

Labor Solidarity Has No Borders

News of Workers' Struggles in
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Also: Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party, Part 2

by Paul Le Blanc

The Struggle Over Health Care Reform

by Dayne Goodwin

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U.S. Miners Launch Project Solidarity 93

by Jean Tussey

While observers, advisers, and consultants continue to wring their hands and deplore the weakened condition of the trade union movement, the traditional "shock troops" of American labor, the coal miners, have declared war against the multinational union-busters of the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA).

Carefully assessing the relationship of forces when negotiations broke down in May, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) donned their camouflage fatigue picket uniforms and launched a united and disciplined campaign to shut down the profitable BCOA mines.

Coal still generates about 55 percent of the electricity in the U.S., a June 8 *New York Times* report noted, but "the union controls only about 30 percent of coal production." The central issue in the current strike is the mine owners' practice of cutting costs and increasing profits by shifting work to non-union affiliates or subsidiaries.

Miners — many of them third-generation union members — closed ranks and began building solidarity in their locals and communities. On May 1 more than 3,000 mine-workers were joined by hundreds of other union supporters in a march from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to the headquarters of Consol Energy, Inc., the holding company for Consol's coal lands. Rally speakers, along with UMWA President Richard Trumka, were Gerald McEntee, president of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; Amy Newell, secretary-treasurer of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers; Bill George, president of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO; and Johnny Morris, vice president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

On May 10, President Trumka announced the first wave of selective, strategic, expanding strikes against AMAX Coal Industries, Inc., Arch Mineral Corp., and Zeigler Coal Holding Co., involving 2,000 UMWA members in Illinois and Indiana.

On May 17 the UMWA began placing 60-second radio spots on 178 stations throughout the coalfields and ads in 25 newspapers demanding the BCOA companies bargain in good faith over future job opportunities. The ads pointed out that it was the work of union miners that increased the profits of the BCOA companies and enabled them to invest in new mines, where they now refuse to hire UMWA members. On May 18 the strike expanded to West Virginia subsidiaries of Ashland Coal Co. and Arch Mineral Corp.

"Project Solidarity 93" established a coordinated reach-out campaign, with an accessible information hot-line number: 1-800-334-UMWA. In addition, a union publication with "Negotiations News Briefs," keeps members and supporters informed of strike support and progress.

The May 20 issue of this publication reported the growth of international labor support. UMWA Secretary-Treasurer Jerry Jones traveled to the Miners International Federation convention in Budapest, Hungary, to rally support. Delegates passed a resolution pledging solidarity and agreeing to undertake a worldwide campaign to pressure the British-owned Hanson, PLC, owner of Peabody Holding Co., and also the German company Rheinbraun, RWE, which has a 50 percent holding in Consol. Peabody and Consol are the two largest coal producers.

By June 3 some 3,000 UMWA miners struck Peabody and Consol, expanding the U.S. total to 9,000 strikers; and on the other side of the world about 1,000 coal miners demonstrated their solidarity by walking off their jobs at mining operations co-owned by Peabody in Australia.

Meanwhile the relationship of forces had begun to change on the home front.

- **May 25** Cyprus Minerals Co., which bargains with the UMWA independently, announced plans to merge with AMAX, the third largest U.S. coal producer. AMAX notified BCOA that it is withdrawing from the multi-employer bargaining group im-

mediately. (On June 7 the strike at AMAX ended, with 400 workers returning to their jobs.)

- **May 27** By a vote of 256 to 151 the United Mine Workers won a union representation election supervised by the National Labor Relations Board at Zeigler's Marrowbone mine in West Virginia. A similar election at that company's Wolf Creek Collieries mine was set for June 28.
- **June 11** The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the United Mine Workers had expanded its five-week-old strike to include 16 additional mines owned by Peabody and Consol in West Virginia, Illinois, and, for the first time, Kentucky. This adds 3,000 miners to the strike against BCOA companies, bringing the total to 12,000.

The report also quoted an analyst with Shearson Lehman Brothers in New York: "We are starting to hear that spot coal prices in these targeted strike regions" are beginning to increase. "This is clearly due to the supply disruption caused by the strike."

The *Journal* article concluded with the news that Peabody had "filed a series of lawsuits and charges of unfair labor practices against the UMW seeking damages for slowdowns in its mines."

A United Mine Workers representative on the Project Solidarity hot line dismissed the company charges as a "frivolous" attempt to counteract the union's growing support and effective strike strategy. □

Editor's Note

Working-class internationalism being the focus of the present issue, we are pleased to offer articles on U.S. working-class struggles (the miners' strike and the health care fight) along with valuable material on problems and struggles in Mexico, Canada, Russia, Iran, Sri Lanka, and South Africa. Also quite appropriate in this regard is the discussion by Jack Bresée and Steve Bloom, on the relevance of the concept of "permanent revolution," and the concluding part of Paul Le Blanc's "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party," which address the question of internationalism in general and the Fourth International in particular.

We look forward to future discussion and debate on issues of central importance to building the labor and socialist movements. In this regard, we are gratified to be publishing the panel discussion (from the Socialist Scholars' Conference) on Black liberation struggles with Mary France, Lloyd D'Aguilar, and Vera Wigglesworth, which broadens the ongoing debate on Black nationalism that Peter Johnson continues with his article defending the concept of "revolutionary integrationism" from critics in these pages. In a future issue Evelyn Sell will respond with additional views on the relevance and revolutionary character of Black nationalism.

The Struggle Over Health Care Reform

by Dayne Goodwin

Dayne Goodwin is a leader of the Utah Coalition for National Health Care Reform. Assistance in preparation of this article was provided by Jean Tussey.

Health care reform has moved to the center stage of U.S. politics. Business leaders and their economic advisers are alarmed about the rapidly rising costs of U.S. health care, especially in the context of world recession and increased international trade competition. U.S. health care costs are the highest in the world in absolute and proportional terms — approaching one thousand billion (one trillion) dollars annually, about one-seventh (15 percent) of GNP.

The capitalist class has been driving down the standard of living, reducing its labor costs and also reducing the social wage, the government-funded social programs. Skyrocketing medical costs are a major cause of continued growth in government spending, and Medicare and Medicaid are a major target of capitalist politicians bent on “cutting the deficit.”

One of the influential business leaders who stirred up the current consideration of health care reform was Lee Iacocca, who observed a few years ago while he was still Chrysler CEO that average health care costs per vehicle in U.S. production were over \$700 compared to \$200 in Canada. A Ford executive complained at Clinton’s economic summit last December that they were spending more on employee health care benefits than on steel.

The employment-based insurance that has provided access to health care for most Americans is a recipe for crisis when the economy is stagnant and in recession. The layoffs among relatively well-insured industrial and manufacturing workers add directly to the number of involuntarily uninsured (over 30 million and growing).

Most new jobs are in lower-paid, unorganized service sectors of the economy, where minimal benefits often don’t include health insurance. The predatory, private-profit health insurance companies are in a better position than ever to pick over their potential customers, excluding those with “pre-existing conditions” and generally providing insurance only to those least likely to need it.

Employers are on the offensive to reduce their health care costs, cutting back coverage, shopping for less expensive insurance programs like HMOs, raising deductibles and co-payments. Unions go on strike more often to defend health care benefits than any other issue in recent years. For their respective reasons, employers and unions are increasingly looking to the government for a resolution of this health care crisis.

People Need a National Health Care Program

Public opinion strongly favors increased government responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to needed medical care.

While the standard of living of working people has been going down for the past twenty years, the cost of health care has been rapidly escalating, leaving most Americans fearful over potential medical bills, if not terrorized by real ones. Even those fortunate enough to be employed and “insured” delay or don’t get needed medical attention because of high deductibles and co-payments. Most of us know of employed and insured people who have been pauperized by a medical emergency or catastrophic illness.

Advocates and organizations of the disabled and chronically ill, and of the increasing numbers of unemployed, poor, and uninsured, are in constant battle for public health care funding and services. Hospitals and clinics have been closing down in low-income urban and rural areas where people don’t have the means to pay for health care. A new law requiring businesses to financially provide *now* for the cost of future retiree health benefits has been the occasion for slash-and-burn cutbacks by employers. Working people who have retired and those thinking about retirement have been shocked to see corporations unilaterally betray past commitments for retiree health care coverage. Among the growing numbers of elderly in the aging U.S. population, organizations from the Gray Panthers to the AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) are mobilizing to see that their greater health care needs are met.

Conscientious doctors and public health professionals directly face the results of a deteriorating health care system. They see the return of childhood diseases among the millions who don’t get basic inoculations, new resistant strains of tuberculosis developing and spreading among the homeless, new diseases like AIDS that don’t get appropriate levels of government attention and funding. They share the growing awareness of the human damage that results from an economic system that shirks responsibility for such “externalities” as toxic wastes, polluted air and water, and other environmental hazards. They want to see a serious commitment to public health and preventive medicine.

Although the U.S. health care system is the most expensive in the world, it is far from the

best. Public health indices such as life expectancy and infant mortality rank near the bottom of all advanced capitalist countries. Health indices for African-Americans and Latinos rank with Third World countries. Poor, isolated Cuba does a much better job of providing medical care for all its people than the rich United States of America.

The angry stew of dissatisfaction with unaffordable costs, decreasing access to medical care, and government cutbacks and inaction in the face of growing public demand has been brought to a boil by Democratic Party politicians who discovered that promising universal access to affordable health care was a useful tactic for winning elections. One pundit has called national health care reform the “Vietnam” of the 1990s.

Why Is There No National Health Program in the U.S.?

Obviously working people in the U.S. would be better off if we had a national health program that assured our access to medical care. Once again the U.S. is notable for its lack of a social program that exists in every other advanced capitalist country (excluding South Africa). This social backwardness is ultimately a result of the political weakness of the working class. An independent working class or labor party with sustained activity on a national level has never existed in the U.S.

The strong hold of capitalist ideology over much of every social class in U.S. society provides fertile soil for fanatical right-wing organizations funded by extremist elements of the capitalist class. From the John Birch Society through the Libertarian Party to the growing right wing in the Republican Party, there is a knee-jerk ideological rejection of any progressive social program.

Proposals for a national health care program have been on the political agenda several times in U.S. history. Each time the beginning of a war (World Wars I and II and the Cold War, including the Vietnam War) preempted national attention while the American Medical Association (and the private health insurance industry, once it arose) fought fiercely and successfully against “socialized medicine.” The medical industry is one of the most profitable sectors of the U.S. economy, with strong incentives to defend private profit over public health.

The U.S. has an unusual health care system built on access through employment-based payment for private-profit health insurance.

The industrial backbone of the working class wasn't unionized until just prior to World War II. The class collaborationist political perspective of the dominant socialist tendency of the time (the Stalinized Communist Party) and increasingly of the union leadership they influenced was manifest during the war when health insurance benefits were provided by employers as a thank you to unions for promoting class peace and accepting a wage freeze.

Business unionism institutionalized health care access for the organized core of the working class, satisfying the potentially strongest social force for a national health care program. Relatively strong industrial unions habituated to routine business unionism are now being forced to find other ways to secure health care benefits for their members. The last national contract between the oil industry and the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) committed both sides to work for a national health care program.

Clinton Goes for "Managed Competition"

New developments in the highly profitable health care business have also prepared the way for national health care reform. Giant health care provider corporations are buying and building hospitals and organizing doctors and "consumers" into preferred provider and health maintenance organizations (PPOs and HMOs). The archetypal example of a hospital chain corporation is Humana, of a PPO is Blue Cross/Blue Shield, and of an HMO is Kaiser.

These new "managed care" businesses organize consumers on a massive scale into a private health insurance type of contractual relationship, so that the business has a large, steady cash flow of premiums. Doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals become employees of these large corporations, working under supervision and regulations designed to manage health care delivery in such a way as to maximize profits. Metropolitan Life, Prudential, Aetna, Cigna, and Travelers insurance companies have recently invested billions of dollars in creating their own health maintenance organizations. Nationally, all types of managed care businesses have grown from a total enrollment of 10 million a decade ago to well over 40 million today.

Public opinion polls during the 1992 presidential election campaign showed that the American people wanted fundamental reform of the health care system. Although Clinton didn't have a plan, he joined other candidates in calling for universal, comprehensive, affordable health care insurance and frequently postured with the challenge, "We have to have the courage to take on the insurance companies!" The reality was that the Clinton campaign was "taking on the insurance companies" in private meetings.

After he had the Democratic Party nomination, Clinton agreed to a "reform" plan designed by the largest insurance companies: managed competition. Once the deal was made, Metropolitan Life, Prudential, Aetna, Cigna, and Travelers left their own industry-wide Health Insurance Association of America and joined with the Blue Cross/Blue Shield PPO network to form the "Alliance for Managed Competition." Clinton was able to win the election with only vague explanations of this little understood, oxymoronic conception.

What Is "Managed Competition?"

"Managed competition" is a plan for government regulation to aid in institutionalizing the giant HMOs as the predominant health care provider.

The federal government would legislate a basic health care benefit package, organize people into large (about 250,000 minimum) health insurance purchasing cooperatives called "Health Alliances," and manage competition among those HMOs large enough to bid for the Health Alliance business. This would be a tremendous boon to the large HMOs. They would gain tens of millions of new customers, potentially including at government expense the millions who can't presently afford health insurance. Many of the hundreds of smaller-scale traditional health insurance companies who remain in the Health Insurance Association of America would not be able to survive in this environment.

The Clinton administration is trying to sell "managed competition" to employers as a program that will cut their health care benefit costs.

Theoretically the efficiencies of size, a nationally standardized basic policy, simplified administration, and the pressure of competition would keep prices down. Managed competition relies on profit-driven insurance companies to cut costs by looking over doctors' shoulders and supervising medical practice. The government might also limit HMO malpractice liabilities and completely shelter employee-doctors with legal immunity. This should result in reducing the quality of medical care, whether or not it reduces costs.

The government-mandated basic benefits package may well be a bare-bones affair less generous than many current policies. The government would assist and pressure employers to move to the standardized policy by ending the current tax exemption for employer expenses beyond the basic package and by taxing as employee income any benefits beyond this level.

According to recent news reports, Clinton's economic advisers favor a plan with a \$2000 annual deductible along with substantial payroll taxes. The "Jackson Hole Group" of insurance and other corporate executives, and their hired minds who are credited with designing managed competition, theorize that a primary cause of medical cost inflation

is "overuse." Americans with insurance who don't pay directly for each doctor visit and medical procedure greedily consume excess health care, presumably begging for just one more operation. That's why discouragingly high deductibles or co-payments are needed.

Because there is no assurance that managed competition will be able to cut health care costs, Clinton at one point planned to tack on a budgetary system of expenditure limits. Whether to have overall spending limits or price controls or neither remains unresolved.

Clinton's prospective managed competition health care program is a typical capitalist reform. While appearing to be prompted by concern for the public interest, it is primarily driven by the needs of employers and by the specific interests of the largest health insurance corporations in restructuring the health care business. Health care insurance will become a government-regulated industry with a typical oligopolistic structure favoring the few largest corporations with guaranteed profits.

The Single-Payer Alternative

The single-payer alternative is to nationalize private health insurance and make government the single-payer of health care bills as in Canada. Single-payer is more economically efficient because society no longer pays for the private insurance middleman. The money that now goes into insurance company management salaries, profits, and costs of competition like underwriting and advertising is saved.

Insurance companies contribute nothing to the health care system. They simply impose additional costs for access. The role of private health insurance is completely analogous to the function of a mafia protection racket. There is no economically rational excuse to waste money on this parasitical "industry." The Canadian system serves 27 million Canadians with about the same number of administrative personnel as Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Massachusetts, which serves 2.7 million people. A 1991 Government Accounting Office study found that if the U.S. switched to a single-payer health care system on the Canadian model, there would be an immediate \$67 billion savings, more than enough to cover all those presently uninsured. A recent Congressional Budget Office study reached similar conclusions.

Contrary to widespread myth, health care competition is economically expensive not economically efficient. For example, hospital costs go up as the number of hospitals competing in an area go up. Private health insurance companies operate with overhead costs of 20 percent or more, while the U.S. government operates Medicare with overhead costs below 3 percent.

Under a single-payer system, the present level of U.S. health care spending could be used to provide universal, portable (delinked

from employment) coverage with comprehensive benefits. Everyone would be under the same equitable program, and it would be up to us to choose when and where to get medical care.

There is no additional cost to us for switching to single-payer. We simply stop paying money to private insurance companies and instead pay approximately the same amount in (preferably progressive) taxes to federal, state, or local government. Estimates of the initial cost of implementing managed competition range from around \$50 to nearly \$200 billion, depending on whether it really is universal, whether benefits are comprehensive, and how fast it is implemented.

Unlike managed competition, a single-payer system has the means to constrain health care costs through a process called global budgeting. State or local public health boards allocate resources for each provider based on last years spending and rational planning for future medical care needs.

Development of Single-Payer Movement

A few intellectuals like Yale University Public Policy Professor Ted Marmor have been explaining the merits of a single-payer system for years. In the late 1980s, two Harvard University M.D.'s, Steffie Woolhandler and David Himmelstein, started an organization of medical professionals called Physicians for a National Health Program (PNHP) to promote a single-payer system. PNHP now has over 5,000 members.

The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union teamed up with PNHP and began to campaign for single-payer within the labor movement. During the 1992 presidential campaign, the AFL-CIO was split down the middle with a bare majority of international unions supporting the mainstream Democratic Party "play or pay" plan. Most of the large industrial and public employee unions supported a single-payer system. *Labor Notes* and other networks of progressive trade unionists support single-payer.

A number of public interest and consumer organizations like Citizen Action, Jobs with Justice, and the Consumers Union have been campaigning for single-payer. Consumers Union has published several major articles (in *Consumer Reports* magazine) and a book showing that 20 to 25 percent of the present health care dollar is wasted on unnecessary administration and insurance costs.

Some activist organizations that come from the peace movement, like Neighbor-to-Neighbor, are an important part of the single-payer movement. The Democratic Socialists of America was an early supporter of single-payer, touring NDP leaders and physicians from Canada. Other respected socialist organizations like Solidarity and the Committees of Correspondence support single-payer.

Union locals, PNHP chapters, and progressive political activists have combined with a

variety of local community, low-income advocacy, senior citizen, and some church groups to create dozens of local and statewide single-payer coalitions throughout the nation. One outstanding local coalition, the Northeast Ohio Coalition for National Health Care, initiated a nationwide coalition, the Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN), through a conference it organized in Washington, D.C., immediately following the November elections.

UHCAN sponsored a December mobilization of 1,000 people who went on short notice to Little Rock to demand single-payer health care from President-elect Clinton. UHCAN mails a high-quality monthly newsletter to 4,000 activists in every state of the nation.

Senator Paul Wellstone and Congressmen John Conyers and Jim McDermott have initiated single-payer legislation in Congress ("The American Health Security Act" S. 491/H.R. 1200), which now has 8 Senate cosponsors and 75 House cosponsors. UHCAN is working to get more Congressional cosponsors.

A variety of national polls (CNN, Harris, CBS/*NY Times*) taken in the spring of 1993 showed 60 percent or more of the American people support a single-payer health care system.

The Clinton Task Force

Shortly after taking office, President Clinton set up a Health Care Task Force chaired by Hillary Rodham Clinton ostensibly to come up with a proposal for a national health care system. The Task Force's actual mission was to work out the details of a managed competition program and prepare the political campaign to get it implemented.

The managed competition crowd in the Health Care Task Force could not just ignore the single-payer movement. Their strategy has been more along the lines of seduce and abandon, claiming to share the same goals and principles while asserting that single-payer is not politically feasible.

Some single-payer advocates were eager to work with the new Clinton administration. Keynote speaker Ted Marmor clashed with PNHP and Citizen Action "single-payer fanatics" at UHCAN's founding conference. Marmor proposed cooperation with Clinton as long as there was a commitment to eventually achieve certain threshold criteria: universality, comprehensive benefits, cost containment, choice of providers, and quality assurance. The Communication Workers of America and AFSCME also wanted to work with the Clinton administration rather than counterpose single-payer to managed competition.

The steady stream of leaks and trial balloons from the Clinton Task Force indicated serious problems, disputes, and retreats. Concessions to various interests have resulted in a multitier system that will still be primarily employment based.

What to cover and how to pay for it was never resolved. Senior citizens will be dissatisfied if long-term care is not included in the program. Schemes for phasing in various combinations of coverage, benefits, and taxes over varying time frames were constantly mulled over with an eye to the political support and public relations costs and trade-offs.

Managed competition is simply not practical for half the U.S. population which does not live in areas with a sufficient demographic base. The Clinton Task Force has responded to this problem with a proposal that is supposed to win support from the single-payer movement: state option to choose single-payer (or another system).

The Health Care Task Force disbanded in late May without agreement on a proposal. The debate within the Task Force has been a strong attraction away from the single-payer movement. Many leaders of the single-payer movement are politically oriented to the Clinton administration and are pleased to be seen as a sympathetic counterforce to those who oppose any national program.

The Current Political Situation

Hillary Clinton has argued that the single-payer movement must get behind the administration proposal or it will jeopardize the chance of getting a national health program at all. Now that the Clinton presidency is clearly weakened and compromising to the right, "politics of the possible" arguments will be more seductive.

Single-payer supporters continue to defect to the Clinton camp. Citizen Action is supporting a managed competition system in the state of Washington. The statewide Ohio health care coalition was taken over by a pro-managed competition leadership, which prompted determined single-payer advocates like OCAW to withdraw.

Clinton will undoubtedly reassess the political landscape during the next few months of delay beyond his original schedule. He will probably make programmatic deals and timing concessions to bring in more support behind his eventual proposal. Although the Clinton administration has done polling to find a more attractive name than the already tarnished "managed competition," their proposal will certainly be built on this foundation.

Meanwhile, the single-payer movement has continued to grow. UHCAN held a national conference in mid-May in Chicago, attended by 150 leaders from 24 states and cosponsored by 91 national and local organizations. Three unions (ACTWU, OCAW, and UE) were actively involved in the conference. A statewide Ohio conference of single-payer supporters will be held June 19. It is cosponsored by United Automobile Workers Region 2 and half a dozen UAW locals, Communication Workers District 4, OCAW, Machinists, and other union locals.

Continued on page 46

Democratization Has Only Begun

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

The following is based on the presentation made by Marilyn Vogt-Downey of the US-Soviet Workers Information Committee as part of a panel on "Russia Between Democracy and Chaos" at the Socialist Scholars Conference held in New York City, April 1993.

I want to describe some of the political currents emerging as a result of the democratic openings in Russia (and the former USSR). These are not individuals or groups that you could read about in the corporate media, but they are forces important to the workers movement, both in the former Soviet Union and in the United States. I present them by way of example, to show some inspiring developments.

The U.S.-Soviet Workers Information Committee was organized to "overcome the problem of opening new channels of information and collaboration" with the emerging working-class and pro-socialist movements in the former Soviet Union by soliciting and making available materials from these movements and activists.

You will find a great deal of such material translated and available to you in our US-Soviet Workers Information Committee (USSWIC) *Bulletin*, two issues of which have appeared, while a third will soon be printed.

I might add that we also send to collaborative groups and individuals in the former Soviet Union materials about the workers, democratic rights, and other social movements in the USA.

We have received a great deal of information from many types of sources. It shows us what the capitalist media and even the reformed Russian mainstream media do not.

The following are examples of political tendencies in the new workers movement in the former USSR that will be participating in forging the new order that must be built there.

1. "Home-Grown Marxists." The first type I want to describe is one based on the work of activists who were imprisoned and persecuted during the Stalin and post-Stalin

period. We have all heard of Andrei Sakharov but how many have heard of A.B. Razlatsky?

Razlatsky, a worker-intellectual from the Urals, was arrested in 1981 for trying to organize workers. He was not released until 1987 and he died in 1989. He is what I call a "home-grown" Marxist, that is, he rejected the Stalinist falsifications of Marxism and sought to apply a genuine Marxist method to analyze and understand what had transpired in the Soviet Union and the world and how workers could organize.

Some of his key ideas are contained in Razlatsky's "Second Communist Manifesto" and have inspired the thinking of the Workers Party of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat (WPDP) and the newspaper *Zabastovka* (meaning "strike"). Their newspaper is printed in Samara (formerly Kuibyshev).

You may disagree with some of the WPDP's and Razlatsky's formulations, assessments, and conclusions. For example, he concluded that the counterrevolution over which the Stalinist bureaucracy presided was social as well as political and that it represented a revival of feudal relations. While the WPDP thinks that workers must form a revolutionary party and take control of the economy, it does not think that the revolutionary party *per se* should take power, because in the WPDP's opinion that would lead to its corruption. The WPDP feels that the degeneration of the Russian revolution and the Bolshevik party began soon after the October revolution as a result of the corrupting influences of power.

Nevertheless, the WPDP is a strong proponent of the workers movement and opponent of the ruling bureaucracy in its "feudal, 'democratic,' or 'Communist' variants." The WPDP newspaper, printed twice monthly, with a circulation of 10,000, contains a great deal of useful information and analysis.

2. **KAS-KOR Workers Information Center.** Another important current is the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalist Correspondents — KAS-KOR. It was organized in the aftermath of the coal miners' strikes in 1989 and 1990 when it became obvious that there needed to be a center that collected and distributed to workers information about workers struggles.

Some currents from within the KAS, with some forces from the new trade unions, established an independent information center — KAS-KOR — for the workers movement. It prints a weekly information bulletin in Russian that is received by some 500 organizations throughout the former USSR. It also prints a monthly *KAS-KOR Digest* in English, which our committee helps circulate in the US. It contains accurate and up-to-date information on workers struggles across the former Soviet Union. The KAS-KOR editors are young workers and student activists in their mid-twenties, for example, Kirill Buketov and Boris Kravchenko.

3. **Party of Labor, the MFTU, and Solidarnost.** Some KAS-KOR supporters collaborated with Marxist and socialist activists like Alexander Buzgalin (who is also on this panel today), Andrei Kolganov, Vladimir Kondratov, and Boris Kagarlitsky in another important effort — the Party of Labor initiative. The Party of Labor, which had its founding conference in October 1992, is still very small. However, its supporters collaborate with the much larger Moscow Federation of Trade Unions (MFTU) and together with the MFTU publish the weekly paper *Solidarnost*, which contains news and analyses by many currents in the new workers movements, including those of revolutionary Marxists.

4. **The Mass of the Workers Organizations.** The overwhelming majority of the workers are organized in unions that are successors to the official trade union structure of the prereform era, which under Stalin was given the name All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU). The AUCCTU was reorganized as the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU), which includes many local and Russia-wide organizations, such as the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FITU), the St. Petersburg Federation of Trade Unions, and the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions. These represent a combined membership of some 70 million!

The GCTU and FITU leaderships suffer from major weaknesses — one of the worst being their current acquiescence in the bureaucracy's privatization program and willingness to become the "loyal opposition" to the "new capitalists." However, they represent a membership which for the most part has not — despite all the repression of the past and the economic and social attacks of the present — suffered any major defeats. Most of these workers grew up not during the Stalin terror but after Stalin's death. They are beginning to learn to struggle on their own. The militant workers inside these unions — MFTU, FITU, GCTU — can surely be expected to play a major role in the unfolding political and economic developments in the coming months and years.

5. **The AFL-CIO and the Independent Unions.** In addition, it is important to follow

To find out more about the U.S.-Soviet Workers' Information Committee, and/or to obtain a subscription to the USSWIC *Bulletin* write to: USSWIC, P.O. Box 1890, New York, NY 10009. The cost of one *Bulletin* is \$3.00 plus \$1.25 postage. A contribution of \$25 allows you to receive six issues of the USSWIC *Bulletin* plus six issues of the KAS-KOR *Information Digest*.

what the AFL-CIO leadership is doing in Russia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. It is expending considerable effort to organize seminars, provide computers, "train," "advise," etc. Although its politics are not much different from those of the GCTU leadership, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy has instituted a no-contact rule on officials of AFL-CIO unions, who stand to lose their posts if they make any contact with GCTU officials.

The AFL-CIO is focusing its energies and resources on fostering relations with some of the new, independent trade unions — that is, those formed by workers who concluded that the only way for them to organize effectively was outside the formerly official unions. These independent trade unions — some very small and others like the Independent Miners Union (IMU) numbering in the tens of thousands — have a total membership of perhaps 100,000.

Real Workers Alternatives Are Yet To Emerge

It is important to reiterate that neither the leaderships of the unions that the AFL-CIO is supporting, like the IMU which is avidly pro-Yeltsin, nor the large unions that make up the GCTU offer an economic or political alternative to the bureaucracy's market reform and privatization programs. Both seem quite content with being a permanent "loyal opposition," lobbying for a few concessions rather than mobilizing the workers in their millions to extend workers economic and political power.

I am presenting this information not just to inform you but to demonstrate that for the vast majority of the workers in the former Soviet Union the democratization process and glasnost is only getting started. It will take time for them to fashion organizations of their own and build their own new, independent leaderships.

It cannot happen at once.

Despite the tremendous gains toward democratization — beginning to recover the genuine history as opposed to the false history of the Stalin and post-Stalin period, uncovering the crimes of Stalin and rehabilitating many victims, lifting the repression, new possibilities to travel and communicate, etc. — despite all these gains, for the mass of working people, the democratization process has only just started.

Do they have time? Will history give them time to organize as they must to protect their lives and future from the ravages of the world capitalist market?

In examining this question, a number of considerations must be kept in mind:

1. The first is the economic impasse. It is becoming evident that imperialist aid is only aimed at destroying the former USSR's economic base.

This is evident from the IMF proposals which propose elimination of the industry that exists, laying the basis for conversion of the former Soviet Union into a source of raw materials and cheap labor — a Third World country. This reality is behind the current political crisis, in my view. A section of the apparatus is no longer prepared to go along with full implementation of IMF dictates, seeing as it does that large quantities of aid are not forthcoming as a result and that the material basis for their power and privileges are about to collapse.

2. The second is the nature of the privatization program. A massive privatization program is in the offing — 5,000 medium and large enterprises are scheduled for privatization by year's end. Yeltsin has made land privatization a focus of many of his speeches. This privatization is not in the interests of workers. Even concepts of workers' self-management or dreams of worker ownership of individual plants are pipe-dreams: None of the privatization plans available to enterprises offers workers a controlling share of their enterprise.

But this process, too is only beginning: 95 percent of property is still state-owned.

3. A third important consideration is the army. Is there a likelihood that the IMF and the bureaucrat-marketeters can call upon the army to help them impose these devastating reforms on the workers?

This is very unlikely. The army is a demoralized and unattractive sector in a deepening crisis. Only some 30 percent of draft-age men reported for duty last year. According to *Moscow News*, 360 soldiers committed suicide during a 10-month period in 1992 and three homicides are committed each day in

the army. In addition, the quality of life inside the military, like that of the population at large, has suffered considerably as a result of the market reforms.

There seems, therefore, to be little likelihood that the soldiers could be convinced to turn their guns against their own people. In fact, quite the opposite would appear more likely, that is that the rank-and-file soldiers would turn against the officials viewed as responsible for the economic devastation.

The workers will be pushed more and more into action around their own needs and demands. There is really no alternative for them. To leave the economic planning to the IMF or the bureaucrats or the speculators and blackmarketeers whose dealings are responsible for the shortages and high prices will only lead to further devastation.

In conclusion, I want to say that the collapse of Stalinism — and it continues to exist in a transitional form — does not necessarily mean chaos. It only means that a new phase of history is upon us. There is a new kind of order. What we are entering is a transitional phase in which the workers — the CONSCIOUS elements of history — will need to make a difference if we are to avoid a further descent into barbarism.

The IMF, the apparatchiks, the factory directors, U.S. imperialists, and the AFL-CIO all have their own plans for implementing their own goals and they are busily at work on them. None of these plans are in the interest of the mass of workers.

The workers must have their plans too.

