

Information, Education, Discussion Bulletin  
**In Defense of Marxism**

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# American Workers Need a Labor Party

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# Who We Are

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

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# U.S. Citizens Fight the Government's Blockade of Cuba — and Win!

by John Daniel

For more than 30 years the U.S. government has attempted to isolate the Cuban revolution. This summer U.S. citizens successfully confronted Washington's hostile position toward Cuba by organizing a massive grass roots educational and material aid campaign that struck at the heart of the illegal trade embargo and travel ban. Organized nationally by Pastors for Peace and locally by an estimated 10,000 U.S. citizens in hundreds of cities, the second U.S.-Cuba Friendshipment successfully delivered 100 tons of material aid to Cuba in direct violation of the embargo.

Three hundred drivers in 92 vehicles started out in July along ten separate routes to deliver the humanitarian aid. They visited scores of cities along the way and spoke to tens of thousands of people through fundraising events, interviews in local newspapers, TV stations, and radio talk shows. This represented the largest U.S. campaign ever held to end the blockade and isolation of Cuba.

At the beginning of July, U.S. Treasury officials swore they would detain the caravan

as it attempted to cross into Mexico at Laredo, Texas, but on July 29, when the 300 drivers in 92 vehicles rolled up to the border, U.S. officials backed down. All but one little yellow school bus were allowed to cross. U.S. Customs officials pitifully argued that the school bus might be used "for military purposes or torture" and promptly towed the bus to an impound lot with 13 people aboard, who immediately decided to go on a hunger strike to force the release of the bus. After more than 3 weeks of U.S.-imposed torture on the 13 strikers, who were forced to endure being held in 105 degree heat in the middle of an asphalt parking lot, once again the government officials were forced to back down and allow the little yellow school bus to continue on its way.

The Friendshipment was met in Mexico by "Va Por Cuba," the Mexican organization for ending the blockade, and thousands of people lined the road to Tampico, where the supplies were loaded aboard a Cuban freighter. The Friendshipment drivers then flew to Havana to accompany the material aid as it was delivered to churches throughout Cuba.

What forced the U.S. government to back down and allow the Friendshipment to continue and what also forced the release of the bus was the courage of the participants and the thousands of calls and letters and dozens of protests in their support. It seems that the only way Washington can continue its campaign of terror against the Cuban people is through the hoodwinking of the U.S. population. Whenever citizens hear the truth and start to mobilize, the government begins to lose its hold. This is the simple and powerful message of the Friendshipment, the lesson we must all learn if we are to end the illegal and immoral U.S. blockade of Cuba. □

September 8, 1993

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***Our next issue (November-December) will include analyses of the crisis in the ex-USSR and the Israel-PLO "peace" agreement.***

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## Editor's Note

A central aspect of politics for revolutionary Marxists involves the conflict between the capitalist class, which owns the economy, and the working class, which is exploited by the capitalists. As explained in our reprint of George Breitman's article, revolutionary socialists line up with the working class majority, and we favor the creation of a mass working class party in the United States.

How will such a party come into being? Contributions by Jerry Gordon and Saladin Muhammad relate the possibility of a labor party to the growth of a broader working class insurgency and labor organizing, especially among Black workers in the South. In addition to Labor Party Advocates, we have in the past given attention to the Campaign for a New Tomorrow, whose recent efforts are discussed in this issue by Claire Cohen. We also offer Mike McCallister's critical analysis of the New Party, whose conciliatory approach to "good Democrats" — the article warns — could derail independent electoral efforts. Even more problemati-

cal among "independent political" efforts, of course, is the Perot phenomenon. Tom Barrett's analysis of what this represents presents one view, different from that offered by Jerry Gordon, which may generate critical discussion in future issues of our magazine.

While the creation of a labor party is a major goal among U.S. Marxists, this by itself is hardly a panacea. Canadian activist Barry Weisleder reports on the labor party in Canada — the New Democratic Party (NDP) — whose triumphant candidates have betrayed working class hopes. The NDP represents the Social Democratic and Labor parties of the reformist Socialist (or Second) International, which have traditionally fallen short on socialist promises and compromised away the interests of workers to "realistically" come to an understanding with big business. From a different angle, similar problems are posed by Dave Riehle's and Walter Creel's historical accounts of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, which had such promising beginnings before collapsing into the Democratic Party.

The focus of this issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* intersects centrally with a discussion and debate initiated earlier in our pages with Paul Le Blanc's two-part article, "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party in the United States," to which Tom Barrett responded with a challenging look at "Racism and the Labor Movement" last month. This discussion and debate is continued in the present issue, by Steve Bloom, and we look forward to future contributions to this dialogue over the next few months.

Evelyn Sell's article on how revolutionary Marxists in the past have related to struggles in the African American community (which rounds out the ongoing debate in these pages on Black nationalism) stresses that broader social struggles are central to a revolutionary approach to politics and that by a labor party we don't mean simply a trade union party but a broad tribune of the working class as a whole, especially its most oppressed sectors, as well as all oppressed groups in society.



## Appeal from United Farm Workers

# Don't Let Arizona Court Break Union

by Arturo S. Rodríguez

The following appeal was received from Arturo S. Rodríguez, president of the United Farm Workers (UFW) AFL-CIO. The UFW address is P.O. Box 62, La Paz, Keene, California 93531.

Last month a Yuma, Arizona, court ruled that telling you stories like the following is “improper” and ordered us to pay \$2.9 million. Please read the story. You be the judge.

Aurelia was struggling. With every head of lettuce she wrapped, a strong blast of nauseating steam from the wrapping machine would hit her squarely in the face. To make matters worse the sun's heat seemed especially relentless that day. Three times she asked the foreman if she could stop working. He said no. Her body just couldn't hold on.

Aurelia collapsed. The crew foreman — fearing the company would be blamed — abandoned Aurelia by the side of the lettuce field. After a few hours, with her lips turning blue, the foreman ordered a mechanic to get her off the property. When she was found some time after that, she died on the way to the hospital.

But the tragedy didn't end there. Aurelia's grieving husband and daughter received one final blow from the lettuce company. A letter came in the mail. Aurelia had been fired. The reason: “for having died.”

Aurelia's story is painful to tell. But I wanted you to hear it.

You see, the court handed us a \$2.9 million verdict for telling you about Aurelia — and about other atrocities suffered by workers at the Bruce Church Inc. (BCI) lettuce company.

But you be the judge. You decide. Please read on and tell me if what we did was wrong.

In 1979 we launched a boycott of Bruce Church lettuce. Workers had had enough of sexual harassment, pesticides, and other horrible conditions on the job. We sent letters to consumers telling them what goes on at BCI. We asked them not to buy Bruce Church lettuce and not to shop where that lettuce is sold.

We got tremendous support. And then, BCI took us to court. Now we're being punished with a huge \$2.9 million decision — simply because we had a successful boycott.

Was this wrong? Was it “illegal” for us to exercise our First Amendment freedoms? To speak out and boycott against injustice?

Of course not. I was the UFW's National Boycott Director for the past four years and I can tell you that agribusiness will stop at nothing — not even unconstitutional lawsuits — to make sure we never boycott again.

Throughout our Union's history, boycotts have been poor farm workers' only voice — and the growers' greatest fear.

César Chávez knew this back in 1965 when he launched the Union's first boycott back in Delano. And in the 20 years that I worked by César's side, I saw first hand how powerful growers buckled under the economic pressure of the boycott.

It's a powerful lesson we learned from César — and we're not going to give it up now.

I know I have a difficult job in trying to follow in César's footsteps as union president. It's an awesome responsibility and a job that I take on with humility and honor. I'll do the best I can. And I trust that you'll stand with me — and with farm workers — as we continue our struggle for justice.

Our first task is making sure we beat Bruce Church in the courts.

*We must appeal the massive \$2.9 verdict.*

We're fighting for our Union's livelihood — for our right to boycott — even for our right to a fair and just trial.

You see, in addition to an outright violation of our First Amendment rights, Bruce Church's lawsuit was a blatant mockery of the justice system.

Bruce Church virtually shopped around to find a court — and a judge — that would guarantee a biased trial.

And they found it in Yuma. This rural, desert town in southwestern Arizona could, in many ways, be the Alabama or Mississippi of 30 years ago. Segregated neighborhoods divide the town. Thousands of acres of agribusiness land dominate the otherwise dry and desolate landscape. Take a drive through downtown Yuma, and it's clear that everything from jobs to housing to the courts and city hall are run by agribusiness.

In Yuma, farm workers never stood a chance for justice — and Bruce Church knew it.

It didn't matter that almost all of BCI's land is in California. Or that BCI lists its corporate offices in California. Or that we didn't do any store boycott work in Arizona. BCI chose to file their suit in Arizona — and specifically in Yuma — because they knew a fair trial was impossible there.

Take, for example, the judge, Joseph Howe. *It's clear his mind was made up even before the trial began.*

*He wouldn't let us bring up the First Amendment in his courtroom — even though that's what the whole case is about! He told Mike Aguirre, our UFW attorney, to bring his toothbrush to court with him. Why? Because, in Howe's own words, if Mike so much as mentioned the First Amendment, “you [Mike] will be speaking to me from the Yuma County Detention Center.”*

Howe's obvious bias tainted the entire trial. At one point, BCI attorneys called César to the stand. In mid-trial, after two days of answering questions asked by BCI, César passed away. He never got to testify for our side.

Everyone thought a mistrial would be called. Many of the jurors expected to go home. But Judge Howe ordered us back in court just days after César's funeral.

As the trial continued, farm workers came to Yuma from across the Valley. Despite long, hot days in the stuffy courtroom, workers sat quietly and observed. A priest said they behaved better than people do in church on Sunday. But Howe called us a “circus” and moved us to a courtroom where only 25 people could attend.

And on the day the verdict was announced, Howe brought in armed Yuma County deputy sheriffs — sending a not-so-subtle hint to the jury that a riot was in the works.

I could go on with the list of Howe's abuses. Our lawyer said that, in his 20 years of practicing law, he'd never seen anything like this happen to any defendant.

*It was obvious we weren't in a fair courtroom.* Farm workers were never heard. Justice was never served. And it was no surprise when the \$2.9 million dollar verdict was announced.

This is a lot of money for anyone and especially for us. What little we have goes to organizing workers and consumers to change the terrible conditions in the fields.

And the \$2.9 million would have to be paid not by a big, rich, and impersonal union, but by men and women who suffer daily to harvest the lettuce, tomatoes, oranges, and other crops we all eat every day.

*Clearly we must appeal.* Not only does this decision threaten our Union, but it puts our very freedoms at stake — our First Amendment right to speak out in the face of injustice, to organize a boycott, to tell you, and con-

*Continued on page 22*



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## At the August 28 March on Washington

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# March for Jobs, Justice, and Peace Spurs Labor Party Movement

by Jean Tussey

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*The author is a member of Communications Workers of America Local 4340, Labor Party Advocates, and Workers Unity Network.*

The 30th anniversary mobilization "March on Washington for Jobs, Justice, and Peace" on August 28 saw an impressive coming together of 75,000 people representing a broad diversity of movements for social change.

By now there have been enough "post mortems" of the event, detailing the organizational weaknesses and political inadequacies of the national civil rights and labor leaderships still tied to "Faith, Hope, and Charity" for the Clinton administration and to lobbying "friends" in the Democratic Party.

What is more useful at this time, it seems to me, is to report on some of the things we learned in Washington about the proliferation of movements in working class communities across the country that are organizing "from the bottom up," and the issues they are raising.

In large part the demonstration was built by such coalitions of labor and community groups, including those in the District of Columbia, and this was done with substantial union organizational and financial support — for buses, printed literature, banners, souvenirs, etc. This was evident in the mass of familiar green AFSCME (American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees) shirts and jackets; groups of UMWA (United Mine Workers of America) strikers in their camouflage fatigues; CWA (Communication Workers of America) marchers with "Jobs with Justice" T-shirts and banners; ILGWU (International Ladies' Garment Workers Union) and ACTWU (Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union) members and others in colorful distinguishing uniforms.

African American workers constituted a major part of many of the largest union contingents. This reflects their weight in the labor movement today, as well as the fact that the initiative for calling the anniversary march came from the civil rights movement. It also helps explain why — unlike 30 years ago — the AFL-CIO endorsed and cosponsored this year's march.

The August 28 demonstration was accompanied by a week of related activities that brought people to Washington by planes, trains, vans, and autos. Events included

major affairs like the 36th annual convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, with programs commemorating Martin Luther King and the goals and objectives of the 1963 civil rights march.

The day before the march, a People's University on the Mall scheduled workshops on numerous social and political issues and provided space for dozens of literature tables.

The planned agenda covered the following topics: Criminal Justice, Jobs and Justice, Environmental Justice, War to Peace: Issues of Conversion, Access to Health Care, Children and Families, Housing and Homelessness, Foreign Policy, Violence, Religion, NAFTA, Education, Urban Development, D.C. Statehood, and Civil Rights. But adjustments were made by the people who came to this People's University, combining, deleting, and adding specific issues, such as the struggle for single-payer health care. Native Americans, including some from as far away as Colorado, had a table in the main literature tent, but attracted special attention by erecting their own tepee separate from the rest.

The week's activities also included smaller formal and informal meetings and gatherings that provided opportunities for networking with activists from different cities and discovering links with new groups and publications.

For example, although there was no activity organized by Labor Party Advocates (LPA) there was an open meeting of the Workers Unity Network (WUN) steering committee scheduled for the day after the march.

### Call for California Labor Party

A major development reported at the WUN meeting was the action of the San Francisco Labor Council which passed a unanimous resolution on August 9 calling for the formation of a California Labor Party.

The resolution, which touches on familiar concerns, voiced at the March on Washington and in many working class communities, is reprinted below because these are the kinds of issues that are beginning to shape a labor party agenda.

WHEREAS, it has been a bipartisan policy of both the Democrats and Republicans to tax working people and the poor, and

WHEREAS, the United States of America

and South Africa are the only [industrially developed] nations which have no form of national health care, and

WHEREAS, both parties have supported government attacks on workers' rights and union rights from the PATCO strike to the recent rail strike, and

WHEREAS, in California, unemployment benefits are among the lowest in the country and workers' compensation has now been cut in a bipartisan effort, and

WHEREAS, quality public education has been part of our social wage, benefiting our children, and has been constantly cut, and

WHEREAS, anti-union elements such as Ross Perot have been filling the vacuum due to the dissatisfaction with government for the rich, and

WHEREAS, Jack Henning, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the California Federation, AFL-CIO, has stated the need for a Labor Party,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the San Francisco Labor Council request Executive Secretary-Treasurer Henning to convene a statewide meeting of all Labor Council delegates to begin the process of building the California Labor Party, in conjunction with Labor Party Advocates, and organizing its founding convention open to all elected representatives of working people.

At the WUN meeting Cleveland members of LPA and WUN were delighted to discover copies of the August-September 1993 *Working People's News (WPN)*, published in New York City, featuring the following item, under the headline "Workers Unity Network — An Independent Voice":

For some time now, workers have recognized the need for an independent working class political party. Many efforts have been undertaken over the past several years to bring this about. *Working People's News* believes the process of developing the political independence of the U.S. working class has taken a major step forward with the establishment of the Workers Unity Network. The Workers Unity Network combines the movement for political power, self-determination, and equal rights for African Americans with the struggle to establish a workers' party and organize the South. Below is their statement of purpose. *WPN* urges all supporters and readers to seriously examine this network with an eye to joining it. It's an important step in the right direction.

*Continued on page 22*



## British Miners Bear Costs of Inept Labor Leadership

# Too Little, Too Late Hands Victory to Tories

by Dave Osler

The following article is reprinted from the June 26, 1993, issue of *Socialist Outlook*, the newspaper published by the International Socialist Group, British section of the Fourth International.

The fight against pit closures is close to being defeated, and there is little point in pretending otherwise. The Tories' stalling tactics achieved exactly what they were designed to achieve. Public anger has been defused.

Meanwhile, the High Court has overturned its previous ruling that it was "illegal and irrational" to shut the first ten pits in British Coal's closure program.

Cuts are now likely to prove far more savage than anything envisaged last year. We could now witness the scenario outlined in the leaked Rothschild report of 1991, which predicted just 12 pits and a workforce of 10,000 by 1995.

Over 16,000 of Britain's 50,000 miners have quit in the last eight months, largely as a result of BC's bully-boy tactics. At Brims-thorpe, for instance, enhanced redundancy money worth an additional £8,000–3,000 was put on the table, and miners told to take it or leave it. They voted 140 to 40 to take it.

Now 1,290 miners have gone at Parkside and Trentham, the first compulsory redundancies since nationalization in 1947. The two pits were singled out because they resisted closure. Further job losses will come thick and fast.

Some 20 deep mines — 18 of them on last October's original hit-list of 31 — will be offered to the private-sector licensees over the next few weeks.

Asset-strip king Lord Hanlon may put in for the best. Other interested parties include IB Mining and Edwards Energy. But experts predict takers for six of them at most, with the rest to close.

Of the 30 remaining BC collieries, 12 were ostensibly "retrieved" in the March white paper, when trade secretary Michael Heseltine seemingly promised £500 million to enable threatened pits to find new markets.

Senior Whitehall sources now say the government never had any intention of paying. The money is conditional on National Power and PowerGen making more BC coal on top of their existing five-year contract. This is all but excluded.

The two companies together have a 34-million-ton stockpile, and shareholders, including the government, want this reduced to improve cash flow. Even if they bought more, BC itself has 11 million tons in stock, with the 12 pits adding 1 million tons a month.

Moreover, existing private mines and new licensees would also be in the running.

Until earlier this year, BC charged generators 180p a gigajoule, a price that has now dropped to 150p and falling. BC is offering extra supplies for just 90p a gigajoule, but the European spot market price is around 86p.

The root of the problem — a "free market" rigged by the dash to gas, nuclear power, the French interconnector, and low world coal prices — remains in place.

### Class-Wide Fight

A class-wide fightback could have forced political concessions from the government. But the labor movement leadership, from day one, derailed the mobilization which alone could have brought this about.

As the storm broke last October, Congress House subsumed the coal question into a non-specific TUC "Jobs and Recovery Campaign." An emergency committee on pit closures was formed, excluding the leader of the union most affected — Arthur Scargill, president of the National Union of Mineworkers.

In November, the TUC general council met in Doncaster, convening outside London for the first time ever. Norman Willis, TUC general secretary, denounced demands for a 24-hour general strike as a "legal noose" that the movement should not put its head through, and even dismissed Scargill's more modest call for a day of action.

Instead, we got the laughable "Day of National Recovery" on December 9, with trade unionists asked to secure expressions of concern about job losses from their bosses, including those who had already sacked thousands. Few bothered.

There was a plea to switch off our lighting for five minutes on the Saturday before Christmas, perhaps a deliberately ironic echo of the "Switch on at Six" campaign during the Great Strike.

Scargill continued his agitation, but the TUC put the dampers on his call for a day of action January 19 as not "appropriate." Then there was the TUC's "Jobs Action Day" of February 18.

Scargill had used an earlier rally in Cardiff to propose that it be turned into a South African-style "stay-away," using this euphemism to skirt the anti-union laws banning solidarity action.

*Socialist Outlook* welcomed his thrust, while pointing out the drawbacks with the wording. However, the TUC insisted that Jobs Action Day was "not a call for industrial action, but a broad-based activity to demand change."

In March, the TUC called a demo at three days' notice, in protest at the white paper. Unsurprisingly, it was poorly attended. Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes used the subsequent rally to support strike action.

### Dodged

Labour frontbenchers Margaret Beckett and Frank Dobson dodged the question.

The brightest hope of turning the tide came in April, when the rail union leaderships, under rank-and-file pressure, reluctantly organized two one-day stoppages against job losses in their industry. They were synchronized with similar action from the NUM, and a TUC call to spread the anti-privatization struggle would have won a wide response.

None came, while Labour's national executive expressly declined to back the strikes. Ultimately, rail leaders Knapp and Fullick used pseudo-concessions from British Rail to block further activity.

This was a clear signal to the Tories that, as far as the official labor movement was concerned, the fight was finished. The collieries began to close.

It is clear now that only much more militant tactics earlier in the dispute, involving occupation of the pits and other forms of industrial action, could have created the depth of political crisis necessary to secure the prolonged mobilization necessary for victory.

The NUM's defeat will have contradictory consequences. The ruling class will push home their advantage. The NUM and RMT have been punished with loss of check-off facilities.

Oil workers and journalists face industry-wide derecognition drives. New legislation enables bosses to refuse trade unionists pay rises granted to people on personal contracts, gravely undermining collective bargaining.

### Wage Cuts

For the first time in decades, there is a danger of widespread U.S.-style "givebacks." The 3.5 percent wage cut agreed to by local government unions in Sheffield earlier this year set a terrible precedent.

*Continued on page 34*



# Civil Rights and Labor Justice in the South Today

by Saladin Muhammad

*The following is the keynote speech given to the annual Martin Luther King Support for Labor Banquet, held in Raleigh, North Carolina, April 3, 1993. Saladin Muhammad is the national chairperson of the Black Workers for Justice.*

Our gathering here tonight at the Martin Luther King Support for Labor Banquet is part of a growing tradition of the workers movement to Organize the South, a tradition which the BWFJ believes is a necessary vehicle to enable Black workers to be a force for uniting all Southern workers into a conscious and powerful movement for social change in this country.

While recognizing the importance of winning basic civil rights in the 1960s, African American workers learned firsthand that civil rights have limited benefits for the vast majority, as long as the vast majority lack working-class and Black political power to enforce and expand civil rights to every area of society.

This developing awareness of Black workers in the 1960s of their need to have power was shown partly by their efforts to empower themselves through unionization. It was this working-class sentiment that was embraced by the Dr. King who called for the "Poor People's March" on Washington and who stood with the sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee, as they organized their union.

It is thus BWFJ's obligation as an organization of African American workers to build and promote this tradition highlighting Dr. King's support for labor, as a way of helping to propel forward the struggles of African Americans, workers, and all who are oppressed in the South in a movement to liberate and empower themselves.

Throughout Dr. King's civil rights activism, at least one principle was crystal clear. No matter who he made formal appeals to about civil rights and democracy, he always saw the direct involvement of the masses of African American and poor people as the key ingredient to bringing about meaningful social progress.

However, there is a message being promoted today by some in the name of honoring Dr. King. It is calling on African American and poor people to wait patiently and give Clinton a chance to deliver on his promises; after all, they say, "he is a Democrat." But history shows that this is not the true legacy of Dr. King!

Even after supporting the re-election of Lyndon Johnson for president in 1964, Dr. King did not urge the people to sit back and wait for Johnson to take his own time to fulfill his campaign promise of signing the voting rights bill. Not Dr. King! Just one month after Johnson was sworn into office, Dr. King was

leading a voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

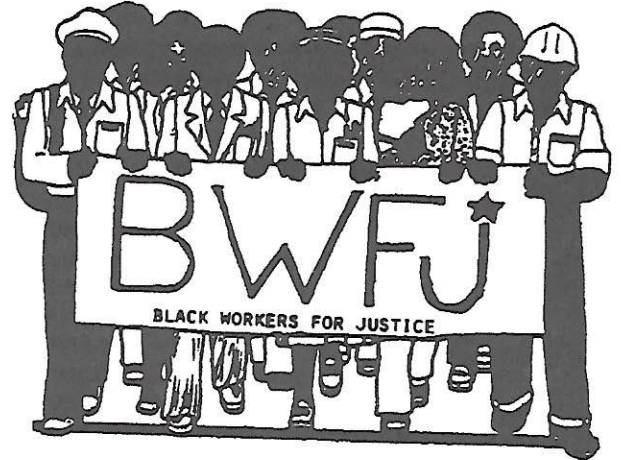
Political power, as Dr. King was growing more to understand, is the ability of the people through an organized movement to continuously (not just on election day) impact on the institutions in society in a way that makes their decisions accountable to the needs of the majority of the people.

Since our beginning, the BWFJ has been an organization of African American workers helping to organize all workers at the workplace regardless of race, nationality, sex, age, or religion, around struggles for workers' rights — and in the African American community against injustice. At the same time, the BWFJ saw its work as contributing to the building of a large movement beyond its immediate base to help empower Southern workers and the African American people to bring about meaningful social change in the South.

