against the uncooperative governments to "prepare the populations" to accept that military campaign.

Instead of swift military reprisals in this case, the imperialists have been content to send former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Britain's Lord Owen from capital to resort to swank hotel, where they routinely wine and dine with the Serbian war criminals, who routinely promise a cease-fire that is routinely violated; the bombardment of Sarajevo that has devastated that city and its vital services for over a year continues unabated before the TV cameras of the world, and the "ethnic cleansing" goes on.

The Source of the Patience

The source of this unusual "patience" on the part of the imperialists is imperialism's tacit approval of the actions of the Serbian forces as well as of the Croatian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The political transformations in the USSR and Eastern Europe have created openings through which popular-based movements of workers and their allies can begin to advance their own economic and political demands. Such movements obstruct the Stalinists' and imperialists' drive to reimpose the rule of "the market economy" (that is, capitalism) in these regions.

Imperialism is accustomed to launching military offensives against revolutionary and popular-based-governments which, upon coming to power, attempt to put human needs before profits to one degree or another. Imperialism does this overtly — as was true against the Russian, Vietnamese, Cuban, and Grenadian revolutions — and "covertly" — against the Nicaraguan revolution, the popular-based governments in Mozambique and Angola, and the reform-minded Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan, to name but a few examples.

Its goal in either case is not only to crush popular initiatives that threaten the hegemony of transnational corporate concerns but to destroy the potential for the new, independent governments to set an example of a more humane social system. In the case of former Yugoslavia, the Serbian chauvinists — and their counterparts in Croatia behind Croatian President Franjo Tudjman — are doing imperialism a favor. The ethnic cleansing in Bosnia has not only decimated the popular movement but has set back the economy for decades.

A "Peace Plan" that Sanctions Aggression

There has also been a great deal of posturing in connection with the Vance-Owen peace proposal, which by itself is testimony to imperialism's real concerns. The proposal sanctions Serbian conquests of large areas of Bosnia. Little territory would be left for the Muslims and others. Serbs were only 31 percent of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina when that republic declared independence. As a result of the Serbian campaign of ethnic cleansing, the Serbian paramilitary forces have grabbed nearly 70 percent of the territory. Under the peace plan they would be required to relinquish only a fraction of this land. The Serbs do not intend to give up any of it.

Karadzic, now called "Dr. Karadzic" in the *New York Times*, is posing as a moderate. Having personally commanded the year-long siege of Sarajevo, which has targeted civilians and has left tens of thousands dead and wounded, Karadzic agreed to the Vance-Owen peace proposal, obviously knowing that the self-appointed "parliament" of the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina" — an undemocratic creation of Karadzic and other Serbian chauvinist invaders — would overwhelmingly reject it. And it did.

Serbian President Milosevic met with this "parliament" in early May (in one of the rare occasions when he has left his palace fortress over the past year). He also struck a conciliatory pose: This initiator of the campaign

Continued on page 40

Labor Activists Meet in Michigan

by Melanie Benson

The author is a member of Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1005, Minneapolis–St. Paul.

More than 1100 labor activists from the U.S. and around the world met April 23–25, 1993, in Dearborn, Michigan, at the seventh Labor Notes Conference to discuss "Solidarity and Democracy." The conference was sponsored by the monthly newsletter *Labor Notes,* published since 1979 by the Labor Education and Research Project in Detroit. This valuable resource prints in-depth coverage and analysis of events and policies affecting working people in many countries and also serves as an "organizing tool" for labor activists. Approximately every two years, *Labor Notes* readers and supporters come together at a conference where they can meet face-to-face to share ideas, debate strategies, and establish links with others who have the same concerns: workers' rights, respect for diversity, union democracy, labor solidarity, and — increasingly — independent labor political action.

This year's conference was the largest ever, and the most international: over 100 Canadian activists, many from Mexico and Japan, and some from Germany, Sweden, Brazil, New Zealand, Britain, the Middle East, the Philippines, and South Africa. Many spoke on panels and led workshops on the conditions of the labor movements in their respective countries and helped to explore ways of working across borders to strengthen international solidarity in the face of global industrialization and threats like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

This year marked the first time that the president of an AFL-CIO international union has addressed a Labor Notes Conference. Bob Wages, president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), spoke eloquently of the need for labor to establish its own political party. He said that other top labor officials who don't agree with breaking from the Democratic Party have suggested that by calling for a Labor Party, Wages is "wandering in the wilderness." His answer is: "I would rather wander in the wilderness than die in the desert of political compromise."

Another first for this conference was the structuring of the issue of gay and lesbian rights into a plenary session that featured Ann Montague, founder of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 503.

In addition, some new networks were created — among Newspaper Guild members, postal workers interested in forming one big postal union, and people involved in organizing community-based Workers Centers. U.S. Representative Bernie Sanders (Vermont), the only independent in the U.S. Congress, gave the opening address on Friday, counterposing a "Workers' Bill of Rights" to the Clinton agenda. Juan Gonzalez (New York Newspaper Guild and co-chair of Concerned Guild Members) electrified and inspired the banquet crowd Saturday night with his vision of "Reinventing Organized Labor."

So enthusiastic and optimistic were those attending the banquet that, collectively, they pledged or contributed a total of $20,000 to continue and expand the work of *Labor Notes* and its various publications, school, and workshops.

The main session Sunday morning featured activists from Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), including Teamster Vice-President Diana Kilmury, who gave conference participants a look "Inside the New Teamsters." At the main (and final) session Sunday afternoon Elaine Bernard, head of Harvard's Trade Union Program, and Bob Wages of OCAW motivated an independent role for labor in "Labor's Political Future."

There's no way that a short report could do justice to the talents and energy of all the plenary speakers or the quality of the 56 workshops and 26 union, interest, and industry meetings that took place over the course of the weekend. (For more detail about these and the main sessions mentioned here, see the other reports in this issue.)

If you were at the Labor Notes Conference this year, please share the materials you brought back with others. If you weren't there — you missed a good one. Don't miss the next. ❑

What follows is a kind of "symposium" on the April 1993 Labor Notes Conference. To start out, Melanie Benson and Bill Breihan give brief reports that complement one another with slightly different slants. Frank Lovell provides greater detail about much of what happened at the conference and goes into broader questions raised there. Stan Yasaitis compares his experience at the conference with that at a university class on union leadership, focusing in the process on central issues facing the labor movement. And Vera Wigglesworth, in consultation with Gary Kennedy and Dave Riehle, illustrates the kinds of discussions that went on at the conference in relation to a particular industry — rail.

The 1993 Labor Notes Conference

by Bill Breihan

The organizers of this year's Labor Notes conference really outdid themselves. This was a conference to be remembered.

These biennial gatherings of the trade-union Left got started in 1981, shortly after the monthly magazine *Labor Notes* was launched by a group of socialist union activists. I'd been to several of these events of the years; most were held in the Detroit area, where the magazine is published. Each has been a valuable experience: hundreds of union activists drawing together, sharing notes, discussing and debating out strategies to reform and revitalize the labor movement. By attending conferences like these the isolation trade-union militants and progressives so often experience in their separate unions or locals begins to break down. The bigger picture comes into focus. You feel you are in fact really part of a broader movement, a labor movement. For someone like me who has been plugging away for nearly twenty-five years in a highly bureaucratized and conservative union like the United Steelworkers, this is important. After each Labor Notes conference I've found myself looking forward to the next.

This year's conference was special. It's not just that it was the biggest Labor Notes conference ever held, with nearly 1,200 in attendance. This in itself was impressive. But what really struck me about the gathering was its internationalism. *Labor Notes* is a publication with a strong commitment to international labor solidarity, and each of the past conferences has reflected this in the program and workshops offered. But this year the theme of international solidarity seemed to permeate every aspect of the conference. The big challenge facing workers in North America, with the likely ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement, explains part of this focus. There were perhaps several dozen Mexican unionists at the conference,

more than at any past gathering. It was also reported that 117 Canadians were present.

But it was more than the topical relevance of NAFTA that made for the internationalist character of this year's conference. The important work *Labor Notes* has done in combatting the anti-Japanese bent of the U.S. trade-union bureaucracy over the issue of imports — its campaign against "Japan-bashing" — was reflected in the noteworthy size of the Japanese delegation in attendance. Apparently nearly twenty unionists and labor activists came from Japan. There were also smaller groups from Brazil, the Philippines, South africa, and a number of European countries.

Another important feature of the conference was the spirit of militancy, a sort of never-say-die combativeness and determination displayed by so many of the speakers and participants. This was not a gathering of labor historians and academics. These were fighters hoping to make (or already making) their mark on history. A good example was the major presentation "Inside the New Teamsters" at one of the conference plenaries. Ken Paff, Teamsters for a Democratic Union founder and International Organizer, detailed the seventeen-year-long struggle waged by TDU and its allies to win back the union for its members. Exemplifying the steadfastness and determination of these insurgents was the fiery oratory of the next speaker, Diana Kilmury, Vice President of the New Teamsters and Co-chair of TDU.

As I listened to yet another militant woman leader of the Teamsters, Gillian Furst from Minnesota, I realized another striking aspect of this conference, especially when compared with the many official gatherings of the union movement I've attended: the leading role of women. So many of the workshops were chaired by women; so many of the featured speakers were outstanding women union leaders and activists.

In a lot of ways the conference was like a Who's Who of North American labor struggles. So many of the speakers were leaders of some of the most important ongoing fights for social and economic justice: Juan Gonzalez, leader of the New York *Daily News* strike; Angaza Laughinghouse from Black Workers for Justice; Baldemar Velazquez of Farm Labor Organizing Committee; leaders of the Mexican farmworkers union and the main independent union of Mexico.

Another important theme of the conference was independent political action. The opening address on Friday night was given by U.S. representative Bernie Sanders (Vermont), the first independent elected to Congress in forty years and a self-described socialist. He talked about the need for "A Bill of Rights for American Workers." He was followed by Matt McCarten, leader of the insurgent New Labor Party of New Zealand. One of the best attended workshops at the conference appeared to be the one on independent politics entitled "Beyond the Democrats." Panelists included 1992 independent presidential candidate Ron Daniels and Russ Leone, an Autoworkers official and leading spokesperson for Labor Party Advocates.

The final plenary of the conference was also largely devoted to the question of independent labor political action. Elaine Bernard, former chair of the New Democratic Party (British Columbia) — Canada's labor party, and Bob Wages, President of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union addressed the issue of "Labor's Political Future." Both argued that now is the time for the labor movement to begin the break from the two parties of corporate America, that labor needs its own political party, a party to advance and defend its own interests.

It was quite a conference. Impressive. Inspiring. I'm already looking forward to the next one. No one interested in the genuine rebirth of the American trade union can afford to miss the next Labor Notes conference. ❑

Labor Notes Conference, 1993

by Frank Lovell

The 1993 Labor Notes Conference was advertised as "a very special one." And that turned out to be no ad writer's idle boast. The conference this year was in all respects different and better than previous ones, all of which were gratifying gatherings of progressive unionists seeking to exchange experiences and understand the disheartening decline of the union movement during the past two decades.

This year's conference was the largest ever, attended by more than 1,100 participants. The *Labor Notes* staff exceeded all previous efforts. From registration Friday evening to the singing of Solidarity Forever at the close of the conference on Sunday afternoon there was not a single hitch in the scheduled program of speakers panels and workshops that could be discerned by the most critical participants. The focus was on "Solidarity and Democracy," but this time it became more specifically defined: "Labor needs its own political agenda." And in the final session the speakers, Elaine Bernard, director of Harvard University's trade union program, and Bob Wages, international president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) union, spelled it out: U.S. workers need their own labor party based on a resurgent union movement.

Bernie Sanders, the independent congressman from Vermont, gave an opening address Friday evening on the need for "A Bill of Rights for American Workers." He stands for tax reform, single-payer (Canadian-style) health care, military cuts, public works projects, and a shorter workweek. His talk was followed by a "main panel" of speakers on "Solidarity Beyond Borders," led off by Baldemar Velazquez, director of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), who described cooperative efforts of farm workers on both sides of the Mexican border to win higher wages and better working conditions. He explained that his experience as an organizer, in the U.S. and Mexico, teaches that the present crop of politicians and government agencies in both countries serve the interests of the big growers and try always to thwart independent unionism. This was confirmed by several more speakers from the ranks of largely unorganized workers in Canada and Mexico. They addressed the complex problem of organizing the unorganized in the present age of multinational corporations.

Saturday usually is the main day of these three-day conferences and this one seemed to be planned as usual. The main panel, starting at 9 a.m., was called "Solidarity Out of Diversity" and featured representative labor activists from working mothers, Black Workers For Justice (BWFJ), and a Gay and Lesbian union caucus. It was a women's event, chaired by Mary Hollens of the *Labor Notes* staff. The message was, "Our diversity can be our strength if our movement recognizes and respects differences of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual preference."

The first set of workshops, following the opening panel, gave conference participants a chance to meet and discuss union problems of particular interest. No less than 22 such workshops were scheduled for this session, listing experienced and knowledgeable activists in all areas of labor struggle — from *maquiladoras* on the Mexican border to South African "democratization." The workshop on "solidarity with South Africa," for example, listed Bobby Marie, national organizer of COSATU–Metal Workers Union in South Africa, as a participant. Other workshops in this early session were structured to deal with the bureaucratic curse of the AFL-CIO. The one on "organizing for international union conventions" listed several leaders of opposition caucuses in different unions, including Jerry Tucker of the UAW New Directions caucus. This workshop was chaired by Susan Jennik, of the Association

for Union Democracy, an organization that specializes in legal assistance and advice to opposition groups in bureaucracy-ridden unions.

Workshops and Industry Meetings

There were two more sets of such workshops, another one on Saturday afternoon and a third set on Sunday from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. Nearly all of the 56 workshops were well attended. A rail worker remarked that the meeting of workers in his industry reflected a new interest in unionism resulting from the vicious assault by the companies and government, including the U.S. Congress, on jobs and working conditions in this industry. He thought the political consciousness of rail workers, especially those who consider themselves solid union supporters, is changing. Workers generally harbor illusions and hopes in the Democratic Party and what the new administration can do for them, he said, but job cuts and more railroad accidents provoke resentment and arouse determination to strike back. This has already brought some changes in elected union officials (at least some old fixtures have been voted out and there are a few new faces in top offices), and conditions may be ripe for a new union resurgence, he said. [For more on the rail industry meeting, see the article by Vera Wigglesworth elsewhere in this issue.]

In addition to the many workshops, time and meeting rooms were provided for 23 union and industry meetings on Saturday afternoon for workers in auto, airlines, building trades, health care, public transportation, postal service, etc.; and for labor educators, union organizers, lawyers, union caucuses, industrial conversion/jobs with peace, workers centers/community-labor organizations, Haiti Solidarity, and other social and political protest groups.

In the general conference area table space and posters displayed union and movement T-shirts for sale, union literature, books about the union and radical movements, and political tracts for a union-based labor party. This all spilled over into the hotel lobby, where several radical groups hawked their newspapers and magazines. Some publishers found places to display their books and catalogs; two authors were on hand to autograph their recent books on well-known labor struggles, *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland: The Hormel Strike and the Future of the Labor Movement* by Peter Rachleff and *Collision* (a history of Teamsters for a Democratic Union—TDU) by Kenneth Crowe. All this added to the militant mood and leftward political drift of the conference.

On Saturday, during the time allotted for lunch (12:30 to 2:30 p.m.), a meeting of a "People of Color Caucus" was scheduled. The speakers were Ron Daniels, of Campaign for a New Tomorrow, and Matt McCarten, leader of the formation called the New Labour Party in New Zealand. In previous years such a meeting would not have attracted much attention among a crowd of predominantly progressive unionists, preoccupied with caucus problems. But the meeting this year was well attended and widely discussed during the remainder of the conference. Some said it reflected a growing political awareness and understanding by secondary union officials, including many who were not present at this conference.

The Saturday night banquet, included in the $55 registration fee, is an occasion for conference organizers to make known their general position on the national political scene and the prospects of working class solidarity, including international alliances and union cooperation around the world. Consequently the banquet speakers are carefully chosen. Two years ago, at the 6th Labor Notes Conference, Ron Carey was featured and Juan Gonzalez also spoke. Gonzalez is a leader of the Newspaper Guild in New York City and of the strike at the *Daily News* in that city two years ago.

Gonzalez was the only speaker this time. His talk, "reinventing organized labor," stressed the changing composition of the U.S. labor force, which is being reinforced by third world immigrants, many from Mexico and Central and South America. He observed that U.S. imperialism for most of this century has drained the Latin American continent of its natural resources and now at the close of the century the impoverished peoples from the southern hemisphere are invading North America in the hope of reclaiming some of the stolen wealth. After detailing the anti-labor policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations and their consequences in the U.S. and elsewhere, Gonzalez hinted that it is dubious whether the present administration can make a difference as far as ending the exploitation and oppression of the working class. The clear implication was that workers in the U.S. can ensure a better life for themselves only by relying on their own organized economic and political power. This was not lost on the audience. The applause came immediately and was sustained. It seemed as if this was what many were waiting to hear.

A party (and cash bar) followed the banquet, attended by most who were registered for the conference. Few retired to their rooms. There was little drinking but a lot of lively discussion, prompted largely by the talk Gonzalez gave. He had a difficult assignment because he spoke after a long fund-raising effort. And the fact that he managed to capture and hold the attention of the audience, and to inspire them with the prospect of independent labor action following long years of quiescence, was generally remarked upon. The fundraiser was also a subject of party conversation, surprising as it seemed to many who found themselves talking about it, with opinions of approval.

The program guide for the conference (souvenir copies of which participants often take home) contained a brief notice that this time *Labor Notes* was calling upon its readers and supporters for contributions and sustainer pledges. For those who read the guide carefully this meant that an extraordinary effort would be made at the banquet to raise money. The effort was well planned and many prospective contributors, including some union locals, were approached in advance to pledge money and to announce at the banquet the amount of their pledges and their reasons for them, including what they expect in return. All this takes time after the food is eaten and before the guest speaker delivers the conference message. And sometimes the donors like to talk longer than expected in order to get their money's worth. So it wasn't surprising that the fund-raising ceremony took a little longer than necessary and would have continued further if the chairperson hadn't called a halt. But it all turned out well and everyone was gratified, including those donors who didn't get a chance to say their piece, when the chairperson announced that the collection had netted more than $20,000. One enthusiastic contributor proposed that the Labor Notes Conference be held annually, and this drew a round of applause.

All this speaks well for *Labor Notes* and for the growing progressive union movement which this magazine has helped build and upon which it must depend. Both the magazine and the movement will benefit. Only a movement that can sustain itself and its publications on the resources of the working class will grow and finally become strong enough to transform society. This is how the talk went after the banquet was over. But few were fully prepared for what was yet to come the following day.

Inside the New Teamsters

The Sunday sessions began at 9:00 a.m. with the main panel on "Inside the New Teamsters," fully attended despite the night-before partying. The speakers were Gillian Furst, a member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) ethical practices committee; Ken Paff, international organizer of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU); Michael Savwoir, co-chair of TDU; and Diana Kilmury, co-chair of TDU and a new vice president of the IBT. They described some of what goes into a successful challenge and overthrow of an entrenched bureaucracy in a conglomerate union like the Teamsters — with 1.5 million members, thousands of them employed in industries and workplaces unrelated to trucking. And they told some of what is going on inside "the new Teamsters" since the election a year ago of Ron Carey and the full slate of 15 reform candidates to the top offices of the union.

The central idea these speakers sought to convey was that success depends on organiz-

ing, educating, and mobilizing the ranks. This requires patience. Ken Paff, in reference to the 15-year history of TDU, stressed the importance of democratic decision-making and the need of a small group (such as TDU was when it began and still is compared to the IBT as a whole) to constantly learn from its experiences and reeducate itself. He said one of the most important decisions TDU made was when it voted to endorse Ron Carey for IBT president. In retrospect it is generally accepted that Carey could not have won without TDU support. But the other side of this proposition is a question: where would TDU be today if it had failed to support Ron Carey? As matters now stand the Carey/TDU alliance holds the top offices and the Old Guard remains entrenched in many IBT locals and in the wealthy and powerful area councils. These Old Guard officials have declared war on Carey and the International union. The task now is to mobilize the ranks to complete the clean-up of the union.

Several workshops that followed addressed the questions formulated by the speakers on this panel. One such workshop was a more detailed review of "The Teamster Experience," and here Ken Paff and Diana Kilmury, with IBT Local 490 Vice President Steve MacDonald, continued the discussion on what's being done to complete the "revolution" in the Teamsters union.

Another Sunday workshop took up a current issue closely related to (and a necessary part of) any winning strategy to transform the labor movement: "Health Care Reform." This continued the discussion from a Saturday workshop on the same subject. The discussion on Saturday was largely led by and directed to community activists, and seemingly was planned that way. Two questions were counterposed in the program guide: "Will Congress pass a form of 'managed competition' that still allows insurance companies and providers to make enormous profits from health care? Or can the people's prevailing desire for a simple, single-payer plan be turned into reality?" In the Saturday workshop health care reform activists talked about immediate and long-term action plans, including appeals for union support.

The Sunday workshop was union-oriented, led by Glen Boatman of OCAW, Allen Cholger, president of an OCAW local, Richard Balnis, a Canadian member of the public employees union there, and chaired by Rick Wadsworth of West Virginians for Health Care Rights (which in West Virginia is almost synonymous with coal miners health care). The problem here for the unions is that in order to win broad support and political influence they must champion issues like universal free health care and take the lead in the struggle to win these goals.

The final conference session began promptly at 2:30 p.m., chaired by Elise Bryant, Labor Studies Center, University of Michigan. She conducted this session with a show of professionalism rarely seen at radical forums or meetings of progressive unionists. The meeting room was filled, unlike the closing sessions of previous Labor Notes Conferences and totally different from all union conventions in recent years. Few who came to the Labor Notes Conference this year had scheduled an early departure, and some who did changed their travel plans.

Elaine Bernard was the first speaker. Many at the conference had heard her speak before at other meetings, and that may be one reason for the unusually large attendance. She is popular with that segment of the presently existing radical movement which comes from the anti–Vietnam War protests and subsequently found jobs as union organizers or became minor union officials. In 1960s jargon, "Elaine tells it like it is." She is wise to union bureaucrats and explains in colorful contemporary language that the present gang of top union officials really are modern "labor lieutenants of the capitalist class." She says they adamantly oppose the idea of a labor party in the U.S. and cravenly support Democrats even while the Democratic Party endorses and helps enact the anti-union economic policy of big business, because this union bureaucracy has adopted the political agenda of the employers. She says the employers' political agenda is "a conservative corporate agenda" designed to boost profits and drive down working class living standards to the poverty level. Part of the plan, she says, is to pretend that U.S. capitalism rests on a classless society in which everyone is "middle class" except the very rich, who remain unmentioned, and the very poor, who don't count. She argues for a candid recognition, at least on the part of those who pretend to represent workers as well as those who aspire to represent them, of U.S. political reality.

Under the present two-party system working class voters have no choice in electoral politics and are repeatedly informed of this fact by their unions, their employers, and by all government agencies and public officials. So emphatically is this dogma delivered that most voters believe it. They have discovered that the Republican Party serves only the rich, and they don't trust the Democrats because in Congress, Democrats and Republicans always join forces to enact legislation that satisfies the employers. But when election time comes the voter who refuses to vote for the Republican candidate and doesn't like the Democrat is reminded again, "If you don't want to waste your vote, you have no choice. So take the lesser evil and vote for the Democrat." Bernard urged her audience to get behind the Labor Party movement and help give U.S. workers the only meaningful choice they will ever have in the polling booth. The logic of her argumentation was so clear and her delivery so persuasive that her listeners seemed completely won over and responded with a standing ovation.

OCAW President Robert Wages

After this, one wondered what Robert Wages, the international president of an important AFL-CIO union, could say. He was scheduled to be the concluding speaker. He led off with the candid announcement that he is in fact a union bureaucrat, international president of OCAW, which surprised no one. He then gave assurance that he is different from all other AFL-CIO bureaucrats because his union is the only one officially in favor of a Labor Party and the reason it calls for a Labor Party based on a resurgent union movement is because polls taken by objective pollsters have shown that the OCAW membership by a large majority favors a labor party and will support labor party candidates if given a choice. The same polls also show that members in all other unions in all sections of the country where such polls have been conducted respond overwhelmingly in favor of a Labor Party.

Wages said he became firmly convinced that a Labor Party is essential to the future of unionism when he looked at the 1992 Democratic Platform and saw that nowhere in it was there even a mention of trade unions, not once. He said, "That pretty well sums up the story." He continued to explain, by way of contrast, what a labor party will mean for the well-being and protection of unions, and for the needs of the working class. He envisions a resurgent labor movement today as something similar to what the CIO movement was in its formative years in the 1930s, that is, a social movement which seeks to improve the conditions of life for the benefit of everyone. Before he finished he had won the enthusiastic support of the audience. One veteran unionist wrote a note that Wages had become her candidate for president in the 1994 general election.

Solidarity Forever

While enthusiasm was still high and before the applause ended the chair said a few words about the history of the Battle Hymn of the Republic, the tune to which Ralph Chaplin set the words of Solidarity Forever, hummed a few bars, gave the pitch, and led the singing

of the song. It was a fitting and moving conclusion to an altogether successful conference.

Everyone there had learned something new, and no one left without a sense of having witnessed signs of a new beginning for the U.S. labor movement. The pity is that there weren't eleven thousand present instead of eleven hundred.

As Labor Notes staff and volunteer assistants packed up and left the hotel another small segment of organized labor moved in for the UAW Bargaining Convention. They came in chartered buses, some from the airport and others from union halls in Detroit and Solidarity House, home of the UAW bureaucracy. The contrast between those leaving and the others coming was easy to see. There was clearly a generation difference. And there was also a visible difference in mood. Those about to leave were standing in groups, still talking seriously about the meaning of their conference and what had been accomplished. The others were coming in routinely, something most of them had done several times before and become accustomed to.

Beneath surface difference was a material difference. Those who came to the Labor Notes Conference paid the registration fee out of their own pockets; most of them paid their own transportation, many traveling long distances; they paid for their rooms at the hotel, and for their meals. They came to learn, and because they hoped to make a difference in the work of the conference. The UAW delegates, by contrast, knew that everything that would be done at the convention they would soon attend had been decided in advance. They were there as part of the show, and because they were paid to come. Every delegate was on per diem wages, plus all expenses paid. That amounts to a big difference at the end of the day.