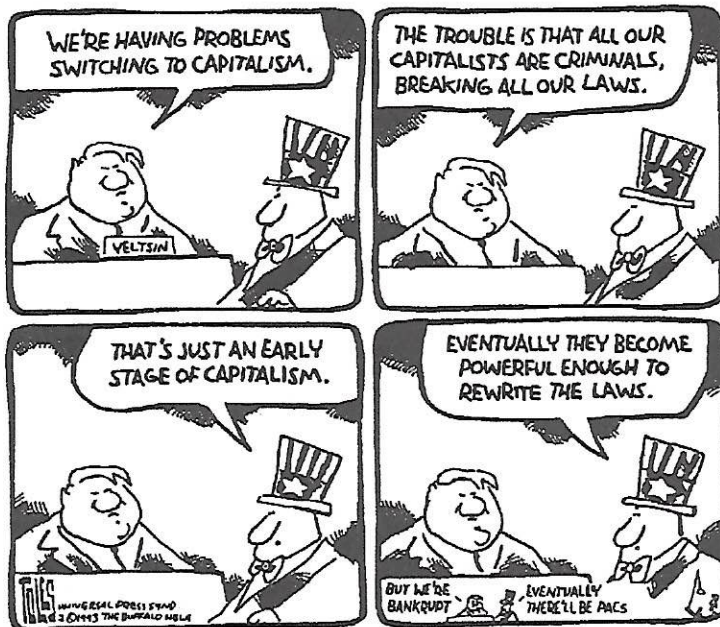
Unfortunately, we have no MASS revolutionary workers international through which we might all collaborate toward helping the workers in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere — "here, there and everywhere" as the saying goes — not only to advance their interests but to move toward taking power in

order to eliminate exploitative class rule, which is critical to humanity's survival.

However, what workers in Russia do and do not do to advance their interests is of utmost importance not only to us here but to workers the world over. We must find ways to extend our contacts with them, which is an important reason why USSWIC was set up in the first place.

As Leon Trotsky said in 1938 in the founding document of the Fourth International: "The world political situation as a whole is characterized by the historic crisis of proletarian leadership." Building this leadership or helping build it remains the central task today, as it was back then.

Those of us here who want to collaborate in this process must begin now. □



Referendum and Media in Russia

Yeltsin's Referendum "Triumph": How Democratic Was It?

by Renfrey Clarke

In Russian warships based in the port of Kaliningrad, the English-language *Moscow Tribune* reported on April 26, the vote in the April 25 referendum went heavily against President Boris Yeltsin. This was not just a reflection of hostility to Yeltsin in the armed forces — though the president ought to be gravely concerned on this score.

Probably to an even greater extent, the sailors' failure to endorse Yeltsin reflected the fact that while out at sea, they were among the few Russian citizens not to be exposed to a television and radio assault of staggering one-sidedness.

Yeltsin's "triumph" in the poll was not in fact particularly impressive — only 34 percent of eligible voters turned out to endorse his economic policies — and one does not normally pay much attention when election losers cry "Foul!" Still, it is astonishing by how much the vote for Yeltsin exceeded the predictions of opinion surveys taken before the campaign began in earnest some two weeks earlier. Meanwhile, some of the most pro-Yeltsin Western journalists in Moscow have had to concede that the conduct of the electronic media during the campaign was — well, not up to the elevated standards of the West.

Just consider how your own electoral authorities would react to the following. On St Petersburg television, which is relayed throughout much of Russia, election eve viewing consisted of a five-hour spectacular in favor of the president. The staunchly pro-Yeltsin *Moscow Tribune* was moved to observe:

"The sight of the country's leading artists, actors and musicians professing loyalty to President Yeltsin in one of the Kremlin's gilded halls reminded many visitors of the ceremonies of Andrei Zhdanov, late and unlamented cultural commissar of Stalin."

A few days before viewers were to decide whether they had "confidence" in the president, they were also treated to an hour-long program depicting Yeltsin "at home" in a typical three-room flat with his

family. The scene was not even authentic: the flat was that of the president's daughter. Yeltsin and his wife currently live in a well-appointed villa on the outskirts of Moscow, and are soon to move into a palatial 400-square-meter apartment in a building being constructed especially for senior state officials.

Among other slabs of free prime-time advertising enjoyed by the president, the most outrageous was perhaps the one screened during the interval of the Spartak Moscow versus Antwerp European Football Cup match. The manager of Spartak was shown in an interview urging people to vote for Yeltsin. The match attracted enormous interest in Russia, since it was the farthest any national team had advanced in the cup competition.

Meanwhile, some of Yeltsin's best-known opponents were having a hard time making it onto television at all. Alexander Rutskoi, who despite being Yeltsin's vice president has emerged as a leader of the opposition Civic Union bloc, was denied air time on April 23 when he sought to make a speech exposing government corruption. On occasions when speeches by Rutskoi or Congress Chairperson Ruslan Hasbulatov were screened, they were followed by withering pro-Yeltsin commentaries.

The one-sidedness of the television coverage of the campaign shows up in figures compiled by the parliamentary press office, which the president's staff has not challenged. Of television programs which mentioned the referendum, the proportion of time

taken up by programs supporting the president and programs supporting the parliament was as follows (programs in which both positions were featured were scored, perhaps unrealistically, on the basis that half the time went to each side):

Supporting:	Parliament	President
Commonwealth of Independent States TV		
Russian TV	23%	77%
Moscow TV	24	76
Channel Four	17	83
St. Petersburg TV	15	85
	4	96

The bias in the coverage of political events is not denied by Russian TV producers and controllers. Under the title "Who Rules the Media?," *Time* magazine reported in its April 12 edition:

Some journalists complain that broadcasts about anti-Yeltsin leaders get held up under the pretext that they might "strike a blow against democracy."... Yeltsin supporters respond that they must push hard for his embattled reforms. "We are not so well advanced with our democracy as not to take sides," said Yuri Reshetnikov, deputy director of Vesti [a Russian evening news program]. "If we want the Yeltsin reforms to succeed, we must back them to the hilt."

Russian citizens who tire of televised plaudits to Yeltsin do, of course, have the option of buying newspapers instead. But they need to choose carefully, since the ratio on their television screens of about 80 to 20 percent support for the president is roughly the same in the print media. Newspapers like *Pravda* that are critical of government policies attract little advertising and are much more expensive than pro-Yeltsin papers.

Newspaper subscriptions in general have fallen sharply since Yeltsin's "reforms" began cutting deeply into people's real incomes. The situation described by a correspondent for the paper *Rabochaya Tribuna* is now commonplace: "In my apartment building (as I ascertained from the post office), only a few people now receive newspapers. They're expensive, the neighbors feel, and what's the point if there's radio and television?"

With the electronic media exercising a heavy dominance over the information field, and Yeltsin and his supporters ruthlessly exploiting a near-monopoly of the electronic media, the reasons why unexpectedly large numbers of Russians turned out on April 25 to express "confidence" in the president begin to seem less mysterious. □

May 4, 1993



Russian Constituent Assembly Called

Yeltsin Moves to Install Dictatorship

by Renfrey Clarke

To the puzzlement of many observers, Russian President Boris Yeltsin during the first weeks after his April 25 referendum held off introducing the “tough measures” through which he had promised to “neutralize” the country’s parliament and clear the way for an unimpeded rush to capitalism. But on May 12 the “phony war” period came to an end. After meeting the previous day with regional leaders, Yeltsin signed a decree ordering a special assembly to convene on June 5 and adopt a new constitution.

This decree is clearly illegal, and is highly likely to cause another drawn-out political crisis. But still more menacing than this prospect is the draft document with which the president hopes to replace the current constitution. Since it was released at the end of April, Yeltsin’s draft has drawn stinging condemnation as a blueprint for elective autocracy.

The first hint that the president was about to launch a new offensive came in a May 6 television address in which he claimed a mandate to purge opponents of radical change from his government and from local administrative bodies.

On May 11 Yeltsin announced the transfer “to other duties” of two members of his cabinet, including Yuri Skokov, the powerful secretary of the Security Council. Once counted among the president’s closest allies, Skokov balked during March at supporting Yeltsin’s attempt to go outside the constitution to introduce “special rule.”

On the same day, May 11, the president met in the Kremlin with leaders of almost all of Russia’s 88 republics, provinces, and autonomous regions, calling on them to nominate delegates to a constituent assembly. Once a new constitution was in place, Yeltsin indicated, he wanted to see elections for a new parliament no later than autumn.

In setting the June 5 date for the opening of the constituent assembly, the president made clear he did not expect the body to dwell at length on its tasks, or to consider drafts other than his own. The assembly was given just five days to approve a new “basic law.”

The major obstacle Yeltsin faces is that his plans openly violate the existing constitution, under which the only body able to adopt a new basic law is the full parliament, the Con-

gress of People’s Deputies. In legal terms the constituent assembly will be a strictly informal gathering, whose resolutions will have no binding effect.

At a certain point, Russia’s Constitutional Court is likely to have to rule on the legality of the president’s actions — and the stage will be set for another constitutional and political showdown of the type which saw Yeltsin narrowly survive an impeachment vote by the congress in late March.

With the law on its side, the Russian parliament has tried to outflank the president’s scheme by making its own proposals for constitutional reform. This activity has centered on the Constitutional Commission, the body which has long been charged with preparing a new draft, and of which Yeltsin is still technically the chairperson. The commission completed a draft for a new constitution last year, but the congress has not adopted it — largely because the deputies have been reluctant to cut short their terms, which would otherwise run until 1995.

On May 7 the Constitutional Commission met to consider the president’s draft, and to decisively reject it. According to the English-language *Moscow Tribune*, the commission’s secretary, Social Democratic leader and former Yeltsin supporter Oleg Rummyantsev,

...attacked Yeltsin’s blueprint as authoritarian and a threat to Russian statehood. He said it would give the President the autocratic powers of a Russian tsar and set up a “shadow center of power” comparable to the Politburo of the former Communist Party.

Parliamentary speaker Ruslan Hasbulatov called on the legislatures in the republics and regions to consider the commission’s draft by June 1, and Rummyantsev suggested that the congress might be convened in October or November to adopt a new constitution.

Political commentators in Russia are now predicting freely that the country’s constitutional fate will be decided in the provinces. Whether or not this is true — the critical factor might well be the attitude of the armed forces General Staff — the response of provincial leaders to the appeals of the two sides will obviously be vital in deciding how the conflict evolves during the next few weeks.

In general, Russia’s provincial elites are much more attuned to the parliament than to the president; many local power brokers are

themselves members of the Congress of People’s Deputies. Jealous of their prerogatives, such people are likely to be wary of the highly concentrated presidential authority Yeltsin is claiming. According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, most of the leaders of the republican legislatures have already indicated that they prefer a “constitutional course” for the adoption of a new basic law.

However, it is far from clear that the legislative rather than the executive organs will decide who should be sent as delegates to the constituent assembly. Many of the executive heads of Russian provinces are unelected Yeltsin appointees. In these circumstances, the battle in the constituent assembly is likely to be tight, and to be decided by the concrete inducements that each side offers.

Already, there are signs of a political auction developing, with the president and parliament trying to outbid one another in their offers of autonomy and economic handouts. The English-language *Moscow Times* reported that Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin on May 7 offered a financial carrot to regional administrations that “supported reforms.”

The president’s side is handicapped, however, by a conception of federalism that is much less favorable to the ethnically Russian provinces than to the non-Russian republics — which are nevertheless generally hostile to Yeltsin. This imbalance is written into the president’s draft constitution through the inclusion in it of three federation agreements, negotiated last year but not yet implemented. Sentiment in the provinces, meanwhile, is in favor of upgrading local rights to match those of the republics.

Around half of the delegates will also be conscious that their local populations voted against Yeltsin in the referendum, at least on the question of confidence in his economic and social policies.

All this guarantees that debate at the assembly will be fierce, and the political horse trading desperate and sordid. Whatever the formal result, the real victors will be the republics and regions, whose effective independence will be enhanced while the fight for the diminishing power of the center will not be settled. □

May 14, 1993

Interview with Neville Alexander

The Strategy of Assassination

The assassination of Chris Hani, leader of the South African Communist Party, has fueled fears of further polarization and violence in South Africa. The South African periodical New Nation obtained the following interview with Neville Alexander, chairperson of the Workers' Organization for Socialist Action (WOSA), who believes that Hani was killed by clandestine state or right-wing forces intent on wrecking the negotiation process. These forces, he says, will stop at nothing to prevent a transition to majority rule.

New Nation: How do you view Hani's assassination?

Neville Alexander: First of all, I think the government is either directly involved or that they are clandestinely encouraging the assassination of top officials in the liberation movement. The state has tolerated acts of violence on political trade-union, and civic leaders for decades. There is an ongoing, systematic policy to eliminate influential people in the liberation movement.

The right-wing element is totally opposed to any concessions to black people. They will go for anybody who has influence among blacks and tries to bring about change in the country. They are not prepared to relinquish even a little bit of power. There is no question that these people are involved in violence against our people.

I think we must expect the worst from the right wing in the months and years to come. There will be an attempt on their part to destabilize the negotiations process and to prevent any power sharing deal, and certainly to prevent any takeover of power by blacks.

And then there are people, either outside government or close to it, who want to weaken the entire liberation movement and the ANC in particular because it is such a major player.

One of their strategies to weaken the movement is by using assassinations of key leaders and officials. They also aim to cause confusion in the ranks of the movement by using propaganda to try and set the leadership against each other — Winnie Mandela against Nelson Mandela, Harry Gwala against the national leadership, and so on. That is the transparent propaganda that you read and which does not reflect what is going on in the ANC. It is quite evident to people like myself outside the ANC that this type of propaganda is being orchestrated against the movement.

In the case of Hani, my suspicion is that he was eliminated because he had a lot of influence among the youth of the country.

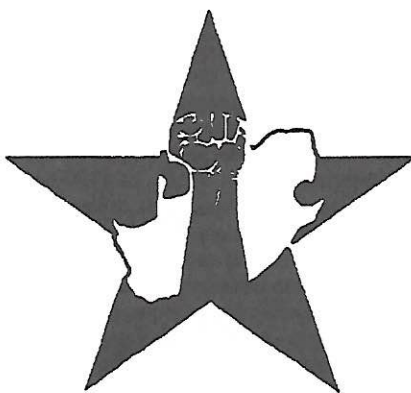
Some elements in government were getting concerned that Hani was beginning to defuse the militants in the townships. Because of his influence, charisma, and heroic status, he was able to defuse that militancy. I think that is not what some people in govern-

ment wanted. They actually want the youth to continue being rebellious to cause divisions within the ANC and weaken its position in the negotiations process.

Since Hani seemed to be the only person capable of bringing the ANC youth into line, he had to be disposed of.

There has been a resurgence of violence in certain parts of the country during the past few months. What is the source of this violence?

There are different sources, but the fundamental source of violence is still apartheid.



Increasing numbers of people in the metropolitan areas are competing for limited jobs, housing, education, and health facilities. This pressure causes immense social conflict.

The way in which this social conflict is politicized and expressed depends on different circumstances in particular regions. In Natal, the state funding of Inkatha to compete with the ANC was a government strategy to cause divisions among the people.

We have got a similar situation in areas like Khayelitsha and Crossroads, where various groups are competing to control civic life.

But we in the leadership also have to blame ourselves for falling into apartheid's "divide and rule" trap.

In the Cape we have a situation where the ANC and the PAC are fighting one another. This is a situation that must not be allowed to continue. The liberation movement must work together in unity.

Before Hani was assassinated, he made a call for the PAC to reconsider its armed struggle. Do you think the call was justified, taking into account the violence currently plaguing the country?

The Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) has decided that you can talk and fight at the same time. But it is a contradictory position. I think there are two voices within the PAC. One is saying, let's talk now before we get marginalized, and then there is the APLA voice. But the voice which wants the armed struggle to continue cannot last forever. It has to go one way or the other. I think the PAC will eventually split.

The ANC leadership in the Western Cape and Natal have called for the suspension of the negotiations process because of the Hani assassination. Do you think that is the right move?

I think the leadership in Natal and the Cape are expressing the mood on the ground in their regions. As far as I know, in the Western Cape and parts of the Natal Midlands there is a radical current developing within the ANC which is very critical of the negotiations process. I therefore think the leadership in these regions is expressing the view from the ground. I think the ANC leadership will have to resolve this issue because it might continue for a long time, particularly if assassinations and death squad activities take place.

Some of us believe the Hani assassination will have the same impact as the killing of Hector Peterson did in 1976 when the whole country erupted. All the social contradictions will come to the surface. No leadership will be able to control what might come. Everything will come to the surface.

Do you think Hani's assassination was a deliberate attempt to spark off a popular uprising?

I think certain people in government and on the right want to see an uprising which they can then put down with military force. They want to demoralize the people so that they can negotiate from a position of strength. They want to cause divisions within the ANC and isolate the radicals from the mainstream to boost their chances of negotiating a more favorable deal for themselves. □

Labor Movement in Iran

Four Years After the War

by Reza Moqaddam

Reza Moqaddam is the editor of *Worker Today* and a long-time labor activist.

During the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war, the Islamic Republic government blamed the war for the economic problems burdening the workers. So when the war at last came to an end, workers, hopeful that their demands would be met, for some time put off their protests waiting for things to improve. These hopes were dashed, however, with the propaganda campaign that the government launched against what it called the workers' "excessive expectations." This soon led to sporadic strikes and protests. But Khomeini's death shortly after, just as it overwhelmed other issues in society for some time, also put a brake on the new resurgence in the labor movement. How the government was going to adapt itself to the post-

Khomeini era, and its fate as a whole, became the main preoccupation for people and workers. They passively looked on the events taking place at the top, anticipating the regime's collapse with the death of Khomeini, its central figure.

But, already prepared for the post-Khomeini era, the government adapted itself to the new conditions much faster than those down below. Khamenei replaced Khomeini, and Rafsanjani became president. Getting the economy going was put on the agenda, and workers very quickly found themselves shouldering the burdens of the government's economic policies. With the scrapping of subsidies, the lifting of price controls, the gradual abolition of coupons, and the sharp

The articles "Four Years After the War" and "Support the Labor Movement in Iraq" are reprinted from *Labor Solidarity*, a quarterly publication of the Labor Committee on Iran. Readers may subscribe to *Labor Solidarity* for \$10.00 per year or obtain copies to distribute at 10¢ per copy, from Labor Committee on Iran, P.O. Box 241412, Los Angeles, CA 90024.

devaluation of the rial [Iran's currency], workers' living standards plummeted. The result was such that even the rise in employment (due to the start of some projects and the increased industrial production), and the raising of the minimum wage, failed to bring the workers' living standards even up to that in the war years. As a result, the wage demand became the workers' first priority.

Struggle for Higher Wages: a Background

The struggle over wages, going on in various forms all throughout the war, has turned into the most important field of labor struggles — though under a new set of circumstances. One ideological weapon in the government's armory, that the "country is at war," has obviously lost its relevance. The government and employers used this weapon during the war not only to keep workers from taking up their grievances but also to make them pay part of their wages to sustain the war effort — directly or indirectly, voluntarily or forced. And to avoid a head-on clash with the workers on the issue of wages the government blocked all channels of wage bargaining, and, through its Supreme Council of Labor (SCL), opted for small wage increases nationally once every few years. This kind of official raising of the minimum wage — in fact a mockery of the workers' call for higher wages — made the struggles focus on issues only indirectly related to the wage issue. Thus the labor struggles over the war years were fought mainly around such issues as the calls for the introduction of job classification schemes, productivity benefits, benefits-in-kind, etc.

End of the War, New Battleground

With the ending of the war, the workers' antiwar protests in the factories, which had been going on in various forms during the war and especially in its final years, also came to an end. After the war a new labor law was passed, which thus pushed the eight-year battle over it to the margins. Although the labor law has not yet fully come into effect (the executive statutes of each of the articles are yet to be drafted by the labor ministry), May Day became an official holiday. This, too, brought to an end the long fight over May



Reprinted from *Labor Solidarity*

Day. Thus three important fields of struggle during the war years either receded or were closed: the struggle for the recognition of May 1 as a holiday, labor law, and the antiwar protests. With the ending of workers' struggles on these three fronts, which had mobilized vast numbers of workers, workers now focused their struggle on the wage issue.

A New Period for the Labor Movement

As a result of the government's economic policies, workers now find it impossible to restore their energies physically or intellectually. This has meant that they are quickly worn out and exhausted; their average working and life expectancy is declining, and most will find themselves crushed before the retirement age. The only restraint to this open butchering of workers in the interest of capital is the workers' struggle. If Iranian workers fail to defend themselves and their livelihood in the face of this unbridled offensive by capital, then in the most optimistic case, one generation of workers will be decimated under the pressure of work and economic misery. The labor struggles have become focused on the issue of wages in circumstances where both the workers' living standard has plunged to its lowest level in over twenty years, making survival almost impossible, and the government has lost its ideological weapons and maneuverings.

The oil workers' strike last spring, accompanied with the issuing of a resolution at their mass meeting, symbolically announced the end of a period in which the workers had yielded to the government's attacks. Coinciding with the SCL meeting to decide the level of the minimum wage, this strike was one of the factors which forced the Supreme Council to concede the highest percentage rise in the minimum wage in the past decade.

But this wage rise could not diminish the workers' persistence for wage increases. Widespread protests at the level of the increase began from the day after the announcement, reaching even the pages of the government-censored press. Although workers have always been dissatisfied with, and protested against, the level of SCL-determined wage increases, the new and unprecedented element in the recent fights was the specific all on the SCL to repeal its decision. This showed that, unlike the past, workers did not consider the issue closed, seeing it within their powers to force the government to back down on its decisions. These are indications of the entry of the Iranian labor movement into a new era.

Struggle for Implementation of the Labor Law

That faction of the Islamic Republic (the Resalatis) which wanted the labor law written according to the Islamic tenets on rent, will, through its influence in the National Islamic Assembly, try to hinder the implementation of the Islamic labor law. This in turn will mean that the struggle for the implementation of the labor law will preoccupy some sections of the workers' movement. It is therefore not unlikely that labor law may once again become an issue among the workers as a whole. But what can strengthen the labor movement, both in the event of the reopening of the issue of labor law and under the current struggles, is the taking up by workers of such chief demands as a minimum wage on the basis of the expenses of a family of five, inflation-indexed wage increases, an adequate unemployment benefit for all workers, the right to strike, and the right to organize. To these should be added the demand for the right to free and independent May Day celebrations.

Inflation-Indexed Minimum Wage

The raising of a common demand in the struggle for higher wages can give to this struggle a generalized character and boost its power and chances of success. The demand for the determination of a minimum wage according to the expenses of a family of five can unify the movement for wage increases.

Once a year the government, through the SCL, decides on the level of the minimum wage. Even if this decision means a wage rise, the effect is eroded in a matter of days against the steep inflation rate. And until the next time around, i.e., a year later, when the SCL fixes the new level of the minimum wage, workers have to be witness to the daily reduction of their purchasing power. The annual rise in the minimum wage in a country having a more or less "non-crisis" situation could go some way towards compensating workers for the drop in their living standards. In a country like Iran, however, where prices go up every day, the minimum wage should be raised several times a year, to be of any effect. Increases proportional to inflation, which just mean restoring the lost purchasing power of the workers, should be done automatically, so that workers would not have to be forced to engage in strikes and struggles in order to achieve them, exposing themselves to the perils that go with struggle in countries like Iran. The demand for inflation-indexed wage increases should be put forward simultaneously with the call for the introduction of a minimum wage proportional to the expenses of a family of five.

Strike and Organization Rights

Two years of activity to draw international labor solidarity with the labor movement in Iran have resulted in the condemnation of the Islamic Republic by labor unions across Europe.
Continued on page 45

Support the Labor Movement in Iraq

Through a communiqué issued on July 10, 1992, a group of Iraqi labor activists abroad announced the formation of the Solidarity Committee with the Workers' Movement in Iraq. Below we publish the text of this communiqué:

The working class and the labor movement in Iraq have demonstrated itself, more than any time, as an independent social movement in Iraq. With a brief view of the advanced section of the working class in Iraq, you find that workers' struggle for their rights has been a part of their historical class struggle against capitalism in Iraq.

The working class which came to the sphere of action in the circumstances of the past two years clearly declared its opposition to capitalism and the capitalistic movements through its demands. The development of the council movement, attempting to dismiss plant managers, putting forward the workers' demand to the capitalists, be-

sides the workers' protests and strikes which have been carried out since then, clearly show the workers' movement in opposition to the capitalists and other anti-worker movement in Iraq. Unfortunately, not only have the voice and image of the workers' movement in Iraq been reflected very little among the working class worldwide, but the little [that] has, is unclear. And this is a big vacuum for the workers' movement in Iraq which should be filled. To fulfil this task, we will try, as a group of Iraqi communist activists abroad, to communicate the workers' protest and the struggle of the working class in Iraq to the world working class and the workers' movement abroad.

Therefore we declare the establishment of "Solidarity Committee with the Workers' Movement in Iraq — Abroad." Solidarity Committee for accomplishing this important tasks calls on all labor organizations and labor activists and socialists abroad, and also calls on all labor and communist groups, organizations and papers in Iraq for help and support.

The Solidarity Committee, for gaining its goals, publishes *Labor Solidarity* in Kurdish, Arabic, and English.

Solidarity with the Workers' Movement in Iraq — Abroad. Address: SKAI, Box 283, 175 25 Jarfalla, Sweden. □

Political Crisis in Sri Lanka

by Thirunavukkarasu

Editorial Note: This article has been received from a comrade of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International.

President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka was assassinated in Colombo on May 1, 1993, in a May Day parade. He was a friend and favorite of imperialism in the South Asian region. Demagogue that he was, he would on the one hand maintain (for public consumption) that he would not be cowed by the terms of any foreign lending agencies, while on the other, he carried out to the letter the dictates coming down from the IMF/World Bank under the structural adjustment program on privatization, employing the deceptive term “peoplization,” obviously to hoodwink the masses.

Premadasa was one of those mainly responsible for sacking en masse some 100,000 workers who participated in the July 1980 general strike demanding higher wages. He was prime minister at that time. The workers and their families underwent untold hardship and suffering, and about thirty of them committed suicide.

The ruling United National Party (UNP) came into power in 1977. Under the open economic policy introduced by that government, there was a considerable drop in domestic production, since imports became liberalized. No sooner than the government assumed office the rupee was devalued by almost 100 percent. The exchange rate, which stood at Rs. 8/- to US\$1 just before the UNP took office in 1977, is now RS 46/- to US\$1. It was therefore the biggest joke in Colombo when Premadasa went about stating at some recent meetings that the Sri Lankan rupee would soon be on par with some of the world's major currencies.

The fall in domestic production resulted in a big loss of employment and incomes. In southern Sri Lanka, the unemployed and the displaced peasants had begun to become more and more restive and, since the Old Left had betrayed them, too, by their opportunistic political alliance with the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), they found in the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) [a youthful pro-guerrilla war organization] a pole of attraction to assert their aspirations. Because of the dead-end tactics adopted by the JVP, particularly during the 1989–90 period, the Premadasa government grasped the opportunity to launch the bloodiest repression in the south, resulting in about 60,000 Sinhala youths being slaughtered.

In northern and eastern Sri Lanka, there was an intensification of the ongoing civil war stemming from the nonresolution of the Tamil national question, which has plagued the island country's politics since the 1950s.

In the aftermath of the assassination of

President Premadasa, while firecrackers were set off in certain areas of Sri Lanka to celebrate the death, some sections of the national and international media portray him as a hero and a friend of the poor, particularly since he was himself of poor origin. As a matter of fact, he was a highly authoritarian president, and his Secretariat sat on top of the Cabinet, and it was thus that he was accused by his ex-Minister of Food and Cooperatives/Educational and Higher Education, of running a “one-man show.” In fact, the latter had spearheaded an impeachment action about a year and a half ago against Premadasa. (It was none other than Mr. Lalith Athulathmudali, who was shot dead just one week prior to the assassination of Mr. Premadasa.)

Whenever Premadasa faced a political crisis — as, for instance, on the occasion of the impeachment motion against him — he would come down to earth, pleading that he was a common man and that the elites were going all out to cut his throat. But in the matter of implementing imperialist dictates on privatization, cutbacks, or vital social overhead, etc., he proved that he would outshine the comprador bourgeoisie of the classical type, represented by former President Junius Richard Jayawardene (JR), the late Lalith Athulathmudali, et al., and those sections obviously became exasperated by Premadasa's bid to outdo them in this respect.

According to latest reports, Premadasa was “widely praised in the business community for his economic policies, including one of the fastest privatization programs and most extensive deregulation campaigns in Asia” (*Financial Times* of May 4, 1993). This, of course, has meant big losses of employment and wages and a consequent decline in living standards. The 1991 UNICEF report on Sri Lanka bears ample testimony to this, stating in part:

In the current situation in Sri Lanka, the entirety of the poor have become vulnerable. Indeed, nutritional assessments indicate that they have been adversely affected. Such a situation places the poor pregnant and lactating women and preschool children in especially difficult circumstances. The situation is worsened by the increased susceptibility to infections to which the undernourished are prone. The plight of these groups is further aggravated by their limited access to effective, proper health care.

The worst hit by the privatization programs are the working population of the tea and rubber plantation sector, who are at the bottom of the Sri Lanka social ladder. Their workdays and wages have become greatly reduced. About 500,000 workers are adver-

sely affected by this. Malnutrition in that sector was already a menacing problem. With the recent privatization of the management of the plantations and the attendant cutbacks on welfare measures, there is a further aggravation of the situation.

While Premadasa boasted that the growth rate was 4.8 percent in spite of the civil war in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, the growth means little to at least 70 percent of the population. Besides, the country is groaning under the weight of a debt burden of US\$5 billion, against what was US\$284 million in 1978. And Premadasa's utterly evasive and sterile approach to the Tamil national question has led to an intensification of the ten-year-long war between the government and the LTTE [the Tamil liberation organization], especially by aerial bombing, targeting hospitals (which even Hitler forbade), schools, refugee camps, examination centers, places of worship, etc. The war now devours Rs. 25 billion a year. Over 50,000 lives have been lost in the north and east, and many thousands more have been maimed for life, besides colossal destruction of property.

Over 700,000 war-displaced persons are gradually perishing in filthy refugee camps on meager food rations worth Rs. 9/- (or US\$.22) per person per day, which means “at best one meal a day” (1991 UNICEF report).

The position of those living in their homes is not far different from that of the refugees, given the severe disruption, if not near-collapse, of economic activity, combined with scanty supplies of food, fuel, medicine, etc., to these areas, tantamount to an economic blockade. This is further compounded by the complete disruption of electricity supply to the north for well over three years.

It is clear from this brief balance sheet that Premadasa, the declared champion of privatization, can hardly be a friend of the poor. Rather, in point of fact, he was anti-poor. For all his grandiloquence on poverty alleviation, even the already eroded food stamp relief scheme was being wiped out in devious ways. Indeed, he was a friend and favorite of imperialism.

It is common knowledge that the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) has been the most uncompromising and relentless opponent of the UNP regime, which Premadasa headed since 1988. The NSSP has been fighting most bitterly against (a) privatization, (b) the genocidal war in the north and east of Sri Lanka, (c) the repressive anti-working class laws, etc., and was thus the target of attacks at the hands of the Premadasa regime. Nevertheless, the NSSP deplors the dastardly assassination.