The economic and political direction of this country, which continues to lower the quality of life for the vast majority of the people, is moving at a pace and on a scale that is faster than can be effectively combated by the efforts of a single organization or even by the efforts of many organizations acting individually without a coordinated strategy. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is an example of how the corporations are using the government to structure a large section of U.S. workers right out of existence. In place of jobs will be more brutal police, jails, and states issuing the death penalty every opportunity they can.

The cost of not having a powerful workers' organization or union at the workplace was made clear by the tragic corporate murder of twenty-five Hamlet [North Carolina] workers. But we are proud to say that thousands of workers throughout the country have rallied in support of the Hamlet workers in a way that helps to strengthen the movement to Organize the South.

What we continue to find, however, is that when workers lack organization to help empower themselves at the workplace, they are not usually a leading force in the struggles around issues affecting them in their community and society, out of fear that it might endanger their jobs. So when we speak about



building a labor movement in the South, about organizing unions at the workplace, we are talking about empowering the working class to be able not only to win rights in the workplace but to be a powerful force to help change society.

Yes, we must think of the working class, African Americans, and other oppressed people as gaining the power to change society. Not simply as large numbers of voters only able to elect people every two to four years with the hopes that they will change society on our behalf. Unless we have the power to radically change society, society will continue to radically change us. Look at how it has already changed millions of formerly productive workers into unemployed and homeless people. Look at how it has changed the lives and dreams of many young African Americans and others that were shaped by the struggles and gains of the 1960s into an epidemic of misery and despair, full of drugs and self-destructive activities as a means of escaping reality.

Our drive for liberation and social progress for all can no longer be satisfied by symbols of Black upward mobility and labor-management cooperation schemes promoted by the system to fool people into believing that it is workable if we would just get behind the president; if we would just become part of the corporate team to make employers more competitive at the workers' expense.

It is the employers who are opposing the establishment of a national health care system; who are opposed to increasing the minimum wage; who favor the hiring of temporary workers with no benefits; who oppose strong government-mandated workplace and environmental health and safety regulations; who favor plant closings; and



who want workers and their children to fight the employers' unjust wars for profit, as was done in the Persian Gulf, costing the taxpayers billions of dollars and severely deepening the crisis faced by increasing numbers of people in this country.

So if the Clinton administration and the Democrats really want to change the corporate-driven policies of Reagan, Bush, and the Republicans, then why does Clinton have more millionaires and corporate representatives appointed to his cabinet than did Reagan and Bush? Just as Bush broke his promise about not raising taxes, so has Clinton. What is the difference?

Our need to build a strong labor movement and unions in the South today has become more important than just the goal of winning a contract. And certainly far more important than being able to obtain a credit card for union membership. Unless we are clear on this point, the employers' anti-union propaganda will be successful in defeating the efforts of workers to empower themselves.

In fact, good union contracts are won and improved, not simply because workers have been successful in establishing a union. Good contracts are won when the unions are successful in uniting and mobilizing the power of the workers on a continuous basis and in a variety of ways at the workplace, in the communities, and at the international level to bring pressure on the corporations and the government.

The movement to organize labor in the South must take the form of a mass campaign, a campaign which incorporates the energy, tactics, and cultural expressions displayed during the civil rights movement. It must take the form of a Workers Fairness Campaign.

At the heart of the Workers Fairness Campaign is the building of the workers' unity movements in every sector of the working class — among industrial workers, among service workers (including those young workers in the fast food chains), among public workers, among farm workers, and among the unemployed. The leadership of women workers is key and must be further developed and strengthened within these sectors.

The worker unity movements must help organize and mobilize the workers to establish their demands across the board in every industry and sector of the economy. Along with raising joint political and economic demands for the welfare of all workers in society, beginning at the local levels. This will better help to define the role of unions and the issues which they must base their organizing around.

These worker unity movements will help workers to overcome the isolation and fears associated with being the only workplace in the area engaged in worker organizing, and from their uncertainty of community support for their efforts. This will also help Southern workers, who have a lower level of union consciousness than Northern workers, to see

the organization of unions as a necessary outgrowth of their indigenous movements for social progress.

Without rank-and-file worker unity movements built in every industry and sector of the economy, there will be no force to help overcome the rivalries and jurisdictional disputes between the various unions over organizing rights. If not combated by the rank and file, these disputes will continue to weaken and distort the power and image of the trade-union movement and will allow the corporations greater opportunities to convince workers that unions are no longer viable labor organizations. They will also serve to further divide the working class along union lines.

The North Carolina Public Workers Assembly Movement is taking the lead in building the workers' unity movement in the public sector in North Carolina. It has held three workers' assemblies, bringing together public workers from eleven different towns, cities, and counties, uniting public workers who belong to unions with those who have only begun to form workplace organizing committees. Their unity will strengthen the fight against downsizing and privatization in the public sector. The struggle for safety shoes for city workers is starting to win victories in some locales. This movement will continue to grow and will provide important lessons for similar organizing in other sectors.

The Poultry Workers Fairness Committee is another form of organizing and unifying workers. It is helping to develop and transform a movement around health and safety among poultry and meat processing workers into a movement to organize and unionize these workers.

A Women Workers' Unity and Leadership Movement continues to be developed as part of the work of the BWFJ Women's Commission. It is mobilizing women workers from various workplaces, unions, and communities to [take part in] "Speakouts" to raise their special demands as part of the Workers' Fairness Campaign. Through the Speakouts and other activities, women workers are continuing to establish for themselves a consensus about the problems they face in the home, in society, and in the social movements and organizations that contribute to their oppression and minimize their participation and leadership in the struggles for social change.

The Fruit of Labor is helping to promote and unify the Workers' Fairness Campaign through songs about the worker and community struggles. Their contributions are part of the efforts and program of the BWFJ's Cultural Commission to help build a strongly African American-influenced popular working-class culture expressing a movement to Organize the South. This program must also include the building of a Cultural Workers Unity Movement. This will help to unite and promote the various expressions and struggles that highlight the progressive

character of all Southern working-class cultures. Song, dance, art, music, poetry, and theater must all be used in helping to promote the Workers' Fairness Campaign and the movement to Organize the South.

In 1992, several workplace fight-back movements and organizing committees, developed over the past three years as part of the Workers' Fairness Campaign, have now become union campaigns. While all is not perfect and there are still many kinks to be worked out and lessons to be learned from these experiences, they represent an important rank-and-file democratic approach to unionism which has the potential of winning the larger communities to the goal of unionization as occurred during the 1930s throughout the North and Midwest, and which has been occurring in South Africa and in other countries throughout the Third World over the past twenty years.

While there is still much work to be done, we are seeing the beginnings of a wave of new trade unionism which is being called for by the rank-and-file Southern workers themselves. They are building and testing their own working-class unity and strength in struggles around issues they face at work. They are developing community allies around their struggles and participating in broader community coalitions, shaping their awareness about the issues they face at work and winning them to a longer-term commitment as allies in support of their decisions to form unions.

Unions growing out of the Workers' Fairness Campaign in the South may be formed in various ways. Some will result from a vote in a labor board election; others will get recognition from the employers because they have built a movement strong enough; and others will form without a labor board election or formal recognition from employers, because they have built an organization at the workplace which expands its membership over time as it carries out campaigns to improve and change the working conditions. What will make these unions strong will be their unity as rank-and-file workers in a democratic labor movement, regardless of how they were formed and what national or independent union they belong to.

Rocky Mount Undergarment workers have formed an independent union and are continuously trying to find ways to make it stronger; Raleigh city workers have formed a local union of the Communications Workers of America; the Standard Products workers in Rocky Mount are organizing for a union election to become members of the United Auto Workers; Lundy Meat Company workers in Sampson County are organizing to become members of the United Food and Commercial Workers.

A union victory at Standard Products resulting from a majority vote on April 29 of this year will be key in helping to further consolidate the workers movement in Rocky



Mount and will serve as a strong base from which to build an auto workers' unity movement to expand and strengthen the efforts to further organize auto workers in the state. There will be community rallies and activities leading up to the election. The Standard effort needs as much worker and community solidarity as can be built. But again we say that this movement must spread beyond the immediate base of the BWFJ. [For more on the struggle at Standard Products, see box on this page.]

The building of a solidarity movement throughout the country and internationally in support of these efforts and the Workers' Fairness Campaign is essential. This will help to place these struggles within a larger social context that more closely corresponds to the increasing globalization of the economy. This will also contribute to the shaping of confidence and a larger social vision for African American and all Southern workers to forge ahead as a unified political leadership of the struggles for social change.

But working-class political leadership requires an organizational base. Without this base, the poverty, lack of information and education, time, and political training resulting from their class and national oppression, will be the very factors that will force workers to surrender leadership of their struggles to other classes who (while suffering some mistreatment) are not victimized in society in the same way as the working class. This is especially true for the most exploited of all U.S. workers, the oppressed nationalities and women workers.

The racist system of national oppression often referred to as institutionalized racism has a widespread and varying impact on the conditions and nationality consciousness of African American people of all classes, especially in the South. The working-class demands in the struggles around housing, environmental justice, and for Black political power are often lost or distorted when African American workers lack the organization to help them raise and clarify their demands.

An African American workers' organization is thus essential for the shaping of a working-class base, political consciousness, and leadership in the African American people's liberation movement. This consciousness and organized leadership will better enable Black, white, and other oppressed workers to recognize and understand the centrality of African American workers as an organizing and unifying force for the empowerment of all Southern workers. This will in turn help to show the often hidden and resisted interdependent political connection between the African American people's liberation movement and the struggles of all workers and their communities in the South against exploitation and oppression.

Thus, contrary to narrow thinking, the existence of a Black workers' organization

should not be seen as an obstacle to the building of working-class political and organizational unity inclusive of all workers, regardless of race. The Workers' Fairness Campaign is a good example of how a Black workers' organization is helping to build a Southern labor movement to unite all workers into common workplace fight-back organizations and unions.

A strong labor movement, while constituting a major force to help alter the balance of power in society in favor of the working class, must not be seen exclusively as the sole force to empower the working class in all of its many expressions. This is true partially because the labor movement represented by unions and other workplace organizations makes up less than 15 percent of the U.S. working class (employed and unemployed). Trade-union consciousness has also shaped a limited vision and program for organizing and mobilizing the working-class struggle against racism and sexism.

The BWFJ sees the labor movement as a major component in the development of a larger working-class movement for independent political action.

This movement must have as a major goal the formation of a national independent political party representative of the oppressed nationalities and women and based on the working class. The formation of a national working-class political party will not occur overnight. However, it must be engendered by a working-class political movement which can help to foster and embody a variety of independent working-class political campaigns, expressions, and organizational forms that begin to establish concretely the political independence of the working class from the two corporate-dominated political parties.

A labor party may be one of the various political organizational forms that will be developed to help consolidate a base and leadership within the working class as part of developing the larger working-class movement for political independence. The op-

pressed nationalities and women may also develop special forms of working-class political organization to help ensure their leadership and to express the national self-determination of their peoples. All will contribute to the shaping of the social character and political program of the larger movement.

Thus, it is imperative that the working class outside of the trade unions have an entry into and an organized identity within the developing working-class independent political movement, so as to enable it to contribute to the shaping of the working-class character and leadership and to the development of the political program.

Working-class community and workplace-based organizations, including local unions, can begin now to help shape the consciousness and social base for this political movement.

Among other political activities, these organizations can individually and as part of larger grass roots coalitions, begin to run local and statewide independent candidates for public office, initiate referendums to repeal right-to-work laws and for favorable legislation, launch recall campaigns to remove unaccountable officials, struggle for favorable political reapportionment of electoral divisions and for fair ballot access for independent candidates, organize movements for the community control of institutions like schools, utilities, police, health care, housing, etc., and help to organize a movement throughout large unincorporated rural African American majority communities in the South for the creation of governmental municipalities.

This movement for independent political action can help to broaden the working class's and the African American people's understanding of political power—a popular political power where the people begin to struggle for a more direct involvement of themselves in the controlling of major institutions and the running of society. This will

*Continued on page 34*

## Struggle to Unionize Standard Products

The 700 workers, mostly African Americans, at the Standard Products plant in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, lost a recent union-recognition election by a narrow 20-vote margin after the company resorted to a variety of scare tactics. However, the minority of workers who defied this intimidation have gone ahead and declared a union in the plant, which produces automobile seats and parts for General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, and Honda. The union, called United Workers of Standard Products (UWSP), elected a president and union steward.

The workers are determined to have a union to protect them from intense management harassment and health and safety hazards that

make the plant "not fit for humans to work in," according to a report in the September 1993 *Labor Notes*.

Since UWSP announced itself and held election of officers, the company has escalated its attack, suspending the union steward, Raffand Johnson, who has worked there for 12 years, and suspending and firing the union president, Billie Battle, against whom it fabricated a criminal charge. The courts found Battle not guilty of the frame-up charge after a broad local coalition of workers' and community groups organized a defense campaign.

The UWSP is continuing its organizing efforts.

—Marilyn Vogt-Downey



# For Advancing the Cause of Independent Working Class Political Action

by Jerry Gordon

The following is an edited version of a report by the author to the founding conference of the Workers Unity Network, held in Cleveland, Ohio, May 15, 1993. This was one of two main reports to the conference. The other, by Saladin Muhammad, entitled "Organizing Southern Workers: Key to Independent Political Action," will appear in the next issue of *Bulletin IDOM*.

One of the more recent indications of the depth of disenchantment of workers with the two-party system was last November's election. Eighty-four million people did not even bother to vote. Clinton was elected by only 22.3 percent of those eligible to vote. Nineteen percent of voters cast their ballots for Perot, a statement of disgust with the Democratic and Republican parties, but one moving in a reactionary direction.

Surveys taken by several unions, as reported by Labor Party Advocates, confirm not only the widespread alienation of workers from the two parties of big business but also support for the idea of establishing a third party: a labor party based on the unions. Regardless of which union was polled, regardless of the composition of the work force in terms of gender, race, nationality, age, geographic considerations, etc., the results were uniform and consistent: 55 to 60 percent of the workers polled said they would support the formation of a labor party.

Neither the Democrats nor the Republicans have solutions to the social and economic problems convulsing this country. And there is now a demonstrable sentiment among rank-and-file workers to break with these parties and establish a workers' party that can protect our interests. So, what's holding up the formation of such a party?

The answer, of course, is the labor leadership. With rare exceptions they are hell-bent on keeping the labor movement tied to the Democratic Party, come what may.

## Role of the Democrats

For the past 12 years union officials have attributed every major setback the labor movement has experienced to the Reagan-Bush presidencies. We haven't been able to organize? Blame Reagan-Bush. Strikes have been lost and unions busted? It was Reagan's and Bush's fault. We've suffered legislative defeats? Put it at the door of Reagan-Bush.

Now, of course Reagan and Bush, on behalf of the Republican Party and the big business forces that own it, have led a vicious assault on the living standards of U.S. workers. There's no question about that. But what about the Democrats?

It's dishonest to shield them from responsibility for labor's reverses; or to pretend that they don't play a thoroughly anti-union role, basically the same as the Republicans.

Just consider two of the most flagrant ac-

tions taken by the Reagan administration: busting PATCO [the air traffic controllers union] and giving the big corporations a \$750 billion tax boondoggle. The Democrats were fully culpable in both of these.

PATCO occurred shortly after Reagan assumed the presidency. How is it he was able to move so quickly and decisively against the air traffic controllers and, at the same time, ensure the uninterrupted flow of air transportation? The answer is that detailed plans for breaking the PATCO strike had been developed under the Carter presidency. Reagan just pulled those plans out of the file, dusted them off, and put them into operation. And when he did, did anybody hear even a peep of protest out of the Democrats? No. They went right along with what Reagan was doing.

As for the massive tax breaks given the billionaire companies, Reagan didn't just get them by fiat. *The Democratic majority in Congress voted them in!* The Democrats may demagogically complain now about "trickle down economics" but they approved them under Reagan.

More recently the Democrats joined the Republicans in practically unanimous votes to break railway workers' strikes and force the workers back on the company's terms.

Of course, the worst single blow leveled against the labor movement over the past decades was enactment of Taft-Hartley. When that legislation was before Congress in 1947 the union leadership aptly referred to it as the "slave labor law." *Yet a majority of Democrats in Congress voted for it!* But no matter — the labor leaders continued to refer to the Democrats as the party for workers. And they haven't stopped since.

So when the 1992 elections came along the leadership predictably said that at all costs we had to elect Clinton and defeat Bush. Well, they got their wish. But what difference has it made for U.S. workers?

## Clinton's Record

Clinton ran on a program that doesn't begin to meet the needs of working people. He talked about providing jobs for the unemployed, but when his paltry "job stimulus" proposal was defeated — without any fight by Clinton to get it enacted — he said, "I was only trying to reduce unemployment by one-half of one percent." The AFL-CIO estimates the jobless rate at 10.6 percent, so Clinton

would have reduced that to 10.1 percent. That would have left millions upon millions of workers still without jobs.

Today there's a "labor saving" revolution taking place whereby companies are downsizing, restructuring, eliminating *tens of millions* of jobs. Full-time workers are being replaced by "temporary," "contingent," "leased," "contract," or "peripheral" workers, who come cheap and receive no benefits. Clinton and the Democrats have no program for those currently unemployed. What's going to happen when their numbers multiply and the economy enters a full-blown depression, which is where it's headed?

But Clinton is known less for his inadequate promises than for his broken promises. Here is just a partial list:

1. He said he would increase taxes for the rich and reduce taxes for the "middle class." Now he wants to raise everybody's taxes.
2. He said he opposed regressive taxes. Now he has endorsed them.
3. He said he would not touch social security benefits. Now he seeks to raise taxes on 9 million seniors.
4. He said he wanted to raise the minimum wage. Now he's put that on the back burner.
5. He said he would only favor a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) if there were labor and environmental protections with teeth. Now Mickey Cantor, Clinton's millionaire trade representative, says getting such protections is impractical.
6. He said he would admit to the U.S. refugees from Haiti's repressive regime. Now he's blocked their entry.
7. He said he would eliminate discrimination against gays in the armed services. Now he's repudiating that commitment.

The list goes on and on. And you have to add to it the fact that Clinton refuses to speak out for civil rights (although he received the vote of about 84 percent of African Americans who cast ballots). He wouldn't even condemn the recent lynchings in Mississippi jails. He advocates \$270 billion for the Pentagon, while calling for billions in cuts for entitlement programs. And even though the U.S. government spends more on spy operations than on education and the environment combined, Clinton wants to *increase* the gap, urging Congress to vote additional appropriations for spying at the expense of education.



The problem in this country is that politics have moved so far to the right that when Clinton throws a few crumbs our way — such as signing a very weak family leave bill — the labor leadership makes a big to-do about it and claims it vindicates the policy of supporting the Democrats.

### The Labor Movement's Immediate Priorities

At the moment the labor movement is focused on four issues, which are seen as make-or-break issues:

1. Defeating NAFTA
2. Labor Law Reform
3. Health Care
4. Anti-Scab Legislation

As for the first of these, Clinton supports NAFTA and is campaigning hard for its approval.

As for labor law reform, Clinton's secretary of labor, Robert Reich, and his secretary of commerce, Ron Brown, make clear what they have in mind. They set up a commission to propose changes in the labor law by May 1994. The *Wall Street Journal* says that Reich and Brown are "seeking to portray the panel as a potential boon to corporate America." How so? The commission's purpose will be "to create a new model for America's firms to flourish...and compete and win in the global marketplace." It will plan ways to "boost labor productivity through labor-management cooperation." According to Reich,

both the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce support the commission. No wonder!

The commission's key objective, though it doesn't say so, is to legalize company unions so as to promote speed-up. Labor's priorities — primarily the repeal of the repressive anti-union provisions of Taft-Hartley — will predictably be ignored.

As for health care, Clinton's "managed competition" program will help ensure a continued role and high profits for the insurance companies. The program may also be financed by a payroll tax, which could hit workers hard — to the tune of about \$672 a year per wage earner, according to one report. Don't look for the Clinton program to pro-

## LPA to Form Steering Committee "The Labor Party Idea Is Catching On"

*The following are some significant excerpts on important new developments toward the formation of a Labor Party from the September 1993 issue of Labor Party Advocate, the newsletter of Labor Party Advocates (LPA).*

**The painstaking effort to launch a Labor Party in the United States is expected to take on an even sharper focus in the coming months with the naming of a broad-based Steering Committee [of Labor Party Advocates]. The Committee will meet for the first time in Chicago on Saturday, October 9.**

Tony Mazzocchi and several other advocates of a new political party built around a working class agenda are already contacting union officials and labor activists who have a recognizable base among organized workers to serve on the intermediate panel.

The temporary Steering Committee will be comprised of men and women from all over the nation who have indicated they want to play a major role to help launch a Labor Party in this country.

Organizers of Labor Party Advocates have held off naming a Steering Committee until it was clear that there is sufficient basis for taking this step. LPA organizers have always said that the development of genuine grassroots backing for the idea was more important than moving too quickly in traditional ways that haven't worked in the past and probably won't work in the future.

"We needed time to build real support in a lot of different places and among a lot of different people before we attempted to take this important step," said Mazzocchi.

Based on the positive response to the idea from all kinds of organized segments of the Labor Movement, and the growing awareness that working people won't get much help from the Democratic Party, there appears to be increasing interest in LPA's prime goal of bringing together a representative group of people to formulate strategy for developing a genuine political movement around workers' major concerns.

LPA recruiters continue to effectively utilize a survey to demonstrate that rank and file union

members support the notion of a Labor Party and are genuinely turned off by either one of the two major political parties. Survey results tend to bolster the confidence of union leadership at all levels because it confirms LPA's belief that working people are prepared to move in a new and different direction.

Grassroots activists have found that building an educational conference around a subject of special importance to working people — health care, NAFTA, labor law reform, etc. — has helped attract interest to the idea of a Labor Party.

There is evidence that the idea is catching on. For example, St. Louis Labor Council President Bob Kelly, who is a member of the Democratic National Committee, said he has "heard more talk about a labor party or a labor-farm coalition than I have in the past 15 years. And the guys who are doing the talking aren't the fringe, left wing radicals who used to do the talking. It's more the moderate, the middle-of-the-road centrists." He was quoted not long ago in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

In a recent issue of the OCAW [Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union] *Reporter*, the union's president Bob Wages, a prime mover of building a labor party, said: "The time has come to realize that we must move toward independent political action, that is, action and activism that goes outside of the existing two-party structure. Why? Because neither party represents the interests of workers. If you review the issues which are important, there is no mistaking the conclusion that both parties are being driven by the right-wing corporate agenda which places profits before people and their communities and embraces the doctrine of 'corporate socialism,' which says it's okay to bail out corporations or savings and loan thieves, but to hell with the working class."

[The LPA newsletter went on to cite the struggle of Local 837 of the Allied Industrial Workers in Decatur, Illinois,] fighting back against management's aggressive campaign to brutally manipulate their lives through forced twelve-hour shifts (without overtime pay) and the *introduction of work teams that destroy seniority* [emphasis added]. Company owners press for more and more cooperation which, as Alexander Cockburn said in *The Nation* of May 17, really means workers get to "cooperate in their own misery." In the presidential campaign Bill Clinton said he favored labor law reform and spoke solicitously of taking steps to improve the conditions of workers, yet now it appears, says Cockburn, that Clinton's labor policy will turn on a reform that institutionalizes cooperation and eviscerates the current legal guarantees for workers to organize independently.

In Washington, D.C., Jesse Jackson, Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly, and other prominent, mostly Democratic ... leaders are organizing civil disobedience protest demonstrations aimed at a recalcitrant Democratic Federal Establishment to win Statehood for the District of Columbia. The issue, considered crucial to the well-being of the predominantly African American citizenry, and an important symbol of the nation's allegiance to its high-minded principle of equal justice, seems doomed to sit on the back burner despite the Democratic Party's promises in the past election.

[The LPA newsletter also reprints the resolution passed by the San Francisco Labor Council in August, calling on the California AFL-CIO to begin building a California Labor Party in conjunction with Labor Party Advocates. (The text of the resolution appears elsewhere in this issue of *Bulletin IDOM*; see "March for Jobs, Justice, and Peace Spurs Labor Party Movement" by Jean Tussey.)]



vide quality, comprehensive, universal health care coverage, as promised. That was no more than Clinton's campaign rhetoric.

