

In Defense of Marxism

\$3.00



Special Issue:

Labor Party Founding Convention Reports and Discussion

Left: Labor Party Convention Banner painted by Mike Alewitz

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The Founding of a Labor Party in the United States

This issue of our magazine focuses on the founding of the Labor Party at the June 6-9 convention in Cleveland, Ohio. We present a number of reports, from different angles (and expect to continue discussion on the building of the Labor Party in future issues). We have tried to keep to a minimum the repetition inevitable in several reports on a single event. Where authors present differing accounts of events or different opinions on key issues at the convention, some repetition occurs.

We reprint several texts from the convention, including speeches by two of the featured speakers: Baldemar Velasquez, a person of color whose organization is an important endorsing union and is doing vital cross-border organizing; and Margaret Trimer-Hartley, who addressed the convention on behalf of the striking Detroit newspaper workers. Also, the text of the convention resolution in support of the Detroit strikers, and the key resolution — "A New Organizing Approach to Politics."

Our reports on the founding convention begin with an overall account by John Hinshaw, a Labor Party activist from Pittsburgh, whose article seems to us an admirably balanced appraisal of most aspects of the event. Peter Rachleff's article, reprinted from a Minnesota labor paper, is an excellent summary of the highlights, with an emphasis on the way it looked from the Minnesota delegation.

Bill Onasch takes up the electoral question, the most divisive question at the convention and after. (We also include some information about the Buffalo Labor Party chapter, which since the convention — and in direct opposition to the convention decision not to endorse or run candidates during the next two years — took the action of endorsing a labor-backed liberal Democrat. Such is the pressure in an election year to turn the beginnings of an *independent* political voice for labor into the same old, tired support for labor's imagined "friends" in one of the bosses' parties.)

Frank Lovell's report was presented to Labor Party supporters and sympathizers at a gathering in Manhattan; Marilyn Vogt-Downey's report was circulated at that same meeting and elsewhere. Jean Tussey discusses the impact of the convention on politics in Cleveland and reviews the history of Labor Party Advocates in that city. Charles Walker takes a look at the news blackout of the convention by the big business press nationally, and we include a round-up and commentary on news coverage about the Labor Party in smaller-circulation liberal, radical, and labor publications.

Further, Rita Shaw tells about developments in the Seattle, Washington, chapter, and Mike McCallister reports as a delegate from the Madison, Wisconsin, chapter, expressing particular concern at the disproportionate influence of en-

dorsing international unions. In our summary of comments by Adolph Reed Jr., in the article by Andrew Parsons, and in the e-mail posting by UE organizer Sam Smucker, the logic of such influence is defended.

Two articles closely related to our Labor Party coverage are: Jim Lafferty's slashing attack on the sorry tradition of voting for "the lesser of two evils"; and Jerry Gordon's response to the disagreements we voiced in our last issue on what tactics to pursue at the Labor Party convention, the relative importance of resolutions on paper as opposed to the actions of party building, and how to conduct the struggle to win the adoption of more advanced positions by the Labor Party.

The article by Adolph Reed Jr. entitled "Building Solidarity" (in the August issue of *The Progressive*) coincidentally makes the same kind of point we were seeking to make in our article "Broad Consensus Is in the Best Interests of the Labor Party." We summarize, quote from, and comment on that article as a way of responding to Jerry Gordon's concerns.

Also related to the question of building the Labor Party and transforming the union movement is the article by Charles Walker on the July convention of the Teamsters union, which we print together with the texts of two resolutions, one on the Labor Party and one on the 1996 elections. And Paul Le Blanc discusses the question of how to continue the work of socialist education simultaneously with Labor Party support activity.

International Questions

In the area of foreign policy the program of the Labor Party adopted only the minimal position of international labor solidarity. But a consistent struggle for "global unionism" could have very significant consequences. And as we all know, the Labor Party is just in its beginning stages.

Besides developments in the U.S. labor movement, this issue of our magazine carries articles on the burning of Black churches, on Clinton's new welfare bill, on problems of "lesser evilism" in elections in Russia and Nicaragua, on current developments in the labor movement in Mexico, and on labor and politics in Taiwan.

An important discussion of why socialist internationalists support the Palestinian cause and oppose the Israeli colonial-settler state appears in an exchange of views between Prof. Morris Slavin of Youngstown State University in Ohio and Tom Barrett, one of *BIDOM's* editors, who goes back over the history of Israel's formation and of international socialist views on Zionism and on Israel's role and record. Barrett's purpose is to explain why the interests of American workers, as well as Israeli workers and Palestinians, are not served by support for the pro-imperialist leadership of the Israeli state.

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

Volume 14, No. 4

Whole No. 133,
July-August 1996

Closing News Date:
August 1, 1996

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Clinton Signs a Dole-ful Welfare Bill

“We can’t let the Republicans take the White House.” That’s the main argument given for voting for Clinton. It is given out by liberals, by AFL-CIO leaders, and by many “on the left” (especially former liberal friends of the Soviet bureaucracy — that is, the “Communist Party USA.”).

But Clinton follows the same policies as the Dole-Gingrich Republicans. His signing of the welfare bill is one more illustration of that. This welfare bill is straight out of Gingrich’s “Contract on America.” Even worse. Clinton is not just borrowing this policy from the Republicans. Clinton *himself* advocated this policy in his 1992 campaign when he promised to “end welfare as we know it.” And he claims he has to keep his campaign promises if he wants to be reelected. Never mind all the other promises he’s broken — such as providing a decent health care system for all Americans.

“Master Move”?

A *New York Times* article datelined July 31 called Clinton’s action a “master move.” “With today’s action, Mr. Clinton fortifies his credentials as a ‘New Democrat’ and strengthens his political position going into this fall’s Presidential election.” He has “deprived” Dole, they say, of “a central issue in his campaign for the White House.”

In other words, Clinton has beaten Dole by joining him. So voting for Clinton to keep Dole out of the White House won’t work. Clinton is Dole — with a different face.

The *New York Times* claims that an “overwhelming majority of Americans say they want some form of welfare reform.” (If they really do say this, it’s because of the unending propaganda in the corporate-owned media clamoring against welfare.)

The *New York Times* acknowledges that many liberals, labor leaders, civil rights advocates, and religious organizations were opposed to Clinton’s signing this bill. But so what? The *Times* says they have nowhere else to go. “Liberals have no alternative but to back [Clinton] for reelection.”

There Is an Alternative — the Labor Party

But there is an alternative. Instead of playing the Republican-Democrat shell game, supporters of labor, civil rights, and human values can help build the Labor Party.

Those who argue, “We can’t let the Republicans take the White House,” forget a small detail. The super-rich who own the banks and corporations already *have* the White House.

Whether Clinton or Dole is the occupant — or “Pierrot” for that matter.

The capitalist class is not some figment of the imagination or dim historical memory. It decides policy. And it controls both major parties, giving us a “choice” every four years. At regular intervals the fat cats allow the poor mice to choose which fat cat representative will sit in office and carry out the pro-cat policy common to them all. This is no choice. Dole will eat the mice quicker. Clinton will toy with them, pretend to be their “friend,” before swallowing them down.

The Labor Party says, The mice need to get organized to put their own in office, to put an end to fat cat rule.

Labor Party Position on Welfare

On the question of welfare, the Labor Party says: guarantee everyone the constitutional right to a job, to earn their own livelihood. And if there are no jobs, let society, through the government, guarantee a decent income for all.

The Labor Party also says: End *corporate welfare* as we know it. Every year the fat cats, the corporations, are awarded \$200 billion from the government budget. The U.S. government subsidizes McDonalds, for example, to help it export hamburgers, but it wants to stop giving a measly pittance of Aid for De-

pendent Children. As the August 1 *New York Times* reported, “The bill would eliminate the 61-year-old Federal guarantee of cash assistance for the nation’s poorest children.” An editorial in the same issue of that paper said, “This is not reform, it is punishment. The [Clinton] Administration’s staff estimates that such provisions [of the bill] will throw a million more children into poverty.”

Even this editorial’s mild criticism of the bill Clinton signed is devastating: “It is not fair to cut parents off welfare unless they are provided an opportunity to work. It is not humane to remove a Federal guarantee of welfare aid and create the leeway for additional punitive cuts at the state level. A bill that creates child poverty is not an acceptable way to end welfare as we know it.”

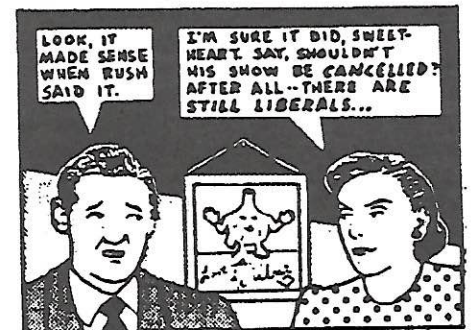
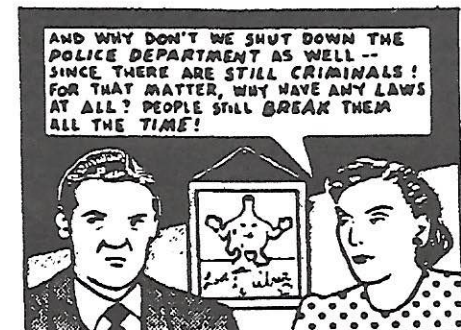
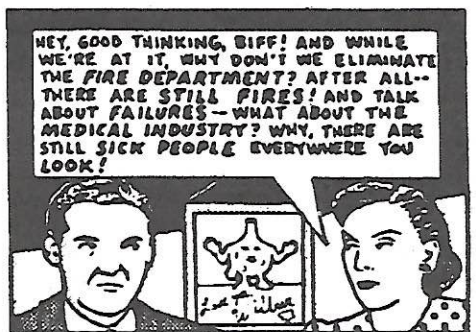
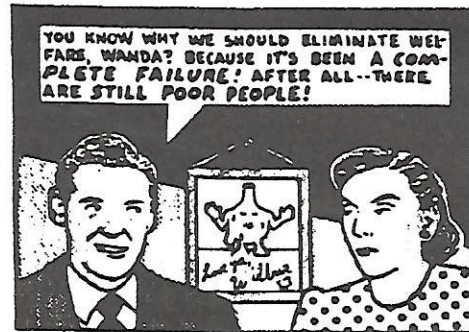
By signing the welfare bill, Clinton has decreed that, by his own staff’s estimates, a million children will be cut off from receiving the tiny amounts of assistance traditionally allowed to families living below the poverty level. Such assistance has been part of American life since the New Deal era, since 1935. This kind of social assistance was won as the result of mass struggle by unemployed leagues and trade unions in the 1930s.