Premadasa fell as a victim of the very methods of state repression and terrorism that his regime employed for silencing dissent. Especially therefore this is a resounding lesson to all those who pursue the politics of terrorism. Not for nothing did Marx and Engels say that the alternative to socialism is barbarism. □

May 7, 1993

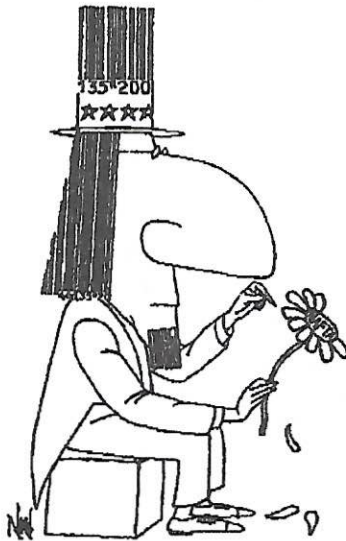
The Outlook for the Mexican Labor Movement

by Hector de la Cueva

*Editor's Note: This article, slightly edited, is reprinted from the April 29 issue of the Mexico City daily **La Jornada**. Hector de la Cueva serves as head of CILAS, a trade union research and advisory institute, and has played a major role in the Mexican Network on Free Trade, the body which brings together most organizations opposed to the terms of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Explanatory footnotes have been added. Our thanks to Rosendo Mendoza for translating. Useful background information can be found in Comrade Mendoza's article "Salinas's Mexican Miracle Begins to Fade," **BIDOM** #105, April 1993.*

May Day 1993 will take place at the same time that negotiations are under way for the so-called sidebar accords to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which the Mexican government was forced to take up, particularly with regard to the delicate issue of a supplementary labor pact. May Day events will serve as an apt contrast to the pretensions of the three countries' negotiators to take up the idea of "protecting labor rights."

Two of the key issues that will be the focus of protests on May 1 — the existence of wage caps and the absence of trade union democracy — directly clash with the announced aims of the trilateral talks. And at the same time, this May Day finds the Mexican workers movement immersed in a deepgoing process of recomposition with regard to both workplace and trade union issues, a process also marked by the new presidential succession.¹



Rogelio Naranjo, *El Universal*, Mexico City

The State's Strong Cards and Contradictions

Without a doubt the situation of the labor movement is fundamentally determined by the fact that since 1992 Carlos Salinas de Gortari has managed to implement key aspects of his "modernization" strategy that implies fundamental changes in labor issues.

Major policy innovations cascaded down upon the labor movement in 1992, including: the National Agreement to Raise Quality and Productivity, Educational Modernization, the Retirement Savings System (SAR), the social pact that is now labeled the Competitiveness and Employment accord, and the changes in articles 3 and 27 of the Mexican Constitution.² These were topped off by the signing of NAFTA. And after a two-year hiatus, a wing of the labor bureaucracy led by Francisco Hernández Juárez and his Federation of Goods and Services Unions (FESEBES)³ got the go-ahead for their plans to "modernize" the official trade union movement. The vast majority of Mexican workers have been mere spectators and victims of this process, which has been directly orchestrated by the state.

But it would be a serious mistake to believe that the government's strategy is inexorably advancing toward its goals, free of any contradictions or resistance or threat of failure. Despite its unquestioned successes, the new labor regime is far from being consolidated.

A key aspect of Salinas's strategy, which has yet to be put in place and which appears to have little chance of seeing the light of day before the end of the current administration, is the overhaul of the Federal Labor Law (LFT) which has been announced and postponed on thousands of occasions. During his recent speech before the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM),⁴ Salinas de Gortari said that for the time being the LFT will remain intact. In this way he deactivated a political conflict with the traditional trade union bureaucracy that could have affected the presidential succession. But the message was also directed at the Clinton administration, responding to Washington's efforts to press for a labor accord by pointing out that the LFT is more advanced than existing labor legislation in the U.S. and, therefore, requires no changes.

The fact is that for both domestic and international reasons it was necessary to postpone changes in the LFT. This doesn't mean the administration isn't going to try to make some headway in this direction. It is known that in government, business, and labor circles there are talks aimed at tacking on an amendment to the labor law that would deal with the question of productivity. In this way they hope to provide the bosses with a "flexible" legal framework that would allow

them to get around key aspects of the LFT. But despite the fact that they continue to implement their project in violation of the existing law, sooner or later they must provide a new legal framework to back up their policies, either in the form of a greatly "flexibilized" version of the LFT or in the form of a law that would be broken up into regionally adapted components. But all of that will have to wait.

Businessmen and bureaucrats have encountered similar problems in the implementation of their efforts to further boost productivity. The gravity of the obstacles they face implies that publicity campaigns and simple paper agreements such as the National Productivity Accord will not suffice. This latter agreement offers a very general but important framework for carrying through on the plans of the government and the employers. It puts forth the new productivity philosophy that says that employers and workers are all part of one big quality family and that the need for "teamwork" subordinates collective rights to the needs of individual competition. Though the initial accord is very general, it has served as a guideline for drawing up more specific pacts dealing with specific branches of industry. But there are questions on how to measure productivity, under what working conditions productivity will be increased, and how improved productivity should be compensated. These are all issues that have tripped up efforts to sign and implement such agreements.

Yet the biggest problem is that attempts at implementation of the agreements have simply run up against a wall. The case of *Telmex*⁵ — the regime's "modernization" showcase — is typical. Not only has the company failed to implement productivity accords beyond certain test departments; they have concluded that it is "very expensive" to pay any compensation for increased productivity. The showcase is starting to look a bit shabby. *Euzkadi* (the country's leading producer of tires) also successfully pressured workers to accept a productivity accord, but then decided that it would be too expensive to pay out bonuses or invest in new technologies required by the pact. Mexican businessmen want to impose a "barbarous" version of productivity and that is causing problems. Meanwhile, the trade unions have failed to understand the need to fight for

Mexican Labor and Political Organizations

CT: *Labor Congress*, an umbrella organization of the 34 largest union federations in Mexico.

CTM: *Mexican Confederation of Workers*, with 2 million members the largest confederation within the CT, traditionally having close ties with the PRI.

CROC: *Confederation of Revolutionary Workers and Peasants*, a new competitor with the CTM for a favored relationship with the PRI.

FESEBES: *Federation of Goods and Services Unions*, a recent formation, described in this article.

LFT: *Federal Labor Law*, adopted in 1931, which guaranteed freedom to unionize and gave considerable advantages to organized labor.

PRI: *Institutional Revolutionary Party*, the ruling government party, which — under various names, and with varying levels of radicalism, authoritarianism and corruption — has controlled Mexican politics since the 1920s.

collective benefits that go beyond the logic of individual incentives, which ultimately undermine collective organization and consciousness. The productivity accord exists but its implementation has proven to be extremely slow and tortuous.

The famous Pact for Competitiveness and Employment is proving increasingly unviable. The pact's name is no accident. Competition has become the supreme goal as the country moves closer to regional economic integration; and that competitiveness is openly and officially based on the comparative advantage that employers gain when wages are tightly controlled. Employment, an objective that is used as a threat against workers, has reverted to the worst conditions that existed in the mid-1980s. The economic "slow-down" and the adjustments being implemented in anticipation of NAFTA have led to the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. The brutal and cynical way that the new pact has been implemented has led to one of the most open verbal conflicts ever between the CTM leadership and Salinas. Fidel Velasquez's⁶ belligerence, as on other occasions, has been fueled by other considerations and once again he has backed down. But the conflict produced an interesting debate on wages in Mexico.

The truth of the matter is that the minimum wage continues to fall. Ten million people earn between one and two minimum wages⁷; the gap between minimum wages and contract agreements continues to grow. Despite a slight recovery on the level of manufacturing wages, at the current ratio it will take 28 years to regain the levels recorded in the mid-1970s. Wages have dropped so low that it would be easy for management to offer hikes well above current wage guidelines without sacrificing their goal of achieving single-digit inflation.

Many companies believe that the current government-imposed wage caps are "excessive." In many contract negotiations, including those at Ford, agreements have been reached "under the table" that allowed for increases beyond those demanded by the government, based on an understanding that it would be necessary to keep the terms of the

agreements secret. In this way the government's policy has been shown to be a corporatist masquerade. And at the same time that the wage cap proves to be unsustainable, it is shown to be incongruent with the proclaimed effort to negotiate an agreement aimed, supposedly, at bringing Mexican wages closer to U.S. and Canadian levels. The Mexican government has claimed that NAFTA will generate higher wages. This is neither credible nor possible as long as the wage cap is in place. It is absolutely necessary at a time of economic integration for the unions to be free to negotiate wages, especially with transnational companies. The May Day demand for an end to the wage cap is a key and realizable demand.

Meanwhile, NAFTA is running into trouble. As the key element around which other major policy decisions are being designed — privatization, constitutional reform, productivity, competitiveness — obstacles remain to its implementation. One problem is the fact that it was drawn up by Bush (who is out of office), Mulroney (on his way out), and Salinas (whose term of office is in its last stretch). Obviously, NAFTA represents a strategic objective of the most powerful business interests in the three countries and it will be difficult to keep it from going into effect. But problems lie ahead, particularly in Canada. In Mexico there is no sign of the promised benefits of free trade. The last few years of adjustment policies have had clearly negative effects, despite all the government propaganda in favor of NAFTA. The few new jobs that are created are more than offset by the huge losses of jobs suffered in traditional sectors of the economy. Though there has been a lack of broad, popular opposition to NAFTA in Mexico due to a lack of information and people's willingness to hope for the best, this situation could change once it becomes clearer how the accord will directly affect people's lives.

Mexican officials have now been forced to negotiate environmental and labor accords after having sworn that they would never agree to such talks. It would be a mistake to hold illusions in Clinton. It is clear to almost everyone that the White House hopes to use

these issues for protectionist and interventionist reasons. But the Mexican government can't call for full North American economic integration and then appeal to Mexican nationalism to defend the corporatist system from any possible challenge. Independently of NAFTA and the final terms of the sidebar accords — which will in no way change the character of the trade pact — there exists a real process of integration and an enormous mobility on the part of the transnational companies. The workers must face up to this fact. The Mexican Network on Free Trade has put forward a charter of labor rights for the workers of the region which includes: bringing wages and working conditions throughout the region in line with the highest existing pay scales and conditions; freedom to organize; rights for migratory workers; trilateral mechanisms to supervise respect for labor rights; the implantation of compensatory mechanisms; and — especially in Mexico — the administration of labor justice. This last issue will be key, as well as the issue of increased trilateral labor coordination, which has contributed to important reflections on new forms of union collaboration on an international scale.

The Outlook for a Recomposition of the Labor Movement

It isn't possible to understand the meaning of labor "modernization" without taking into account the goal of modernizing the traditional union bureaucracy. The aging labor chiefs have proven too expensive and no longer useful for the new productivity goals and state reform policies. It was no accident that Salinas kicked off his administration with quick action in this regard. Getting rid of "La Quina" was his first salvo. That was followed by the fall of Jongitud and Venus Rey⁸ — in the face of rank-and-file resistance — and the imposition from above of new model figures of collaborationist union leaders. At the same time the FESEBES made its debut, generating a violent response from the Labor Congress (CT). But the government had not counted on the new upsurge in union struggles that took place between 1989 and 1990. The rebirth of the opposition movement in the petroleum workers union, the teachers movement, Ford, Tornel, Modelo Beer, Cananea Mines, Sicartsa Steel, the Social Security workers, and others all came to represent a democratic threat from below against the entrenched bureaucracy, especially that of the CTM. Once again the government prioritized political control and decided to defend the CTM, thereby putting "modernization" on hold. Nevertheless, officials continued to give preferred treatment to the CROC⁹ and the CTM bureaucracy started to lose ground.

Another two years would go by before the FESEBES was pulled out of the freezer and won its legal recognition. In 1992 "modernization" was back on track. Francisco Her-

andez Juárez made a spectacular intervention into the Volkswagen (VW) conflict, serving as a go-between with the company, the government, and the union bureaucracy,¹⁰ proving himself to be the new “capo,” the new “Don” that workers would have to turn to if they wanted their voice heard within ruling circles. It should be known that there have been few takers since then. Even the Electrical Workers’ (SME) leader, Jorge Sánchez, threatened to break with the FESEBES and formed an unprecedented alliance with the CTM on the wage issue. It didn’t take long for him to be brought back into line, but the conflict reflected the changes taking place in the labor movement.

Lacking any industrial unions — unless VW can eventually be brought on board — the FESEBES has been forced into an alliance with the CROC to create an axis of power within the union movement as an alternative to the CTM. Meanwhile teachers’ leader Elba Ester Gordillo has yet to break with the federation of state employees (FSTSE).

So two major blocs have taken shape inside the CT (a body that has in recent years been reduced to a largely abandoned office building) in a test of strength to see who will sit atop the labor bureaucracy. The conflict offered a new example of Mexican surrealism recently as political cartoonists crank out caricatures of Fidel Velazquez accusing Hernández Juárez of being a government lackey.

In fact it is a conflict between two types of corporatist¹¹ unionism. The conflict between the two appeared to have reached the breaking point recently, but once again the battle has been put on hold. It will continue to evolve under the table. But because the presidential succession demands that they close ranks, unity is the order of the day. The time for open conflicts is replaced with a period marked by low blows. And the government has adopted a mediating discourse, making some concessions to the CTM and allowing the old corporatist party structures to coexist with the new. Yet the conflict between the two brands of bureaucracy persists.

The democratic union movement has yet to develop an alternative project and has been essentially silent. Without a project of its own and lacking any united coordinating body, it has suffered the effects both of sterile sectarianism and of collaborationist “realism.” The changes under way in the organization of the workplace have left many in a hopeless resistance while others have been attracted by the sirens of “joint administration.”

This doesn’t mean that nothing is happening. There are important changes going on in the middle-level and base structures of the unions, within the fissures that have developed amid the crisis of the traditional bureaucracy. New democratic or simple trade union

leaderships are developing. Within the union structures and among the productivity committees many are looking for new alternatives. There exists a great deal of instability and mobility inside the unions.

It would be a mistake to think that there can be only defeats, or to oversimplify things by constantly repeating that the workers are on the defensive (which is true of all but very special historical periods). It would be a mistake to insist that Mexican workers have suffered a definitive defeat that will now give way to a prolonged period of labor stability under the terms of the regime’s new model. Even the figures that point to an overall decline in labor struggles are poor indicators of what is going on. Many conflicts are taking place on the shop floor that assume the character of full-fledged strikes. And as we’ve already indicated, many strikes have been averted because it was possible to win new wage accords beyond the official wage cap, though such accords are not made public.

We will continue to experience for the foreseeable future a period of great instability and union turbulence. This is a period of recomposition in which nothing is yet settled. Next year, during the course of the presidential transition, many of the contradictions we have already mentioned could produce new conflicts. May Day 1993 will show signs of the existing tensions, but it will be a simple prelude to a path fraught with conflicts. □

Notes

1. Presidential elections will be held in August 1994, but since the 1920s the real presidential succession revolves around a cryptic process of internal selection of a presidential standard-bearer within the upper councils of the governing party, the PRI.
2. Article 3 was amended to open up the educational system to greater private control, while the counterreform of Article 27 effectively brought to an end a decades-long land reform and opened up collectively managed farms to private ownership.
3. Francisco Hernández Juárez, a former leftist, is the prototype of the new union bureaucrats that have enjoyed the backing of Salinas and his predecessor Miguel de la Madrid. FESEBES was aimed at creating a trade union federation bringing together the key unions led by this wing of the bureaucracy. But so far very few unions have joined. Nevertheless, Juárez and FESEBES have played a high-profile role within the labor movement, promoting pay-based-on-performance and stock-investment schemes, as well as other elements of modern-day business unionism. As de la Cueva indicates, FESEBES was not immediately granted formal recognition due to opposition by the traditional wing of the union bureaucracy, but this changed in 1992. See footnote 10 below.
4. The Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) has traditionally been recognized as the regime’s official trade union. However, in recent years other organizations such as FESEBES and more traditional federations such as Alberto Juárez Blancas’s

CROC (see footnote 9) have won the backing of federal officials by proving even more pliable and cost-effective than the CTM. This change of policy has led to increasing disputes between the CTM leadership of Fidel Velazquez and the Salinas administration over such issues as wage policies and possible changes in the LFT.

5. Teléfonos de México, the telephone monopoly that was privatized in 1991.
6. Fidel Velazquez was one of a group known as “the five little wolves,” which in the late 1940s, with government support, carried out an anti-Communist purge of the CTM, expelling its Stalinist-oriented leader Vincente Lombardo Toledano (with whom Velazquez had been associated since the 1930s). Velazquez has been described this way in James Cockcroft’s *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation, and the State* (Monthly Review, 1983, p. 55): “Today’s corrupt and wealthy CTM boss Fidel Velazquez, who had replaced Lombardo Toledano in 1938, typified the official anti-Left union leadership that remained after the witch hunt. It increasingly tied itself to state favors, class collaborationism, and upper-class aspirations and values. In exchange for sending hired thugs to murder or maim labor dissidents and for guaranteeing labor discipline, labor leaders received personal luxuries that elevated them into the living rooms of the bourgeoisie. In addition, they periodically received institutional pay-offs for their organizations.”
7. The minimum wage currently averages between \$4 and \$5 a day.
8. Soon after taking office Salinas sent troops to arrest the leaders of the petroleum workers union, at that time the most affluent and politically powerful leadership of a single union. Joaquín “La Quina” Hernández, the general secretary of the union, had generated considerable anger from Salinas by offering limited backing to congressional candidates allied with the presidential candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Salinas later pressed forward his plans to install a more pliable labor bureaucracy, responding to rank-and-file rebellions in a series of unions by replacing traditional leaders with “reformers” more attuned to the government’s modernization project. Two such experiences involved Jongitud Barrios, the head of the 1.2 million-member teachers union, and Venus Rey, the boss of the musicians union.
9. CROC is the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers and Peasants. See footnote 4.
10. In 1992 Juárez intervened in a major conflict at the massive Volkswagen plant in Puebla, where a majority of the 15,000 workers had struck to protest a secret agreement between management and their union leadership aimed at dismantling the collective bargaining agreement and allowing the company a free hand in imposing a more “flexible” arrangement. Juárez helped design an end to the conflict based on the firing of virtually the entire workforce and its rehiring under a contract drawn up unilaterally by management. When FESEBES won legal recognition from the federal government a few days later, Juárez bragged that it was a compensation for his role at VW.
11. *Corporatism* is a term whose definition varies depending on who is using the term, but it suggests government intervention and regulation of society in “partnership” with business and labor.

International Viewpoint

One of the distinguishing characteristics of revolutionary socialists is our global outlook. We are not only revolutionary activists where we live and work but recognize the need to be part of a worldwide struggle against capitalism by supporting the battles of workers, oppressed peoples, and super-exploited groupings in all societies. *International Viewpoint* magazine is an invaluable source of information and helps provide linkages for supportive activities among revolutionaries and working-class fighters around the world.

Published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, *International Viewpoint* presents news about and analyses of events and developments, written by participants in struggles as well as by internationally-respected Marxist economists and political theorists. A February letter sent to subscribers and distributors announced its recent reorganization and briefly described some contents:

A NEW CRISIS erupts in the Middle East as Israel expels 417 alleged activists from the Islamic fundamentalist organization, Hamas.

In the first (February) issue of the new 36-page monthly *International Viewpoint*, Lea Tsemel, Dalal Bizri, and Manar Hassan go behind the headlines to explain the meaning of the Israeli government's act and the reasons for the rise of Hamas.

There's also Catherine Samary, recently returned from Sarajevo, on the Yugoslav war, David Finkel on Bill Clinton's first steps and François Piguet on the social and political consequences of the crisis in Somalia — and more.

We think *IV* provides a unique resource for those who want to go beyond catchphrases, labels, and slogans to understand what British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd has recently described as the "new world disorder."

IV's access to a wide range of publications and organizations allows the magazine to present documents and articles not usually available, for example:

- A document on the U.S. military operation in Somalia, written by Rakiya Omaar, a Somali lawyer fired from her job with Africa Watch because of her opposition to U.S. intervention, and Alex de Waal, who resigned as Africa Watch director when the U.S. initiative was endorsed by its parent Human Rights Watch organization. This material first appeared in the Flemish newspaper *De Morgen*.
- A debate on the legacy of the 1917 October Revolution in Russia between revolutionary Marxist Ernest Mandel and Gregor Gysi, leader of the parliamentary group in Germany which succeeded the former ruling East German Communist Party. This public discussion, attended by 800 at Berlin's Humboldt University, was organized by *IV's* German sister publication *Inprekor*.
- The Declaration of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia and of the leaders of the Russian Branch Unions, and the Statement of the Political Committee of the Party of Labor. These documents addressed Yeltsin's attempt to achieve a "soft" coup d'état.

- "The politics of hate" — involving the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya and the deepening crisis of the Indian ruling classes — were reported and analyzed by Kunal Chattopadhyay in an article which originally appeared in *Naya Antarjatik*, publication of the West Bengal State Committee of the Indian section of the Fourth International.

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Because many of the working-class fighters and Marxists in these countries do not have the resources to subscribe on their own, part of the international circulation of *Bulletin IDOM* has been made possible by financial donations. The thirst for information and political/economic analysis is great! Many more magazines could be sent. *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* has established contacts with militants and Marxists who wish to receive materials — but *Bulletin IDOM* does not have the resources to fulfill all the requests and possibilities which have opened up, especially with

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Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party in the United States

Part Two

by Paul Le Blanc

The previous installment of these notes focused on the proposition that it is not possible to build a Leninist party in the United States worthy of the name in the absence of a *class-conscious proletarian vanguard*.

This does not mean a relative handful of would-be Leninists proclaiming themselves to be “the vanguard” of the working class. It means an actual percentage of the working class, a minority numbering in the millions, who actually believe that, as the American Federation of Labor proclaimed in the preamble to its Constitution in 1886, “a struggle is going on in all the nations of the civilized world, between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between the capitalist and the laborer, which grows in intensity from year to year, and will work disastrous results to the toiling millions, if they are not combined for mutual protection and benefit.” Class-conscious workers perceive that, as the 1908 preamble to the Constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World put it, “the working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.”

These two excerpts indicate what is missing today in the United States. From the 1860s through the 1930s it is possible to trace the existence and development of a vital subculture of labor radicalism, and the existence of a mass working-class vanguard which consisted of men and women who believed in (and were prepared to do something about) the ideas expressed by the early AFL and IWW. Ample documentation of this reality can be found in the work of such labor historians as Philip S. Foner, Herbert Gutman, and David Montgomery; it is vividly illustrated in the pages of the recently-published *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, edited by Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (a massive \$30-dollar paperback which belongs in every socialist’s library).

This subculture of labor radicalism now can only be found in books, artifacts, documentaries, and the memories of old-timers. In the 1940s and ’50s it passed out of existence thanks to the impact of the Second World War, the corrosive effects of Stalinism, the reformist labor leadership’s deep-going class-collaborationist compromises, the Cold War and anti-Communist hysteria, and especially the extended period of relative economic prosperity which seemed to banish hunger and want among majority sectors of the working class, giving increasing numbers a small but gratifying taste of “the good things in life.” There was also the impact of a largely commercialized mass culture, to a large extent

absorbing and/or crowding out the myriad of subcultures within the American working class.

While the working class (blue-collar and white-collar) makes up an overwhelming majority of the U.S. population, massive layers of this working class see themselves as “middle class” (neither rich nor poor, but somewhere in the middle). They don’t translate their ongoing resentments and conflicts with their bosses and other “upper-class” representatives into a notion of linking up with all other members of their class (with whom, in many cases, they don’t identify) to struggle for common interests, overturn capitalism, and democratically run the economy to provide a good life for everyone. There are deep divisions within the working class along the lines of race, ethnicity and gender, and some of those who are prepared to struggle against oppression do so around issues related to these identities, and also around such issues as opposition to the destruction of the environment, opposition to war, support for gay and lesbian rights, etc.

In the previous installment of these notes, it was argued that revolutionary socialists should be involved in all struggles against oppression, while working to make conscious the underlying class dynamics of such struggles, and working to draw together various sectors of the working class into common struggles. Combined with this is the need for effective socialist educational work and cultural efforts. Stirrings in the trade union movement, and future working-class upsurges in response to capitalist crisis, will open up possibilities for leaps in class consciousness, and the ferment reflected in Labor Party Advocates but also in other independent electoral orientations (Ron Daniels’s Campaign for New Tomorrow, the feminist 21st Century Party, etc.) suggests the possibility of a broad-based working-class party. Only within such a context, involving the crystallization of a mass working-class vanguard, will the creation of a genuine Leninist party be possible.

This has brought us to an important question: how should revolutionary socialists organize themselves *now* in order to most effectively establish the necessary preconditions for a revolutionary party?

Revolutionary Internationalism

A starting-point for serious and practical-minded Marxists in the United States must be the understanding that capitalism is a global system. It is not possible to understand what is happening in our country without reference to what is happening in the international economy and in world politics. It will be difficult for workers in trade unions and in social movements to secure and evaluate significant victories here without reference to the struggles of workers and the oppressed elsewhere.

Yet revolutionary internationalism cannot involve simply passive observation and reflection. The victories and defeats of working-class and popular social struggles in one part of the world have an impact on struggles in other parts of the world, and sometimes mutual assistance across borders can help tip the balance. A cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences among revolutionaries and activists of different lands can immeasurably strengthen working-class militants and revolutionary socialists of all countries. If there is to be any hope for socialism at all, the socialist-minded working-class will need to come to power in several countries within a common time-span, relying on the active solidarity of millions of workers in other countries, and providing an inspiring example to them as well.

There is a need, then, for ongoing and practical collaboration among working-class and socialist revolutionaries around the world. To build and maintain a truly revolutionary socialist organization in the United States necessarily means that serious collaborative relationships must be developed and maintained. This is not a simple matter. There are many countries, many different working-class and socialist organizations and movements and grouplets in the various countries. A small group of revolutionary socialists could exhaust itself simply trying to establish contact with them all.

At the present time there are two already-existing global bodies of socialists: the Socialist International (or Second International), and the Fourth International established by Leon Trotsky and his co-thinkers.

“A starting-point for serious and practical-minded Marxists in the United States must be the understanding that capitalism is a global system. It is not possible to understand what is happening in our country without reference to what is happening in the international economy and in world politics.”

The Second International consists primarily of moderate, reformist socialist and social-democratic organizations which are highly bureaucratized and hostile to the overthrow of the capitalist system. While enjoying the adherence of many parties that have a substantial working-class base, and while sometimes promoting positive projects, it has a long record of rejecting Marxism and promoting class-collaborationism, more than once betraying the interests of the working class. It is conceivable for revolutionaries to find a place in the Second International for tactical reasons (as did many Trotskyists for a short time in the 1930s), but it is clearly not an adequate instrument for collaboration by revolutionary socialists seeking to battle against and finally overturn capitalism throughout the world.

On the other hand, there is the Fourth International, which consists of relative handfuls of revolutionaries in a variety of countries (although with larger groups in a few countries, such as France, Mexico, Sri Lanka), who identify with the revolutionary Marxist traditions represented by Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and others. It can be argued that the Fourth International is too small, that it is not as well-organized as it needs to be, that there is often not sufficient political clarity within its ranks, that its various

affiliates have made one or another serious mistake. Other criticisms undoubtedly can also fairly be made.

The fact remains that the Fourth International represents an invaluable body of experience and a rich programmatic heritage (reflected in *The Transitional Program*, in *Socialist Democracy and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, and in the recent *Manifesto of the Fourth International*) which must be utilized and built upon by revolutionary socialists. More than this, it consists of seasoned activists who have made important contributions to the class struggle, to social movements, and to Marxist theory in a variety of countries, and it stands as a vital pole of attraction for radicalizing and revolutionary-minded militants throughout the world. It is open and democratic (some critics argue that it is too open and insufficiently centralist), and its central bodies have no interest in trying to dictate to member organizations how to “make the revolution” in their own countries. Instead, through its structures, meaningful discussion and practical collaboration take place among revolutionary organizations in North and South American, in Western and Eastern Europe, in Asia, in Africa.

It seems obvious that organizations of revolutionary socialists should actively participate in the work of the Fourth International. Also, supporters of the Fourth International in any particular country obviously belong in a common organization within that country — but this is an issue to be dealt with in a later section of these notes.

The fact is, however, that there are many revolutionary socialists who are not part of the Fourth International and who do not want to consider affiliation. Some of these consider themselves to be Trotskyists and favor an abstract “Fourth International” that would conform to their own particular notions — but unfortunately most of these comrades, to a large degree, are mired in sectarian delusions, and (despite substantial verbiage) are not active in real struggles of the workers and the oppressed. Others, such as the SWP of Britain (associated with Tony Cliff), as well as the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (associated with Pierre Lambert) and Lutte Ouvrière in France, and the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores of the late Nahuel Moreno in Argentina have maintained more substantial organizations and activities, but are inclined to see their own particular groups as the center of the revolutionary universe in a sectarian manner.

More significantly, there are revolutionaries and proletarian militants in many countries (one thinks of Central America, South Africa, the Philippines, China, Russia and Eastern Europe), many of whom come from non-Trotskyist traditions, some of whom have earned authority in mass struggles, who are also not inclined, even for a moment, to consider becoming part of the Fourth International. Some of these comrades may eventually find their way into the ranks of the Fourth International, and others may eventually cease to be revolutionaries and principled working-class fighters. It seems likely, however, that for some time to come many revolutionaries and revolutionary socialist organizations will remain outside of the Fourth International. This is true not only in the countries mentioned, but also in the United States.

For reasons already indicated, those of us who are Fourth Internationalists must give serious attention to building, and strengthening our world movement. But it would be destructively sectarian to act as if all genuine revolutionaries must or will join the Fourth International. It may be that a broader revolutionary international, embracing militants of the Fourth International plus at least many of the others enumerated here, will eventually come into being. This could be a very positive development. At the

present time, however, for a revolutionary socialist organization in the United States, maintaining ties with the Fourth International can only be one aspect of its international work.

The structures, the programmatic and material resources, the organizations and activities associated with the Fourth International are of great importance. No less important, however, are the things that can be learned from all real, practical, mass movements and struggles of the working class and the oppressed in each country regardless of what particular organization is in the leadership of the movement and struggle. In addition to learning from such real class-struggle and revolutionary experience, it is important to provide assistance, and also to establish practical links between the efforts of activists, working-class militants and revolutionary socialists in the United States and other countries.

To the extent that a revolutionary socialist organization is able to contribute, in a practical manner, to international collaboration and internationalist consciousness among sectors of the U.S. working class, among trade unionists and social movement activists, it will be paving the way for the kind of revolutionary party that is so badly needed in the United States. The notion must be developed and popularized that labor needs its own foreign policy that is independent of the foreign policy of the capitalists.

Revolutionary internationalism — not just verbal, but real, practical, structural — is one primary orientation for revolutionary socialists seeking to organize themselves in the United States today.

Democratic Centralism

Even though it is impossible to organize a genuinely Leninist party in the United States today, it is not impossible to organize a revolutionary socialist group along Leninist lines. Revolutionary internationalism is one aspect of Leninist organizational norms, but another involves what has come to be known as “democratic centralism.”

This term has been grotesquely distorted in an authoritarian manner by Stalinists and others to mean something like this: lower bodies (individual comrades, local groups, etc.) are subordinate to higher bodies (the central party leadership); there can be freedom of discussion until a decision is made, then all members must openly express agreement with the decision and help carry it out, even if in their heart of hearts they are fundamentally opposed to it.

This is an anti-Leninist distortion of democratic centralism. It is inconsistent with genuinely Marxist principles. It should be rejected by serious revolutionary socialists. Lenin argued that “the principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organizations implies full *freedom to criticize* so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action; it rules out *all* criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the *unity* of an action decided on by the Party.” Insisting that the party leadership must not define “freedom to criticize” too narrowly and “unity of action” too broadly, he asserted that “criticism within the limits of the *principles* of the Party Program must be quite free..., not only at Party meetings, but also at public meetings.”

Genuine democratic centralism means that all members of an organization will be involved in a collective process of discussing, making decisions about, carrying out, and evaluating the organization’s work. The individual activist brings her or his experience to the *collective* (one’s comrades, the other activists in the socialist group), the collective helps to think through the political work, and the collective helps the individual carry out the work. All

comrades assume responsibility for helping to think through the work, and there is often a division of labor among comrades to enable the organization as a whole to carry out various activities. There should be a high degree of individual initiative encouraged, and also a high degree of autonomy for comrades actually carrying out the work. But the functioning of the organization involves a high degree of democratic decision-making and a certain cohesion that comes from comrades working as a political collective.