As for anti-scab legislation, it will sail through the House of Representatives but will probably be filibustered to death in the Senate. Right now there are three votes lacking to stop a filibuster. Clinton is not fighting for this legislation. He says he'll sign it if it reaches his desk. Don't hold your breath.

So the prospects are dim for the labor movement to make real headway on these issues. Those labor leaders who have backed Clinton and placed their faith in the Democrats will probably walk away empty-handed, or with minimal and totally inadequate concessions. What then?

### What the Network Stands For

It is in the context of the above that we are this weekend launching a workers' network. With regard to independent working class political action, the Call for this conference laid out four basic propositions.

**The first is for labor to break immediately, totally, and definitively with the Democratic Party.** This is in the tradition of perhaps the best-known trade unionist in U.S. history, Eugene V. Debs. For years Debs was a stalwart supporter of the Democratic Party. But when he came to understand that the party was owned and operated by the big corporations, he broke with it and never looked back. Debs rejected "lesser evil" politics. In a famous and often quoted statement, he said: "It's better to vote for what you want and not get it than to vote for what you don't want and get it."

The total rejection of both employer-run parties is also consistent with Malcolm X's philosophy. Malcolm X described the difference between the Democrats and the Republicans this way: "One is a wolf, the other is a fox. No matter what, they'll both eat you up." In April 1964 he said, "Any Negro who registers as a Democrat or a Republican is a traitor to our people." Two months later he vowed: "We won't organize any Black man to be a Democrat or a Republican because both of them have sold us out. Both parties are racist."

In taking a position urging labor to make a *total and immediate* break with the Democratic Party, we distinguish ourselves from those who call for an "inside/outside" strategy, which is the strategy of encouraging workers to work inside the Democratic Party and support its candidates, while talking about the need for a labor party sometime in the remote future. We also distinguish ourselves from the recently formed "New Party," which urges cross-endorsement of "progressive" Democratic (and Republican) politicians.

The New Party explained in one of its pamphlets how this would work. It cited the race for Senate a few years ago in the state of Washington. Slade Gorton, a reactionary Re-

publican, won narrowly over "progressive" Democrat Mike Lowry. The New Party says if it had been on the scene, it could have cross-endorsed Lowry, allowing voters to vote for him either on the Democratic Party line or the New Party line. That, says the New Party, could have made the difference and elected Lowry.

What the New Party isn't talking about is that after this senatorial election, Lowry ran for and won — with all-out labor backing — the race for governor of the state of Washington. Shortly after he was in office, he rammed through legislation privatizing thousands of state jobs and gutting seniority protection in AFSCME's contract. Lowry told the Washington House of Representatives, "We Democrats have to decide whether we are running the state government or the unions are." AFSCME organized a mass protest demonstration of several hundred, and the union's international president, Gerald McEntee, pointing to the governor's mansion, said to Lowry, "You used us! You sold us out!" So much for the "progressive" Democrats!

The "liberal" or "progressive" Democratic Party politicians help keep labor chained to the Democratic Party. They contribute to the illusion that the party can be reformed. It confuses, disorients, and miseducates workers to tell them: The Democratic Party represents big business. But let's work hard to elect Democratic candidate "X" because he's a good guy.

It's wrong to concentrate on individual Democratic Party politicians. What is needed is to look at the party as a whole and determine what class it represents. Either the Democratic Party represents the bosses or it represents the workers — it can't represent both. Our network says that the Democratic Party represents the interests of the propertied class — the corporations and banks. The party can't be reformed. It must be replaced by a workers' party. And the call for a workers' party must be *clear-cut*, unconditional, and unqualified.

**The second position set forth in the Call is that the fight for Black liberation and organizing the South is inseparable from the fight to establish an independent workers' party.** We are not going to have a workers' party in this country that means anything unless that party has a mass base among African American workers and unless African American workers play a central leadership role. But for that to happen, the workers' party from its inception must be a fighter for equal rights for Blacks, for Black empowerment, and against every manifestation of racism. That lies at the very heart of the network's program.

**Third, the Call for the network advocates a workers' party that organizes and mobilizes as well as runs candidates for office.** We need a party that is more than an electoral expression of workers' needs. It has

to champion the interests of all oppressed sectors of society and it has to do so on the picket line and in demonstrations in the streets around social and economic issues. It should focus on issues such as privatization, like the union-based coalition in Detroit, for example, which is seeking a referendum to protect municipal workers' jobs; or police brutality, like the community coalition in Cleveland, for example, which is seeking a referendum vote outlawing murderous choke holds by cops.

**Fourth, the Call urges unions and worker-based community groups to run independent working class candidates for office at all levels.** Proponents of this position have frequently cited the example of what happened a few years ago when the mine workers put up a union leader, Jackie Stump, to run for the Virginia state legislature. He won easily on a write-in vote — by a 2-to-1 margin — over a reactionary Democrat who had held the seat for years. It's too bad we don't have a number of other examples in this period to demonstrate labor's power to elect its own independent candidates for public office. We've got to do everything we can to change that. We've got to be talking to trade unionists and others active in the workers' movement and raise this idea of taking on the Democrats and Republicans in races for school board, city council, state legislature, or whatever, and doing so on the basis of a program in the interests of workers and the great majority.

Not everyone who advocates a labor party agrees with this idea of running workers' candidates before a workers' party is even formed. The skeptics say that the individual elected will get co-opted into the system. They also say he or she will be discredited because the legislative body to which the worker candidate has been elected will pass anti-labor and repressive legislation and all members of the body will be blamed.

But we're not talking about electing to office a politician in the same mold as the Democrats and Republicans. We're talking about electing a workers' candidate who will fight for our needs around a program that has been collectively and democratically decided. We're talking about a candidate who is *accountable* to the rank and file. And we're talking about someone who will be a rebel in the legislative halls, who will raise hell, take on the system, organize demonstrations in support of progressive legislation, etc.

In advancing the call for a labor party based on the unions, we've got to consider the experience of such parties in other countries. We often say that what we need in the U.S. is a party like the labor movement established in Canada, the New Democratic Party. But the NDP is in crisis in Canada. Its support is way down in the provinces where it has power. Its working class base is turning against it.

*Continued on page 24*



# Campaign for a New Tomorrow Charter and Statement of Principles

## Preamble

Campaign for a New Tomorrow is a nationwide, independent, progressive political organization led by Blacks and people of color — Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Pacifics, etc. — whose goal is to build a grassroots, independent political party, separate from the Democrats and Republicans, rooted in our community struggles, and having the interests of oppressed groups, working people, and the poor as its core political agenda. We believe that, despite our differences, all of us who are oppressed — whether due to our race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability,

reason, we are opposed to this current exploitive system, and believe that no amount of tinkering can make it just and fair. Indeed, its inherent oppressive and exploitive tendencies are not only degrading the moral fabric of our society, and debasing the humanity of the people, but increasingly threatening the very existence of the human race itself, through toxic destruction of the environment and ozone depletion of the atmosphere.

Therefore, we believe it is *imperative* to struggle for a *fundamental transformation* of this system into one that will produce a new society that is truly democratic, just, equitable, and fair. The power structure

## Campaign for a New Tomorrow: Evaluating Past Efforts, Clarifying Principles, Preparing for the Future

by Claire Cohen

Campaign for a New Tomorrow (CNT), the independent electoral effort which ran Ron Daniels for president in the 1992 elections, held its first national convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on August 6–8, 1993. More than fifty people attended, from New York City and Washington, D.C. (which sent the largest contingents) as well as Syracuse, Yonkers, Memphis, Phoenix, and Pittsburgh. Three-fourths of those attending were African Americans, with one Mexican American, and eleven whites. This was a working conference which was advertised to paid members only (195 at the time of the conference), although some active supporters who had not yet paid national dues were also invited to attend — and four such supporters attending the conference became national members of CNT by the end of the conference.

The gathering had originally been conceived of as a founding convention, but in the early going we decided that at this stage in our development it would be more appropriate to have a working conference. The gathering had a three-fold purpose: (1) to assess what we have done so far on the national and local levels, including a critical evaluation of the Ron Daniels independent presidential campaign; (2) to review and ratify a charter and statement of principles (which had been previously mailed to paid members and discussed in preconference meetings in the three cities — Pittsburgh, New York, and

Washington — where there are formal chapters); and (3) to develop goals and plans for action over the next few years. Although the conference was small, there were a number of seasoned activists among the conference participants, and the enthusiasm and commitment were high. As a result, a lot of good work got done. The Charter was substantially revised and ratified. The Charter's preamble and principles of unity appear together with this report.

During the assessment on the conference's first night, the focus of discussion was the Ron Daniels presidential campaign. Mistakes as well as correct actions were identified and discussed. There was agreement that a fundamental break from the Democratic Party (as opposed to the "inside-outside" orientation of the Rainbow Coalition) was an important step forward, but we also candidly discussed the initial overprojections of our effort, and why these were made. We also attempted a realistic assessment of where we are: an enthusiastic but small and struggling effort with meager resources. In discussing what CNT can do to build itself, we recognized that this is a long-term project that will proceed slowly. But the people involved are committed and determined to persist.

This modest but determined note persisted throughout the conference. It was decided that when CNT membership reaches 1,000 members, a founding

convention should be held. Depending on the political/social climate (i.e., objective conditions) at that point, CNT will either declare itself a third party, or will remain a "pre-party formation," or will merge with other independent political parties or efforts. A fundraising goal was set: \$25,000 by the time of the founding convention. Preliminary to all of this, there will be another national conference (set for August 5–7, 1994, in Washington, D.C.), and a goal has been set to increase the national paid membership to 400 by that time. The three local chapters have each made a commitment to double their own membership: from 67 to at least 134 in New York, from 52 to at least 104 in Washington, from 23 to at least 43 in Pittsburgh. The implementation of these fundraising and recruitment efforts, through a number of well-organized political activities, will be the primary CNT focus over the next year.

Between now and the next conference, an interim national coordinating committee will oversee the work of CNT. This governing body consists of a chair (Ron Daniels), a vice-chair (Janice Graham), a secretary-treasurer (Kupenda Olesequ), chairs of the three local chapters (Mary France of New York, Claire Cohen of Pittsburgh, and either Paul Pumphrey or Judith Ramy of Washington, D.C.), and three at-large members who shall be people of color other than African Americans (including Angel Torres and two others to be selected in the future).

age, or class — must unite around the fight against the oppressor — the predominately white male power structure of the super-rich, multinational corporations, and the military-industrial complex.

We believe that a socioeconomic system such as ours is inherently unfair and unjust because it is based on assuring the ability of a small, wealthy elite to obtain an increasingly disproportionate share of the wealth, resources, and power of society, at the ever greater expense of the vast majority of people, especially Blacks and other people of color. Indeed, throughout history, this greed-driven system has known no bounds in its pursuit of excessive profit for this small, privileged elite — to the points of genocidal exploitation and oppression of Africans and their descendants, Native Americans, and other indigenous peoples throughout the world.

We can *never* achieve full freedom, equity, and self-determination under this present socioeconomic system. *It is impossible.* For this

will *never* undertake such a monumental task because this is not in its interests. Only we, the great masses of people who are struggling under the yoke of this oppressive system to maintain a decent standard of living and, in some cases, just to survive, can produce such a fundamental change — through struggle and organization. The dynamics of this system are such that the most oppressed segments of our society — Blacks and people of color — must play a central and substantial leadership role in this effort for it to succeed.

We believe that a major impediment to building an effective movement for fundamental change in the United States has been the lack of a political party firmly rooted in the movements and struggles of the grassroots and the oppressed to function as a vehicle through which we can unequivocally express our interests and seize the reins of power in this society in order to control our lives, our communities, our destiny.



We believe that true political power goes far beyond just voting for the available choices every two to four years. True political power means being able to determine and implement political, economic, and social policy on a local and national level. It means having a political structure financially and socially controlled by and accountable to us and our communities through which we can determine and implement policy that will meet our needs and interests.

No matter how you look at it, both the Democrats and the Republicans are financially and socially controlled by and accountable to the rich, white power structure, with the Democrats being "the kinder, gentler" version which keeps us pacified by providing us with crumbs. Thus, neither party will produce the kind of fundamental change we need for true political, economic, and social power. Thus the need to build a third party independent from the power structure and rooted in grassroots struggle.

The nature of the needs and concerns of poor, working, and oppressed people is such that any third party formed which truly represents all of our needs and unifies us in struggle will, of necessity, have a progressive platform. Such a platform should strongly affirm the right of *all* people to claim their power to control and enjoy the fruits of their labor and the distribution of this country's natural resources and wealth. It should affirm each community's right to cultural, political, and economic self-determination. It should affirm the basic civil and human rights of *all* people, including the right to a job with wages enabling a decent standard of living; to decent, affordable housing; to comprehensive health care; to quality, multi-cultural education; to living in a clean and healthy environment; and the right to live in a just, peaceful, and equitable society, free of racism and all other forms of exploitation and oppression.

Campaign for a New Tomorrow sees part of its role as developing such a platform through researching and critiquing similar attempts by other efforts, public education, and ongoing public discussion, broadening that discussion to allow a full, uninhibited investigation of all options in order to facilitate the development of a platform that best meets the needs and interests of the majority of people in this country — who consist of the poor, working people, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups. To this end, Campaign for a New Tomorrow is proposing an initial set of principles around which it believes such a platform should be built.

## CNT Principles of Unity

Campaign for a New Tomorrow stands for:

1. A socially responsible economy, which is democratically controlled, and which places the highest priority on the needs and interests of human beings, instead of corporate profit.
2. Creating a new, more inclusive, more democratic, more participatory political system through (a) public financing of elections, (b) universal, permanent voter registration, (c) guarantees of equal access to the media by all political parties and candidates, (d) abolition of the electoral college, and (e) other measures needed to create a structure which guarantees priority representation of the needs and interests of grassroots oppressed, poor, and working people, and enables them to play a central role in governance on local and national levels.
3. Elimination of racism and all forms of discrimination based on race, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or disability.
4. Guarantees of full and equal human and legal rights for *all* people living in the United States, with an equal opportunity to achieve U.S. citizenship for all who come to this country, regardless of race, creed, or national origin.
5. Constitutional guarantees of each woman's right to have control over her own reproductive system.
6. A reduction in military spending of at least 50% or more, with the monies being used for conversion to a full-employment peace and justice economy. Repeal of the National Security act in order to dismantle the CIA, which has served as a destructive, uncontrolled, autonomous spy machine.

7. The right of the people to determine, through referendum, whether or not our nation goes to war or commits troops, monies, or aid to any military effort.
8. A "Worker's Bill of Rights," which includes the right to a job with a living wage, the right to organize into a union, the right to strike and not be replaced on the job while doing so, the right to safe and healthy workplaces and working conditions, and the right to fair and equitable treatment, without discrimination in hiring and on the job.
9. Replace the Federal Reserve Board with a democratically elected body to develop and recommend fiscal and monetary policies in the interests and [for the] well-being of all citizens.
10. A fair, progressive tax system with *no* loopholes and *no* tax breaks for the wealthy or big corporations.
11. Reparations to African Americans for their centuries-old forced free labor and the subsequent degradation and exploitation which they have suffered.
12. Respect for the sovereignty and treaty rights of Native Americans. Economic restoration and economic justice for all Native American people.
13. An environmental justice policy which ends environmental racism, repairs the environmental assaults disproportionately borne by communities of color, and ensures clean air, water, land, and food for *all* communities.
14. An ecological energy policy which promotes the efficient use of non-fossil, non-nuclear, renewable energy resources.
15. High quality, affordable daycare and eldercare for all families that need and desire it.
16. Free, quality education from preschool through graduate school, which incorporates an African-centered and multi-cultural curriculum. Strong support of efforts by Blacks to establish independent educational institutions, in addition to the public schools, in order to teach Black children their heritage, since this cannot be left solely to the public school system.
17. An affordable, universal, single payer, national health service which includes preventive health care and ensures quality health care for all. Establishment of a health policy that eliminates discrimination in training, treatment, and research, as well as in the areas of AIDS and substance abuse.
18. Decent housing for everyone.
19. A multi-billion dollar Domestic Marshall Plan to rebuild and revitalize economically devastated communities.
20. An agricultural policy that stops the discriminatory loss of Black-owned farm land, supports family farms for farmers of all races, and promotes ecologically sound farming practices.
21. A criminal justice policy that implements intensive rehabilitation of the 90% of inmates who are not truly dangerous into productive members of society; puts a moratorium on prison construction; eliminates the death penalty; and eliminates institutionalized racist and sexist practices throughout the criminal justice system.
22. The development of community-police review boards to address incidents of police brutality and abuse, specifically as it relates to youth and communities of color (African American, Latino, and Native American).
23. The immediate, unconditional release of all political prisoners and prisoners-of-war currently held throughout United States prisons and jails. These are the former and current members of the Black Panther Party, Black Liberation Army, American Indian Movement, Puerto Rican Liberation Movement, and others who continue to languish in American prisons because of their active opposition to U.S. racism, white supremacy, and its instruments of oppression.
24. A foreign policy based on grassroots solidarity with all oppressed, poor, and working people around the world; forgiveness of Third World debt; the right to self-determination of all peoples; opposition to imperialism by the industrialized world; and opposition to the economic recolonization of the developing nations by the developed ones. □



# The Experience of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party

by David Riehle

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*The following is the transcript of a talk given at the Labor Party Advocates Educational Conference in Detroit, December 5-6, 1992. Dave Riehle is the chairperson of United Transportation Union Local 650, and a labor historian.*

I'm going to speak about our experience in Minnesota with the Farmer-Labor Party. It was an experience that was confined to one state, at a period of time in the past, and it is not easy to find a similar experience in the rest of the United States. I think that it has relevance to a discussion on how a Labor Party might be formed in the United States, and what it might look like. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party existed for 26 years, from 1918 to 1944. This was the most prolonged experience in this country with an authentic mass labor party. Its history can tell us a lot about how a future labor party is likely to be founded, and how it's likely to function.

In the English-speaking countries, particularly in Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, the term labor party has been understood to mean a political party organized, financed, and controlled by the trade union movement. A labor party is also different from most other political parties in that it makes its primary appeal to one social class and puts itself forward as a party that will devote itself primarily to that class. In that sense, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party was a real labor party. As long as it maintained that orientation it was a strong and healthy movement.

There were two primary factors that prepared the ground for the emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota in 1918, one long-term and the other immediate. The first factor was the prior experience, stretching back over several decades and generations, with the great third party reform movements of farmers and urban workers in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century: the Greenback Labor Party of the 1880s, the People's Party, or Populist movement, of the 1890s, and the Socialist Party of the first two decades in the twentieth century. These parties and movements, all of which involved tens of thousands of working people and farmers in electoral and other activities, inculcated the deeply held belief that the two old parties were incapable of reform and were held hostage to the wealthy — the "plutocracy," as they said. This comes through in conventional American history only (to the extent that

it's mentioned at all) as some sort of exotic and transitory phenomenon. This is not true. It was something that was sustained for generations.

I'd like, as an example, to make a short personal reference to this tradition. My great grandmother was the editor and typesetter for a newspaper called the *Workman*, in the small town of Bloomer, Wisconsin, in the 1880s. This paper proclaimed on its masthead, "Defend the rights of the poor — the rich will guard their own." This paper was published in support of the Greenback Labor Party, which was an amalgamation of farmers and urban workers and their movements in the post-Civil War era. This is what my great grandmother, Jennie Jones, wrote in the *Workman* in 1881:

The head of the Republican Party is up among the aristocracy, and they mold public opinion for their party. These aristocrats are the principal oppressors of the American laborers. The head leaders of the Democratic Party are but little better. They've camped on the Republican camping ground for four years — and in the rear of the Republicans for the last sixteen years. The leaders of that party take no special interest in the oppressed working masses. This is one reason why a third party is necessary. So laboring men, having failed to find friends in the old parties, please look at the new. You will find over six hundred Greenback newspapers that are fighting for the rights of the toiling millions. You will have a friend in us. Will you come into our ranks? Will you help strike the shackles from off our brothers throughout America first and Europe next?

The point I want to make here is that this sentiment was rooted in a profound and deep way in large sections of the American working people for generations, and this was the soil from which the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party grew.

The second important factor in the emergence of the Farmer-Labor Party in 1918 was that World War I had opened up a ferocious bipartisan campaign of political repression in the state. As the war ended, this was transformed into an "open shop" union-busting campaign by the employers, who controlled both old parties. At the same time, a powerful

political movement of farmers, the Non-Partisan League, had captured the state government in North Dakota and instituted far-reaching reforms, including favorable labor legislation. This helped to convince many in labor that a labor party would not just be restricted to the cities. The Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota was formed.

Now, in the last statewide election it contested in 1942, it got 38 percent of the vote. In 1944 the Farmer-Labor Party ended 26 years of formal political activity and merged with the Minnesota Democratic Party to form the Minnesota Democratic Farmer-Labor Party, as it is known today.

From the time of the Farmer-Labor Party's first unified statewide campaign in 1922, until the last campaign in 1942, the Farmer-Labor Party was always the first or second party; it was never a third party. The Democratic Party never got more than 9 or 10 percent of the vote in statewide elections during this whole period of over two decades. The Democrats were completely marginalized in the state for twenty years, including the period when Roosevelt and the New Deal were dominant nationally. Roosevelt's coat-tails, so to speak, did not carry any state Democratic politicians with them.

The Republican Party remained strong during this period, but they were gravely weakened by the defection of working farmers, who traditionally supported the Republicans. It's an important point to consider, since one of the arguments against a labor party is that it will split the so-called progressive vote, which is assumed to be exclusively located in the Democratic Party. In fact, what happened in Minnesota with the Farmer-Labor Party was that its existence split both the Republican and Democratic camps. The mythology of the Democratic Party as the so-called people's party, in contrast to the Republicans, tends to obscure the fact that any viable party that competes in elections has to have a mass voting base. The Republicans as well as the Democrats get most of their votes from people with ordinary incomes. The formation today of a real labor party would do the same, I believe. That is, it would significantly split the votes of both the Democratic and Republican parties, as well as stimulate participation by the 50 percent or so of the eligible voters that don't vote.

The Farmer-Labor Party was started by a convention of the Minnesota Federation of Labor and was largely financed by a per capita tax from the affiliated unions, which included practically the whole trade union movement. Unions in Minnesota carried on the party's work as regular union activity. In Minnesota before World War I, as in other states, a large and active group in the unions advocated independent political action by labor. Many labor leaders who were Republicans themselves found an easy excuse by pointing to the conservative backward farmers, as they would characterize them. This



notion exploded in 1916 with the emergence of the Non-Partisan League, which swept into office in North Dakota, began organizing extensively in Minnesota, and grew into a mass movement covering much of the Middle West.

World War I brought on a crisis for organized labor, which was attacked by a nationwide "open shop" drive and in Minnesota by a special supergovernmental body created allegedly to coordinate the war effort and war production; in reality it was directed against militant workers and farmers, especially immigrants from Scandinavia, Germany, and Eastern Europe, who were overwhelmingly opposed to United States participation in the war. An indication of the prevailing atmosphere in Minnesota at that time comes from the chairman of this body, which was called the Public Safety Commission. He was federal judge John McGee on the United States circuit court in St. Paul. He was celebrated for saying, "A Non-Partisan Leaguer is a traitor every time. Where we made our mistake was in not establishing a firing squad in the first days of the war. We should get busy now and have that firing squad working overtime."

At the convention of the Minnesota Federation of Labor in 1918, two delegates from the Pressman's Union, one of whom was William Mahoney, the editor of the *St. Paul Union Advocate* newspaper, proposed an all-labor political convention to follow the Federation's meeting. This motion was adopted and it was convened in August. Ninety unions sent delegates to the convention. A committee was appointed to work out a joint slate with the farmers for the fall elections. The 1918 slate was not elected, but in 1919 the Minnesota Federation of Labor established a permanent political organization, the Working People's Non-Partisan League. They adopted a platform that included demands for many far-reaching reforms, a lot of which have yet to be established in that state. When you look back and review what the aspirations of the movement were at that time, it gives you a realization of how far we've come and how much yet remains to be accomplished.