In the course of discussion among those who had attended the Labor Notes Conference and were waiting around for late flight departures, one longtime union activist remarked that everything that was said and done at the conference was good, but what had *not* been said there was also important. He went on to elaborate.

Despite the excellent successes of the reform movement in the Teamsters, he said, there was a danger that the reformers had waited too long in moving against the "old guard" middle layer in the union. When a year had gone by and the middle-level bureaucrats, in cahoots with the companies, were still running local unions the old way, tying up grievances, etc., some activist members had begun to feel that, despite the Carey victory, nothing much had changed. There was a danger of demoralization, demobilization, and disorientation.

Obviously a lot of work went into winning the election, and the credit for that goes to TDU, but there was a slacking off after the election victory. The illusion that winning the votes was enough had to be combated, and the TDU now needed to provide leadership in remobilizing all the forces that helped win that first stage in the battle to transform the union and go on to cleaning out the entrenched fossils in the middle levels of the union who engage in corrupt practices, line their own pockets, work with the bosses, and fail to stand up for the needs and interests of the union membership.

Even more broadly, he said, there was an absolute need for a leadership group with a vision of how society as a whole must be changed. The problem can't be solved just within the Teamsters, or the Electrical Workers, or any one union. It's a problem of the social system. The struggle to transform the labor movement must be led by people who have a radical vision, a vision of the future, of a better way of organizing society. If those are to be called Communists, so be it. You can't be Red-shy, he said, and hope to make any fundamental changes.

Conclusion

However we may assess the degrees of danger and difficulty, the challenges facing the left wing of the labor movement today are many. While this conference helped lay the basis for meeting those challenges, success in the struggle for a better life for the U.S. working class will finally be assured only by big changes in mass consciousness. When millions of workers realize one day that it is they, and they alone, who can change the conditions of their lives, then will come social transformation never before seen, nor hardly dreamed of. The preparatory work of this year's Labor Notes Conference will surely hasten that day. ❑

Rail Workers Caucus at Labor Notes Conference

by Vera Wigglesworth

At the Labor Notes Conference, unionists employed in the rail industry in the U.S., Canada, Japan, and Britain gathered for a discussion on the prospects and conditions confronting rail workers. The meeting was chaired by Peter Rachleff, author of *Hard-Pressed in the Heartland* (about the 1986 struggle of meatpackers Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota) and "Derailed But Not Defeated," an article in *Z* magazine about the April 1991 national rail strike.

This meeting differed from previous rail meetings at Labor Notes conferences in the number, political diversity, and international character of those attending. Where there had been only 4 participants previously, this time 22 rail workers brought their experiences into the discussion. They represented various crafts in the industry: clerks, dispatchers, engineers, maintenance of way workers, and switchmen.

Clearly these workers were searching for answers to questions posed by rail labor's many defeats during the '80s, engaging in a dialogue that has now become national and international in scope. Among those attending was the president of a Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way local in Chicago who had led Rail Labor Chicago, a formation of unionists from various rail crafts that arose during the 1991 rail strike. Another was from Nebraska, looking to broaden readership of a rail newsletter he had started. Rachleff saw this as a significant reflection of rail labor's rising political awareness.

The different character of this meeting reflected what had happened among rail workers during the past two years since the solid national rail strike, which saw no crossing of picket lines by any craft anywhere in the country. Even though Congress ended the strike, intervening on behalf of the carriers, rail workers are increasingly willing to resist the corporate/government assault on pay and working conditions. According to Rachleff, this shows that rail labor may have an opportunity to lead some significant struggles in the future.

Cindy Burke, an editor of *Straight Track* (an intercraft publication for rail workers) and a member of Transportation Communications Union (TCU, clerks), pointed out that the attacks on labor continue despite Clinton's election and highlighted the sinister underpinnings in the Workplace Fairness bill. This bill has language that prohibits sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts. Rail workers of one craft would not be allowed to honor the picket lines thrown up by rail workers of another craft. (Currently for rail labor there is no legal restriction against secondary picketing. The proposal is to extend to the railroads the restriction that exists for workers in other industries under the Taft-Hartley law.)

While this legislation extends to rail workers a legal handicap endured by nonrail workers, other legislation would extend to nonrail workers the handicaps suffered by those in

rail. The pending striker replacement bill (Senate bill 55) would establish three-member boards for workers not covered under the Rail Labor Act, to be used to arbitrate disputes between management and workers instead of letting strike action continue to a free resolution. Such compulsory arbitration would virtually nullify the right to strike. Because government intervention has posed the most serious obstacles to rail strikes, rail labor is in a unique position to explain to the rest of the labor movement the disastrous implications of this legislation. "We need a real Workplace Fairness Bill, not some of the most reactionary legislation since Taft-Hartley," Burke said.

If passed, these legislative moves would pave the way for further attacks by rail employers, most importantly around the size of crews that run or make up trains. A Canadian United Transportation Union (UTU, switchmen) member noted that Canadian railroads are applying advanced technology in their attempts to operate with even fewer employees than the skeleton crews they are already down to. He gave the example of a company operating a joint classification switching yard which uses computerized switching via a link with a console on the engine — and with no one in the engine. Rail workers have seen crews shrink from five workers down to three, and now the trend is toward only two — engineer and conductor. The discussion on the application of technology in rail made clear that the last round of reductions in "crew consist" will not be the end of job cutting, but only the beginning of what rail companies intend to do.

The meeting also discussed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), whose signing was eagerly anticipated by the rail companies. One of the participants, from a UTU local in Texas, related that for weeks prior to the signing of the preliminary agreement, the Union Pacific Railroad's Ney yard in Ft. Worth had track after track packed with cars full of manufacturing work destined for Mexico and that sidings between Ft. Worth and Laredo were filled with cars of the same kind in anticipation of the agreement's implementation. On the day of the preliminary signing of NAFTA, he was working in the Ney yard and saw boxcars being pulled out in whole blocks for Mexico; he contrasted that to the way cars had been switched out one by one for previous Mexico-bound trains.

(This may seem to provide more work for American rail workers, but in fact NAFTA poses a direct challenge for rail unionists on both sides of the border. Mexican rail crews may be forced to run trains for several hundred miles into the U.S., trains formerly run by U.S. rail crews. This could result in U.S. and Mexican rail workers fighting each other over jobs, instead of fighting the rail bosses and their governments.)

The Texas UTU member maintained that the interests of all North American workers with regard to NAFTA can be defended only through international solidarity. He called for "worker to worker to worker dialogue" between American, Canadian, and Mexican workers. This could lay the basis for joint international actions that would fight for decent wages and working conditions for all North American workers. He pointed to the anti-NAFTA rally held in Minneapolis-St. Paul (led by Tom Laney of the Ford UAW local there, which proposed to bring Mexican and Canadian auto workers together) and suggested that rail workers in Texas, being in the best position to do so, should establish contact and dialogue with rail workers in Mexico.

Along these lines, Don Tennant of the Canadian UTU rose to make the point that transnational corporations transcend the authority of national governments, that they increasingly do not have to answer to anyone. This makes international solidarity all the more important. That workers around the world are coming to this conclusion was made evident earlier in the meeting when Japanese trade unionist Ben Watanabe indicated that rail workers in his country are interested in maintaining a dialogue with rail workers in the U.S.

Such international discussion helps generalize the lessons learned by workers in different countries. After the meeting someone asked Don Tennant, "What difference has having a labor party made for rail labor in Canada?" For one thing, explained Tennant, Canada has no "short lines." (In the U.S., starting with former President Carter's deregulation of the rail industry, major rail lines have been selling "unprofitable" rail trackage to corporations that simply declare themselves not to be railroads, thus circumventing the labor protection provisions of the Railway Labor Act. Many of these "short lines" have simultaneously abolished both unions and craft distinctions; for example, a worker can be an engineer one day, a switchman the next, do track maintenance the third day, etc. Aside from eliminating jobs and making work schedules even more unpredictable and disruptive to workers' personal and family lives, such practices tend to undermine workplace safety, which is based on established daily work routines and rules specific to the tasks of each craft.) Canada's labor party, the New Democratic Party, got a ban on short lines written into the Canadian labor code. Tennant also stressed that Canada's national health care system was the result of NDP efforts; this victory removed health care issues from discussions around collective bargaining.

During the meeting some participants wondered whether, when the current national rail agreement expires, it would be better to negotiate carrier by carrier instead of nationally. It was pointed out that that had already been tried and failed; another point was made that as usual, the government, carriers, and union bureaucrats will be working out such issues behind closed doors.

As is now increasingly true for all workers, the task confronting those in rail has been direct action to defend the right to strike in the face of government intervention and labor bureaucratic sell-out. Among the many preliminary steps to promote this is national discussion among labor activists. The Labor Notes Conference provided an all-labor get-together that enabled rail workers to link up in international solidarity with unionists outside of rail, and to begin a discussion of the political and class character of the coming struggles for labor union rights. ❑

A Class on "Union Leadership" and Living Lessons at the Labor Notes Conference

by Stan Yasaitis

The author is president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 82 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

In the fall of 1992 I attended a six-session class on "Union Leadership and Organizational Development" at the University of Wisconsin School for Workers. I'd been elected president of my 500-member AFSCME local the previous spring. For four months I'd struggled with the day-to-day functioning of the union. I'd had no time for strategizing. I'd had no time to review the "big picture." I'd had no time for the individual contacts I knew the local needed if it was to pull itself ahead in the battle.

Instead, I spent hours every day reviewing paperwork. I spent hours putting out fires. I spent late nights staying awake to prepare for the next day. I spent weekends recovering and getting ready for the next week.

I'm a member of Solidarity, a socialist organization oriented toward the working class, and an active union member who's been called upon to lead. Yet during my cam-

paign for union president I found that most of our members just plain don't believe they can make a difference in their work lives or the world around them. As I spent time meeting and talking to members my major goal formed — somehow I must bring the members of the union to believe a change is possible and that they themselves are the instrument of that change.

I signed up for the "union leadership" class with the hope of finding some clues to resolving the problems and difficulties I've described.

What I discovered was that I'm not alone. The class consisted of 12 union "leaders." Some were official leaders: local presidents, officers, stewards. A couple were unofficial leaders or people who wanted to become leaders.

We spent an introductory session discussing where organized labor is at these days: 12.4 percent of all workers in the United States, and dropping. We discussed how we got here. According to the AFL-CIO itself, 60 percent of the membership losses since the early 1960s could have been recouped if unions had been organizing the unorganized. Whether because of stereotypes about certain occupations, ethnic groups, or women, or the idea that it was impossible to organize certain industries, or the racist direction unions sometimes took in *not* organizing Black workers, 60 percent of union membership loss was the result of our own failure to organize.

Another session of our class went into the whole issue of how to turn the labor movement around. It will take work. It will take old-fashioned organizing. But who has the time, I wondered, who has the energy, who has the structure?

We learned that there was no choice. Either there had to be a resurgence of the labor movement or it would continue to decline. Each of us in the class faced that problem a little differently. One class member frowned and said it just wasn't possible. Another just couldn't picture it. The president of a 1200-member local at a power and light company made up a half dozen excuses as to why this just wouldn't happen within his local. There he is, with a closed shop of 1200 members, 200 stewards, an existing, active committee structure, and he just couldn't see what to do.

Lesson one, then, became that the only thing inhibiting the resurgence of unions is the unions themselves.

The second lesson was that the only way to bring about the resurgence was through old-fashioned organizing. Our teacher preached the gospel of "one on one" organizing. He spoke of the need to talk to each member or prospective member of our locals. One person can't do it, but a committee could, just by speaking to one person a day at work. I kept wondering how something so simple could be so difficult.

When I ran for local president I spoke to about 400 of our 500 members. I spoke of basic union goals and ideas. Almost everybody understood them. Almost everybody knew the score. Almost everybody wanted to believe there could be a difference.

Hardly anyone had the faith.

Where does that faith come from? Why do I believe that I can make a difference? Why do I want to?

These are the questions that our class members faced. Many didn't want to. About half did, and they got a lot out of the class. They received ideas for progress, hope for their future and the future of the unions.

We also got a view of the reality. There are serious impediments to union activism from the government, from the corporations, from our own unions, from the economic straits we face, the economic crisis of the global capitalist "market economy."

On the other hand, most of the ideas for improving the situation of U.S. unions came out of the AFL-CIO. To my surprise. There are people within the union officialdom who do care, who do think, who do plan. It is so hard to find those resources and get access to them. I, for instance, don't trust the "leaders" within my own union. I've seen them sell out and undercut locals and members.

The only choice, though, is to work around them. Find some comrades and solidarity elsewhere. There are a lot of fighters out there winning. Yes, there are small victories. And every victory counts. Each one inspires others to fight on.

What a contrast there was between my experience in that class and the 1993 Labor Notes Conference. Over 1100 union activists. All from the "progressive" or radical wing. I found, again, the dilemmas I face in my union work, the challenges to overcome from management, the government, and our society. I found, again, that I am not alone in this battle.

How invigorating it was to spend those two and a half days with comrades, with allies, with "people like me." To escape the cynicism and servility, the angst and the apathy of the so-called leaders of the labor movement. I felt — stronger than in a long time — what it really means to be part of the working class. The working class was at the Labor Notes Conference, snarling at the idea of spending a weekend at the bourgeois Dearborn Hyatt, exchanging stories of union bureaucracies that serve themselves and not the workers, reminiscing on how good it felt to see George Bush concede defeat last November while remembering how much work still remains under a Clinton regime. Another wing of the ruling class was in place, but we are still here fighting. How fresh and restoring it was to share that knowledge. How exhilarating to know there are so many of us out there still reminding our coworkers that "an injury to one is an injury to all."

As we celebrated our solidarity, we mourned the news that César Chávez and Oliver Tambo had died during our weekend of renewal. As we enjoyed being among allies, we also remembered whose oppression and suffering continues. May I thank each of you who reverently and excitedly asked for the Workers' Memorial Day (April 28) black ribbons I'd brought. Your donning those ribbons further invigorated my faith in our movement, our struggle. We will *not* forget.

Nor will we give up.

I was particularly impressed by the 58 different workshops at the conference. The topics covered incredible diversity. Labor activists are into *everything* — and that's because of our concern whenever any one of us is injured, whether it's wages and hours, or political rights, here in North America or in Algeria.

At one moment on the drive home I thought, "Gee, why didn't I get any answers about specific steps I could take to resolve this or that problem?" I wondered at that moment why the speakers or workshop presenters couldn't have outlined exactly what they'd done to win or what they'd had done to them when they lost. Then I remembered that each case is different, and that the real lesson is to struggle and to rediscover the power of the workers united. For a moment I'd been looking for formulas. For a moment I'd been looking for the easy path. I'd forgotten that we're in a struggle. It isn't a game, living in the belly of late 20th century imperialism.

Then as now, as time passes after the conference, I rejoice in the diversity of our movement, our class. Being with 1100 fighters in one building is an incredible experience. All over the U.S. and around the world, our struggle continues. If you didn't make it this year, or it's been a while, start making your plans for the next Labor Notes Conference. You won't regret it. ❑

Clinton Administration Begins Campaign to Curb Organized Labor

by Dave Riehle

On Wednesday, March 24, the Clinton administration named a 10-member commission whose task will be to recommend changes in U.S. labor laws, with Secretary of Labor Robert Reich expressing the hope that the "hostility" and "distrust" of labor which prevailed under the Reagan administration would be overcome in a new era of cooperation. The commission, officially designated the Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, will be headed by former labor secretary John Dunlop, a Harvard professor who represented the university when it negotiated its first contract with the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers after a bitter anti-union campaign in 1989. Other members include former labor secretaries Ray Marshall and W.J. Usery, retired UAW president Douglas Fraser, and Paul Allaire, chairman of Xerox Corporation, who is described by the *Washington Post* (March 24, 1993) as the "business representative."

The commission was welcomed by AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland, who said, "We look forward to working with the commission as it sets about its vital task." Kirkland expressed the hope that the commission would bring new legal advantages to workers:

> Despite the promises of the law, workers do not in fact enjoy freedom of association today. Every day brings new evidence of employers acting to deprive workers of their basic rights, demonstrating the continued failures of the current system and the urgency of the work of the commission [*AFL-CIO News*, March, 1993].

The *Wall Street Journal* was not so enthusiastic, worrying that Clinton was capitulating to "Big Labor's dream of somehow restoring a bygone industrial age." In the *Journal's* view, the commission is made up of "the usual academics and bureaucratic worthies" intent on slipping the U.S. into the "German model of Big Businesss–Big Labor welfarism," and, the editors suspect, somehow intent on "piling on such union favorites as health-care mandates, training taxes, family leave, and so forth" (*Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1993).

The centerpiece of the commission's attention will be the National Labor Relations Act, first enacted in 1935, although it will also examine the Railway Labor Act, passed in 1926 and amended in 1935. It is the NLRA that essentially provides unions with whatever legal status they have in this country. More importantly, through the National Labor Relations Board and its various subordinate bodies, the Act *regulates* the procedures by which unions establish their legal right to bargain collectively on behalf of groups of workers and defines the *limits* of union activity. The obligations which it imposes on employers, which have been enforced to a greater or lesser degree under successive administrations, have not fundamentally improved the basic relationship of forces between capital and labor created by the 1930s' labor upsurge. In fact, the Act has been successively amended since its original adoption, each amendment imposing new and one-sided restrictions on permissible union activity.

The NLRA was passed as the great labor upsurge of the 1930s unfolded with irrepressible force, through mass strike mobilizations and confrontations with the forces of capitalist law and order. The immediate prelude to the passage of the NLRA in 1935 were the three great strikes of 1934 — in Minneapolis, San Francisco, and Toledo, all led by radicals, and all essentially outside the framework of the old American Federation of Labor and its class collaborationist craft union structure.

It was in this context that the Roosevelt administration recognized the imperative necessity of subordinating this upsurge to government and judicial administration. It was concluded that it was necessary to do this within the framework of a legal right to organize, bargain, and establish contracts. The preamble to the Act states this in so many words:

> Experience has proved that protection by law of the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively safeguards commerce from injury, impairment, or interruption and promotes the flow of commerce by removing certain recognized sources of industrial strife....Experience has further demonstrated that certain practices by some labor organizations, their officers, and members have the intent or necessary effect of burdening the free flow of commerce by preventing the free flow of goods through strike and other forms of industrial unrest....*The elimination of such practices is a necessary condition to the assurance of the rights herein guaranteed*...It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States to eliminate the causes of certain substantial obstructions to the free flow of commerce and eliminate these obstructions when they have occurred by encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining... [29USC, Sec 151; emphasis added].

While the provision that employers were legally required to recognize and negotiate with unions whose legitimacy was established through NLRA procedures constituted a real concession, this simultaneously set in motion the process, which has deepened continuously over five decades, of undermining the independence of the unions and making them quasi-governmental extensions of the state apparatus. This was evident at the time, even to the old-line craft union leaders, who felt their particular form of *laissez-faire* class collaboration, which was primarily with the employers, and not the state, to be threatened by the implications of subordination to the government. None other than Daniel J. Tobin, the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters from 1907 to 1952, wrote in 1935 to Senator Robert Wagner, the primary author of the Act, that it was "better to fight the antagonisms of the employers against organizations of labor than to have the power and the machinery and the right of labor to settle its own disputes destroyed."

Those were prescient words. Tobin, and the rest of the labor bureaucracy, however, changed their tune when it became apparent to them that subordination of the independence of the unions to the institutionalized framework of labor law also qualitatively increased *their* independence from rank and file control. Tobin was one of the first beneficiaries of this when the Roosevelt administration framed up and convicted his socialist and antiwar opponents in the Teamsters Union in the 1941 Minneapolis Smith Act trial.

It was World War II which firmly established the quasi-official status of the union bureaucracy, with tripartite war labor boards, dues checkoff, and a huge expansion of union membership, primarily in war industries. And at the close of the war, to the immense relief of the bureaucracy, the employers and the government were not able to launch a successful open-shop drive to take back the concessions in terms of union recognition made during the war, as they did at the end of World War I. As labor journalist Bert Cochran summarized it:

> It is part of the historical record that after the nation won the wars for democracy, once in 1918 and again in 1945, labor, on each occasion, had immediately thereafter to face a sustained onslaught. Gompers' AFL did not have what it takes and succumbed to the attack; the steel strike of 1919 was crushed; the miners retreated under the threat of government injunction; the packinghouse victory was quickly dissipated and the industry resumed open shop operations; the railroad shopmen's strike went under the knife....It was a far different story with the labor movement forged during the New Deal. The 1945–46 strike wave was victorious all along the line, and came up with the first round of postwar wage increases [Cochran, "The Taft-Hartley Decade," in *American Labor in Mid-Passage*, Monthly Review Press, 1959].

The employers and government did, however, proceed, especially through the medium of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 (formally an amendment to the NLRA), to impose drastic limitations on the rights of labor to use its social and economic power, and through the so-called "right-to-work" provisions of Section 14-B of the law, significantly handicapped any expansion of union organization to new areas. The much publicized "Operation Dixie," announced in May 1946, which deployed 400 organizers and placed a $1 million budget at their disposal, with the aim of unionizing the South, foundered on the provisions of Taft-Hartley and the inability of the union bureaucracy to break with the segregationist Democratic Party, which had a political monopoly in the South.

The concession of the legal right to organize and obtain representation contained in the NLRA was carefully calculated by the capitalist government to be extended only to the boundaries of the new relationship of forces established through the upsurge of the 1930s. The upsurge of the 1930s was a stupendous social upheaval, but it was also something that rose, peaked, and began to recede in only a few years.

> The breakthrough into new fields took place during the CIO crusade from 1935 to 1941. The next big membership gains came during the war when the established unions mushroomed out in their jurisdictions under the "maintenance of membership" clauses that they secured from Roosevelt's War Labor Board in return for the no-strike pledge and the wage freeze. Their expansion since has been primarily a reflection of the expansion of the work force in the unionized industries [Cochran, *ibid.*].

The CIO upsurge reached its peak in 1937, as the great Flint sit-down strike inspired a wave of factory and workplace occupations by militant workers. By 1939 it was clear that the struggle was receding. A discussion of all of the reasons for this is beyond the scope of this article, but the essential underlying cause was a subjective, political one, as the union bureaucracy, both its Stalinist and non-Stalinist wings, each for their own reasons, strove to restrain the class struggle in favor of their new relationship with the capitalist class. This relationship was expressed most tangibly in the new labor laws, whose real content and purpose, as discussed previously, was the institutionalization of the union *bureaucracy* as an intermediary and an instrument of social control for the ruling class. By 1939 about 23 percent of all workers were in unions, an increase of only 7 percent from the beginning of the decade. From 1939 to 1945 the percentage of organized workers was up to almost 34 percent, that is, an increase of *11 percent,* almost entirely due to the enormous expansion of war production. From 1945 to 1953, the end of the Korean War, the percentage of organized workers increased only *2 percent,* to a total of 36 percent, and from that point on it began a decline continuing up to the present day.

These are extremely significant statistics for understanding the interrelationship of union membership, the dynamics of the class struggle, and capitalist labor law. The general misconception which still prevails throughout the labor movement, and among its intellectual explicators, is that there existed for a time an enlightened attitude toward unions on the part of the powers-that-be which was replaced beginning in the 1980s with a hostile one. Robert Reich's pious wish to dispense with the "hostility" and " distrust" engendered under the Reagan administration expresses this prominently.

What Labor Law Really Is

The truth is there was *never* an "enlightened" attitude on the part of the ruling class, only a realistic one. *The labor laws of the 1930s were not an undifferentiated concession to the working class as a whole of the right to organize and bargain collectively, but a calculated, and successful, attempt to impose a legal and institutional framework on an irrepressible social upsurge and, of most central concern, to find and to partially create an intermediary strata which could act in collaboration with the ruling class and the government to contain and regulate this upsurge and keep it within the boundaries of capitalist law and order.* This is quite apparent from the excerpt from the NLRA quoted above. There is not even a hint that those who create the wealth of society with their labor have any *inherent* rights, only a recognition that their unregulated struggle may create an impediment to "the free flow of commerce."

It is a common assumption that the National Labor Relations Act is the "good" labor law, as opposed to the "bad" labor laws like Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin. The truth is that, like all capitalist labor law, it was calculated to make the minimum concessions necessary at the time while imposing the maximum social controls. The key to understanding what labor law *reform* is all about is to grasp what labor law *is*.

(a) Labor law as a whole is fundamentally *undemocratic*. What it does is create a special body of laws exclusively applicable to one segment of society — laws that restrict its exercise of the rights generally available to all citizens.

(b) Labor law is fundamentally *unfair*. When one part of society, the workers, is contending for its rights against another segment of society, the employers, the fact that these legal restrictions are applied to only one party to the struggle is *unfair*. These are simply basic considerations of bourgeois-democratic norms, and hardly constitute an original discovery, but they are frequently overlooked in consideration of capitalist labor law, even by radicals.

For example, under the Taft-Hartley amendments to the NLRA (1947), unions are barred from sympathy strikes, so-called "secondary boycotts," and other forms of class solidarity:

> Nothing...shall be construed to prohibit publicity, other than picketing, for the purpose of truthfully advising the public, including consumers and members of a labor organization, that a product or products are produced by an employer with whom the labor organization has a primary dispute and are distributed by another employer, *as long as such publicity does not have an effect of inducing any individual employed by any person other than the primary employer in the course of his employment to refuse to pick up, deliver, or transport any goods, or not to perform any services,* at the establishment of the employer engaged in such distribution [29USC Sec 158; emphasis added].

Not only does this statute bar certain *activity,* but it clearly restricts exercise of advocacy and free speech, and has been interpreted and enforced accordingly.

There are, however, no equivalent laws barring acts of class solidarity on the part of the employers directed against the workers. The Landrum-Griffin amendments to the NLRA (1959) impose special requirements on unions for financial disclosure and dictate who can legally be a union officer. There are, it ought to go without saying, no equivalent requirements for private corporations. Even workers' compensation laws, which are nominally for the benefit of labor, take away a basic right of every other citizen, to seek redress for injury in civil court. Injured workers under the jurisdiction of workers compensation laws can only sue third parties, such as manufacturers of equipment involved in their injuries, but not their employers. On-the-job injuries, where covered by workers compensation laws, can only be adjudicated through the criminally inadequate state workers compensation bureaucracy. The only significant group of wage workers who can pursue injury claims though civil court, railroad workers, receive qualitatively higher compensation settlements. Unemployment compensation eligibility is predicated, not on any needs of an unemployed worker as a human being, but solely on the recipient being a healthy and able-bodied resource for a potential employer.