This description of democratic centralism is, obviously, in contrast to a different mode of functioning: the organization gets together primarily for the purpose of providing a forum for discussion and a framework for social activities, but whatever actual political activity members may engage in is basically their own individual affair. There may be good revolutionary activists in the organization, but it is not a revolutionary activist organization.

Democratic centralism assumes that revolutionaries, who are in basic agreement on general Marxist perspectives and revolutionary socialist goals, will naturally have differences on how to interpret aspects of those perspectives, on how to apply the perspectives to practical struggles, on how best to work for the realization of socialist goals, on how to understand complex social and political realities while developing strategic and tactical perspectives, etc. Two counterposed perspectives can each yield an aspect of the truth — no one has a monopoly on the truth. Only through democratic discussion and testing political perspectives in practice is it possible to clarify the meaning, and the degree of truth, in one or another political perspective.

The Leninist mode of functioning is often associated with the notion of *discipline*, which is correct, but truly Leninist discipline is not something that is mechanically imposed on members from the “political center” (whether this is defined as a leadership decision or a majority vote). Rather, what is valued is an internal discipline of the members involving the development of one’s own knowledge and capacity for critical thinking, self-control and working with others, strength of character, orderliness and efficiency. These qualities, not simply following orders or submitting to authority, constitute the kind of discipline consistent with the Bolshevik-Leninists described, for example, in John Reed’s *Ten Days That Shook the World* or Trotsky’s *History of the Russian Revolution* or Victor Serge’s historical accounts and novels. These are qualities most consistent with the best in the writings and organizational practice of James P. Cannon, one of the finest representatives of a distinctively American variant of the Bolshevik tradition.

Unfortunately, even among Trotskyists there have been serious distortions of healthy Leninist organizational norms. Perhaps this can best be explained if we consider this passage from Lenin’s *Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder*:

The first questions to arise are: how is the discipline of the proletariat’s revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? First, by the class-consciousness of the proletarian vanguard and by its devotion to the revolution, by its tenacity, self-sacrifice and heroism. Second, by its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and — if you wish — merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people — primarily with the proletariat, *but also with the non-proletarian* masses of working people. Third, by the correctness of the political leadership exercised by this vanguard, by the correctness of its political strategy and tactics, provided the broad masses have seen, *from their own experience*, that they are correct. Without these conditions, discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being a party of the advanced class, whose mission is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and

transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved. Without these conditions, all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning. On the other hand, these conditions cannot emerge at once. They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in its turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.

As Lenin put it, “all attempts to establish discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning” if a would-be “Leninist” party leadership attempts to short-circuit what must in fact be created by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. First there is the need for the development of a class-conscious proletarian vanguard — which in the United States passed out of existence a few decades ago. Today it can be argued that a renewed vanguard layer is being brought into existence (and the primary task of Leninists is to help further that process), but this first precondition is far from an accomplished fact. The second precondition, the at least partial merger of this radical working-class vanguard with broader layers of the working class, is also in the future. The third precondition, the authority gained by demonstrated political correctness of the would-be revolutionary leadership, cannot be simply declared to exist by that would-be leadership. It must be recognized by masses of people on the basis of their own experience.

All too often, even among Trotskyists, an impatient small-group leadership, claiming to have “correct revolutionary theory” (which it seeks to impose on, or counterpose to, the actual movements and struggles of the workers and the oppressed), insists that the members of the small group demonstrate “Leninist” discipline by accepting the wisdom and authority of the leadership. The result is phrasemongering, clowning, splits, expulsions — and more splits and expulsions, plus burn-out and demoralization even among those who support the leadership. Unfortunately it all happens under the banner of “democratic centralism” and “Leninist party-building,” even though the method is the opposite of that proposed by Lenin.

“Only through democratic discussion and testing political perspectives in practice is it possible to clarify the meaning, and the degree of truth, in one or another political perspective.”

The point is, if properly understood — as a profoundly democratic and collectivist (anti-authoritarian) form of organizational practice, *with a clear conception of where we are in party-building process*, and with an understanding that before all else U.S. revolutionary socialists must be engaged in helping to recompose a mass vanguard layer of the working class (which is a precondition for a meaningful and genuinely Leninist revolutionary vanguard party) — if properly understood, democratic centralism is a valuable mode of functioning, a necessary mode of functioning, for consistent revolutionary socialists today.

Fragmented Vanguard

In a sense, those who believe in the need for the working class and the oppressed to carry out a socialist revolution, and who are prepared to devote significant time and energy to winning others to this perspective for the purpose of translating it into reality,

constitute a *revolutionary vanguard*, although a very tiny one, not to be confused with the much larger “proletarian vanguard” that Lenin said would be the base of a revolutionary party. In addition to being tiny, this vanguard is fragmented. Even those who adhere to a common tradition of revolutionary Marxism as represented by Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky are fragmented. Even those who identify with the actually-existing Fourth International are fragmented.

This reality poses a challenge as we consider the question of how revolutionary socialists in the United States today should organize themselves. We don’t have a clean slate on which to draw a diagram to which reality can be expected to conform. There are more than a dozen groups claiming to be, in some sense, revolutionary and socialist, that are for the most part competing with each other. These include the Communist Party, the split-off from the CP organized into the Committees of Correspondence (part of which is attracted to the social-democratic Democratic Socialists of America), the still-Maoist Revolutionary Communist Party, the ex-Maoist Freedom Road Socialist Organization, the ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, the Freedom Socialist Party, the Workers World Party, the Spartacist League, the International Socialist Organization, the Trotskyist League, Socialist Action, Socialist Organizer, the Alliance for Independent Socialist Politics, and others. I am aware of clusters, here and there, of Marxist-oriented African-Americans. There are undoubtedly other formations of which I am unaware.

I happen to belong to Solidarity, whose strengths are indicated in this self-description:

We are revolutionary socialists who are democratic, feminist, anti-racist and stand for “socialism from below” based on the self-organization of the working class and oppressed peoples. Our members are active in the union movement, working to strengthen a working-class opposition to corporations and “business unionism.” Many are involved in committees and demonstrations in solidarity with the people of Central America, Southern Africa and Palestine. Still others work to support reproductive rights of women, gay and lesbian rights, and to fight racism....

Although from different backgrounds, we all agree on the need for a socialist organization to fight the politics of the ruling class and the right. We need to develop a theory and practice that can provide an effective alternative to capitalism. Solidarity recognizes that creating a revolutionary democratic and socialist alternative that is working class, multi-national and neither sectarian nor reformist is not an easy task.

We don’t have all the answers and don’t pretend to. We see Solidarity as the beginning, not the end, of a regroupment by revolutionary socialists. To us regroupment is more than the merging of various leftist organizations; it is an attitude of openness and collaboration despite our disagreements. Some of us were once members of left organizations that were too inflexible to draw the full lessons of their experiences and weren’t able to develop creative new approaches. We advocate breaking down sectarian boundaries and forging new and creative politics.

Solidarity is not a Leninist organization in any of the senses indicated in these notes, although there are a significant number of its members who identify with the tradition of Lenin and Trotsky. Only a third of its members actively identify with the Fourth International, although a majority have some significant degree of friendliness toward what it is and what it is trying to accomplish. While not projecting a clear and comprehensive strategic orientation, Solidarity members are active in some of the most important trade union efforts in the U.S. labor movement, have been active in a number of social movements, and have been

among the most articulate spokespeople and activists attempting to build a broad working-class, anti-racist, feminist electoral alternative to the pro-capitalist Democratic and Republican parties.

Despite its strengths, it seems to me unlikely that Solidarity — in and of itself — will become a revolutionary activist organization that is capable of being the unifying pole of attraction for all or most people who are committed to revolutionary socialism. The organization will, undoubtedly, be able to develop an increased democratic-collective manner of functioning, carry out extremely important activist and educational work, help generate increasingly valuable revolutionary Marxist analytical and theoretical work, and double or triple or quadruple its numbers. But this would give it a membership that is still less than 2000. One of Solidarity's strengths is that it perceives that it will not become *the* organization of the revolutionary vanguard.

Other organizations that believe they already are, or will become, that exclusive vanguard organization are also incapable of becoming this in reality. Groups that insist on pretending they are *the* vanguard will be hampered in playing even a modest vanguard role. They will be prone to the phrase-mongering and clowning that Lenin warned against, and an internal life marked by accumulated frustrations, purges, splits. Only by keeping themselves in perspective, as part of a fragmented vanguard, will it be possible for such groups to avoid sectarian degeneration.

The achievement of Solidarity in drawing together four national groups (the International Socialists, Workers Power, Socialist Unity, and most recently the Fourth Internationalist Tendency), as well as attracting additional local collectives and individual activists, demonstrates that elements of the vanguard can overcome their fragmentation. Eventually, more organizations — quite possibly Solidarity itself — will want to pass out of existence in order to help create a larger, stronger, more unified organization of the revolutionary socialist vanguard. This organization would be far more effective in trade union efforts, in the social movements against all forms of capitalist oppression, in socialist educational work and more far-reaching cultural efforts, and in helping to build a mass party of the working class. Such work as this is essential in helping to recompose the radicalized working-class vanguard layer that must be the basis for the kind of revolutionary party that Lenin stood for. Such a party is not important because Lenin stood for it, of course, but because some variant of this is what it will take to bring about a socialist democracy.

Solidarity and especially the Alliance for Independent Socialist Politics (AISP) have given special attention to the Committees of Correspondence (CoC) as a formation which could well evolve, at least in part, into a substantial revolutionary socialist organization. In addition to some significant Stalinist residues and an inclination to drift into the non-revolutionary direction of social-democracy on the part of some CoC members, one of the most serious obstacles to this loose organization's evolution in the direction of revolutionary socialism is the involvement in the Democratic Party of many CoC members. It may be, however, that at least some in CoC will belong in a common organizational framework as Solidarity and AISP.

Another logical trajectory toward unity would seem to be among those who identify with the Fourth International — Socialist Action, the AISP, the FI Caucus of Solidarity, and the Trotskyist

League. At the very least, one would hope that the roughly 300 members of these groups would be inclined to work together and maintain channels allowing for ongoing communication and political discussions. At present, friendly relations exist between AISP and Solidarity, and also between Socialist Action and the Trotskyist League, but prospects at present seem quite poor for a generalized regroupment among U.S. supporters of the Fourth International.

What is most important, however, is not who joins what organization or which organizations eventually merge. Most important is that the actual political, educational and cultural work is carried out. It is vitally important that revolutionary socialists

“One of the most important things that we must do is move away from petty competitions in which we validate our own particular little group at the expense of others on the Left.”

commit themselves, above all, to *doing good work* that can help to advance the various struggles of the working class and the oppressed, that can help spread and deepen socialist consciousness, and that can draw together a broad working-class vanguard. Members of different socialist groups need to cooperate and collaborate as much as possible on such real, practical work. This can and should be done informally among individuals, but also the various left-wing organizations should try, and should be encouraged to try, to develop coalitions and united fronts around specific efforts. Such common work, especially within the context of real struggles, can be a key factor paving the way for more durable unity.

One of the most important things that we must do is move away from petty competitions in which we validate our own particular little group at the expense of others on the Left. None who are committed to struggling against oppression and for a socialist society in which all can live in dignity should be dismissed or denigrated simply because they belong to the “wrong” left-wing group. There are too few of us to do this, nor is it the right way to treat people in general. Especially at this time, we must seek serious discussions with all on the Left about what we face and what must be done — discussions in which those who disagree listen to each other, not being afraid to consider and speak to perspectives different from their own.

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* has a distinctive orientation, summarized in its “Who We Are” statement. This is meant not to be a banner of our own “superiority” but rather an indication of what we hope will be a genuine contribution to the larger effort of advancing the interests of the working class and all the oppressed. One aspect of that contribution involves political clarification and an evolution toward unity among U.S. Fourth Internationalists, but also among other segments of the fragmented vanguard of revolutionary socialists. In the pages of this magazine, and also through other channels, we must explore how to transform the general principles of revolutionary socialism into living realities. □

Democratic Rights Versus Government Wrongs

by Evelyn Sell

Evelyn Sell was a named plaintiff in the socialist lawsuit, and a major witness during the 1981 federal trial in New York City.

This article is not simply a salute to a hard-won and successful challenge to government violations of basic constitutional rights. It is important to call attention to the information gained through the socialist lawsuit and other sources so that the facts remain part of the arsenal of today's fighters against oppression and discrimination. It is crucial to understand the value of safeguarding and exercising democratic rights incorporated in the U.S. Constitution — a contradictory document which was the product of two interconnected revolutions at the end of the 1700s: the war of Independence, which overthrew British rule and established the dominance of big landowners, merchants, and bankers; and a second revolution won by small farmers and dispossessed groups in the new United States of America. This second struggle — which included uprisings and armed battles — succeeded in adding the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. The first ten amendments laid the foundations for the working-class, anti-slavery, and feminist struggles of the nineteenth century, provided necessary tools for twentieth-century battles, and are indispensable for pursuing militant actions today.

Socialists Put Government on Trial

In the summer of 1973 the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) filed a landmark lawsuit charging the U.S. government with political spying and disruption tactics. This unprecedented challenge to federal institutions was brought against the Attorney General of the United States, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Director of the Secret Service, the heads of other federal agencies, and individuals (for example, then-President Richard Nixon, John Mitchell, H.R. Haldeman, and John Ehrlichman). The plaintiffs included all post-1948 SWP members and supporters and all YSA members and supporters during the years after the youth organization was founded in 1960. The suit demanded an injunction against further harassment and spying as well as monetary damages.

Many gains were achieved during the eight years leading up to the 1981 trial, and as a

result of the trial proceedings and posttrial appeals:

The case provided the most extensive record ever compiled of the government's war at home against ideas it doesn't like and against constitutionally protected protest activities. The government was forced to produce millions of pages of previously classified documents exposing over forty years of warrantless wiretaps and electronic surveillance, burglaries, mail tampering, deportation threats, use of informants, "trash covers" (rummaging through garbage!), anonymous phone calls and poison pen letters designed to sabotage jobs and personal relations and cooperation between organizations, planting slanderous newspaper articles, and invasions of privacy — such as contacting employers, landlords, neighbors, credit bureaus, relatives, friends, co-workers, and parents.

The FBI alone maintained at least 9,801,114 pages of files about the SWP and YSA in operations labeled "Counterintelligence Program" (Cointelpro), "Disruption of New Left," and "SWP Disruption Program." Documented illegal actions included: 20,000 wiretap days and 12,000 bug days of electronic surveillance between 1943 and 1963; the FBI's use of 1,300 informers who were paid \$1,680,592 for spying and disruption activities, including stealing 12,600 documents between 1960 and 1976; and 208 "black bag jobs" resulting in the theft and photographing of 9,864 private documents from SWP offices and the homes of party members.

Although the CIA charter prohibited surveillance within the U.S., files dating back to 1950 showed that the CIA's Office of Security monitored the SWP and its members. The overwhelming majority of material detailed the CIA's attention to SWP election campaign activities. In addition, CIA Director George Bush was compelled to admit that agents had burglarized and wiretapped SWP members who traveled overseas. Other testimony revealed that agents had opened SWP members' mail and had broken into and copied materials in places where party members were staying. The YSA was targeted for CIA infiltration and spying as part of the agency's surveillance of dissident groups in the U.S. "Operation CHAOS." The CIA's domestic

program, collected information on 300,000 persons and groups in a vain attempt to prove that the antiwar movement, the Black struggle, and campus activities were all the result of "foreign plots." The CIA also utilized the YSA as a training ground for its operatives during the early 1970s.

Along with 667 other organizations, the SWP was on an Immigration and Naturalization Service blacklist used to plague, exclude, and deport people. A foot-high stack of secret materials revealed that the INS: had a stable of informers parallel to those employed by the FBI; was in collusion with the secret police of foreign governments, including South Africa; conspired with Mexico and Canada to identify and target suspected "subversives" in each country; maintained "subversive libraries" of literature expressing forbidden ideas; and kept a "subversive index" listing the names of native-born U.S. persons as well as noncitizens.

Many other federal agencies carried out surreptitious and illegal activities designed to paralyze the SWP and YSA. Each discovery helped expose the role of state institutions in capitalist society. The accumulation of evidence blew away the veil of secrecy the government needs in order to function most effectively against those desiring change.

Court rulings won by the socialists upheld the constitutional rights of persons and groups opposed to government policies and actions. On August 25, 1986, U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Griesa issued a 210-page decision affirming the right of the SWP and YSA to publicize their views and engage in lawful political activity free from government interference. The judge's ruling on disruption activities, surreptitious entries, and the use of informants were declared to be "violations of the constitutional rights of the SWP and lacked legislative or regulatory authority." The judge rejected the government's claim that "national security interests" justified its actions. A key government rationale for illegal operations was ruled invalid.

This was a historic victory, which went far beyond the SWP and YSA, and far beyond socialist organizations; it provided broad protections for the political rights of all: unorganized workers and unionists fighting employers' exploitation and assaults, people of color

struggling for justice and equality, women battling sexism, antiwar activists, lesbian and gay rights fighters, young people, and other oppressed groups in U.S. society. The court victory also served to show that "you can fight city hall" — and you can win! It proved, once more, the value of protecting and exercising democratic rights.

Evidence gathered during the pretrial period demonstrated the collusion between federal agencies, local police departments, and employers, resulting in the loss of jobs because of political affiliation and protest movement activities. Documents obtained in 1975 showed for the first time FBI collaboration with local police agencies in carrying out Cointelpro disruption operations. In the case of Evelyn Sell, the *New York Times* reported:

...a Texas school teacher was dismissed from her post after F.B.I. agents had her superiors informed that she had once sought public office as a candidate of the Socialist Workers party....The information, the documents show, was made available by the F.B.I. to Austin [Texas] police intelligence officials, who promised to keep its source confidential and who then passed it on to the school district.

The result, according to the documents, was "the decision" by school officials "not to issue a new contract or consider the subject further for employment after the termination of her current contract." The papers also noted that Mrs. Sell had a reputation as "an intelligent, excellent teacher who was well qualified in her field."

In 1980, the SWP and YSA obtained documents proving that the FBI aided company security cops in the firing of SWP members working in the Lockheed aircraft plant in Marietta, Georgia. Sworn testimony by a Lockheed security officer and internal company documents showed that the socialists — who were members of Lodge 709 of the International Association of Machinists — were singled out for their political ideas and

activities. The investigation of the SWPers began after a union meeting where they distributed an SWP leaflet voicing solidarity with the union and supporting a labor party. The company cop then went to the FBI for information — which was given to him. He followed the socialists to their homes, restaurants, laundries, stores, and political events.

SWP members were not the only workers investigated by Lockheed's security police; suspected "subversives" included any worker who had a college degree or who gave as an emergency contact a person with a "foreign-sounding" name. The company used electronic equipment to bug private conversations and had a network of informers inside the plant who spied on unionists' discussions and slandered them to co-workers, and who entered homes and looked at private correspondence in workers' mailboxes. Lockheed, the FBI, the local policered squad, and a Pentagon spy agency (the Defense Investigative Service) collaborated in campaigns against employees — resulting in the firing of fifteen workers at Lockheed's Marietta plant. Similar investigations and firings took place at McDonnell Douglas, Hughes Aircraft, Martin Marietta, GE, and General Dynamics, and other companies with Pentagon contracts.

The lawsuit played a crucial role in exposing significant facts: the government's war against a broad list of groups and individuals; the illegal surveillance and disruption campaigns carried out by federal agencies; and the bipartisan nature of these violations of fundamental rights. Both Democratic and Republican administrations approved and carried out operations against: political parties, civil rights organizations and activists, students and faculty members, the movement against the war in Vietnam, feminists, and civil libertarians. The information gained through the lawsuit and related sources was publicized by the

Political Rights Defense Fund, established to solicit support and financial aid for the court case. The discoveries made in the socialists' lawsuit were confirmed and expanded during hearings held by Congressional committees, materials received under the Freedom of Information Act, and lawsuits filed by various individuals and organizations.

FBI Targets African Americans

In a 1967 memo, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover instructed agents around the country to "expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist...organizations." The following year, the FBI was directed to: "Prevent the *coalition* of militant black nationalist groups."

FBI headquarters in San Diego, California, carried out these national directives by taking advantage of the political differences existing between the local Black Panthers chapter and US, a Black nationalist group headed by Ron Karenga. In an interview, Karenga explained,

The police would shoot at the Panthers, and say it was US. Then they [the police] would shoot at US, and say it was the Panthers.... The climate was created to get a certain result. It [the violence] was prompted and provoked. It would never have happened if it weren't for the police. [*The Militant*, January 23, 1976]

The FBI heightened friction between the two African American groups in many ways. The bureau created cartoons attacking the Panthers as police agents and pretended that the cartoons actually came from Karenga's group. The FBI warned Black leaders attempting to negotiate peace between the two groups that the Panthers had marked them for death. Such tactics resulted in the murder of two Panthers, the wounding of four Black activists, the bombing of the US headquarters, and other acts of violence.

By early 1970, the San Diego FBI boasted in a memo to Washington, "As a result of our efforts, the Black Panther party in San Diego is no more. It has been completely done away with."

In sharp contrast to the violence instigated by the FBI against African Americans, terrorist plans of the Ku Klux Klan were allowed to proceed unchecked. Former undercover FBI agent Gary Rowe testified that he joined the Ku Klux Klan following orders from the bureau. Rowe notified his superiors about many KKK plans to commit violence, but the FBI did nothing about these warnings. In one instance, Rose told the FBI that the Klan was going to beat up civil rights "freedom riders." The bureau did not pass this information on to the Justice Department and did nothing to stop the vicious attack, which took place as scheduled.

An FBI file, dated March 4, 1968, stated that a "primary goal" of the bureau was "to prevent the rise of a messiah who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement." To carry out this objective,

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many of the bureau's efforts were aimed at Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. U.S. Senate and House hearings during 1975 exposed the FBI's campaigns against Dr. King — including an attempt to induce him to commit suicide. Leading Black civil rights leaders and legislators issued a statement pointing out that “disclosures of the Cointelpro operations and of widespread government use of paid provocateurs and other unconstitutional tactics raise obvious questions about the mysteries surrounding the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X.” They asked “to what extent was the government complicit in the murders of these two Black leaders? Or in the coverups of those murders?” The statement also cited the 1969 murders of Black Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark in Chicago, and noted that a paid FBI informer was posing as the Panthers' security chief at that time. (For further commentary, see “Cointelpro and the Destruction of Black Leaders and Organizations,” by Dhoruba Bin Wahad in the May 1993 issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.)

Students and Teachers

The campuses were a very special target of the FBI. Students provided the cutting edge of the civil rights and antiwar movements. In addition, students were fighting to gain democratic control over their campus existence. Many teachers were involved in struggles to win Black control of public schools and helped organize massive demonstrations against the war in Vietnam.

Here are some of the things the FBI did during the 1960s and 1970s:

The bureau sent anonymous letters to parents of two Oberlin College students participating in a hunger strike to protest the Vietnam war. The letters expressed concern about the youths' health and school performance and warned the parents about the terrible influence of the YSA. The intent was clearly to have the parents pressure their children into dropping their antiwar activities.

The Cleveland Educational Research Council of America received materials from the FBI for distribution throughout the city's high schools. The material claimed that the YSA controlled the Student Mobilization Committee (the major student antiwar organization at that time) in order to discourage young people from joining the SMC. According to a bureau memo, this “could substantially curtail problems of high school student agitation before they begin.”

A phony student newsletter, called *Armageddon News*, was created by the FBI to hamper student antiwar activity at Indiana University in Bloomington. The local FBI office received this guidance from the national headquarters:

The next issue (Volume 1, Number 2) and subsequent material must contain a more sophisticated approach with regards to the situ-

ation at Indiana University and in relation to the broad protest movement in this country. Your leaflet should be prepared ostensibly by students who, while disagreeing with the Vietnam war policy and so forth, nevertheless deplore subversive elements on and off campus who are using these issues for their own purposes.

Another bogus publication was *The Rational Observer*, which called itself “an alternative American University [Washington, D.C.] campus newspaper,” and claimed to be “an attempt by a small group of students, who love democracy, to preserve democracy...”

As part of a high school assignment, a 16-year-old student wrote for information from the Socialist Labor Party. However, she addressed the envelope incorrectly, and the request went to the SWP instead. The letter was intercepted by the FBI as part of its ongoing mail cover of the party. Special Agent John Devlin then checked the family's credit, the father's employment situation, and possible police records of any family member. The FBI agent also went to the young woman's high school principal to ask about her background and interests.

The FBI sent a series of letters signed “A Fed-Up Taxpayer!” to a Michigan state senator describing the political activities of a professor over a period of seventeen years, including: his participation in a university socialist club, his election to the executive board of the Detroit American Civil Liberties Union, and a 1952 debate with a former FBI agent on the topic “Does the FBI Menace Civil Liberties?”

The bureau tried to get a Washington, D.C., public school teacher fired by sending an anonymous letter, supposedly from a neighbor, to the school district's superintendent. The “neighbor” wrote that the teacher had held meetings of a socialist youth group in her apartment and explained, “I bring this information to your attention in order to protect the D.C. school system from the menace of a teacher who does not have the interests of the children or the country at heart.”

Another poison-pen operation resulted in an SWP member losing his position as an associate professor at Arizona State University. A leader of the Phoenix Committee to End the War in Vietnam and a founder of the ASU American Federation of Teachers, the educator was targeted for an intensive slander campaign by the bureau.

Cointelpro and the Antiwar Movement

In an article entitled “Documents Show F.B.I. Harassed Foes of War,” the June 25, 1975, issue of the *New York Times* reported:

The 256 pages of F.B.I. files, captioned “Cointelpro — New Left,” described a number of incidents between 1968 and 1971 in which bureau agents, by sending “anonymous” letters to employers and parents, attempted to secure the discharge of teachers and other individuals and disrupt their per-

sonal lives because of their political [and] antiwar activities.

The papers, which show for the first time the extent to which the F.B.I. attempted to disrupt, confuse, and “neutralize” the domestic antiwar movement, are the first to be made public relating to [the] program for disrupting the “New Left”...

In October, 1975, the U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee heard testimony from top military personnel that, according to the *Los Angeles Times*,

For six years the National Security Agency reported on the foreign communications of 1,650 Americans, partly to determine whether antiwar and other demonstrators had links overseas....An “eyes only” 1967 cable to NSA from the Army's acting chief of staff for intelligence, which the [Senate] committee released, showed that the Pentagon considered foreign involvement in anti-Vietnam and other domestic protests as the “big question.”...

The 1,650 persons on the NSA's “watch list” were provided by the FBI, Secret Service, CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the former Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. About 1,000 of the names were furnished by the FBI. The newspaper article reported,

The NSA director said the watch list operation averaged about two reports a day. They included some messages between American citizens, but over 90% of them had at least one foreign participant and all of them involved at least one foreign location, he said.

During hearings held by the U.S. House of Representatives' Intelligence Committee, Robert Hardy testified about his 1971 services as an FBI provocateur in an antiwar group. Under bureau instructions, Hardy organized an illegal raid on a New Jersey draft board. He taught a group of professors, students, and clergy how to cut glass and open windows noiselessly and other break-in techniques. Hardy explained, “My neighbors began to wonder why I had this crowd of people climbing up the side of my house and parading along the edge of my roof every day. I began to feel like Pied Piper.” Hardy rented trucks, obtained floor plans, and led the antiwar activists into the FBI-devised trap. Members of the group were arrested as they attempted to break into the draft board offices.

Women's Liberation Movement

Another former FBI informer, Timothy Redfearn, helped expose the bureau's operations against women's rights fighters. The mysterious 1975 burglary and vandalism of the office of a Denver feminist newspaper, *Big Mama Rag*, was cleared up when Redfearn confessed that he reported regularly to the FBI on the newspaper collective for several years. Bureau files show that his reports were especially concerned with the interconnections between lesbians, feminists, and the radical community.

The February 6, 1977, *Los Angeles Times* reported:

Using female informers to provide details its male agents could not obtain, the FBI investigated women's liberation groups for at least four years...In response to a Freedom of Information Act request, the FBI made public 1,377 pages from its files on the women's liberation movement, or WLM, as it was known to the FBI.

...The New York office filed an inch-thick report on women's activities in that city Aug. 14, 1970. It said there were 3,200 names, "not all of them radicals," on the mailing list of the Women's Liberation Center....

Reports were also filed by FBI offices in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Seattle, Philadelphia, Chicago, Newark, St. Petersburg, and other cities. In addition to utilizing informers, the bureau assigned regular agents to monitor feminist rallies and demonstrations.

FBI files contained reports such as: "...a WLM meeting was held on 4-6-69...New York City. Each woman at this meeting stated why she had come to the meeting and how she felt oppressed, sexually or otherwise." And, "Karate classes are being organized and are held at the center [Women's Liberation Center in New York City]." The Seattle office, reporting on a feminist conference in Eugene, Oregon, noted: "The women, in general, appeared to be hippies, lesbians, or from other far-out groups. Most of them were very colorfully dressed, but the majority wore faded blue jeans. Most seemed to be making a real attempt to be unattractive."

The June 1977 issue of *Ms.* magazine, reporting on these revelations, explained that the FBI

filed Women's Movement fliers, position papers, membership lists, agendas, meeting notices, and conference reports. They listened to our radio interviews and clipped articles on us and by us, whether published in the straight press or the most obscure underground paper.

Speculating on why the FBI targeted the women's liberation movement, Letty Cottin Pogrebin wrote:

1. Fear of social change and unrest. In 1970, the special agents in San Francisco sent [J. Edgar] Hoover a trenchant analysis of the Women's Movement: "This movement reflects the same restlessness and dissatisfaction which has motivated minority, student and a variety of other groups to engage in agitation."...

2. Fear of affiliation with "dangerous" or "subversive" groups.

3. Fear of some deep erosion of the American way of life....the Women's Movement — its programs, issues, and personal lifestyle — was seen as an alarming threat to the status quo....Free abortion on demand and health collectives smacked of socialism. To FBI ears, communes and community-controlled child care had an unmistakable communist ring to them....Self-

defense classes, lesbian rights, understanding female sexual pleasure, criticism of the nuclear family, and attacks on male chauvinism, all introduced sour ingredients into American apple pie, not to mention the idea that Mom might stop making it.

To FBI guardians of the capitalist credo, the solidarity of feminists, socialists, peace and Third World groups, prisoners and poor people, probably added up to a conspiracy of saboteurs and heretics.

In its April, 1972 study, the FBI spells out a supposed conspiracy in which the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) advocates women's issues as part of its manipulative scheme "to encircle and direct the Movement for political purposes." ...Whatever the facts about SWP "use" of the Women's Movement, a constructive joining together of forces for change seemed to be what the FBI feared most. If we could put aside our differences of political affiliation in order to work together on one issue, there was no telling where it could end. So when the agents witnessed compromise or coalition, they called it manipulation and exploitation.

Unwittingly, some of us gave them occasional cause for celebration. Groups split up over suspected hidden agendas or possible domination. While women were worried about so-called radicals or FBI plants tearing the Movement apart, the FBI was worried about radicals and mainstream women joining together. [*Ms.* June 1977]

Learning from the Past, Fighting Today

As pointed out above and through other examples in this article, the government's disruption programs were successful in hampering group efforts, destroying some organizations, victimizing individuals, and creating barriers between groups. When these activities were exposed to public view, however, many activists learned the destructiveness of red-baiting, witch-hunting, and

falling for the "dirty tricks" of informers and agents. Distrust of once-sacred government bodies grew as proofs of government lies accumulated.

Noam Chomsky noted that

...while public attention was riveted on Watergate, much additional information was released on court order in civil suits. Still more was provided by former government agents and others.