They want to drive us back to the Hoover days of the Great Depression. The system

Continued on page 8

THIS MODERN WORLD

BY TOM TOMORROW



... and socialists, too!

It's Time We Abandon Lesser-of-Two-Evils Politics!

by James Lafferty

The author is executive vice president of the National Lawyers Guild. The following is a speech given at the Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles on May 22, 1996.

In 1964, fresh out of law school, and shortly after becoming executive director of the National Lawyers Guild, I visited Los Angeles, where a group of Guild members were having the traditional "lesser-of-two-evils" debate, this time over whether it really mattered who won the '64 presidential election, Barry Goldwater or Lyndon Johnson. A number of reasons were offered for supporting Johnson, chief among them being the fear that a Goldwater victory would see the U.S. drawn more fully into the Vietnam war. Well, of course, Johnson won the election and promptly sent us down the road of deeper and deeper U.S. intervention in Vietnam, not stopping until over 560,000 U.S. troops had been sent there, 58,000 of them had been brought home in body bags, and millions of Vietnamese had been murdered, maimed, or left homeless.

My point, of course, is that this "lesser-of-two-evils" debate has been going on now for as long as I can remember, and as far as I can see, all the progressive movement has to show for holding its nose and voting for one lesser-evil Democrat after another is a nation where every year more and more of our people slip deeper and deeper into poverty, alienation, and hopelessness.

Whatever may have been the case in the past, more and more the choice we face these days is a choice between guys like Bob Dole and Bill Clinton, and it's my contention that, when you come right down to it, this is really no choice at all. Or, to quote Michael Moore, it's a choice between "the-evil-of-two-lesser." Certainly, it's not a choice that is sufficient to stop this nation's downward slide into ruin. The reason is simple: today, neither major party represents workers or the vast majority of people in this country; they both represent business interests and the rich and powerful few who rule this nation.

Any Difference of Consequence?

For all their paper differences, is there really a "difference of consequence" between Clinton and Dole? Before you answer, consider this: In the last several years over 40 states have adopted so-called "welfare reform" legislation, result-

ing in millions being cut from the welfare rolls and pushed into poverty. And in each of the 40 states I refer to, Democrats were in control of the statehouses when welfare was "reformed."

There are more people without health care insurance today than when Clinton took office. More homeless people in our streets now than when George Bush was president. Clinton supported the Torricelli bill before Bush did and just signed the Helms-Burton bill, which further tightens the embargo against Cuba. Clinton is also quite willing, in exchange for some votes, to let the fasting members of Pastors for Peace die, rather than release medical aid bound for Cuba.

Most shameful of all, Clinton supports ending 60 years of child welfare legislation, despite the fact that his own people tell him this will mean a million more children living in poverty! Despite his claimed support for a woman's right to choose, he signed the omnibus spending bill, containing a number of restrictions on reproductive freedom. Ever the keeper of the moral flame and upholder of "family values," Clinton has now spoken out against same-sex marriages.

Clinton and the Democrats pushed through Congress some of the most Draconian "anti-crime" legislation in our history and are now the prime authors of the so-called "anti-terrorist" bill — a bill that guts the ancient right of *habeas corpus* and infringes on civil liberties to a degree not seen since the days of Joe McCarthy.

Despite his professed concern for working men and women, Clinton spent much of his presidential capital pushing NAFTA through Congress at an estimated cost of over 300,000 jobs lost to workers in this country, in exchange for poverty-wage jobs abroad. An overwhelming majority of Democrats in the House of Representatives voted for a repressive immigration bill that, among other niceties, sought to deny public education to the children of undocumented immigrants.

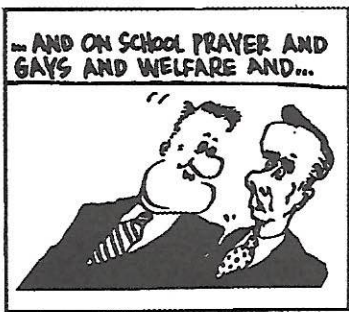
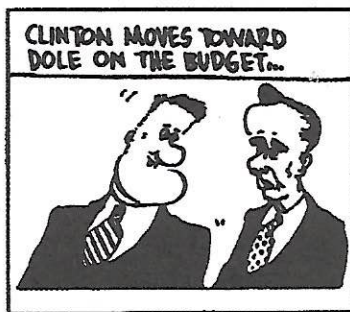
In short, Democrat Bill Clinton, whose most memorable pronouncement during his last State of the Union address was that, "the day of big government is over," has, with the support of most Democratic Party members in Congress,

happily joined the Republicans in their efforts to dismantle the federal government, in general, and social programs for the people, in particular. Hell, the Republicans are now complaining that Clinton has stolen their precious "Contract with America"! And you know what, they're right!

The "Clinton's Bad, But Bush Would've Been Worse" Argument

This may all be true, some say, but just think how much more horrific things would be if Bush had won re-election? The welfare bills would be even worse than they are. There'd already be prayer in the public schools, although Clinton and the Dems seem to favor this as well. The recent appointments to the Supreme Court would have been worse than they were, although when you reflect on some of Justice Ginsburg's decisions, one wonders. Affirmative action would be an even more endangered species than it is, although Clinton opposes "preferences," and it's only fair to ask why Democratic Senators Boxer and Feinstein have not spoken out strongly against the CCR initiative in California. The budget would be slashed even more harshly than it's going to be, although considering how Clinton signed on to the Republicans' call for a balanced budget in 7 years with GAO figures to guide us, again one must wonder.

However, for the sake of argument, I'll agree that as bad as things are today, they would be even worse if Bush had won reelection. But this is exactly the kind of defeatist thinking that traps the progressive movement in this country, election after election. Since things are no longer getting any *better* under the Democrats, the only argument left to proponents of "lesser-of-two-evils" politics, is that "things could be even worse." Isn't it finally time, at long last, to admit that while "things could be worse," even with a Democratic in the White House and Democrats in control of Congress for most of the past 20 years, things have *still* only gotten worse than they were?



Failed Efforts at Reform via Democrats

If we're to be honest, don't we have to admit that our efforts to meet the needs of our sisters and brothers through the Democratic Party have failed? To admit that things are only worse for poor women needing an abortion, or a roof over their children's heads? That things are only worse for the growing ranks of the homeless and for workers, more and more of whom today work for a minimum wage worth no more than it was in 1970 and, even if that wage is raised, will work below the official poverty line? Worse for the great majority of our people who today live in the most non-equalitarian nation on earth, with one percent of the people in this country owning 40 percent of its wealth? Worse for the millions who have lost their welfare benefits, or seen them slashed to a level that will not sustain human life?

What will it take before we're willing to admit that our efforts to reform the Democratic Party have failed? When will we be willing to admit that voting our fears rather than our hopes is not good enough? Will all the colleges have to close to make room for new prisons before we come to our senses? Will 5 out of 6 of us have to live in poverty before we admit failure? Will all have to lose their health insurance before we try a new way? Will all of our civil liberties have to be sacrificed on the altar of the Democratic Party's anti-terrorism bills and crime bills before we finally realize we have lost our freedom?

Why Vote for Just a Slower Death?

The other day I heard a respected liberal Democratic Party member of the state legislature say that she prefers Clinton to Dole because while Clinton wants to *cut* welfare benefits for the poor, Dole wants the poor *dead*! But, when you come right down to it, does Clinton's "five-years-and-you're-out" welfare plan amount to anything more than a *slower* death than Dole's "five-years-and-you're-out" welfare plan? Would she prefer a slow death to a good fight? A good fight for welfare rights and real health care reform? A good fight for gay rights, and civil liberties, and the environment? A good fight for affirmative action and decent jobs at a livable wage? Will we forever be content with taking the road that leads to a slow death, rather than striking out on the road that can, at long last, lead to a better life?

Isn't it time for a good fight? Time for liberals and progressives and, yes, leftists to join together in an effort to make things better and not simply be content with forestalling our slow but certain death? Friends, our ship of state is sinking like the *Titanic* and rearranging the deck chairs won't save us. We're drowning, and all the Democratic Party offers us is a leaky raft. Oh, the holes in its raft may be smaller than those in the Republican Party's raft, but if we

continue to cling to it we will drown just as surely, if more slowly, as we will on the raft of the Republicans.

One reflection of how little real difference there is these days between the two major parties is the way both parties are now financed. Both Democrats and Republicans now win office through contributions from well-financed special interest groups, in general, and the big money of conservatives, in particular. Remember, in the last presidential election Bill Clinton received more campaign contributions from Wall Street than George Bush did, putting a lie to Kevin Phillips's comment that "the Democratic Party is the capitalists' *second* favorite party." Since Clinton took office, unprecedented levels of cash have poured into the Democratic National Committee. The Democrats have raised a record \$80 million dollars — the bulk of it from big donors. The party's Business Leadership Forum, which has an admission price of \$10,000, has ballooned from 135 members last year, to 850 members now. A couple of weeks ago, the Democratic Party held the single richest fund raiser ever! Some donors gave as much as \$100,000 apiece! I doubt *they* were working stiff.

Better a Protest Vote Than a Vote for Either Major Party

Now, some have argued, "Yes, it's time to start putting together a new party. But until we accomplish that task, we might as well vote for the lesser-of-two-evils Democrat." But given today's realities, isn't voting for Bill Clinton this fall, and urging others to do the same, simply lying to people about what can really make things better and what cannot? And doesn't it also serve to slow our struggle for a new party? Isn't it time to tell people the truth? (And given how few of them bother to vote anymore, I think they already know it!)

Isn't it time to tell them that voting for either major party is to express support for four more years of suffering and decline? Time to tell them that a vote for Bill Clinton is really a vote for Shell Oil and AT&T and Clinton's other backers? Time to tell them, in simple terms, that the real "wasted vote" next November is a vote for either Dole *or* Clinton? Isn't it time to tell them that neither candidate has their interests at heart; that neither offers a program that will materially advance their lot in life, or substantially reverse the downward slide their lives are now on?

If we ever hope to turn this nation around, we've got to break completely with the Democratic Party. We've got to bite the bullet and begin the long, arduous task of forming a new party — a true people's party. The Greens and the New Party are already on the ballot in many states, and in some cases have already won significant local elections. Next month, unions representing over one million workers will form a new Labor Party, in Cleveland, Ohio. This will

be the first true party of working men and women in many, many generations.