The National Labor Relations Act usurps the democratic right of unions, and therefore workers, to mutually determine the extent of their jurisdiction, as Tobin noted in 1935, and dictates who can be a union member — for example, who is in a bargaining unit and who isn't. It also developed under the purview of the NLRA that the employer, rather than the union, became the usual agent for collecting union dues, thus further insulating the union bureaucracy from the pressures of the rank and file, although this was not an explicit provision of the law. The Act allows the employer, as a third party, to intervene with all of the employer's resources and power in a decision that exclusively belongs to workers, that is, an election to determine whether and to what organization they may affiliate.

Never a Pro-Union Policy

Contrary to conventional wisdom, there was *never* a generalized bourgeois social policy

in this country to incorporate the working class as a whole into unions, not during World War II, and not during the so-called golden age of the 1950s and '60s. In fact, as the preceding statistics ought to make plain, there was the opposite policy. The actual conquests of the workers upsurge of the 1930s determined the maximum extent of unionization in this country over the past 60 years, and were essentially registered by 1939. Expansion of union membership after that, from 1939 to 1953, was due almost entirely to the expansion of war production deriving from U.S. imperialist foreign policy. Unionization was not extended in any significant way to agricultural workers, white collar workers, service workers, and others, as it would have been if there had been a general social policy of unionization, although there was significant unionization of public employees in the 1960s and '70s.

This is not to say, however, that it is not in the interests of workers to defend whatever restrictions on the arbitrary power of the employers as may be codified in labor law. To do otherwise would be to concede to the employers a monopoly of the law, somewhat as if a union would not obtain legal representation for pickets arrested during a strike on the grounds that the courts are employer dominated. This lesson was learned long ago in the labor movement. However, it is essential not to take labor law at face value, but to comprehend its underlying class dynamics and its historical origins, in order to defend effectively whatever gains of the class struggle may be registered in these laws.

Robert Reich and Friends

This brings us now to the impending revision of the National Labor Relations Act. This effort on the surface appears to emanate from a number of Clinton generation intellectuals, many with ties to the so-called "New Left" of the 1960s and '70s. The most prominent, of course, is Robert Reich, the secretary of labor appointed by Clinton. Most of these intellectuals claim to be sympathetic to labor, and some even suggest that the losses suffered by the unions over the past decade should be redressed in some manner. Reich, in fact, in announcing his plan to name the commission, said that "it is my intention and the president's intention to restore a level playing field to labor-management relations."

Reich is a friend of Barry Bluestone, a professor of political economy, who with his father, Irving, is the author of a recently published book *Negotiating the Future: A Labor Perspective on American Business*. The book proposes a "New Covenant for labor and management, based on participation, cooperation, and teamwork." Under this banner, "organized labor would give up contractually protected work rules and abandon controls on productivity, enlisting itself wholeheartedly in management's efforts to compete and produce a profit," according to a critical review in *The Nation* ("Sleeping With the Enemy," by Dana Frank, March 8, 1993). The message of the Bluestones' book is summarized by Frank as follows: " [Unions] and management should bury the hatchet, reject 'zero-sum thinking' and recognize that a new partnership of unions and management can create a win-win situation in which all the 'stakeholders' in the company recognize and achieve common, mutually beneficial goals." The Bluestones' book features endorsements from Reich and Clinton on its dust jacket, giving it virtually the status of a presidential encyclical.

The Bluestones advocate that

> labor must be brought into the inner circle where the strategic decisions about the enterprise are made....Instead of viewing the company as its mortal enemy, labor must be willing to change with the times — focusing its energy on achieving a better life on the job while concurrently improving the competitiveness of the enterprise [p. xiii].

If such sonorous pronouncements sound remarkably like the usual fat-headed wisdom of union bureaucrats whose new-found maturity allows them to "see the employers' point of view," the resemblance is not a coincidence. Irving Bluestone, the senior member of the writing team, was a longtime official of the United Auto Workers Union and head of its General Motors department for a time.

In fact, much of the Bluestones' advice seems to be directed to the union bureaucracy:

> [Union] officials must carefully explain their positions to their members whenever they depart, even marginally, from what is taken to be the politically correct position. Advocating "cooperation" is still controversial enough to keep many from speaking up. As former Secretary of Labor John Dunlop [Reich's and Clinton's choice for head of the new commission — D.R.] has noted, those labor leaders who support joint action or who see the need for improved enterprise productivity are often labeled by those who oppose these concepts as "class collaborationists" who have "sold out to the bosses" and "signed sweetheart deals" [p. 18].

While it is heartening to learn about this current of articulate and principled opposition to "class collaborationism" within the unions from such an eminent authority, one wonders exactly from what source Professor Dunlop has obtained this information. The image of "labor leaders" cowering and intimidated by militant rank-and-file accusations of selling out to the bosses, although a ludicrous exaggeration, and obviously one this Ivy League professor could only have obtained from the extraordinarily thin-skinned bureaucrats themselves, has a germ of truth to it, expressing a continually deepening sense of insecurity and doom on the part of the labor fakers in the face of the employers' relentless offensive.

It is precisely for this reason that the bureaucracy, which has no confidence whatsoever in the capacity of the rank and file to be a force for change, and an almost superstitious belief in the omnipotent power of the employers, is desperately embracing the Clinton-Reich commission, hoping it will somehow give them some new official status.

The Bluestones cite an opinion poll which found that many Americans view union leaders with hostility. They don't say what percentage of union members were included in the poll, or offer any differentiations as to possible sources for this hostility. However, we can be reasonably sure the pollsters did not make any inquiries as to the respondents' opinions about "class collaborationist" tendencies among "labor leaders," or "sweetheart contracts." The Bluestones do bravely point out that "in some cases unions have brought this on themselves."

"In the incessant struggle to maintain job security for their members," the Bluestones say,

> there is often enormous pressure on unions to maintain outdated work rules or jurisdictional lines that hamper productivity, that encourage employers — even some generous ones — to move operations to nonunion regions, and that alienate the consuming public [p. 20].

Here again the Bluestones' unintentionally provide a revealing psychological self-portrait of the union bureaucrats, who characteristically identify *themselves* and their narrow self-interest with the unions — and their main arena of struggle as with the membership — on behalf of rational, objective, and even "generous" employers. What else, after all, does it mean to say that there is "enormous pressure" on "the unions" to maintain "outdated work rules or jurisdictional lines that hamper productivity"? Who else is putting this pressure on "the unions" but the membership? And then who are "the unions" but the officialdom?

"The most flagrant examples," they say,

> receive great attention. After the diesel locomotive replaced the steam-driven railroad engine, the locomotive engineers' union insisted on maintaining a fireman on board to stoke a nonexistent coal-burning furnace. There are stories about electricians refusing to change light bulbs because that task was not explicitly written into the job description.

It is little wonder, after hearing the Bluestones repeat these old anti-union chestnuts, which have been retailed at countless Chamber of Commerce meetings, that their book received such a ringing endorsement from the right-to-work governor in the White House.

Of course, calls to recognize the common interests of capital and labor have been around since the Reverend Charles Kingsley counterposed Christian Socialism to the class struggle movement of the Chartists in England in the 1840s. Certainly such calls are no innovation for the current union bureaucracy, either in word or deed. What is notable here is not the originality of the message but the source. The endorsements from Pennsylvania Avenue are an unmistakable statement that the views expressed within are not simply just another banal reformulation of class collaborationist ideology, but the choral accompaniment to a new governmental offense against organized labor.

An Expression of Existing Trends

The thesis here does not emerge full blown from the heads of this group of interconnected intellectuals. They are merely giving political and professional expression to something which has already been formulated and implemented by the pragmatic imperatives of capitalist production. In particular the connection with people like Irving Bluestone and Douglas Fraser, former top officials in the United Auto Workers Union, and former heads of its General Motors department, is no coincidence.

"Worker-management cooperation," quality circles, "jointness," etc., emerged first in the auto industry, and in GM in particular, with the indispensable cooperation of the UAW bureaucracy, notably in the late 1970s and early '80s. It was at that time that the UAW allowed Chrysler to withdraw from the industry-wide contract, establishing substandard wages and working conditions at Chrysler supposedly to save it from bankruptcy. In turn, Chrysler gave Fraser a figurehead position on the Board of Directors. The auto corporations were permitted by the UAW to create so-called "quality circles," with soft jobs for favored workers as "facilitators" of these speed-up schemes. With the full cooperation of the UAW heads, successive steps have been taken toward supplanting shop floor stewards and their functions as exclusive representatives of the workers grievances with these company-selected committees. This has reached its most finished form in the agreement signed by the UAW officialdom and General Motors at GM's Saturn plant in Smyrna, Tennessee, before a single worker was hired at the new facility. It is the codification of this betrayal into federal law and national labor policy which is the essence of the proposals for labor law reform.

What the Clinton administration intends to implement has several facets, but central to it is a revision of the National Labor Relations Act that would give legal status to company unions. The necessity for this change was emphasized to the incoming Clinton administration by a decision on December 17, 1992, of the National Labor Relations Board in which so-called "action committees" set up by an Elkhart, Indiana, auto-parts manufacturer, Electromation, Inc., were found to be employer- dominated organizations in violation of Section 2 of the National Labor Relations Act — that is, "company unions." This has engendered a widespread fear among employers that the NLRB's interpretation of the Act in the Electromation case, which is consistent with its traditional application, may prevent the extension of worker-management cooperation set-ups.

Quentin Riegel, deputy general counsel at the National Association of Manufacturers, quoted in the April 1993 *Multinational Monitor,* said,

> We are very concerned about the implication of the Electromation decision because although the National Labor Relations Board tried to make the decision as narrow as it could, the decision on its face seems to apply to any cooperative committee between workers and management ["The Soul of Labor — Electromation and Cooperative Committees," by Ellis Boal].

The article goes on to cite a statement from the AFL-CIO defending the Electromation decision, but doing so entirely within the framework of accepting bourgeois labor law and the economics of capitalist competition, and not speaking up at all for the interests of employees:

> All that the NLRB's Electromation decision does [says the AFL-CIO] is to faithfully follow what the [Wagner] Act says and what it means....Only companies that are committed to an honest and equal partnership between management and labor can create and sustain the kind of employee participation that is essential if this country is to meet the competitive challenge of a world economy.

There are important dissents from this collaborationist view, however, even within the official labor movement.

"In notable contrast," the article says,

> the Teamsters, now headed by Ron Carey, more directly challenged the entire concept of labor-management cooperation as it is currently conceptualized. Carey interpreted the ruling in terms that apply more generally to all jointness programs. "This ruling exposed management-dominated quality-of-work-life programs for what they are: attempts to pit worker against worker and undermine workers' rights."

Along similar lines, the March 1993 issue of *The Paperworker,* organ of the United Paperworkers International Union, said:

> With some 30,000 employers in America sponsoring worker-management jointness programs that go by nearly the same number of monikers, the wave is decidedly in favor of company domination over work units to elevate competitiveness through higher workforce productivity.

"A shredding of worker guarantees to have and to hold a union without interference by the employer is at stake," the paper said.

> Even Reich's rhetoric tells which way the winds are blowing. Asked at his Senate confirmation about Wagner Act (NLRA) provisions outlawing company unions, he said, "If it has a chilling effect upon cooperation and collaboration between management and labor, then something must be done."

Further confirmation of this intent comes from an article carried on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* (March 10, 1993) by Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers titled "A New Deal for Labor." The authors call for revision of existing labor law. They point out, correctly, that union membership in the private sector is less today than it was before the Wagner Act was adopted in 1935. They also suggest that the government should increase protections for workers to join unions. But the centerpiece of their article is their contention that the government

> should also modify the ban on company unions. The vast majority of non-union workers are not going to join the AFL-CIO unions in the foreseeable future. If *their employers* feel that granting greater participatory rights to workers is good for the enterprise they should be free to do so [emphasis added].

On March 24 Freeman, an economics professor at Harvard, was named as one of the members of Reich's commission. In an influential book which he co-authored in 1984, *What Do Unions Do?,* Freeman wrote:

> Whether such activities are sold as "Quality of Working Life," "Employee Involvement" or "New Industrial Relations," they represent a needed effort to shake up traditional labor-management relations.

"It is our hope" the authors wrote,

> that union workers and leaders will have learned from experience that always extracting "more" is harmful in the long run, not only to society as a whole, but to labor itself, and that they will use their economic power more judiciously in the future....In a well functioning labor market, there should be a sufficient number of union and non-union firms to offer alternative work environments to workers, innovation in workplace rules and conditions, and competition in the market (p. 250).

Rogers, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, is the main author of the founding statement of the so-called "New Party," a new left–type formation.

The range of liberal to left opinion which is chiming in on the proposal to reform labor law should be of some interest to readers of this magazine. There is, again, nothing particularly novel about a group of intellectuals who demonstrate some affinity for the labor movement acting as the press agents for changes which are exclusively in the interest of the employers. They invariably describe their proposals in terms of balanced changes which may involve some discomfort for both capital and labor, but are in the broader interests of society. The intellectuals' conceit is that this is the way things will actually be carried out. It never works out that way. The so-called tripartite labor boards, of World War II, allegedly representing business, labor, and "the public," held down wages while profits skyrocketed. Mutuality of sacrifice always turns out to be one-sided, in favor of the employers. In fact, most of this rhetoric sounds remarkably like the propaganda for the anti-union "open shop" movement in the 1920s. A little book published in 1922 called *Seven Nights Debates on Closed and Open Shop* provides some typical examples:

> Today the employer realizes that in order to prosper, his employees must prosper also. Let us look for a moment to some modern employers. One is the Swift Company of Chicago, another is the International Harvester Company, another which we hear more about but which is no greater than the rest is the Ford Company of Detroit....They give their men good wages, suitable working conditions and they go into the homes of the worker and better conditions there.

To anyone who is even superficially acquainted with the organization of the CIO and Ford's Social Service Department the irony is obvious here.

> According to our economist there is only one method of raising wages, other than at the expense of society, and that is through increased production. But unions, as we have just seen, have decreased production. Among the chief aims of the labor unions is the raising of wages, but if the raising of wages is accompanied by the limitation of production, it is always the public that pays....
>
> Labor does not need the sort of protection it did in years past, when employers believed in getting as much out of the men as they could and giving as little as possible in return. Today fairminded and educated employers realize that their profits are greater and conditions much more satisfactory to all concerned, if they provide good wages and satisfactory hours for their employees....
>
> We do not believe that we should risk the dangers attendant upon union destruction nor upon a labor monopoly.... We believe in labor organizations up to a certain point, but we are emphatically opposed to a Closed Shop.

Compare this to Freeman:

> While our research suggests that unionism generally serves as a force for social and economic good, it has also found that unions benefit labor at the expense of capital [!!!]... we should develop the voice/response face of unionism and weaken the monopoly face [*What Do Unions Do?*, pp. 247–248; exclamation points added].

What will actually happen when the restriction on company unions is lifted is that the employers will move to further eliminate existing unions in most workplaces outside the basic industrial unions. Within the basic industrial unions, existing restrictions on the unilateral right of the employer to determine work rules and staffing, speed and intensity of production, and other matters of immediate concern to workers will be increasingly surrendered or legally defined as illegitimate restrictions on "competitiveness" and employer prerogatives. There will be no such thing as shop floor grievances. Local unions, the last place in the bureaucratized U.S. labor movement where the rank and file can exert any direct influence on who their representatives are and what their wages and working conditions are, will be absorbed into broad district structures run by officers who are independent of the membership and who have increasing legally sanctioned authority to personally settle wage and contract issues without membership ratification.

The reason it is possible to predict all this is because it is already happening. Labor law reform will only serve to extend these practices and grant additional legal sanction to them.

A Delusion and a Kernel of Truth

The bait that is held out here to the union bureaucracy is that these changes will be accompanied by a reduction in the obstacles to union organization, and that compulsory arbitration will prevent the employers from snatching away the fruits of successful organization by refusing to negotiate a contract, thus allowing them to increase their dues base. This prospect is essentially a delusion, with a kernel of truth, in my opinion.

The delusion is to believe that labor law reform will include any effective provisions to counter the ability of the employers under existing law to obstruct union organization through victimizations and firings of workers, and to stall on signing labor agreements after successful representation elections until the elections are rendered void.

For such changes to be implemented, including compulsory arbitration of first contracts, would mean that a social policy of general or near universal unionization had been established by a capitalist government. Many of the intellectual proponents of labor law reform seem to have something like Sweden or West Germany over the past several decades in mind. First of all, even in those countries, the postwar social contracts are being dismantled rapidly. Their existence was dependent on the uninterrupted capitalist expansion based on postwar reconstruction, the existence of mass labor parties, and a resultant ruling class consensus that social peace and stability required broad material concessions to the working class. It hardly needs to be said that none of these factors exist in the United States in the 1990s.

The growth of worker-management cooperation schemes, which have been adopted by 80 percent of the Fortune 500 corporations, and have grown steadily throughout the 1980s and up to the present, is no indication of an emerging consensus on the part of the employers for extension of material concessions to the U.S. working class. In fact, it is conspicuously obvious that this same period coincided with the most sustained and far-reaching offensive against unions since the open shop drives of the 1920s.

The kernel of truth to the delusion is that there is a role in this for the union bureaucracy. Although it must certainly be a tempting prospect, the employers cannot simply abolish the existing unions altogether. If they tried to, there is no doubt that the bureaucracy would be no more capable of offering effective resistance to that effort than it did to the antilabor offensive of the 1980s. The problem for the employers is that such a step would open the possibilities of a new independent labor movement arising, with the dead hand of the bureaucracy removed.

The union bureaucracy, deriving even more of its formal authority and status from the government, the employers, and the restrictive structure of labor law, will need to remain in place as a preemptive guarantee against the emergence of militant and democratic new unions. An essential part of the proposed reforms is the elimination of the concept of the *local union* as a formation upon which the rank and file exerts direct pressure and influence, including the direct election of its officers, and which has at its central function the enforcement of the union contract. The concept of local agreements, which are negotiated and ratified directly by the workers affected and which govern wages and work rules and often exert some form of control over production, will have to go. The local union has long been an anomaly within the framework of the bureaucratized union structure. It is not necessary to idealize existing local unions to see that this is essentially the one remaining arena where the rank and file exerts some form of direct influence.

A Commission to Increase Productivity

The Commission on the Future of Labor-Management Relations is also part of a process to codify as national labor policy that matters of production, staffing, discipline, and anything else which in any way impedes the unilateral ability of the employers to restructure the workplace (or in their words, any obstacle to "competitiveness") is illegitimate. This is, in fact, the explicit goal of the Commission. The Commission's "mission statement" says it will consider "what (if any) new methods or institutions should be encouraged, *or required*, to enhance workplace productivity through labor-management cooperation and employee participation" and "what (if any) changes should be made in the present legal framework and practices of collective bargaining to enhance cooperative behavior, improve productivity and reduce conflict and delay" [emphasis added].

This prospect is a necessary and complementary part of the sweeping changes in the capitalist productive process already being carried out under the yet to be ratified North American Free Trade Agreement. The fulfillment of the changes envisioned under NAFTA will require a corporatist, statist union structure similar to that which prevails in the official Mexican labor organization. It is possible that the revisions in the NLRA will encompass some changes facilitating the rapid incorporation of nonunion workers into such new statist union formations — if, as Rogers and Freeman say, "their employers feel that granting greater participatory rights to workers is good for the enterprise."

What can be said with certainty is that the real logic of the proposed labor law reforms which the commission will recommend, and which in their substance have already been decided, is to further weaken the ability of the unions, and therefore the workers, to impose

demands on the employers and to further subordinate unions and workers to the state. In spite of the flagrantly undemocratic and class collaborationist character of the existing unions, there is no doubt that their replacement by government/employer-dominated labor battalions of the *Reich-Arbeitsdienst** variety would be no gain for workers.

In spite of decades of bureaucratic rule and government interference, the existing unions remain genuine workers organizations, made up exclusively of wage workers, financed by workers, with leaderships which are formally selected exclusively by workers, whatever the distortions of democratic functioning. A struggle to defend the unions as authentic workers organizations, which will undoubtedly develop spontaneously to some extent, will further isolate the bureaucracy, whose moral and political authority is at an all-time low, and contribute to the mobilization and education of the best and most farsighted among the union ranks. Such a campaign is a necessary part of the transformation of the unions into real instruments of struggle for the interests of the working class. ❑

Workers' Memorial Day

"Fight for the Living" in Dallas, Texas

by L.D. Brandley

For the fifth year in a row trade unionists across the country observed Workers' Memorial Day on April 28. Moments of silence, candlelight vigils, rallies, and demonstrations marked a tragic statistic: ten thousand workers are killed each year on the job, one for every hour of every day.

The state of Texas, the most unionized state in the South, led the nation in these fatalities. In fact, Texas, a "right-to-work" state, accounted for one-eighth of these deaths. These grim statistics reflect the antilabor attitudes of its elected officials.

It was with this in mind that North Texas Jobs with Justice made a decision to hold the first-ever Workers' Memorial Day in Dallas. Members of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), United Transportation Union (UTU), United Auto Workers (UAW), and United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners (UBCJ) organized a "Fight for the Living" rally in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas.

The rally was held at the Letter Carriers Hall, and opened with a short video entitled "Fight for the Living." Betty Boyer, organizer for the ILGWU, opened the meeting with an appeal for more solidarity among unions in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. Father Jim McKenna from Holy Cross Catholic Church told the assembled trade unionists that we as working people had a "need" and that our "need" of safe jobs and a decent wage was greater than the "greed" of the employers. He related how in South America he had found that his Christian God was poor. Quoting the great mine workers' organizer Mary Harris ("Mother") Jones, Father McKenna said, "Mourn for the dead and fight like hell for the living. That will be our prayer."

Testimonials followed:

- Gary Kennedy from the UTU related several railroad accidents and how they related to cutting crews and training time for workers on the railroad. He told of an accident in Dallas Yard of Union Pacific where a worker had lost both legs due to reduced crew size; switchmen now worked with radios and not within sight of each other. He spoke of hazardous material, electromagnetic fields, poor rest, and the "we don't care" attitude of the nation's carriers.
- David Ramsey from the Letter Carriers stated that we needed to fight like John L. Lewis. He related how John L. wanted to strike during World War II, but President Roosevelt asked him if he knew there was a war on, and John L. replied, "Yes, we have been fighting a war for mine safety for years." He described letter carrier problems and displayed a vest that had ignited when a carrier was caught in a house fire as he tried to deliver the mail.
- Bryant Tillery from the Firefighters Union told the audience how firefighting had become even more hazardous since they were now doing the jobs of paramedics and how disease was a worry. He expressed sympathy with the railroad workers about the danger from hazardous materials, and reported that increased traffic had caused fatalities to firefighters on their way to fight fires.
- David Bradford of the ILGWU related how the union at K-Mart had brought safer working conditions to the job, that worker injuries had dropped dramatically since the warehouse had been organized.
- Jim McCasland, executive secretary of the Dallas Central Labor Council, explained why union workplaces were safer than nonunion shops. He stressed the need to support OSHA reform to give workers a voice in their own safety and health, establish an oversight system, extend coverage to public employees, require safety and health training, and give workers the right to refuse unsafe work.

Next on the agenda was a proclamation from the city of Dallas that declared April 28 Workers' Memorial Day. Considering the anti-labor attitude of the Dallas elite, this was a real coup. Grady May, an ILGWU staffperson, read the proclamation. He also reminded people of the fire on March 25, 1911, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in New York City, in which 145 of the 500 young Italian and Jewish immigrant women burned or jumped to their deaths after the company had rejected sprinklers. The company's excuse was that the cost of the sprinklers amounted to a "confiscation" of its profits. The tragedy led to the establishment of the New York State Factory Investigating Commission.

After Brother May spoke, OSHA reform cards were signed and returned. Candles were lighted, and a moment of silence was observed for our fallen sisters and brothers. A final video, "Workers' Memorial Day," was shown, and its theme was echoed in Dallas as it was throughout the country: "We come here to do the work; we don't come here to die!"

Although attended by only thirty people, the organizers of the event were pleased. The Dallas AFL-CIO Council had been cold to such events in the past. Whether it was because they did not want to be left out or because they wanted to lobby for OSHA reform, they were present this time and complimented the event's organizers. Meanwhile, the garment workers, rail workers, auto workers, and carpenters who are part of the North Texas Jobs with Justice are looking forward to Labor Day. ❑

*State Labor Service — the Nazi-era compulsory labor organization for all citizens of Hitler's Third Reich

Labor and the 1929–1940 Depression

by Jerry Gordon

The following is an edited version of a talk delivered at a November 1982 conference of the Greater Cleveland Labor History Society. Its relevance to the present period of mass unemployment has led us to publish it now. Gordon is an international representative of the United Food & Commercial Workers.

I was asked to give a general overview of labor and the depression years. The two speakers who follow will deal with what happened in Cleveland more specifically.

The years that constituted the Depression spanned from 1929 to 1940. Those years break down into three very distinct periods: the first from 1929 to 1933, the second from 1933 to 1937, and the third from 1937 to 1940.

With respect to the 1929–1933 period, the preliminary question is what kind of shape was the labor movement in at the time the roof fell in, that is, when the stock market crashed in October 1929. You hear about the "golden years" of the '20s and you might think that the labor movement was in great shape then. That, however, was not the case. The fact is that during the '20s, there was a very high level of unemployment in this country — it was double digit for virtually the entire decade, standing at 13 percent in 1928. When the crash occurred, 10 percent of the workforce was jobless. Millions and millions of workers endured tremendous misery during that period. You don't read much about that. Of course, the labor movement's membership went way down during those years. Labor started off the decade with over five million in its ranks and ended up with three and one-half million, which was nearly a one-third decline.

During that period, the employers were on the offensive. They brutally crushed a number of strikes. People who were working, ironically, were making some gains. But there was mass misery which went largely unreported. Just as there's not much said today about the more than 30 million people living in poverty — they didn't talk much then about the several million people who were unemployed. If the labor movement was in a weakened state going into the Depression, when that thing hit it was really pulverized and almost wiped off the face of the map.

The period began with Herbert Hoover calling together leaders of the business community and the labor movement and saying, "Look, this thing's just temporary — let's maintain stability, let's not have a lot of wage cuts, let's not have strikes." And everybody agreed. It was a very tranquil session, but short-lived. Within a matter of months, the employers were imposing one wage cut after another. Wages tumbled. We had a situation by 1932 where the total wages and salaries paid to working people in this country were one-half of what they had been in 1925. Of course, unemployment skyrocketed. By January 1930 over four million people were out of work. This figure continued to grow, so that by the time Herbert Hoover left office in March 1933, one out of every three workers in this country — anywhere from 13 to 17 million people — was without a job.