In comparison with these revelations, the whole Watergate affair was a tea party. The evidence now available, though fragmentary, reveals a systematic campaign of disruption, intimidation, instigation of violence, and terror, initiated under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. [*More*, December 1975]

By providing a large portion of the evidence uncovered during the 1970s and early 1980s, the socialist lawsuit helped enormously in demolishing government credibility. Many secrets were revealed and widely publicized, and government lies were demolished; for example, claims that the FBI's Cointelpro operations ended in 1971 and that the CIA's domestic surveillance programs lasted only from 1967 through June 1973.

The socialists' court victory in 1981 and subsequent favorable rulings expanded the space for political action. At the same time, the basic problem has remained: the capitalist state's need to violate democratic rights and to utilize disruption tactics in order to maintain the rule of a tiny minority over the overwhelming majority of the population. We must continue to recognize and cope with this ever-present danger. What we have learned from previous experience needs to be known by current generations of working-class fighters. The gains won in the socialist lawsuit can still be used as effective tools in today's struggles against oppression. □

May 26, 1993



The Centrality of the African American Movement

by Mary France

The African American struggle is really key to anything that happens in this country and to the progressive movement moving forward. As progressives, as long as we continue to talk about and yet not really understand the centrality of the African American movement in this country, we'll never move forward.

That's who we need to be looking at in terms of what we need to do in order to bring about change, rather than look at any particular group.

Greed is what motivates this society; it always has. That's why the indigenous people were destroyed. It's all about profit and greed and it won't change until we're willing

“America's version of apartheid, while lacking overt legal sanction, comes closest to the system even now being reformed in the land of its invention.”

We have to begin to pull together. This is one reason that I am with the Campaign for A New Tomorrow. Last year I was running for state assembly and Ron [Daniels] asked me to take on New York for his campaign to run for president as an independent. I told him that I really didn't have the time, but the more that I talked to him and learned where he was going and what his vision was, I decided that I really had to be in the Campaign for A New Tomorrow and I stopped running for state assembly. I'm deciding whether or not I'll run next year, I don't know. But I decided to get into Ron's campaign because he was talking about building a movement about real change.

Our focus is on struggle, getting out there where it's happening and working with the people who are most oppressed, most affected and most disenfranchised to bring about a togetherness in our struggle, because as bad as things are today they're not going to change without a movement. Elections are not going to do it. We have to have some street action. We have to have people fighting. That's what's lost today. Years ago we had people fighting. In other countries people are out in the streets. They're shutting down plants left and right, taking over the business. Mexicans and Americans are going to be fighting each other about jobs that shouldn't be going to Mexico in the first place, where people are going to be working like slaves. But nobody's fighting. It's like we've been numbed over the years. And there aren't any students active anywhere, which is a real problem. We always had students out there on the front lines. There's just so much work to be done.

We have to start being more critical of what we're about and really attacking and understanding what our country's make-up is and what we can do in terms of fighting the racism that people use to play one off against the other. We need to work where we are to get rid of that, especially white progressives. So many people don't realize that when people grow up in a system, that's what they understand. As Carter G. Woodson said, “After a while you don't have to show the slave the back door; he will find it for himself.” People have become conditioned. They begin to

The following are three talks given at a workshop at the 1993 Socialist Scholars' Conference on “The African American Struggle Today.” The talks were transcribed by Lee DeNoyer.

We know that we have the highest infant mortality rate — 18.6 percent in 1990 — and that unemployment in the Black community is higher than the national average: 14.2 percent, as compared with 7.1 percent overall. This has been constant over the last 30 years. We need to look at these things and why. For young Black adults the rate of unemployment is close to 40 percent. What does that say about trouble and gangs? Unemployment is higher than it's been in 25 years. While there is homelessness everywhere, there are more and more jails being built. There's so much that we need to look at as a progressive community in terms of what all this means and where it's going. In the schools there is absolutely nothing that reflects us.

I came to this conference thinking about war and racism and what it all means. In this country militarism, racism, and classism are tools which are used for a white, imperialistic, domineering society. That's the bottom line. It's not just racism: it's a tool that's used to beat up on people, to keep them intimidated, to keep them afraid, to get other people afraid of other people, so that we can't move forward. People begin to blame the persons or the group rather than looking at the system that is inherently incorrect. It was created that way. From its inception, this was a country that said, “We will have what we want because we will take it.” We have a mentality of greed and selfishness where people take what they want.

In this country, people must begin to look at who our real enemies are, rather than look at each other. When we have a country where 1 percent of the income earners have more than the bottom 90 percent, we definitely should not be fighting with each other. The people who have the 1 percent are the enemy.

to look at what our country really stands for. Look at the Constitution and how it was written: there is nothing but greed that perpetuates what's going on. We look at other countries where we've seen feudal societies and different kinds of systems like the French, for example, and their queen who said “Let them eat cake.” But in reality we have the same kind of a system: a few people at the top who control all the money and have all the power, and when a few other people get a little something, well— This is a real problem for the Black community, because at this point we have more judges, more doctors, more lawyers, and more professionals than ever before, so it's like we have arrived. But we have not arrived. The majority of people in this country have not arrived and we need to understand that.

So there's a lot of education that has to go on and progressives especially need to look at what they need to be doing other than having conferences every year that don't move anybody's agenda.

We really have to be serious about some change because it's getting worse and worse. Think about the North American Free Trade Agreement, for example. Throughout the world, America has something to do with what's going on in every country and it is not good, whether it is Haiti or Palestine, wherever it is. We have to do a real analysis and see how we can position ourselves to start making some change. Folks certainly cannot sit around and think that Clinton is going to make any difference either. We don't have a left in this country any more. Where is the left?

There is a book written by Andrew Hacker called *Two Nations, Black and White: Separate, Hostile, and Unequal*, and he states:

think that things are all right. Some people have the illusion today that we're doing all right. The ones that have jobs think that they're all right. The ones that have homes are thankful to God or somebody that they still have their homes. They don't think about the masses around them that are hungry. Some people even blame homeless people, like homeless people *want* to be homeless! There's so much insensitivity. We've gotten so afraid that we won't have a job, or won't have this or that, that we've become all for self. We have to get away from that. There's really a lot of looking at ourselves and our society that we have to do and see how we can try to bring about some change.

The Campaign for A New Tomorrow is really very dear to me. I feel that I work in the campaign because it is a way that we really can begin to bring about change, and I'm so committed to that because of all the devastation I see. It just pains me too much. I see all the hurt and the murder and the killings where the victims are being blamed. I went to the movies the other day, and there were two white middle-aged women, and their conversation went like this, "You know, as bad as things are, there's almost nothing left but to sell drugs." These weren't teenage Blacks or Latinos, these were two middle-aged white women saying in effect, "What are we going to do?" It's just that bad. What is left for people to do? And that's how people feel, that they don't have anywhere to go. There's so much frustration. Look at what happened to Rodney King. Where are we? And people can actually rationalize that this is OK. It's bad news. There's a lot of work that we have to do.

I was walking in the street going to my daughter's and a little Black boy who must've been about ten, threw a potato chip bag on the ground. I picked it up and said, "Now why did you throw that on the ground? You could find a trash can." And he said, "'Cause I'm a man!" I said, "Well you're probably about ten, so you're certainly not a man, but even if you were a man, does it make you a man to be able to throw garbage in the street?" People don't understand. The children don't know where they're going, or who they are. The society that's doing this is not correct.

We had a rally on March 31 and we had a Palestinian speaker, an academic, a speaker who is with the Haitian Initiative, Ron Daniels, Rev. Calvin Butts, a guy who spoke about what's going on in Kashmir, in the northernmost part of India, and someone with the *Daily News*, who spoke about what's going on there. More and more I come to see how this stuff is just all over the place: the greed, the corruption, and the callousness about other people's lives. Humanity is being treated as though things don't matter any more. And it's everywhere.

So it is a race issue, but it is also a class issue. The Campaign for A New Tomorrow is

led by people of color because the intent is to have those in the leadership who are the most oppressed. I think it is a way for us to come together to begin to build a movement for change that will say to this country that we are not satisfied; we will not tolerate these things. We are working with People Against Racism in Housing and the Coalition for Massive Jobs Through Housing because we haven't had decent affordable housing being built for 50 years. We build jails, but we don't build housing.

We will continue to deal with the agendas that need to be addressed. We will continue to put pressure on the government to take money from the military for housing because there's nobody at risk any more. We are the "superpower," so there's no reason why we cannot cut the military budgets. There will be people who will be afraid. They'll say, "What will happen to those people who were working in defense?" So we'll have to educate people that it's not going to hurt them to go to a peace economy. But we do need streets, railroads, houses, hospitals, day care centers, etc. Or let them go into research on how to use solar energy, etc. There's plenty to be done.

People with power will play the race card and they will play the fear card so that people will be afraid of these things. We have to have our forums, etc., to educate people around these things so they will really understand. When you have fear and no understanding, you do things that are not kind. People are taught to be afraid of what's not known. Many people who see a young African American male walking down the street, the first thing they do is cringe. That's how people have been raised to think.

I'd like to say a little about what Ron has said, because Ron has a vision. I'm very happy to be in the campaign and work with him. First of all, he chose a native person as his running mate, who was also female, to make a statement that we have to deal with the indigenous people. Because as much as we talk about Black people being at the bottom of the barrel, native people aren't even considered. They are dying of alcoholism and diabetes and other things on the reservations. The story of Native Americans is a real sad story that needs to be told, but nobody thinks about them. They're still fighting for their land today.

This country is just as bad as any other country you can think of in terms of when they want something they just make a law or change a law to make it work. When they beat Rodney King half to death, it was legal. Unless we fight against these laws they will remain in place. Ron speaks about how change never comes without movement. He talks about accommodationalists, like some of the Black political people we have today who do not represent us. He talks about the rule of the super rich. This country is owned and

operated by a few corporations and wealthy people, and our elected officials buy into this.

This is the introduction to a book by Derrick Bell called *Jeremiah's Lament*.

That we are not saved echoes down through the ages and gives appropriate voice to present concerns of those who, flushed with enthusiasm generated by the Supreme Court's 1954 holding that segregated public schools are unconstitutional, pledged publicly that the progeny of the American slaves would at last be free by 1963, the centennial of the emancipation proclamation. That pledge became the motto for the NAACP's 1959 convention in New York City where we gathered in jubilant euphoria: veterans of racial bias and society's hostility who believed that they had finally and permanently achieved the reform of the laws that had been for a century vehicles for the oppression of Black men, women, and children. Not even the most skeptical at that convention could have foreseen that less than three decades later the achievement would be so eroded as to bring us once again into faithful and frightful coincidence with Jeremiah's lament. With the realization that the salvation of racial equality has eluded us again, questions arise from the ashes of our expectations, how have we failed and why? What does this failure mean? For Black people and for whites. Where do we go from here? Should we redirect the quest for racial justice? A response to those questions, more accurately a series of responses is the purpose of this book... I recognize that most of what can be said about racial issues has been said and likely more than once. Over and over we have considered all the problems, tried many of the solutions, and concluded reluctantly or with relief that while full racial equality may someday be achieved, it will not be in our time. Developments in the civil rights field have been dutifully recorded and analyzed by the media. And scholars have not been silent. Library shelves creak under the weight of serious studies on racial issues. Surely one might think the literature would not suffer, and might even benefit from the period of repose. For better or worse, though, race is not like other public problems. Throughout America's history racial issues have been high among, if not central to, the country's most important concerns. Often, as when the Constitution was written, during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and throughout the decades of the Civil Rights Movement since the Supreme Court's Brown decision in 1954, racial issues have riveted attention. At no time has race slipped down the list of the most crucial matters facing both the nation's top policy makers and its most humble citizens. Consider the predictable self-congratulation as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Constitution's signing in 1787. Racism in America is much more complex than even the conscious conspiracy of a power elite or the simple delusion of a few ignorant bigots. It is a part of our common historical experience and therefore a part of our culture. It rises from the assumptions we have learned to make about the world, ourselves and others as well from the patterns of our fundamental social activities.

That's why racism is so dangerous, because it is a part of our very culture. We were developed in a racist system, where people were dehumanized. This is where power keeps power, by dehumanizing people and keeping people frightened and thinking that they are nothing and having other people think that they are nothing. It doesn't matter who the group may be, but it appears that it is especially worse with people of color. Maybe it's because of the pigmentation. But whether it's in Ireland or wherever it is, for somebody to be in control you must have somebody in subjugation. Steven Biko, a leader in South Africa who was murdered when he was only 30 years old, speaks about dehumanizing other people in order to main-

tain control. These are things that we have to fight against, and as African Americans move up, we have to understand that we're not really moving up. Even a bigger danger that we have today is that people will bring out Black folks in front of us and say to us that they are our leaders — like a Clarence Thomas — so it is not just about what color you are.

Progressives need to understand how racism is used as a tool, and work in their communities with other whites so that they will understand. I say to my white friends that people can't help but be the way they are. They are taught to be that way because all they ever see is that they are superior. They see it on the television, on the radio, in the

movies, and everywhere else in this dominant white society that projects other people as not being as important in many ways. That says to them unconsciously that they are better. You cannot blame them for that until you make them aware. We have to understand that up until that point, that's where people are. White progressives especially need to work against that. People that are interested in real change would be interested in the Campaign for A New Tomorrow because it is Black led. One of the truths of whether or not white progressives are ready is whether or not their willing to follow Black leadership. That's the bottom line. □

Viewing the Struggle in Its Dynamic Context

by Lloyd D'Aguilar

To start on a personal note, a magazine that I've been furiously working on in order for it to be ready for today is not yet ready. It is called *Third World Viewpoint*, and one of the unique features of this magazine is to be able to deal with the African American struggle in a Third World context. People rarely make the link between the African American struggle and the Third World situation. When you look at the social statistics of the position of African Americans in American society you will find great similarities between their situation and that of the Third World. Similarities in terms of health, education, and housing. The latest statistics put out by the Urban League, for example, say that during the Reagan-Bush years poverty increased absolutely among African Americans: there are more Black people below the poverty line, whereas for whites, the numbers for those below the poverty line decreased. That is an indication of a permanent status for African Americans in this country.

That is not an accident. It is part and parcel of the history of this country, it is part of the political economy. I think that if you had 50 percent unemployment among urban white youths, you probably would be having some kind of serious social upheaval. Fifty percent of Black youths are unemployed. That's a very serious indictment of the system and a statement that needs to be looked at in terms of the permanency of poverty, underemployment, and underdevelopment in the African American situation. As a colony within the United States, African Americans are subject to the same kind of unrelenting attacks as the people in Panama and the people in Iraq or whatever Third World country you want to mention. Those are the kind of daily oppressions that African Americans face in this

country. We could argue the fine points of how to define a colony and so on, but certainly on a psychological-political level, the struggle of African Americans lies within the struggle of the Third World people. So we really don't have to fine-tune that discussion.

The Soviet Union no longer exists as we knew it. Especially during the 1960s and 1970s, the theory prevailed that United States imperialism would be defeated by either the domino theory — countries one by one having a socialist revolution and becoming a workers state — or there would be some kind of a confrontation with the Soviet Union and United States imperialism would be defeated. Well, we have seen the Soviet Union is no longer a superpower as the United States is. This calls for a reexamination of this kind of theory in terms of how we deal with the phenomenon of United States imperialism. I think that the Achilles heel of United States imperialism is not so much external as it is internal. The Achilles heel that is part and parcel of the weakness of United States imperialism is the fact that it has created an enemy of 20 to 30 million people simply because of their race. Now, that is significant and I think that it is unfortunate that over the years, in the development of the American left, the gravity of the situation has not really dawned on them.

Every year we have the Socialist Scholars Conference and there are token panels that deal with the African American situation. We could extrapolate as far as the seriousness that the left generally takes that struggle in terms of the resources, the time, and the intellectual energy that is devoted to analyzing and understanding that struggle and coming to grips with it. It is tokenism. My position is that the working class is divided and has been

divided historically on the basis of race, and of course the ruling class benefits from that division. What is also happening is that there is a division by race within the left movement as well. That is unfortunate. I'm not accusing the left movement, which is overwhelmingly white, of being racist, but I am saying that they have inherited a kind of thinking which plays into the strategy of dividing the working class on the basis of race.

What do I mean by that? Well, first of all the whole question of what would be the role of the African American working class in the overall struggle for socialism and revolution in this country. What role are they playing and what role should they be playing? I think that because there is this perception that African Americans are a minority in this society and because they are a national component to the struggle, it somehow diminishes the significance and the motivating factor of that revolution for the overall struggle generally. There's an attitude that struggle will play itself out. That is their struggle. When they resolve their problems then somehow we will all synchronize and fall back into the working class being the leader of the struggle for socialism. In other words, the working class is usually viewed as being white. African Americans are part of the working class, but they are not so much working class as they have other problems. The possibility of a vanguard of a minority being able to lead the charge to change the society is not recognized and accepted and that is where the problem lies.

I think it is necessary sometimes to go back into history to see how this question has played itself out. Lenin was one of the first persons to put forward the position that Black Americans are a nation. He said they were a

nation without equal rights or something to that effect. He just left it there; he spoke of them as being a nation. Sometime around 1920, for whatever reason, Stalin also picked up on that thesis and advocated that the Communist Party here should fight for a separate state in the United States for Black Americans. That's where the Black Belt thesis came from. The nation would be constituted somewhere in the South because Blacks were a majority in that part of the United States. That was the approach. I don't think that that was a position to be condemned outright because obviously it had some merits to it in the sense that it fed into the position of Black people being a nation in this country, but do you necessarily have to confine it to a geographic area? That is the problem.

Now, during that time, because of the fact that Blacks were in the South I guess some kind of argument could have been made and could have been debated. The point is that today in 1993, and since the middle of the 1940s, certainly after World War II, Black people are essentially an urban people in the United States. They've moved into the city en masse from the South and so they are now basically concentrated in the various urban areas. If you're going to talk about a nation and if you're going to confine it to the aspect of it that says it must have a particular geographic location and constitution, then I think you run into problems. It is an undialectical and mechanistic approach to the problem. On the other hand, if you see the Black struggle for international self-determination without borders, then I think that it introduces a new dimension into that particular struggle.

In the 1930s there was a very interesting discussion between Trotsky and C.L.R. James, which was facilitated by the Socialist Workers Party, and the idea came up again that Black people are not a nation, so how can we talk about self-determination and so on. Trotsky's position was that it is a political question, and while he felt that Blacks were a race and not a nation, the dynamics existed for them to move toward becoming a nation and that it would be the duty of the white left to support them if that was their choice. Trotsky said,

The Negroes are a race and not a nation. Nations grow out of racial material under definite conditions. The Negroes in Africa are not yet a nation but they are in the process of forming a nation. The American Negroes are on a higher cultural level. But since they are under the pressure of imperialism, they become interested in the development of the Negroes in Africa. The American Negro will develop leaders for Africa, that one can say with certainty, and that in turn will influence the development of political consciousness in America.

We of course do not obligate the Negroes to become a nation; whether they are is a question of their consciousness, that is, what they desire and what they strive for. We say: If the Negroes want that, then we must fight imperialism to the last drop of blood, so that

they gain the right, wherever and however they please, to separate a piece of land for themselves. The fact that they are not today a majority in any state does not matter. It is not a question of the authority of the states but of the Negroes. That there are and will be whites in areas that are overwhelmingly Negro is not the question, and we do not need to break our heads over the possibility that some time the whites will be suppressed by the Negroes. In any case the oppression of Negroes pushes them toward a political and national unity.

I don't think that anybody would debate that there is a sort of "political and national unity" among Black people in the United States today. Anybody who has a cursory understanding of the struggles that have been going on over the years will acknowledge that. The weakness that I see in Trotsky's position and the way in which the SWP and other groups have interpreted that position, or tried to deal with that, is that we still get the position of "us versus them." You find yourself boxed into a corner: it's their struggle, they are struggling for a nation, they are the ones that must put forward the demand for nationhood, and if they do, then we will support that. But what is your position, what position do you take? Do you think that they should become a nation? Do you think that they should fight for self-determination? I think it's an easy way out to say, "Well, if they demand it and if they want it, then we will support them."

I think that were there not this division along race, then the left would feel much more comfortable in taking a position. In other words, if we say Black people should be a nation, then it is *us* whites who are telling *them* that they should either separate or so on. We don't want to create the impression that we are in any way supporting segregation, so let them put forward that particular position.

The opposite side of that point is that the Black struggle also suffers the obverse of that kind of myopic view of the broader situation. In other words, the white left says, "Well, you are a minority and as a minority you can't change society." So the Black left says, or the Black working class movement says, "We are a minority and we can't be the agent for change in society anyway. We can struggle for what we want, but can we really seriously struggle for state power when it's obvious that the other side doesn't believe that we can take state power?" Now, I think that that element should be introduced into the discussion — that it is possible not just to struggle for national self-determination, but to struggle for state power regardless of whether you are a minority or not.

The question really is the dynamics of the struggle. Does the struggle of African Americans for self-determination, against discrimination in housing, health, etc. put them on a collision course with the state? That really is the key question. Nobody is really prepared to address that question. So, I'm saying that

if self-determination is endorsed in its dialectical element, in its dynamic aspect, then it negates the possibility of an "us versus them" kind of mentality which permeates the left movement. I think that it would then make it possible for more resources, more time, more effort, more seriousness to be accorded the African American struggle.

I have talked about the SWP and I talked about Trotsky. I want to talk a little bit more about the SWP and the evolution of its position, because you have to be fair to all sides and you have to see the evolution of how that whole thing developed, to reemphasize the point that I'm making. In the '60s, George Breitman, who was a very important theoretician in the SWP on the Black question, was instrumental in reshaping the position somewhat to the point that it was no longer just "we will support them if they demand self-determination," but "we think that self-determination is an appropriate thing to support and even to advocate."

I think the shortcoming of that position was that it was in terms of controlling neighborhoods, and within the Black community there was a little ridiculing of that position. When you say controlling neighborhoods, what are we really controlling? Are we controlling a few community centers and so on? That really didn't impress anybody. I guess I'm simplifying the position put forward then, but in essence, in how it played out, this is what it appeared to be saying. So it comes back to my point that if the position is not put forward in terms of struggle for state power, whether it's in Brooklyn, to control the unit of Brooklyn as a political entity, however that would be defined, and not just in terms of one or two individuals elected to become mayor or to become congressman and so on. But something similar to what happened in Los Angeles — the riots where masses of youths rebelled not just against the Rodney King verdict, but against the kind of oppression and hopelessness and powerlessness which they face in that situation — so that implicit in that struggle is a struggle for power.

I'm not going to say that the slogans and program are ready-made and worked out and this is what we demand and what should not be demanded, etc. But I am trying to put forward the question in a dynamic context.

In terms of the theoreticians who have approached this question in a worthwhile manner and with understanding and who made a contribution to this question, I would say that there's one very unknown person — an obscure individual, I should say — whose work I would highly recommend to those of you who are interested in the subject, and that is James Boggs. His work is published by Monthly Review Press. I think that Boggs has the right approach in terms of the dynamics of the question — the dynamics of power and the proper revolutionary mix between white workers and Black workers. He advocates a position that it is not necessary for Black

workers to sit back and wait until white workers are ready to make a socialist revolution. I think his position also challenges the left to end this cloud which has retarded developmental revolutionary theory for decades and begin to view the struggle in a different context.

I will end by saying that I have articulated this position in one form or another in several different forums, but I find myself also the

victim of what I was talking about in the sense that unless there are enough forums to articulate the position and refine it and develop it, you find it is an idea that is thrown out there and never gets developed beyond the rudimentary outline. Until organizers such as the people who organize the Socialist Scholars Conference, who have the resources, who are part of the left, pose this question in the way in which it should be

approached, I think that we will really be only skimming the surface of the question and we probably will be meeting here year in and year out for the next decade and no serious advance will have taken place in terms of coming to a more definitive theoretical analysis of how we ought to approach this question. □

The Meaning of Self-Determination

by Vera Wigglesworth

When we say that Black people will be in the forefront of fundamental change in this society, which we are all here dedicated to bringing about, there's something very significant about the content of that statement that we should take a very close look at. I think that the reason why Black people will be in the forefront of the struggle in this country is precisely because of the character of the Black liberation movement. It is a fight for self-determination. That is a very simple statement and yet it has very deep and profound implications that the left has not begun to grapple with. The meaning of the self-determination struggle is simply the struggle by African Americans to determine our own affairs, to determine our own destiny, as is the right of any people.

As I said, that seems like a very simple statement, but it has very deep implications. I'd like to start off with one of the questions Lloyd raised. He was concerned why we don't seem to go very far with this idea. He was also concerned that it's not enough to say that you support the right to self-determination, but you really should be doing something about it. I agree with that, if that question is addressed to Black people. Because that's what self-determination really means: let Black people decide how they want to determine their own destiny. That would mean that it would be Black people who would raise the question, for example, if it were necessary for self-determination that we have our own state. It is not appropriate for it to be raised elsewhere; otherwise it would not be self-determination, but somebody else deciding for Blacks that they should have their own state. It would be a violation of self-determination for anyone else to call for that. That's exactly what Stalin ordered the Comintern, under his control during the '30s, to demand, to decide for Blacks that the Blacks should have a separate state in the South irrespective of what Black people might have felt at the time, irrespective of the organization of Blacks at the time and what they might want to do and where their

development was at. That is not self-determination; it is a violation of self-determination. So, this discussion needs to be happening in the Black community.

The discussion that needs to be happening here is *support* for the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination. This is where I think many progressives don't understand the fundamental character of Black people as a nationality. We might easily bandy about terms: Blacks are fighting for national liberation, the Black liberation struggle, and so forth, but when you use the words liberation and national, you're talking about a people who have the right to determine their own destiny up to and including having their own state.

What do we mean by "own state"? Geographical boundaries? In order to even get there against the American bourgeoisie you'd have to wage a tremendous struggle, because they're not going to stand for that. They waged a big fight themselves to take away much of the territory and resources from other nations to create the presently existing imperial borders of the United States. There's no way that they're going to allow that.

Such a fight would mean that you have to be organized. First of all, people would have to be absolutely clear that this is what we must do and we will risk all to do it. This is what Trotsky meant when he said to fight for an independent Black state is a sign among Black people of great moral and political awakening. To launch this struggle is to totally understand your own nationality. You would have to be politically organized as well as militarily organized in order to carry out that struggle; it's such a profound struggle. That's what it means when we say it's a national liberation movement. It has that national basis.

So, I think Lloyd is right. Maybe progressives don't understand that. But they won't understand that, you see, until Blacks decide that they are going to take their own destiny in their hands. Then the question will be posed for allies of the Black liberation move-

ment, what position are they going to take? That's sort of an introduction, and yet the heart of what I wanted to get to.

I'm going to explain from this context: why we must support the right of Black people to self-determination up to and including the question of a separate Black state. This is what our business is about. Support for the right. The principle of self-determination was laid out by Lenin and then by Trotsky, and manifested by Malcolm X and all independent fighters for the liberation of Black people.

First of all, what we have to understand in order to understand Blacks as a nation, is that this thrust has always been there for self-determination and will be there. First of all, the whole history of Black people in this country has been the denial of that right. I don't need to go into great detail, but the first and basic fundamental denial of self-determination is to drag somebody across 1,000 miles of ocean in chains to build a world for someone else under brutal conditions, and then after a war that liberates you in which you fought for your own liberation and you were terrorized by an organization that's trying to return you back to semi-slavery status—that is, the Ku Klux Klan during the period following the Civil War. There's something else that's also very important. For the next hundred years after the Civil War we also had to endure, and to a certain extent internalize, the assault on our very identity and heritage. These assaults were a continuation of the racist ideology from slavery times. This was a deliberate assault on our national confidence: we have no background, no philosophy, no language, no culture, no conception of government, we spoke gibberish before and we speak gibberish today, and we're only good for manual labor or lower wages in whatever form. That's a very conscious assault on our national identity.

Since the civil rights movement, the end of legalized segregation hasn't alleviated the gross inequalities in standard of living between Blacks and whites. Blacks are now living in depression conditions, with 31 per-

cent of African Americans now living in poverty. Nor has inequality of justice been eroded either. For example, it took a massive social explosion in Los Angeles involving the deaths of more than 50 people, I believe, hundreds of arrests and millions of dollars in property damage simply to force a retrial of the cops who viciously and brutally assaulted Rodney King.

We should understand if all of African American history has been a denial of self-determination, it's also a story of a struggle to assert that right. The first step was taken with great courage. The slaves ran away. We know that, but what does that really mean? Their escape to the North spread the abolitionist movement as no other development could. Because the federal government was dominated by slave power at that time before the Civil War, it had to erode democratic rights in the North in order to force the Northerners who were sheltering slaves to return them back to their slave masters, so that this government was prosecuting whites for sheltering slaves. The self-determining act of running away actually spread the abolitionist movement, which fed into the real political basis of the Civil War.

From the very beginning of the Civil War, Blacks fought to assert their right to fight for their own freedom, not to be liberated by somebody else. Thereby they assured the destruction of slavery through their brave fight, which was composed of 200,000 Black soldiers. On that basis, they won political power in the South for a short period following the Civil War. Blacks had the right to vote and they had the right to self-representation, which back then meant a lot more than today. Where power really resided was in the legislative bodies, state and national, before there was a standing army, a state armed body that would actually control power in this country. So they controlled much of the governments of the defeated Confederacy.

The failure of the federal government after the Civil War — which during the Civil War had been a revolutionary government — was the failure to back up that newly won Black power with radical land reform. This radical land reform would have created an economic basis for Black independence and Black equality at that time. The failure to back up radical land reform and the failure to back up Black legislatures with armed state militias of Blacks and poor whites resulted in the loss of Black political power, and that's what the counterrevolution that overthrew Reconstruction was. This loss of political power resulted in the loss of Black political equality, which African Americans had to fight to regain over a period of a century, culminating in the civil rights movement.

Now let's take a look at the civil rights movement to see the thrust of self-determination there. This is a thrust to determine your own destiny by any means necessary and to whatever extent is required. What the Black

masses demanded during the civil rights movement was desegregation, not integration. That is, they did not mount the mass mobilizations that overthrew the Jim Crow laws in the South in order to sit next to whites, to use white rest rooms, or to live in white neighborhoods. They engaged in these battles to win the democratic right to equal treatment and equal political representation. To have equal access to resources and facilities in this society. That's different than integration. Integration is not a self-determining thing; it's an adapting thing. Begging someone else to accept you and your condition is dependent on somebody else. Desegregation was a fight to have the right to be equal. During these independent mobilizations of the civil rights movement, Blacks became independent in their thought and action in an important way, by taking action themselves. This made them independent from the white ruling class institutions during that struggle. This independence was reflected in the resurgence of Black nationalist consciousness. The Black nationalist movement obtained its clearest political expression in the leadership of Malcolm X, whose consistent nationalism had by the time of his assassination in 1965 led him to internationalist, prosocialist, and revolutionary conclusions.

Because of the denial of self-determination to African Americans and because of the historic thrust of Black movements toward self-determination, what is now on the agenda for the Black liberation struggle is an open fight for political power. Why is that so today? Well, we're very clear on that. The civil rights victory was limited to formal desegregation. De facto segregation and the economic consequences of Black superexploitation still exist today. The limitations of the civil rights victory, as the phenomenon of the Black Power movement showed, pose more sharply the question of self-determination as a fight for political power. Because that would be the only way that Blacks could finally secure and expand the gains of the civil rights movement. Through means up to and including the exercise of the ultimate democratic right to form one's own state.

I'll talk a little bit about what we mean by political power. First and foremost is self-organization. That is, Blacks organizing themselves, having the right to decide who is going to be in their organization and doing this on an independent basis, independent of the capitalist class. That's the very first step: elemental political clarity. Another level of expansion of this fight for political power is control over one's own communities. Black control of Black communities. This is not a simple demand. Just think what it would take for Blacks to control their own communities. First of all, the white capitalist state would not have any say in it. Can you imagine them not having any say in how funds are going to be appropriated or expended in the Black community? They would not have any say

about who the police, fire, or any of the other services would be. It would be completely controlled by Black people for their own benefit.