At first the Farmer and Labor Leagues worked jointly in elections. In 1923 the leagues were merged into the Farmer-Labor Association. I might point out that during this period when the Farmer-Labor Party was coming into existence the percentage of organized workers in this country, and Minnesota was no exception, was at one of the all-time lows in this century — the other period is now — but the fact that the organized labor movement only enrolled 15 percent or so of the work force did not preclude the formation of this party or its ability to obtain a mass following and support from working people and farmers. This is something that might be kept in mind during discussions about the possibilities for the formation of a labor party today.

What kind of party was the FLP? As immediate aims the party fought for labor rights, better farm prices, and relief from farm debts. It always pressed the point that the two-party system was a fraud, that workers and farmers couldn't win in a choice between the two old parties, both controlled by the rich. The Farmer-Labor Party elected two senators, in 1922 and 1923: Henrik Shipstead and Magnus Johnson. Magnus Johnson was a colorful character. He was a farmer who had been an urban worker for a time. He spoke with a broad Scandinavian accent and was known for his many vivid expressions, many of which are remembered to this day. One of the things Magnus Johnson said was, "The only difference between the Democrats and the Republicans is that they work different shifts for the same cause, except in emergencies when they work overtime together." My friends in the rail union certainly felt the truth of that observation in 1991 when we were ordered back to work by a bipartisan vote of congress.

### Politics Was Union Business

Political activity in the FLP started in the affiliated unions, where political discussions, reports of political delegates, and campaign activity were part of the regular business agenda, and payment of the per capita tax to the labor political organization was a part of each budget. Delegates from the unions of each city held monthly meetings or oftener as the Farmer-Labor Central Committee. This went on month after month, year after year.

In 1930, the FLP ran Floyd B. Olson for governor and won. The party controlled the state administration for the next eight years. The FLP's 1934 program called for the replacement of capitalism with a cooperative commonwealth. This so-called radical program scared off some of the more conservative party officials, but the party did better than ever before at the polls. When the party officeholders started watering down the program in search of votes, what actually happened was that the party lost ground. In 1938, when the Republican candidate Harold Stassen was elected governor, the party's program was the most moderate ever, with no demands even for public ownership of utilities.

The increasing control of the party by opportunistic officeholders and politicians gravely weakened it. The party was at its peak of strength, not when it watered down policy and program trying to chase votes, but when it was seen as a class-based party defending the interests of workers and farmers. When it did that, it always had a solid base whether it won in elections or not. The rank and file of the party were what gave it its strength, not elected offices. The more that the rank and file Farmer-Laborites were disenfranchised, the weaker the party became. Yet its natural base remained loyal to the end. As I said earlier, even in its final statewide election campaign in 1942, it got 38 percent of the vote.

In the 1918 and 1920 elections the Farmer-Laborites tried to employ the tactic of capturing one or another of the old party candidates through the primary route. It didn't work out at all, and the confusion it engendered about the identity of the movement made it more difficult to crystallize a rank-and-file movement effectively. From 1922 on, the party also decisively rejected employing the fusion tactic — that is, the tactic of running only in districts where it felt sure it could win and endorsing Republican and Democratic candidates in the other districts. It put the priority on building the movement, and it felt that could most effectively be done by presenting the face of this party in every election it could possibly contest, whether it had a chance of winning or not. The old-timers in the movement knew well that the fusion tactic was what helped to wreck the People's Party twenty years earlier, and they were determined not to repeat that experience.

The Minnesota experience, in my opinion, refutes the idea that the two-party system is natural and inevitable in the United States. The two-party system was breached when a party was organized that was authoritatively based on the real mass organizations of working people and answerable to the unions and rank-and-file farmers organizations. Conditions for a labor party were not highly favorable even at that time. Nevertheless, the FLP was able to establish itself and retain a loyal mass following. Class division turned out to be so strong and natural that even this isolated, distorted, and eventually crippled working class party hung on for a quarter of a century and won victories. When we look back on the experience today, I think its relevance is emphasized by the fact that most of the issues the party addressed and campaigned for are not yet resolved. Even the New Deal and the era of post-World War II prosperity are turning out to be passing phenomena. At the beginning of the 1980s, nearly 80 percent of unemployed workers received unemployment compensation. Today, it's maybe 20 percent. Growing numbers of workers face the insecurities of old age, sickness, unemployment, housing, and education for their children without protection. Many working people without jobs are in the same position their grandparents were in the 1920s: dependent on inadequate private charity.

In order to learn how to go forward, we're going to have to reconquer our own history, and when we do, we're going to find out that our own past contains many of the answers for today and the future, buried for generations by the neglect of official history and public education. We have to relearn what has come before us, and I'm confident that when we do that, the labor movement will rediscover its own heritage again in much the same way that Malcolm X is being rediscovered by young African American people today. Thanks for your attention. □



# The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party

by Warren Creel

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*The following article appeared in **The Fourth International**, vol. VII, March 1946. Warren Creel had been secretary of the Educational Bureau of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Association.*

In 1944, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party ended twenty-six years of activity as an independent party by merging with the Democrats. The party was eliminated by a bureaucratically formed merger although it was still a strong political force. The Farmer-Labor candidate for governor had been defeated in 1938, after eight years of electoral victories. Yet up to the merger the party was still polling 38 percent of the vote in state elections, more than the Minnesota Democratic Party.

able relation, shifting from cooperation to opposition at various stages of the movement.

The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party started in 1918, at the end of the First World War, and took form from the class pattern of its time. This pattern has changed greatly since then.

The seed of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party was in the Socialist Party, which reached its height just before the First World War. The Socialist weekly *Appeal to Reason* had a

Jennings Bryan Democrats, and the Bull Moosers behind Theodore Roosevelt, the phony “trust-buster,” and the various “money crank” movements, were some of the expressions of this petty-bourgeois protest against capitalism.

Many of the best and most farsighted of these middle-class protesters, both small businessmen and farmers, joined the Socialist Party and helped make it the mass movement that it was. But they also helped import their non-working class tendency into the Socialist Party.

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*One of the important responsibilities carried out by revolutionary socialists is to serve as “the living memory” of working-class struggles. The invaluable lessons learned from previous experiences need to be transmitted to each generation of revolutionary fighters — not to establish rigid rules nor to enshrine dogmas but to help activists work out successful strategies and tactics. It is in this spirit that **Bulletin in Defense of Marxism** publishes Walter Creel’s 1946 survey of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and George Breitman’s 1959 explanation of why socialists advocate independent working-class political action. These archival materials complement the presentations by Dave Riehle and Jerry Gordon which are published in this issue. Breitman’s commentary on the disastrous ties between the labor bureaucrats and the Democratic Party provides an historical dimension to Gordon’s current argument that workers and oppressed groups must break completely with both major parties and undertake genuine independent political action.*

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### A Fraudulent Alibi

In the Minnesota labor movement before the First World War, as in other states, a large and active Socialist group constantly advocated political action by labor. The labor bureaucrats, who were Republican politicians themselves, found an easy excuse by pointing to the bugaboo of the “conservative, backward farmers.” In Minnesota the population was evenly divided — 50 percent urban, 50 percent rural — during this period. When a resolution for political action was debated at a labor convention, the bureaucrats would agree that labor needed political action, but they would say, “You can’t win an election without the farm vote, boys, and the farmers are conservative, they are anti-labor, they always vote Republican, so it’s useless to try.”

That notion exploded in 1916 when the farmers organized the Nonpartisan League and swept into office a state ticket and a legislature in North Dakota in their first election campaign.

The Nonpartisan League soon grew into a mass movement covering the Middle West, putting its candidates into office in a large group of states, and then was liquidated so thoroughly that the scope of the movement is almost forgotten. It was strictly a farmers’ group, a small proprietors’ party, an organization of petty-bourgeois political action.

The Nonpartisan League built on the farm following of the old Socialist Party; the organizers would go into a county with the list of subscribers to the *Appeal to Reason* as their starting point. The League won immediate mass support, gaining startlingly prompt election success. In Minnesota it soon gained a large membership. The League scored substantial achievements in economic and social

The Farmer-Labor Party’s quarter century of activity provides the longest experience with a labor party that U.S. history offers up to the present. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Association was a genuine labor party. It was not just a pro-labor party, it was a party of organized labor, a political federation of labor unions.

The Minnesota Association was started by a convention of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, and was largely financed by a per capita tax from the affiliated unions, which included practically the whole trade union movement. Unions in Minnesota carried on the party’s political work as a regular union activity.

The Farmer-Labor Party contained another class element, a current of middle-class political protest, based particularly on the farmers and small businessmen. The relation between these two class elements, working-class politics on the one hand, and middle-class or petty-bourgeois politics on the other, played a large part in governing the party’s life, and finally brought about its death. It was a vari-

circulation of a million, with two to four million printed for special editions. Other Socialist periodicals had mass circulations. The Socialist Party elected mayors in Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and elsewhere.

The Socialist movement of that day sprang, not from capitalist decline, but from capitalist growth. Large-scale enterprises were taking over the economic scene. Monopolies were ousting the small businessmen. Capitalism was changing America from an agricultural to an industrial nation, forcing out the farmers by the debt and mortgage foreclosure route.

While the workers organized against capitalism for working-class reasons, a separate movement of the middle class attacked capitalism for reasons of its own.

The American petty bourgeoisie, the middle class, steadily reduced and circumscribed by capitalism, formed a series of political movements in the hopeless attempt to stop the historical development that had doomed them. The Populists, who merged with the Democratic Party and became the William



legislation in several states. But it set itself no goals beyond this, and even during its victories fell to pieces. In the space of a few years the national Nonpartisan League went through its complete evolution ending in death.

The First World War brought a crisis for organized labor, which was attacked by a nationwide open-shop drive, and in Minnesota by anti-union prosecutions of a particularly vicious Minnesota Public Safety Commission. While this emergency turned labor's eyes to a political defense, the Nonpartisan League put a stop to the labor bureaucrats' stall about the impossibility of getting the farmers into motion. It was labor's move.

At a convention of the Minnesota State Federation of Labor in July 1918, Socialists who were delegates from numerous unions offered a resolution calling for a state labor political convention. In the war atmosphere, many delegates were afraid to sign the resolution for fear of being labeled pro-German. But the resolution was nonetheless passed, and the State Federation called the unions to a convention which set up the Working People's Nonpartisan Political League. The labor movement took as its model the farmers, who had been called "backward" for so many years.

At first the labor and farm leagues worked jointly in the election campaigns. In 1923 the separate leagues were merged into the Farmer-Labor Federation, and later the name was changed to Farmer-Labor Association. This was the membership organization, made up of both affiliated unions, paying a per capita tax of two cents a member a month, and Farmer-Labor clubs, with membership dues of a dollar a year.

The rise of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party was not an exceptional one-state development, but part of a national political upsurge in the postwar period which brought the organization of similar Farmer-Labor parties in many states, and the national campaign for LaFollette for President in 1924. The exceptional state feature was this, that during its rise the Minnesota party was given official labor sponsorship and organized labor party machinery. While in other states Farmer-Labor parties were formed by a few unions, in Minnesota the State Federation of Labor issued the call to the whole labor movement. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Association drew its finances from a per capita paid by stable union organizations.

### "Declaration of Principles"

Out of all the nationwide organizations, the Minnesota movement, having official organized labor backing, was the only one to survive.

In spite of continued loyalty from Minnesota farmers, and a continued strong farm vote, the dues-paying membership in rural counties dropped to almost nothing in a few years, and the function of financing the As-

sociation fell completely on the labor unions through the '20s.

In various detailed points the Association's "Declaration of Principles" expressed its general aim, to serve as the political arm of the working people, without differentiation between workers and farmers.

The Farmer-Labor movement seeks to unite into a political organization all persons engaged in agriculture and other useful industry, and those in sympathy with their interests, for the purpose of securing legislation that will protect and promote the economic welfare of the wealth producers.

And further,

It maintains that the prevailing inequality of opportunity is due to special privileges and monopolistic advantages, which can and should be abolished by legislative action.

It declares that the government at present is dominated by the few and its powers are used to serve special interests. Money and credits, market and exchange facilities, the means of transportation and communication and the natural resources and other basic industries of the nation are practically monopolized by an industrial and financial oligarchy, which is in a position to extract tribute from all who live by labor and to keep great masses of people in a condition of unemployment and destitution by manipulating the productive powers of the nation.

It aims to rescue the government from the control of the privileged few and make it function for the use and benefit of all by abolishing monopoly in every form, and to establish in place thereof a system of public ownership and operation of monopolized industries, which will afford every able and willing worker an opportunity to work and will guarantee the enjoyment of the proceeds thereof, thus increasing the amount of available wealth, eradicating unemployment and destitution, and abolishing industrial autocracy.

As immediate aims the party fought for labor rights and labor strength and protection of labor organization, for better prices for farm products, relief from farm debts, and strengthening of farm cooperative organizations. It campaigned for "honest government" and fought the corrupt old parties.

It always pressed the point that the two-party system was a fraud, that the workers and farmers couldn't win in a choice between the two old parties, both controlled by the capitalist class.

The effect of this Farmer-Labor program was electrifying. The members sacrificed to finance campaigns. They distributed literature, made house-to-house drives to register voters, etc., to build the party of the working class, "to promote the economic welfare of the wealth producers."

### Why Party Survived

Victory in each immediate election is not necessary for a party's survival so long as it has this class orientation. Its very existence is a victory. The labor members of the party feel well rewarded for their campaign efforts

by getting a few spokesmen into effective positions. And they are right, for a spokesman who is a servant of the labor party is a great gain. Thus, a few Farmer-Laborites in the Minnesota state legislature were able to force real concessions for both farmers and organized labor in the '20s. The record of legislation, especially farm legislation, won by a Farmer-Labor minority in the Minnesota state legislature, is phenomenal.

When the party began getting majorities in the '30s, the petty-bourgeois officeholders who had jumped on the bandwagon put forward the idea that only majorities and election victories can count, because that's all that can count for jobs for officeholders. They set to work to weaken the program and turn away from the class line to appeal to everybody, so as to always have the majority and the election victory. Dropping the class orientation for victory at any price brought defeat and eventually killed the party.

The prosperity of the '20s was a lean time for political protest movements. The Minnesota party, however, was able to survive the general decline that killed off the national Farmer-Labor movement precisely because of its stable organized labor backing. While the Minnesota FLP suffered along with the rest, it continued to be, not a third party, but the second party. Minnesota politics was a fight between the Republican and Farmer-Labor parties, with the Democratic Party a poor third, even through the Coolidge prosperity era.

The first election campaign of the Farmer-Labor Party, in 1918, gave this vote for governor (to the nearest thousand):

<b>1918 Final Election for Governor of Minnesota</b>	
Farmer-Labor, David H. Evans .....	112,000
Republican, J.A.A. Burnquist.....	167,000
Democrat, Fred E. Wheaton.....	77,000

In 1920 the candidates were run in the final election under the name "Independent." (All votes show larger than 1918, because the suffrage amendment had given women the vote.)

<b>1920 Final Election for Governor of Minnesota</b>	
Independent, Henrik Shipstead .....	281,000
Republican, J.O.A. Preus .....	416,000
Democrat, L.C. Hodgson .....	81,000

The party's percentage of the vote, it will be noted, had dropped badly. In 1922 the movement abandoned "nonpartisan" tactics altogether, fought all the way through the primaries and the general election under the Farmer-Labor name, and came very close to victory, with the Democrats still nowhere:

<b>1922 Final Election for Governor of Minnesota</b>	
Farmer-Labor, Magnus Johnson .....	295,000
Republican, J.O.A. Preus .....	310,000
Democrat, Edward Indrehus.....	80,000

In 1922 the party elected two Farmer-Labor congressmen and a senator.

Even in 1928, which marked the low point



in the party vote, it kept its second position, exceeding the Democrats by a small margin. In 1930, with the outbreak of the depression, the party elected the first Farmer-Labor governor and started the eight years of Farmer-Labor state administration.

In the farmer and labor alliance trouble did not develop in the form that might be expected, as a conflict between the interests of the two groups. In Minnesota the farmers and labor cooperated very well on the level of immediate issues. The farmers were most favorably impressed by what the labor movement was willing and able to do for them.

However, the genuine farmers as well as the pseudo-farmers — small-town bankers and lawyers — were an influence for retreat from a working-class orientation. When the movement was taking shape there were sharp battles over opportunist steps, such as the nomination of Henrik Shipstead for U.S. Senator in 1922. The farmers, of course, considered themselves as holding the party on the correct middle of the road. As Marx explained, the petty bourgeois, pulled two ways by his double class position, “inwardly flatters himself that he is impartial and has found the right equilibrium.”

In Association conventions the farm and labor delegates represented entirely different types of organizations. The farm delegations came from a few small or even inactive clubs, since the dues-paying rural membership dropped away after the first wave of organization. Yet they cast convention votes all out of proportion to their membership, because the Association constitution allotted votes by areas in proportion to Farmer-Labor strength in the state election. As long as the party's farm vote held up, which it did, delegates from a few small rural clubs voted for half the Farmer-Labor Association.

The labor section was basically a political federation of labor unions, a genuine labor party organization. It had in operation the elementary machinery that is necessary for real working-class politics. Political activity started in the affiliated labor union locals, where political discussion, reports of political delegates, and political campaign activity were part of the regular business of each meeting, and payment of per-capita to the labor political organization was a constant part of the budget. Delegates from the unions of each city met in monthly meetings or more often, as the Farmer-Labor Association city central committee. This went on month after month and year after year.

In the cities, on the fringe of the political federation of unions there were other organizations, also part of the Farmer-Labor Association, and also sending delegates to the Farmer-Labor central committee. These were mainly Farmer-Labor clubs; some other organizations, such as Socialist Party locals, also were affiliated. All these organizations played a secondary role to the unions, until the days of decline of the party.

A functioning labor party organization, based on the unions, is a powerful means of holding the party to a class program. The petty-bourgeois politicians wanted to turn the party away from the class program and toward compromise. They soon saw that they would have to begin by eliminating the labor party form of organization, and they tried it. The leader in this attempt was F.A. Pike of the Nonpartisan League. Pike was a Democrat, not a farmer but a lawyer, the Nonpartisan League's attorney. He was state chairman of the “Farmer-Labor Party,” which was the non-membership skeleton “organization” required by the state election law for all parties on the ballot. He proposed liquidating the membership organizations and operating with only ordinary election machinery like the two old parties.

Some of the story of this struggle was retold in the May 13, 1925, issue of the movement's state newspaper (then the *Farmer-Labor Advocate*, later renamed *Farmer-Labor Leader*):

A peculiar conflict of opinion has prevailed within the Farmer-Labor movement since its organization. Many of the supporters coming from the old political parties cannot see the necessity for maintaining active organization and educational work between campaigns. These voters have not yet been able to discover the vital difference between the Farmer-Labor Party and the old capitalist parties....

Perhaps the most intense discussion of party affairs arose out of the campaigns of 1922-23 over the difference of views between the state chairman of the Farmer-Labor Party, F.A. Pike, and state chairman of the Working People's League, [ex-Socialist] Wm. Mahoney....

Mr. Pike, as head of the Farmer-Labor Party, took the position that it was identical with the old parties in form and method and that it was not permissible nor necessary for it to assume any other functions than that prescribed by the state law creating and governing political parties. On his side of the controversy were a large number of persons who did not have a fundamental grasp of the Farmer-Labor movement and considered it simply a variation of the old parties.

On the other side, Mr. Mahoney and others maintained that the Farmer-Labor movement and the party that represented it was fundamentally different from the old parties and required an entirely different form of organization to accomplish its purpose.

Pike was defeated at a convention in St. Cloud by a coalition of trade unionist and Communist Party forces. This set the movement on the path of labor party organization and cleared the way for the merger of the labor and farm leagues into the Farmer-Labor Federation. The following year the trade unionists expelled the Communists and changed the name to Farmer-Labor Association.

### Olson and the FLP

The struggle against the forces led by Pike forecast the party struggle of the '30s, when

another lawyer from the Democratic Party, named Floyd B. Olson, was to try again to substitute old party forms for the labor party machinery.

Floyd Olson, a capable, courageous, and spectacular politician, had been county attorney in Minneapolis for several years, and had made himself immensely popular. The depression offered the Farmer-Laborites a chance of victory in 1930, and they wanted Olson as standard-bearer. As a condition of accepting the nomination, he demanded that the Association convention vote him a free hand in making appointments. The convention granted it.

Olson promptly proceeded to set up an organization of “Olson All-Party Committees,” outside the Association. These were made up of bandwagon-climbing Republicans, Democrats, and political opportunists of every stripe, who supported Olson on the promise of state jobs or other political deals. The task of the “All-Party” politicians was to campaign on the “good man” platform. Meanwhile, the Association was to keep on getting votes for the Farmer-Labor program.

The campaign of Olson and his supporters was an open effort to “slur over contradictions and differences,” and to “unite people of different views and tendencies, and subordinate clarification of their differences to success in the organization struggle.” Such an aim required them to get rid of the Association. Olson began his attempt to replace and eliminate the Association immediately after he was elected. But he ran into trouble, and a lot of trouble.

This labor party, even though it was divided within itself by its two-class composition, even though it was crippled by limitation to one state, even though at this time it lacked leadership conscious of the party's role and organizational needs, still this labor party showed an amazing vitality, a capacity to absorb punishment and keep moving forward.

Olson went into office as the first Farmer-Labor governor, but he appointed old party politicians from the “All-Party” machine to policy-forming state posts, and even appointed a Republican as State Personnel director, in charge of hiring for all state jobs. Naturally, state patronage went to “All-Partyites.” The loyal Farmer-Laborites stood out in the cold for a while before they woke up to what their idol was doing, and then they started a party struggle which boiled in the movement for years.

The struggle couldn't be resolved as Olson had planned it, because even the state jobs did not succeed in building up the “All-Party” machine into a party to replace the Association. The Association just did not submit to being eliminated. In spite of political patronage starvation it grew, until it forced substantial political recognition from Olson. When Olson came up for re-election he was forced to recognize the strength of the Association.

Yet through the years the political oppor-



tunists slowly gained. They outmaneuvered the rank-and-file Farmer-Laborites, principally by exploiting and betraying the loyalty of the members to the party. The "All-Party" politicians themselves could accomplish little in the fight, because they couldn't command respect or trust from the party's rank and file. It always had to be politicians from the Association who served as cover.

The worker members had strong organizational loyalty. Even when skeptical, they preferred to try almost anything before forcing a break that would jeopardize their party. The protesting worker Farmer-Laborites, in the various committees from the state association, from local clubs and affiliated unions would confer again and again with state and party officials on their grievances. What the workers wanted, at bottom, was to take the situation into their own hands and do it their way, but the matter was always presented to them as if they did not have that choice. It was made to appear that they had to choose between accepting a bad bargain or breaking ranks and injuring the whole organization. Faced with this choice, the workers often backed down, "for the good of the party."

Various items of the Farmer-Labor program, on which the administration had been delaying, finally saw some action as a result of Association pressure. In the end the administration yielded on the patronage issue, which was a burning one in years of unemployment like 1932 and 1933. A system of preferred lists was set up for state jobs, made up on endorsements from Farmer-Labor clubs. Although some big policy-forming jobs went to "All-Partyites," a Farmer-Labor endorsement became necessary for the general run of state jobs.

In this period the Association grew by leaps; previously unorganized counties were covered with Farmer-Labor clubs in a rush, and the club membership began to rival the affiliated unions in size. By the convention of 1934 for the first time all counties of the state had Farmer-Labor organizations. There was no guarantee of the political interest of the new members. A large part of them eventually came to be controlled through their state jobs, and acted as a state employee machine in the Association. The attempt to replace the Association with an "All-Party" machine had failed, but the administration captured the Association by the patronage route. For a time finally came when the Association's state committee voted on organization issues squarely on job lines, with all the state employees on the committee voting to uphold the governor, and all the rest voting against the governor. In the end the administration had a majority of jobholders on the state committee.

Unbelievable as it seems, with all the advantages on the side of the politicians, there was still a period of several years of struggle before the Farmer-Labor members were licked.