The labor movement's membership plummeted. A total of five million union members in 1920 went down to two million in the early '30s. For example, the Clothing Workers, which had 177,000 members in 1920, dropped to 7,000. The Miners in 1920 had over a half million members. In 1932 they fell to 50,000. That's a 90 percent loss of membership. The labor movement was fighting just to survive. It was forced to take a number of austerity measures. Unions shut down offices, they canceled conferences and conventions, suspended publication of labor papers, laid off staff, and got rid of organizers — *there was no organizing at all during this period.* The labor movement was in dire straits.

In addition, this was the period when the labor movement really became infested with racketeers. To give you just one example: in Chicago, Al Capone was collecting money from probably two-thirds of the unions. Here's how it worked. Capone, or one of his mob, would go up to a trade union leader and say, "Either you pay or you're going to get your head blown off." That threat had a lot of credibility to it, since Capone virtually ran Chicago and got away with a lot of strong-arm stuff. So most of the labor leaders paid up.

What was labor's response to some of the social issues in this period of crisis? Of course, as you know, we had only the AFL at that time. It was dominated by a very conservative craft leadership, which opposed unemployment compensation, opposed social security, and opposed other measures to relieve the plight of the unemployed and the poor. The question is why — why would they be so backward? It's really rooted in history. Until this time, there had been no national legislation guiding labor relations in this country. Nothing like the National Industrial Recovery Act or the Wagner Act, which came during the New Deal. What you had was rule by court injunctions. The courts really ran riot — they issued injunctions against strikes, picketing, boycotts, use of the word "scab," trespassing, paying strike benefits, holding meetings, making phone calls, parading on the roadside, singing songs in groups, and pickets who were not American citizens, or did not speak English. Courts also enforced yellow-dog [company] contracts, and the like.

As a result of this kind of rule by the courts and the restrictions they imposed, the labor movement's reaction was to fight anything having to do with the government getting involved. The only thing labor wanted was legislation protecting the right to organize, strike, and boycott. Anything else, they opposed. This was the Gompers stamp that was firmly fixed on the labor movement. He died in 1924, but his policy was picked up and continued by his successor, William Green. The labor leadership wanted the government to stay out of matters affecting working people, and this included social legislation as well.

The union officials had another objection, and that was that they considered help by the government to be a dole that was unworthy of workers. They said workers didn't want assistance like unemployment compensation. In 1931, the AFL said, "Compulsory unemployment insurance would be unsuited to our economic and political requirements. American working people want work — they abhor charity. They must not and will not become the victims of a paternalistic policy." It wasn't until 1932 that the AFL came to support unemployment compensation. As far as organizing the unemployed, battling against foreclosures and evictions, there was none of that. The labor movement's record was described by J.B.S. Hardman, who was the editor of *Advance*, the organ of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. He said in 1934, "The Communists staged hunger demonstrations and marches, the liberals organized unemployment insurance conferences, the Socialists advocated remedial legislation and relief measures, the men of the Conference of Progressive Labor Action promoted unemployment compensation, the AFL alone carefully guarded its record of safety and sanity and did just about nothing." That was their scandalous record.

Another thing the labor leaders did in this period compounded the scandal. Radicals had been leading the movement of the unemployed. They built the gigantic marches and demonstrations. Radicals of various kinds organized a big demonstration in New

York, on March 6, 1930, in support of the unemployed, and 35,000 turned out. There were some confrontations with the police, and this led to action by Congress to investigate the left-wing, "un-American" influence in the unemployed movement. This is how the House Committee on Un-American Activities got its start. A resolution passed by Congress gave it the green light to crack down on the radical movement. Who do you think was there, fighting to support that resolution? You guessed it. The leadership of the AFL.

So, in summary, for this first period, it was a period of wage cuts, high unemployment, diminished union membership, wrong policies by the labor leadership, and infestation by racketeers. The workers themselves were defeated, they were demoralized, and those were the worst of times.

Now, during the second period, 1933–1936, you had a complete turnaround. A new mood settled upon workers in this country. The defeatism of the previous years gave rise to a heightened militancy. It was a reaction to the bitterness engendered by all the suffering during those first Depression years. It's interesting about the turn of events — what happened was a pickup in the economy. Slightly (there was still a big residue of unemployment), but a pickup. This helped to give rise to a period of real struggle. The first really significant recovery was not until 1935, which only lasted a couple of years.

In 1933, there was a big surge of strikes in auto and other industries. By June, Congress had passed the National Industrial Recovery Act, with its famous Section 7-A which, in a vague way, recognized labor's right to organize and bargain collectively. Some audacious labor leaders ran with this thing. John L. Lewis emptied the Mine Workers treasury and sent a hundred organizers into the field, plus some volunteers. In a couple of months the union organized virtually every mine worker in the country. You have the AFL gaining a million members. You have individual unions, like the Garment Workers, recruiting 150,000 workers in a couple of months.

You might think from this that, "Well, this law was passed, everybody could go into the unions, so the membership just shot up." That's the kind of picture people have been given. But it was just a few unions that got a big jump in membership after the law was passed. In the main, you had dogged resistance by the employers, who flouted the NRA. It was ignored, and workers came to regard it as the National Run Around.

What followed the signing of this law was not a recognition of labor's rights, but the beginning of a virtual civil war in this country. It lasted for five years. Hundreds of workers were killed, thousands wounded, hundreds of thousands arrested and otherwise victimized from 1933 to 1938. It took mass struggles to generate the big growth of the labor movement. 1934 was the most eventful year in the entire history of the labor movement. There were three major strikes: one at Electric Auto Light in Toledo; one by the truck drivers in Minneapolis; and one by the longshoremen on the West Coast. These strikes were examples of the kind of style and method of mass involvement that really hadn't been seen before, certainly not on the scale we saw in 1934.

The employers used every weapon they had, from injunctions to police — private and public — to the National Guard, the deputy sheriffs, citizens' organizations, labor spies, vigilantes, professional strikebreakers, and so on. Today we talk about a one-sided class war being waged against labor. In that period it was definitely a two-sided class war. The workers fought back. Masses of workers would assemble with clubs and sticks and stones and chains. They armed themselves and they fought back. They took on the police, they took on the National Guard and, on many occasions, they routed them. What distinguished these strikes was the rank-and-file involvement, the fact that they were democratically conducted, and that they spread. There was always a concept of "spread the strike and develop support." Those strikes are models for us — we can learn from them how to conduct and win strikes in a period where we're losing so many strikes. There was a lot of solidarity.

The strikes were led by radicals. The strike in Toledo was led by Sam Pollock who later, for many years, was the president of Meat Cutters Local 427 here in Cleveland. In Minneapolis, the strike was led by Trotskyists, and on the West Coast the strike was led by Harry Bridges who, though not a member, was close to the Communist Party. The employers and the press and the government attacked these movements and red-baited them, but that didn't mean much to the workers. They knew what they needed and they were ready to fight for it and the baiting just rolled off their backs.

The 1934 strikes gave the impetus that led to the organizing of the CIO. It is interesting to note that the AFL crafts were intransigent in opposing organizing industrially, in forming industrial unions. They fought it tooth and nail. The labor movement was wracked with conflict as to which group of workers would come into which union. But the crafts were dead set on maintaining control of the labor movement. Lewis, one of the more enlightened leaders, attempted to stay within the AFL while he and others set up the CIO. The CIO was initially conceived to be advisory and educational — its members were to come into the AFL. But that wasn't enough for the craft leaders. They simply opposed any movement outside the AFL, so they suspended and later expelled the ten unions involved in the CIO effort. We did see, in this period, the organizing of packing, auto, a part of steel, rubber, and electrical.

Another big feature of this period was the sit-down strike. Millions of workers engaged in it in many different industries. They seized hundreds of factories and other places of work and they were extremely effective. Particularly at General Motors. GM was brought to its knees through the sit-down strike. The most famous sit-down strike was in Flint, Michigan. The bosses would have loved to have grabbed hold of the workers there, pulled them out, and arrested them or worse, but they were scared because the workers had their hands on $50 million worth of machinery.

The initiative in conducting the sit-down strikes came from the rank and file. Take, for example, the Flint strike, in plant No. 4, where the workers were sitting down. That was the nerve center of GM. It was wintertime and the strikers had the company all tied up, so, to force the workers out, GM turned off the heat. They were going to freeze the workers in the dead of winter. Then GM went to Lewis and said, "Talk sense to these people and get them out of there." Lewis said, "I did not ask these men to sit down. I did not ask GM to turn off the heat. I did not have any part of the sit-down strike or the attempt to freeze the men. Let GM talk to them." It was true. He really didn't. It was workers organizing workers.

Finally, in this period we had an entirely different approach to political action. The CIO, unlike the AFL, didn't limit itself to statements of personal preference by the leadership. They went and they mobilized people. They were very highly politicized and while, for the most part, they threw in with Roosevelt and the Democrats, this was not unanimous by any means. The auto workers, for example, at their second convention, unanimously took a position for a labor party and repeated that resolution at their subsequent conventions in the next years. The same with the clothing workers and the garment workers.

In the final period — 1937 to 1940 — we had another sharp economic downturn and serious reversals for the labor movement. As a matter of fact, we talk about what happened in 1929 — what happened in 1937, believe it or not, was even more serious. In the first four months of 1937, industrial production fell at a rate three times as great as the drop in the first five months of 1929. I mean it really nose-dived. There was a lot of additional unemployment.

So there were millions and millions of people out of work and this was after the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and other public works programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the other New Deal measures — all of which were never directed at more than 25 percent of the unemployed and did not end the Depression. The Depression was not ended until America got ready for World War II.

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Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party in the United States

Part One

by Paul Le Blanc

Socialism is a radical form of democracy in which the economy is in the hands of the majority of working people, used to meet the needs of all, allowing each person to develop as a free and creative human being. It constitutes a historic break with the vicious "progress" of corporate capitalism, the overturn of a system which gives a wealthy minority immense power at the expense of the peoples of the earth. Some of us believe that such a revolution is worth fighting for and is achievable not in some far-off future but in our own time. This is the starting point of these notes. We must do a lot of work to move beyond this starting point that unites revolutionary socialists. Such work can only be successful if a number of us do it together. This means engaging in a collective thinking process that involves expressing (and learning from) disagreements, and that leads to ***collective*** *practical activity.*

Serious revolutionary socialists naturally give attention to the questions: (a) what are the practical tasks they should set for themselves? and (b) what is the manner in which they should organize themselves to work for the accomplishment of those tasks? My study *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* has advanced the argument that the Bolshevik party reflected a profoundly democratic and profoundly revolutionary socialist orientation that was developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, and that — if adapted and applied to the specific traditions and conditions of the U.S. working class — it is an appropriate model for those who want to defend and advance the interests of workers and the oppressed in our own country.

This line of argument is taken further in my essay "Leninism in the United States and the Decline of the Socialist Workers Party" (which served as the introduction to *Revolutionary Principles and Working-Class Democracy,* the second volume in the trilogy entitled "In Defense of American Trotskyism"). In that essay I sought to examine what I consider to have been the most sustained and impressive effort in the United States to develop a distinctively American-proletarian variant of Leninism, that associated with the U.S. Trotskyists led by James P. Cannon. I sought to understand the failure of that effort, a failure which was reflected in the collapse of the Socialist Workers Party as a Leninist-Trotskyist entity in the 1980s.

In this set of notes I want to deal with several interrelated questions having to do with the contemporary relevance of Leninist political and organizational perspectives in the United States. These include the present nature of the U.S. working class (with special focus on class consciousness and political action), the present nature of revolutionary internationalism, the meaning of democratic centralism, and the multi-tendencied — or fragmented — character of the revolutionary vanguard.*

Leninism and Its Decline in the U.S.

It may be useful, first, to summarize some of the views offered in the above-mentioned book and essay. Then an effort will be made to suggest a practical orientation for revolutionary socialists in the United States for today and tomorrow.

Essential to Leninism are several basic ideas, among which are the following:

1. the struggle for socialism and the struggle of the working class must be advanced through the merging together of the two;
2. the working class must establish its own political independence from the capitalists and at the same time must ally itself with and become the champion of all oppressed groups in society;
3. just as capitalism is an oppressive *global* (imperialist) system, so must a successful working-class strategy for socialist revolution be developed on a global scale, involving practical working-class solidarity beyond national borders and involving an international socialist organization;
4. a consistent and militant struggle for immediate (nonsocialist) economic demands of the working class and especially for the democratic demands of *all* oppressed sectors of society necessarily leads in the direction of workers' power and socialism;
5. the struggle for reforms should not become an end in itself, but must be an integral part of organizing a working-class majority to establish its control over the political and economic life of society;
6. revolutionary socialists must function in democratic-collective organizations, on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program (indicated by points 1 through 5), to participate in the actual struggles of the workers and the oppressed, in a manner that

*The term "vanguard" has become unpopular among many on the Left, but the fact remains that a majority of the people are not yet in favor of an uncompromising struggle by the working class or of a revolutionary socialist transformation of society. Those who see the need for such things are, in my opinion, far-sighted minorities — or vanguards. In this discussion contribution I will make reference to two distinct vanguards: a class-struggle vanguard that constitutes a layer of the working class, and a much smaller vanguard of revolutionary socialists. The blending together of these two vanguards constitutes the basis for a revolutionary vanguard party.

facilitates the crystallization of a mass working-class vanguard capable of leading the working class as a whole in a successful struggle to replace the bourgeois state with a workers' state.

In the United States, as throughout much of the world, mass working-class movements developed from the 1860s through the 1930s, which included a mass left-wing workers' subculture, nourished by periodic radical upsurges, that gave relevance to this Leninist orientation. The U.S. Trotskyists associated with Cannon were an integral part of that tradition and subculture. In the 1920s and '30s the Communist movement was a relatively small but vital component of the labor movement, and it was conceivable that proletarian revolutionaries might become hegemonic (achieve predominant influence) in the larger movement. This was true even after the bulk of the Communist movement came under the authoritarian, bureaucratic, antirevolutionary leadership of the Stalinists. As Trotsky pointed out, the base of the Communist movement consisted of rank-and-file workers "who are honest and devoted" to the revolutionary ideals of the Bolshevik revolution: "We must set the base against the top." This revolutionary-minded working-class base, combined with the even larger radicalized mass base of the Congress of Industrial Organizations, was an essential aspect of the reality which gave vibrancy to the revolutionary party-building orientation articulated by Cannon in *The American Theses* in the mid-1940s.

Unfortunately, a fundamental shift took place in that objective reality. The Second World War, the corrosive effects of Stalinism, the class-collaborationist orientation of prominent labor reformists, the Cold War and accompanying anti-Communist hysteria, the U.S. economic prosperity and "consumerist" mass culture of the 1950s and '60s, along with other far-reaching social and cultural changes, were among the phenomena which combined to deradicalize the U.S. labor movement and to melt away most of the vibrant left-wing working-class subculture of which the U.S. Trotskyists of the Socialist Workers Party were a part. When the SWP's ranks were replenished by radicalizing youth in the 1960s and '70s, the SWP was necessarily a qualitatively different organization, and it was not possible for the 1930s and '40s proletarian party-building orientation of Cannon to be implemented.

The majority of SWPers in the 1960s and '70s could formally be defined as working class, just as the program of the SWP could be defined as formally proletarian-revolutionary. But the objective realities — which involved the absence of a radical wing of the labor movement, and a disconnectedness of most SWP members from working-class life — introduced a *déclassé* quality into the actual consciousness, lifestyles and political work of many party members. The SWP became increasingly undermined by qualities alien to the democratic working-class orientation of Lenin, Trotsky and Cannon.

When the SWP attempted to "proletarianize" itself in the 1970s and '80s, this corrosion was already quite advanced, despite good work that the party had been able to carry out in various mass struggles (against imperialism, against racism, against sexism, etc.). Nor was the U.S. working class of that time capable of quickly bringing back into existence a substantial radicalized vanguard layer such as had been so important in earlier periods of workers' struggles. The absence of such a layer, plus the younger SWPers' own inexperience, made it impossible for the superficially "proletarianized" cadres of the SWP to duplicate earlier Trotskyist successes or partial successes of the 1930s and '40s. This generated a crisis which culminated in the collapse and fragmentation of American Trotskyism.

The attempt to leap over the experience of the SWP — either to uncritically reproduce the pre-1979 SWP or to hypercritically reject it — involves a failure to assimilate the positive and negative lessons of that experience. The result, in either case, will be to reproduce, one way or another, much of the negative experience — elitism, arrogance, narrow "maneuverism" and sectarianism, and an incapacity to be an organic element in the actually existing working class and its struggles. An attempt simply to rebuild the healthier SWP of Cannon is also doomed to failure because some of the essential conditions and realities which brought it into being and gave it relevance (not the least of which was a vibrant and deep-rooted labor-radical subculture stretching back to the post-Civil War era) no longer exist.

There can be no Leninist party worthy of the name under present conditions. The attempt to create such a party in spite of the conditions will result in a *sect:* a small group with no organic connection with the working class as a whole, a group whose activities have little relevance for the working class, and whose real or imagined wisdom and leadership abilities are incapable of attracting a substantial number of adherents.

A simple — or "sophisticated" — rejection of Leninism by would-be revolutionary socialists will also lead to a dead end under today's circumstances. Until the imperialist stage of capitalism and the need for socialist revolution are left behind, Leninism cannot be "transcended," just as we cannot go beyond Marxism until we go beyond the realities which Marxism describes: the predominance and destructiveness of the capitalist mode of production; the existence of capitalists and workers as essential to that mode of production; the ceaseless and all-pervasive struggle, "now hidden, now open," between those two classes.

The fundamental task for genuine Leninists in the U.S. today is to contribute to the creation of the necessary conditions for the relevance of a Leninist party in the United States. There is a need for a labor-radical subculture, organically a part of the lives of a significant percentage of the actually existing working class — involving a rich pool of remembered experiences, ideas and evolving outlooks, activities, institutions, activists — that will sustain an accumulation of struggles and a developing class consciousness and that will be the basis for a mass party of the working class. Within such a party a left wing will naturally cohere, and this revolutionary wing will be the U.S. variant of Bolshevism. Only within such a context can there be a realistic expectation that a real Leninist party could come into existence.

The U.S. Working Class and Its Consciousness

There is first of all a need to define what we mean by *working class,* because the confusion sown by procapitalist propagandists and sectarian leftists has penetrated deep into the ranks of the revolutionary socialist movement.

According to the definitions of many sectarians on the left, the working class is the shrinking number of manual "blue collar" workers who are directly engaged in the production of surplus-value. The old stereotype also tends to picture "the workers" as white males, with women, and with African Americans and other oppressed people of color, as important "allies of the working class." Sometimes lip service is paid to the notion that there are women workers, Black workers, Puerto Rican and Mexican-American workers, the "new immigrants" from Latin America and

Asia, etc., but often this is inadvertently forgotten as soon as the lip service is paid. The fact that a significant number of workers are gay, lesbian and bisexual rarely even makes its way to the status of lip service. In addition, large sectors of the labor force — often the bulk of the "service" and "white collar" and "professional" categories — are designated as part of a nonproletarian "middle class" (or, somehow, at least as being "less working-class" than those who must work in industrial jobs).

The procapitalists, on the other hand, define almost everyone as being "middle-class." Excluded from this category are only the very rich (who are "upper-class") and the very poor (who are "lower-class"). In fact, most members of the U.S. working class see things in that way, and define themselves as being part of the "middle class" rather than as working-class.

The more scientific definition of Marx and Engels holds that those who sell their labor power to an employer in order to make a living are part of the working class. Consistent with this is the notion that those whose livelihood depends on the wages or salaries of such workers (such as family members: spouses, children, etc. — including children who happen to be college students) should be considered part of the working class. In addition, *unemployed* workers, including those who are "chronically unemployed" due to the dynamics and restructuring of the capitalist economy, are also part of the working class. The same is true, of course, for retired workers. Also included are the overwhelming majority of service workers, government workers, clerical and computer workers, "professional" workers (teachers, librarians, social workers, etc.) as well as the more traditionally "proletarian" industrial workers.

Defined in this manner, the great majority of the population in the United States, certainly 80 percent at a minimum, makes up the U.S. working class. It is a vibrantly multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural proletariat, almost equally male and female: an interesting but not unimportant fact is that white males by definition are a minority of the working class (since at least 50 percent of the working class is female, and then nonwhite males decisively tip the balance), but this minority status of white males has also developed within the *wage-earning labor force* throughout much of the United States.

One of the key problems for revolutionary socialists is the fact that most of this working-class majority does not see itself as part of a working-class majority. This relates to the question of class consciousness. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire* Marx wrote that the French peasants of the 19th century, insofar as they "are merely connected on a local basis, and the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or political organization, they do not form a class." The peasants actually existed, of course, but not as a self-conscious and self-organized entity. That is, to a large degree, also true of the U.S. working class: it is an objective reality, but many of those who are part of it have neither a feeling of community with all the members of their class, nor national links, nor a political organization. These are essential aspects of *class consciousness*. The working class is, in fact, fragmented in many ways — occupationally, racially, culturally, etc. — and this fragmentation has an impact on the consciousness of the various workers.

What members of the working class have in common must not be conjured away. It is an essential, elemental part of one's identity. There is an intimate knowledge of having no way to make a living except by selling your own labor power, finding someone willing to hire you, and being under the economic domination of a boss who tries to convert your labor power into as much actual labor as possible. It involves a sense of common cause (despite petty aggravations) with your workmates, a desire to exercise at least some common control over your work situation, and a shared resentment over the "bossism" of your superiors. It involves a feeling that you earn every penny that you make, and in many cases a vivid sense that your labor enriches others. There is a shared understanding with millions of others that those on top will always have many more advantages, privileges, tax breaks, perks, resources, opportunities, etc., and that the majority of us — looked down upon and taken for granted — pay for that.

And yet for most workers there is *not* a sense that the working class, as such, is pitted against the capitalist class in an irreconcilable struggle which must be resolved, finally, in the victory of one over the other. Nor is there a belief that the working class, as a self-conscious and self-organized entity, can and should take political power, establish its dominion over society, and run the economy in the interest of all. And for many, there is a tendency to identify one's self primarily as belonging to an entity other than something called *the working class*.

Much of the working class sees itself as part of "the great white American middle class," although this also subdivides ethnically into Italian Americans, Polish Americans, Irish Americans, etc., etc. A person's family and community are primary mechanisms for the creation of a person's sense of who one is, and the spectacular ethnic diversity in the United States consequently generates a variety of strongly felt ethnic identities in our multicultural society. This is also one aspect of the reason why much of the working class sees itself primarily as African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Chinese American, etc. For many, religious affiliations are also a central component of their self-identity.

Another, and more powerful, aspect of this fragmentation involves the persistent, sometimes perniciously subtle and sometimes openly vicious, ever-present oppression that various sectors of the working class have experienced. Anti-immigrant racism against white ethnics, even more thoroughgoing and vicious racism against African Americans, anti-Hispanic and anti-Asian racism, genocidally-tinged racism against Native-Americans (or "Indians") — all of this has borne down on one or another oppressed group from "the larger society," including from other sectors of the working class. Often this experience heightens, quite naturally, one's sense of ethnically or racially based "peoplehood" above one's sense of working-class identity.

Having a similar impact are the deep and pervasive limitations placed on women's human rights, individual dignity, and capacity for self-realization. Women have been oppressed, insulted and injured through traditionalistic patriarchal "protectiveness" and commercially lucrative sexual exploitation, through overt legal discrimination and subtle psychological intimidation, through unequal treatment in the workplace and often impossible burdens in the home — all this and more. While badly distorting the humanity of men, such cultural patterns have been most keenly felt by women, and their sense of solidarity with the abstract "working class as such" is often far less pronounced than is their sense of identification as women.

A primary identification of one's self as "gay" or "lesbian" is similarly generated by the social viciousness experienced by those whose personal orientations do not conform to "mainstream" heterosexual norms. While a majority of gays and lesbians are part of the working class, their class location can hardly be expected

to obliterate their intimately felt vulnerability and sense of oppression, especially given the fact that homophobia is as prevalent within the working class as elsewhere.

Of course, all of us have more than one of the characteristics discussed above. We have within ourselves a variety of competing identities, which blend together in different combinations. And there are other identities which are woven into the fabric of our lives and consciousness. For many people there is a matter-of-fact and/or patriotic and/or chauvinistic identification of being "an American." One's age and generation also provides an important sense of identity for many, as does one's educational background and cultural tastes.

Culture, Struggle, Consciousness

Culture is especially significant, because it touches on some of the key aspects of people's creative lives and consciousness. Although some would-be Marxists view it as peripheral to the class struggle, in fact it is central, and it leads us to part of the solution to the problem of class fragmentation that we have discussed here. The meaning of life for many people will incorporate certain sports (or sports teams), certain types of music (and in some cases musical artists, forms of dance or other expression), certain movies or television programs, or the acquisition of certain commodities (types or brands of clothes, sneakers, cars, etc.), as well as such things as the preparation and/or enjoyment of food, gardening, the beautification of one's home, certain crafts (carpentry), etc.

Some social critics have argued that under capitalism the masses are simply drugged, manipulated, and turned into passive sheep by a mass commodity culture. The reality seems more complex, however. Many working-class consumers appear to maintain a critical mind and a sense of humor (perspective), as well as their own creative inclinations; this results in an *interactive* relationship of much of the working class with the "mass culture," and this critical interaction at least in part transforms and renews the larger culture. Sometimes this is done in ways that elude and even subvert the manipulative designs of the capitalists.

More than this, the larger culture provides significant cross-fertilization among the diverse sectors of the population, contributing at least in some ways to a common experience and consciousness. This helps to transcend aspects of the fragmentation within the working class. Serious revolutionaries must take seriously the question of cultural and educational activity which helps to interlink and draw together the various components of the working class. It is clear that some artists and other cultural activists are engaged in important efforts along these lines in the graphic arts, music, literature, film, television, etc. To the extent that we are able to relate our own activities to such cultural developments, we will be more successful.

What is most important in giving various sectors of the working class a sense of power, however, are the more direct political struggles against various forms of oppression. As masses of people are mobilized in collective action against a common problem, winning partial victories through their own efforts, they can develop forms of consciousness and organization, and a vital accumulation of experience, that are necessary preconditions for challenging the power of capitalism. This political activity is not primarily *electoral* — it involves fighting for reforms through mobilizations at workplaces, placing demands on employers; through mobilizations in communities, reaching out for the support of others; through mobilizations in the streets, placing demands on governmental figures.