This is a profound step leading in a very revolutionary direction. Who would make these decisions? Black people would through elected councils. This is an exercise of democracy directly by Black people. Now naturally there would have to be some coordination. There's not just going to be one organized unit in Chicago, for example, and one in New York. There would need to be some coordination and some consultation and ways to block together to defend yourself against the government. There would naturally be a necessity to federate together. All this implies a basis just like there would be for a fight for one's own country. There would have to be defined geographical boundaries, your own organization, rules and laws within them to regulate your own affairs, and most importantly there would have to be a vision of political clarity. You would have to have armed capabilities to defend those borders, to defend your right to make your own rules, and defend your right to make your own decisions and to carry them out.

So this is really deep stuff. It's no wonder that it's not been gotten by either most Black people or white progressives. It has to be put forward by Black people.

In this regard, I return to the question of why does it seem to be so difficult to get a grasp on this? It is simply that it is hard for us to see this liberation for African Americans at the center of the coming American socialist revolution. Black people are in retreat right now. Just like the union movement, the Black movement is mired in the capitalist Democratic Party, and consequently it doesn't have the required independent organization and leadership. Without a mass independent Black revolutionary movement to demonstrate otherwise, there's a tendency among many on the left to view the Black struggle as purely a fight against racism, like we're all together to change this problem that poor Black people have. Whites treat them badly, and we have to try to change all that, so that Black people will be equal and feel better, etc. — this is all well intentioned, but it doesn't deal with the fundamental problem.

The fundamental issue has to do with going back and reconquering the principles of self-determination, as Lenin and Trotsky laid out. In so doing there's a tendency to subsume the Black struggle within the working class struggle as a whole — what there is of it — rather than correctly anticipating the struggle for Black self-determination as a powerful separate movement of national liberation that will play the vanguard role in the process. The socialist revolution will be a process in the United States; a process like Lenin talked about, a revolutionary outburst of all kinds of discontented elements, different classes and national liberation move-

ments. But it's the proletariat that's going to be able to unify and direct that and bring the working class to power and complete all the democratic tasks of the unfinished bourgeois democratic revolution, and from the first day also to begin to build the basis for socialism and to actually build socialism.

To wrap up, we talked about how we see Black political power in the self-determination context. One of the first steps in self-organization is to have one's own political party. The political party being the instrument to fight for self-determination. That's key to the fight for self-determination, because we can see that the absence of such a party has been keenly felt at every major turning point in Black history, from Reconstruction right up to the present. We want to be very clear that this means independent of the Democrats and Republicans. Not only independent of those two particular parties, but of any capitalist political party. A Black party represents the interests of Black workers and Black people generally, independent of the capitalist parties. So many political people and organizations that are caught up in supporting Clinton are not only confused and misleading themselves, but they are misleading the working class and misleading the Black liberation struggle with their own false illusions in the Democratic Party. Malcolm X emphasized the need for Black people to organize their own political party. As Malcolm put it, we can't be supporting Democrats and be stuck in their hip pocket; once you trust them and support them you're stuck in their hip pocket and they don't want to negotiate with you any more. He said that we should organize ourselves and negotiate with the powers that be from a position of strength. That is definitely what's on the agenda and I

think that the Ron Daniels movement is an important step in that direction. It's a political effort led by Blacks based in the Black community and advocating the self-determination of Native Americans on the same ground.

So many progressives are in favor of self-determination for Native Americans, but they don't stop to think why that wouldn't also apply to Black people. I was thinking about that, and I thought that we are accustomed to the idea of Native Americans having land; we know they were here before, etc., so it makes it easier to understand why they should have some land back. But what about Blacks? Just because we never had it before doesn't mean we shouldn't get a chance to have it now. The fact of the matter is that anybody who opposes the Black state will say that most other national groups have got to have their own country, but you don't get to because you never had one before. Well, that's in violation of self-determination and that's a fundamental betrayal of revolutionary principles.

I do want to make mention of the class basis of racial oppression, that is, that it will remain as long as capitalism exists because the capitalists reap profits based on this racial oppression and they won't lead a fight to get rid of racist ideology which they invented to justify this exploitation in the first place. So when Blacks make a motion to free themselves of being exploited, by removing themselves as victims, they are going to attack the very foundations of capitalist power in this country — just by removing themselves, just by refusing to be a victim any more. That's the dynamic of Black liberation.

What's the question for the white allies? To support unconditionally the right of Blacks to separate, to self-determination without conditions. To encourage an understanding that the Black struggle needs to be independent of the capitalists. And most importantly, education of white workers. This is what Trotsky and Lenin constantly talked about. We should not be arguing against the tendency of Black people to have their own land or determine their own destiny. That is not what we should be addressing. We should be addressing the class oppression of white workers, but make no concessions to them whatsoever when they say, "Well, naturally Blacks shouldn't have their own country. That would create a problem for Black and white unity." What white workers are going to have a problem with that democratic right, that part of the unfinished task of the democratic revolution? It's not a socialist revolution yet, although only a socialist revolution can realize the granting of the right of a nation to secede. Capitalists can't do that.

We have to ask ourselves this question when we are considering the issue of self-determination: Whose side will we be on? What dynamic will we be reinforcing? Are we encouraging the backwardness of white

workers by saying it's really not necessary if it's going to interfere with unity between Black and white workers? When Lenin was having the same debate he said, "The close alliance between Swedish and Norwegian workers, their complete fraternal class solidarity, came from the Swedish workers' recognition of the right of Norwegians to secede. This convinced the Norwegian workers that the Swedish workers were not infected with Swedish nationalism and that they placed fraternity with the Norwegian proletarians above the privileges of the Swedish bourgeoisie and aristocracy." Lenin is saying that the only way you can have unity between two national groups is when the workers of the oppressor nationality unconditionally recognize the right of the oppressed nationality to secede. Also, if you don't do that, you're siding with the bourgeoisie. And that is not our position. We are in opposition to the bourgeoisie. So the position that we take has everything to do with the strategy for socialist revolution.

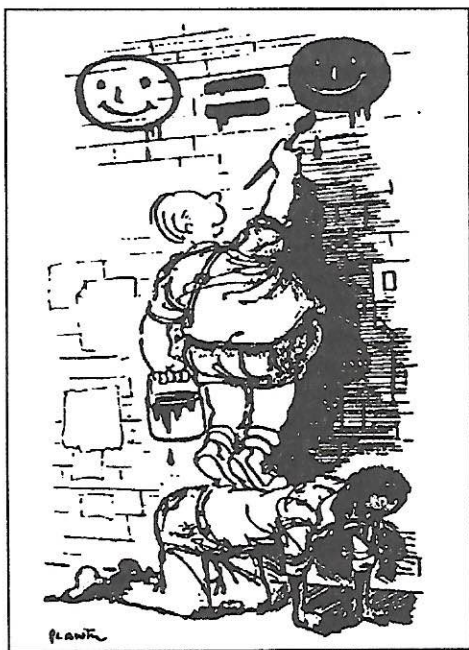
Rather than be concerned about what we tell Black workers about the right way to conduct their struggle, we should be concerned about educating the white workers. As Lenin said 70 years ago,

In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom of the oppressed [nations] to secede and their fighting for it. Without this there can be no internationalism. It is our right and duty to treat every Social Democrat of an oppressor nation who fails to conduct such propaganda as a scoundrel and an imperialist. This is an absolute demand, even when the chance of secession being possible and "practicable" before the introduction of socialism is only one in a thousand.

This racism will wither away in the same way that money, religion, and the state will gradually wither away in the transition toward communism. I think that Lenin sums up the revolutionary Marxist position best. He says,

By transforming capitalism into socialism the proletariat creates the possibility of abolishing national oppression. The possibility becomes reality "only" — "only"! — with the establishment of full democracy in all spheres, including the delineation of state frontiers in accordance with the "sympathies" of the population, including complete freedom to secede. And this in turn will serve as a basis for developing the practical elimination of even the slightest national friction and the least national mistrust, for an accelerated drawing together and fusion of nations that will be completed when the state withers away.

I think that Lenin would have really appreciated Malcolm X's succinct dialecticism: "Before we can have any Black and white unity, we have to have some Black unity." □



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Trotskyism and the Struggle for Black Liberation

by Peter Johnson

*Editor's Note: This contribution is part of a debate which has been featured in **Bulletin in Defense of Marxism** since December 1992. In a future issue Evelyn Sell will offer a defense of the perspectives on Black nationalism criticized by Peter Johnson. The debate up to this point includes articles by Evelyn Sell, Peter Johnson, Claire Cohen, Steve Bloom and Claire Cohen, Vera Wigglesworth and Jim Miles, and Roy Rollin. The titles of these articles and the issues of **BIDOM** in which they appeared are given in the article below, although the assessment of the course of the discussion is the author's. Interested readers can obtain each of the back issues mentioned from **Bulletin in Defense of Marxism** for \$2.00 each.*

The exchange on Black liberation in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* has provided an all too rare opportunity for serious, in-depth, comradely discussion among revolutionary Marxists on a key question of revolutionary strategy.



"Trotsky's...starting point was the imperative need for Trotskyists to overcome any difficulties and find a way to provide political leadership to the Black liberation struggle."

The discussion began with Evelyn Sell's article "How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed" (*BIDOM*, no. 101, December 1992). I added an element of controversy with my article "Revolutionary Integrationism and Black Liberation" (*BIDOM*, no. 103, February 1993), which took up the debate in the Socialist Workers Party in the 1950s and 1960s and defended Richard Fraser's "revolutionary integrationist" analysis of Black oppression and strategy for Black liberation against George Breitman's "revolutionary nationalist" view.

Three criticisms of my article have appeared since then: Claire Cohen's "Notes on the African American Struggle" (*BIDOM*, no. 104, March 1993), Steve Bloom and Claire Cohen's "In Defense of Black Nationalism: A Reply to Peter Johnson" (*BIDOM*, no. 105, April 1993), and Vera Wigglesworth and Jim Miles's "Marxism and Black Self-Determination: In Reply to Peter Johnson" (*BIDOM*, no. 106, May 1993). They were followed by Roy Rollin's defense of our shared revolutionary integrationist position in his article "Black Liberation and Socialist Revolution in Today's America: Movementism or Marxism?" (*BIDOM*, no. 107, June 1993).

In this article I want to reply to the criticisms of my article, focusing on what they have in common: denial of the need for multi-racial working-class unity and Trotskyist leadership in the combined, revolutionary struggle for socialism and Black liberation. Rollin's comprehensive reply to Bloom and Cohen's article and his critical review of SWP history make this much easier.

Cohen's "Notes on the African American Struggle"

Claire Cohen's "Notes on the African American Struggle" (*BIDOM*, no. 104, March 1993) criticizes my article from what can only be characterized as a reformist standpoint, although I know from her other writings and activity that she is a revolutionary socialist. Her objections begin with the first paragraph of my article, from which she extracts and slightly misquotes one sentence. My introductory sentences actually read:

Black liberation is a key strategic question of the American revolution. Next to the self-emancipation of the working class, it is the key question. If Black and white workers struggle together for socialism and Black liberation — under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party — they can win both. If they do not, they can win neither.

Cohen objects to this as "idealist" and explains:

The reality is much more complex than this simple statement. Racism is so pervasive and

entrenched in U.S. society that it is extremely naive to think that significant numbers of white workers are going to join the struggle for Black liberation any time soon. In addition, at this point in history, the masses of workers — Black or white — are not inclined to rally to the cause of socialism.

Cohen's criticism is somewhat ambiguous. She might mean, "Johnson is correct to link Black liberation and socialist revolution in the U.S., but the situation is complex, since many white workers are racist, and most workers, both white and Black, lack socialist consciousness." If so, I agree and said so in my article.

However, she seems more to mean, "Johnson is wrong to link Black liberation and socialist revolution, since many white workers are racist and most workers, both white and Black, lack socialist consciousness." If so, I disagree and reply with Trotsky that the starting point for revolutionaries must be the objective situation, what is historically necessary, not the current level of mass consciousness.

The program must express the objective tasks of the working class rather than the backwardness of the workers. It must reflect society as it is, and not the backwardness of the working class. It is an instrument to overcome and vanquish the backwardness...

Another question is how to present this program to the workers. It is a pedagogical task, a question of terminology in presenting the actual situation to the workers. [Leon Trotsky, in "The Political Backwardness of the American Workers," transcript of a discussion with Trotsky, May 19, 1938, in *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*, edited by George Breitman and Fred Stanton, third edition, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1977, pp. 155–6.]

The pedagogical task of building a bridge to the current consciousness of the vanguard and the mass of workers is important. But we must first know the actual situation: where the bridge must lead. Any other approach leads to opportunism.

“Under the Leadership of a Leninist Vanguard Party”

Cohen also objects to my phrase “under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party”:

There is also the question of precisely what Peter means by workers coming together “under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party.” Depending on what this means, it may be that I disagree...Only the masses can choose what kind of society they want or what kind of leaders they have confidence in. The masses may eventually choose socialism, but not choose a self-proclaimed “Leninist vanguard” to lead them, and still win a successful revolution...

African Americans are alienated when groups which they perceive as being basically white (including “Trotskyists”) presume to tell them what they should fight for, as if African Americans are unable to determine that for themselves. Only African Americans themselves can decide the nature and goals of their struggle.

Again, Cohen’s criticism is somewhat ambiguous. She might mean, “Black workers, as part of the working class, must emancipate themselves and will not pay much attention to tiny white, petty-bourgeois sects, even if they call themselves Trotskyist.” If so, I agree. The problem is to build a mass, multi-racial revolutionary working-class party.

However, Cohen seems more to mean, “Black workers on their own, without the leadership of a vanguard party, can determine the nature and goals of their struggle and carry out a successful socialist revolution.” If so, I disagree and reply with Lenin that the working class, Black or white, on its own cannot do this.

We have said that *there could not have been* Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade-union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc. The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophical, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. [V.I. Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, 1903, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, edited by Victor Jerome, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, p. 375, emphasis in original.]

Black liberation, like working-class emancipation, will come only through a socialist revolution in which Black and white workers, led by a Leninist-Trotskyist vanguard party, seize power and impose their rule through democratically elected workers’ councils. This does not mean Black and white workers led by white petty-bourgeois intellectuals. On the contrary, the vanguard party needs a large majority of workers and a disproportionately large number of Blacks. Moreover, many of its intellectuals will be from work-

ing-class backgrounds, and a disproportionately large number will be Black.

Reformism and Revolutionary Socialism

Cohen’s treatment of the Ron Daniels Campaign for a New Tomorrow heightens the impression that she rejects the Trotskyist view of program and party, that is, the revolutionary socialist perspective in general. She writes:

Asked about the program of Campaign for a New Tomorrow, [Daniels] stressed the need for a radical economic reconstruction and far-reaching social programs, involving “economic democracy” and “democracy in the marketplace,” and adding: “A model may not exist. We may have to create something. I’m not for nationalizing industries. I’d much rather see workers take them over and run them.”

She quotes Daniels:

“I articulate five basic human rights: First, a job with good wages and benefits. Full employment is a national responsibility, and government should be the employer of last resort. Second, quality housing for every human being in a safe and environmentally secure environment. Third, quality health care in a single-payer system. Fourth, education that offers a multicultural curriculum, social workers in schools, and well-paid teachers. Fifth, a sustainable environment...”

“Cut the military budget 50 to 75 percent. Raise money through a genuinely progressive tax system. Then provide a domestic Marshall Plan and rebuild our cities, rural areas, and the reservations where Native American people live. We accomplish economic conversion of the military and economic democracy.”

She concludes:

The program of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow suggests how the issues of race and class realistically can be interlinked — in a manner far superior to that suggested in Peter Johnson’s “Revolutionary Integrationism.”

If Cohen said merely, “We must go beyond the general perspective indicated in ‘Revolutionary Integrationism’ and develop a program of concrete transitional demands, including the ‘five basic human rights’ proposed by Ron Daniels,” I would agree and defend myself only by pointing out that such a program was beyond the scope of my brief article. Unfortunately, however, this is not what Cohen says. Instead, she characterizes the *approach* of the program of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow as “far superior” to the approach of my article.

The program of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow is unabashedly reformist, not revolutionary. In the interview Cohen quotes, Daniels describes himself as for “economic democracy” but “not for nationalizing industry.” However, without nationalizing industry there can be no socialism and no “economic democracy.”

In the interview Daniels says that he wants to “cut the military budget 50 to 75 percent.” In his main campaign flyer he said “50 percent.” But this would leave U.S. imperialism with ample firepower to devastate the next Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Iraq — or even Russia and the world. And it would leave American workers paying \$150 billion per year in current arms expenditures and \$200 billion in interest on the national debt for past arms expenditures.

Trotskyists should have given critical support to Ron Daniels in the November 1992 presidential election, not because of his reformist program but because his campaign in some localities represented a limited but important mass break from the capitalist parties. However, our support should have been very critical, since the program of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow is a utopian program for capitalist reform, not a transitional program for socialist revolution and Black liberation.

Bloom and Cohen’s “In Defense of Black Nationalism”

Steve Bloom and Claire Cohen’s “In Defense of Black Nationalism: A Reply to Peter Johnson” (*BIDOM*, no. 105, April 1993) is an improvement on Cohen’s article, because it attempts to place its criticism in a revolutionary framework. But it suffers from lack of clarity on the basic Marxist concepts of “nation” and “self-determination” and an objectivist view that Blacks somehow will find their way to revolutionary consciousness spontaneously, with Trotskyists acting only as their “outside allies.”

Bloom and Cohen complain that my attempt to provide a scientific definition of the concepts “nation” and “self-determination” is a “quibble over terminology.” This shows a dangerously light-minded approach to theoretical questions. As Lenin said, “Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement. This idea cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with infatuation with the narrowest forms of practical activity” (*What Is to Be Done?*, p. 369).

I took as my starting point Stalin’s classic definition of a nation in “Marxism and the National Question,” which both Lenin and Trotsky praised highly. Stalin defined a nation as follows:

A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. [Joseph Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” 1913, in *The Essential Stalin*, edited by Bruce Franklin, New York: Anchor Books, 1972, p. 60.]

Unable to find a single line in which Lenin or Trotsky in any way distanced themselves from Stalin’s historical-materialist definition of a nation, Bloom and Cohen seek support in a footnote in *The ABC of Communism* by

Nikolai Bukharin and Yevgeny Preobrazhensky. The book, which Bukharin and Preobrazhensky described as “an elementary textbook of communist knowledge,” defined a nation as follows:

A nation or a people is the name given to a group of persons who are united by the use of a common tongue and who inhabit a definite area. There are additional characteristics of nationality, but these two are the most important and the most fundamental.

Attached to this definition was the following footnote:

Long ago, the Jews inhabited a definite territory and possessed a common speech; today they have no territory, and many of them do not understand Hebrew. The gypsies have their own language, but they do not inhabit any definite territory. The non-nomadic Tunguses in Siberia have a territory, but they have forgotten their distinctive tongue. [N. Bukharin and E. Preobrazhensky, *The ABC of Communism*, 1919, edited by E.H. Carr, Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 241.]

Bloom and Cohen take this footnote to mean that Bukharin — and presumably co-author Preobrazhensky, whom they do not mention — had a more “flexible” definition of a “nation” than Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky...or me. They write: “The Jews, gypsies, and Tunguses are nations even though they lack either a common language, or territory, or both.”

Unfortunately, we must snip the thread from which they suspend their argument, since Bukharin and Preobrazhensky meant the opposite of what Bloom and Cohen think they meant. Bukharin and Preobrazhensky were attempting to summarize Bolshevik thinking in a popular form, not revise it. Their definition and footnote echoed the commonplace views of Lenin and other Bolsheviks, as, for example, in the following:

But the [Russian Jewish] Bund’s third argument, which invokes the idea of a Jewish nation, is undoubtedly of the nature of a principle. Unfortunately, however, this Zionist idea is absolutely false and essentially reactionary. “The Jews have ceased to be a nation, for a nation without a territory is unthinkable,” says one of the most prominent of Marxist theoreticians, Karl Kautsky (see No. 42 of *Iskra* and the separate reprint from *The Kishinev Massacre and the Jewish Question*, p. 3). [V.I. Lenin, “The Position of the Bund in the Party,” 1903, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 7, edited by Clemens Dutt, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965, p. 99.]

The later decision of the Soviet government to establish the Jewish autonomous region of Birobijan in 1928 might have allowed Russian Jews to develop as a nation, but very few chose to relocate there. The establishment of a Jewish settler state in Palestine in 1948 led to the development of the Israeli Jewish nation, but this does not make Jews in Russia or the U.S. a nation.

Fortunately, there is no need for a lengthy explication of the term “self-determination,”

because Bloom and Cohen concede that the SWP’s latter-1960s usage was not Lenin’s and Trotsky’s:

As far as “self-determination” is concerned, Johnson is technically right but still wrong on the substance of the matter. Marxist terminology, like anything else, can change under changing circumstances...

During the 1960s the Black community itself began to use the idea of “self-determination” as synonymous with “Black control of the Black community.” This was not a theoretical innovation of Breitman or the SWP, but merely the adoption of a new meaning for old terminology resulting from the evolution of a particular struggle. Would it have been better for the SWP to sit on the sidelines and lecture Blacks about the proper use of words?

Should Trotskyists have sat on the sidelines and lectured the Black movement about the proper use of words? No. Should we have sat on the sidelines, cheered the spontaneous Black struggle, and adapted to its inevitable confusion? No. Should we have attempted to intervene with our indispensable analysis, program and strategy? Yes.

“The Actual Dynamics of the Struggle”

Moving on, Bloom and Cohen correctly observe:

So the real question that needs to be addressed is not whether the SWP was sufficiently orthodox in its definitions when it made its turn toward Black nationalism during the 1960s, but whether that turn was right or wrong. And this takes us to the real substance of our disagreement with Johnson’s article.

They continue:

Whether or not the Black community in the U.S. is a nation in the strict scientific meaning of that term, and whether or not true “self-determination” in the Marxist sense of a separate Black state is possible, *the revolutionary struggle of Blacks to control their own communities, to shape their own destiny as a people, is, in these two respects, 100 percent analogous to the dynamics of national liberation as properly defined by Peter Johnson*. The campaign for “Black self-determination” as understood and defined by the Black community itself is both a basic struggle for democratic rights and human dignity of an oppressed people, and a fight which, if waged in a revolutionary manner (or if it is victorious even in part), can seriously weaken the U.S. ruling class. It is, therefore, a struggle which all working people in this country should encourage and support. [original emphasis]

Good. This is an important statement. Trotsky and the pre-1960s SWP saw the development of a revolutionary struggle for an independent Black state in the South as a potential channel for the struggle for Black liberation and a potential component of the struggle for socialism in the U.S. They said Trotskyists should support such a struggle if

it developed, although they should not advocate it. In fact, such a struggle did not develop and is extremely unlikely to develop, although Trotskyists still should support it if it did develop.

There is, however, an *analogy* between national liberation struggles and the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. Trotskyists must understand and pedagogically explain both the extent and the limit of this analogy. The extent of the analogy is that oppressed nations and racially oppressed American Blacks are struggling for the political power to end their oppression. The limit of the analogy is that in the case of American Blacks the right to secede and form a separate state is not the relevant form of this political power.

Black control of the Black communities is not the relevant form of this political power, either. As I indicated in my original article, Trotskyists should support most demands for Black community control, apart from those that strengthen the capitalist state or deepen the capitalist exploitation of Black workers, but we should understand and explain that community control is not enough. Too many decisions affecting the Black community are made and, because of the interdependent nature of a modern, industrialized economy and society, must be made outside the Black community.

The actual dynamic of the struggle for Black liberation is not the struggle for the right to secede from the U.S., nor the struggle for Black control of the Black community.

Rather, the actual dynamic is the combined, multiracial working-class struggle for socialist revolution and Black liberation, in which Black workers, taking advantage of their strategic position at the center of the industrial working class and most metropolitan areas, as well as their generally higher political consciousness, provide overall leadership to the working class and defend their interests both as workers and as Black people.

The Role of Trotskyists in the Black Liberation Struggle

The second main disagreement I have with Bloom and Cohen is over the role of Trotskyists in the struggle for Black liberation. The key passage in their article is the following:

If genuine working-class revolutionaries are going to forge a real alliance with genuine Black revolutionaries, our task is clearly to convince Blacks that we are not simply trying to use, manipulate, or sacrifice their struggles for our own ends, as so many have before us. And the only way we can do that is to unconditionally support whatever legitimate demands emerge from the Black community — up to and including the demand for a separate national state. That support cannot be half-hearted: “Yes, well, we acknowledge your democratic right to decide this, but we really think it is a bad idea.” No, it will have to be militant and wholehearted support: “If that is

what the Black community democratically determines, that is what we want, too, with all our heart and soul. And we will fight to the last drop of our own blood alongside of you if that is necessary to achieve your objectives." White workers, and revolutionaries, who think like that will prove that they are worthy of the trust and collaboration of the Black community.

There are three problems with this passage. First, it assumes that Trotskyists and other "genuine working-class revolutionaries" are *outside* the Black liberation struggle, trying to "forge a real alliance with genuine Black revolutionaries." But Black Trotskyists are "genuine Black revolutionaries," the most politically conscious part of the Black proletarian vanguard. Second, it assumes that Trotskyists should follow rather than lead the Black liberation struggle. On the contrary, Trotskyists, to the best of their ability, should lead the struggle for Black liberation. Finally, it reeks of liberal moralism. It portrays Trotskyists as white outsiders whose only role is to "unconditionally support whatever legitimate demands emerge from the Black community...to the last drop of their own blood" and thereby prove themselves "worthy of the trust and collaboration of the Black community."

How different this is from the attitude of Trotsky, who thought that supporters of the Fourth International should intervene actively in the Black struggle, putting forward their own analysis, program and strategy, as they would in any other struggle.

So far as I am informed, it seems to me that the CP's attitude of making an imperative slogan of it [national self-determination] was false. It was a case of the whites saying to the Negroes, "You must create a ghetto for yourselves." It is tactless and false and can only serve to repulse the Negroes. Their only interpretation can be that the whites want to be separated from them. Our Negro comrades can say, "The Fourth International says that if it is our wish to be independent, it will help us in every way possible, but that the choice is ours. However, I, as a Negro member of the Fourth, hold a view that we must remain in the same state as the whites," and so on. He can participate in the formation of the political and racial ideology of the Negroes. [Uncorrected transcript of a discussion with Trotsky, April 4, 1939, in Leon Trotsky *On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, edited by George Breitman, New York: Merit Publishers, 1972, p. 31.]

Trotsky's approach was highly sensitive to the problems the mainly white SWP would face in its intervention and rightly emphasized the critical role of the SWP's Black comrades in "the formation of the political and racial ideology of the Negroes." But his starting point was the imperative need for Trotskyists to overcome any difficulties and find a way to provide political leadership to the Black liberation struggle.

Wigglesworth and Miles' s "Marxism and Black Liberation"

Vera Wigglesworth and Jim Miles's "Marxism and Black Self-Determination: In Reply to Peter Johnson" (*BIDOM*, no. 106, May 1993) takes a very different approach from that of Cohen and Bloom. While Cohen and Bloom, following Breitman, revise traditional Marxist theory on the national question to fit the real situation of Blacks in the U.S., Wigglesworth and Miles attempt to revise reality to fit the traditional theory. But they come to the same conclusion: denying the necessity for multiracial working-class unity and Trotskyist leadership in the struggle for socialism and Black liberation.

Wigglesworth and Miles begin by stating their view of the concrete goals of the struggle for Black liberation as follows:

Yet the struggle for self-determination is what will place African Americans at the forefront of confrontations with the bourgeoisie. The other reasons that are often given — that Blacks have traditionally been the most militant fighters; that their condition of oppression means they have nothing to lose and have fewer illusions than whites; or that, being overwhelmingly proletarian in number as well as experiencing special oppression as Blacks, they are impelled to play a vanguard role — all these are true enough. But the coming fight of African Americans will not simply be for freedom from oppression, for equality, for equal opportunity. It will be a fight for political power to bring about, secure, and advance those aims.

Very good. But what kind of political power? Political power as a leading component of the proletarian ruling class of a unitary workers' state? Or political power in a separate Black nation-state? Wigglesworth and Miles are somewhat vague but appear to argue for independence:

As the capitalist economic crisis deepens, Black workers will certainly fight side by side with white workers to win certain particular demands. But Black people have something more on the agenda: a struggle to determine their own destiny that would encompass a fight for the means to secure that right — geographical boundaries, organization, and laws — with armed capabilities to defend and enforce them.

What would be the "geographical boundaries" of this state? Would the Black political power fortify the perimeters of the present urban ghettos? Would Blacks relocate to some other part of North America and establish state borders there? Either way, separation would weaken, not strengthen the position of Black workers. It would reduce their ability "to bring about, secure, and advance" their aims. Most Black workers know this and would decline the invitation.

How can Black workers win political power? Wigglesworth and Miles answer:

The first workers' councils will probably be Black, certainly led by Blacks and championing the interests not just of Black

unionized workers but the entire Black community. Thus it's the vanguard role of Black workers leading white workers in struggle and the successful conquest of political power by Black people that will insure the successful conquest of power by the U.S. working class as a whole.

The first sentence and the first part of the second sentence are true enough. But to say that "the successful conquest of political power by Black people...will insure the successful conquest of power by the U.S. working class as a whole" is to stand the matter on its head. On the contrary, the successful conquest of power by the U.S. working class as a whole will insure the conquest of political power by Black people.

This does not mean that Black workers should "wait" until white workers are ready to fight for Black liberation. But it does mean that Black workers need to do more than "fight side by side with white workers to win certain particular demands," that is, trade-union and other reforms. Black workers need to play their "vanguard role of...leading white workers in struggle" for the working class to win political power, build socialism, and, in the process, achieve Black liberation. Both socialism and Black liberation depend on this.

Having stated their positive position, Wigglesworth and Miles proceed to their criticism of my article. They begin with extensive quotations from Lenin defending the right of self-determination of nations, that is, state secession, culled from the 1970 International Publishers book *National Liberation, Socialism and Imperialism*. The quotations are a useful illustration of Lenin's method, but they are relevant only by analogy, since Black liberation is not a question of state secession.

More directly relevant would be quotations from the 1974 International Publishers book *Lenin on the Jewish Question*, containing Lenin's polemics against the Bund for falsely claiming that Jews in Russia were a nation, for pretending that the right of self-determination meant something other than the right to secede and form an independent state, for proposing "cultural national autonomy" (essentially, "community control") as a solution to Jewish oppression, and for demanding that the Bund, not the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party as a whole, represent Jewish workers in Russia. We will return to this below.

Wigglesworth and Miles Meet Stalin

Wigglesworth and Miles then attempt to prove that Black people in the U.S. are a nation in the traditional Marxist sense, whose oppression can be lifted only by exercising the right of self-determination, that is, the right to secede and form an independent state.

Needing to retreat from what Trotsky described as the "historico-materialist definition of nation" to a more "abstracto-psychological" one, they take an obligatory

potshot at Stalin's definition in "Marxism and the National Question." They quote out of context Trotsky's one criticism of Stalin's article, a criticism of its "structure of composition," wrongly implying that this is a criticism of its content. The full quotation follows:

The logical construction of the article, not devoid of pedantry, is due most likely to the influence of Bukharin, who inclined toward professorial ways, in distinction from Lenin, for whom the structure of a composition was determined by its political or polemical interest. Bukharin's influence did not go beyond that, since on the problem of nationalities he was much closer to Rosa Luxemburg than to Lenin. [Leon Trotsky, *Stalin: An Appraisal of the Man and His Influence*, 1940, edited by Charles Malamuth, New York: Stein and Day, 1967, p. 158.]