The Minneapolis workers found that the

Farmer-Labor Party was less dependable as a class instrument than their unions. Early in the '30s at the Minneapolis city election the Farmer-Labor voters turned out the Republican mayor, on the issue that his police had killed two pickets during the truck strike. The new Farmer-Labor mayor was not a militant worker nor a union worker at all, but a lawyer named Thomas Latimer, a former Socialist Party candidate for governor. Before many weeks Mayor Latimer marched in person at the head of his police to escort scabs through a picket line at the Flour City Iron Works, where later his police tear-gassed and shot pickets, killing two bystanders.

Latimer was following the advice of certain conservative Minnesota labor leaders. These bureaucrats were terrified by the strike wave, which was under the leadership of the Minnesota Socialist Workers Party; they were alarmed by the rank-and-file activity this stirred up, and the militant leadership this was advancing in the unions. They wanted the Farmer-Labor mayor to make the labor movement safe for union bureaucracy by stopping mass strikes and sending all labor disputes to government arbitration. Latimer created a city Board of Mediation, appointed some employers and conservative labor officials to it, and called on all strikers to go back to work without a settlement, leaving their disputes to his board.

When the strikers wouldn't trust their fate to Latimer's Mediation Board he lost his head and tried to use the police to enforce his "labor peace" with bullets. Latimer and his kind not only couldn't understand working-class action; they were panic-stricken by it.

But the workers had a hold over the Farmer-Labor mayor, even such a miserable example as Latimer. Minneapolis labor boiled. The movement held a protest mass meeting to which it summoned Latimer, and *he had to respond*. Behind the scenes the party officials and union leaders tried to close ranks to protect Latimer ("these protests will embarrass the governor"), but they only succeeded in keeping him from being bodily thrown out of office. He remained a political cripple for the rest of his term.

### Aftermath of 1934 Victory

The party officials thought the "radical platform" adopted in 1934 under the workers' pressure would kill the party, but in the 1934 election the Farmer-Labor ticket as a whole polled better than ever before. Olson was reelected by a good margin, although his personal vote went down a little from the previous point. It was more a party, and less an "All-Party" vote. Still the convention's action scared the Farmer-Labor state officials out of their wits, and they set out again to get rid of the inconvenient rank and file, more precisely, the membership organization form.

One of their plans was to eliminate the Association entirely by merging with the Progressive Party of Wisconsin. The latter was a

LaFollette family affair, with no membership organization to demand adherence to a program. The party tops maneuvered frantically. They removed the state secretary of the Association because he pushed Association policies against Olson's wishes. They discharged the editor of the *Farmer-Labor Leader* because he supported the Association against the "All-Partyites." They changed the paper's name.

With all their scurrying they couldn't find a substitute for the Association, nor a way to get along without its votes. The Farmer-Labor Association continued to stand for a certain program to thousands of workers and farmers, and they clung to it. The officeholders only succeeded in tightening up control to stop any more voice from the ranks, to make more clear the widening gap between the worker members and the petty-bourgeois politicians in office. They succeeded in adding more and more to the feeling of the worker members that it was no longer their own party. Thus they dealt mortal wounds by striking at the basic program of the movement, "to serve as the political arm of the working class." Nevertheless, it took four years before the movement suffered an election defeat, and ten years before the Association could be liquidated.

The movement became weakened especially at its core, the affiliated unions. The dissatisfaction of the union members led them to demand party discipline, which demand comes in the normal course of events in a labor party. But this dissatisfaction was used by the large bloc of labor officials whose real feelings were against the labor party. Every political grievance of the union members gave them opportunity to do deadly work.

The labor skates used every opportunity to stir up discontent with the Farmer-Labor Party and to channel that discontent away from an attempt to enforce discipline. They did not want to improve the party but only to split the unions away from it. They were in a fine position to deceive the union members. They denounced the same politicians that the members denounced and cursed the same betrayals. They stressed the main issue, that the party no longer belonged to the workers. Only their remedy was not to get rid of the petty-bourgeois parasites but to march out and leave the party in their hands.

Floyd Olson's early death in 1936 brought on a scramble for control, which speeded all the tendencies of decline in the party. Elmer Benson, who was elected governor by the Farmer-Labor Party after Olson's death, was a prisoner of the deals he had made for support from various blocs in the party. Benson was a small-town banker, with no knowledge of the labor movement and no skill in politics. In the party struggle he grabbed for allies and hung on.

### Perfidious Role of Stalinists

It was the Communist Party (Stalinists) who



cash in on this situation through their superior organizing techniques and methods plus their recklessness resulting from their desertion of working-class principles. Benson and the Stalinists used the Farmer-Labor organization and state patronage strictly for their own ends. Veteran Farmer-Laborites were spurned, union organizations rebuked. Union representatives were refused appointments to see the governor, and labor's program was thrown out the window by Benson.

Benson's antics brought great satisfaction to the labor skates. They proclaimed that the movement was in a hopeless mess from Stalinist control and could no longer be considered an instrument of labor. They urged the unions to walk out and set up separate labor central political committees in each city, to serve as direct political arms of organized labor. They proposed such committees as a cure for the sick Farmer-Labor Party, by giving simon-pure independent labor political action, the genuine article, representing labor alone and excluding the non-worker elements. In practice this was a step back to the Gompers method of an "independent" labor choice between two identically anti-labor old parties. The Farmer-Labor mess was so bad, and the workers were so sick of the interlopers, that this proposal succeeded in confusing genuine Farmer-Laborites in the unions. The labor fakers' proposed "reform," of course, turned out to be a bridge back to old party politics, to Republican Party politics for most of the labor skates. The labor political committees didn't give Republican endorsements, but they tied up the labor movement while the skates themselves went in droves on "Labor Volunteer Committees for Stassen."

Some Farmer-Labor militants had welcomed the Stalinists, expecting them to be allies against the "All-Party" politicians. But entanglement with the old parties was exactly the Stalinist plan. They led the fight against a working-class program and united with any discredited reactionary who would go with their bloc.

### Scuttling of the FLP

The party's retreat from its working-class orientation killed it politically during Benson's administration. In the fall of 1936 he was elected by the largest majority ever polled for governor in a Minnesota election. In 1938 Benson was ousted, and the Republican Stassen elected by the largest majority ever polled except one, the record set by Benson two years before!

Following this catastrophic defeat, the Association called a postelection convention, in January of 1939, to cure the ills of the party.

Preconvention maneuvers showed that the "All-Party" politicians and conservative labor leaders planned to use the Stalinists as scapegoats for the defeat. That convention

was reported in this magazine. (Walter Bierce, "A Party Without a Program," *The New Internationalist*, March 1939.)

At the 1939 convention the party bureaucrats and labor bureaucrats, in close teamwork, finished off the Farmer-Labor Party. They used up the whole convention with a sham battle on the Stalinist issue, and protected their own records by keeping out every word about program. The convention did nothing but adopt a "purge" rule against the Stalinists, which nobody took seriously.

The role of the labor officialdom appears in the St. Paul *Union Advocate*, in its issue of February 2, 1939:

On no less than half a dozen occasions the majority of the Ramsey County (St. Paul) delegates were on the point of walking out of the convention in a body. Had they withdrawn from the convention it would not have been for the purpose of holding a rump convention, but to definitely wash their hands of the Farmer-Labor Party.

And how the labor skates were urging the unions to that conclusion!

A few days later the Duluth Central Labor Political Committee withdrew from the Farmer-Labor Association. That's what the committee had been created for — to withdraw. A general union exodus followed, leaving the Association machinery in the hands of the Stalinists, in spite of the "purge."

In the Minnesota election of 1942 the union bureaucrats went the farthest in open support of Stassen, paying off because the latter used every resource of state machinery down to his State Labor Conciliator in order to force the Minneapolis drivers into Tobin's AFL union, prohibiting a vote on whether they preferred 544 CIO, under the leadership of the Minnesota section of the Socialist Workers Party, who had built the drivers' union. Their hands trembling with gratitude, these skates rushed labor endorsements to Stassen, Joe Ball, and any other Republican who would accept a labor endorsement.

In the 1942 general election, the Farmer-Labor nominee, Hjalmar Peterson, a weak candidate of a split movement, with no organized union support, still polled 38 percent of the vote.

This was the last Farmer-Labor campaign. In 1944 the Farmer-Labor Association was merged into the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. The merger was a Stalinist bureaucratic move from start to finish, perpetrated in order to demonstrate loyalty to Roosevelt. It was not a Minnesota plan, but part of the same worldwide Stalinist maneuver that brought the formal burial of the Third International and the dissolution of the American Communist Party at the time.

When we sum up the lessons of Minnesota's labor party certain points stand out:

1. Minnesota's experience refutes the assertion that the two-party system of politics

is "natural" to the United States. The two-party system was breached when class issues were raised. Conditions for labor party development were not highly favorable, as the collapse of the movement in the rest of the country showed. Yet the class division in politics turned out to be the natural one, so natural and so strong that even this isolated, distorted, diluted, and crippled working-class party hung on for a quarter of a century and won victories, and it took the reactionary period of the Second World War and the abysmal treachery of the Stalinists to kill it.

2. The Minnesota experience gives evidence against the proposition that a national labor party in America, in this period, could settle down into a stable, bureaucratic labor machine, holding the workers in line by distributing a few reformist crumbs, like the labor and Socialist parties of Europe in an earlier period. In Minnesota there was no such stable relationship between the members and the conservative labor leaders. The bureaucrats were willing enough; all they wanted was to settle down. But they couldn't find a way to manage it. They had to settle down with Stassen.

Labor parties hardened into stable reformist machines in Europe in the upswing of capitalism, during a lengthy period when the ruling class had some degree of security and some substantial economic concessions to offer the workers. The labor party movement in the United States, by contrast, comes when capitalism and its class relations are at a later stage, a higher level.

This same high level of class relations, which makes the first steps slow, will greatly aid the party once it gets a start. The character of the times will not help the bureaucrats in their efforts to turn the labor party into an efficient brake to hold back the workers.

3. The Minnesota movement scored its greatest successes when the workers took the leadership. The workers had to act for their own class program, not only free from capitalist politics, but free from non-working class influences in the party's ranks. In the coming national labor party the workers will find the same paramount need to build working-class independence.

Events will confirm the need for independent working-class political action and help them in this task. The new national labor party movement will develop in a stormier period of economic crisis, and with a more advanced working class than existed in America at the time of the previous national labor party movement. The achievements of the Minnesota workers under much less favorable conditions have shown the tremendous power latent in the American working class, only waiting for a chance to find expression in political growth and struggle. □



# Progressives and the Democratic Party

by George Breitman

*Socialists have long debated questions about supporting relatively liberal capitalist parties and candidates. Arguments for and against participation in the Democratic Party were presented in a May 8, 1959, debate sponsored by the Friday Night Socialist Forum in Detroit. Although there may have been many changes in specific economic and political circumstances, the basic views counterposed 34 years ago remain relevant for socialist activists today. In fact, contemporary revolutionaries have the advantage of being able to test the different political approaches against the historical record.*

*Carl Haessler, a well-known and highly respected longtime socialist, argued in favor of the proposition that progressives should work in the Democratic Party. He detailed a number of recent gains for the labor movement which, he asserted, were the result of electing Democrats at the state and national levels. Pointing out the difficulties of creating a new party and winning ballot status, he urged progressives to take over the existing Democratic Party. According to Haessler, labor had successfully "infiltrated" and "captured" three states — Michigan, Minnesota, and West Virginia — and was well on its way to capturing Ohio; other states ripe for labor control of the Democratic Party were: Oregon, Washington, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.*

*George Breitman, at that time a leading figure in the Socialist Workers Party and an internationally recognized political writer, answered Haessler's points and argued in favor of an alternative: independent working class political action. Following are major excerpts from Breitman's presentation. The material is taken from a mimeographed pamphlet published by the Friday Night Socialist Forum.*

**S**ocialists say that political parties represent, express, reflect class interests. This doesn't mean that parties necessarily say they represent class interests; nor that all their members think they do; nor even that all their members come from the same class. The truth of this proposition doesn't depend on what socialists say. It can be tested by facts, the evidence of history, objective analysis.

When socialists say the Democratic Party is a capitalist party, they don't mean that most of its members are capitalists. Obviously not. If the capitalists had to depend on their own numbers, they couldn't elect a justice of the peace, for they are a tiny part of the population. Actually, most supporters of the Demo-

cratic Party are workers, farmers, and members of the middle classes. But they aren't the ones who decide the real aims of the party.

Nationally, the Democratic Party is a coalition: of capitalists and labor leaders, of Southern white supremacists and Northern Negroes, of corrupt machines in the cities and unorganized or loosely organized farmers on the land, of conservatives and liberals, etc.

This coalition explains why the Democratic Party says the things it says, why it writes the platforms it writes — for it appeals to conflicting interests and tries to hold them together. It also explains why the Democratic Party sometimes says different things than the other capitalist party, the Republican

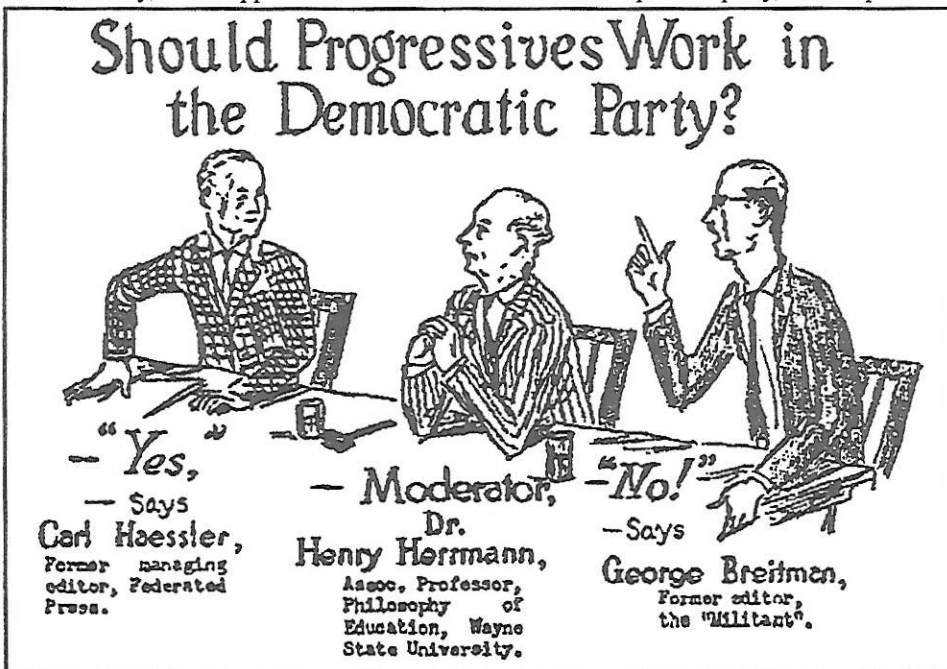
Party. The Republican Party has a somewhat different composition and following, making its major appeal for support to the middle classes and nonunionized sections of the working class.

But the coalition which makes up the Democratic Party doesn't determine which interest controls, dominates, runs, and uses the Democratic Party. We say it is dominated, as the Republican Party is dominated, by a minority of its members — by a small group of monopoly capitalists who also control the economy, the government, the means of communication, and the educational system.

It doesn't matter what the Democratic platform says; the chief function of this party, as of the Republican Party, is to protect the interests of the monopoly capitalists at home and abroad. It doesn't matter what the candidates of this party say during election campaigns — they usually say what they think will win votes, not what they think — what counts is what its officeholders do about the important issues of the day.

## Wars, Jobs, Civil Rights, Witch Hunts

The overwhelming majority of the people in this country, and of the members of both capitalist parties, want peace, the relaxation of international tensions, a ban on nuclear explosions, and so on. But what do they get? Wars, war crises, preparation for war, militarization, the draft, a permanent arms economy and crushing taxes to maintain it, the continuation of the cold war and cold war propaganda. And the Democratic Party's chief complaint against the Republicans is that they don't appropriate and spend enough for these purposes! On this issue, the Democratic Party surely serves the interests of the ruling class faithfully and consistently.



Drawing from leaflet promoting May 8, 1959, Friday Night Socialist Forum.



The Democrats differ from the Republicans occasionally on what to do about unemployment because the Democrats usually have greater support among the unemployed and want to retain that support. But their differences are minor, sometimes insignificant. They agree on the basic things: that the present economic system must not be reorganized to abolish unemployment; that when workers are laid off through no fault of their own, they should suffer cuts in their living standards — rather than the employers; that jobless compensation should not be paid for the duration of unemployment; that the workweek should not be shortened. These are things the capitalist class thinks, too.

### The Democrats and Racism

The Jim Crow system in the U.S. is the scandal of the world. Nevertheless, the American ruling class shows no intention of abolishing it within the time of anyone now living. In the South, the Democratic Party is a one-party dictatorship dedicated to maintaining white supremacy. In Congress, it provides the bulk of the votes against meaningful civil rights legislation. Northern Democrats have to make some gestures to keep the Negro vote, but their liberalism is rarely more than skin deep on this question. If you elect liberals who swear undying devotion to the civil rights cause, the first thing they do when they get to Washington is vote to elect the Southern Democratic enemies of the Negro people to the key Congressional posts which are used to block civil rights and all other progressive legislation. Liberals like [Michigan] Governor Williams will make impassioned speeches about injustice to Negroes in the South, but no one has ever heard him utter a single word about the most Jim Crow city in the North — right on his own doorstep, Dearborn, whose mayor boasts that no Negro can live there. So, it would be putting it mildly to say that the Democratic Party's policy on civil rights is in accord with that of the ruling class, which always benefits from hatred and discord among the workers.

The record shows that the Democratic Party served the capitalist class just as zealously in [the] witch hunt as the Republicans. The Democrats passed and enforced the Smith Act to gag political dissent. Democratic presidents transformed the FBI into a political police force. The Democrats started the misnamed government "loyalty" program. A Democratic president initiated the "subversive" blacklist. Democrats spearheaded the passage of the Internal Security Act of 1950. Liberal Democrats took the lead in passing the Humphrey-Butler "Communist Control" Act of 1954. We tend to think of this as the era of McCarthyism [Republican congressman], but the Democrats, liberals as well as conservatives, were in there doing their fair share of gnawing away at the Bill of Rights.

### Labor and the Democratic Party

Unions are created in the first place because there is a fundamental clash of interests between workers and capitalist. A necessary condition for the effective functioning of unions is that they be independent of the capitalists. As we all know, a company union, an organization dominated by the employers, does not and cannot defend the workers' interests. I believe it can be stated as a law: the more independent a union is of capitalists, of individual capitalists and of the capitalist class as a whole, the better able a union is to defend the workers' interests. Or if you don't care for the word "law," let me put it this way: independence of the labor movement is a first principle, recognized and expounded by the best labor leaders, like [Eugene V.] Debs and [Bill] Haywood.

This has always been true, but it is especially true today when the monopoly stage of capitalism expands the role of the state and gives all struggles, including labor struggles, an openly political character. What labor in our country needs above everything else is a party of its own which can fight for the needs and aspirations of the workers on the political field as unions can on the economic field. The present steel negotiations show how inseparable these two fields are becoming.

But instead of having a party of its own, the labor movement is dependent — in the political sphere — on a party controlled by the capitalists and promoting the interests of the capitalists. It is a tail to the Democratic kite, as one union leader put it.

This must be designated as a violation of the principle of independence on the basis of which the union movement was created. It is not only harmful in principle, however. It is also harmful in practice and the cause of most of the ills besetting the labor movement today.

It was reported not long ago that the unions spent more money on the last congressional election than the Democratic campaign committees did. What have the unions gotten in return? UAW Secretary-Treasurer Emil Mazey said about a month ago: "We won an election last November but until now we have not received a single thing from this victory." This is true after every election.

The present Congress, controlled by the Democrats the unions helped to elect, has refused to end the filibuster. It has refused to extend jobless benefits for a year. It has refused to enact a federal standard for jobless compensation. It is on the verge of passing the Kennedy-Erwin bill to further restrict the independence of the unions by subjecting them to government control, a bill which becomes worse and worse every time Congress takes it up.

The Democrats have much more influence in the labor movement than the labor movement has in the Democratic Party. The Democrats can take the unions for granted because they feel they have them in their pocket;

because the unions, having sworn not to create their own party, have nowhere else to go. The union leaders not only have become dependent on the Democratic Party, they have become its captives. And this is one of the reasons why the Democratic Party has been moving steadily to the right year after year.

So, labor's support of the Democrats is wrong in all respects — from the standpoint of principle, from the pragmatic standpoint of results.

What the labor movement and its allies need is to make a clean break with both capitalist parties and form an independent labor party dedicated to winning control of the government and putting into effect a program that will meet the needs of the majority of people.

### Socialists and Election Activities

For radicals and socialists, the situation is even more clear-cut. Our goal — the creation of a new society through working class political action — requires that we help the labor movement to break away from capitalist parties and capitalist politics; and to expand the influence and organization of radical and revolutionary groups and parties fit to provide leadership to the workers in a fight for a better society.

Neither of these objectives can be served by working in the Democratic Party. The highways are littered with the political corpses of radicals and socialists who entered the Democratic Party with the idea of making it radical and who ended up by becoming mere liberals or even conservatives themselves.

The main function of the radical movement today is educational and propagandistic, pending the time when it once again can lead people in great actions and struggles. To educate means first of all to say what is, to tell people the truth. What good is a radical, what right do radicals have to any hearing, if they don't meet this minimum condition?

But you can't be in the Democratic Party and tell the truth to people. The first thing demanded of you in the Democratic Party is that you support its candidates, that is, help spread the propaganda that the election of Democrats is in the interests of the people. If you do this, you have to lie, you have to cover up the fact that the Democratic Party stands for the cold war, more armaments, little or no help to the unemployed, racial oppression, restrictions on the Bill of Rights, retention of the [anti-labor] Taft-Hartley Act, maintenance of the status quo generally.

In short, the condition for working in the Democratic Party is that you must abdicate the primary function of the radical. If everyone did it, it would mean the death of all organized opposition to capitalism.

The final test of a policy is in its results. The policy we are debating tonight is not a new one, and it has been tested for a long



time. The labor movement has been working in and supporting the Democratic Party for the last 25 years. The main sections of the radical movement have been supporting the Democratic Party, directly or indirectly with only a few lapses, for over 20 years. Isn't it true that the Democratic Party today stands to the right of where it stood 25 years ago, and not to the left?

Supporting the Democratic Party is at best an exercise in futility for radicals, and is one of the causes contributing to their decline. At worst, it is a betrayal of anticapitalist principles that are at the heart of radicalism, and without which it must decay and die.

People sometimes ask: What happened to the old idealism of the socialist movement, the self-sacrificing spirit of solidarity and militancy that the American radical movement used to know? What happened to it was that the leadership of the movement, lacking or losing confidence in the capacity of the workers to change society and govern themselves, began to find all kinds of pretexts and rationalizations for deserting the policies of class struggle and embracing the policies of

class collaboration. One of the manifestations of this change was the change from the old principle that it's the duty of socialists to oppose capitalist party candidates, run independent candidates, and use election campaigns to expose the nature of capitalism and present the truth about socialism. There's been a change from this tradition to arguments that independent campaigns achieve nothing, that you must not let yourself get "isolated," that you must adjust yourself to the politics of the labor bureaucrats rather than fight them.

You can't create idealism, you can't maintain militancy and devotion to the great goals of the socialist future through such maneuvers. Take the workers into the Democratic swamp of opportunism, horse trades, and dirty machine politics — where any piece of filthy work is justified if it helps win the next election — and you can't expect anything but that it will sap the workers' militancy, devotion to principle, and class consciousness, if they remain there and don't drop out of politics altogether demoralized.

The future lies with the youth, the young people just beginning to recover from a decade of cold war conformism. They've heard enough lies to last them for a lifetime. What they need is the truth, simple and direct. Only if they get it will they respond with those reserves of militancy and bravery that are especially characteristic of the young, that seem to be the prerequisite of every genuine revolution, and that can revitalize American radicalism as an effective fighting force. You'll get nowhere telling the youth lies or half-truths about the Democratic Party.

Therefore, the policy dictated to progressives is to oppose the Democratic Party, not to work in it or get others to support it. Those of us who are workers should strive in our unions to bring about a break with capitalist politics and the formation of an independent labor party. Those of us who are radicals and socialists should do everything we can to fight the two-party system, utilize election campaigns to spread socialist ideas and influence, and run socialist slates for office, wherever possible. □

## Don't Let Arizona Court Break Union

*Continued from page 2*

sumers across the country, the terrible stories that come from the fields.