No Quick Fixes

Can either of these new parties, or any others formed in the near future, win the presidency? Of course not! There are no quick fixes for what ails this nation, and no quick way to build third parties that can challenge for the presidency. Indeed, I suggest it was those who believed, in good faith, we could reform the nation by reforming the Democratic Party, who were looking for a "quick fix," and they have failed. It took over 300 years to get into the mess we're in now and it will take a long time to get out of it. But we will never get out of it if we cling to the failed ways of the past.

Now, we know the kind of political party we need. We need a party that represents workers and the majority of people in this country, not a party for the rich. We need a party that calls for a massive public works program and a shorter work week with no cut in pay and a truly livable minimum wage. We need a party that will push for single-payer health insurance for everyone. We need a party that does not waffle on affirmative action, but fights to strengthen protections for minority workers. A party that will truly protect our environment, not sell off our resources to the highest bidder. A party that defends civil liberties, not a party that pushes Draconian anti-terrorist bills. Does anyone in this room honestly think that the Democratic Party is, or can be, that party?

If we ever hope to see the day when governance in this nation is truly performed in service of the people, what choice do we have but to abandon what Ralph Nader calls "the two parties of the bosses" and get about the business of building a party that can, at long last, make this a better place to live for all of our sisters and brothers, the great majority of whom have already abandoned both "parties of the bosses"? If we can honestly admit that our efforts to do this through the Democratic Party have failed, and find the courage and perseverance to build a new party, we can take this country back from the greedy few who now rule it.

I truly believe that there has never been a better time than *now* to begin this struggle. We must not hesitate to act and to act decisively. If we let this opportunity slip through our hands, it will be to our everlasting shame. But if we will join together, if we will abandon the failed ways of the past, if we will get about the business of building a party of, by, and for the people, we *can* win this struggle and, in the process, give real meaning to that old political slogan, "It's time for a change!"

Thank you. □

Teamsters End Deadlocked Convention

by Charles Walker

They even booed a moment of silence for deceased members.

—*Hoffa's disruptive tactics as described by the Associated Press, July 15, 1995*

Let's cut to the chase. At the 25th Teamsters Convention (July 15–19), the old-guard forces behind James Hoffa, Jr. — arrayed against the reformers headed by Ron Carey — counted on getting their hands on the international union's treasury. Instead they left empty-handed.

Hoffa Junior had wooed many local union officers with the promise that they would share in the more than \$16.8 million in the treasury, equal to three-quarters of the total annual payroll of the IBT (International Brotherhood of Teamsters; the total payroll is about \$23 million). Now, for Hoffa Junior, it's back to the drawing board to work on his campaign after being outgeneraled at the five-day convention by Ron Carey, the first Teamsters general president elected by the rank and file.

Underlying the disputes at the convention was the question of whether the union would continue its makeover into a fighting union. A union that struck the freight industry after 15 years of declining membership, a union that took on United Parcel Service despite a federal court injunction, and a union striving to bring the ordinary members into the life and struggles of their organization, especially through rank-and-file organizing programs. In other words, a union that has confidence in its members' ability to think critically and act boldly.

Hoffa Junior's Reactionary Vision...

Hoffa Junior has a reactionary vision for the union. He would halt the fight against corruption, restore multiple pensions for top union offices, and put the lid back on strikes. Hypocritically, the son debases his father's accomplishments, implying that the Hoffa name, not the members' muscle, will return the union and its members to their glory days. Hypocritically, he defends local union autonomy to reverse Carey's steps toward building the union as a democratic bulwark against the bosses.

...and Calculated Disruption

Hoffa Junior's supporters will say that Carey should have been defeated. Of the 1900 delegates assembled in Philadelphia during the convention, old-guard supporters had a slim majority, after defections by delegates "pledged" to Carey. But the day before the convention opened, and before the defections took place, Hoffa Junior plainly declared his intent to disrupt: "Don't bring your spouses and children because it's going to get rough. By Wednesday, we are going to force Ron Carey to shut this convention down!"

In turn, Carey denounced his opponents' "thug tactics and mob rule...[which] brought shame on this great union. They don't care if our union has the strength and respect to stand up to employers and fight for the members' interests."

Previous Teamster conventions have had rival candidacies, dissent and debate, and even thuggery and gangsterism on the convention floor. But those conventions were anemic in comparison with this year's wildly acrimonious, seismically divided, one-of-a-kind power fight. It's likely that this convention will become the most talked about since the 1935 AFL convention, when John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers strode across the convention floor and landed a haymaker on the 300-pound chieftain of the Carpenters Union, Bill Hutcheson.

Speaker Drowned Out

The Hoffa Junior delegates, and their supporters among the 2700 rank and filers, retirees, spouses, children, and guests, began their calculated disruption with the crack of the opening gavel. Their deafening partisanship drowned out Carey's keynote address. Their shouts, chants, catcalls, and booing went on and on for nearly three hours.

They drove United States Senator Arlen Specter (Republican, Pennsylvania), chairman

of the Senate Labor Appropriations Subcommittee, from the podium. He returned at the urging of Philadelphia's longtime Teamster leader, IBT Vice President John Morris. Specter tongue-lashed the Hoffa delegates, saying: "they are setting back the labor movement, and they are setting back the Teamsters, and they are setting back Mr. Hoffa by this kind of unruly, undemocratic behavior."

Time Lost Counting Votes

During the week, the convention lost a lot of time due to "division of the house" vote counts. Carey, as chairman, or a minimum of 200 delegates were eligible to call for a division of the house, when voice votes were too close to call. Clearly, with the delegates implacably at odds, and with the added voices of the alternate delegates and guests, a voice vote was often unreliable. After reports that some delegates were moving around the huge hall in order to get counted more than once, Carey ordered that each delegate's bar code be scanned as he or she passed through doors posted "Yes" or "No." It took an hour to scan the delegates and complete each "division of the house" vote count.

By the convention's first vote it was clear that the Hoffa forces were carrying out a well-

Teamster Convention Proposed Resolution

On the Labor Party

This resolution and the following one were prepared by the Resolutions Committee and other committees at the July 1996 Teamsters convention, but were not presented or voted on because of the general deadlock between the Carey and Hoffa forces. We reprint them for the information of our readers as an indication of the thinking in top Teamster circles: on the one hand, a strong interest in and friendliness toward the Labor Party idea, but also a continuing failure to see beyond the "lesser evil" outlook despite keen awareness of Clinton's failings on NAFTA, etc.

In this first resolution, one factual error about the Labor Party convention should be noted. There were nearly 1,400, not "2,000," delegates, although the several hundred visitors to the convention could have brought the total attendance close to 2,000.

Whereas working people in America increasingly feel alienated from both major political parties; and

Whereas this feeling of disconnect has caused workers, particularly union members, to look elsewhere for support; and

Whereas workers in many countries around the world have formed viable, successful Labor political parties founded on the strength of workers' issues; and

Whereas organized labor in 1996 will put forth an unprecedented campaign to elect worker-friendly politicians and in turn will expect unprecedented support from those politicians; and

Whereas more than 2,000 delegates gathered in Cleveland, Ohio, in June to dis-

cuss the formation and support of a true Labor Party that will voice the concerns of working families and not be beholden to the power of Corporate America's dollars; and

Whereas this Labor Party convention was attended and supported by many Teamster Union members as well as other AFL-CIO union members; **therefore be it**

Resolved: That the Teamsters Union commends these concerned delegates and their organizations for the effort made to bring workers' issues to the political debate; and **be it finally**

Resolved: That the Teamsters Union will work with all of organized labor to assure that all political parties are responsive to the needs of workers and their families.

planned strategy of rule or ruin (rule the convention or ruin it for everyone else). One Hoffa supporter reportedly told a TV interviewer that they "had practiced for five weeks."

First Vote on Credentials

The first vote was also the most controversial of the week's many disputed votes. It was a vote on the report of the Credentials Committee. The report was seconded, and three delegates spoke in favor. Carey called for the ayes, then the nays. Then Carey declared the ayes had prevailed, thereby approving the delegates' credentials, including 134 appointed delegates. Seventy-five percent of the appointed delegates work for the international union and back Carey, with most of the rest backing the Hoffa slate. Hoffa Junior's delegates claimed that Carey had called the vote too quickly, wrongfully ruled that the ayes had won, and ignored a call for division of the house.

The *New York Times* reported, "A strong chorus of 'Ayes' was followed by a longer, louder chorus of 'Nos.'" The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Carey "accepted a voice vote, which appeared close to many in the hall." The Associated Press wrote that "the convention was sent into a frenzy when Carey ruled against the Hoffa camp on a credentialing issue that was decided on a questionable voice vote."

This writer sat in the guest bleachers in the rear of the hall, surrounded by Hoffa supporters who were led by "cheerleaders," not unlike those at football games. While the guests had no right to vote, many screamed "Nay" under the guidance of floor whips wearing earphones or carrying walkie-talkies.

For two hours numerous guests had cheered Hoffa Junior and jeered Carey, prior to their joining in on the voice votes. They shouted their slogans in time with the Hoffa slate delegates and alternates. They switched slogans and chants in an instant, as if they were well rehearsed. Shortly after Specter's futile attempt to deliver his speech, barely five hours after the convention opened, Carey ordered that the 2700 guests leave the hall. Another two hours would pass before the convention was once again called to order.

No Decisive Issues Settled

The remaining sessions were marked by tense drama, though no decisive issues were settled and despite recurring disputes over parliamentary procedure. Each side won votes, but the Hoffa Junior loyalists could not overcome Carey's advantage built into the convention rules dating from the 1991 convention and buttressed by the rules of parliamentary procedure.

When it looked like the tempo of the proceedings might speed up, the Hoffa Junior delegates would often shoot themselves in the foot. For example, during a crucial consideration of constitutional amendments, a member of the Hoffa slate asked that the convention take up the report of the Grievances and Appeals Committee. Carey readily assented, thereby protecting his

constitutional powers from hostile amendments. At other times they would call for a division of the house which was not crucial, but which brought the convention one more hour

closer to adjournment. Nevertheless, they claimed that Carey was stalling in order to prevent their amendments from reaching the floor.