In many cases, such struggles of one or another sector of the working class will not be seen as a *class* struggle. Instead it will involve primarily a consciousness or identification of race or ethnicity, of gender, of sexual orientation, of concern around a particular issue (perhaps ecology, or civil liberties, or anti-imperialism). The participants in such a struggle will for the most part be drawn from the working class (although they often will not identify themselves in that way), they will be struggling around issues that objectively are in the interest of the working class as a whole (although this may not be perceived, at first, by a majority of the working class), and the definitive, as opposed to partial, victory of such a struggle can be won only through the working class taking political power and bringing about the socialist transformation of the economy (although only a handful of Marxists will see things in this way, at least initially).

Revolutionary socialists must be active and visible in all such struggles against oppression. They must see these struggles as having value in and of themselves, and at the same time understand that they are part of the general struggle of the working class. Previous disputes on the U.S. left help to shed light on this approach. In the 1960s and '70s, critics of the Socialist Workers Party accused it of "sectoralism" and "poly-vanguardism" — giving the social movements of Blacks, women, youth, etc., equal weight with the labor movement, in contradiction to the Marxist dictum that it is the proletariat that must make the revolution.

A young SWP leader of that time, Gus Horowitz, explained the importance of the social movements: "Under capitalism, side by side with the exploitation of the working class, there also exist new forms of long-known oppression, the reactionary institutional and ideological remnants of a precapitalist era: the oppression of women and nationalities, religious superstition, the persecution of homosexuals, reactionary social morality, restrictions on civil liberties and human rights are but a few examples." A seasoned veteran in the SWP leadership, George Breitman, went beyond this in emphasizing the working-class composition of substantial sectors of these new social movements, commenting that "it is idiotic and insulting to think that the worker responds only to economic issues; he can be radicalized in various ways, over various issues, and he is." Breitman elaborated:

> The radicalization of the worker can begin off the job as well as on. It can begin from the fact that the worker is a woman as well as a man; that the worker is a Black or Chicano or a member of some other oppressed minority as well as a white; that the worker is a father or a mother whose son can be drafted [to fight in Vietnam]; that the worker is young as well as middle-aged or about to retire. If we grasp the fact that the working class is stratified and divided in many ways — the capitalists prefer it that way — then we will be better able to understand how the radicalization will develop among workers and how to intervene more effectively. Those who haven't already learned important lessons from the radicalization of oppressed minorities, youth and women had better hurry up and learn them, because most of the people involved in these radicalizations are workers or come from working-class families.

Horowitz explained, "We see that movements such as the women's liberation movement, the struggles of oppressed nationalities for self-determination, the gay liberation movement, and the revolution in culture are a part of the general struggle against the outmoded capitalist system," adding that "these new movements are not unimportant or peripheral to the socialist revolution, but at the center of its advance" (*Towards an American Socialist Revolution* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971], pp. 15, 101).

A strength of the SWP in this period was to be ahead of its time (advancing perspectives which today are on the cutting-edge of left-intellectual "discourse" — see Stanley Aronowitz, *The Politics of Identity: Class, Culture, Social Movements* [New York: Routledge, 1992]), but in fact this approach was seriously grounded in the classical Leninist perspective, expressed in *What Is To be Done?*, that the revolutionary socialist should strive to be

> *the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of people it affects; who is able to generalize all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth *before all* his socialist convictions and democratic demands, in order to clarify for *all* and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.

In the United States today it is more important than ever for revolutionary socialists to be active in social movements which, while not explicitly proletarian, are essential for the political revitalization of the actually existing working class. In addition to helping advance these struggles toward victory through serious and consistent practical efforts, revolutionary socialists must also work to advance the consciousness of participants (plus working-class nonparticipants) regarding the class dynamic inherent in the struggle. Whenever possible, coalitions should be built which help to draw together different sectors of the working class in common struggles. Such coalitions will sometimes not gather under an explicitly proletarian banner, but they can provide a framework within which the crystallization of working-class consciousness will take place.

Those revolutionary socialists who are involved in explicitly working-class organizations (such as trade unions, progressive union caucuses, groups such as the Coalition of Labor Union Women and the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, as well as Labor Party Advocates) have a special responsibility. To the extent that they can win other workers in their organizations, and their organizations as a whole, to champion the cause of especially oppressed groups, they will help to advance the consciousness of those who are members of their organizations, of course. But in addition, such conscious working-class activists will be able to advance the consciousness of class and of the value of labor action among those members of the working class whose primary identification has *not* been around class.

Revolutionary socialists must pool their resources and build institutions to do such work as outlined here. It is also necessary for at least some of them to find organizational forms enabling them to coordinate their energies for the purpose of carrying out these educational, cultural, and activist efforts as effectively as possible. At the same time, it is essential that they avoid the pitfall of seeing such a necessary organization as a "revolutionary workers' party" or "Leninist vanguard party" or as that party in embryo, or even as the "nucleus of the revolutionary party" (around which a mass of proletarian electrons will eventually orbit). Such a party, vitally important, will be brought into existence only through a more broadly conceived effort than the self-anointment of a small

Continued on page 34

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Labor Action in Ottawa May 15

Unemployment Insurance Fightback Continues

by Elizabeth Byce

Elizabeth Byce, a member of the Toronto Canadian Union of Postal Workers, is campaign coordinator for the U.I. Fight Back for Labour Council of Metro Toronto.

There can be no doubt that the Unemployment Insurance Act was in need of change — but not the way Bill C-113 (which drastically cuts back unemployment benefits), now law, changed it.

Amendments are needed to meet the challenge of the deep economic recession that grips every worker. Naturally, the federal Tories went in the opposite direction.

Why should workers be punished for the massive levels of unemployment caused by the system, and worsened by the economic and social policies of the Conservative government?

How will victimizing the worker who has contributed unemployment insurance (U.I.) premiums help solve the unemployment crisis? How will disqualifying a worker who is fired or quit improve things for anyone but the boss?

Canadians are not indentured servants whose very existence is governed by the management rights of the employer. Or at least I thought that the Masters and Servants Act was abolished many decades ago.

And the reduction of U.I. benefits from 60% to 57% of insured earnings is nothing more than a move to lower our standard towards the level of the United States. What's next? Fifty percent — or less?

But it would be wrong to think that this new law is mainly about saving money. It's really about shifting the balance of power in the workplace even more in favor of the employers. And what better time than now to do it, when job insecurity is so high.

Guilty Until Proven Innocent

Under this law the worker is guilty until proven innocent. Even a person accused of a criminal offense is treated better than an "accused abuser of U.I." (to use Tory Immigration Minister Bernard Valcourt's terminology).

Here are a few more examples to show what I mean:

- The onus of proof is on the claimant, not the employer.
- U.I. is guided by directives that can be changed by the commission at any time (unlike laws that can be changed only by Parliament), and its directives can be interpreted loosely or severely.
- Employers have more power than a witness in a court trial because of the weight given to the separation slip and the approach recommended by U.I. directives.
- The claimant suffers total loss of income immediately, whereas normally a jail term or fine is not imposed on the convicted until after appeals are exhausted.
- There are no regulations for a minimum appeal time in favor of the claimant; a law court may drop charges if an appeal process is too lengthy.
- C-113 allows the chair of an appeal board to exclude the claimant while hearing evidence from the employer; a defendant cannot be excluded from her/his own trial, except for extreme misbehavior in court.

The Real Cost

The cost to society of the U.I. cuts will be staggering.

People who can't get U.I. will further swell the welfare rolls of provincial and municipal governments.

The appeal process will become even more lengthy and more costly to both the taxpayer and the claimant. Increased penalties and greater injustice raise the stakes for everyone.

People who are hit by the U.I. cuts, and employees caught in unsatisfying or abusive work situations will be more open to physical and psychological illness, and more prone to social problems like substance abuse, criminal activity, marital problems, and violence in the home. This, in turn, means more stress on hospitals, jails, mental health treatment, women's shelters, child welfare, etc.

Protest Sweeps the Country

All across English Canada and Québec, demonstrations, rallies, and marches were held in opposition to Bill C-113 before it became law.

Forty-five thousand rallied in Montréal. Demonstrations occurred from St. John's, Newfoundland, to Vancouver, B.C., including a 6,000-strong rally and march in Toronto on a bitterly cold March 13.

Working people told the government that we want jobs, not U.I. cuts. We want sector-by-sector training and education, a fair tax system, research and development, and job creation through public-sector initiatives.

A law that says you can look forward to lengthy and costly appeals, and to go without benefits for months, is no solution to the crisis we face. This law is a disaster for working people.

It's time to attack unemployment, not the unemployed.

On May 15, on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, tens of thousands of workers will tell the federal Tory government just where to get off. And it won't end there. We're not going to just sit back and wait until the federal election next fall. ❑

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Canada

Reject Bob Rae's Social "Con-Trick"

by Barry Weisleder

Barry Weisleder was re-elected in April to the Executive Board of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

With mandatory wage and job cut legislation waiting in the wings, Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP, Canada's labor party) Premier Bob Rae is trying to get public service unions, representing over 950,000 workers across the province, to agree to cutbacks worth $9 billion — all in the name of a "social contract."

But Rae's game is a "con-trick."

The "con" is the myth that we're "partners," "all in this together," or "equals shouldering the burden of tough times." In truth, workers are getting hammered by a government that has done nothing to share power or trim its bloated management, while letting private-sector bankers and capitalists continue to rake in millions in untaxed profits.

The "trick" is Rae's attempt to suck unions into a divide-and-conquer exercise: at separate tables pitting one sector (like health care or education) against others (like social service agencies or government ministries). Or by setting poorly-paid workers against those somewhat better off (stealing a page from Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells, who has targeted teachers for wage rollbacks). Or by distracting unions with a pointless talkfest, and then lowering the boom with legislation just in time for the May provincial budget.

So far, leaders of Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), Canadian Union of Public Employees, the teachers' federations, the Ontario Nurses Association, and other public sector unions, remain united in opposition to job and wage cuts. But there are discernible differences expressed from day to day, ranging from threats of strike action to hints that wages might be traded for "genuine" job security.

Rank-and-file members are getting a mixed message at a time when unions should be mobilizing successively larger protest actions, involving all social sectors that will be victimized by cutbacks. As of mid-April, however, no plan of action has been announced by the unions, individually or collectively — although the Metro Toronto Region of OPSEU is advancing a thirteen-point mass-action proposal adopted at a well-attended emergency meeting on April 3.

Inaction plays right into the hands of a government that is betraying the working class and joining with Bay Street and the commercial media in whipping up a frenzy about debts and deficits.

Workers should reject such self-serving, self-generated hysteria with a very clear message: No to any cuts! This must be backed up by immediate mass mobilizations.

Our response to the bosses' arguments should be threefold:

1. The debt crisis is grossly exaggerated.
2. Enormous amounts of money can be saved by cutting management waste and regressive programs, and by taxing wealth.
3. The real problems are the cyclical crises of capitalism, high unemployment, and lack of democratic control of the economy.

The Deficit Myth

Ontario has a debt of $68 billion. Per person, that's higher than British Columbia's and Alberta's, but lower than all the other provinces'; Québec's is the highest.

Premier Rae says Ontario's debt will hit $120 billion in 1996 unless he does something drastic now. His projection is dubious, but even if true, would cause the province to spend 26¢ of every tax dollar on interest payments. The federal government currently pays 35¢ of every revenue dollar on debt servicing (partly because of the Bank of Canada's artificially high interest rates), and yet Ottawa is not being threatened, let alone being cut off by lenders.

Japan currently pays more to service its debt than does Ontario.

It's natural for government debts to go up when more people are out of work, pay less taxes, and depend more on government services (like welfare).

Debts climb even faster when corporate taxes are reduced, which is precisely what's occurred, at both federal and provincial levels over the past thirty years.

The *Financial Post* (April 1) outlined, hypothetically of course, what it would take to eliminate the entire $17 billion deficit projected by Ontario Treasurer Floyd Laughren for 1993:

- raise the sales tax by twenty percentage points from the current 8%;
- fire 375,000 of the nearly one million people who work for Ontario's public service;
- close down the entire health care system.

Is this hypothesis supposed to soften up workers for more "modest" cuts?

A "mere" $7 billion cut in the public sector would boost Ontario's unemployment rate to almost 12%.

Is that a solution or just a naked maneuver by employers to grab an even bigger slice of the pie that workers produce?

Cut Management Waste

To be sure, money could be saved by cutting many unnecessary expenditures by government.

For example, by ending the job relocation program, which creates no new jobs, $1 billion (and considerable worker/family hardship) could be spared.

The $1 billion JobsOntario training program has been a wage subsidy scheme for private business, failing to deliver long-term employment. It needs to be revamped.

Money is being wasted on faltering partnerships with the corporate sector, such as Teranet. Computerization of land registry data should be brought back into the public service.

Plans to create new agencies that can sell off services and accumulate their own debts should be halted. Downloading debt to municipal taxpayers, and allowing a deterioration of public services is counterproductive.

So is selling off public assets, like buildings, computers, and trains, and leasing them back.

$900 million was spent by Queen's Park on contracting-out of government work in an eighteen-month period, a scandalous escalation of cost, at public expense, and for private business gain.

Another such example is the nearly $500 million Ontario spends annually on medical tests done in private labs, instead of public hospitals.

The government could also implement the 1992 Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor, which indicated many areas of lost revenue and waste.

And finally, there could be even greater savings if the government would empower its workers to find new and better ways of delivering services. But that would be possible only if workers had front-line decision-making power, and assurances that we will share in the benefits of productivity, rather than lose jobs.

Today there's one manager for every four workers in the Ontario Public Service. In some community colleges, and broader public sector institutions, the ratio is 1:2. Imagine the savings that would result from a "delayering" of management, plus the predictable reduction in grievance expenditures.

Workers' power would make dollars and sense.

Tax the Rich

Bob Rae boasts to the media that Ontario has the lowest corporate taxes in the Great Lakes region. Of course, the consequences are that workers pay the price in higher taxes, fewer jobs, deteriorated services, and a lower overall standard of living.

But the debt and deficit "crisis" would disappear quickly if Rae would implement the recommendations of his own Fair Tax Commission, which recently called for a wealth tax, an inheritance tax, and a corporate minimum tax. Progressive tax reform is one of the many promises of the 1990 NDP election platform that has been buried as a result of pressure from Bay Street.

The government could also enforce the Employer Health Tax and the Employer Wage Protection Program. Employers are cheating on the health tax $200 million a year. The wage protection program has paid out $73 million to workers owed wages, benefits, and severance, but, due to staff shortages, it has not recovered any of the money from employers.

Finally, the government should mobilize the population in a major campaign to demand that the federal government restore full transfer payments to the provinces, spend less on military hardware, and end the tax-free status of Canada's super-rich under the Family Trust laws.

By pursuing his present political course, however, Rae is alienating the population, especially the NDP's labor base. And by perpetuating debt and deficit myths, he's making it easier for big business parties to secure a mandate to continue the cutbacks.

Despite placing a distant third in two provincial by-elections on April 1 (having won Don Mills, and coming a very close second in St. George–St. David in 1990), the party leadership shows no sign of changing its disastrous course.

Leadership Challenge Needed

Such a change will necessitate a change of leadership, which entails an organized challenge to the present one.

This is one of the key tasks facing the labor movement, whose own leadership is reluctant to tackle more immediate problems, much less plan a challenge to Bob Rae.

So the fight to challenge the anti-worker policies of the Rae regime is closely related to the struggle against our business unionist labor leaders — to make our unions more militant and more democratic.

Irresistible pressure from an organized, cross-union, rank-and-file movement is needed if these struggles are to advance.

If there's progress in this direction, new possibilities open up, not only to stop cutbacks, not only to defend and extend the public sector, but to challenge the economic system of cyclical depressions itself — the irrational, wasteful, and oppressive capitalist order. A planned economy under workers' democratic control could emerge as an attractive and viable alternative.

On the other hand, if such a movement does not materialize, workers will lose ground, materially and politically.

That's why the fight against Ontario NDP government cutbacks is so important. ❑

Palestinians Return to "Peace" Talks

by Michael Steven Smith

The author was part of a fact-finding trip to the West Bank and Gaza in 1985, looking into the Israeli deportation of Palestinians. He later testified on this question at the United Nations.

Despite the military siege of the West Bank and Gaza by the Israeli authorities, Palestinian negotiators have been forced to return to the "peace" negotiations, against their own earlier promise not to do so. After a six-month hiatus since the deportation by the Israelis of 413 Muslims the negotiations were scheduled to resume in Washington, D.C.

Previously the Palestinian negotiator had vowed not to resume the talks until the 413 were returned and the human rights situation in the occupied territories improved. "It's like Native Americans being forced to negotiate for a reservation," commented Arab American leader Abdeen Jabara.

Samir Riah, head of the Palestine Aid Society in New York, said: "The overwhelming sentiment of the Palestinians is to not go through with this sham."

The 413 deportees have not been restored to their homes. Rather than improving, the situation of the Palestinian residents of the territories has degenerated under the siege. Hunger and malnutrition are rampant. "Since the late-March closure [of the borders between Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza]," reports the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn), "some 111,000 Palestinian workers have been unable to reach their only source of income inside Israel." The paper states that this has directly affected at least 120,000 families who depend completely on work inside of Israel. The Palestinians are cut off from hospitals as well, with services like radiation and chemotherapy being suspended.

Meanwhile the Israeli occupying forces have grown ever more trigger happy. Civilian deaths have climbed to over 1,250, half of them children. This week alone, Israelis killed 7 Palestinians and wounded many more. On April 20, nearly 200 people were left homeless after Israeli forces completely destroyed 11 houses with antitank missiles. "More than 100 Palestinian homes have been destroyed since Israel started using antitank guns late last year in search for Palestinian activists," wrote *Al-Fajr.*

As an inducement to resume the "peace process," the U.S. government got Saudi Arabia to start up some donations to Palestinian charities. Before the Gulf War and the PLO refusal to support the U.S. savagery in Iraq, the Saudis had given money directly to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

Samir Riah said that the Palestinian leadership "showed weakness" by returning to the talks without all of the banished 413 being allowed to return. Furthermore, he said, "it was easier for the U.S. to ask Saudi Arabia to give money than to ask the Israelis to return the civilians it had illegally deported."

The Yasir Arafat group in the PLO favored returning to the peace talks. That position was opposed strongly by the Palestinian delegation itself and by a number of Palestinian factions when it was announced after a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Damascus on April 21. ❑

May 6, 1993

Over 40 Years in the Struggle

César Chávez, 1927–1993

by Tom Barrett

After over forty years of struggle against oppression of all forms, César Chávez, the president of the United Farm Workers union — the only president the union has ever had — died in his sleep on April 23, 1993. He had gone to the home of a friend in San Luis, Arizona, after a full day of union activity. The cause of death has not been disclosed.

Chávez was one of the central figures in the 1955–75 period of militant struggle. Like his contemporary Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he exemplified both the strengths and the weaknesses of those two decades. The struggle to win higher wages, better working conditions, and collective bargaining rights for the predominantly Chicano migrant farm workers inspired people far beyond the ranks of the farm workers or the Chicano community. However, Chávez's inability to break free of the restraints of trade union reformism and reliance on the Democratic Party prevented the farm workers' struggle from realizing its full potential. Nevertheless, Chávez, like King, will be remembered as a giant in the struggle for social justice. The victories won by this brutally oppressed sector of the working class are an achievement which no one can take away from him.

César Estrada Chávez was born March 31, 1927, in Yuma, Arizona, the son of migrant farm laborers. As his family followed the harvests, he attended over thirty elementary schools and worked with his family in the fields. The conditions faced by migrant farm laborers in the 1930s were well documented in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and Woody Guthrie's autobiography *Bound for Glory*. Even the limited reforms won by industrial workers in the cities, such as compulsory education and prohibition of child labor, bans on piecework and homework, limits on hours, and regulations on sanitary conditions, did not apply to migrant farm workers.

After service in the Navy during World War II, Chávez traveled to Chicago. From 1952 to 1962 he worked for the Community Service Organization (CSO), an agency founded and led by Saul Alinsky. Alinsky — whose contribution to the radicalization of the late 1950s–early 1970s period is insufficiently recognized today — combined mass action, civil disobedience, economic boycotts, electoral activity, and litigation into a strategy known as "community organizing" and led a number of successful struggles on behalf of poor people in Chicago. Chávez worked in voter registration and community relations and learned Alinsky's organizing techniques. He became the CSO's general director in 1958.

The Formation of the United Farm Workers Union

In 1962 Chávez returned home to the Southwest, to put the organizing skills he had learned in the CSO to use on behalf of his own people. The post–World War II prosperity, which had for over a decade settled the industrial unions into a routine of periodic wage increases and support for conservative prowar Democrats, had bypassed the migrant farmworkers. The migrant workers remained at the mercy of unscrupulous labor contractors, who herded them into camps lacking running water, electricity, and sanitary facilities, sold food and other necessities on credit at exorbitant prices, and responded to any resistance with violence. Just as in the 1930s, the migrant farm laborers had no protection from child labor and piecework and lacked even the most basic health and retirement benefits. These were the conditions that Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and the other founders of what was to become the United Farm Workers union were determined to change.

Sketch by Jack Bresée

In addition to the methods he learned directly from Alinsky, Chávez consciously emulated the tactics of the African-American civil rights movement, which was at that time smashing racial segregation in the South. He combined the economic demands for improved wages and working conditions with a struggle against the racism which Chicanos suffered (and continue to suffer), thereby mobilizing the entire Chicano people behind their brothers and sisters in the fields. The civil rights movement had reawakened millions of Americans to continued injustice within the United States itself, and even Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy recognized that something had to be done about migrant farmworkers' living and working conditions. (Chávez never forgot Kennedy's early support, and he remained a loyal Kennedy Democrat until the end of his life.) Thus, broad support within the U.S. population as a whole was generated for the farmworkers' organizing drive, in a period in which struggle for social justice was on the increase.

The organizing tactics employed by the fledgling United Farm Workers Organizing Committee sharply differed from the methods of the AFL-CIO leadership during the 1960s. Chávez appealed directly to the Chicanos' pride in their Mexican heritage, adopting a black eagle of Aztec design as the union's logotype, addressing union rallies in Spanish, and building what came to be known as *la causa* through the predominantly Chicano Roman Catholic parishes (just as Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference was building civil rights struggles through networks of African-American churches).

The Grape Boycott

Four years after the organizing work began, the farm workers' union, which had yet to win recognition by the AFL-CIO, launched a strike against the table grape growers in California. It was a more militant strike than any since the 1946 strike wave, and in many respects it was unprecedented in the history of the U.S. labor movement. Partly because it was logistically impossible for a farm labor union to use the same tactics as an industrial union, and partly because of the farm workers' leadership's background in civil rights and community organizing activities, the grape strike quickly broke the barriers of traditional trade unionism and took on a much broader character.

Winning the strike on the picket line was out of the question. The farmworkers had neither the numbers nor the military strength to close down the thousands of acres of grape fields. With the support of state and local government and police forces — especially after Ronald Reagan was elected governor of California in 1966 — the growers (farm owners) would easily prevail in any test of brute force. The farmworkers turned instead to the boycott weapon.

Economic boycotts are rarely effective. The AFL-CIO maintains a boycott list which is published in nearly all trade-union journals and is routinely ignored by nearly all trade-

union members. An economic boycott can only be successful with widespread educational activity, grassroots organizing, and mass action, including picketing of retail stores. The farmworkers used all of these tactics to organize the grape boycott.

The boycott was organized at the grassroots level through the network of Catholic parishes and other institutions of the Chicano community. Social justice–minded Catholics outside the Chicano community, both clergy and lay people, became informed of *la causa* and began spreading the word in their communities. Radicalizing youth on university campuses, organized in the Students for a Democratic Society and other groups — including the Young Socialist Alliance — rose to the farmworkers' call. They made sure that campus dining facilities honored the boycott, and they provided the troops for local supermarket picket lines. The grape strike — partly by tactical necessity and partly by conscious leadership decision — was transformed from a narrow trade union conflict into a broad social struggle, pointing the way forward for the entire labor movement. For the first time since the end of the Second World War, young people who were taking action around the social issues of racism and poverty were united in struggle with a militant trade union.

During the early years of the so-called "New Left," student leaders and their intellectual mentors — such as Herbert Marcuse, C. Wright Mills, and others — wrote off the trade union movement as an agency for social change in the future. The postwar prosperity and corresponding anti-Communist witchhunt had enabled Samuel Gompers's heirs in the united AFL-CIO to gain undisputed power over organized labor. AFL-CIO President George Meany, who came from the plumbers' union, played golf with politicians and corporate executives and boasted that he had never been on strike and never walked a picket line. Racism, sexism, and national chauvinism ran deep among the white males who held the higher-paying union-organized jobs (as it still does). Radicalizing young people understandably looked to other social layers as the agencies for change.

The grape boycott began to change that consciousness. It demonstrated in practice that militant trade unionism was not obsolete, and that there was no stone tablet which decreed that unions were only for white males. Many New Left activists were experienced community organizers, some trained by Alinsky himself, and they were impressed that a labor struggle was putting their tactics to use effectively. Radicalizing young people began a process of taking a second look at the revolutionary potential of the working class, and a first look at the idea of socialism.

The grape boycott put the AFL-CIO officialdom in an extremely uncomfortable position. There was no way they could refuse to support such an obviously just labor struggle and retain the least credibility. On the other hand, the grape boycott's militancy and breadth had the potential of setting an example for the rest of the labor movement — especially if the farmworkers won the grape strike — thus endangering the bureaucrats' cozy relationship with the employers and their political representatives.

As a consequence, Meany and the other AFL-CIO top bureaucrats gave lip-service support to the grape strike and the farmworkers' organizing drive but did very little to ensure its success. They hid behind strict interpretation of AFL-CIO bylaws to deny the farmworkers an AFL-CIO charter for as long as possible. They were not as financially generous to the farmworkers as they were to some of their anti-Communist projects in Latin America and Eastern Europe. And the farmworkers' allies outside the labor movement played a far bigger role in the grape boycott's success than did the AFL-CIO and its member international unions. However, it was a union outside the AFL-CIO which put into practice the official labor leadership's hostility to the kind of social unionism which the farmworkers were putting into practice.