*But we must appeal outside of Arizona.* We must go to a federal court where farm workers stand a much better chance of being heard by an impartial judge and jury. To be heard in the federal courts, we must file an appeal immediately with the Arizona courts.

*Our case is strong.* Our attorneys are working virtually around the clock to prepare for the next trial.

*But before we can appeal we need to raise at least \$300,000 to post an appeal bond.*

*Any amount you can send will help, but I hope you'll consider increasing your usual gift by at least \$10 to meet this urgent need.*

You be the judge. If you agree with us, stand with us in our struggle for justice. Help us appeal this terrible decision by sending \$30 *today* — or whatever you can afford — toward posting an appeal bond.

You decide whether farm workers can be heard. You decide whether we can keep boy-

cotting and telling customers about the injustices in the fields. You decide whether we can finally get our day in court.

As I end this letter, I think about all the times I saw César pick up his pen to write to you. No matter how late at night, how tired he was, you were often one of the first he turned to with important news about our Union. It's one of the most enduring lessons I learned from him.

Thank you for your continued support — especially during this difficult time. □

## March for Jobs, Justice, and Peace Spurs Labor Party Movement

*Continued from page 3*

### Workers Unity Network Statement of Purpose

The Workers Unity Network (WUN) strives to promote organizing the South as key to strengthening the labor movement and the cause of working people nationally and advancing the fight for Black liberation. We urge solidarity with community-based campaigns to organize southern workers — such as those at Standard Products in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, who are victimized for trying to form a union.

WUN stands for independent working class political action; for unions and worker-based community groups to run candidates for public office; for labor to break immediately and totally with the Democratic Party; and for educating on the need for a workers' party based on the working class — organized and unorganized, with oppressed nationalities and women playing a central role, which is essential if unity and empowerment of the working class is to be won.

WUN also stands for international labor solidarity and support for the struggles of working people around the world. We oppose U.S. interventionism in other countries — whether military, economic, or any other form — which is carried out in the interests of capitalists and bankers at the expense of the working class and exploited masses of people.

The Workers Unity Network steering committee also heard reports and planned support actions for the United Workers of Standard Products of Rocky Mount, North Carolina; the national boycott campaign by Allied Industrial Workers Local 837, locked out at the A.E. Staley Manufacturing Company's corn-processing plant in Decatur, Illinois; and the Labor Day rally of striking United Mine Workers in Bristol, Virginia. The Network voted to encourage attendance at an International Trade Union Conference in Solidarity with Cuba, to be held in Toronto, Canada,

October 1–3, at the offices of the Ontario Federation of Labor. (For more information about the Network, write P.O. Box 24377, Cleveland, OH 44124-9998, or call 216-382-4597.)

The Washington, D.C., meeting of WUN was informed of a conference to be held on September 11 in Hudson, Ohio, on "Building a Labor Party," a discussion of ideas and strategy, jointly sponsored by Cleveland Labor Party Advocates and Youngstown Workers' Solidarity Club.

After the march, independent labor/community political action can be expected to grow as President Clinton continues to divest himself of the phony pro-labor image of election campaign days. He made a good symbolic start by skipping the March on Washington and the Labor Day parades. □

September 7, 1993



# Why the New Democratic Party Betrays Workers

by Barry Weisleder

The degree of anger and bitterness people feel toward New Democratic Party (NDP) betrayals is in direct proportion to their faith in the NDP as a progressive working-class party. For many, the feelings of betrayal are considerable.

The fact that the NDP has betrayed before, and often, and that it is behaving today like other social democratic parties around the world will come as slim comfort to the party faithful.

It is nonetheless important to know the facts — if the workers movement is to learn from experience and go forward.

### Ontario NDP Not Alone

Firstly, with its \$4.1 billion expenditure cuts, the elimination of thousands of public sector jobs, and a further \$2 billion payroll reduction in each of the next three years through its one-sided “social contract,” the Ontario NDP government is not alone among provincial NDP governments in cutting services and attacking workers’ rights.

The British Columbia NDP government sought health care downsizing through attrition and redeployment of workers, and it legislated striking teachers back to work after school boards rejected a mediator’s proposal — a proposal the teachers accepted. It has also sided with forest industry monopolies against the environment.

The Saskatchewan NDP government has scrapped free children’s dental care and grants to schools, hospitals, and municipalities. Government employees conducted rotating strikes from November 20, 1992, to March 26, 1993, to protest plans to axe hundreds of public service positions.

And previous B.C., Saskatchewan, and Manitoba NDP governments have used anti-strike legislation or permitted police and scabs to violate workers’ strikes. They’ve blocked licensing of free-standing abortion clinics, instituted education cutbacks and fee hikes, privatized public services, and they’ve broken many election promises to redistribute wealth and power in society (e.g., through improved public housing and childcare, tax and welfare reform, etc.).

In fact, they’ve never acted in any fundamental way to challenge capitalist rule. Like their counterparts around the world, NDP leaders seek to reconcile fundamental class antagonisms. They promote class harmony (and their own careers in the state apparatus). But given that Capital rules and

Labor doesn’t, when push comes to shove that means subordinating the interests of labor to capital.

### World Capitalist Squeeze Play

And lately, push comes to shove much more frequently because world capitalism is in crisis. It’s running out of gas. It can’t afford even the most modest reforms. The industrialized countries remain, for the most part, in the deepest economic downturn since the 1930s. There’s mass unemployment, growing homelessness and crime, rampant militarism, and the rise of fascist and racist movements.

Capital is trying to refuel itself by more aggressively sucking the vital fluids of workers and farmers, transferring production to poverty wage zones, driving down social standards, and opening up new vistas of exploitation in the post-Stalinist states of the East.

Over the past ten years across Western Europe, in Sweden, France, and Spain, and beyond to Australia and New Zealand, social democratic governments have moved decidedly to the right. They abandoned Keynesian spending policies in favor of neoconservative “deficit fighting,” regressive tax reform to favor the rich, cutbacks in social expenditures, privatization of public services, layoff of state employees, joint venture megaprojects, and bigger subsidies to transnational corporations.

Free trade realignments and deregulation of standards were undertaken to accommodate Big Capital. To that end, the Maastricht Treaty was supported by all the social democratic parties of Europe, just as the Charlotte-town Accord was backed by the NDP. The interests of workers, women, and oppressed nations were put a distant second to those of the State — or mega-State — and the ruling classes’ drive for mega-profits.

### Social Democracy Abandons Its Base

Basically, this is nothing new. Social democracy has been solidly procapitalist from at least the period preceding World War I (when its leading parties endorsed the imperialist war). The degeneration of the Communist parties into Stalinist machines of oppression and betrayal in the 1920s and ’30s and the post-World War II capitalist economic boom both gave the social democracy a new lease on life.

But as social democratic parties today veer farther and farther away from the needs of their social base they risk losing their rationale for existence; they risk becoming just another capitalist party.

This could easily happen to the NDP if it loses its union affiliates. The party’s steady departure even from tepid social democratic values (“reform of capitalism”), in favor of liberal market economics, and lately neoconservatism, leaves the organization with no ideological anchor. Being adrift in stormy seas makes a party particularly vulnerable to destruction.

Socialists seek to heighten the contradiction between leadership and base in labor and social democratic parties, expecting that a significant number of workers in those parties will feel compelled to challenge their misleaders and assert their class interests politically.

This usually takes the form of an internal struggle over policies and principles before it assumes the form of a split, let alone the emergence of a new mass workers’ party.

### Its Nature Defies Reform

Social democratic parties cannot be reformed into genuinely socialist, revolutionary workers’ parties. This is true for the NDP, too, which is a labor party dominated by a thoroughly corrupted, social democratic/neoconservative tendency.

The party is an undemocratic, top-down, electoral machine; its elected officials at all levels operate autonomously in relation to party policy and convention, while they behave as a rigidly loyal component of the bourgeois state.

In its material privileges and its freedom from the constraints of the normal bosses’ workplace and schedule, the party elite resembles (and overlaps considerably with) the labor bureaucracy. It recognizes well that its place in the sun depends on its collaboration with the system, so long as it *appears* to be doing just enough for workers to maintain a steady flow of dues and memberships. (Clearly this is now in jeopardy.)

Finally, the politically heterogeneous character of the party membership, the lack of membership education and recruitment standards, the paucity of regular party meetings, militant activity, and campaigns (outside of elections), all serve to furnish the opportunistic and privileged NDP leadership with a permanent passive base (to resist internal



challenge), and thus political impunity to act however they see fit.

Right-wing NDPers are quick to denounce any notion of "Bolshevik discipline" (i.e., forcing the leadership to implement adopted party policy); they make every excuse imaginable to justify the autonomy of the parliamentary caucus. The most common one is, "We must legislate in the interests of all the people, not just for labor or another interest group." The distance from that position to Bob Rae's "social contract" is a short one.

## Struggle for the Hearts and Minds of Workers

Now, given the structure and nature of parties like the NDP, isn't it utterly pointless to struggle from within?

No, it's not pointless, unless one thinks socialism can be achieved without the working class. If it's difficult to convince workers who support the NDP to fight for socialist transformation of society, will it be any easier to persuade workers who vote Tory, Liberal, Reform, or Bloc Québécois?

As long as parties like the NDP have a significant following in the working class,

there is both the potential and the likelihood of internal anticapitalist currents emerging and splits being provoked by right-wing leaders acting against the class interests of members.

Especially in countries with a weak socialist tradition, it is crucial that close attention be paid to labor and social democratic parties. Trade union affiliation, united front activity, and internal membership education and activity will play a big role in exposing the dead-end nature of procapitalist policies and the need for a return to traditional working-class values — and in particular, to class-struggle politics! □

## For Advancing the Cause of Independent Working Class Political Action

*Continued from page 10*

What's being discredited in Canada is not the *idea* of a labor party but, rather, the *policies and leadership of the NDP*. In Ontario, the NDP is pressuring public service unions to agree to \$9 billion in cutbacks. The province's debt is \$68 billion and the government is trying to impose an austerity budget on the working class to deal with that debt. The NDP government refrains from putting the burden on the corporations, which threaten to close plants and leave if they are taxed too heavily.

*The problem is that the NDP refuses to take far-reaching measures that are critically needed to deal with the situation.* It should nationalize companies that shut down plants. It should cancel debts owed to the banks and nationalize the banks as well. These are the kind of steps that a truly committed workers' government would take.

Working people have also experienced major problems in Great Britain and France. The British Labour Party has been out of power for years and its leadership is moving the party further and further to the right. The French Socialist Party won power 12 years ago with the support of the French working class. But conditions in France today are

worse than they were before the Socialists were elected. The voters in France just gave the Socialists the boot. The Right won 460 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly, while the Socialists were reduced to 75 seats. As one observer put it, the Socialists were punished in the elections, not because they were socialists, but because they *weren't!*

It's not just in domestic policies that the British Labour Party and the French Socialist Party betrayed the workers' interests. They did so in foreign policy as well. They supported imperialist military aggression, including the U.S. government's "Desert Storm" war, which killed over a hundred thousand Iraqis. (Of course, the Democrats in the U.S. did the same. Before that, the Democrats prosecuted the war against the people of Indochina. And they supported U.S. government ties with anti-labor dictators around the world: Batista in Cuba, Somoza in Nicaragua, Duvalier in Haiti, and so on. They also helped prop up the hated apartheid system in South Africa.)

A workers' party has to be based on international solidarity and support for workers around the world. It can't support imperialist policies in the interests of the corporations and banks.

Labor parties in other countries have not lived up to this. But their experience will not automatically be repeated in the U.S. We have to learn from their wrong policies and mistakes, and make sure the same things don't happen here. And that's another reason for having a network of the kind we're starting this weekend — *a united front of worker activists who want to see a real workers' party, which will fight consistently for the interests of working people and the oppressed here and around the world.*

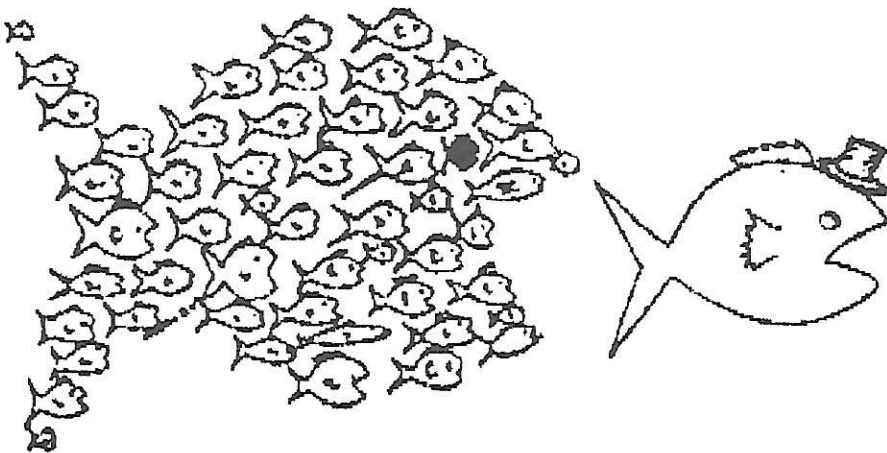
One final point. If an independent broad-based labor party is constituted in this country and its program has weaknesses and shortcomings, we should support it anyway, while working to strengthen it. Even a workers' party with a weak program would be an improvement for the U.S. working class, which today has no party of its own.

## Implementing the Network's Program

Our perspective for the network is to focus on *program* and to take that program to existing organizations: to unions, worker-based committees, Labor Party Advocates, and to formations that promote the running of independent worker candidates. We want to help build and strengthen all of these, and we don't see ourselves in competition with any of them. Rather, we see ourselves as a *tendency, wing, or current* within them, fighting for our program.

We are *action-oriented*. This means having a membership that's active in workers' struggles and in the social movements. It also means urging the labor movement to take action around the burning issues confronting workers. We want to show in the course of concrete struggles around the issues that only through a workers' government can they be resolved.

We also want to be a force for *democracy* in the workers' movement. It is especially important that all formations that constitute the labor party movement function on the basis of democratic decision making and collective leadership. □





# The New Party Advances — with Muddled Politics

by Mike McCallister

**O**f all the movements toward independent political action launched last year, the New Party is probably the one most to be reckoned with.

The leadership of the National Organization for Women ditched the notion of the 21st Century Party early in the drive to elect female Democrats to the U.S. Senate and Bill Clinton to the White House.

Labor Party Advocates continues its low-key campaign to win support among trade unionists, but is clearly not yet a factor in American politics at any level.

While the effort led by Ron Daniels's presidential campaign also continues, no great movement toward independent political action in the communities of the oppressed has appeared.

Meanwhile, the New Party has largely carried out its locally-based electoral strategy as planned, as well as support for particular Democratic Party candidates.

A July 1992 article promoting the New Party in the left-liberal weekly *The Nation* drew more reader mail than any other single article in the 125-year history of the magazine. That article, by University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Joel Rogers and NP organizer Sandy Morales Pope, declared, "These political dinosaurs, nearly everyone agrees, are getting increasingly hazardous to our public health."

New Party activists have been elected to city councils across the country, while a few NP-endorsed Democrats are now state legislators.

The NP electoral plan was laid out by Rogers in a January article in *Boston Review*:

In 1994 [NP] candidates — both for local office and, it is hoped, at least a few statewide and federal offices — to gain about one million votes.... Over 1995-96, ... win a wide [emphasis in original] number of state and federal races in, say, six states. Establish a decisive presence in those states' legislatures by 2000. Do that in a dozen states, with half as many governorships, by 2004. Rock the Congress with a small but growing (say, 30 members by 2000, 60 by 2004) New Party caucus (likely operating in close alliance with the Congressional Black Caucus)... Try a serious presidential bid by 2008.

Is the New Party really all that new? Over the decades, third parties like the LaFollette Progressives of the 1920s, the Henry Wallace Progressives of the post-World War II era, and the American Labor Party in New York have attempted to create a new political land-

scape in the U.S. by pressuring the existing parties through an "inside-outside" strategy.

NP leaders to date have stressed their "bottom-up" character, reassuring potential recruits that they can call themselves "national Democrats, local New Party" without sounding contradictory. They have also cited the American Labor Party example as one to emulate, along with references to Canada's New Democratic Party.

The ALP was formed to herd radicals and others who were fed up with the two-party shell game into supporting Franklin Roosevelt and other "progressive Democrats" using New York ballot laws, which permit "fusion tickets," where other parties cross-endorse candidates from the big-business parties. This fusion tactic was the initial centerpiece of the NP's strategy.

The *Nation* article defined the nature of the NP thus:

Ideologically, we want the New Party to be broadly "social democratic" in its orientation. That is, it should recognize that capitalism needs to be regulated if it's not going to kill us, and that government "by the people" and "of the people" can be more than rhetoric if the "people" get organized. It should be the party of labor but not just a labor party, a party of environmentalists but not just a green party, a party of racial pluralism and justice but not just a black or Latino party, a party of feminists but not just a feminist party. Rather, within a framework of commitment to sustainable development, distributive equity, racial justice, gender equity, and collective security and development, the New Party should convene popular discussion of how all these things are mutually and practically achievable, and then set about competing for and using state power to help achieve them.

Rogers's agenda for a successful NP delegation in Congress, expressed in the *Boston Review* article, reveals much. The NP would offer "practical, visionary, egalitarian-minded alternatives to what our current president has called 'the brain-dead policies of both major parties.'"

Despite much rhetoric about nonelectoral work, NP remains basically an electoral machine. For example, after several successful campaigns in 1992, NP affiliate Progressive Milwaukee organized a broad-based coalition to support a school bond issue to build new schools in the central city. When the referendum failed, the coalition folded and Progressive Milwaukee went on to other things.

But nowhere is the term "machine" more apt than in the tangled politics of New York City. Many of the NP's leaders come from New York, where NP has a solid base in the labor movement and activist community. Here NP has made a deal with Mayor David Dinkins in order to achieve ballot status.

While NP leaders don't talk about fusion politics as readily as they did at the beginning, in New York the tactic remains central to building the NP. In the May 4, 1993, *Village Voice*, Michael Tomasky reported on the merger of NP with the Majority Coalition, organized in 1991 to reform the City Council (a task at which it failed miserably). The Coalition featured several Dinkins staffers in its leadership.

Jan Pierce, head of District 1 of the Communications Workers of America, vowed: "It will not be a Dinkins thing or a Dinkins vehicle or a Dinkins party. It will be a party with an ideology...structured to give Mayor Dinkins, or any politician it might support, a constituency for taking more progressive positions." Of course, when the Liberal Party endorsed Republican Rudolph Giuliani, they may have had one of their leaders say the same thing.

Tomasky noted that New York law gives a party permanent ballot status (and the cross-endorsement privilege) when it gets 50,000 votes in a statewide election. If NP were to get 20,000 to 30,000 votes for Dinkins on its line in November, then it would be just a short hop to permanent status in 1994.

However, this scenario also projects NP endorsing Democrat Mario Cuomo for governor in 1994. "You can get away with telling people that Dinkins is some kind of progressive," Tomasky wrote, "but Cuomo?"

So far the NP has attracted a number of talented activists and youth to its ranks, as well as some layers of the labor bureaucracy. It is important for revolutionaries to support the creation of a mass party that is prepared to "compete for and use state power" in the interests of the working class and the oppressed. Revolutionary socialists will be at the heart of a genuinely new party, one which represents a clear break from the parties of big business. Revolutionaries will also participate in any nascent movement toward such a party, urging it to make that complete break. But if the New Party is to be such a movement, it will have to get out of the backrooms of bourgeois politics and refocus its sights on the working masses. □



# H. Ross Perot and "United We Stand America"

by Tom Barrett

*Tom Barrett is presenting one point of view on the Perot phenomenon; we anticipate running other viewpoints in future issues.*

One year ago Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot stole headlines and television ratings from the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates as the most successful third-party candidate since racist Alabama governor George Wallace. Today, he is still attracting public attention, and his campaign organization, called "United We Stand America," seems to be growing. Though he is squarely and proudly committed to the defense and maintenance of capitalism, his electoral effort may have a different dynamic than Perot himself intends. His message, both during the 1992 presidential campaign and now, is contradictory — at times reactionary, at times concerned with social justice. United We Stand America is attracting a very mixed group of people, including rank-and-file workers, small businessmen and professionals, and even some self-made plutocrats like Perot himself. The one thing which seems to unite all his supporters is thorough disgust with the Democratic and Republican parties and with politics — and politicians — as usual.

## Perot's Appeal

As an individual and a public speaker, Perot has cultivated the image of a Southwestern small businessman — a plain-speaking, straight-shooting family man. He doesn't talk like a lawyer or an intellectual but like the working person or small businessman who goes to work every day, pays taxes, and worries each month over paying the bills. People feel as though he respects their intelligence. He is not surrounded by speech writers and spin doctors, so he is perceived as a genuine concerned citizen, not the creation of campaign advertising executives. Whether that is an *accurate* perception or not is beside the point — the image which Perot has created for himself is one to which masses of Americans respond.

As the name of his organization would indicate, Perot's basic appeal is to patriotism, but a different kind of patriotism than Ronald Reagan's or George Bush's. He is more interested in solving the U.S.'s problems than in world conquest — he understands that Rambo politics ring hollow in a world without "Communism" and that Americans are far more afraid of a banking collapse which would wipe out their life savings than of foreign invasion.

## Where Perot Stands on the Issues — Positive...

Perot's program is contradictory. On some issues he takes stands which are squarely in the interests of the working class; on others, he takes stands squarely *against* the interests

of the working class. Fundamentally, however, his movement is qualitatively different from reactionary protest movements like Wallace's American Independent Party in 1968. Perot does not appeal to white racist sentiments, nor does he attempt to blame the country's problems on "illegal aliens," "welfare cheats," or any other false scapegoats. He even has words of criticism for some of his fellow big businessmen for putting greed ahead of social responsibility. The criticism is a just one, even though all he offers as a solution is his own moralistic preaching.

Perot recognizes the basic injustice of putting American workers out of work because it is more profitable to employ lower-paid workers, whether in other countries or within this country. He has joined in the campaign to stop the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) — and for the right reasons: that it will lead to unemployment in the United States and superexploitation in Mexico.

During the 1992 election campaign, Perot and his running mate made it very clear that they supported a woman's right to choose abortion and that the controversy surrounding it was a diversion from the real issues facing the American people. Unlike Reagan and Bush, Perot has not attempted to capitalize on a sexist backlash against feminism.

Though it was not an election issue, Perot of all the capitalist candidates was the least enthusiastic about the Gulf War. He called for a settlement negotiated among the Arab states and for the U.S. to stay out of the conflict. He argued that no U.S. interests would be served even by victory.

## ...and Negative

While Perot criticizes corporate greed out of one side of his mouth, he would deprive workers of their only weapon against corporate greed — strong trade unions. He has a long record as a businessman and public figure of opposing organized labor, and he has gone on record against anti-scab legislation. Even so, rank-and-file union members who feel betrayed by their officials remain responsive to Perot's ideas. Perot's appeals to "national unity" to the contrary, there is no "national interest" which both the employing class and the working class share. Does Perot mean that workers should give *more* concessions to the employers in order to keep the plants open? For more than ten years our unions have given concession after concession after concession, and plants have closed.

Perot has also spoken out on health care reform — and he has a very bad position. In the face of a crying need for single-payer

national health insurance, all Perot can say is, "We can't afford it."

## Perot's Effect on the Political Environment

Perot and United We Stand America have accomplished something which perhaps they did not intend. They have legitimized the idea of electoral activity independent of the Democratic and Republican parties. Though the Perot movement is definitely a protest movement, based on disgust with politics as usual, it is by no means seen as a "fringe" or "extremist" movement, and its message is basically one of concern for the needs of the American people. Consequently, it has broad appeal. The impact which Perot had on the 1992 elections has also demonstrated that independent political action can be *effective*. Bush and Clinton were falling over each other to attract the Perot voters, especially when Perot temporarily withdrew during the Democratic convention. It has been suggested that if Perot had not withdrawn and then re-entered the election campaign, he could have been elected president.