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Teamster Convention Proposed Resolution

On the 1996 U.S. National Elections

Whereas the 1996 elections for Congress and the U.S. President offer American voters a stark choice to determine national priorities and policies that can profoundly affect the economic well-being and quality of life for working men and women and their families; and

Whereas the 104th Congress under the leadership of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, and now Trent Lott, has aggressively worked to undermine or repeal virtually every federal law written to protect or enhance the economic security of American workers; and

Whereas Bob Dole and Newt Gingrich have taken the lead in promoting special interest legislation to:

- Rob Medicare to pay for new tax loopholes for big corporations and the rich;
- Allow employers to raid pension funds;
- Offer companies new ways to avoid paying overtime rates;
- Make education less affordable for our children by cutting student loans;
- Wipe out legal protections for public employees;
- Destroy workplace democracy by allowing employers to go back to creating "company unions"; and

Whereas Bob Dole for three decades in Congress has sided consistently with corporate special interests to oppose labor law reform, gut job safety laws, weaken pension protections, undermine minimum wage and overtime laws, and block passage of Medicare and health care reform; and

Whereas at Bob Dole's initiative the Congress is actively considering so-called "right to work" legislation designed to weaken unions; and

Whereas President Bill Clinton has worked to improve living standards for working families by:

- Issuing an executive order to punish employers who replace striking workers;
- Vetoing legislation permitting employers to raid pension funds;
- Opposing efforts in Congress to wipe out job safety laws, laws that protect the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively and to destroy prevailing wage and fair labor standards;
- Defending Medicare and other health programs from reckless attacks by Congress;

- Supporting tax policies that benefit middle-income Americans; and

Whereas neither candidate or party is ideal. Both too often listen to the advice of those who discount the needs of workers. Both support NAFTA and other global trade policies that drain good jobs from this country. Nevertheless, the President's emphasis on job creation and training for workers is important. While many Americans remain insecure in their jobs or unemployed, the Clinton Administration has taken unemployment to its lowest level in a generation; and

Whereas Teamsters, like all Americans, are free to make their own decisions about political candidates. The union's primary obligation is to give its members timely and accurate information to involve members and their families in political action; and

Whereas an independent poll of Teamster members showed that by a margin of roughly two to one, members believe that the Clinton-Gore ticket is a better choice for working people than Bob Dole; **therefore be it**

Resolved: That every Teamster local begin immediately the task of ensuring that every eligible Teamster family member is registered to vote; that every Teamster local take responsibility for giving its members information provided by the International Union on the candidates and their records; and that every Teamster local union participate actively in getting members and their families to the polls; and **be it further**

Resolved: That delegates to the Teamsters 25th International Convention believe that the positive accomplishments of the Clinton Administration, when compared to Bob Dole's long history of service to corporate special interests, speak for themselves, and that every member needs to know this information; and **be it further**

Resolved: That the International and every local union will use its resources and encourage its members to replace the current Congress with one more responsive to the needs of our members; and **be it finally**

Resolved: That the International Union will work with the Joint Councils and locals, with the AFL-CIO and other unions, and in coalition with a wide array of organizations to organize rallies, demonstrations, phone banks, canvassing, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote drives aimed at reasserting the influence of labor and the concerns of working people in this election.

Detroit Striker at Labor Party Convention

“Together, the Unions Can Turn the Tide — and a Labor Party Could Unite Us”

Text of speech by Margaret Trimer-Hartley

Power never takes a step back — only in the face of more power. Power doesn't back up in the face of a smile or in the face of a threat or in the face of some kind of nonviolent loving action.

It's not the nature of power to back up in the face of anything but some more power. Power recognizes only power, and all of them who realize this have made gains.

—Malcolm X

Early in the Detroit newspapers strike, we were quoting Martin Luther King, Jr. We were learning nonviolent civil disobedience. And we were appealing to the collective corporate conscience of Knight-Ridder, Gannett, and the many businesses that advertise in the scab newspapers.

Now, eleven months into this brutal ordeal, strikers realize that those tactics alone aren't going to win this strike. We are becoming more militant and confrontational.

Our circulation and advertising boycotts have cost the companies an estimated \$260 million. We've annihilated their reputations. In the public's mind, journalistic integrity and freedom of the press no longer exist in Detroit.

And yet, these mega-corporations haven't budged at the bargaining table. The longer the strike drags on, the deeper their pockets seem to get. Truth and decency are alien concepts in their so-called New Corporate Reality.

In fact, in this New Reality, the strike is over. And we've all been replaced.

But have no doubts. The remaining 2,000 of us still on strike grow stronger and more determined to win with every blow. This is a war. We have dug in our heels. *We will not surrender!*

Only now we're not quoting Martin, we're talking Malcolm. We will have a victory by any means necessary!

But we don't want to win just so we can go back to our comfortable \$30,000 and \$40,000 jobs.

No, we've been out of work long enough to realize that the fight in Detroit is so much larger than most of us ever dreamed. Indeed, the responsibility and the burden of winning this strike overwhelm and terrify us.

We're fighting so that all the members of the UAW, AFL-CIO, Teamsters, and other working people in this country can keep their decent \$30,000 and \$40,000 jobs. And their health care and their rights to bargain collectively, to strike, and to *belong to unions!*

And we're fighting so that our eight-month-old son Nikolas doesn't have to fight this same fight. His generation is likely to have enough

Labor Party Convention Supports National March for Detroit Newspaper Strikers

In introducing a resolution for a national labor march on Detroit to support striking newspaper workers, a Labor Party delegate from Detroit explained that in early April the Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO sent a letter to AFL-CIO President John Sweeney urging him to call a national march on Detroit. This request was sanctioned by the leadership of the striking unions allied in the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions, and supported by Strike Coordinator Eddie Burke of the Teamsters, who had been assigned to Detroit by Sweeney and Ron Carey.

The AFL-CIO leadership had not responded to this request, and so the Labor Party convention was being asked by the Detroit strikers to lend its support to this idea, and all delegates were urged to seek support for it among unions, central labor councils, state federations, etc., in their home areas.

After the resolution was adopted (see text below), OCAW President Bob Wages, who was chairing the session, promised to petition among members of the AFL-CIO Executive Council, of which he is a member, for support to this idea.

Since the convention the Detroit strikers have called for a million unionists to come to Detroit on Labor Day in support of the striking newspaper workers. They are urging all who agree with the need for a national labor march to contact their locals, labor councils, and International unions to support the Labor Day protest and call on Sweeney to back it with the full resources of the AFL-CIO.

Text of Resolution

Whereas: over 2,000 newspaper workers in

the Metropolitan Detroit area have been on strike since July 13, 1995; and

Whereas: Gannett and Knight-Ridder, owners of the struck *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press*, are hell-bent on destroying the six striking newspaper unions; and

Whereas: the publishers have taken the position that there are no longer any jobs for the strikers since they have been permanently replaced by scabs; and

Whereas: the Detroit newspaper strike is one of the most significant labor battles in the history of this country; and

Whereas: if the publishers succeed in breaking the newspaper unions in a union stronghold like Detroit, then no union anywhere is safe from similar union busting by other employers; now therefore be it

Resolved: that the Labor Party commits itself to all-out support for the striking Detroit newspaper workers; and be it further

Resolved: that all unions, chapters, and workers' organizations affiliated with the Labor Party are urged to mobilize our collective force and power to bring this struggle to a successful resolution; and be it further

Resolved: that the Labor Party specifically endorses the call for a national labor march on Detroit in support of the strikers and will do everything possible to assure a maximum turnout for such an event; and be it finally

Resolved: that the Labor Party pledges to support all labor actions endorsed by the striking unions aimed at shutting down the scab papers, including marches, mass picketing, and local and national solidarity strikes.

other battles to wage.

The Detroit strike is pivotal to the future of the working class. A labor professor at Wayne State University described the strike as a "Noah's Ark of labor issues." We're dealing with everything from outsourcing to automation, from wages to health care, from keeping our union to losing it.

Once upon a time, I believed that making this

newspaper monopoly profitable would protect us. I believed that busting my butt on the job and being a dedicated employee would be worth something.

My ten years at the *Free Press* meant nothing when the bottom-line bosses took over. It is clear that today's brand of corporate journalism and the American Dream cannot coexist. The

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The Fire This Time: The Burning of Black Churches

by Joe Auciello

As fires continue to burn Black churches mostly in the South, from Virginia to Texas, little in the way of solid evidence or clear explanation has emerged from the federal government. Even the numbers and statistics change, depending on which source is cited, and the Justice Department, within one week, raised its score of burnings by fifty churches. The FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), which together have deployed 200 agents to investigate the burnings, are convinced that no conspiracy exists, that no individual or group has planned and coordinated the destruction of the churches.

It is readily understood by most observers that racism is the underlying cause of the fires. But in most cases, neither the motives for the burnings nor the identities of the arsonists are as yet clear or certain.

The resulting confusion is due to several factors. First, while the burning of Black churches in significant numbers has been occurring for more than eighteen months, only recently have these fires received national attention. Many of the churches are located in rural areas, away from the notice of the media. Often the cause of the fire is unknown, as evidence is destroyed in the blaze. Further, local police and government agents have typically confined their investigations to members of the churches' congregations, ministers especially, which has not been a fruitful source of inquiry. Months passed before an unmistakable pattern of burnings was realized.

Only since June has concerted pressure, from the National Council of Churches, the Center for Democratic Renewal, and civil rights organizations, been placed on the federal government to solve and stop the string of arson attacks.

Not every fire has been deliberate or set for racial causes. But leaving aside the likelihood of some accidents (faulty wiring, lightning, etc.), and even putting aside the work of drunkards, vandals, and pyromaniacs, the fact remains that a striking number of Black — not white — churches are continuing to be destroyed, with no end in sight.

The pattern which does take shape points to deliberate actions by racist individuals whose crimes need not be coordinated to be effective.

U.S. Representative John Lewis, former chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating committee, has argued: "The people burning churches throughout the South are united not by concerted planning but by a conspiracy of innuendo and intolerance. Their common bond is the politics of hate and division." Novelist and journalist Melissa Fay Greene, writing in *Newsweek* (June 24, 1996), pictured the

church burnings as "signal fires from one disgruntled band of whites to another." Noah Chandler, a research associate at the Center for Democratic Renewal, put the matter concisely in the *Washington Post*: "The conspiracy is racism itself," (June 19, 1996).

Federal authorities have stated that in the few cases which have been solved, most of the suspects have been connected to "hate groups." Thus, Attorney General Janet Reno has conceded that there "clearly has been evidence of racial motivation." Even President Clinton, who has cautiously tried to limit his criticisms to tepid platitudes ("To burn a church is a terrible thing") that might give little offense to right-wing voters in this election year, has been forced to admit that racism is at fault. Compared to the Republicans, though, Clinton almost sounds forceful and clear. Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole have condemned "violence" and "acts of hate" but have been skittish about even referring to racism, much less condemning it, for fear of alienating their racist supporters. White Southern voters, resentful of Blacks, have long been a mainstay of Republican Party electoral strategy.