Having fired this volley, Wigglesworth and Miles bravely march on. They state the obvious when they say Blacks in the U.S. have a common language. That language is English. They go off the deep end, however, when they proclaim "a separate Black English language." They also state the obvious when they say Blacks in the U.S. have a common culture. But again, they go off the deep end when they say that this defines them as a nation. Black culture is an important component of U.S. American culture. As Fraser pointed out, it is in many ways the most original and defining element of U.S. American culture.

Wigglesworth and Miles state the obvious when they say "African Americans have always had a common territory, the U.S. itself." But so have all other U.S. Americans. As the Comintern, the CP/USA, Trotsky, and the SWP all recognized, the "black belt" South could have provided the territorial basis for the development of a Black nation, national consciousness, and an independent nation-state. But that did not happen. Instead, as Wigglesworth and Miles concede, the Black population "has shifted from the relatively contiguous rural South to the noncontiguous urban industrial ghettos." The Black ghettos are no more the territorial basis for a Black nation in the U.S. today than the Jewish ghettos were the basis for a Jewish nation in Russia in Lenin's day.

Wigglesworth and Miles outdo themselves when they describe the "common economic life" that supposedly defines the Black nation:

A common economic life, though dominated by the white institutions of capital, has always existed in the form of services providing a structure of support in local communities: medical care, schooling, churches, child care, funeral homes, insurance and banking, legal assistance, personal grooming, and entertainment.

To be sure, these services exist in the urban ghettos, although they are often provided by Jews, Arabs, or Asians, not Blacks. But the main "common economic life" of the Black

ghettos is to provide labor power to the capitalist economy outside the ghettos and to consume commodities produced outside the ghettos. The service industry in the ghettos is very much secondary, not the basis for a national political economy.

Wigglesworth and Miles are correct when they say that Blacks in the U.S. are an historically constituted, stable community of people. But the history that has constituted Blacks as a community is the history of slavery and racial oppression. Blacks are — to use the ungainly but serviceable term Kautsky and Lenin applied to Jews in Russia and then Fraser applied to Blacks in the U.S. — a "caste," in the case of Blacks in the U.S. a racial caste, discriminated against and forcibly segregated to the bottom of every class of which they are part.

"Changes of Position"

Wigglesworth and Miles object to my statement that by 1939 "Trotsky no longer held the CP/USA position of raising the slogan of national self-determination for the 'black belt' South. He agreed with [J.R.] Johnson's formulation." This is easy to prove, however. In his 1933 discussion with Arne Swabeck Trotsky said:

I can therefore see no reason why we should not advance the slogan of "self-determination."

...Because of all these reasons, I would in this question rather lean toward the standpoint of the [Communist] Party. [Uncorrected transcript of a discussion with Trotsky, February 28, 1933, in *Leon Trotsky On Black Nationalism and Self-Determination*, edited by George Breitman, New York: Merit Publishers, 1972, pp. 14-15.]

In his 1939 discussions with J.R. Johnson and other SWP leaders Trotsky said:

Comrade Johnson used three verbs: "support," "advocate" and "inject" the idea of self-determination. I do not propose for the party to advocate, I do not propose to inject, but only to proclaim our obligation to support the struggle for self-determination if the Negroes themselves want it...

So far as I am informed, it seems to me that the CP's attitude of making an imperative slogan of it [national self-determination] was false. [April 4, 1939 transcript, pp. 29, 31.]

The shift of position is clear. In 1933 Trotsky thought his cothinkers should "advance [that is, advocate] the slogan of 'self-determination'" and "lean[ed] toward the standpoint of the [Communist] Party." In 1939 he thought the SWP should not "advocate" self-determination and regarded the CP position as "false."

Wigglesworth and Miles also seem upset by my statement that "the SWP sharply revised its position in a nationalist direction" in the 1960s, unlike Bloom and Cohen, who seem quite comfortable admitting that the SWP "made its turn toward Black nationalism during the 1960s."

Wigglesworth and Miles attempt to trace the view that Blacks in the U.S. are a nation in an unbroken line back to Lenin by quoting a remark he made in passing that "In the United States, the Negroes...should be classed as an oppressed nation." Lenin, however, never took a definite position on whether Blacks in the U.S. were a nation or a race. For example:

In the Northern states Negro children attend the same schools as white children do. In the South there are separate "national," or racial, whichever you please, schools for Negro children. [V.I. Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question," 1913, in *Lenin, Collected Works*, vol. 20, edited by Julius Katzer, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972, p. 37.]

The first time the Comintern took a clear position on the question was the 1928 resolution which set the CP line discussed above.

As I pointed out in my first article, the SWP initially took an open position on the question of whether Blacks in the U.S. were a nation to which the slogan of self-determination would apply. The resolution "The Right of Self-Determination and the Negro in the United States of North America," drafted by J.R. Johnson and adopted at the SWP's July 14-, 1939, National Convention, supported the right of Blacks to form a separate state, if they wished to do so, but opposed the SWP's raising the slogan of self-determination until large numbers of Blacks began raising it themselves.

The 1948 SWP National Convention adopted a longer document, also drafted by J.R. Johnson, called "Negro Liberation through Revolutionary Socialism," which reaffirmed the 1939 perspective of a revolutionary integrationist struggle in the present and a possible revolutionary nationalist struggle in the future. The 1956 National Convention resolution asserted this yet again.

Theoretically, the profound growth of national solidarity and national consciousness among the Negro people might under certain future conditions give rise to separatist demands. Since minority people have 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. ["The Class-Struggle Road to Negro Equality," New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1957.]

These resolutions all differ sharply from the resolution "A Transitional Program for Black Liberation" adopted by the 1969 SWP National Convention, which called for, that

is, "advocated," Black national self-determination.

"Freedom to Secede, Freedom to Integrate"

From this point on, Wigglesworth and Miles's article collapses into complete confusion. Having argued that "advocating self-determination" was not a change in position from "not advocating self-determination," they then explain why "unfolding reality" justified the change.

Having argued that Black national self-determination meant an independent state ("geographical boundaries, organization, and laws — with armed capabilities to defend and enforce them"), they then defend the latter-1960s SWP view that Black national self-determination meant "Black control of the Black community." They explain their inconsistency by describing community control as "a transitional step toward a separate Black nation with or without contiguous borders, if African Americans so choose."

In the end, however, Wigglesworth and Miles adopt the same stance as Cohen and Bloom: Trotskyists should not attempt to lead the Black struggle.

Rather than being concerned, as Johnson is, about "what we tell Black workers," our main task is educating white workers, since it is for this sector that the most distance must be traveled along the road of class solidarity.

They follow this with half a quotation from Lenin:

In the internationalist education of the workers of the oppressor countries, emphasis must necessarily be laid on their advocating freedom for the oppressed countries to secede and their fighting for it. Without this there can be no internationalism...

But they distort Lenin's point by omitting the other half of the quotation:

On the other hand, a Social-Democrat from a small nation must emphasize in his agitation the *second* word of our general formula: "voluntary *integration*" of nations. He may, without failing in his duties as an internationalist, be in favor of *both* ["either...or" would be a better translation — PJ] the political independence of his nation and its integration with the neighboring state of X, Y, Z, etc. But in all cases he must fight *against* small-nation narrow-mindedness, seclusion and isolation, consider the whole and the general, subordinate the particular to the general interest. [V.I. Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up," 1916, in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 22, edited by George Hanna, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964, pp. 346–7, emphasis in original]

Wigglesworth and Miles, like Cohen and Bloom, do not see Trotskyists as leaders of

the struggle for Black liberation, who *must* be concerned about "what we tell Black workers."

The "Bundism" of the 1960s SWP

The SWP's "nationalist turn" began formally with the decision of the 1963 National Convention to alter the SWP's view of its relationship to the Black liberation movement.

The 1939 discussions between Trotsky and J.R. Johnson and the other SWP leaders took up Johnson's proposal for a Black transitional organization. The conclusions of that discussion were incorporated into the resolution "The SWP and Negro Work" adopted by the 1939 National Convention.

The SWP, therefore, proposes that its Negro members, aided and supported by the party, take the initiative and collaborate with other militant Negroes in the formation of a Negro mass organization devoted to the struggle for Negro rights. *This organization will NOT be either openly or secretly a periphery organization of the Fourth International.* It will be an organization in which the masses of Negroes will be invited to participate on a working-class program corresponding to the day-to-day struggles of the masses of Negro workers and farmers. Its program will be elaborated by the Negro organization, in which Negro members of the Fourth International will participate with neither greater nor lesser rights than other members. But the SWP is confident that the position of the Negroes in American society, the logic of the class struggle in the present period, the superior grasp of politics and the morale of members of the Fourth International, must inevitably result in its members exercising a powerful influence in such an organization. ["The SWP and Negro Work," 1939, in *The Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions 1938–39*, edited by George Breitman, New York: Monad Press, 1982, p. 359, emphasis in original.]

The Black transitional organization was to be a mass organization independent of the SWP in which Black SWP members would put forward their ideas and proposals and attempt to win leadership on that basis, as Trotskyists would in the unions, a labor party, and, eventually, soviets.

In 1963 the SWP effectively shifted to the "Bundist" view that whites and Blacks need separate political parties, including vanguard parties. From this standpoint, the SWP was not a competitor for political leadership in a mass, militant Black organization but an "outside ally."

Having united their own forces, the independent Negro movement will then probably undertake the tasks of division and alliance. It will seek ways to split the white majority, so that the Negro disadvantage of being a

numerical minority can be compensated for by division and conflict on the other side...

The general alliance between the labor movement and the Negro fighters for liberation can be prepared for and preceded by the cementing of firm working unity between the vanguard of the Negro struggle and the socialist vanguard of the working class, represented by the Socialist Workers Party. ["Freedom Now: The New Stage in the Struggle for Negro Emancipation and the Tasks of the SWP," 1963]

The problems with the SWP's "national turn" on the Black question in the U.S. are essentially the same as the problems with the "nationalism" of the General Jewish Workers Union of Lithuania, Poland and Russia (the "Bund"), against which Lenin polemicized from 1903 through the dissolution of the Bund in 1921. The arguments against the SWP position are essentially the same, too.

First, Blacks in the U.S. are not a nation. They are an historically constituted, stable community of people, but they are a racial "caste," not a nation. They do not have the material basis of a common language, territory, economic life and culture, and a corresponding national consciousness, distinguishing them from the rest of the U.S. population. The right of national self-determination, that is, state secession, is not the solution to Black oppression.

Second, if Blacks in the U.S. were a nation, Black control of the Black communities — the equivalent of the Bund's "cultural-national autonomy" — would not liberate them. The right of self-determination means the freedom to secede and establish an independent state.

Third, Black separatism behind fortified ghetto walls or on a distant reservation or "homeland" somewhere in North America would isolate Black workers from the rest of the U.S. working class, deny them their vanguard role in the struggle for socialism, weaken their ability to win equality, and reinforce Jim Crow "separate but equal" segregation.

Finally, division of the proletarian vanguard into Black and white vanguard parties would fatally weaken it and prevent it from leading the revolutionary struggle for socialism and Black liberation, especially if only the white party is assumed to be Trotskyist.

After the SWP's nationalist detour of the 1960s, Trotskyists today must reassert the elementary truth about revolution in the U.S. with which I began my first article: "If Black and white workers struggle together for socialism and Black liberation — under the leadership of a Leninist vanguard party — they can win both. If they do not, they can win neither." □

June 2, 1993

Question and Answer

Is Permanent Revolution Applicable in the World Today?

Letter from a Reader

I have a question about permanent revolution and its application today. But first let me summarize my understanding of this concept to make sure that I am defining my terms accurately.

- Permanent revolution means that any state or nation, regardless of its economic or political level of development, to have a successful democratic revolution requires the working class to be in the vanguard (supported by others, such as the peasantry) and the dominant force in the new state power. The nation need not go through a stage where the bourgeoisie holds governmental power.
- Such a revolution will be compelled to begin to take up socialist tasks, due to the pressures naturally arising both from the working-class base of the new state power and from the counterrevolution. If it does not take up such tasks, in essence skipping over the bourgeois-democratic stage, it will fail.
- A successful revolution along these lines in any nation or state will be a compelling force stimulating revolutionary upsurges of the working masses in surrounding states. A “domino effect” will ensue.
- Finally, if the revolution does not spread in this way, it will also be defeated. “Socialism in one country” is impossible.

These ideas make sense to a large degree. Actually, to me it seems as if permanent revolution flows from one side of the class struggle in much the same way as the spread of imperialism does from the other side. In fact, we might say that imperialism forged the “network” through which permanent revolution could travel.

But today we are faced with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries, the hiatus of the Nicaraguan revolution, setbacks in El Salvador and Guatemala, and a severe crisis in Cuba. So my question is: How can a process of permanent revolution take place as long as the international corporate caucus, backed by U.S. military power, is willing to do anything it has to do to crush any revolution that threatens to move in this direction?

History is clear on this. They will *allow* a revolution to happen — up to a point. Indeed, it may even serve their purposes. When the leadership of some smaller nation becomes an embarrassment, or simply ineffective — as in the Philippines or South Africa — they are willing to allow a certain level of independent mass activity to change things, as

long as the “free market” continues to dominate, since that in turn guarantees the domination of rich nations over poorer ones.

But let the unrestricted power of “free enterprise” be threatened — whether from an elected government as in Allende’s Chile or from a revolutionary one as in Nicaragua — and the hammer falls. I see nothing in the world today that can combat the fact of U.S./European/Japanese economic and military power.

Sure, if the revolution happens in the U.S. or Europe I can see the process spreading laterally and downward. But otherwise? No, it seems that the question of permanent revolution is moot.

I would appreciate getting your comments on this.

Jack Bresée
Springfield, Missouri

Steve Bloom Replies

The question you pose is an extremely important one. It is being asked by many revolutionary activists today — especially in the less developed countries — given the profound changes which have taken place on the international scene over the last decade or so. During the 1960s and ’70s, when the Soviet Union (and to a lesser extent China) represented a counter-pole to imperialism (even if only in a distorted way) that was willing (even if inadequately) to give military, economic, and political support to peoples struggling against imperialist domination, “socialist” (more precisely “permanent”) revolution in the Third World seemed like a much more practical prospect than it does today.

I would say that your statement of what permanent revolution is all about is basically accurate as far as it goes. Of course there are many aspects that cannot be covered in a short summary. The only question I would raise is with your formulation about the effect of a revolution in one country on its neighbors. Rather than saying that it “will be a compelling force stimulating revolutionary upsurges of the working masses in surrounding states” I would tend to say that it “could be” such a force, or perhaps that it will be a force and, in some cases, a compelling or decisive one. As we know from long experience, revolutions can never be traced to a single cause. They are stimulated by a whole complex of interacting forces converging in an exceptional way.

I would also take this international component of permanent revolution one step fur-

ther than you do in your last thesis. Not only will any individual revolution in any individual country fail if it does not spread to surrounding states, it will ultimately fail even if it does spread to its neighbors *but does not succeed in overturning the rule of imperialism on a world scale*. This prediction of permanent revolution is being demonstrated in a most dramatic fashion by the crisis in the former USSR today. In 1917 no Bolshevik would have predicted the survival of the Soviet Union for even 10 or 20 years had they known that the international revolution they believed they were starting would fail to overturn capitalism in Germany and the other imperialist powers.

They were wrong, however. Despite this failure, the USSR maintained itself for 70 years — albeit in a distorted, bureaucratized form. But in the end, the failure of the Russian revolution to spread to the imperialist countries has led to the breakup of the former Soviet Union and a profound crisis. There remain only two possible resolutions to that crisis, the same ones predicted by the theory of permanent revolution in 1917: either a renewed revolutionary upsurge of the Russian working class, opening up a real possibility for a revitalization of the revolutionary working class movement in the rest of the world, or else a complete and decisive return to capitalist market relations in Russia and the other republics.

So it is essential to keep in mind that the theory of permanent revolution derives its name from both a domestic reality in any specific country which is undergoing a process of social transformation, and also from this international reality. In an individual, relatively backward country the revolution is “permanent,” as you explain, in the sense that it cannot satisfy itself with giving power to the domestic capitalist class, hoping that this will somehow solve the remaining bourgeois-democratic tasks. The working class must take power directly and proceed, from the outset, to combine democratic and socialist measures to one degree or another. Internationally the revolution must be “permanent” because it cannot stop until the working class is also in power in at least the major imperialist countries.

How, then, does all of this relate to the problem you pose? Essentially, it underlines the necessity for a global vision. Once we have that vision, we can begin to see a road out of the present impasse that you describe.

If one asks only: “How am I to make the revolution in El Salvador, or the Philippines, or even Brazil?” there is simply no answer to the question. By itself a revolutionary power in any one of these states could not “combat the fact of U.S./European/Japanese economic and military power.” Had the Bolsheviks in 1917 asked only: “How can we succeed in making a revolution in Russia?” they would have been faced with precisely the same dilemma.

But if we pose the question in a slightly different fashion, a fashion suggested by the

international aspect of permanent revolution, then a possibility presents itself. Revolutionaries in El Salvador, the Philippines, and Brazil have to ask themselves the same question that the Bolsheviks actually did when they made the revolution in Russian: Is it possible that we, in our country, can take an initial step, thereby starting a world revolutionary process that can culminate in changing the present "fact of U.S./European/Japanese economic and military power"?

To answer that question in the affirmative, to say: "Yes, this is possible," does not mean that anyone can guarantee success. There are, certainly, circumstances in which small revolutions in small countries may not be able to survive, where the working class, even if it is able to take power, will be unable to hold onto it even if it does everything right. But just as it would be wrong to act on the assumption that victory is assured if only there is a "correct leadership" (a common misconception of sectarians who want to blame every setback on someone's "misleadership,") it would be just as wrong to act on the basis that victory is excluded as the international relationship of forces now stands. Whether any individual "small" revolution ends in victory or defeat can only be determined by a process of struggle — against domestic counterrevolution and imperialism. History has shown that it is possible to take on the imperialist colossus and win. And, perhaps most important, *there remains no other road to genuine independence in the Third World today.*

Imperialism has always been and will always be "willing to do anything it has to do to crush any revolution." What changes in the equation is not the willingness of imperialism to act in a reactionary way but its ability to do so. And the key factor limiting imperialism's ability to crush revolutions is the international solidarity of working people and the oppressed, which in turn gets a big boost from every successful revolution — even in small or "backward" countries. What happened in the 1960s around the struggle of the Vietnamese people is an obvious example of this dynamic.

Thus the continued struggle for even such "small" revolutions, if pursued from the perspective of mobilizing international working class solidarity, *can, in and of itself,* become a decisive factor in the ability of the revolution to find the necessary solidarity and thereby survive.

If the imperialist power you speak of is permanent and unchanging (or even if it is unchallengeable and completely entrenched for the next half-century or so) then, as you say, "the question of permanent revolution is moot" at least during this period of entrenchment. And in that case the only alternative becomes the one that you hint at — fighting simply for whatever social reforms the imperialists are willing to accept, refusing to cross the line that will bring about intervention.

But I do not accept such a prognosis, because parallel to the crisis of the so-called "socialist" world, there is also a profound crisis of capitalism and imperialism today. There is no reason to believe that "U.S./European/Japanese economic and military power" is unchallengeable and firmly entrenched for the next 50 years, even for the next 10-20. Despite the facade of strength and invulnerability that it presents to the world today, that power is teetering on the edge of an abyss.

Of course, teetering on the edge of an abyss is not the same thing as falling in. In order for the economic and social crisis of imperialism, which is real enough, to threaten its ability to maintain an ideological, political, and military domination over the world — that is, before it can actually fall into the abyss — it has to receive a push. That push can only come from the growth of mass protest by the working class and other oppressed people throughout the world.

It is, of course, possible that such a development of mass protest will arise first within the imperialist nations themselves. If this happens, and if it is strong enough to overthrow, or even to seriously challenge, the power of the imperialist bourgeoisie, then it would, as you suggest, solve in passing the problems confronting revolution in the Third World. But isn't it also possible that a renewal of revolutionary activity by the masses in the colonial and semicolonial countries could be an important, even decisive, factor in transforming the present world capitalist economic crisis into a political crisis? Couldn't it be a force for stimulating resistance and struggle by the masses in the imperialist countries? And if that is possible, doesn't it raise at least a question mark over your statement that permanent revolution is moot?

In fact, if we think about it, we might cite the downturn in the colonial revolution during the 1980s as one important factor that helped create our present predicament. Until the beginning of the last decade not a single ten-year period had gone by since World War II without some advance for permanent revolution in the world. In the 1940s there were social transformations in Eastern Europe and China. The 1950s saw victories in North Vietnam and Cuba. During the '60s the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese against U.S. imperialism in the South captured the imagination of people around the globe; the revolution in Cuba made giant strides and had a profound impact on the thinking of millions in Latin America and around the world. In the 1970s the Vietnamese won their decisive victory over the U.S. and revolutions took place in Nicaragua and Grenada.

But during the 1980s this process of permanent revolution on an international scale began to be reversed. The revolution in Grenada was overthrown. Nicaragua was severely undermined by U.S. sanctions and the

contra war. El Salvador's civil war never captured world attention as the Vietnamese did, probably because no imperialist troops were directly involved, and now it has been ended on terms less than favorable for the revolutionary forces. Cuba has been isolated and is under increasing attack.

During the 1960s Che Guevara called for "two, three, many Vietnams." For a time it appeared that things were headed in that direction, and each success reinforced those that had come before, as well as stimulating new struggles. But the ability of imperialism to weather this storm, and then to reverse the process during the 1980s, has had precisely the opposite effect.

No one can say for sure that an anti-imperialist victory in a Third World country today would be enough to turn this situation around — putting international solidarity and a rise of social struggles back on the agenda in other parts of the world. But it is certainly possible that something along these lines could happen. One might even say that it is likely given the real global economic and social crisis that the imperialist system faces. This is especially true if a revolution were successful in Brazil, or Mexico, or South Korea — with their substantial working classes and productive resources. But it would also seem to be a reasonable strategy for revolutionaries in less developed countries.

So, if we think of permanent revolution strictly in terms of what it means for any particular nation, assuming the continued invulnerability of imperialism on a world scale, then your conclusion is accurate. If, however, we understand permanent revolution in its international aspect — appreciating that the relationship between imperialist nations and Third World revolutions is not unilinear, but rather a complex interaction of contradictory forces — then it is possible to project a different scenario.

Just as there is no guarantee of victory for working class revolution in any individual country, there is also no guarantee of success for any individual strike or other mass struggle for immediate or democratic demands. But revolutionaries consistently urge people to begin to struggle nonetheless, even when conditions for victory might seem to be unfavorable. We do so because we know that when people begin to struggle, unfavorable conditions can be transformed. Only if the world revolutionary upsurge begins again, whether in one or several countries, can there be any *possibility* of success. Someone, somewhere, has to be bold enough to take the next step forward, understanding that if they do, that very act can change the entire relationship of international forces which, on the surface, appears to make revolution impossible today.

Steve Bloom
New York, NY

Kendra Alexander, Committees of Correspondence Leader

by Barry Sheppard

Kendra Alexander, a leader of the Committees of Correspondence on both the national level and in Northern California, died in an accidental fire in her home in Berkeley, California on May 23. Because of the central and unifying role she played, her loss will be felt throughout the CoCs.

Kendra had been a leader of the Communist Party until its convention in December, 1991. Leading up to that gathering, differences had developed in the CP over the events in the former Soviet bloc. As Angela Davis explained in her eulogy for Kendra at a memorial service in Oakland, Calif., it became clear to a section of the CP that there were serious problems with political and economic democracy in the former Soviet Union and East Europe. (See "Revolutionary Socialists and the Committees of Correspondence" by Alex Chis and Malik Miah, *BIDOM* #105, p. 16, for information on the political development of the CoCs.) In March of 1992, Kendra helped lead Northern California Communists to leave the CP and to join in forming the CoCs. Kendra was elected as one of five national co-chairpersons at the CoC founding conference.

I first met Kendra in her home last September, when I raised with her the desire of people who had founded Independent Politics to join the CoCs and help to build it through discussion and activist work. Most of us had come from the Trotskyist tradition, and we knew there were others who had the same origin, such as Peter Camejo, who were already members and leaders of the CoCs.

Kendra welcomed our participation. In the course of working to build the Committees, I began to learn some things about her.

One was that she was completely committed to holding a free and open discussion

in the Committees. She helped see to it that all opinions were heard and reflected on leadership bodies and in assignments.

She said on more than one occasion that she herself was overcoming anti-democratic or "verticalist" practices found in the CP (something all of us who came from different traditions have to deal with also to one degree or another).

At the same time, she was concerned that some groups, including some who claim to be Trotskyist, appeared to have joined the CoCs as a raiding operation. She knew these groups weren't really trying to help build the CoCs whatever their political viewpoint, but she was wary of taking any measures that could have the effect or even the appearance of limiting the discussion.

She also didn't claim to have all of her own political positions worked out. She was a real participant in the unfolding discussion that is beginning in the CoCs nationally and locally about what kind of organization it should be.

A major concern she had was the need to reach youth, especially African-American youth and other people of color, if the CoCs were to consolidate and become viable. She knew there were no easy answers, but kept this necessity in the forefront.

In the brief time I knew her, I had many occasions to go over to her house. The door was almost always unlocked, and the house was used for all sorts of meetings. She and her husband, Franklin, always were friendly, warm and hospitable. If you were hungry, you could always get something, and if you were there at mealtimes, you would be invited to enjoy some of Franklin's excellent cooking.

Like many of her generation of African Americans, Kendra's first political activity

was in the civil rights movement. As a teenager, she worked with the Congress on Racial Equality during the Freedom Summer of 1965, fighting to integrate lunch counters and register Black voters in Jonesboro, Louisiana.

Returning to Southern California, where she grew up, she enrolled at Los Angeles State College. There she joined the DuBois Clubs, a socialist youth organization associated with the Communist Party. She joined the CP, and helped form the Che-Lumumba Club of Black revolutionary activists in South Central Los Angeles.

Recently she stated that she became a communist because she became convinced that Black liberation could only be won through socialism. This was true of others who joined different socialist groups. Another who joined the CP, after being recruited by Kendra, was Angela Davis.

Alexander and Davis traveled to Cuba together as part of the Venceremos Brigade in 1969 to work on the huge effort to harvest 10 million tons of sugarcane.

When Angela Davis became the victim of the famous government frame-up on murder and conspiracy charges, Kendra moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to head the defense effort. The campaign to free Davis established Kendra in the party ranks as a leader. She was elected to the CP National Committee in 1972, and became Organizational Secretary of the Bay Area District in 1973.

At a recent press conference, Kendra said, "I do not regret that I belonged to the Communist Party nor do I regret that I left it. The struggle to make our country a better place to live will always remain my life's work."

Unlike many who go through negative experiences in one socialist group or another, Kendra did not become cynical or disillusioned. She remained a communist with a small "c" as she helped launch the new project of the CoCs.

I regret that I knew her for such a short time, but am grateful for the time I did. □

Carl Feingold (1928-1993)

Carl Feingold was born on June 13, 1928, in Los Angeles, California, and died April 6, 1993, ending a life devoted to the struggle for the socialist future of society. A longtime friend, Myra Tanner Weiss, has recalled: "Carl began his political activities in 1946 by taking two Los Angeles high schools on strike in protest against the speaking schedule of the fascist demagogue Gerald L.K. Smith. He was promptly expelled from school, but won his reinstatement after a few days of protest. He was active in the Socialist Workers Party of Los Angeles until the mid-1950s, when he was sent to Minneapolis to help the Twin Cities branches, and then to New York in the early

1960s." In 1962 he ran for U.S. Senate on the SWP ticket.

In a lengthy interview with another friend, Todd Ensign, Feingold described how he always felt an affinity for such prominent SWPers as James P. Cannon, V.R. Dunne, Murry Weiss, and Myra Tanner Weiss, but that by 1964 he felt demoralized and dropped out of the SWP. In later years he was active in various other political groups, including the International Socialists and Workers Power, where he was closely associated with Steve Zeluck.

In this interview, Feingold commented: "We didn't accomplish our long-term goals.

In my early years, I was certain we could have a socialist revolution in this country in my lifetime. I remember that at one critical point I decided that I would keep working at this, even though it might not happen in my lifetime.... The truth is, I really hate the system we live under. I still hate capitalism. I have never been able to accept the poverty and the injustice that it created. I hated its racism. I was so alienated from ordinary society, I couldn't live in it unless I felt I was doing something that might help do away with it.... I don't have any regrets because I tried to do the best I could." □

Irving Howe (1920–1993)

Editors' Note: Given Irving Howe's importance as an intellectual force on the U.S. Left, we are pleased to publish this obituary submitted by one of our readers. Robert J. Alexander is author of *International Trotskyism, Communism in Latin America, and many other studies*. His articles have appeared in numerous publications, including *Dissent* and the *New Leader*. A different assessment of socialist politics in the 1930s can be found in James P. Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, chapters 6 and 7; a different assessment of Howe's politics can be found in accompanying comments by Paul Le Blanc.

by Robert J. Alexander

Irving Howe was one of the principal literary critics of his generation. But he was also one of the leading critics of the U.S. economy, society, and polity. I don't feel myself qualified to comment on Irving's status as a literary critic, but perhaps I can do so on his role as a political critic and activist.

During most of his adult life, Irving Howe was an "independent radical." However, in his teens, starting at age 14, he belonged to the Young People's Socialist League, the youth organization of the Socialist Party. He rose to be one of the important secondary leaders of the YPSL in New York City, when I was a leader of the YPSL at Columbia University.

We both participated during the 1930s in the internal struggle in the Socialist Party against the so-called Old Guard, which had dominated the party since the exit of the Communists right after World War I. But in his later years, Irving admitted that on the major ideological issues of that struggle — the nature of the Soviet Union and of the Communists — the Old Guard had been more correct than their "Militant" opponents, a judgment in which I concur.

The first time I became acutely aware of Irving was when he, to my consternation, aligned himself with the Trotskyists in the YPSL, against the so-called "Clarity Caucus" to which I belonged. He became one of the YPSL "natives" (as the Trotskyists called those who had belonged to the SP and YPSL before they entered) who joined the Trotskyists when they left the SP in 1937 to form the Socialist Workers Party and the YPSL—Fourth International.

Subsequently, he joined the Shachtmanites in the 1940 split in the SWP. [The organization which Max Shachtman led was first called the Workers Party; in 1949 it changed its name to the Independent Socialist League; and in 1958 it dissolved into the Socialist Party. — *Editors*.] Howe became editor of the Shachtmanite newspaper *Labor Action*, but was subsequently in the U.S. armed forces for four years during World War II. Upon returning

Continued on next page

by Paul Le Blanc

Irving Howe had a different meaning for me than for Robert J. Alexander. He was a moderate-leftist social and literary critic who often wrote thoughtfully, humanely, and well (not surprisingly, since his literary models were the great essayists Edmund Wilson and George Orwell). Some of his best work is collected in the 1961 volume *Politics and the Novel*. But above all, for me he was an ex-revolutionary — and, when push came to shove, anti-revolutionary. In his 1978 study *Leon Trotsky* (neither the worst nor the best book on the subject), Howe noted that since his "brief youthful experience" under Trotsky's political influence, "I have found myself moving farther and farther away from his political ideas." The truth of this is documented in his interesting memoir *A Margin of Hope* (1982) and his collected political essays *Steady Work* (1966), from which I draw the quotes that follow.

For Howe his own brief but intense involvement with Trotskyism

was a school in both politics and life, and much of what we know, both good and bad, we learned there. It made us sensitive to the decay and brutality of the modern world. It taught us to look upon social problems in terms extending beyond local or even national interests. It imbued us with an intense fascination for the idea of history... It trained us to think on our feet...

In the decade following the 1940 split from the Socialist Workers Party, however, Howe increasingly distanced himself from the perspectives of Trotsky and Lenin, and by 1960 he no longer considered himself a Marxist.