The people who have been attracted to United We Stand America are not by any means radicals, but they do tend to be people who think for themselves. There is no guarantee that Perot himself can always impose his views on his own supporters. Is it possible that United We Stand America members may disagree with Perot on anti-scab legislation? On health care reform? And what impact will local Perot supporters have on politics in their communities — on school policies, environmental questions, property tax issues, etc.? If United We Stand America members involve themselves in political activity on national or local issues, rather than simply being an electoral machine for Mr. Perot himself, many members may come to radical conclusions, as has happened so often in the past when well-meaning citizens have gotten involved in political action.

Ross Perot himself will never break from capitalist politics and deserves no support from working people. But the movement he has started may very well have an independent and progressive dynamic that he cannot control. Those activists working to build a labor party or independent political parties based on the communities of color would do well to take an active interest in getting to know and working with Perot supporters. Radicals should see them as a broad grass roots political force which offers important new opportunities. □

September 2, 1993



## Discussion

# Testing Concepts about the African American Struggle: Theory and Reality

by Evelyn Sell

**W**ithin the pages of this magazine, the discussion and debate on the nature of the struggle for Black liberation has covered a broad range of theoretical questions, historical processes, and practical political problems. This article will focus on several significant developments which took place during the 1960s — a period when various concepts of the nature of the African American struggle were tested against the realities of everyday events and dynamic developments. As I wrote previously:

Although not perfect in every respect and at all moments, the SWP [Socialist Workers Party] implemented the theoretical and programmatic foundations laid down over many years. Understanding the essence of self-determination sensitized the SWP to respond positively to the demand, "Black Control of the Black Community!" — a call which was heard in regard to schools, policing neighborhoods, and controlling vital services in areas where African Americans lived and worked. Basing itself on an analysis of the dual nature of the Black liberation struggle, the SWP was prepared to support the independent development of African American organizations and activities. ["How the Concept of the Dual Nature of the African American Struggle Developed," *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, December 1992.]

### Black Control of the Black Community

The core concept of self-determination is: the right of an oppressed grouping to *choose its own destiny*. That fundamental element was contained in the demand for Black control of the Black community. Voiced over and over again by Black liberation fighters, the demand expressed the need to make decisions about the conditions of their everyday lives. This was not only a matter of a basic democratic right — which deserved to be supported by revolutionary socialists — but was a first step in developing a revolutionary consciousness about the need and capacity to fight for the power to make decisions about fundamental institutions in U.S. society.

The battles that Blacks fought in the 1960s to gain control over their own communities had many positive results: they were impelled to directly confront local capitalist power structures — and resistance from these authorities raised the fight to state and national levels in some cases; mass mobilizations were carried out; Black activists gained experience in developing strategies and learning organizational skills; new, more militant leaders were pushed to the forefront of the struggle; connections made between local communities helped develop regional and national efforts; large numbers of African Americans were radicalized; and the level of self-confidence in their own abilities and capacities to change society was rapidly increased, so that initially modest aims were transformed into more ambitious and far-reaching goals. The inherent dynamic of the fight for Black control of Black com-

munities moved African Americans in the direction of revolutionary consciousness and action.

These generalizations are based on: information contained in articles I wrote as U.S. correspondent for *World Outlook* (a publication sponsored by the Fourth International and edited by Joseph Hansen); knowledge gained from public and internal materials published by the SWP; and my personal experiences. To illustrate the general points about community control struggles, here is a concrete example in which I was involved.

Already active in the emerging fight against the Vietnam war when I became a public school teacher in 1965, I contacted fellow unionists in the Detroit Federation of Teachers in order to secure signatures on an antiwar advertisement published in the *New York Times* during 1967. As a result of this activity, I met a number of teachers who were concerned about democratizing our union, fighting against racism in the school system, and addressing other social and political issues. We formed Teachers Against Racism and War, which developed into a militant opposition caucus within the local, state, and national Federation of Teachers. A 1967 article in the *Baltimore Sun* reported:

A coalition of black power and anti-war groups have formed a splinter party here at the [national] convention of the American Federation of Teachers to fight the conservative forces which they say have insinuated themselves into AFT policymaking....The group which has temporarily named itself "the New Caucus" is expected to fight to overturn the present AFT policy which supports President Johnson's "efforts toward peace in Vietnam," and to replace it with one expressing unequivocal opposition to United States involvement in the conflict.

The new group is also expected to push for a resolution requiring that all future AFT policy related to problems of the slums be formulated by a committee of "black teachers"...The more outspoken of the Negro delegates to this convention indicated that they adhered to the black power concept.

Literature distributed by the New Caucus at the 1967 convention was headlined: "BLACK COMMUNITY CONTROL; STOP THE BOMBING [of Vietnam]; BLACK AWARENESS CURRICULUM." The caucus platform promoted: "the right of Black teachers within the American Federation of Teachers to determine policy and take leadership in the implementation of programs affecting education and social welfare of Black pupils and the Black community."

The New Caucus was consistently active within the Detroit local and won sufficient support to send delegates to the statewide convention of the Michigan Federation of Teachers. At the 1968 AFT convention, the New Caucus ran a slate of candidates for national offices and distributed literature which continued to promote its previous positions and broadened its program to include support for "student protest activities" and other important issues. The caucus platform:



Decries the backward and reactionary policies of the present leadership of the A.F.L.-C.I.O. on the pressing social issues of our time, e.g., the war in Vietnam, the crisis in our cities, racism, poverty, absolute dependence on the two-party system, lack of militancy in the organization of non-union employees, and believes the American Federation of Teachers has the responsibility to assume a leadership role in the AFL-CIO in order to press for the necessary revitalization of the labor movement.

### “Self-Determination”

The term “self-determination” appeared frequently in New Caucus literature — but it was not meant to convey the classical Leninist concept regarding the right of oppressed nations to establish their own states. The term was utilized to express a key demand of the Black liberation struggle. For example, the New Caucus candidate for AFT president issued a press release explaining:

I will campaign on the platform of the New Caucus, an issue-oriented platform. I stand solidly for the right of Black Americans to the self-determination that is the right of every citizen in a democracy. That includes, inevitably, the right of democratic community control of schools in local communities — the schools that can determine the very direction of children’s lives.

This “self-determination” concept was presented in a New Caucus position paper entitled, “Community Control and the Future of the AFT.” The text focused on “the present conflict between the UFT [United Federation of Teachers] leadership and the entire Black and Puerto Rican community leadership in New York.” Reviewing the background to that conflict, the position paper explained:

For more than twelve years — more than a school generation — the city’s minorities waged an all-out struggle to integrate the faculties and student bodies. They pleaded, demanded, negotiated, marched, demonstrated, picketed and boycotted — and failed.... Frustrated by the failure of their efforts, the community changed the focus of the struggle. If the decision-makers are not responsive to the needs of the children they are charged with educating, why not change the decision-makers? Why not put the decisions in the hands of those with the greatest stake in the achievement of the children, their parents and local community leadership?

Posed in this way, community control of the schools was a profoundly revolutionary concept in that it raised the demand *to change the decision-makers*. This demand is essentially what Marxists advocate: take the power out of the hands of the oppressors and transform the oppressed into the decision-makers. The fights for community control of the schools *appeared* to be localized and limited — that is, they didn’t develop into a nationally coordinated movement (although they erupted in a number of cities) and they didn’t directly confront basic power institutions of capitalist society. Even if community control had been won, Blacks would have remained oppressed and exploited. But Marxists understand the dynamics set into motion by relatively limited struggles. Efforts to gain community control of schools prompted people into the kinds of actions that expanded their goals and raised their consciousness about the possibilities for changing decision-makers in other spheres, such as government and the workplace.

### Role of SWP

To its credit, the Socialist Workers Party solidarized with African Americans who were engaged in community control efforts and attempted to build bridges between limited views of goals and a

more far-reaching revamping of capitalist society. Forums organized by the party across the country not only featured leading activists in the struggle but were attended by parents, students, and community residents. SWP election campaigns promoted support for community control demands. In the course of the party’s varied activities, we were able to discuss both immediate concerns and broader socialist ideas with activists, strengthen working relationships with Black militants, acquaint African Americans with Marxist literature, engage in discussions about a range of issues, and recruit new members.

Direct involvement was conditioned by local circumstances. SWP members were vigorous participants in and local leaders of the struggle in New York City — as parents, community activists, UFT members, socialists. The SWP branch in Detroit was involved in that city’s school battles in various ways: party candidates urged support for community control; public meetings were organized; party members who were in the teachers’ union participated in the New Caucus, which played a leading role in the fight for community control of the schools. Although the composition of the New Caucus was overwhelmingly Black, Anglo teachers (such as myself) carried out leadership responsibilities. My own activities in the caucus included: publishing the *New Caucus News*; presenting the caucus position in the union newspaper; participating in the Michigan Federation of Teachers convention as a New Caucus delegate; and writing the detailed plan for establishing community control in the Detroit public school system. This proposal was adopted by the caucus and presented for the union membership’s approval as part of the contract negotiations with the Board of Education.

### “Nationalism” and “Black Nationalism”

The heated political life of Detroit during the 1960s presented the SWP with complex questions — one of the most important was the development of Black nationalist organizations and sentiments. The term “Black nationalism” cannot simply be understood by placing “Black” in front of the classical Marxist explanation of and approach to “nationalism.” Scientific socialism, like other sciences, utilizes a distinctive vocabulary with particular definitions. As a popularly used term — employed by millions of African Americans as well as by the mass media — “Black nationalism” covered a wide spectrum of ideologies and activities.

For example, the Republic of New Africa, a small group founded by Detroit Blacks, consciously organized for a separate Black nation-state. The SWP held the traditional Leninist approach of support to the *right* of an oppressed grouping to form a national state but did not advocate or promote the RNA’s demand. When the Detroit police burst into an RNA meeting with guns blazing, the SWP branch immediately reorganized its public forum series and featured a defense appeal by the central leader of the RNA. At the conclusion of his talk, a collection was taken up, and he noted that it was ironic that the first financial aid came from a largely white organization.

The SWP’s actions in this instance were an application of the party’s opposition to racist assaults as well as its defense of democratic rights to freedom of assembly, speech, and association — precious rights for the working class which were won in revolutionary struggle. It was clear to all involved — SWP members and supporters, the RNA, and Black activists — that the SWP was not supporting steps to create a separate Black national state.

The Nation of Islam (known widely as “Black Muslims” during the 1960s) was born in Detroit’s Black ghetto during the early



1930s. Its stated goals were the separation of the races and the creation of an independent Black nation on either U.S. or African soil. Their activities were focused on organizing temples and missions across the country, establishing businesses and educational institutions within the Black community, and influencing African Americans through sales of their tabloid newspaper, radio broadcasts, and public meetings. Of modest size for many years, the NOI experienced a spectacular local and national growth during the 1950s and '60s. Functioning in the heart of Black ghettos (primarily in Northern urban centers), the NOI achieved its most successful recruitment among poor young working-class Blacks, although a growing number of African American college students began joining during the early 1960s. Very few Black intellectuals and professionals were interested in temple membership, and the NOI was condemned by middle-class leadership figures in the civil rights movement.

The NOI refused to participate in or even support the fight for civil rights or any type of integration action — a position which ran counter to the mass mobilizations and sentiments of that time. Most Blacks were not joining the NOI and were not seeking the establishment of a separate Black nation-state, but many expressed agreement with the NOI's pungent condemnations of racist institutions and practices, sharp criticisms of conservative civil rights leaders, and emphasis on racial pride and self-esteem.

Recognizing the impact of these bluntly stated sentiments on Black workers and political activists, the SWP attempted to understand and evaluate this development. For example, a 1963 Friday Night Socialist Forum featured a talk by Wilfred X, Minister of Muhammad's Mosque No. 1 and brother of Malcolm X. Like the forum involving the Republic of New Africa, it was clear that the SWP was not espousing nor promoting the NOI's call for a separate Black nation. George Breitman, who chaired the meeting, pointed out that socialists supported the NOI's freedom of religion, assembly, and free speech — all of which were under heavy attack by the government and the mass media. Of the more than 100 persons attending the forum, over a third were African Americans — an indication of the interest aroused among Blacks who were not NOI members and had no intentions of joining.

A number of Blacks who attended or were speakers at the Detroit forums were involved in groups which did *not* work for a separate Black nation but which did incorporate general Black nationalist features: all-Black membership, self-mobilization and leadership, self-esteem, Black initiative. Many such organizations were active in Detroit during the 1960s, including: Independent Negro Committee to End Racism and Ban the Bomb, Group on Advanced Leadership (GOAL), Uhuru (college students), Revolutionary Union Movement (auto workers), Freedom Now Party. One of the most significant Black nationalist gatherings was the Northern Negro Grass Roots Leadership Conference, which was held in Detroit in November 1963.

The SWP related positively to these groups: supporting GOAL's campaign for a citizens' review board to oversee the police; participating in Uhuru demonstrations against the police killing of a Black woman; being part of picket lines organized by the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement; attending the public meeting sponsored by the Grass Roots Conference; and promoting the Michigan Freedom Now Party as the most advanced expression of independent political action at that time.

Some recruitment of Black workers and African American youths resulted from the SWP's activities and classes, but the party's influence on Black activists was much greater than mem-

bership figures would indicate. Many Black high school and college students participated in the SWP's Marxist educational programs, consulted with branch members, and collaborated in political activities. When emergencies arose for the Freedom Now Party in fulfilling red-tape requirements to get on the ballot, FNP leaders asked SWPers for help — knowing that the party had gained expertise in taking care of the paperwork and technicalities designed to make it difficult for independent parties to secure ballot status. Mutual respect and confidence marked the relationships between the SWP and African Americans involved in carrying out Black liberation efforts.

## Separatism and Independent Black Formations

During the 1960s, clearly distinctive currents existed within the broadly designated Black nationalist movement. Separatism, defined as the goal to create an independent Black nation-state, constituted one such current. The overwhelming majority of African American activists, however, pursued quite different goals: achieving equality under the law; eliminating all forms of legal, semilegal, and informal segregation; and gaining recognition as first-class U.S. citizens with all the rights and opportunities of the white majority. Experiences had convinced Blacks that it was necessary for them to organize independently in all-Black or Black-dominated formations. There were both negative and positive reasons for reaching such a conclusion.

Many African Americans had gone through or knew about very negative experiences with multiracial or predominantly white political organizations, such as the Communist Party USA (CP) and the Democratic Party.

For many years, the CP had gained respect and authority within Black communities because of its principled position against racial prejudice, its many defense campaigns for victims of racism (the Scottsboro case and others), and numerous activities to fight for civil rights. But the needs and aspirations of Blacks were betrayed repeatedly by the CP, which shaped and reshaped its U.S. policies to serve the interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union. A critical example of sharp reversals injurious to Blacks' needs was what happened just before and during World War II. The CP initially opposed U.S. participation in the war, pointed out that the conflict would not serve the interests of the Negro people, and called for struggles against job discrimination. When the Soviet Union was invaded by the German army in 1941, however, the CP line switched abruptly. The CP beat the drums loudly for U.S. military involvement, formed the Negro Labor Victory Committee, and denounced Negroes' demonstrations for jobs in 1942 as "disrupting the war effort."

Liberals in the Democratic Party also contributed to Blacks' loss of confidence in white "allies" and "friends." Time and again promises were made and broken. Blacks were urged to be content with tiny improvements and to "go slow." The politicians excused their betrayals by pointing to their helplessness in the face of Dixiecrat opposition to civil rights measures — although they refused to break relations with this Southern wing of the Democratic Party. The labor movement's ties to the Democratic Party prevented unions from carrying out promised campaigns to organize the South — a blow to the expectations and crucial needs of Black workers.

These kinds of negative experiences contrasted sharply with positive ones: the successful battles during the 1940s and early '50s against racial discrimination carried out by uncompromising



groups which were wholly or predominantly Black; the inspiring examples of post-World War II revolts in Africa against colonial European powers; and the emergence of the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s and its stupendous growth during the '60s. The gains achieved by struggles involving the mobilizations of Black communities and led by African Americans enhanced the self-confidence of Blacks in their own abilities and capacities. Although they acknowledged and sought broad support from the white majority, Blacks were encouraged — through their own experiences — to rely on their own strengths.

This kind of consciousness about the values of independent organization, leadership, and agendas — defined as “Black nationalism” by African Americans engaged in struggle — is still being expressed today. In a presentation at this year’s annual gathering of Black Workers for Justice, Saladin Muhammad explained:

The racist system of national oppression often referred to as institutionalized racism has a widespread and varying impact on the conditions and nationality consciousness of African American people of all classes, especially in the South. The working-class demands in the struggles around housing, environmental justice, and for Black political power are often lost or distorted when African American workers lack the organization to help them raise and clarify their demands.

An African American workers’ organization is thus essential for the shaping of a working-class base, political consciousness, and leadership in the African American people’s liberation movement. This consciousness and organized leadership will better enable Black, white, and other oppressed workers to recognize and understand the centrality of African American workers as an organizing and unifying force for the empowerment of all Southern workers.... [Contrary] to narrow thinking, the existence of a Black workers’ organization should not be seen as an obstacle to the building of working-class political and organizational unity inclusive of all workers, regardless of race. The Workers’ Fairness Campaign is a good example of how a Black workers’ organization is helping to build a Southern labor movement to unite all workers into common workplace fight-back organizations and unions. [See the full text of Muhammad’s talk, published in this issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.]

This is clearly not an approach in the direction of establishing a separate Black nation-state — but is a contemporary example of the continuing life of Black nationalist attitudes regarding the need for African Americans to press for their goals and to control the methods of their struggle. At the same time as they create and build their own organizations, many militant Blacks recognize the broader context of a class-struggle approach and promote interrelations between different racial and ethnic groupings in order to fight for mutually desirable ends. These sentiments and this approach are also put forward by other organizations currently active: the National African-American Network, Campaign for a New Tomorrow, the Ron Daniels presidential campaign in 1992, and the National People’s Progressive Network.

### **Building a Revolutionary Party**

Projections for establishing a viable multiracial revolutionary party in this country must take into account the history of political relations between different races, ethnic groups, and nationalities. It is a mistake to view independent Black organizations as competitors or barriers to creating a revolutionary socialist party encompassing people of color. In a world in which the objective

conditions are overripe for placing capitalist societies into the dustbin of history, *subjective* considerations become increasingly decisive. Consciousness is a key feature which uniquely differentiates socialist revolutions from all previous ones, such as the bourgeois democratic revolution against feudalism. In terms of the issues taken up in the discussion of Black nationalism, understanding the primacy of consciousness in the revolutionary process means that Marxists must respect how oppressed people define themselves, must find ways of working together without imposing preconceived terminology and organizational forms, and must present revolutionary socialist perspectives in a convincing fashion.

In my opinion, this is what the SWP was able to do — at least until about the mid-1970s, when substantial changes began to take place within the party. This article contains some concrete examples of how the SWP was able to collaborate with new forces in the Black liberation struggle — including Black nationalists whose ideas, vocabulary, and actions were directed toward enhancing self-reliance, grass roots mobilizations, and independence from groups which attempted to hold back the struggle.

Through its recruitment of African Americans, the SWP became more multiracial in composition. Broader layers of Black militants were exposed to and influenced by Marxist analyses and revolutionary socialist perspectives through the SWP’s educational programs, election campaigns, publications, and involvement in protest struggles. The SWP, persistently and persuasively, promoted the concept of the dual nature of the Black liberation struggle: “a unique combination of the struggle for democracy by an oppressed minority with the working class struggle for socialism.” (See the SWP resolution entitled “Negro Liberation through Revolutionary Socialism,” final version adopted and published in 1950.)

With this basic concept in mind, SWPers actively sought — and in some cases were able to play — leadership roles in Black liberation groups and activities, such as: union caucuses and committees; Black student demonstrations in high schools and on college campuses; GI antiwar and antiracism actions; and community battles. Rather than denying the need for Trotskyist or revolutionary socialist leadership, SWPers were confidently predicting significant expansion of the party through a greatly enlarged Black membership and looked forward to becoming a more potent revolutionary force than the CP and social democratic organizations. These projections were not realized. The explanation does not lie in a lack of will, weakness in theory, application of program, departure from correct concepts, nor deference to independent Black formations. The SWP was affected by the same socio-economic and political circumstances as other revolutionary groups. Over the past twenty years, no socialist organization in the U.S. has been able to claim outstanding successes in terms of size or mass influence. Neither superiority nor inferiority of program and practice can be proven by numbers, racial composition, working-class support, or political authority.

All groups seeking revolutionary leadership are being tested now, and will continue to be tested by reality in the period ahead. The discussion and debate in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is an important part of the ongoing process of creating the type of mass multiracial revolutionary party which is needed to help transform this country and create the conditions for the construction of a North American component of a socialist world. □

August 18, 1993



# For the Reunification of the FI Movement in the United States: A Critical Reply to Paul Le Blanc's "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party"

by Steve Bloom

The June and July issues of this journal carried a two-part article by Paul Le Blanc, "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party in the United States." Despite the many positive aspects of his analysis, it seems to me that in at least one respect Le Blanc's presentation is deficient. For approximately ten years the forces in the United States that are in fraternal solidarity with the Fourth International have been divided into different organizations. How to resolve that division remains one of the key questions that FI supporters in this country need to address. Le Blanc's approach, however, leads away from such a solution, creating a theoretical rationale for justifying and codifying the present divisions.

I can only take space here for a brief sketch of the background to our present situation.

For more than four decades after its founding in 1938, the Fourth International recognized the affiliation of only one U.S. organization — the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Then, in the early 1980s a purge was carried out by the Barnes leadership of that party, aimed at getting rid of anyone who remained loyal to the SWP's historical traditions and program. In 1983 a new organization, Socialist Action (SA), was founded by some of the individuals who had been expelled from, or otherwise pushed out of, the SWP.

But the fragmentation of the former SWP did not stop there. Additional comrades were expelled from the party after SA was formed and SA itself suffered more than one split. By 1985 there were four separate organizations, each maintaining a fraternal affiliation with the FI: the SWP itself, SA, the FI Caucus of Solidarity (FIC), and the Fourth Internationalist Tendency (FIT). A partial resolution of the situation took place in 1990 when the SWP turned its back and walked away from the FI. In September 1992 a majority of the FIT voted to join Solidarity and merge with the FIC.

Nevertheless, the division of FI forces in this country is far from having been overcome. SA continues to insist that it, and it alone, represents the true continuity of the SWP and the FI movement in the U.S. Many former FITers disagreed with the decision to join Solidarity and remain outside of that organization. A number still consider themselves supporters of the FI and participate in the publication of this magazine. In addition, the Alliance for Independent Socialist Politics (AISP) was founded by a group that left SA in 1992 and at least some of its members continue to identify with the FI. AISP is also represented on this journal's editorial board — as is the Trotskyist League, a group seeking some kind of fraternal affiliation with the FI, though it has none at the moment.

Such a division of FI forces in any country is an abnormal state of affairs, according to the statutes of our world movement and according to common practice. Yet ten years of abnormality can sometimes begin to seem normal. (It represents a long time in the life of a revolutionary organization.) The flaw that I detect in Le Blanc's analysis lies precisely here. He begins to treat our present, divided situation as if it were the norm, presenting an approach that could actually be used to justify its continuation.

## Looking at the Text

In Part One Le Blanc lays out a general political/organizational perspective:

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

The vision of the kind of party we aim to build, if possible in the near future, is a key in helping us avoid the sectarianism we have just warned against. One of the greatest opportunities for the advancement of class consciousness would be through the development of a real, mass-based working-class party in the United States — a development which may not be inevitable but is certainly *possible*....

This is a context which would make possible a fruitful U.S. variant of the Bolshevik party of Lenin and Trotsky....

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

Part Two of the article begins by recapitulating some of the same ideas just cited. Then it goes on to discuss the international context:

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....

More significantly, there are revolutionaries and proletarian militants in many countries...who are 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....

...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...will eventually come into being....

With this background in mind, and after an intervening discussion of "Democratic Centralism," Le Blanc addresses the question that directly interests us here. The last section of the article is entitled "Fragmented Vanguard." He explains that there is "a *revolutionary vanguard*, although a very tiny one" in the U.S. today and it is badly divided.

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.... 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.

The reader is now informed that Le Blanc "happen[s] to belong to Solidarity," one among these "more than a dozen groups." The article lists what he sees as a number of Solidarity's strengths and continues:

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.... One of Solidarity's strengths is that it perceives that it will not become *the* organization of the revolutionary vanguard....