Further Questions

Yet, while it is clear that racism is a cause of the church burnings, that answer only raises further questions. Even racist actions should make sense, that is, be subject to analysis and understanding. Racism did not disappear as a result of the civil rights movement that was born in the mid-1950s. But why should Black churches — which were largely untouched through the 1970s and 1980s — become a target now, in the 1990s?

It is obvious enough that during the 1950s-1960s violence by vigilante bands of white supremacists, lynchings, and bombings of Black churches were all a desperate, futile reaction to the growing civil rights movement.

What, though, can explain the burning of churches in recent months and weeks? Unlike the 1960s, the 1990s are not a time of marches and protests for civil rights, of liberal legislation, radical reform, and profound, irreversible change in daily life. It's difficult to imagine the church burnings as a reaction against the Million Man March and the growth of Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. Nor does it appear that theologian Michael Eric Dyson, quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* (June 20), is accurate in asserting that the attacks are directed against the concept of the church itself, "the universal church," as if the fires were set by overenthusiastic atheists.

The reality of American life is that Blacks are still second-class citizens. The political, economic, and social concessions they won during the last few decades have suffered erosion and are now exposed directly to political storms. For instance, the battle now over affirmative action is to defend past gains, not to extend them. Black unemployment is several times that of whites; those Black males who are working earn 28 percent less than white males (*New York Times*, June 11, 1996). The major cities, which are predominantly Black, suffer from substandard, underfunded public education. Theories of genetic inferiority have resurfaced in the work of social scientists and have been widely publicized. Blacks face continued racial segregation in housing, a discriminatory criminal justice system, and a shorter life span as compared to whites.

Poorer health and inadequate health care for Blacks are a direct consequence of social inequities stemming from institutional racism. Recently, the Supreme Court ruled against Congressional districts that were designed to ensure Black political representation, a decision in opposition to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Black adolescents have been called, by their elders, a generation without hope. In short, by any standard or criterion, Blacks in America are not as successful or as well off as whites. This conclusion is not startling or new. All of this information is well known to anyone even mildly aware of contemporary political realities.

What Is Behind the Fires?

Therefore, to view the recent church fires as a replay of the 1960s does not seem credible. What then is the reason, or reasons, for the dozens of Black church fires that, in the last several years, have plagued the South?

The most likely explanation is that many of the church fires are deliberately set by white racists, working alone or in twos or threes. Each is probably responsible for one fire or a cluster of fires in a given locale. The total number of people involved is probably quite small. They do not know each other but are linked by shared hatreds and the impulse to act on resentment and rage.

According to a 1991 New Orleans *Times-Picayune* poll taken shortly after David Duke's failed bid for the governorship of Louisiana, 14 percent of Duke's voters felt that the ex-Grand Wizard, ex-Nazi had *not* changed his political convictions (Christopher Hitchens, "Minority Report," *The Nation*, December 16, 1991). Either these voters were not troubled by or they actually supported Duke's National-Socialism-with-a-handful-of-face. It is not difficult to imagine that from this element might be found those responsible for the church burnings in Louisiana, and that their socio-political "cousins" in other states were inspired to similar acts of terror.

The psychological "trigger" that compels racist Southerners to go out into the night — most fires have occurred between midnight and 7 a.m. — and burn churches is harder to account for, as their motive is more likely to be grounded in perception rather than reality. But in the

minds of white racists, those who joined the Klan yesterday and will work for David Duke tomorrow (he has just announced that he will campaign for the Senate), Blacks are too visible, prominent, and proud. Blacks are on television, in sports, in the mayor's offices, in state legislatures, and in Congress.

Economic Hardship and the Labor Party

As economic instability and hardship increase in the U.S., deeply affecting the non-unionized South, some whites instinctively forge a solidarity based on race instead of class, mistakenly blaming Blacks for their hardships and troubles. The need for a labor party to articulate and champion workers' interests, to point out the necessity of racial unity, is made all the more apparent by the Black church fires. Otherwise, rubble and ashes will stand as an unintended emblem for the future of the working class.

The action of the Labor Party convention in Cleveland June 6-9 in adding to its program a condemnation of the burning of Black churches and a defense of Black and Brown majority electoral districts is a favorable sign.

Leadership Role of Black Churches and Clergy

Because of the political history of the Black church, because of its symbolic role, the fires are clearly an attack on the Black community as such. Leaders from Martin Luther King to Jesse Jackson were, or are, clergymen. When Malcolm X traveled to the South and told young audiences about the distinction between the house Negro and the field Negro, he spoke in a church. John Lewis explains why churches became a target during the civil rights era:

The churches inspired, motivated, fortified and energized us in the fight against racism. Black churches were the site of voter registration workshops and housed "freedom schools," which helped Blacks participate in the democratic process. Before we agitated, we would gather at the church. Our churches provided a meeting place; they were the bedrock of the civil rights movement. [Boston Globe, June 23, 1996.]

The intended victims of the fires are Black people in general. What's worse, Black people have become targets largely because of who they are — an oppressed nationality that is

fighting to attain its fair share of American opportunity and wealth.

What Are the Aims of the Terrorists?

What could possibly be the political goals of burning Black churches? What do the arsonists hope to gain by terrorizing Black communities? Although deep-seated racism has been likened to a kind of mental illness, every madness has its method. Cross burnings, for instance, have been undertaken for a demonstrable end — to run a Black family out of a neighborhood or out of a town.

When terrorists in the 19th century assassinated the tsar or the president, they hoped to destroy an oppressive social system by killing the individuals who most embodied it. The political strategy was thoroughly flawed, but there was a discernible political analysis that did inspire the desperate actions. When the CIA plotted assassinations and ran paramilitary adventures in foreign countries, it did so in pursuit of specific political objectives. More recently, the bombing of abortion clinics and the murders of their doctors and staff are clearly intended to deprive women of the means of ending unwanted pregnancies.

In all these instances, and in many more that could be added, terror, which is often described in the media as "random" and "senseless," serves to advance a political agenda. In short, violence has a political purpose.

The church burnings, to the contrary, have no specific goal. No action that Black people can take — no political policy they adopt — will lessen or end the burning of churches. In the sick minds of the racist criminals responsible for these approximately one hundred fires, Blacks are already and always guilty. Blackness itself is what must be punished. Specific struggles that Blacks undertake around issues like affirmative action, welfare, and political representation might stir a cauldron of resentment, but beneath this level of animosity lies a deeper hatred that would allow Blacks no viable place in American life.

The clock would have to be turned back one hundred years, to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* era of "separate but equal" that in reality legislated the second-class status of Black people, before white supremacists would begin to be appeased. Of course, this scenario is conceivable only as

a racist fantasy — in real life it is an impossibility. Thus, the burnings of churches are not accompanied by political demands because none could in fact be realized. The clock refuses to run backwards.

It is significant to note that the destruction of Black churches is carried out in secret, because these actions do not meet with any groundswell of sympathy in the South or in America as a whole. The tide of racism has receded since the 1960s. Even though racial discrimination has hardly been eradicated from American life, those who are responsible for the burnings must be well aware of their isolation.

Solidarity with Black Churches

The most encouraging sign is the solidarity and support for the Black churches that has developed throughout the country. Diverse organizations, including the full spectrum of religious affiliations, have donated their time, labor, and money to rebuild. In some communities, twenty-four hour interracial church watches are being organized. The National Council of Churches has announced a \$2 million fund-raising effort on behalf of Black churches. Individual churches have adopted a burned sister church.

A typical instance is Myrtle Baptist Church in Newton, Massachusetts. This congregation pledged to raise the \$30,000 needed to begin rebuilding the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Arkansas. As the Rev. Howard Haywood, pastor of the Myrtle Baptist Church explains, "We were just drawn to them. As bad as their story was... it was the essence of how we as blacks have survived in this country. We just want to make sure they know that someone else out there is looking after them, is caring about them." (Boston Globe, June 18, 1996.)

Despite the church burnings, the South can no longer be "the land of cotton" precisely because old times are not forgotten, and the nation will no longer look away. A growing national movement of outrage, partially organized, has arisen as churches have burned. It is in this spontaneous and deep outpouring of solidarity for the most oppressed — an inkling of what must occur for justice and freedom to triumph — that there can best be found reasons for confidence and hope about the future. □

July 18, 1996

Clinton Signs a Dole-ful Welfare Bill

Continued from page 1

keeps shrinking the available jobs, through "downsizing." It disproportionately denies jobs to Blacks and other people of color, through racial discrimination. And now it wants to cut back on public aid to the 12.8 million who receive welfare payments and the 25+ million who get food stamps.

Why is this happening? It's not just a question of "clever election policy." It's not just that both major parties are playing to a scapegoating mentality that they themselves have promoted

among the electorate, of blaming the super-poor and the immigrant worker for the budget deficit created by the super-rich beneficiaries of decades of unrestrained military spending.

The economic system itself is the cause of the problem. The competitive drive for profit requires capitalists to constantly try to reduce labor costs through automation. For them, "labor-saving devices" are just ways of cutting back on payrolls in order to keep profit levels up. And having a lot of unemployed people as a result is just fine for the capitalist system.

Competition by the many for the few available jobs drives wages down. The lower living standards for working people mean the employer has to pay less to hire labor. "The market" is indifferent if people starve or have miserable lives as a result. Maximizing profit is all "the market" knows.

This is why the Labor Party must be built. So that opponents of this kind of corporate cruelty will have an alternative. □

The Russian Elections and Their Meaning for the Working Class

by David Mandel

The following article is scheduled to appear in the August issue of *International Viewpoint*, monthly publication of the Fourth International. For U.S. subscriptions, send \$50 (one year) to IV, PO Box 1824, New York NY 10009.

If you think rationally, Yeltsin didn't have a chance. He has wrecked the reforms. His physical condition is awful. He started the war in Chechnya. He hasn't kept a single promise. Instead of a personnel policy there is a personnel merry-go-round. He has given society no clear prospect. In other words, Yeltsin lacks everything that is valued in a human being and a politician.

— *Gennady Zyuganov, candidate of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, in Sovetskaya Rossiya (July 11, 1996)*

Six months before the elections, polls gave Yeltsin an approval rating of around 5 percent and a negative rating of 80 percent (*Time*, May 27, 1996, p. 31). Two-thirds of the population believed he was corrupt and had ruined the economy. Liberals were urging him not to run again, to leave the field to someone who had a chance. Even a month before the first round in June, well-informed, sober Russian leftists were convinced Yeltsin could not win. But they were equally certain he would not relinquish power.