Confrontation with the Teamsters

By 1969 the farmworkers had achieved considerable success in winning contracts from the table grape growers. Membership was up to about 60,000, and the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC, as it was recognized by the AFL-CIO) was ready to turn its attention to other sectors of agribusiness. Its next target was the iceberg lettuce fields, centered in the Coachella Valley of California. However, many lettuce growers unveiled a new tactic to preempt the farmworkers' organizing efforts: with the unmistakable blessing of the Nixon administration in Washington and the Reagan administration in Sacramento they gave union jurisdiction over their workers to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. At that time rank-and-file teamsters did not even have the right to *see* their contracts, let alone vote them down, and the IBT officials quickly imposed contracts on the migrant workers which stuck a union label on nearly all of the unfair practices against which Chávez and his colleagues had been fighting, including the hated labor contractor system.

The Teamsters provided everything that the growers needed to fight against the UFWOC — a union label to confuse well-meaning but uninformed rank-and-file workers, legal agreements which could stand up in court (especially with judges sympathetic to the growers), and old-fashioned gangster muscle. The growers and their friends in state and national government could dissociate themselves from the violence in the fields (with pious denunciations of corrupt and violent "big labor") by letting the IBT hired goons, who were more experienced anyway, carry out the dirty business.

The UFWOC was in a fight for its life. It launched a nationwide boycott of iceberg lettuce and at the same time had to fight for renewal of its contracts in the table and wine grape fields, taking strike action against the Gallo wineries. The balance of power shifted after 1974 when Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown, succeeded Ronald Reagan in the California governor's mansion. Brown, a Kennedy Democrat, was sympathetic to the UFW (by now a chartered AFL-CIO union) and intervened to negotiate an end to the jurisdictional dispute between the Teamsters and the Farm Workers. In 1977 a compromise was reached, giving the UFW jurisdiction in the fields and the Teamsters jurisdiction over transportation and canning.

Chávez and the Democratic Party

Throughout his career, César Chávez remained loyal to the liberal Democrats who had acknowledged the justice of the farmworkers' organizing campaign. He brought his significant moral authority to bear in support of Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1968, and in 1976 he and the UFW campaigned throughout the country on behalf of Jerry Brown's candidacy for president. Chávez placed Brown's name in nomination at the 1976 Democratic convention. He never understood the intrinsic class character of government at all levels, blaming individual politicians for any partiality toward big business. He was therefore unable to play a positive role in breaking the labor movement out of the twin-party political trap in which it has been ensnared for six decades.

When Democratic politicians failed to deliver on their campaign promises or were unwilling even to make promises to working people, he simply supported alternative Democrats, such as Edward Kennedy against Jimmy Carter in 1980, Jesse Jackson against Michael Dukakis in 1988, and Jerry Brown (again) against Bill Clinton in 1992. Though the UFW under Chávez's leadership made a contribution toward transforming the unions from narrow collective bargaining agencies to a broad, fighting social movement, he was unable to play any part in leading the labor movement toward political independence from the Democratic Party, and that in turn began to blunt the broad, militant character of the UFW itself.

Because of its inability to break free of Democratic Party "realism" and legality, the UFW was unable to respond to one of the growers' tactics, the hiring of undocumented workers from Mexico and other countries. The so-called "illegal aliens" were willing to work for far lower wages than the union would accept, and even those low wages were far better than anything they could get back home. Furthermore, fear of deportation prevented them from raising any protest whatso-

ever against their working or living conditions. The undocumented migrant workers were simply unwilling to risk even the few dollars they could send back to their hungry families. Rather than fight for the undocumented, whom the UFW leaders acknowledged as "our own brothers," they joined the AFL-CIO bureaucracy in calling for their deportation and for strict legislation barring so-called "illegal aliens" from employment in the United States. Not only did the UFW fail to make a dent in employment of the undocumented, it sacrificed a good deal of its moral authority beyond its own ranks and cut itself off from potential allies among the Mexicans and other immigrants.

Chávez's Legacy

Chávez's successor, his son-in-law José Cruz Rodriguez, has assumed the leadership of a union with an uncertain future. Though César Chávez will be remembered as a giant not only of the trade-union movement but of the entire struggle for social justice, it is his negative legacy which weighs most heavily on his union's future.

The United Farm Workers has become what its founders wanted it to become — an official trade union, a member union of the AFL-CIO, which bargains collectively for its members just as any other union does. And that is precisely the problem. Pure-and-simple trade unionism, which does nothing more than bring labor's representatives together with management's to work out a fair package of wages and work rules, is no longer adequate, if indeed it ever was. Class battles today cannot be won on the picket line alone, especially in the agribusiness sector. In order to organize the United Farm Workers initially it was necessary to mobilize broad forces across the United States and even internationally in economic boycott and direct action. And, yes, government intervention played a role as well, sometimes positive, more often negative.

Like all unions today, the UFW is losing members. It is facing increasing difficulty negotiating contracts with the growers, and it is uncertain if it could win strikes today as it did twenty-five years ago. At that time, the UFW set an example for the entire labor movement with its innovative and effective tactics, tactics which remain effective today. And, though there may be occasions where a Democratic or even a Republican politician may be helpful, reliance on the political parties of big business is a strategy for defeat. Labor needs to send representatives into the Congress and state legislatures who are not its friends but who are directly accountable to organized labor's rank and file. The policies followed by Chávez and his associates up to now have hindered efforts toward organizing a labor party, especially because of the well-deserved moral authority which Chávez had accumulated as a fighter for social justice.

Nevertheless, César Chávez deserves to be remembered as a hero, as a dedicated fighter for the oppressed. If the United Farm Workers — and the rest of the labor movement as well — not only remember but emulate his militancy and dedication, the entire working class will gain added strength for the confrontations of the future. ❑

May 4, 1993

Labor and the 1929–1940 Depression

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In the face of this kind of economic downturn, the organizing momentum declined. There was still growth — still momentum from the previous period — but at a much reduced rate. Strikes sharply declined. The labor movement took a big licking. It had organized U.S. Steel, the titan of the industry, without requiring a strike. In the middle of the organizing campaign, U.S. Steel gave in. But now, in this later period, the employers hardened. In "Little Steel" they decided to take on the steelworkers. So there was a very bloody struggle led on the company's side by Tom Girdler of Republic Steel. He bought $50,000 worth of munitions in one month — in May, he hired a huge police force, armed them with a slew of weapons, and distributed 40,000 copies of a pamphlet called "Join the CIO and Help Build a Soviet America." He drowned the steelworkers' strike in blood.

Of course, it was in this same period that we had the Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago. Workers tried to organize a demonstration. They peacefully assembled and were shot in the back by the cops, with scores wounded and killed. This led, a month later, to a question put to Roosevelt: what was his reaction to this? That's when he made the famous statement about "a plague on both your houses." This infuriated Lewis, who was the dominant labor personality of this period, because labor had thrown in and supported and fought for Roosevelt and now, at a time of this bloodshed of workers, to say "a plague on both your houses" — to take such an evenhanded approach — led to a break.

As the 1940 elections approached, Lewis moved completely away from Roosevelt and began talking about the possibilities of a labor party. As a matter of fact, in August 1940, Lewis told the auto workers that the Democratic Party was in default of the American people on every major domestic and international issue. He said, "Some day in this country, the people are going to lose confidence in the existing political parties to a degree to where they will form their own party." But Lewis ended up backing the Republican Wendell Willkie in 1940.

In 1938, the New Deal programs to relieve the plight of the unemployed were laid to rest. Roosevelt moved in a very conservative direction. It was the end of his vaunted social welfare programs. As a matter of fact, the government dismantled what had been established. They laid off two million people from the WPA work relief roles. This resulted in a wave of strikes and unemployment demonstrations. The reason for Roosevelt's pullback was that he was becoming single-minded in getting ready for war and arming the country. This, in turn, led the labor movement to complain that the social needs of the people were being neglected. Philip Murray, who was then president of the CIO, said in June 1940 that he preferred to see the government spend $10 billion "to put the idle to work, rather than to spend one dollar for American- made bullets to be used to kill someone." That has a familiar ring today, when we're talking about using money from military spending to put people back to work.

Well, to conclude, the Depression years were certainly years of unspeakable impoverishment. But at least they were rich in one respect: in the lessons and experiences they provide for us today. They help to teach us in the labor movement what things to do and not to do.

Let's just hope that these lessons are learned as we get set for the big battles that lie ahead. ❑

Discussion

Black Liberation and Socialist Revolution in Today's America: Movementism or Marxism?

by Roy Rollin

Editor's Note: This article is part of a debate which was initiated with Evelyn Sell's "How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed," documenting the evolution of the revolutionary Marxist appreciation of Black nationalism (with special attention to the views of Leon Trotsky, C.L.R. James, and George Breitman) in our December 1992 issue. In the February 1993 issue Peter Johnson offered a critique of this position (based on the views of Richard Fraser) in "Revolutionary Integrationism and Black Liberation." Some critical comments responding to Johnson were made in Claire Cohen's "Notes on the African American Struggle" in our March 1993 issue, followed up in the April issue by a piece which she co-authored with Steve Bloom — "In Defense of Black Nationalism: A Reply to Peter Johnson." The May issue saw an even more substantial polemic, "Marxism and Black Self-Determination, In Reply to Peter Johnson," by Vera Wigglesworth and Jim Miles. Interested readers can receive any of these back issues for $2.00 each.

In addition to criticizing the Black nationalist perspective, Roy Rollin takes the opportunity in this article to outline a more far-reaching critique of the Socialist Workers Party of the 1960s and '70s, accusing it of taking a "sectoralist" rather than a class-struggle approach to the various social movements of that period. Some of his views also correspond to those expressed by Emily Turnbull and James Robertson in their letter printed in this issue. All of this is more than simply historical interest, relating very much to what revolutionary socialists should do in the present and future. The editors' response to Turnbull and Robertson, and also the article by Paul Le Blanc "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party," both in this issue, offer a defense of the SWP's record and suggest what they feel is a superior application of revolutionary Marxist strategy and tactics.

Recent issues of this publication have carried a series of articles on the relationship between Black liberation and socialist revolution in general and the debate that has long raged within the American Trotskyist movement in particular on what both sides agree is "a crucial question for the revolutionary movement in the United States today." Like Peter Johnson, I am a supporter of the "revolutionary integrationist" position put forth by Richard Fraser in the SWP in the 1950s and 1960s.

Fraser "disagree[d] with the proposition that the study of the national question in the Russian revolution [gave] specific illumination to the Negro question in the U.S., except in...[the] qualitative difference between them." He maintained that "the Negro question...is not a national one, but is the question of racial discrimination." Therefore "the question of self-determination is not the question which is at stake in the...struggle." Rather "the goals" of the struggle for Black liberation "are to achieve complete equality through the elimination of racial segregation, discrimination and prejudice. That is the overthrow of the race system. It is from these historically conditioned conclusions that the Negro struggle, whatever its forms, has taken the path of the struggle for direct assimilation [and] these goals cannot be accomplished except through the socialist revolution."

Needless to say, there will be no socialist revolution in this country without united struggle by Black and white workers against their common class enemy. Within that struggle, Black workers, as both the most exploited and oppressed, as well as the most combative element within the American proletariat, will play a vanguard role. And needless to say, for revolutionary Marxists, "the guiding force [behind] this unification can only be the revolutionary party."

"Nationalism" and "Self-Determination": A Question of "Terminology" or Social Relations?

In "In Defense of Black Nationalism," comrades Steve Bloom and Claire Cohen protest that Peter Johnson, like Stalin (and Lenin, who in the words of Trotsky, "edited...him line by line"), is far too "rigid" in his definition of what defines a nation and self-determination. For terminological "flexibility" is a must if one wants to be able to better adapt to whatever tendency is seen as exercising hegemony amongst the Black population at any given time. Not being constrained by "abstract laws" conveniently allows these comrades to label any and every manifestation of the Black struggle as "nationalist" and as an expression of "self-determination."

So fervent are Bloom and Cohen in their desire to "defend," i.e, tail after, Black nationalism, that they go so far as to approvingly cite Bukharin that "the Jews...are a nation." The "logical" conclusion thus should be support to Jewish nationalism, that is, Zionism! Bloom and Cohen's "flexibility" is in line with the SWP's 1963 "Freedom Now" resolution, which stated that "nationalism itself is an empty vessel which can be filled with vastly different contents," as opposed to the "rigid" Lenin, who wrote that "the general concept of national interests as a whole...implies the interests of the ruling class..."

Their understanding of "the dynamics of Black Liberation in the U.S." are in tune with those of George Breitman, who pioneered the idea that there is a "tendency of nationalism to grow over into and become merged with socialism..." and "that the logical outcome of Black nationalism...is to reach the most advanced, most radical social and political conclusions." For us there is no "dynamic," no "tendency"and no "logic" that leads to such a "merg[ing]." So long as the Black struggle is led by petty-bourgeois groupings, these leaderships will do anything and everything to prevent not only the "reach[ing] of...advanced...radical social and political conclusions" but even, and especially, the independent mobilization and organization of the workers during the struggle. That can only come about through the proletariat and its revolutionary vanguard's gaining hegemony in the process and through the political defeat of the petty bourgeois nationalists.

Bloom and Cohen go on to state that Peter Johnson, as a supporter of revolutionary integrationism, "attempts to deny that nationalist consciousness among Blacks has any validity whatsoever..." As opposed to those who continue to agree with the SWP's position that "the motivation for a program of revolutionary mass struggle [amongst Blacks] must be...self-determination...," or that "the most important development of Black consiousness to date, identified with the ideas of Malcolm X...[was] clearly based on the concept of racial independence...," we hold, with Fraser, that "Black nationalism

itself stands aside from the main thrust of the...struggle...," and we oppose any "confusion of the mood of Black nationalism and the politics of separation."

We might add that Malcolm X had certainly moved beyond "concepts of racial independence" when he stated that the struggle for Black liberation was not "a racial conflict... [but part of] a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor..." Malcolm went on to say that he "believ[ed] in a society in which people can live like human beings on the basis of equality." He added, that whereas he had previously defined his outlook as that of "Black nationalism," he had come to reject that label, "[not] using the expression for several months." That may not make Malcolm an advocate of "revolutionary integrationism," but it does place him at a safe distance from Bloom and Cohen's "concept[s] of racial independence"

Johnson is likewise raked over the coals for his "preconceived notions about what a 'nation' and 'self-determination' are...," and George Breitman and the SWP are lauded for their "adoption of a new meaning for old terminology resulting from the evolution of a particular struggle." In doing so, Bloom and Cohen pick up where the SWP left off in the 1970s, "introduc[ing] a change in terminology, using the word 'nationalism,' not so much to describe its specific origins in connection with bourgeois ideology, but in a more limited sense to describe the simple concept of identification with the nation." From our perspective, this "fails to pose the questions that were (and still are) really at stake" here.

While there clearly exists a widespread, if not fully articulated, current of popular attitudes and beliefs around Black pride and consciousness (witness the current rage of Malcolmania), these are not necessarily one and the same as the more articulated program and world view that is propounded by political organizations and leaders that consider themselves to be "nationalists." One can certainly sympathize with the former without adapting to the latter. For Marxists, "terminology" reflects social and political reality. "New meanings" for "nationalism" can be used by comrades Bloom and Cohen to their heart's delight. However, that does not eliminate the fact that the Black "community" is divided into classes with particular interests and social layers expressed by varying ideologies.

"Adopt[ing]...a new meaning" for "nationalism" different from the way that Marxists have traditionally defined it, and more importantly, different from the way it is used by the vast majority of the human race, in no way changes the fact that there are petty-bourgeois nationalist groupings and representatives who intend to prevent the working class from organizing itself under the pretext of "community" interests. These are phenomena which are decisive for the daily political and social life of Black people in the U.S. and they do not disappear because George Breitman and the SWP chose to modify Marxist "terminology." That is the question that is really at stake, and it is those comrades who chose to remain "sufficiently orthodox" vis-à-vis the SWP's "turn toward Black nationalism during the 1960s" who thus "badly misunderstand the dynamics of Black liberation in the U.S." today.

The SWP and Black Nationalism: From a Scratch to Gangrene

The 1960s and '70s indeed saw the SWP adopt new meanings for old terminology when it came to nationalism and self-determination so that they could better accomodate themselves to Black nationalism. Bloom and Cohen ridicule as "half-hearted" the traditional Leninist position on self-determination ("Yes, well, we acknowledge your democratic right to decide this, but we really think it's a bad idea."), but the SWP did not always share their scorn. The 1957 party resolution, "The Class Struggle Road to Negro Equality" still held the following position: "Since minority people have the the democratic right to self-determination, socialists would be obliged to support such demands should they reflect the mass will. Yet even under these circumstances socialists would continue to advocate integration rather than separation as the best solution of the race question for Negro and white workers alike. While upholding the right of self-determination, they would continue to urge an alliance of the Negro people and the working class to bring about a socialist solution of the civil rights problem within the existing national framework." This reaffirmed the 1948–50 resolution's contention that "the primary and ultimate necessity of the Negro movement is its unification with the revolutionary forces under the leadership of the proletariat. The guiding forces of this unification can only be the revolutionary party," a conclusion at one with Lenin's emphasis on the need to "preserve the unity of the proletarian struggle...in spite of the bourgeois strivings for national segregration."

Of course, in 1957 Martin Luther King and the SCLC were still seen as "the differential force in the Negro movement." By 1963, however, "the Muslims headed by Elijah Muhammad, [were] the most most dynamic tendency in the Northern Negro community..." and "have shown capacity during the last year to change in a direction that better serves the interests of all Negroes..." and "where we differ with them, we differ in a friendly way..." (It seems that Malcolm X had a rather different view of the direction of their change and his differences were not at all that friendly!) Thus the 1963 "Freedom Now" resolution sharply departed from its predecessors in stating that "...here, as in Africa, the liberation of the Negro people requires that the Negroes organize themselves independently, and control their own struggle, and not permit it to be subordinated to any other consideration or interest." "Negro nationalism" was now "progressive because it contribute[d] to the creation of such an independent Negro movement..." with "revolutionary socialists welcom[ing] the growth of such Negro nationalism..." since "Negro nationalism and revolutionary socialism are not only compatible but complementary forces..." and "Negro nationalism is...a broad medium for self-identification'...play[ing] a function for the Negro people here in many ways like that which class consciousness plays for the working class."

The 1964 Resolution noted "that Black nationalism based upon an acceptance of self-reliance, racial pride and dignity, identification with Africa and an assertion of independence in action...is bound up with the demand for Black unity, autonomy and power." By 1965, nationalism is no longer seen as being merely "compatible" and "complementary" to socialism but has "grown over" and "merged" with it. However, in spite of all of the objective endorsements of separatism, there remains no mention of Black people as a "nation."

By the late 1960s, ghetto uprisings and vague notions of "Black Power" signaled the eclipse of the liberal pacifism of the mainstream civil rights leadership among the urban Black population in the "deep North." Black nationalism was now seen by the SWP as the "ascending force in the Afro-American communities." So in 1968, for the first time, Blacks emerged as "an intra-colonized nation" and in the 1969 "Transitional Program for Black Liberation," "an independent Black political party" is called for as an "indispensable instrument for...achieving complete control over the black community..." The latter will be achieved via "a National Council of Black Communities" since "the motivation for a program of revolutionary mass struggle must be the self-determination of Afro-Americans." For all intents and purposes, this is the tune that those comrades defending Black nationalism continue to march to today.

In spite of the apparent twists and turns in it, the road followed by the SWP was fairly consistent. Mainly, an attitude that the SWP was a white organization and it wasn't their business to tell Black people what to do. Bloom and Cohen sum up this perspective when they state that "our answer (to young Black militants today) should be that Blacks themselves have a right to define the parameters of their own struggle." A long way from "continu[ing] to advocate integration rather than separation..." Thus the task posed was not to fight for a multiracial workers movement which championed the interests of the specially oppressed but to coax the "white" labor movement to forge an alliance with the "Black movement." The role of the SWP, that is, the white party, was to compete for the

leadership of the labor half of this alliance. As for the Black component, well, that was for the Blacks themselves to decide, and the only way white workers would gain their "trust and collaboration" would be through respecting their choice of leadership apparently irregardless of its political perspective or class composition.

For Bloom and Cohen, "a period of disunity, of Black independence, may be required...in order for them to gain their equality." Translated into the "rigidity" of our movement's traditional thinking on such questions, this sure sounds like "two-stage" revolution. Can you imagine Trotskyists in South Africa taking a similar attitude toward the struggle against apartheid-capitalism and the role of the ANC in it? Giving such a blank check to the "Black community itself" in fact means giving it to those class forces that are in the saddle and formulating the demands. Can you imagine South African Trotskyists giving Nelson Mandela such a vote of confidence as he prepares to offer up that country's Black masses to the Randlords in exchange for a few ministerial portfolios under neo-apartheid?

This abstentionist and patronizing attitude found its ultimate rationalization when the line that "consistent nationalism leads to socialism" became official party dogma. Picking up where Breitman left off, Jack Barnes had little trouble generalizing the evolution of Malcolm X as the SWP saw it. For Barnes, "the entire evolution of Malcolm X...is the evolution of a consistent and irreconciliable nationalist fighter, impelled by the logic of his fight." This methodology was then further generalized to include a whole slew of other struggles. The 1960s were seen by Breitman and the SWP as "the biggest, the deepest, the broadest — and therefore the most threatening [radicalization] for the ruling class..." Barnes added that "there will be no reversal of this radicalization before the working masses of this country have had a chance to take power..." Thus democratic struggles and demands were invested with a transitional content, leading to socialism if only they were "consistent" enough. The role of the revolutionary party was reduced to ensuring that "consistency," being the "best builders" of "single-issue" "independent" movements around them.

This is the methodology that continues to underlie the position that comrades like Steve Bloom and Claire Cohen still cling to. Whether or not the material reality of contemporary American capitalism in fact corresponds to this methodology is, of course, another story. Needless to say the biggest, deepest, broadest and most threatening radicalization was in fact reversed long before Jack Barnes and Co. got their "chance," since there was nothing politically, economically, or socially, that is, in terms of basic class relations, that prevented the ruling class from granting, and later taking back, a whole slew of democratic demands as a lesser evil. The absence of a revolutionary Marxist presence and perspective within the movements around those demands makes it all the easier for the bourgeoise to extricate itself and leaves the field wide open for any and every bourgeois and petty bourgeois misleader to coopt them as well.

Now, even if one "adopt[s] new meaning[s] for old terminology" and agrees (which we do) that the first and foremost duty of white revolutionaries and worker militants is to "unconditionally support whatever legitimate demands emerge from the Black community," it in no way follows that revolutionary Marxists are indifferent as to the leadership that the struggle around those demands produces. Rather then cheerlead or carp from the sidelines, as both tailendists and sectarians do, Trotskyists should be intervening in those struggles to the extent that that is possible and be vying for the leadership of them by proving the validity of their program in practice. Rather than attempt to accumulate and assimilate a Black Trotskyist cadre which might have been capable of doing so, the SWP chose to, in Fraser's words, "boycott" the Black struggle by uncritically adapting to nationalism.

Far from "mov[ing] in a nationalist direction," successive waves of Black militants from Malcolm X to the Black Panthers to the League of Revolutionary Black Workers and the Revolutionary Union Movements were moving in an opposite direction, searching for a way out of the deadend of nationalism and moving toward socialism. Such a move not only entails seeing the Black working class as the key component of the struggle for Black liberation but understanding the need for working class unity and a revolutionary vanguard to help bring it about. It is the abandonment of a revolutionary practice along with a revolutionary theory that might have brought that perspective to militant Blacks that stood at the center of Fraser's critique, as well as ours, not some dogmatic desire to "sit on the sidelines and lecture Blacks about the proper use of words."

Indeed, just the opposite is true. The SWP's perspective was based on a series of impressionistic responses to developments within the Black liberation struggle in the 1960s and '70s, and has been bypassed by the whole course of objective and subjective changes that the American body politic has undergone since that period. The same applies to its "theoretical" underpinning; the misapplication of the theory of the "combined revolution" to an advanced imperialist country such as the U.S. The betrayal and defeat of radical reconstruction after the Civil War was eventually followed by a mass migration of the bulk of the southern Black population to the industrial centers of the north. The majority of them were transformed from sharecroppers to wage laborers. The latter have not, nor are they likely to ever, rise up *en masse* for "forty acres and a mule." They are far more likely to champion the call for "forty hours pay for thirty hours work" along with a whole series of other demands relating to the special oppression they suffer as Blacks and the general exploitation they undergo as workers.

What Are the Actual Dynamics...in the Real World

As Peter Johnson has already pointed out, there exists no Black nation in the U.S. today and therefore no possibility of "self-determination." Instead, the vast majority of American Blacks have become the core of an increasingly multiracial working class, overwhelmingly concentrated in America's major cities. Indeed, the majority of the American working class today is probably made up of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and women rather than white male "ethnic" types as was the case in the 1950s through the 1970s, when the civil rights and Black power movements were at their height.

The living standards of all these workers have been undergoing a steady decline since the 1970s. While specially oppressed workers have undoubtedly borne the brunt of these attacks, white workers have seen their "piece of the pie" permanently shrink as well. There exists a real basis, not to mention a real need, for a multiracial working class fightback against the employers' seemingly endless offensive that didn't exist in the '50s and '60s. A key component of that struggle must be the fight against any and every manifestation of racism if white workers ever hope to gain the trust and collaboration of Blacks in any kind of common struggle against a common enemy.

Unfortunately the absence of any kind of class-struggle labor leadership that champions the interest of all of the exploited and oppressed, or for that matter, any of the exploited and oppressed has hit the Black population the hardest. Ground down by the "deindustrialization of America," more and more ghetto residents have been forced into the ranks of the permanently unemployed where their only contact with racist capitalist society and the exploitation and oppression that characterize it is by way of the corner cockroach capitalist rather than in the factories and workplaces owned by the racist rulers of this country. An insular worldview has taken hold of more and more unemployed Black youth; an unfortunate but understandable phenomenon of capitalist decay. It is further reinforced by the general lack of revolutionary struggles outside the country that were going on in the '60s and '70s. The cynical misuse of this despair by particular sections of the Black middle class, out to feather their own nests, however, is another story.

As the main beneficiary of the gains won by the civil rights movement, the Black middle class as a whole has been hard hit by the

current capitalist crisis. Government poverty programs and the posts and perks that accompanied them have dried up along with the limited markets that they were able to carve out for themselves. The crisis has hit hardest at those who got the fewest crumbs off the bosses' table to begin with or arrived too late on the scene to get any at all. So they choose to vent their frustrations upon those a rung or two above them on the ladder of bourgeois society and inside the machinery of the Democratic Party by utilizing the legitimate resentment felt by the ghetto masses for their own purposes. This regeneration of separatist ideology on the part of an unsavory assortment of middle class hucksters and charlatans who seek to gain the ears of the Black population with an array of Black capitalist "community control" and phoney "empowerment" schemes serves only to channel the grievances of the urban Black masses away from the racist capitalist power structure and onto local stand-ins. For it is the latter whom this section of the Black petty bourgeoisie desires to replace as exploiters and oppressors. Rather than aiming to overturn the entire system of exploitation and oppression they only aspire to get their "fair share" from it.