...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....

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 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.

## What Is Wrong Here?

It would be difficult to argue with a single one of the sentences Le Blanc has written. Every statement is true — taken by itself. But, when we put them all together the article creates a train of thought which is incomplete, and which tends therefore to lead to wrong conclusions. Let's look at it for a moment from the point of view of its formal logical structure:

1. A genuine, Leninist-type vanguard party cannot be built in the U.S. today given the present circumstances of the class struggle and generalized lack of consciousness on the part of working people.

2. On a world scale, as well, the conditions are not favorable for overcoming the relatively narrow existence of the FI.
3. At least partially because of this we find ourselves terribly divided on a national and international scale. "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."
4. Neither the FI nor Solidarity in the U.S. can "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."
5. Therefore we must look to future developments. "It may be that a broader revolutionary international...will eventually come into being." In the U.S., "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."
6. For this reason "it would be destructively sectarian to act as if all genuine revolutionaries must or will join the Fourth International." And, though Le Blanc stops short of explaining it in quite these terms, it would also apparently be "destructively sectarian" to suggest that all those in the U.S.A. who want to properly build and participate in the FI "must or will" join Solidarity.

We thereby reach the problematical conclusion that there is really nothing much we can do right now about the reality faced by Fourth Internationalists in this country. It is objectively based. We are divided and likely to remain so. Le Blanc "happen[s] to belong to Solidarity" and to the FI. Other good revolutionaries "happen to belong" to other groups. (Some of us like chocolate, others vanilla; is there really no more to it than that?) Just wait until "the development of a real, mass-based working class party in the United States" or some similar phenomenon comes along, then we can resolve our fragmentation and, in the meantime let's concentrate on "*doing good work*" (emphasis in the original).

But we should be unwilling to settle for such an approach. I, for one, will continue to insist that FI unity in this country is a vital necessity *in a medium-range sense*. That means acting today in a way that will make it possible to change the reality we face in the not-too-distant future — rather than simply accepting reality with a shrug and waiting for it to change by itself. No, we should not declare that we will have "the Leninist Vanguard Party" as a result, nor even the future nucleus of such a party. But unifying those forces which remain loyal to the FI will put us in the best position *to prepare ourselves today for that time in the future* when such a prospect becomes realistic once again.

Despite all the objective problems, which are real enough, the goal of FI unity in the U.S. still needs to be consciously pursued. The same is true of a broader revolutionary Marxist unity on a national and international scale — although this might be even more difficult to achieve. Yes, "it seems likely... that for some time to come many revolutionaries and revolutionary socialist organizations will remain outside of the Fourth International." And I can certainly agree that "It would be destructively sectarian to act as if all genuine revolutionaries *must or will* join the Fourth International" (emphasis added). But it is not at all sectarian to suggest that right now, today, this very minute, "all genuine revolutionaries" *should* be in the FI (or, to put it in a perhaps less provocative way, that all genuine revolutionaries, including those who are now in the FI, should be in a common international



movement — whether that would turn out to be an expanded version of the present-day FI or some new international organization which supersedes it.)

By posing the question in the narrow way that he does, (“Should we act as if all revolutionary socialists *must or will* join the FI?”) Le Blanc prejudices his own and the reader’s reply. He makes it impossible to draw appropriate conclusions about what revolutionary socialists in general, and Fourth Internationalists in particular, should be advocating to overcome our disunity *right now*.

### What Is the Place of Solidarity?

Our approach to Solidarity in the U.S. should be similar, in this respect, to how we view the role of the FI on a world scale. Those of us who agree should be trying to convince other FI supporters in this country about the relevance (importance, necessity) of building our international current in the context of working, at the same time, for a broader revolutionary socialist regroupment (i.e., Solidarity). We must try to win over those who are not yet ready to accept, or participate in, this kind of regroupment perspective. We have to try to convince them that being part of this process is a *better* way to build the FI today than trying to expand from a tiny, homogeneous political nucleus through a process of ideological self-replication.

No, we do not insist that they “must or will” join Solidarity. We do not propose to sever relations with them if they fail to change their ideological perspectives enough that they can do so. But we must persistently, if patiently, explain that this is what they *should* do if they want to best advance our *proper* goals as Fourth Internationalists in the U.S.A. — given both the objective and subjective political conditions that exist in this country. The only ideological prerequisite to their joining Solidarity is that they must make a sincere commitment to coexist in a common organization with a broader ideological diversity than they have been used to in the past. Once that is accepted, all other questions can be reasonably discussed.

So the correct answer to Le Blanc’s question (“how should revolutionary socialists organize themselves *now*, when it is not yet possible to establish a genuine Leninist party?”) is: by doing everything we can to try and group together *all* genuine revolutionaries *in a common national organization*. Accomplishing this would allow us to act in the most united fashion possible today, participating in the class struggle in whatever ways we can and, at the same time, preparing organizationally and ideologically for the future — when bigger and better things will be possible. We must set this kind of broad, united organization as our goal even though we know that we will never completely achieve it because if we fail even to set it as our goal we are certain to achieve that much less.

“Doing good work” in a broadly dispersed radical milieu can never be a substitute for “doing good work” as part of a more-or-less unified revolutionary Marxist political grouping. Le Blanc is guilty of a serious understatement when he says “it is also necessary for at least *some* [revolutionary Marxists] to find organizational forms enabling them to coordinate their energies” (emphasis added). I have always been under the impression that this is a necessity for any effective action by those who want to be part of the “revolutionary vanguard” — not merely a nice option for “some.”

Whatever Solidarity’s weaknesses might be — and there are many — it remains an organized grouping of revolutionaries that can begin to coordinate a national effort in at least a few key areas

of the class struggle. That is not something to be taken lightly in this day and age of rampant demoralization and disintegration on the left. And with a few more experienced cadre Solidarity could do that much more along these lines. No Fourth Internationalist who is “doing good work” outside of Solidarity will have to sacrifice that work in order to join. And, quite probably, they will find real opportunities, as part of this collective, to advance and improve on the “good work” that they can do.

In the broadest historical sense (and perhaps even in a narrower, medium-term sense) it is certainly true that Solidarity, in its current form, is only a temporary formation, one that will “quite possibly...want to pass out of existence in order to help create a larger, stronger, more unified organization of the revolutionary socialist vanguard.” (I will leave aside the difference between what Solidarity may want to do and what life will allow it to do.) And I agree when Le Blanc explains: “one of Solidarity’s strengths is that it perceives that it will not become *the* organization of the revolutionary vanguard” (though I also believe that one of Solidarity’s weaknesses, precisely because life doesn’t always allow us to do what we want, is that it fails to provide, in its present self-conception, for the possibility that it might be *forced* to evolve into that “organization of the revolutionary vanguard,” quite contrary to its present perceptions).

At the same time, however, we must reject any approach which concludes, on this account, that Solidarity is merely a temporary resting place for *some* FI supporters in the U.S. Those of us who are members of Solidarity must see it as *the* revolutionary socialist organization which we, as Fourth Internationalists in this country, need to commit ourselves to 100 percent. Whatever vision any of us might have for the kind of group we need to create under the present conditions of U.S. and international politics (and even FI supporters inside of Solidarity do not have a common vision), our goal must be to *help Solidarity as a whole play that role*, with the sole limitation that we cannot propose to violate the commitment to ideological pluralism mentioned above.

Our effort to help Solidarity become the organization it needs to become (however any of us define that) is *hampered* by the fact that there are individuals and groups in this country affiliated with or supportive of the FI, whose self-conception makes it impossible for them to become part of Solidarity. And it is also hampered by the fact that Solidarity as a whole does not maintain formal fraternal relations with the FI. True, we cannot overcome this reality simply by wanting to. But we also cannot absolve ourselves of the need to try to overcome it. Above all we cannot treat these as purely neutral facts, noting them in passing and then leaving them aside. This reality is an obstacle on the road to building Solidarity, building the FI, and preparing for a situation when all of us can “help create a larger, stronger, more unified organization of the revolutionary socialist vanguard” — in the U.S. and internationally.

### Keeping Things Right-Side-Up

Le Blanc concludes his piece by citing the collective commitment of all BIDOM supporters to FI unity, as explained in the “Who We Are” statement which we publish each month. This, he says, indicates our desire to make “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.” The actual words in the statement read as follows: “Supporters of this magazine are committed to comradely



discussion and debate as well as practical political cooperation which can facilitate eventual organizational unity of all Fourth Internationalists in the United States."

Le Blanc takes refuge in the temporal ambiguity of the words, "eventual organizational unity." But I will testify that, in approving this formulation as part of the basis for an independent BIDOM after the dissolution of the FIT, I for one never dreamed that Le Blanc or anyone else would begin to interpret it in such an abstract

and long-term sense. The idea of "eventual" unity should not be turned into its opposite — into an excuse to put off the struggle for FI unity until such time as we have a mass labor party, or some similar development, in the United States. Whatever the limitations on what is possible, the necessity of unity within the revolutionary movement in the U.S.A. is something that should animate our thinking and our actions at all times. □

## Too Little, Too Late Hands Victory to Tories

*Continued from page 4*

Timex management, with the agreement of ABEU tops, last week tried to "settle" the ongoing dispute in Dundee with a 27 percent wage cut. British Airways management wants to slash salaries by 30 percent. More employers are likely to try it on.

Even where pay is going up, settlements are averaging under 3 percent, the lowest rate

for 21 years. Only firefighters have shown real determination to bust the 1.5 percent public sector pay norm.

Pivotal though disputes like Timex or Burnsall are, they only involve relatively small groups of workers. Government statistics show that, in terms of overall strike-days, industrial action is still basically at its lowest ebb since records began in the 1890s.

On the positive side, the political situation has visibly changed. The Newbury and county council elections and recent opinion polls show support for the Conservative Party at a new low in modern times. In a volatile climate like this, the industrial picture can rapidly turn around. □

## Civil Rights and Labor Justice in the South Today

*Continued from page 7*

strengthen the social movements and organizations of the working class, oppressed nationalities, and women, including the trade unions, and will help to further prepare them as an organized working-class mass base of power. The political alignment over time of these social movements and organizations embodying this mass base can forge a real vanguard force and powerful mass movement for fundamental social change.

The Workers Fairness Campaign can be a vehicle to help launch this political move-

ment in the South as part of a working-class program to Organize the South. But again we say that this campaign must spread beyond the immediate base of the BWFJ and on a wider scale throughout the South in order for the Southern working class to gain a sense of its real power.

We are calling on everyone here to join the Workers' Fairness Campaign, to go back to your workplaces and communities and build Workers' Fairness Organizing Committees. You are a part of this movement. This very banquet is a mobilization of this movement.

we are calling on you now to be not only supporters of the BWFJ but to become members, planners, and leaders of the Workers' Fairness Campaign.

We must also build this movement because our dignity in the face of our children and the history that we leave for future generations is at stake. There can be no excuses passed on to our children for not taking a stand to ensure them a decent future. Dr. King did not pass on any excuses! Build the Workers' Fairness Campaign! Honor Dr. King with Working-Class Political Action. □

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# Letters

## Dan Rosenshine

Recently *Bulletin IDOM* published an obituary for Dan Rosenshine by Paul Le Blanc. Your readers may be interested in knowing that some of Dan's friends in Pittsburgh have arranged for the establishment of a *Daniel Rosenshine Memorial Book Fund* at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh to honor Dan's memory.

Money contributed to this fund would be used exclusively to buy books for the Squirrel Hill library branch (which Dan often frequented while he was in Pittsburgh) in the following subject areas: Marxism, the American Labor Movement, Peace Movements in the U.S., Racism in the U.S., Psychology and Psychiatry, and Jewish History and Philosophy. The books bought from this fund will be bookplated with Dan's name and dates and a few brief words of tribute. We feel this is an appropriate, small way to show respect for Dan's life and friendship.

Contributions to the Fund in any amount should be made out to "Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh," noted "For Daniel Rosenshine Memorial Book Fund," and sent to: Mr. Robert Croneberger, Director, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 4400 Forbes Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213-4080. Donations to this Fund are 100 percent tax-deductible as charitable contributions.

*Tom Twiss and David Rosenberg  
Pittsburgh*

## Building a Revolutionary Party

These are comments on "Notes on Building a Revolutionary Party in the United States" by Paul Le Blanc.

The reason that practically all U.S. workers see themselves as "middle class" is that that is exactly where they came from: family farms and other businesses. Capitalist development made them workers, but their dreams have not ended. Now capitalism continues to erode classes and individuals, promoting frustration and alienation in society.

Part and only part of this alienation is positive and constructive. It is very necessary to differentiate between reformist and revolutionary developments. Leninists will do worse than waste their time in movements to improve capitalist relations. Those relations must be allowed to run their natural course and show people willing and able to see what is *not possible*. Most people like Ron Daniels come from and gravitate to bourgeois camps. We cannot and will not be all things to all people and movements. Analysis on the basis of *class* is the only method for seeing what and

who is moving toward us and differentiating all others from us.

Resources of individuals and groups among us are very limited. So it is vitally necessary to pick and choose where our time and effort are to be donated. Only in *very exceptional* circumstances should borders be crossed. We have our hands full at home to know and do the correct — or most correct — action. There must be economic division of labor; but more important is the potential for dividing us that we confront. Even "programmatic" movements have the potential to divide the energy and resources that are so scarce. The Paris Commune in France, and the Russian, Cuban, and Chinese revolutions were not mainly made and perpetuated by those who were not native to those countries. And their main strength is the internal cohesion and logic of their social movement. This is not to negate the value of the knowledge that those movements would be helped by consonant movements elsewhere.

Since we are in no way facing the "final overturn of capitalism" — rather its restoration in probably all countries of the world — it would be incorrect to reject working with the Second International, or any of its parts. And, while the Third International is for the most part dead, elements of it (especially in Cuba or the U.S.) could be valuable to work with. Criticisms of the Fourth International had better begin with ourselves as surely as we need to see where we were correct. To that end, it would be valuable to see how our victory of the antiwar movement against the Vietnam war used lessons of the Teamsters victory in 1934. If we aptly see what is to correctly be done, we'll avoid the incorrect.

Granting that optimum regroupment is not now possible, is anything short of that valuable to consider? Beyond the momentary or fragmentary value of bringing people together in specific causes, would an "umbrella" organization offer a beginning to the very necessary cross-fertilization *on a consistent basis*. Perhaps democratic centralism in a party should be differentiated from that explained by Le Blanc. I can then see the value of offering the right of public criticism to members that would fracture or fragment a Leninist political party.

*Jim Krahn  
Minneapolis*

## Black Nationalism

The current discussion [on Black nationalism] indicates the danger of committing the fallacy of rigid categorization. The history of Black people in the U.S. illustrates

the historical limitations of social definitions. Originally brought from Africa as slaves, this was a people identified by skin color. They spoke different languages and had no common nationality. They were a class before they became a people. But as a people, they had no common nationality. The Civil War changed their status as a class but didn't endow them with a national status. The civil rights movement raised that question, but it has remained unsolved.

A historical analogy may help to clarify this point. The Holocaust prodded the Zionist movement to seek national status, by invoking Biblical precedent. By gaining imperialist support, it acquired a territorial base in Palestine. The achievement of territorial status by military force endowed the Jewish people, a religious category, with national status. This attribute is lacking in the Afro-American struggle. That's why Constitutional channels play such a major role. At present, territorial status is unobtainable to the Black movement. But if somehow the situation changes, a material basis would be supplied for Black nationalism as a concrete reality, and not just an ideological force. Only history will tell.

*Nat Simon  
Miami Beach*

## A Reply on Black Nationalism

Since the article by Claire Cohen and me, "In Defense of Black Nationalism: A Reply to Peter Johnson" appeared in issue number 105 of this magazine, two other articles have been written taking issue with us: "Black Liberation and Socialist Revolution in Today's America: Movementism or Marxism," by Roy Rollin (No. 107), and "Trotskyism and the Struggle for Black Liberation," (No. 108) in which Peter Johnson replies to our critique. We could probably write a volume about the various historical and terminological controversies involved in this dispute. And as is normal, both Rollin and Johnson do their fair share of misunderstanding what we had to say. But such things are of relatively minor interest. In this letter I prefer to focus on two very important substantive problems raised by these authors.

Rollin believes that Black Nationalism in the U.S. today represents the politics of a Black middle class trying to secure its own position in competition with white and other middle-class elements. There are two things wrong with this idea. First, it ignores what should be obvious to anyone with even a cursory familiarity with the Black community today: The most dominant layers of the Black middle class are less and less interested in any kind of nation-



alism. Their perspective is clearly and increasingly for integration into white society.

There are Black academics, cultural and religious nationalists, and others whose ideologies involve carving out a personal place for themselves — without truly confronting the capitalist state and its economic dominance. But it is quite incorrect to assert, as Rollin must for his position to have any coherence, that this is the sum total of nationalist sentiment in the community today *and, further, that nothing else is possible*. More radical and more political nationalist currents do exist. And they are fully capable of developing a mass base at some point in the future.

Of course, any generally revolutionary nationalist sentiment we might find among Blacks today is, for the most part, incomplete from a Marxist ideological point of view. But the same is true in the labor movement, among feminists, or anyplace else we care to look. Nothing in this is automatic, and the role of conscious revolutionary Marxists as participants in the discussion about how to achieve Black liberation can be crucial, even decisive. Yet we can hardly expect to play any role in that discussion if we stand *opposed* to nationalism on principle.

This takes me logically to the second article by Johnson. In it he objects to our statement: "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."

Johnson raises three objections: We assume (1) "that Trotskyists and other 'genu-

ine working-class revolutionaries' are outside the Black liberation struggle;" (2) "that Trotskyists should follow rather than lead the Black liberation struggle;" and (3) we portray "Trotskyists as white outsiders whose only role is to 'unconditionally support whatever legitimate demands emerge from the Black community.'" Even leaving aside the use of "Trotskyist" as synonymous with "revolutionary Marxist" (I much prefer the latter formulation and will use it from here on out), Johnson's objections are misplaced.

If we think for even a moment about the specific forms of revolutionary struggle that must emerge in the U.S., we will realize that these are going to include *both* democratic councils of the Black community *and* revolutionary workers' councils based on specific industries. It is simply impossible that these two different kinds of formations, with overlapping but not identical agendas, will have identical leaderships. Won't they have to forge an alliance? And can that alliance be developed on any basis other than that the revolutionary workers' councils "unconditionally support whatever legitimate demands emerge from the Black community"?

Even short of such a revolutionary upsurge this general dynamic must still be applied — no matter how many Black revolutionary Marxists there may be, and no matter how many Blacks may be active in the workers' movement as such. There will still be *two separate* struggles with *separate* dynamics and *separate* (even if overlapping) leaderships which will need to forge an alliance with each other.

As to the problem of providing leadership, Johnson poses the question in such a way as to make it impossible to answer correctly. Our idea is not that revolutionary Marxists "should follow *rather than* lead the Black liberation struggle." We say instead that we must follow *if we are to have any hope of leading*. This

general dialectic of leadership and mass movement has been understood by every serious revolutionary from the time of Marx. Revolutionary Marxists participate in the mass movement with the expectation of learning as much from it as we plan to offer in terms of leadership. That, in fact, is *the only way* we can be prepared to offer leadership. And this idea is especially important for revolutionary Marxists vis-à-vis the Black struggle today, when the number of Blacks who are part of our organizations represent only a tiny handful.

Rollin and Johnson apparently propose that "Trotskyists" present themselves to the Black

community and declare that they are ready, right now, to lead them — with a previously worked out program for liberation which they modestly call "Revolutionary Integrationism." Most Blacks will treat such "Trotskyists" with contempt and I cannot blame them. Rather, our approach must be to work with any genuine and serious current of radical Blacks which might emerge (knowing that today very few will be prepared to join multinational revolutionary organizations) to help advance the struggles of the community as a whole. We must lend our aid and assistance, we must lend the benefit of our experience where that might be of help, but most of all we must lend our ears and listen to the genuine concerns and demands that will emerge in the course of the struggle.

Steve Bloom  
New York City

### Correction

A typographical error occurred in the article by Evelyn Sell on "Working Women and U.S. Unions" (last month's issue of *Bulletin IDOM*). In the following passage, quoted from Susan C. Eaton, two incorrect figures were given: "This compares with 92% of elections held in health services, 22.66% for other services...." The correct figures are "9.2% of elections held in health services" and "22.6% for other services."

### Fidel in Defense of Marxism

Readers may be interested to know that, according to an August 12 Reuters dispatch from Cartagena, Colombia, Cuban president Fidel Castro recently reaffirmed that he would never abandon his commitment to his homeland and to communism. The dispatch included the following significant points.

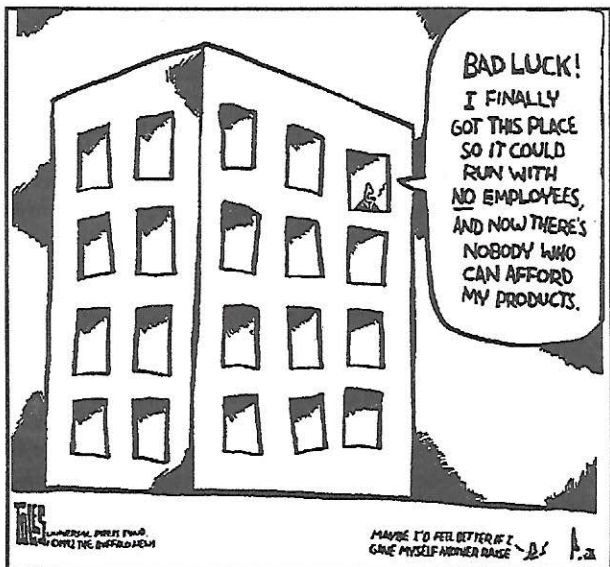
"Asked why he clung 'stubbornly' to ideas that most of the rest of the world has rejected, Castro said: 'If stubborn means being ready to fight to the last drop of blood and the last breath to defend your ideas, to defend the homeland and the revolution...if this means being stubborn, I will carry on being stubborn.'

"Socialism, he said, might be going through a difficult moment but it would recover."

Castro defended socialism as the alternative to the capitalist system, which, he pointed out, has "condemned the earth to poverty, pollution, and misery."

"Capitalism is a failure which offers no future whatsoever to humanity," he declared. "Capitalism gave rise to colonialism and slavery....Socialism is just beginning and we feel honored to belong to this stage of history."

George Shriver  
Marstons Mills, Massachusetts





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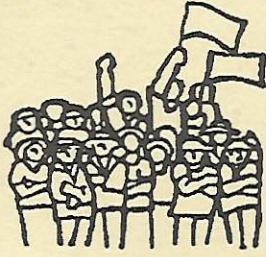
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# The Manifesto of the Fourth International

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

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

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

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

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

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

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tion and places the volume in a larger historical perspective.

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This book focuses on the waves of expulsions which hit the Socialist Workers Party from 1981 through 1984. It provides an inspiring record — and reaffirmation — of the revolutionary ideas and commitments of those who were being forced out of the organization to which many had given "the whole of their lives." also included are: substantial pieces by SWP leaders Jack Barnes and Larry Seigle defending the expulsions; a critique by representatives of the Fourth International; letters and a talk by pioneer Trotskyist James P. Cannon, originally published under the title *Don't Strangle the Party*. A substantial introductory essay by Paul Le Blanc, "Leninism in the United States and the Decline of the Socialist Workers Party," relates the 1981-84 experience to broader questions

of "the vanguard party" and Leninism, the history and character of American Trotskyism, the development of the U.S. working class, and the realities of world politics in the 20th century.

### Volume Three:

#### *Rebuilding the Revolutionary Party*

edited by Paul Le Blanc, 148 pages (1990) — \$9.00

This book consists of eight documents. The longest, written in 1983 by Paul Le Blanc and Dianne Feeley, is entitled "In Defense of Revolutionary Continuity" — a response to SWP leader Jack Barnes's attack on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Also included is the founding platform of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, a lengthy 1988 analysis of the SWP by Frank Lovell and Paul Le Blanc, and two major documents produced by the FIT when the Socialist Workers Party formally broke from the Fourth International in 1990. The volume concludes with three documents dealing with the need for unity among revolutionary socialists in the United States.