Even by purely formal liberal standards, these were grossly unfair elections. Incumbency usually offers some advantage, but Yeltsin was no ordinary incumbent. As a result of his bloody *coup d'état* of October 1993, he became an autocrat, free of effective oversight or control.

He made good use of this arbitrary power in his electoral campaign, which was marked by numerous gross legal violations, including the diversion of public facilities, personnel, and money. Yeltsin disbursed (or at least promised) state funds freely to bolster his popularity. He gave away an unplanned US\$11 billion in everything from tax breaks to enterprises to a cultural center for Muslims, from writing off farm debts to a veterans home and a telephone for a pensioner. His formal campaign expenditures also greatly surpassed the \$3 million spending limit.

Gennady Zyuganov, candidate of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), would have been crucified for even the smallest such infraction.

Another advantage was an overwhelmingly and unashamedly biased press in Yeltsin's favor, especially television, on which most Russians now rely exclusively, newspapers having become a luxury item. But even the vast majority of the printed press was blatantly slanted toward Yeltsin and against Zyuganov. As a result, ordinary citizens had very limited access to objective information about the candidates. The

monitoring team of the European Institute for Media found in the two weeks separating the first and second rounds that Yeltsin scored 247 positive mentions in the electronic media as opposed to Zyuganov's 240 negative points. (Open Media Research Institute [OMRI], part I, July 9, 1996.)

The press's attitude resulted from a combination of ideological affinity to Yeltsin, state administrative and financial pressures (two television channels are state-owned, and the head of the third was a member of Yeltsin's campaign team), as well as outright bribes to journalists: \$100,000 was paid out each month to journalists in Moscow alone (*Washington Post*, June 30, 1996).

Western Money for Yeltsin

Apart from the backing of the new Russian bourgeoisie, Yeltsin enjoyed strong political and financial support from the major capitalist states. Yeltsin's illegal American campaign advisers or Clinton's likening the state terrorism against the Chechen people to the American civil war might not have been much real use to Yeltsin, but Western money undoubtedly played a significant role in the campaign. This took the form of a \$10+ billion loan from the International Monetary Fund (the IMF's second biggest ever, after the recent loan to Mexico), which was granted in February, on the strong urging of the U.S. government. France and Germany followed in April with \$400 million and \$2.7 billion respectively.

Most remarkable about this money, apart from its timing, was that contrary to IMF rules and traditions, it was not made conditional on the government meeting strict economic targets (not so far, at least). An agreement stipulating conditions was indeed signed, but Yeltsin issued no decree making this package binding on the spending ministries. IMF officials said and did nothing, even when the budget deficit began to exceed agreed-upon levels and structural reforms were placed on hold (*The Economist*, July 13-19, 1996, p. 71).

Direct intimidation of voters by the Yeltsin side also played a role in the outcome. Presidential appointees in the regions were led to understand that their jobs were at stake if Yeltsin did not come out ahead. In most cases, local officials merely had to ensure a high electoral turnout, since this generally favored Yeltsin's chances. (Those who felt uncomfortable with both choices were more likely to support Yelt-

sin, if they voted.) This was achieved by various methods, from providing free public transport (including suburban trains to entice city dwellers back from their cottages and garden plots) to free lotteries and prizes for voters. But in the "Red belt" regions, where a higher turnout favored Zyuganov, less innocuous methods were used. According to a Yeltsin adviser, 8,000 Yeltsin supporters descended upon polling stations in villages in southern Russia, challenging voter documents, and even calling in the police. They were thus able to intimidate potential voters and depress the turnout (*Washington Post*, July 4, 1996).

Vote Fraud

Outright fraud also had its place. In Chechnya the falsification was so obvious (74 percent voted, of which 73 percent were for Yeltsin), that even liberal newspapers omitted the results from their tabulations. In Kalmykia, a depressed rural region in the southern "Red belt," official returns gave Yeltsin 69 percent to Zyuganov's 27 percent.

Eyewitnesses charged that votes for Zyuganov were counted as Yeltsin votes on a large scale (OMRI, July 18, 1996). Fraud has been alleged in several national-minority republics, where the pro-Yeltsin vote increased from the first to second rounds by far more than the combined first round votes of Lebed and Yavlinsky, candidates who transferred support to Yeltsin in round two. In Tatarstan, for example, the second round yielded the highly suspect result of 63.97 percent for Yeltsin and 30.1 percent for Zyuganov; whereas the first round gave Zyuganov 38.9 percent to Yeltsin's 37.34 percent (*Segodnya*, July 5, 1996; and *Moscow Tribune*, July 6, 1996).

An analyst for the Central Electoral Commission attributed these shifts to Moscow's ability to influence the local elites between the rounds (OMRI, July 8, 1996). But this does not explain how these elites were influenced and how they in turn were able to influence the voting result. This is something that will probably never be known with certainty, since the Central Electoral Commission, headed by Yeltsin supporter N. Ryabov, is, in practice, responsible only to Yeltsin.

But to take one example: in the Krasnoyarsk region, the heads of the government administration of the various territorial levels met several times during the campaign to set tasks in connection with guaranteeing a Yeltsin victory. (He received 53 percent here.) Meanwhile, over half of the members of the region's electoral commissions were officials in these administrations, and so Yeltsin subordinates (*Segodnya*, July 9, 1996).

Threat of Yeltsin's "Smith & Wesson"

L. Radzikhovskiy, a liberal journalist, gave the following candid, if cynical, evaluation of the role of media bias in Yeltsin's victory. But his evaluation can be extended to all the unfair aspects of the campaign.

"There are two ways to influence the electorate. There was the way of force, and there was the way of Malashenko [head of the private NTV channel, who was a leading member of Yeltsin's campaign team]. In essence, Malashenko's way saved hundreds of lives that might have been lost to the tanks and guns that would have been used in the cancellation of the elections. [...] It's true that in a truly fair election [Yeltsin] might have lost. He violated various rules in the end. So call it the softer variant of what might have been. Yeltsin plays cards only when he knows he can be a winner. He always requires a fifth ace up his sleeve. Otherwise he'll take out his Smith & Wesson [revolver] and start firing. In the election, Malashenko played the role of the fifth ace. Let's at least praise Malashenko for that." (D. Remnick, "Yeltsin to the Brink and Back," *New Yorker*, July 15, 1996, pp. 49-50.)

Yeltsin repeatedly told his aides that he would not let the Communists take power, even if they won a majority (*ibid.*). He said as much even in public, though in slightly more ambiguous terms. No sober observer could doubt his seriousness.

Yeltsin's 3 Prongs: Lesser Evilism, Wild Promises, and Lebed

One cannot say with any certainty whether Zyuganov would have won in reasonably fair elections. However, in several countries of Eastern Europe successor parties to the Communists have won elections, and none of these has national roots as strong as the KPRF. On the other hand, the Yeltsin regime has brought so much hardship to the great majority of people, he has lied so often and murdered innocents (October 1993 and Chechnya), he was viewed so negatively by so many at the start of the campaign, that it could be argued that Zyuganov should have been able to overcome almost any amount of unfairness. A complete explanation of the electoral outcome requires, therefore, that one also look at the content of the two campaigns.

The real battle was for the approximately 50 percent of the voters who in the December 1995 Duma elections supported neither the liberal candidates, who received about 22 percent, voting according to electoral list, nor the "left" (KPRF and allies), who received about 28 percent. These were people dissatisfied with "shock therapy" and other aspects of the Yeltsin regime but unwilling to vote for the Communists or related groups. Instead they supported a variety of "centrist" parties, none of which won more than a few percent.

Yeltsin based his campaign on the calculation that if these voters were made to perceive the choice as one between two evils, they would opt for the evil that they already knew, especially if he offered some hope that he was changing his ways. To this end, Yeltsin adopted a three-prong strategy. On the one hand, his propaganda played on fears that a Zyuganov victory would bring back the worst features of the Communist past. At the same time, it exacerbated the voters' already deep sense of insecurity, arguing that

any attempts to undo the structural reforms he had made, however, unjust and distasteful they were, would lead to even more suffering and injustice and even provoke a civil war.

The other thrust of Yeltsin's campaign was to show the voters that he was indeed changing his policies of the last years. Thus, he concluded an alleged cease-fire in Chechnya and flew there to announce that the war was over. He gave signs of abandoning "shock therapy" for a more "socially-oriented" policy: increased social allocations, payment of back wages (at least in the state sector) and pensions, the beginning of compensation for lost savings, state supports and tax credits for industry and agriculture. In January, he publicly criticized and dismissed Anatoly Chubais, the head of privatization, viewed by the mass of Russians as a gigantic swindle. Yeltsin even spoke of reviewing some of the cases of privatization. The person who had been most responsible for dismantling the Soviet Union, a very unpopular move with many Russians, signed a treaty for a confederal union with Belarus and closer ties with a number of other former Soviet republics.

In an appeal to Soviet and great-power nationalism, Yeltsin reintroduced the Victory Day military parade (May 9) and, surrounded by red flags, even addressed the assembled veterans from the top of Lenin's tomb as "comrades." The man who had proposed replacing May Day with Easter as a national holiday now addressed the trade unions' May Day rally. In an appeal to youth, he promised to end conscription by the year 2000, after having earlier abolished student military deferrals and lengthened service from 18 to 24 months. And so it went.

Since many of these changes were more symbolic than real and they came so suddenly before the elections, one would normally have expected the citizenry to react with cynicism. But Yeltsin counted on the "centrist" voters' fear of the Communists and of new social and political upheavals, which would make them want to believe, even if it went against their common sense.

The third prong of Yeltsin's strategy was to enlist former general Lebed, a Russian nationalist, a "tough" law-and-order advocate, and a "centrist" candidate, to draw off a part of the opposition vote that would otherwise have gone mainly to Zyuganov in the second round. In the Duma elections, Lebed's party won only 4 percent of the vote, and observers wrote him off as a non-starter. But in March, the Yeltsin camp began lending advisers and pouring money into Lebed's campaign. Suddenly, he was a familiar presence on television, whereas Zyuganov barely got any coverage, and little of that was positive. In the first round, Lebed received 15 percent of the vote. Yeltsin immediately put him in charge of the state repressive apparatuses and declared a war on corruption. In the second round, most of the Lebed voters did, in fact, support Yeltsin.

Until recently, this had been the role of the extreme right-wing nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, but buffoonery and repeated support for

Yeltsin on critical issues had caused his star to fade. (Zhirinovskiy called on his voters to vote "against Zyuganov" in the second round.)