As staunch opponents of multiracial working class unity, this fraction of the Black middle class, no less than any of the others, for all of its bluster and bravado, still prefers unity with the exploiters and oppressors within the confines of the Democratic Party. The problem for them, however, is that the latter has made it quite clear they are hardly welcome anymore. Hence the need to appear as representatives of a constituency that can cause a stir every now and then if their desires are not taken into account.

Unfortunately they still get the ear of those revolutionary Marxists who, like comrades Bloom and Cohen, still choose to believe that "...those who maintain a revolutionary perspective, no matter how ideologically incomplete, continue to move in a nationalist direction." These comrades continue to believe that separatism is the inevitable and necessary expression of the Black struggle and "that, today, those who promote an 'integrationist' vision in the Black community tend to be the most classically reformist forces," as if we were frozen in a 1960s time warp.

That the world has changed quite a bit since then seems beyond their comprehension. So too, is the fundamental reality that the Black "community" is in fact divided along class lines. Thus when these comrades write about "the campaign for 'Black Self-Determination' as understood and defined by the Black community itself..." we can only respond: understood and defined by what class or what component of what class within that community? What they choose to dub the "Black movement" is in fact the movement of that section of the Black middle class that has gotten the smallest pieces of the pie and has thus been the least integrated into American capitalism. That neither makes them more revolutionary nor any less reformist when all is said and done since reformist ends most certainly do influence "militant" means to achieve them.

The mainstream of the Black middle class is, if anything, far more powerful and consolidated today than it was in the 1960s and as a result has moved to the right along with the rest of property-owning America in defense of those interests. Rabble rousers and street demagogues like Al Sharpton and Louis Farrakhan and even smaller fry storefront nationalists feel left out and want into the system, not its overthrow. "Militant" rhetoric and a demonstration every now and then are meant to be their ticket of admission.

While we share the disdain of Bloom and Cohen for "those who want Blacks to set aside their own demands and their struggle for equality in the name of some higher 'unity of the workers,'" particularly when it comes from liberals and Social Democrats who apologize for any and every apartheid outrage of Zionism, we, as Marxists must not at the same time set aside the class interests of working people, and in the first place Black working people, for the demands of sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie which pass themselves off as representing the Black "community" as a whole.

No matter who may call the shots on Brooklyn street corners or appear to call the shots in City Hall it remains the capitalist system as a whole that is the entity responsible for the plight of Blacks in America, and it is that system as a whole that has to be fought if racism is to be rooted out once and for all.

What is desperately needed is a militant party of labor; one, which while basing itself on the unions can and must boldly champion the interests of all the exploited and oppressed, with the needs of the most exploited and oppressed taking first place. Such a party can provide a way out of the dead-end tribalization of big city politics and cut the ground out from under the feet of the Perots, Dukes, and Farrakhans by providing a real alternative in a way that no other social force can.

To provide such an alternative, such a party must base itself upon a militant anticapitalist program that makes the demands of all the exploited and oppressed its own demands and fights for them not just in the electoral arena but on the picket lines and battle lines of working class struggle. It must fight against racism, sexism, homophobia, and ecocide with the same tenacity it fights against union-busting, plant-closings, and give-backs. Organized labor, in spite of its decline, remains the main, if not the only, area in which Black and white workers come together in common organizations with common interests, and it is the only force in capitalist society that has the power and to transform it to serve those interests.

Middle-class protest politics, like of those of the assorted "third party" pretenders whose main aim is to pressure the Democrats for the few crumbs that aren't there to begin with, have nothing to offer working people, particularly working people of color. This is not to say that revolutionary Marxists should abstain from participation in Labor Party Advocates, or any other real movements for independent political action. But we should do so on the basis of a critical class-struggle perspective and with the understanding that the fight for the political independence of the working class from the bosses' parties must go hand in hand with the struggle against the racist and sexist labor bureaucracy and the stranglehold it continues to exercise over the unions, as James P. Cannon pointed out long ago.

It must also be linked to an attempt to massively expand the union ranks through the kind of organizing drive that the bureaucracy has long sought to avoid in order to avoid antagonizing their "friends" in the Democratic Party.

Sectoralist Tailending and the Retreat From Class

Completely counterposed to the struggle for a workers party that can unite behind it all the oppressed and exploited are calls for separate parties for the separate "sectors" of the oppressed and exploited. Indeed, one would expect that any revolutionary Marxist worthy of the name would immediately ask just what class these parties would represent? Those who call for a Black party have claimed that because "Black people are overwhelmingly proletarian in composition, that there is only an inconsequential Black bourgeoise, and a relatively weak Black petty bourgeoisie [and] under these specific conditions, all indications are that an independent Black party would be a proletarian party, albeit in nationalist guise." The overwhelmingly proletarian makeup of the Black population is no more a guarantee that such a party would represent the interests of Black workers than the working class majority in South Africa guarantees proletarian hegemony in the ANC. Particularly, but not exclusively, in a period of reaction, the dominant social force in such an organization is bound to be the petty bourgeoisie, especially in the absence of a revolutionary vanguard based on a program of militant class struggle.

"Autonomous" movements are not in fact autonomous from social pressures and social forces that exist within capitalist society. Far from it; they tend to reflect them, as middle class dominance of the women's movement, the mainstream Black organizations, and most of the nationalist milieu as well have shown, particularly as regards their co-optation into the Democratic party. And even in periods of radicalization, if bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies like nationalism go unchallenged within the mass movements

they contend for hegemony over, similar results will ensue.

The Euro-reformist intellectual milieu that vegetates at the fringes of the British left responded to the forward march of Thatcherism by embarking on a full scale retreat from class. In order to woo a few more middle class votes they sought to deprive the working class of its "privileged" role in the socialist project. Thus they would lay to rest the "class reductionists" and "workerists" once and for all. Their aim was to redefine the working class so as to shrink it from a majority to a minority of the population in the advanced industrialized countries. This would, in turn, require alliances with other social forces...on the latter's terms, of course. "Autonomous social movements" were the wave of the future and they would be brought together, not through common class interests, but via "discourse" provided courtesy of those, whom Ellen Wood aptly dubbed the "new true socialists" in an allusion to those idealists and subjectivists that Marx fought against in his time.

For the sectoralists of the SWP school, the socialist revolution is similarly seen as arising out of a coalition of equally independent movements based on the separate oppressed sections of society. These include, but do not necessarily come together around, the working class, which minus all of its components would be but a truncated shadow of its former self. This was given "Trotskyist" legitimacy via a mechanistic transposition of the theory of permanent revolution, applied by Trotsky "to countries with a belated bourgeois development, especially the colonial and semi-colonial countries..." to an industrially developed country like the U.S. Thus George Novack, in "The Role of the Transitional Program," wrote "the law of uneven and combined development, applies not only to sectors of the world which are historically retarded but to the most advanced countries. The S.W.P. and the Y.S.A. maintain that the coming American revolution will be a combination of the anticapitalist movement of the workers for socialism with the struggles of the oppressed national minorities for self-determination. This combined revolution will include all democratic struggles against oppression, such as the struggle for women's liberation, for gay liberation, for abolition of the prison system, and so on." Jack Barnes, always less constrained by concerns of "orthodoxy," was more to the point when he stated that "each of these movements has essentially an independent character and course."

Indeed, the whole sectoralist approach implicitly rejects the centrality of class and the leading role of the working class and its vanguard in the revolutionary process. Yet outside of the similar interests shared by all workers, the separate "sectors" of the exploited and oppressed possess no immediate and necessary points of unity. Outside of the social power wielded by the working class as a whole, they have no real power to end that exploitation and oppression either. Today, of course, it should be more obvious than ever that those who were previously seen as "allies of the working class" are in fact the vast majority of the working class.

The whole sectoralist scenario of separate parties (and transitional programs as well) for Blacks, women, etc., needless to say discards the need for a Leninist vanguard along with the methodology underlying the Transitional Program. Such a party is precisely predicated on the notion that it be the tribune of all of the oppressed and exploited, centralizing their experiences in a common organization since no one particular struggle can, in and of itself, lead to socialist class consciousness. Likewise the impact of the Transitional Program lies in its overall answer to the crisis of capitalism by bringing the masses through their own experiences "to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

Leninism vs. Nationalism

There exists no mysterious "dynamic" hidden in democratic struggles that leads from "consistent" nationalism, feminism, or even trade unionism to socialism. Consistent nationalism leads in just the opposite direction. From Eastern Europe and the former USSR to the Middle East it has led and will continue to lead to xenophobia, pogroms, and "ethnic cleansing." It is an ideology that must be consistently fought by revolutionary Marxists. In those countries where revolutions that combined national democratic with proletarian socialist tasks have in fact triumphed, they did so not because their leaderships were more "consistently" nationalist than the bourgeois or petty bourgeois nationalists, but because they broke with and decisively defeated them politically and militarily. When and where they didn't, the working class went down to bloody defeats. Most nationalists are well aware of the actual "dynamics," that is the social forces that underly their ideology, particularly when a life and death struggle over which class shall rule is posed.

For Lenin, the struggle for just national demands and the struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism in the oppressed nations were two aspects of the same class-struggle policy. In his major contribution on the national question, "The Right of Nations to Self Determination," Lenin makes clear that "workers are hostile to all nationalism." He goes on to say that "we cannot advance to that [class] goal unless we combat all nationalism." He stresses that "the interests of the working class and of its struggle against capitalism...demand strong opposition to the nationalistic policy of the bourgeoisie of every nationality." His conclusion is that the proletariat has "a two-sided task: first, to fight against all nationalism...; to recognize not only complete equality of rights for all nations in general, but also equality of rights as regards forming an independent state, i.e., the right of nations to self-determination, to secession. And second, precisely in the interests of the successful struggle against the nationalism of all nations in any form, it sets the task of preserving the unity of the proletarian struggle and of the proletarian organizations...in spite of the bouregois strivings for national segregation." Finally in his "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question," Lenin again stresses the need to make "a clear distinction between the interests of the oppressed classes...and the general concept of national interests as a whole, which implies the interests of the ruling class..."

As if replying in advance to the SWP, Lenin wrote: "...if we want to grasp the meaning of self-determination of nations, not by juggling with legal definitions, or inventing abstract definitions, but by examining the historico-economic conditions of the national movements, we must inevitably reach the conclusion that the self-determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state..." As opposed to the SWP's "self-determination is the revolutionary solution," Lenin wrote that "the right of nations freely to secede must not be confused with the advisability of secession by a given nation at a given moment. The party of the proletariat must decide the latter question quite independently in each particular case, having regard to the interests of social development as a whole and the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat for socialism." Obviously there is no basis for suggesting that Lenin supported the supposedly "progressive" nationalism of oppressed nations.

Lenin, of course, recognized that nationalism preaches a false commonality of interests, regardless of class. Defenders of nationalism seem to have few problems with this, since our old friend, the "dynamic" will apparently take care of everything, regardless of the ebbs and flows of the class struggle. Nationalism as an ideology has historically expressed the desires of rising bourgeoisies and/or petty bourgeoisies to carve markets out for themselves by creating their own nation-states within which they can exploit and oppress their "own" working class all by themselves. As we have seen, the SWP conveniently redefined the "terminology" in order to make it easier to adapt to the nationalists with a clear conscience.

Distinguishing between the nationalism of the oppressors and that of the oppressed does not in any way, shape, or form imply giving political support to nationalism or nationalist leaders. All that it means is taking the side of the oppressed against their oppressors. This applies to Black nationalism, or separatism to be more precise, as well. If revolutionary Marxists fail to "counterpose themselves to

this trend" it means politically transforming ourselves into appendages of the petty bourgeois groupings and leaderships that exercise hegemony within the Black movement. For the struggle for Black liberation to be successful, that struggle will have to be part of, and the leading part at that, a multiracial working class struggle against capitalism. Nationalism offers no viable strategy for that struggle because it offers no agency for it, in rejecting the leading role of the working class. That it is why we should reject it.

What Does the Historical Record Really Show?

Historically, Black nationalism and/or separatism has become a mass current in periods of working class passivity and/or acquiescence in the face of racist reaction. Most of the struggles of Black people in this country have been directed toward achieving greater equality within the framework of the existing geographical boundaries of the United States. Unfortunately, they have also, for the most part, not gone beyond the political and socio-economic boundaries of the American body politic, that is, bourgeois democracy. The period following the First World War that saw the rise of Garveyism was obviously an example of a Black separatist movement assuming mass proportions in a period of reaction and retreat for the workers' movement as a whole in this country. Even so, one can legitimately ask just how many of the participants in the Garvey movement were participants because they above all desired to go "back to Africa" and how many were mainly interested in fighting against racism and for equality in the United States and turned to Garvey because no other significant forces were engaged in the struggle at the time, Black or white. To ask the question, I think, is to answer it. The late '60s and early '70s were a similar such time.

However, in other periods such as during radical reconstruction, the Populist movement, and most importantly, during the rise of the CIO in the 1930s, multiracial struggle was on the order of the day and nationalism was reduced to playing an insignificant role, if any at all. In the last instance a multiracial working-class organization, the Communist Party, played a key role in uniting Black and white workers against the common enemy, until it abandoned the interests of all workers in the interests of the Kremlin bureaucracy. In other words, the level of class struggle and the political intervention in that struggle by revolutionaries is key. That is the question that is really at stake in this discussion, or to use the words of Bloom and Cohen, "how are we going to make the revolution?" We certainly will not help to do so by abandoning the key task of fighting to imbue the Black proletariat with "a mass socialist consciousness," which is exactly what "defense of Black nationalism" amounts to in practice.

Given today's conditions in which all workers living standards are under constant attack, multiracial working class unity can and must be achieved. Long ago Karl Marx pointed out that as long as labor with a black skin remained unfree, so too would white labor. Be it under chattel slavery or wage slavery that acute observation remains as true today as it was over a hundred years ago. How to achieve that freedom also remains a burning question of our movement as well. For our part, we continue to feel that the class struggle approach still provides the best answers. ❑

April 28, 1993

Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party — Part One

Continued from page 22

number of well-meaning people. This matter of how revolutionary socialists should organize themselves *now* is vitally important, and it will absorb more of our attention before these notes are concluded.

The vision of the kind of party we aim to build, if possible, in the near future is a key in helping us avoid the sectarianism we have just warned against. One of the greatest opportunities for the advancement of class consciousness would be through the development of a real, mass-based working-class party in the United States — a development which may not be inevitable, but is certainly *possible*. Such a labor party will, initially, not be a socialist party, but if it is a healthy formation it will naturally discuss questions of establishing democratic control over the economy by the working-class majority. At the same time, it will not be capable of being a healthy organization unless centrally involved in its leadership and its rank and file are women, African Americans and other people of color, and others — many of whom will represent layers of the working class and social movements outside of the present-day trade union movement. This suggests that *elements* from Labor Party Advocates, primarily an outgrowth of progressive currents within the trade unions, *might* coalesce with other efforts (elements from the Campaign for a New Tomorrow, the 21st Century Party, and others).

None of this can be achieved through forced-march shortcuts, although it is likely that some local efforts might precede the emergence of a nationwide labor party. An accumulation of trade union struggles, an accumulation of social movement struggles, an accumulation of coalition efforts, an accumulation of socialist educational activity, an accumulation of creative cultural efforts will be a necessary precondition. Also essential will be those developments which cannot be planned beforehand — economic, social, and political crises that generate mass action among large numbers of workers, opening up new possibilities. When such things come together, some variant of a mass working-class party can be brought into being.

This is a context which would make possible a fruitful U.S. variant of the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky, one that could actually lead to a working-class revolution and the realization of socialism.

The question remains: how should revolutionary socialists organize themselves *now*, when it is not yet possible to establish a genuine Leninist party? This will be the focus of the second installment of these notes. ❑

Holocaust in Texas

by June Martin

Whatever the Congressional panels or commissions may ultimately decide, the U.S. government, including President Clinton personally, is responsible for the deaths in Waco. On April 19, 1993, the FBI launched a military assault against the complex housing some 80 members of the Branch Davidian religious sect — including perhaps as many as seventeen children — ramming the buildings with M-60 combat tanks that inserted tear-gas canisters, an action that, directly or indirectly, caused the fiery death of those inside. Only nine managed to escape. There is no doubt that the entire operation against these people was an exercise in police-state tactics. The government officials and all those involved in the operation should be charged with murder.

The attack, which "ended" a 51-day government siege of the complex, had begun with a violent assault on the complex February 28 by military forces connected with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Four federal police were killed during that assault, as were possibly up to six cult members (*New York Times*, April 21, 1993).

The assault was unjustified from the outset. The government claimed that they were after Branch Davidian leader, David Koresh, who they claimed had to be arrested for weapons violations. But this claim does not hold water on two counts:

1. Koresh regularly jogged outside the complex and could have easily been arrested there without resorting to a massive military assault on the entire complex.
2. It is legal and easy to purchase firearms in Texas: local firearms dealers maintained that those in the compound, in fact, possessed no illegal weapons.

Because four police agents were killed during the initial assault, the authorities — eager to absolve themselves of any blame in the deaths — then began to justify the continued siege of the complex by accusing the Branch Davidians, who were in effect only defending themselves from an invading army, not only of weapons violations but of murder as well, later airing other accusations in the media, such as child abuse. Meanwhile, according to National Public Radio, forensic examiners reported that the murdered policemen may have died from "friendly fire."

As the siege wore on for 51 days, new "justifications" for the military offensive were sought in hair-raising anecdotes that received wide circulation about a multitude of perverse beliefs and abuses the cult members and leaders had allegedly either committed or condoned. Whether or not any of this was true, the fact remains that none of these tales appeared to have provided sufficient basis for criminal charges to be filed against anyone in the complex before the siege. The siege thus came to be justified not by mere weapons violations but by the deaths of the police during the initial unjustified police raid and by the very fact that the Davidians were an unorthodox "cult."

It appeared that all the major media and the government at all levels conveniently forgot that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Article One of the Bill of Rights, guarantees in our country religious freedom "and the exercise thereof." In other words, we have a constitutionally guaranteed right to believe in and practice any damn religion we want, no matter how crazy its beliefs might be, as long as such practices don't harm anyone. There are and have been any number of "cults" and "sects," some around since the dawn of humanity on through the prophet allegedly born from an "immaculate conception" in Bethlehem — whose birth has by some peculiar logic determined our system of dating — on through the medieval times and the Reformation period right up until today, with everything from Christian Scientists to those who handle poisonous snakes. All of them sound crazy and "perverse" to someone. The Branch Davidian "cult" did not represent anything much out of the ordinary as religions go.

At any rate, conviction on a weapons violation or for bizarre religious practices is not punishable by death, even in the state of Texas (which has executed more prisoners — 57 of 201 — than any other state since the death penalty was declared constitutional by the Supreme Court in 1976).

At some point, the new Clinton-appointed Attorney General Janet Reno, with Clinton's approval, authorized the April 20 assault — proving eloquently to any who had doubts that simply putting a woman in that post does not automatically "humanize" it. The fire which followed the tank assault raged for at least forty minutes before fire engines arrived to fight the blaze. By then it was too late. Only the nine who had escaped survived. The complex burned to the ground.

The police and the media began immediately to claim that the deaths were the result of mass suicide. They claimed to have expected it. Yet these claims, like the initial charges, lack the ring of truth.

If they expected a mass suicide in the event of an assault, why did the government forces launch the assault? If they expected mass suicide, especially by fire as they now claim, why did they have no fire-fighting equipment handy and why had they shut off the water supply to the complex?

While revolutionary socialists have no special partiality for the views or opinions expressed by supporters of this religious sect, our understanding of, and experience with, the agencies of the capitalist state inspire skepticism toward the assertions of the government, particularly those of the FBI, the political police of our "democracy." We should note that the survivors insist that the fire was not set by those inside but was ignited when the tank assault upset kerosene lamps. The authorities claim that many of the dead were shot in the head, trying to place the blame for the deaths on the dead themselves, who can't, of course, respond. Yet, the investigators also admit that most of the skulls of the victims burst from the intense heat of the fire. That must make it rather hard to find bullet holes!

Those inside are dead because of the police assault. It is as simple as that. If they had not died in the fire, many would surely have been killed by the police as the military attack escalated. This incident is reminiscent of the police assault with C-4 plastic explosives on the home of MOVE supporters in Philadelphia in May 1985 — an attack which killed eleven people, five of them children, and caused a fire that burned up more than 300 neighboring homes. (In that case, too, the police permitted the fire to burn for at least forty-five minutes before allowing fire fighters to reach the scene.)

As in that case, so in this, the government was interested in only one thing: exercising the monopoly on violence that it reserves to itself. To those of us who might have forgotten, Waco serves as a searing reminder of an ugly truth about capitalist "democracy." There are times when the capitalist state and its politicians and police decide to show that they can isolate and destroy people, if they wish to, on any thin pretext, without caring who gets hurt or killed in the process.

They should not be allowed to get away with it. The general public revulsion at the government's violent act should lead to protests and punishment of those responsible.❑

Which Side Are You On?

Which Side Are You On? Trying to be for Labor When It's Flat on Its Back, by Thomas Geoghegan. A Plume Book (Penguin Group), New York, 1992. 287 pages.

Reviewed by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

> There is no right to organize. No Wagner Act. Nothing. It's gone. Over. No longer exists.

This is the assessment of a labor lawyer who has been trying to defend workers against bosses over the past twenty years.

> We used to impose sanctions on countries like Poland which didn't let their workers organize. We cheered on Lech Walesa. If labor is in the decline, there must be another reason ("It's the culture, look at the Reagan vote, etc."). In high school, we all learned in American history that in the 1930s workers won the right to organize. It is burned into people's brains: "Workers have the right to organize."

"On paper," Geoghegan goes on,

> the Wagner Act, passed in 1935, does grandly declare there is a right to join unions. But over the years, the right has become illusory. Against any normal employer opposition now, there's no practical way to enforce the right to organize. It is as unenforceable as a right set out in the Declaration of Independence [pp. 251–2].

It is common knowledge that the trade union movement in this country is on the decline. This decline has been attributed to a variety of factors: the reactionary nature of the leaderships, the class collaborationist policies of the trade union bureaucracies, the crisis of world capitalism with corporations closing unionized plants and moving to places where labor is cheaper and not organized. It has been a given, accepted in the revolutionary movement as almost an act of nature, as if nothing could be done about it.

Turning Away

This book prompted me to assess my own political activities from a useful vantage point. During these decades of what appeared to be a decline in labor militancy, many of us on the left turned our attention elsewhere in search of productive political work — the struggles of students, women's movements, African Americans, and other peoples of color for their rights, support to revolutions in the neocolonial world, environmental protection, etc.

However, as this book shows, the decline in the trade union movement did not necessarily mean that there was a decline in the number of workers who wanted to be in trade unions or were trying to form unions. It did not mean that the working class correspondingly disappeared, nor did it mean that the number of working-class militants was getting progressively smaller in the same way that the "radical left" has been.

Again quoting Geoghegan:

> I doubt today if any group of workers can form a union if their employer is determined to resist. The main reason is, employers can pick out and fire all the hard-core pro-union workers. They can do this flagrantly, almost admit they are doing it, yet can be assured they face no legal sanction for it...
>
> Union busting now is almost a science. And the science is a pretty simple one: You go out and fire people. And keep firing until the organizing stops. Because at some point it always will.

Thomas Geoghegan has been an active participant and witness to most recent, critical developments in the union movement. He is a labor lawyer and was on the scene during many of the notable events in the organized labor movement from the elections of "Miners for Democracy" in 1972 — his first field experience — through the campaign when Ed Sadlowski ran for president of the United Steel Workers of America in 1976, representing Steelworkers Fight Back. Geoghegan worked with some Teamsters for a Democratic Union in their rank-and-file struggles, and he was around for much more than that. He helped local unions defend themselves against authoritarian measures by their international; he helped laid-off workers fight in long-drawn-out cases to get some pension benefits owed them by runaway corporations; he worked in the field and in the "marble palace" union headquarters in Washington, D.C.

"Bloodless, Bureaucratic Death Squad"

One can disagree with him on one point or another. However, his book documents well his inescapable conclusion: the U.S. government with its laws and courts has been able to crush working-class organizing "like a bloodless, bureaucratic death squad."

The ruling class with its laws, for example, the Taft-Hartley Labor Law, passed in 1947 and (Kennedy) Landrum-Griffin Act of 1959, and various Supreme Court decisions, like "Boys Market" in 1969, has made it virtually impossible for most workers to organize a union in the United States. The class-collaborationist politics of the Social Democrats and the Communist Party, as well as the labor fakers of all varieties, including those with links to the Mob, have all played an important role in creating this serious crisis. They counseled workers to rely on the politicians of the Republican and especially the Democratic parties as if these politicians could be counted on as "friends of labor." They never were friends of labor. In fact, as Geoghegan stated: "The Democrats themselves are doing the union busting."

Some successful organizing drives have gone on. But there haven't been enough of them to counter the de-unionization drive. This is not solely due to the half-hearted efforts of most trade union bureaucracies. The anti-union laws that have been instituted under the leadership of the "friends of labor" in the government have had decisive consequences.

Since the Taft-Hartley law, the ruling class had been able to impose strict limits on workers' abilities to organize — no mass picketing, no secondary boycotts, no sit-down strikes, strikers subject to injunction and massive fines and jail sentences, and an end to the closed shop.

Then came the Landrum-Griffin Act (endorsed by John F. Kennedy), which opened up the unions to government intervention and regulation and even further restricted trade union solidarity actions.

While *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Rowe v. Wade* are household words among political activists, for some reason the "Boys Market" Supreme Court decision of 1969 that Geoghegan describes is not. With that decision the Supreme Court allowed courts to issue injunctions to enforce no-strike clauses in contracts, to "imply" no-strike clauses that didn't exist, and to issue injunctions against any strike over an issue that could be arbitrated! That decision — on top of the Taft-Hartley law and laws like the New York State Taylor Law — makes almost all strikes illegal!

It is widely recognized among militants in my own union — the United Federation of Teachers — that the UFT is crippled because of New York State's Taylor Law, which outlaws strikes by public workers under penalty of enormous fines and jail sentences. But how many militants realize that even without it, as a result of the "Boys' Market" decision, we would not really have the right to strike without facing similar penalties?