In particular, he had given up on the idea that the working class would overturn capitalism — although he feared, in the Cold War years of the 1950s and '60s, that perhaps Stalinist-led Communist Parties might do so. He and his co-thinkers around the magazine *Dissent* developed a position of "conditional support of the West," hoping that they might be able "to influence — however slightly — the foreign policy of what remained a capitalist power," the U.S. government. In this period, he later confessed, "we yielded too readily to the assumption that the United States government, or some of its agencies, 'could not possibly' frame up dissidents or provoke violence through informers; we un-

derestimated the extent to which the FBI and CIA were eroding freedoms." The viciousness of the capitalist state in defending the bourgeois *status quo* was even more obvious in the anti-revolutionary foreign policy to which Howe offered "conditional support," and this expensive foreign policy fatally undermined the domestic social reforms which he favored.

Howe and those around him advanced the notion that "democratic socialists" should help to build a liberal-labor-civil rights coalition inside the Democratic Party, a moderate precursor of the Rainbow Coalition. He described this as "the Fabian gradualism of the social-democracy... a politics devoted to incremental reform even while claiming a utopian vision." He argued that if this could sometimes be "boring" — negotiating for better social security can hardly be as exciting as storming the Winter Palace [i.e., the working-class socialist revolution of the Bolsheviks in 1917] — the alternative is likely to be murderous." Nonetheless, he mused, "often *Dissent* must have seemed anxious, disturbed, even boring," particularly to those who did not equate revolutionary socialism with murder.

Howe and other *Dissent* editors alienated many radicals and socialists because of their initial equivocations on the truly murderous U.S. aggression in Vietnam. Judging the U.S.-backed dictatorship in South Vietnam to be a "lesser evil" to Communism, they opposed those in the antiwar movement who favored an immediate, unconditional U.S. withdrawal. "By the mid-sixties," he wrote, "we had concluded that the most to be hoped for was a negotiated truce enabling American troops to leave Vietnam and delaying somewhat the impending communist victory."

Howe was a fierce critic of those to his left who opposed his accommodation to U.S. imperialism and his hopeful view that "welfare state" capitalism might painlessly, "incrementally" evolve into socialism. A 1954 essay attacking so-called "Authoritarians of the Left" targeted Paul Sweezy of *Monthly Review*, left-wing muckraker I.F. Stone, Trotsky's biographer Isaac Deutscher, and what he called "the 'orthodox' Trotskyist groups." The leftward evolution of the bril-

Continued on next page

Le Blanc

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liant radical sociologist C. Wright Mills was similarly characterized in 1960 as a “scandalous” shift to “the authoritarian left.” Howe also emphasized that he had “little admiration” for those intellectuals of his own generation who were “swept away by their outrage over the Vietnam war” and who felt “the rekindling of old Marxist sentiments they had supposed would never be put to use.”

All of these were targets in his classic polemic “New Styles of ‘Leftism,’” as were — especially — “new left” activists of the 1960s such as myself. A significant target in the same essay was the recently slain Malcolm X, whom Howe had heard “at a Trotskyist-sponsored meeting.” Impressed by what he saw as “the formidable sterility of his speech,” Howe explained:

For Malcolm, intransigent in words and

nihilistic in reality, never invoked the possibility or temptations of immediate struggle; he never posed the problems, confusions, and risks of maneuver, compromise, retreat. Brilliantly Malcolm spoke for a rejection so complete it transformed him into an apolitical spectator...

For many of us, Irving Howe’s reformism did indeed represent “maneuver, compromise, retreat.” The utter rejection of this kind of politics by such figures as Malcolm X and Leon Trotsky caused some to look more carefully at the powerful ideas of these revolutionaries. Rather than creating apolitical spectators, a commitment to such ideas helped to generate tremendous activity that tilted U.S. politics much further to the left than could be done by all the “incremental” efforts of Howe and his influential social-democratic associates.

Also worthy of note was Howe’s initial hostility to the women’s liberation movement, dramatically demonstrated in an ill-tempered attack on the alleged “Middle Class Mind of Kate Millett” in a 1970 issue of a not particularly proletarian magazine, *Harpers*. Yet in his later years he drew back from this anti-feminist stance, and he partially reversed his rightward drift. For all his accommodation to capitalist politics, he never quite lost the belief that “the common workers can gradually arise to articulation and authority,” establishing their collective, democratic control over society’s economic life — which is socialism. But on the question of how to achieve this goal, Howe was never able to offer a perspective that had the cogency or dynamism of the revolutionary Marxism which he abandoned long ago. □

Alexander

Continued from previous page

from the war, he resumed his activity with the Shachtmanites.

However, a few years later he disagreed with the position of the ISL, on just what issue I don’t recall. At a meeting of the Politburo of the ISL, where he was clearly in the minority, and was being all but ignored, after he had argued his position Irving is reported to have commented to one of those supporting his position, “It’s as if we weren’t here.”

Soon after this, Irving quit the Shachtmanites. From then on, so far as I know, he did not belong to any radical organization, until the 1970s, when he joined Mike Harrington’s Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee. [When DSOC later merged with the New American Movement to form Democratic Socialists of America, Howe was also a member of that group. — Eds.]

Soon after quitting the Shachtmanites, Irving Howe and his friends launched *Dissent*. It remained, and remains, a democratic socialist quarterly, open to a wide range of left-wing opinion, and certainly the most distinguished periodical of its kind. I can attest from personal experience that as an editor, Irving had high standards, both in literary terms and in objective, logical reasoning.

Throughout his long teaching career at Brandeis, Stanford, and the City University

of New York, he undoubtedly influenced many generations of students. But in his writings he reached a much wider audience. He exercised it regularly in *Dissent* and more sporadically through his numerous books, some written with collaborators [such as B.J. Widick and Lewis Coser]. His studies of Walter Reuther and the UAW, of the history of the Communist Party, of Jewish immigration in New York (*World of Our Fathers*, probably his most famous volume), and his own autobiography, are essential reading for anyone concerned with the history of U.S. radicalism in the 20th century. I’ll leave it to the editors of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* to judge Irving’s book on Trotsky.

During the 1960s, although an opponent of the Vietnam war, Irving Howe was one of the most prominent spokesmen for the Old Left in its confrontations with the New Left. Irving strongly objected to the anti-intellectualism, the lack of a definable ideology and program, and propensity toward violence of many of those in the New Left. He was the butt of sometimes vicious attacks by the New Leftists.

However, unlike too many onetime Old Leftists of his generation, Irving Howe never abandoned his belief in democratic socialism. He did not become a “neo-liberal” or “neo-conservative.” He continued to argue against the evils of corporate

capitalism, and against any limitations on civil rights and civil liberties, in this country. But he was also consistently eloquent in his denunciations of the tyranny of Stalinist regimes, and the chicanery of the Stalinist parties. He continued to insist on the possibility of building a more rational and free society. He became the favorite target of attacks by the neo-conservatives of *Commentary* magazine and elsewhere.

One of the people with whom Irving worked closely as an “independent radical” in the 1950s and 1960s was Norman Thomas. Years later he was one of the principal speakers at the two meetings — in Princeton and in New York City — to celebrate Thomas’s 100th birthday. At one of these meetings, Irving admitted that in those earlier years he had sometimes tried to avoid Norman Thomas’s phone calls, because almost always they were designed to get Irving involved in one or another of Norman’s numerous civil liberties, civil rights, or antiwar “projects.” In fact, Irving did get involved in many of them.

However, writing for *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, I must note, too, that Irving Howe was never really a Bolshevik-Leninist. His association with Trotskyism was quite short-lived; and although to his death he remained a socialist, he was probably never the kind of socialist of which Leon Trotsky would have approved. □

“Our Canada” Isn’t

Our Canada, the Story of the New Democratic Party Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow, edited by Leo Heaps (James Lorimer & Company, Toronto 1991, 211 pages)

Reviewed by Barry Weisleder

After nine years of Brian Mulroney as P.M., and with three NDP provincial governments, how can English Canada’s only mass labor party be so low, so flat, and so bereft of vision?

I can tell you this: you won’t find the answer in *Our Canada, the Story of the New Democratic Party Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* — unless you do considerable reading between the lines and from other sources.

A common sight at NDP convention book stalls, this paperback is about as thought-provoking and self-critical as the text on the side of a corn flakes box. Yet there are few books on this subject so widely distributed, so it draws attention.

The back cover of the book asserts that “The New Democratic Party is a different kind of political party — one where idealism comes before opportunism.”

But the contents of the book systematically lay waste to that thesis.

In twenty-six short essays by leading luminaries of Canadian social democracy, we are treated to what is essentially a résumé of electoral results for the NDP (and its predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation [CCF]). These are supplemented by supposedly sage observations extolling the triumph of pragmatism over radicalism within the party.

The quality of the writing is very uneven, from the polished prose of historian Kenneth McNaught, to the vapid vagueness of what reads like a typical Audrey McLaughlin speech. Uniformly, however, the treatment of seminal ideas is shallow, and the rendition of important historical events is cursory.

J.S. Woodsworth’s opposition to imperialist war is dismissed as “utopianism.” David Lewis’s purge of communists, and left-wing unions from the Canadian Congress of Labour in the 1940s and ’50s is portrayed in Orwellian terms as “lessen[ing] the influence [of the]...followers of Stalin.” So much for labor unity and union democracy.

Defenders of the NDP’s self-proclaimed pluralism and openness will find very interesting Ed Broadbent’s declaration that “serious debate about...the desirability of a market economy...is now closed.” Internal party political differences are acknowledged, though not elaborated, and the Waffle internal opposition movement of the tumultuous early 1970s is awarded only one paragraph.

Party leftists are tagged as ideologically self-righteous. But “moderate” party leaders, like “Anglican minister and Victorian

gentleman, Robert Connell...who refused to be bound by the decisions of a [British Columbia] party convention controlled by the far left,” are venerated.

Mass movements and class conflicts are tucked safely into the margins of the parliamentary record. This is a party history that considers it a high compliment indeed to Winnipeg General Strike publicist J.S. Woodsworth for him to be called, by former Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King, “an ornament to any Parliament.”

The only breath of fresh air is the interview with Grace MacInnis, daughter of Woodsworth and a member of the first CCF parliamentary caucus in 1935. Calling herself “an old-time socialist” before her death in 1991, she scolded the party hierarchy for diluting the message (“the wealth of our land [should] be returned to the producers of that wealth”). MPs have been coopted into the lifestyle of the affluent elite, she felt, and rely far too much on the “modern techniques of public relations” rather than on grassroots organizing.

Such anticapitalist sentiments were commonly expressed in the CCF and the early NDP, even though the party never advanced the perspective of a revolutionary transformation of capitalist society, notwithstanding the 1933 Regina Manifesto.

But as the party’s social-democratic bureaucracy became entrenched in the 1940s, it waged an unremitting struggle to dilute, even erase, any vestige of socialist policy or thought within. It nearly succeeded, employing anti-leftist campaigns and purges in the 1950s and ’70s.

In the concluding essay of the book, Ed Broadbent tries to seal the debate over strategy with an ode to the marketplace and the so-called mixed economy. He only succeeds in completely misrepresenting (and perhaps misunderstanding) the Tory agenda, which is not to end government involvement in the economy (witness the \$4 billion purchase order for helicopters), but rather to increase subsidies for giant corporations, and to exact greater discipline and sacrifice from the work force, for the sake of private profit.

Broadbent’s contribution withal, the debate will continue. The party’s historic class base, combined with the organic links to the labor movement forged in 1958–60 with the Canadian Labour Congress, makes the re-emergence of anticapitalist and socialist ideas there inevitable.

So long as the working class exists (no, it is not disappearing, just being restructured) it will express its antagonism vis-à-vis capital. And so long as nearly 200,000 unionists remain affiliated to the NDP, and over two million workers vote for the party, it will

continue to serve as a vehicle for working-class politics, however limited and distorted that may be.

That being said, one historical class impasse the party bureaucracy has succeeded in achieving is to insulate the organization from the Québec working class and its national aspirations. NDP hostility to language Law 101, to the mid-’70s Québec air traffic controllers’ strike, and to the later sign law, and most recently, the party’s support for the big business-backed Charlottetown Accord, demonstrate the party’s commitment to the unity of the Canadian capitalist state above all other considerations.

The chapter on the Québec NDP is a pathetic excuse for the party’s incomprehension of the national question, and a poor attempt to equate “asymmetrical federalism” with genuine national self-determination.

Facing the Music

Simply by correcting its programmatic faults, could the NDP resuscitate its fortunes and avoid the humiliating setback that seems to be its destiny in the next federal election?

Obviously not. The party’s present malaise goes deeper and much farther back than yesterday.

Though *Our Canada* fails to point this out, it has a lot to do with leadership, over the years, stamping out effective internal dissent; with creating an intellectual desert for radical thought; with adopting policies and methods that more and more resemble those of the mainstream parties of the business class.

And it has enormously to do with enforcing capitalist austerity measures as the government in three provinces (while refusing to challenge capitalist power and wealth).

By alienating labor and other social movements, and by adopting the myths and rhetoric of the debt and deficit bashers of the corporate world, the social-democratic leadership of Rae, Romanow, and Harcourt has painted the party into a corner.

Rebellious youth and anti-establishment workers, women, and oppressed minorities don’t see their reflection in the NDP. So they look elsewhere; a few to Mel Hurtig’s liberal nationalist National Party, or even worse, to the right-wing populist Reform Party. Or more likely, most choose to remain on the political sidelines. Advantage Liberals.

The point for socialists, however, is not just to analyze errors and trends, but to *change* things for the better. And that means organizing *within* the present organizational strongholds of the working class.

Unfortunately, abstentionism towards the NDP is encouraged by certain socialist groups who counterpose building their own small pre-party tendencies to the struggle to

build a broadly-based class-struggle current *within* the unions and the labor-linked NDP.

Clearly a mass socialist alternative to social democracy is necessary, and its construction should not be postponed — especially now that dissatisfaction with the NDP among progressive workers is so high. Independent, class-struggle politics must be seen and fought for outside the NDP, too.

But it is a fallacy to counterpose entirely this task to intervention in the labor party. And it is a sectarian illusion to think that a mass socialist party will emerge without socialists' winning a large number of NDP and union activists (who tend to be the same people) to a revolutionary perspective by working with them today, in their existing organizations, as they come increasingly into

conflict with the dictates of capital and the state.

The defense of every worker's rights and benefits, let alone the future of socialism, depends very much on that effort, that's the reality of the struggle that lies ahead.

Our Canada isn't. □

Labor Movement in Iran: Four Years After the War

Continued from page 11

rope and North America. Unions condemned the arrest and execution of labor activists in Iran, calling among other things for the recognition of strike and organization rights for the Iranian workers. In its struggle to win these rights, the Iranian labor movement has to rely on the support of the working class internationally. This working-class support and solidarity is a new factor, and a valuable help, in the workers' movement in Iran, in the struggle for the right to strike and organize.

The struggle for these two essential demands enjoys the widespread backing of labor organizations around the world and restricts the field for the Islamic Republic in its violent suppression of worker activists engaged in this struggle. The election of representative delegations in general assemblies during labor protests is a step which will allow the labor movement to move towards establishing the tradition of general assemblies, the tradition of council movement and of direct action. It will create conditions which allow labor organizations around the world and international labor forums to recognize the general assembly, and the representatives and organs elected by them, as spokespersons for the Iranian workers.

Unemployment Benefits for All the Unemployed

Unemployment in Iran is not set to fall and is rising on a daily basis. This is not denied any more even by the government's own officials. According to the labor minister, 400,000 people enter the labor market each year, while only 35,000 new jobs are created annually. This means that there aren't enough jobs even for ten percent of the people entering the labor market. The recent trade liberalization allowing imports by the private sector — an important part of Rafsanjani's economic policy — has pushed the domestic producers, unable to compete on the same terms, towards bankruptcy and closure. Recently, fifteen textile factories were shut down as

they could not compete with the rival imports in terms of quality and price. Also, a medical instruments manufacturer and the Negahban Shoe factory in the town of Ghazvin closed down, sending their workforces into the ranks of the unemployed. Firms which produce housing appliances and even the Iran Tobacco Company are threatened with shut-down. The "benefit" provided by the Unemployment Insurance law is, firstly, insignificant in amount, and secondly, relative to the number of the unemployed, covers only a few. The demand for an adequate unemployment benefit for all the unemployed should be one of the demands on the agenda.

Islamic Councils

The Islamic Councils — the repressive, non-representative organizations the government has been trying to set up in the workplaces since 1985 — are now in a weaker position than ever, both at the top and below.

At the top, the Islamic Republic government is following the policy of violent suppression, and has, therefore, remobilized its "Islamic societies" and "Factory Mobilization" (Baseej) forces. All this means the reduction of the function of the Islamic Councils, which after all must try to deal with labor issues. The government has not assigned the latter role to the Islamic Societies and the Baseej. Apart from this, in the state industries the government was always trying to coordinate the work of its two arms, i.e., the management and the Islamic Council. But now with the privatization of the state-owned firms, the government can no longer, from the position of owner of the factory, support the Islamic Councils and recommend that its managers come to terms with them. The firms' new owners are not calling on their managers to accept and come to terms with the Islamic councils.

Down below, workers' strikes and protest actions for wage increases have intensified and gathered speed, and look set to overcome

any such hindrances as Islamic Societies, Islamic Councils, and factory Baseej.

Popular Dissatisfaction, Workers' Struggle

Strikes and the recent popular struggles rising in a number of cities in Iran, showing that people aren't going to accept the government's economic policies, have put the Islamic Republic in one of the most critical periods of its life. The general dissatisfaction has engulfed the government from all sides. The executions, arrests, and the invasion of streets by Hezbollahi gangs to terrorize the people following the revolts in Arak, Shiraz, and Mashhad, have failed to make the Islamic Republic succeed in its aim of creating a cemetery of fear and death. Protest and demonstrations, and clashes with the government's security forces, continue to take place here and there. The labor strikes seem set to grow and tighten the grip around the government. The strike by Tehran's water workers, as well as the steelworkers' sit-in protest in Isfahan, which like the earlier oil workers' strike, broke through the state censorship on news of strikes, shows that the atmosphere of fear that the government was hoping to create has not subdued the workers' resolve to keep up the fight for higher wages.

Gaps have appeared even within the Islamic government itself on how best to control the situation and put down the protests, with Khamenei opposing Rafsanjani's economic programs, as well as some other aspects of his policies. But removing the more basic elements of the current economic policy, such as returning to state price controls, will empty these policies of their content, and, before anything else, result in economic deadlock and anarchy. All this, together with the workers' strikes and the popular protests, makes the capitalists hesitant in investment, which only intensifies the current economic crisis. By their struggles under these conditions, workers can emerge more organized and stronger out of this period of crisis. □

The Struggle Over Health Care Reform

Continued from page 4

The UHCAN conference came up with an excellent slogan to advance the single-payer movement and underline the deficiencies of managed competition: "One Health Care System for Everyone." The conference planned for continued movement building and public education work nationally and locally, including immediate coordinated response to release of the Clinton health plan. A conference theme was that health care is the civil rights issue of the '90s. The decision was made to support and build an August 28, 1993, "30th Anniversary Mobilization March on Washington" called by Coretta Scott King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. UHCAN wants to make single-payer health care reform a major theme of the demonstration.

What Is to Be Done?

Socialists agree that we will never have a reliable, humane, economical health care system in a capitalist society where health care is a commodity. The question at hand is

whether to participate in the movement for single-payer health care reform.

A single-payer health care system would be a qualitative improvement for working people. Everyone would have the security of reliable access to health care at a cost roughly based on ability to pay. Since health care access would be a social right and no longer employment based, workers could go on strike without jeopardizing their health care.

The working class would be materially strengthened, literally healthier, better off and better able to fight for its interests.

Single-payer will only be won by mass mobilization that is politically independent from the capitalist parties. Such a struggle would increase working class consciousness, unity, political experience, and, especially if won, confidence. The campaign would also need to continue to bring potential working class allies into the movement.

The single-payer movement presents an excellent opportunity to educate about capitalism and the Democratic Party. We can simultaneously work in the single-payer

movement and work to end the marginalization of the socialist movement in this country. Winning a single-payer system to improve public health and security would strike an inspiring blow against the zealous ideologues of capitalism who fear any example of conscious intervention into the wondrous workings of the free market.

There is no question that health care reform matters to millions of people. Political work to educate and mobilize gets a response from large numbers of people. Among those who choose to join in the work and political activity will be found individuals who come to understand that the capitalist system must go.

Realizing the progressive political potential of this movement depends on participation and leadership from conscious socialists. The political setbacks to the Clinton administration and the delay in pushing their managed competition health care program give us more time to build the single-payer movement. Let's make the most of it. □

June 11, 1993

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Letters

Response on Macedonia

I find Dan Georgakas's response to my short article on the treason trial of the five Greek socialists astounding. If one did not know Mr. Georgakas as the co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of the American Left* and co-author of *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying*, one could think one was reading a tract by an ideologue for the conservative Greek government.

I would like to respond to his charges in two ways: first, by discussing the case and the defense committee; and, second, by describing the issues he raises from the point of view of an ongoing dialogue on the left.

The statement of the Committee to Defend Greek Socialists, reprinted with my article, makes it quite clear that those who lend their support to the Committee are not required to agree with the Organization for Socialist Revolution (Greek initials, OSE), nor its views on Macedonia, the Balkans crisis, nor any other position. Endorsers are asked only to protest the Greek government's suppression of the right to free speech. Perhaps this is one reason why leading figures from every major left party (Coalition of the Left, PASOK, New Left Current, Communist Party) in Greece as well as the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Workers in Greece (GSEE) has supported the campaign to drop the charges against the OSE Five.

When the trial was convened March 26 (it has since been postponed to May 3), 26 expert witnesses, including GSEE's general secretary; the chairman of the railworkers' union; the secretary of the Athens bus drivers' union; the chancellor of the National Technical University; two members of the Greek parliament; and two members of the European parliament, were prepared to offer testimony in the OSE's defense. By no means do any of these people agree with the OSE's view on the crisis in the Balkans. But they, unlike Mr. Georgakas, see the need to lend their support to the campaign in the OSE's defense.

As socialists, the pamphlet's authors oppose all government censorship. Whether the OSE's publication of the pamphlet was deliberately aimed at challenging Greek law or otherwise is beside the point. Those who oppose this kind of censorship should condemn the Greek government's prosecution of the OSE or any other group charged under these repressive laws. Although Mr. Georgakas criticizes the Greek government for prosecuting citizens for "thought crime," he has yet to lend his name in support of the Committee to Defend Greek Socialists.

Moreover, his charge that I "focus on [the OSE's] views rather than their prosecution" distorts the truth. In *The New York Review of Books* letter to which he refers (December 17, 1992), only two of its eleven paragraphs (excluding the *New York Review's* reprint of the Committee's statement) discuss the "argument of the [OSE] writers concerning Macedonia." My article in the *Bulletin IDOM* focuses more on the political issues the case raises because the *Bulletin IDOM*, unlike the *New York Review*, is a socialist publication whose purpose is to stimulate debate on political issues of concern to the left.

Which brings me to the substantive points about the Balkan crisis that Mr. Georgakas raises. I will address three, offering what I believe to be answers which socialists should pose.

First, "Slavic Macedonia is a prime candidate for a civil war à la Bosnia." The implication is that mixed populations cannot live peacefully together. The bulk of Bosnia's history shows otherwise. The horrors of "ethnic cleansing" that we have witnessed over the last year are the products of rivalries stirred up by chauvinist politicians (Milosevic and Tudjman) as part of their plan to carve up the region between them. Macedonia may be a prime candidate for a carve-up — which is what the OSE argues — but not for the reasons that Mr. Georgakas implies.

Second, Mr. Georgakas repeats all of the overblown threats about Macedonian "expansionism." In reality, the balance of military and economic forces in the region shows that Macedonia is too weak to attack Greece. Hence, Mr. Georgakas turns to another scenario — that Turkey will slice off Northern Greece.

In reality, Greece and Turkey are participating in the NATO intervention in Bosnia, contributing jets and military bases to police the "no-fly zone" over Bosnia. Each is hoping to extend its influence in the region. They have rival claims (not necessarily territorial, but of economic and strategic penetration) over Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. Socialists should support neither side of this rivalry and should condemn both Greece's and Turkey's NATO involvement instead of speculating about scenarios of Turkish expansionism provoking right-wing coups in Russia.

Third, Mr. Georgakas challenges me to draw "a border where all Greek villages are on one side and all Slavs are on the other." Socialists are not in the business of drawing borders. On the contrary, we oppose policies of "ethnically pure" areas, whether they are produced by expulsion or by

forced assimilation. That is why the OSE and other Greek leftists and human rights advocates defend the rights of "Slavs living in Greece" that the New Democracy government has attacked. For example, we should condemn the jail sentences and fines an Athens court handed two Macedonians April 1. The two were tried for criticizing the government's treatment of the Macedonian minority in a magazine interview.

My last two objections deal with historical points that Mr. Georgakas raises. He argues that the "area now calling itself Macedonia had a Slavic name prior to World War II." Indeed: South Serbia. This name was forced on it by the royalist regime in Belgrade. Tito accepted the Macedonian name in his attempt to reassemble Yugoslavia.

Tito then became an ally of the Greek regime which won the civil war. He closed the border between the two countries to help the Greek army mop up the last guerrillas. So much for Tito's dreams of expansion to the south! In fact, in the 1950s, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey signed a pact of cooperation to counterbalance the "Soviet threat." A good guide to these twists and turns in the Balkans is Barbara Jellavic's *History of the Balkans*.

Mr. Georgakas's suggestion that Greek Trotskyists carry a "stigma" for their role in the civil war is truly an outrageous charge to make in the pages of an avowedly Trotskyist magazine. But it is also untrue. June 6 will mark the 50th anniversary of the execution of Pantelis Pouliopoulos and 105 other left-wing militants (mostly members of the KKE, but also four Trotskyists). Pouliopoulos was a former CP general secretary and founder of the Greek Trotskyist movement.

The fascist Metaxas dictatorship — whose press censorship law is being used today to prosecute the OSE members — had turned these prisoners over to the fascist occupation armies of Germany and Italy. The Metaxas government was pro-British and thus fought the Axis, but it had no qualms about allowing its avowed external "enemies" to execute its internal opponents. Pouliopoulos was executed while making a speech to the members of the Italian firing squad, urging them to join with their Greek brothers and sisters to fight fascism. In Pouliopoulos, revolutionaries in Greece have a proud tradition of antifascism and internationalism.

The OSE stands in Pouliopoulos's tradition. That is why it opposes the designs of all the regional powers (Serbia, Croatia, Greece, Turkey, *et al.*) in fueling chauvin-

ism and war in the Balkans. It is for this reason that OSE members have been prosecuted. To me, there should be no doubt that socialists, trade unionists, and civil libertarians ought to stand with the OSE Five and against the Greek government. It is sad to see that Mr. Georgakas seems more concerned with the origins of Alexander the Great and Philip of Macedonia than with the suppression of civil liberties in Greece today.

Postscript: On May 7, an Athens court acquitted the OSE Five of all charges brought against them. The brilliant array of defense witnesses helped to beat the government's case. The level of international support for the OSE Five was mentioned many times during the five-day trial.

However, on May 12, the government filed an appeal of the acquittals. It is highly unusual for the prosecution to appeal a unanimous verdict, but it shows the lengths to which the Greek government is willing to go to silence critics of its Balkans policy. The Committee to Defend Greek Socialists will continue its activities until the OSE Five are completely cleared. For more information on the Committee, write c/o International Socialist Organization, P.O. Box 16085, Chicago, IL 60616.

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Disagrees with Hoffa Review

This is a letter of complaint about the review of *Hoffa* in the April issue.

David Mamet is a writer whose work we should pay attention to and take seriously. He is not a Marxist, probably doesn't even consider himself a leftist, and is not particularly interested in mass movements. He is, however, very concerned with the outrageous society within which we all live and the toll it takes on us. He writes, as all good writers do, about individuals whose ills are symptomatic of something pervasive. The script he wrote is not about the Teamsters, it is about Hoffa! — the title tells us so — and a headline that says the Teamsters are being trashed is misleading and erroneous. Yes, perhaps someday someone will do a film about the Teamsters, and even a story of the Minneapolis strikes and

their leaders, but this doesn't purport to be that film. This is a story about corruption and what corruption does both to individuals and their achievements.

Artists quite frequently use historical figures and bend the facts in order to portray an underlying truth. Look at Shakespeare's *Richard III*, and Euripedes's *Medea*, historical figures accused of murders which facts seem to belie. Facts, in and of themselves, can't tell the truth — everyone interprets them differently. People themselves can't be relied on to tell the truth — even in their diaries they may be lying to themselves. Only artists (and it's the rare artist who achieves this) tell the truth. They deliberate and with great care hone their material and bend every word to a central theme. That theme is the only truth there is.

I disagree that the central image of the film is that of Flynn, the dying Irish fire-bomber, who Ciaro, Hoffa's right-hand man, reports mouthed obscenities at a priest on his deathbed. As Mike McCallister reports, we (the audience, and the people at his bedside) cannot decipher what Flynn says; he dies before he gets the words out. So what can we read into that? Where is the truth? The truth is that Ciaro embroiders upon this event — the first time to tell a good story, to make a point with a fellow union organizer about brotherhood; the second time (the second time we hear it — it's clear that he tells this story a lot) he is drunk and just talking, but by now the story is rote and Ciaro has so integrated it that *he believes* this story himself. This is Mamet's way of warning his audience not to believe everything they are told — even by him.

To me the central image is that of Hoffa's trip to prison and the truckers with their trucks who line the way with signs and cheers for Hoffa. These are the men we have not seen too much of in the film. It is the filmic "image" of their support, through thick and thin, of this man who came up from their ranks and they believe has been on their side always. No matter who he has consorted with, gangsters or not, these truckers are tough men and they respect tough tactics. Even if he took something for himself, what they believe in their gut is that there is always someone out there taking something from them, but there are very few who give them something back.

What matters to them is that Hoffa gave them a weapon — organization — and helped them use it to better their lives.

Mamet sees Hoffa as a tragic figure. He's not a nice guy, true — was Macbeth nice? — but he had the potential to be a great leader. He had guts and a gift for organization, and he formed one of the most powerful unions in the country. But his "short-cutting," his deals with hoods (to "benefit" the union) who then had to be paid off, corrupted him. In the end it was their tactics he came to rely on, attempting to kill his opponents, who apparently killed him in retaliation. A man who had always relied on his fists, in the end Hoffa carried "a white man's weapon" — a gun. and in a bitterly ironic ending, Ciaro breaks Hoffa's code never to let anyone into your cab that you don't know. Ciaro, who had let an unknown Hoffa into his cab, sends another unknown — a young, white, purportedly fellow-teamster-in-trouble (the killer) to Jimmy Hoffa's car.

Hoffa's cause was a good one, but Mamet makes it clear, it seems to me, that how you play the game ultimately determines whether you've really won. The "wrong" people quite frequently in his plays and films come out the "winners," but it is always because the protagonists have fallen into the trap of "the end justifies the means," of putting their morality aside in the pursuit of fighting against immorality. The result is that they get used, get caught, get killed.

Hoffa is not a great film, though I think it is a great script. De Vito's direction was heavy-handed, and I think Nicholson's makeup was a disaster — one tended to keep looking at his weird face when one should have been looking at the larger picture. And among other things, even as McCallister points out, it offers a vision of Robert Kennedy as something other than a saint. But, for god's sake, let's recognize what movies can and cannot do. This was not a documentary — and *they* don't always tell the "truth" either. It was an artist's vision offered up in an impure art form — that is to say, too many other people besides the writer got to tamper with the material. As such, I think it was fine. Just fine.

*Gloria Albee
Scottsdale, Arizona*

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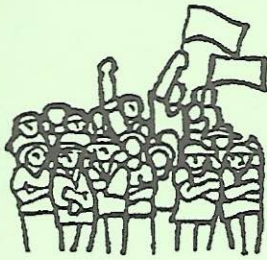
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