Zyuganov's Campaign

Zyuganov's economic platform was traditional social democracy: capitalism, but with a strong state sector, much social spending, protection of the domestic market and supports for industry. The great majority of the population should normally have found this program an attractive alternative to "shock therapy". (One can ask if Zyuganov would have been able in practice to carry out this program any more than his Eastern European counterparts. On the other hand, the size and potential strength of the Russian economy and state would have given him somewhat more leeway.)

However, several aspects of Zyuganov's campaign played directly into Yeltsin's strategy. The main one was his failure to give a central place to the issue of democracy, that is, to popular control over state policy and administration. This would have made him much more attractive and credible to "centrist" voters. Instead, he promised vaguely to abolish the autocratic presidential regime in two or three years. His position on Chechnya was ambiguous, and he did not recognize Chechnya's right to self-determination.

But even if Zyuganov had taken up the cause of democracy, his efforts would not have been credible as long as the KPRF failed publicly to come to terms with Russia's Stalinist past. But this failure is closely linked to Zyuganov's strong, sometimes mystical, emphasis on patriotic themes at the expense of socialism, which leads him to emphasize continuity, rather than a break, with the past. In a 1995 book, he praises Stalin for transforming Soviet ideology along patriotic lines after the war (1945-53 was, in fact, a period of extreme official xenophobia and Great Russian chauvinism, not to mention the waves of terror!) and he criticizes Khrushchev's de-Stalinization for reversing this patriotic trend. (See Zyuganov's *Za gorizontom*, Moscow, 1995, pp. 47-48.)

Pursuing this nationalist line, Zyuganov forged a "national-patriotic" coalition which included such unsavory elements as Viktor Anpilov, leader of Toiling Russia, whose views sometimes seem closer to fascism than to socialism. This, of course, put wind in the sails of Yeltsin's anti-Communist campaign.

Various observers noted the rather lackluster, even seemingly half-hearted nature of Zyuganov's campaign, especially during the two-week interval between the first and second rounds, and wondered if Zyuganov, in fact, wanted to win. While Yeltsin overspent the legal limit by many millions, Zyuganov spent slightly less than half the limit. (After the defeat, he explained that this money was saved for the coming regional elections.) (OMRI, July 24, 1996.) Before the second round, he even proposed a coalition government with Yeltsin forces, something that lent support to the idea that Yeltsin really had changed.

Zyuganov possibly did not want to win. After all, any realistic observer knew that Yeltsin would do anything to hold onto power and that a Zyuganov victory would mean an end of Zyuganov's political career and possibly of the KPRF. This points to the most basic shortcoming of Zyuganov's campaign. For there was only one way to overcome Yeltsin's unfair advantage and at the same time survive politically: any truly pro-worker opponent of Yeltsin's pro-business regime would have had to use the electoral campaign to build a mass movement for democracy, for popular living standards and social rights.

But although the KPRF has a membership of hundreds of thousands, many of whom went door-to-door, the party itself is a bureaucratized structure in which the rank and file have little direct influence. Nor has the party made any systematic attempt to involve itself in the day-to-day struggles of workers and other victims of shock therapy. It did not make significant use of its predominant position in the Duma following the December elections to publicize and support these struggles. Instead, the high point of its opposition work was the symbolic denunciation of the dismantling of the USSR.

The Working Class

So why has the "patriotic" KPRF become the main opposition force in Russian society? And why have all attempts to build a democratic, socialist movement, as a popular alternative to Yeltsinism, failed so far? Ultimately, the answer lies in the weakness of the working class, the objective core of any democratic alternative.

To a certain degree, this weakness can be attributed to a failure of leadership. But only in the sense that leadership, in one way or another, reflects the state of the base, which at present is demoralized and quite passive. The relationship between the leadership and the base is a dialectical one, itself conditioned by the objective economic situation. (For a more detailed analysis, see my "The Russian Working Class and Labour Movement in Year Four of 'Shock Therapy,'" in D. Mandel, *The Former "State Socialist" World*, Black Rose Press, Montreal, pp. 46-68.)

Failure of Trade Union Leadership

The leadership of the "traditional" trade unions (mostly affiliated to the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia; Russian initials, FNPR) officially supported neither Zyuganov nor Yeltsin, even though Zyuganov's economic program corresponds closely to the FNPR's "social reorientation of the market reforms." The official reason was threefold: (1) that some of the KPRF's coalition allies were calling for revenge and even dictatorship; (2) on the other hand, Yeltsin's sudden conversion to a "social market economy" could not be taken seriously; and (3) to support one of the two candidates would "only deepen the political divisions in society" (as if the Yeltsin regime were not already deeply dividing society by conducting a war against the working class).

Logically, this analysis should have led to an appeal to vote "against all," a real option on the second-round ballot, which many democratic socialists were advocating. Instead, the FNPR appealed to its members to exercise their right to vote, an appeal that, as everyone knew, favored Yeltsin. Nor was the FNPR leadership ever able to explain how Yeltsin ended up speaking at its May Day rally, which the federation organized separately from the (much larger) Communist rallies.

Apart from the inconsistency of the FNPR's position and its de facto leaning toward Yeltsin, it never questioned its own role in creating a situation where all the alternatives were bad. In fact, the FNPR bureaucrats, after toying with the idea, long ago rejected the idea of working toward an independent political expression for labor. Instead, they repeatedly entered coalitions with "centrists" from the so-called "directors corps," all of which failed miserably.

The FNPR position *vis-à-vis* the government is one of "social partnership," although the "partner" is conducting a vicious offensive against the workers' living standards and rights. M. Shmakov, president of the FNPR, has admitted that in these conditions "social partnership" can achieve little for workers, but he justifies the policy by the threat of repression that hangs over the unions. (See the FNPR newspaper *Solidarnost'*, no. 12, 1995, p. 8.) In other words, the organization and its (considerable) financial and real-estate holdings are to be protected at any cost, even if that requires sacrificing the goals of the organization.

As for the "alternative" unions that arose after 1990 (and whose membership has stagnated in the past years at a small percentage of the total unionized workforce), their leaders obligingly accepted Yeltsin's invitation to a two-day all-expenses-paid gathering in Moscow, where, once again, they fell in behind the president. Some did so out of visceral anti-Communism; others because they were bought off.

Rank and File Disoriented

Today, there are no insurmountable political or organizational obstacles to a democratic change of union leadership. But the rank and file of the unions suffers from a deep sense of powerlessness, and, despite the formal 85+ percent union membership rate, is quite atomized. The level of solidarity and identification with the unions is generally so weak that it is almost an exaggeration to speak of organized labour. Moreover, relatively few workers have any direct experience of independent collective struggle, and even fewer, of struggles that have ended in victory.

The profound economic crisis, the dramatic decline in real incomes, and the mass unemployment, both formal and *de facto*, have created a profound sense of insecurity and have weakened workers social and economic ties to the enterprises. In many plants work is episodic, and income has to be supplemented, where possible, by other jobs and/or by the garden plots. (Some speak of the new phenomenon of the "urban

peasant.") Moreover, as de-industrialization proceeds apace (especially in the secondary-processing sector — machine-construction and consumer goods), the large enterprises are quickly losing their most active, independent workers. Those who remain are often older people who stay only because they look forward to some social benefit (pensions, housing), expectations that serve to increase their dependency on management, or else they stay simply because they fear that they lack the skills or initiative to improve their situation in the "marketplace."

The decline in the industrial work force has predominantly taken the form of leaving "of one's own will," i.e. quitting "voluntarily" because one can no longer feed one's family. Yeltsin's policy has been so far not to force bankruptcies and closures, even though a very large number of enterprises are insolvent. Activists often say that mass layoffs would be better, since this would provoke a collective reaction. As it is, a significant part of the workers is being "declassed," making them an easier prey for manipulation by the propaganda machine. This surely was a factor in the elections. How else can one explain why Yeltsin won 53 percent of the vote in the second round (with 39 percent to Zyuganov) in the Ivanovo region, a major textile manufacturing center and one of the most depressed areas of Russia, with the highest unemployment rate and widespread child malnutrition?

What Lies Ahead?

Yeltsin's re-election, regardless of how it was achieved, is a defeat for the working class. The labor movement at present plays no active role in shaping the social and political evolution of Russian society and there are no signs of a revival in the near future. In June, one activist at the Kirov Factory in St. Petersburg expressed a widespread view: "The situation puts constant psychological pressure on workers. People are so depressed that they let themselves be fired without complaint. Before, it seemed to me that some kind of protest was maturing. Now I fear people are totally crushed..."

Of course, things could change quite suddenly through a combined crisis "at the top" and a major increase in popular hardship, especially against the background of Yeltsin's electoral promises — both are quite possible, even likely, in Russia today. Yeltsin's death, which seems likely while he is in office, will certainly touch off a political crisis within the elite, especially given Lebed's ambitions and the insecure nature of the bourgeoisie, with its very personalized relations to the state administration.

On the other hand, a further deterioration of the economic situation is likely to occur in the fall and winter, bringing new hardships to the mass of the population. The GDP continued to decline in the first six months of 1996 (a trend that began in 1990), falling by 5 percent over the same period last year (and by a full 9 percent in June as compared to June 1995). (July 16, 1996, OMRI). Although Yeltsin in a recent

speech promised to change economic policy to give priority to raising living standards, strengthening social protections, and to providing factories with orders, this is a familiar post-election refrain that has never been realized. Almost immediately after the elections, the IMF withheld its monthly payment of the \$10 billion loan (after paying for months in a row) and is insisting that the government reduce its budget deficit (which stands at roughly twice the agreed-upon amount).

This will certainly mean a return to "shock therapy" — strict monetarism, reduced state spending, and continued economic decline. With privatization effectively achieved, Yeltsin will be under pressure finally to force the enterprises to "rationalize." This would mean bankruptcies and a sharp rise in open unemployment. That it will be "shock therapy as usual" is also

indicated by the retention of Chernomyrdin as prime minister and the new appointment of Chubais as presidential chief-of-staff. (Yeltsin certainly lost little time in renewing the war against Chechnya.)

Many observers feel that a banking crisis is looming, after having been artificially held back for electoral purposes. (See, e.g. *The Economist*, July 13, 1996, p. 72.) With Yeltsin's power now secure and as the government makes good its intention of opening the treasury bill market to foreign capital, the predicted drop in the hitherto astronomical interest rates on these securities will wipe out the banks' major source of profits.