Virtually the only recourse left to most unionized workers under the existing laws is the deadly "grievance" procedure. This procedure is a terrible scam that can drag out a violation of workers' rights for years before there is any decision at all. As Geoghegan puts it, "management acts and the union grieves, and grieves and grieves."

Finding the Nameless, Faceless Labor Militants

Who will lead the struggle to abolish these laws? Isn't it obvious that even the most elementary sense of labor solidarity would demand that abolition of the Taft-Hartley law, for example, be at the basis of any serious organizing drive for a party of labor? After

all, this law directly oppresses not only the 85 percent of the working class that is unorganized but the 15 percent which is organized. This same repressive law paralyzes the ability of the organized 15 percent to conduct effective actions.

Through not only antilabor legislation but the Cold War politics initiated in the late 1940s and the McCarthy era "Red scare" of the 1950s, the ruling class was able to cripple the workers' movement politically for a number of years. Of course, the prosperity of the 1950s and early 1960s had a conservatizing effect on many workers. But that aspect has overshadowed the critical role of the bourgeois state, with its laws and courts, in virtually prohibiting working-class organization.

The degeneration of the U.S. trade-union movement that was fed by this process has been a primary ingredient in the success of U.S. imperialist policy, which has been able to plunder large areas of the planet in a frantic quest for profits. Who else could have really stopped it if not the organized working class? Yet it was disabled, and many of us in the organized left did not fully realize why.

The labor bureaucracy and its political role in the degeneration of the trade-union movement has often been a useful analogy to help explain the rise of Stalinism and the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. However, it is evident that this analogy works in reverse as well: just as the Stalinized workers' states progressively degenerated under the pressure of isolation from the world revolution, which it helped to derail, so the organized trade-union movement in the U.S. progressively degenerated as its numbers continued to decline and it became more and more isolated from and at odds with the unorganized mass of the working class.

One of the prices organized labor is paying for this is the phenomenon of replacement workers. When unionized workers go on strike, bosses seem to find replacements for them easily among not only the unemployed but among the already employed but low-paid, nonunionized sections of the workforce. Another expression of the degeneration is that even some activists who are elected to union office as progressives fall victim and soon seem little different from the degenerated apparatchiks they worked so hard to replace.

The class struggle is a relentless force. Rank-and-file movements that continue to emerge within the established unions, challenging the corrupt, privileged, and encrusted leaderships, have the potential for reversing some antilabor offensives. But unless these movements can find ways to make links with the ever growing proportion of nonunionized workers, these movements cannot go very far.

There can be no real party of labor; there can be no thought of an effective women's movement to guarantee reproductive choice; there can be no end to police brutality or reversal of imperialism's foreign policy as long as the organized labor movement continues to dwindle.

This means a sharp reassessment of our past political work.

> Recently, the Supreme Court under Rehnquist has cut back, in some limited, technical ways, the protections afforded by the civil rights laws. I don't like these decisions either, but it mystifies me how liberals get worked up over fairly minor blips in the law and completely ignore the fact that, year after year, blacks are being denied the most basic civil right, the right to join a union without being fired...
>
> ...I can walk into Barbara's Bookstore and see fifty books by fifty women novelists, and not one word in any of them about unions. [p. 269]

But to whom can we turn for help?

The Victims of the NLRB

Geoghegan cites a "chilling" study by Paul Weiler of Harvard Law School in two articles published in the *Harvard Law Review* in 1983 and 1984. Weiler shows that in 1980 alone, *10,000* workers won reinstatement before the NLRB mostly for having been illegally fired in connection with a union organizing drive.

To try to get the figures for other years, I went to the source, the NLRB Annual Reports. Not surprisingly, as Geoghegan points out in his chapter "Officers and Lawyers," the mass of data in these reports is incomprehensible unless one has some training in law.

The same was not true of Weiler's articles, in which he not only explained how he located the figures he needed from the NLRB reports, but included a chart he prepared showing the results of NLRB decisions for selected years from 1950 to 1980. The chart revealed some very important developments.

While 10,000 workers were reinstated by NLRB decisions in 1980, some 18,315 had filed grievances because they were dismissed for union activities in violation of NLRA section 8(a)3. In addition to the 10,000 reinstated, another 5,000 received compensation but were not reinstated. (Obviously, an untold number of workers had been fired in connection with union organizing who never filed any grievance at all.)

Weiler reports: "The NLRB has estimated that approximately 90 percent of all discriminatory discharges take place during either organizational campaigns or first-contract negotiations." He goes on to say that "of approximately 19,000 discriminatory discharge cases expected annually" by the U.S. government, "some 17,000 would arise during organizational campaigns or during first-contract negotiations" ("Promises to Keep: Securing Workers' Rights to Self-Organization under NLRA," *Harvard Law Review*, June 1983, p. 1773).

Weiler argues further that the election process mandated by the NLRA (Wagner act) is so long that it allows ample time for bosses to fire union sympathizers and defeat the unionization drive in a plant.

Geoghegan draws the same conclusion. He reports:

> There's no other country (outside the Third World) where it's tougher legally to organize a union. It's getting even tougher than in South Korea.
>
> Once, in the 1950s, before the mass firings began, American unions would win a stunning number of elections, even through the [National Labor Relations] Board...In the 1950s, unions could count on organizing a new, additional *1 percent* of the work force annually. They often won over 80 percent of the Board elections. At the present time unions barely organize *0.3 percent* of the work force annually. They lose, many years, over 50 percent of the Board elections. Also, much of the 0.3 percent, the "new" organizing, comes in the public sector, where there are few illegal firings. There was little public-sector organizing in the 1950s, so the decline in private-sector organizing is worse than it seems. Organizing in the private sector has almost stopped...
>
> When the employer does not oppose or delay the elections, or commit any legal violations, the unions currently win over *90 percent* of the time...
>
> So far I have argued as if the [National Labor Relations] Board were useless. Now, if the Board were only useless, that would not be so bad. But the Board is much worse than useless. The NLRB now seems to exist primarily to slow down the union, delay the election, ball things up, so the employer has even more time to fire people (pp. 256–257).

Changing the "Culture"

To those who try to explain the sharp drop in union membership by claiming that there has been a return to some alleged "individualism" among workers or "resurgence of traditional values" or the rise of a new "culture," Geoghegan responds:

> Why not conduct a little experiment? Why not change the labor laws and let people decide, freely and without coercion, i.e. without being fired, whether they want to join a union? then we don't have to argue, we can find out what people want to do...
>
> We can talk "culture" until we all go mad. But isn't it possible that the law itself may help create the culture? The Jim Crow laws create one kind of culture, and the Civil Rights Act over time creates another. Likewise with the labor laws. If the laws are hostile to unionizing, and if the unions are weak and powerless as a result, then the laws are bound to influence the culture, i.e., the attitudes people hold about unions [p. 267].

Clearly the data Weiler and Geoghegan provide has far-reaching implications and deserve serious scrutiny by labor militants and revolutionaries. Who are these workers? Where are they? What do they think? How can they link up with other militants?

The ruling class has been able — as this book shows so very well — to cripple and atomize our class with laws and legal decisions. The ossified, officiating bureaucrats

have not only deserted the workers in the United States but promoted the imperialist massacres of workers abroad. Undoubtedly, with their betrayals and misleadership, they have certainly added credibility to the bourgeoisie's eternal anti-union propaganda. By their ineffectiveness in defending workers' jobs, wages, and benefits against the capitalists' offensives they have reinforced ruling-class propaganda as to the uselessness of unions of any kind.

There are no easy solutions to the numerous problems related to the paramount task of reversing the decline in trade union membership. However, the sure way to have no solutions is never to raise the question at all. This book puts that question and the antilabor laws so critical to it at "center stage" where they belong.

To the organized left, "labor" has usually meant only the unionized sector of the working class, whose shrinkage and retreats over the past few decades served as the background to this book. It is not, therefore, surprising that broad sectors of the left over the past decade or more have become disoriented and demoralized, and begun retreating, too.

Those of us who seek to reconstitute a sympathizing section of the Fourth International in the United States — a fundamental element for the revitalization of the FI — must not follow the left in this retreat. We must begin at last to address this question.

As a Russian trade union militant has pointed out, if the "vanguard" of the working class in the United States does not get its act together, by the year 2000 at the current rate the number of workers *not* in trade unions in this country will be 95 percent. The corollary to this is that if labor militants are not able to reverse the de-unionization drive of the ruling class that has characterized the post–World War II period, then by the year 2000 not only the demoralized "left" we see today but civil liberties of any kind may be only a distant memory. ❑

Organizing the South

Organizing the South: A Southern Strategy for Labor, a pamphlet produced by Black Workers for Justice, available for $2 apiece from Justice Speaks, P.O. Box 1863, Rocky Mount NC 27802.

Reviewed by Naima Washington

Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ) has come up with a practical and rhetoric-free pamphlet. It is difficult to have anything but respect for an organization which expresses its views in such an open, honest, and intelligent manner. At a time in the United States when African people, the working class, women, etc., are being presented with "feel good solutions" calling for changes in attitudes, lifestyles, or religions, this pamphlet identifies the problems of oppressed people and articulates viable solutions in plain language. It also points to the historical origin of the problems we are now facing. It outlines those problems which are peculiar to workers in the South as well as naming specific obstacles which have, to date, made organizing difficult throughout that region.

Particularly impressive are the analyses dealing with "The Current Situation." We are made to understand why things are the way they are, who's benefiting, who's losing, and what can be done to reverse these situations.

The discussion about the "team concept" reminded me of a recently aired television program featuring Corning Chemical in Virginia. Some time ago Corning adopted the team concept. After hearing the job descriptions of the "worker/manager" assembly line positions held by approximately 150 workers at that plant, the only team I could visualize as closely resembling those workers is the "Borax 20-Mule Team!" These teams have the "responsibility" of hiring and firing workers. Hence, capitalism has come up with another trump card. The bosses have effectively distanced themselves from another ugly task: now, *instead of the bosses, your fellow workers can give you your walking papers.*

After giving a rather up-beat rap explaining that her team was "just like a family," a Corning worker said that it really "hurt" to have to tell a team member who was not performing up to standards that he or she no longer had a job! Is this the real meaning of "family values"? Seeing to it that a loved one can no longer care for their family, pay rent, or buy food?

Black Workers for Justice is approaching the question of organizing Black workers by organizing the Black community. They point to the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike in 1968 as an example of community support for striking workers. (It was while mobilizing support for that strike that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.) Not long after Dr. King's death, Black hospital workers in Charleston, South Carolina, staged a walkout which eventually involved the entire city of Charleston and attracted the attention and support of many national civil rights leaders, union organizers, etc. There is wisdom in this approach, because the bosses and the news media they control portray striking workers as irresponsible, overpaid people who are merely trying to bankrupt a company. They are never shown as exploited human beings seeking economic justice.

The success of union organizing campaigns throughout the South will not only lead ultimately to worker solidarity in other regions of the country but also, because of the nature of the global economy, it will help to further global worker solidarity. BWFJ has honestly articulated the failure of organized labor to carry out its mandate to organize all workers, and particularly those in the South. It seems to me that progressive unionists as well as many of the employed and unemployed workers in the 19th and early 20th centuries had the right idea: they fought for the death of capitalism! They saw that the capitalist system kept them poor — no matter how hard they worked, suffered, or sacrificed — while their bosses and union bureaucrats were well-dressed, well-housed, and well-fed. Union bureaucrats, on the other hand, sought ways to "tame" militant rank-and-file union members and to make sure that only "reasonable" demands were presented to management.

Black Workers for Justice has a strategy which will strengthen and empower the Black working class and its community, develop respectful relationships with other groups, and ultimately serve to develop meaningful programs addressing poverty, health care, infant mortality, education, and the environment.

If I have any criticism at all of this pamphlet, it is this: I would have liked to see a mail-in form included in it. The form I'm thinking of would have been used to order additional copies of the pamphlet, obtain more information with respect to helping organize a labor congress, conferences on labor, support committees, and an Organize the South Solidarity Movement. Perhaps such a form was considered and decided against.

The design, print, and format of the pamphlet are excellent. I very much liked the inclusion of "References." A reader is presented with an opportunity to do further reading and research as well as being able to determine what sources were used to support the discussions taking place in the pamphlet.

The strategy presented in the pamphlet deserves careful consideration. Above all, it deserves support, positive suggestions, constructive criticisms, skills, and financial commitment from those of us who want to see racial, economic, social, and political justice for every man, woman, and child on the planet.

Although I cannot claim to be plugged into existing community networks, Black Workers for Justice can certainly count me in! ❑

Letters

Cannon and Trotskyism

We were gratified to see Frank Lovell's favorable review of the Prometheus Research Library's first book, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism, Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920–28,* in the February issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism.*

The review sees our one "political lapse" in this sentence from the "About James P. Cannon" piece which begins the book: "At the time of his death in August 1974 Cannon was still the National Chairman of the SWP; however, the party had abandoned the Trotskyist program more than ten years earlier." Lovell believes that we imply that Cannon ceased to be a Trotskyist in his last decade.

There is, of course, no reason to believe that Cannon stopped thinking of himself as a Trotskyist in the years before he died. The Socialist Workers Party did not *formally* renounce Trotskyism until Jack Barnes's speech to the YSA convention in December 1982. But uncritical adulation of the petty-bourgeois guerrillaist leadership of the Cuban Revolution; abstention from fighting for Trotskyist leadership in the Civil Rights Movement; the thoroughly reformist basis on which the SWP worked in the late 1960s to contain opposition to the Vietnam War within the framework of bourgeois politics — in short, the political trajectory that the SWP began to pursue in 1960 — cannot be squared with Trotskyism. This was Cannon's contradiction, not ours.

Nonetheless, *BIDOM* itself has printed plenty of evidence that Cannon was increasingly disaffected with the political course of the SWP in the 1960s. Much of this material was collected in the Fourth Internationalist Tendency pamphlet, *Don't Strangle the Party,* which contains some of Cannon's writings on the subject. In his introduction to this pamphlet, the late George Breitman reported that "in 1968 Cannon discontinued direct correspondence with the party center in New York." Breitman also noted that Cannon did not particularly like the SWP Political Committee's draft of the 1965 resolution on organizational principles, though he sent it back to New York without comment.

This resolution, adopted by the 1965 SWP convention — which Cannon did not attend — was the internal organizational counterpart to the party's political departure from a revolutionary orientation. Concretely, it was a codification of the organizational practices used to expel the Revolutionary Tendency, precursor of the Spartacist League. These new practices, flatly in contradiction to the 35-year revolutionary tradition of American Trotskyism, can be summarized by the following syllogism: (1) factions are allowed in the party; (2) factionalists are disloyal people; (3) disloyal people are expelled.

Having no evidence of any disciplinary infractions, Dobbs charged RT members with "disloyal conduct" (not coincidentally Tim Wohlforth — who had previously led an unprincipled split in the RT at Gerry Healy's behest — turned over to Dobbs majority internal tendency documents purporting to show the disloyalty of the RT, giving Dobbs a pretext for expulsions). All this is detailed in the Spartacist League's Marxist Bulletin series, which documents the origins and evolution of our tendency.

The Revolutionary Tendency *wanted to remain in the SWP* to fight the descent into centrism signalled by the enthusing over Fidel Castro's Cuban Stalinist regime (and which in 1965 the SWP leadership generalized into a full-scale reformism), but its members were thrown out as "disloyal" in 1963, denied even the right to appeal their expulsions to the SWP convention or to the international conference of the newly created United Secretariat. Plenty of SWP veterans, including in particular Myra Tanner Weiss, protested the RT's expulsion. We'd like to draw *BIDOM* readers' attention to the special five-issue *Internal Information Bulletin* — the first time this title was used in SWP internal documents — published by the SWP between January and April 1964. This series on the "Robertson-Mage-White-Harper-Ireland Case," documents the expulsion of RT members. Copies of these bulletins can be viewed at the Prometheus Research Library.

James Robertson
Emily Turnbull
for the Prometheus Research Library
New York

Editors' Reply

We welcome the communication by James Robertson and Emily Turnbull, who acknowledge that James P. Cannon consciously and explicitly remained part of the Trotskyist movement to the very end.

As we have helped to document, Cannon criticized the cropping-up of undemocratic elements in the organizational practice of the SWP in the 1960s. The question of whether the Revolutionary Tendency, forerunner of the Spartacist League, was dealt with undemocratically in the SWP is not an inappropriate one to raise in this context. At the same time, Robertson and Turnbull stress that their faction "wanted to remain in the SWP to fight the descent into centrism [i.e., non-revolutionary politics]," indicating that there were substantive political differences related to this split. As Cannon's own perspective demonstrates, these differences are distinct from the "organization question." It is worth giving attention to what Cannon's views were — and whether they did, in fact, represent "Cannon's contradiction" as Robertson and Turnbull state.

Cannon was a firm defender of the Cuban Revolution, with a high regard for the leadership of Castro and Guevara — although neither he nor the SWP in this period were guilty of "uncritical adulation." Cannon and other prominent SWP leaders such as Joseph Hansen were insistent that the Cuban Revolution could best be advanced by establishing and strengthening institutions of working-class democracy. This insight was the basis for the SWP's critical approach to problems of Cuban society before the Barnes leadership's actual break with Trotskyism.

Cannon was not a proponent of "abstention from fighting for Trotskyist leadership in the Civil Rights Movement" but proceeded on the basis of the fundamental Trotskyist understanding that leadership in the Black liberation struggle must — and will — arise organically from within the African American community itself. The SWP's strategic and tactical application of this approach was conditioned by its own human resources, particularly by the very small number of African American members during the 1950s when the civil rights movement erupted and during the early 1960s when it spread across the South and into Northern urban areas. The SWP's programmatic and political involvement in the civil rights movement and in Black liberation developments was recognized by leaders such as Malcolm X as well as by a layer of African American activists. During the 1960s a number of young Black revolutionaries joined the party, and this allowed for greater Trotskyist leadership opportunities. The situation was complicated, however, and requires more explanation than can be given in this brief reply. For example, in Detroit, where young African American Trotskyists were founders and activists in Black organizations, they were berated for being members of a "white group and being told what to do by a white man [George Breitman]." At the same time, the ranks and leadership of the Michigan Freedom Now Party respected and worked closely with the SWP branch. This was a healthy case of *collaboration* and *mutual respect* and not a matter of fighting to exert Trotskyist leadership.

On the other hand, Cannon was quite pleased that the SWP was able to play a major role in the movement to end the U.S. war in Vietnam. "I think the party is proceeding correctly in its attempt to cooperate in action with anybody who will help to make a demonstration against the war," he explained in 1965, "while making it clear we stand for certain definite slogans which really mean opposition to the war. Especially...the slogan: Bring the Troops Home Now. In my opinion, that is the correct slogan. I don't see how any revolutionist could oppose it. It is a revolutionary slogan." As we can see, Cannon did not share the view that this orientation meant containing opposition to the Vietnam War within the framework of bourgeois politics. He believed that "anybody who will not adopt that slogan isn't really fighting the war."

This perspective created both the basis for organizing the broadest opposition of people who were really opposed to U.S. aggression against the Vietnamese people, and at the same time made no concession whatever in principle, because the withdrawal of U.S. troops would mean the victory of the Vietnamese revolution. In addition, he predicted that a mass antiwar movement organized along these lines would contribute to a mass radicalization, especially among youth, creating greater opportunities for revolutionary socialist organizing in the U.S. (See James P. Cannon, "Revolutionary Policies in the Antiwar Movement," *International Socialist Review*, October 1974.)

This orientation enabled the SWP to play a genuinely historic role in contributing to a major defeat of U.S. imperialism and a victory for the Vietnamese revolution. As Cannon predicted, the building of a mass antiwar movement also had a profoundly radicalizing (and decidedly nonbourgeois) impact on the consciousness of millions of people from 1965 to 1974. Unfortunately, the Spartacist League — by rejecting this orientation — was limited in the contributions it was able to make to such struggles and processes. It would be wrong to dismiss the Spartacist League out of hand simply because of this serious limitation. Similarly, it would be foolish — in the name of rejecting the undemocratic policies of Jack Barnes — to denigrate the important contributions of the SWP in the 1960s and '70s.

The Carnage in Bosnia and the "New World Order"

Continued from page 2

for a Greater Serbia promised to halt military aid to the Serbian forces in Bosnia-Herzegovina, knowing full well that those forces had adequate supplies to maintain their offensive for some time to come and would continue to receive material support through the private profiteers making a fortune off the war. (Examples are Davina Milanovic, head of the Dafiment Bank, and Jezimir Vasilyevic, head of Yugoslavia's largest private bank.)

The war by the Serbian militia — organized, led, armed and supplied by Belgrade, which has orchestrated a chauvinist campaign of fear, hatred, and lies to rationalize its aggression against Croatians and Bosnians after these republics declared independence — is merely the logical extension of the Serbian chauvinism whipped up by Milosevic and the Serbian Stalinist apparatus. It began when they needed to justify Serbian military occupation of Kosovo province, inside Serbia, after the Albanian majority there launched popular struggles for democratic and economic rights in the late 1980s. These struggles appear to have had considerable backing among the Serbian workers there, posed a threat to the status quo, and, in the eyes of the privileged bureaucratic rulers, had to stopped.

What Can Be Done?

The events in former Yugoslavia, specifically in Bosnia-Herzegovina — pose a new set of problems for the workers and socialist movements internationally.

While the Serbo-Stalinists under Milosevic mobilize mercenaries under the command of criminal leaders, like Karadzic, in land-grab adventures aimed at preserving their power and privileges, committing one atrocity after another — imperialism looks on and appears guiltless. But it is evident that the imperialists do not want, any more than the Stalinists, to see an independent, self-determined area, which is what Bosnia-Herzegovina was on the verge of becoming a year ago when it declared its independence and the Serbian attacks began.

Similar campaigns of aggression are taking place right now in Georgia, Armenia, and Tajikistan, where forces that benefited under the old Stalinist order have launched bloody battles, reducing economies and populations to ruins, to crush sprouting movements for popular rule that threaten the decades-old systems of power and privilege.

An analogous scenario is under way in Angola, where U.S. imperialism and its allies — the Israeli and South African governments — have armed and funded the UNITA forces that are still waging a deadly and destructive war to overthrow the popularly elected government. UNITA forces have murdered tens of thousands and devastated the Angolan economy, with the dead in recent months alone numbering in the tens of thousands.

If imperialism intervenes in the Balkans, it will only do so if the Serbian forces begin to exceed their "mandate" or infringe on imperialism's own plans to plunder — like Saddam Hussein did when he threatened the oil profits of imperialism and its ally, the Kuwaiti monarchy.

The problem is that neither the Western imperialist powers nor the Stalinists, with their fascist collaborators, represent forces that will resolve these deadly conflicts in the interests of the workers. Only a well-organized political movement of the workers themselves — particularly the Serbian workers — can do this.

Although there have been reports of antiwar initiatives from within Serbia, there are few reports of what the workers there are thinking or doing about the war. With the imperialist blockade tightening, industrial production is down between 40 and 50 percent, and thousands of workers have been sent on forced vacations, although they are still receiving 80 percent of their wages, according to the *New York Times* of April 25. Basic foods and other goods in Serbia are in short supply and high priced; inflation is now more than 1 million percent annually. In response to the economic crisis — and fueling it — the Serbian government keeps printing more money.

Such conditions must be causing unimaginable hardships for the mass of the Serbian working class.

Outright fascists like Vojislav Seselj, charged with war crimes during the Serbian aggression against Croatian civilians last year, and his Radical Party are playing a crucial role now in Serbia, physically intimidating anyone who would dare to criticize the government's policies. In early April in Belgrade, according to press reports, a Muslim actor was dragged from a restaurant in full view and beaten by Serbian chauvinist goons, "an event so reminiscent of the Brown Shirts in Nazi Germany that it still causes shudders among the city's intelligentsia" (*New York Times*, April 25). The *Times* reports that prowar, Serbian chauvinist propaganda dominates the media and that from the start, "control and manipulation of the state-owned [TV] channel was a key to power" for Milosevic. (The *New York Times* is quite familiar with how this is done, participating skillfully as it does in its own government's propaganda campaigns.)

If there is genuine movement among workers aimed at stopping Serbian aggression, its voices have been muted.

Imperialist military intervention against Serbian aggression will not help the workers in either Bosnia-Herzegovina or Serbia or anywhere else. It will only add another set of gangsters to the scene, causing untold death and destruction to still more innocent victims.

The only useful move the imperialists can make is to lift their arms embargo against Bosnian Muslims, so that those under attack can defend themselves from Serbian or Croatian or any other aggressors that might join in on the plunder. ❑

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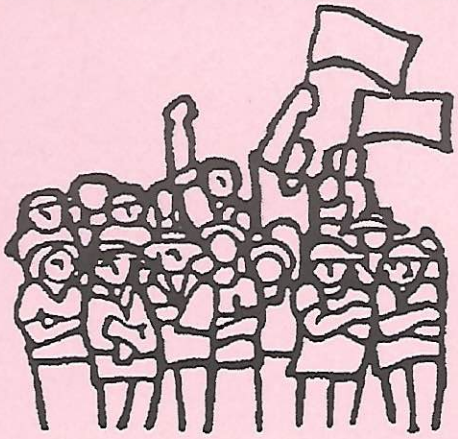

The Manifesto of the Fourth International

Socialism or Barbarism on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century

This document was adopted by a meeting of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (FI) in 1992. It is the product of months of discussion within that world organization and an extensive process of rewriting and revision from an original draft proposed before the FI's World Congress in 1991.

The FI is an international organization of revolutionary Marxist parties and groups from dozens of countries throughout the world. It was founded in 1938 under the leadership of Leon Trotsky, dedicated to a consistent and forthright struggle for the common interests of working people and the oppressed in all nations — to their mobilization in struggle against capitalist exploitation, colonialism, and bureaucratic dictatorship, and against all forms of racial and sexual discrimination.

It should be clear, from the perspectives presented here, that the FI remains true to that purpose today. This, in itself, stands as a major accomplishment in a world where many former leftists and radical activists are rushing to embrace the "new realism" of a capitalism that has supposedly "triumphed over socialism" during the cold war.

But reality is a far cry from the "new world order" proclaimed by U.S. President George Bush after his victory against Iraq in 1991. It is, as the Manifesto points out, a world of increasing disorder — of insecurity, crisis, preventable hunger, poverty, and disease. These things are more the rule than the exception for most of the billions of people on this planet.

In short, we are living in a world that cries out for a renewed commitment to the fight for social change, for a more just and humane political and economic system. Just such a commitment, and a perspective on how those needed changes can be brought about, will be found in the pages of this pamphlet.

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