It is possible, therefore, that the coming fall and winter will see a rise in social protest. However, given the labor movement's present weakness and the insecurity caused by the eco-

omic crisis, this protest will probably not be translated into effective action on the political level, the only level on which significant improvement can be won. If a real threat to Yeltsin's policies does emerge, he will not hesitate to use repression.

Yeltsin's death, against a background of an economic crisis and a rise in labor protest, could lead to an open dictatorship. Lebed, an admirer of Pinochet, might then find an appropriate role for himself. Once hated and feared by liberals for his outspoken criticism of the Yeltsin regime, his recent appointment was hailed as yet another "brilliant move" on Yeltsin's part. Lebed describes himself as "half a democrat." But for Russian liberals, the main half was always the market. □

Will Lebed Be Russia's Pinochet?

by George Saunders

One of the greatest writers to come out of the turbulent experience of the Russian revolution and civil war was Isaac Babel. His forte was the short story, and though most of his stories were very short, they spoke volumes. [See Joe Auicello's review, elsewhere in this issue, of a recent new edition of Babel's stories in English.]

One of Babel's stories tells of Ghedali, a Jewish shopkeeper, whose dream of world revolution and universal brotherhood reflected the highest aspirations of the upheaval Europe was living through in the wake of World War I.

The socialist dream of this little old man, weak and helpless, was contrasted to the brutal behavior of the anti-Semitic Cossack troops who, ironically, were fighting for the Red Army, carrying the revolution westward into Poland on their sabers. Like the sky in a drop of water, this story reflected the contradictory nature of the Russian revolution, in which terrible backwardness was mixed in with the most advanced ideas known to humanity.

The backwardness and brutality of Russian life eventually gained the upper hand, not just in Ghedali's provincial hamlet, but in the seats of power, the Kremlin. But that did not happen until after the beginnings of worldwide working class social revolution were cut short and isolated in that one country. Russia's backwardness and brutality took the form of Stalin and his bureaucracy, which ultimately used the blood purge to exterminate an entire generation of socialists (including Isaac Babel and his admirer Leon Trotsky), people who had spoken for and led the working class.

Today, as the heirs of Stalin, the ex-Soviet bureaucrats, are transforming themselves into capitalist businessmen, the brute figure of the anti-Semitic Cossack has reappeared — in the form of General Aleksandr Lebed. Lebed has now been appointed secretary of the "security" forces in Boris Yeltsin's government. Yeltsin has even spoken of Lebed as his possible successor in Russia's presidency.

Lebed, a product of the military wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy, a "hero" of the war in Afghanistan, promises to restore order in Russia. He has openly praised the example of Chile's General Pinochet, who restored order in that country following the classic model of the CIA-inspired Latin American dictator — mass murder, state terrorism, repression.

The pro-"market reform" *Moscow News* (*MN*; July 4–10) unabashedly praises this iron-fisted potential military enforcer for infant capitalism in Russia. Yeltsin correctly "gauged the people's mood," says *MN*, when he "recruited Lebed onto his team and virtually named him heir apparent."

"The Russian people are so curiously constructed," *MN* goes on, "that they value justice over full stomachs even" (or so the market "democrats" of *Moscow News* hope) — "and Lebed promises precisely that: Order and Truth, which amounts to the same thing: justice for all."

Lebed won about 15 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential election, favored by media publicity and financial aid from the Yeltsin government. But for the pro-market "democrats" that's the voice of the people cry-

ing out for truth, order, and justice — in capital letters.

MN's fawning continues: "...we're dealing with mass psychology here, and controlling those currents in the people's psyche is every bit as hard as stopping an earthquake. You can only play up to those currents, and that's what Yeltsin did." Anyone who wants to clip Lebed's wings, says *Moscow News*, "will have to look out for himself... General Aleksandr Lebed is not one of those people who can be used to gain momentary political advantage and then be discarded. The secretary of the Security Council has already become a power unto himself, with an independent line of policy."

Will Lebed turn out to be the military instrument for the crushing of the working class in Russia, so that the dream of the pro-market "democrats" can finally be realized — the firm establishment of "civilized capitalism"? There is that danger.

But many contradictory social forces are at work in Russia and the world. The success of working class struggles elsewhere in Europe may help reawaken the fighting capacities of Russian workers, which were powerfully displayed in the miners strikes and the Byelorussian general strike in the years 1989–1991. Perhaps the example of the Labor Party founded at last in the United States (a century or more later than needed) will also help Russian workers find their way to organizing their own independent political instrument to voice their needs and fight for their interests in alliance with workers in all other countries. □

July 31, 1996

The Crisis in Russia in an International Context

by Jeff Jones

*The following article is based on a talk given at the Socialist Scholars Conference in New York City in early April of this year as part of a panel discussion considering, sixty years later, Trotsky's 1936 study of the Soviet Union, *Revolution Betrayed*.*

Jeff Jones is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a member of the Carolina Socialist Forum. Since 1991 he has spent much of his time in Russia, mainly in Rostov-on-the-Don, most recently from July 1994 to August 1995.

In the period since 1991 that I've been traveling to Rostov there's been a lot of talk in the West about the "collapse of communism," the "triumph of market forces," and "the establishment of a new world order." But I'm not sure that what I've seen there the last few years really bears that out. Today I want to talk to you about the changes in Russia in a broad, international context, a perspective that I think calls into question the standard interpretation of what we're witnessing in that country.

As far as the economic situation in Russia is concerned, one could either talk about it for many hours, which I won't do, or sum it up quite succinctly: things are all screwed up. Again, I think Russia's crisis has to be understood in an international context, and economically that means talking about the policies of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and World Bank, which is true for a lot of countries around the world.

Disastrous Effect of Economic "Reforms"

In my opinion, the economic "reforms" pushed by the West are not the solution, but rather the root of the problem. Dictated by U.S.-controlled lending agencies, these reforms benefit narrow business interests in Russia and in the West, while impoverishing the majority of Russians.

Even reform advocates now admit that "shock therapy" was too much shock and not enough therapy. The reforms emphasize privatization and budget cutting, familiar themes around the globe. "Privatization" in Russia is a catch phrase for the process of handing out lucrative state-owned enterprises to political cronies and friends, and has shifted state resources into the hands of former party bureaucrats, organized crime, and foreign investors. Russians jokingly turn the Russian word for "privatization" (*privatizatsia*) into (*prikhvatizatsia*) meaning literally "grab-it-ization."

Meanwhile, tight budgetary restrictions imposed by the IMF and World Bank lead the government to withhold salaries and pension payments to millions of people for months at a time. Nonpayment of salaries helps keep inflation in check, which benefits the international banking community, but hurts a large portion of the Russian population. Production continues to fall and unemployment continues to grow as Russia and Russians seem caught in a topsy-

turvy vicious cycle which the papers here call simply the "transition to a market economy."

For the overwhelming majority of the population (roughly 80 percent) the bottom line is that — for example, during the four years that I've been traveling to Russia — the living standard and the real wages of workers have steadily and quickly deteriorated, including a 20 percent drop this past year. People's life savings have been completely wiped out, and over half of the population has been victimized by one of the many financial scams or pyramid schemes that have plagued the country since 1992. There has been a dramatic increase in homelessness, crime, alcohol and drug dependence, and other major social problems. The "triumph of capitalism" has brought a great deal of hardship to Russia.

As you might expect, the economic difficulties have a very strong bearing on Russian politics. The power of international lending agencies in Russia effectively puts leaders in a trap, forces them to choose between toeing the line with the West and its economic experts, or rejecting Western capital and striking out on a path of their own. Just as there is a lot of pressure from the West for Russia to carry through on economic reforms, there is a lot of domestic pressure against the reforms, and a growing anti-American sentiment in the country as well. I saw posters at demonstrations saying Russia is a colony of the U.S., that Yeltsin is a puppet of the West, and other such themes. This has in fact become a major rallying cry for the opposition.

"Democracy" and Lesser-Evilism

As for Russia's "democratic" government that we hear and read so much about in the U.S. media — there is very little that's democratic about it. Yeltsin is a president who closed down and then attacked parliament, ignoring a ruling by the Russian Supreme Court, called new elections without allowing his main opponents to participate, then wrote a new constitution that gives the presidency extremely broad powers. Yeltsin has also consistently harassed the media. His government has periodically banned opposition newspapers; last summer they evoked an old law on the books protecting the country's leaders from "degrading insults" to go after a popular television show called "Puppets," which parodied the country's leaders; earlier this year Yeltsin fired the head of the country's

major TV station because of critical reports on the government. Russians sum it up well by describing their government with another play on words: instead of *demokratiya* (democracy), they call their government *dermokratiya*, from the word *derma*, meaning crap (to put it as politely as possible), creating the new word "crapocracy."

This is a pivotal time in Russia's government because of elections — parliamentary elections were held last December and presidential elections are coming up this June. In December the Communist Party won handily, Zhirinovskiy's extreme nationalist party came in second, and Yeltsin's "democrats" were a distant third. Yeltsin's popularity is very low, but he has a chance of winning as the "lesser of two evils" in a lot of people's eyes, a formula all too familiar to Americans in our own "democracy."

Zyuganov

Still the front runner, according to the opinion polls at this point [early April 1996] is Gennady Zyuganov, the leader of the revamped Communist Party. Zyuganov is often described as two-faced by the Western media, who point out that he tells Western business interests one thing and his own people something entirely different. This reflects exactly the same trap that I referred to earlier, but also reflects a very real split within the new, revamped Communist Party. The party leadership includes elements from the old Soviet bureaucracy, even some factory managers, and would probably like to go the course of their comrades in Eastern Europe, such as Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, where "Socialist parties," still under pressure from international lending agencies, have merely replaced the former "democrats" as the ones being enriched by privatization. I think the huge IMF loan to Russia in March 1996 should be seen in this context as having a twofold purpose: to try and save Yeltsin at the last minute or to increase the West's leverage power over Yeltsin's successor if he loses the elections.

So, should Zyuganov win, he'll be in the same trap and have to choose between Western lending agencies and his support base of workers, peasants, and pensioners. His party's platform, that has won wide support, calls for maintaining high levels of social spending, including guaranteeing a minimum income, imposing price controls, reversing privatization,

and limiting profit margins. There is a labor presence in the party, but the party's structure is no more democratic than it ever was and the leadership no more reflects the interests of the working class now than it did in the old days. Labor remains in disarray, struggling against increasing unemployment and a legacy of weak labor unions. There have been a number of strikes in the country, 11,000 reported for last year, but they usually remain isolated and are for limited demands, like delayed back wages. As in the days of Stalinism, there is a gap between the working class and the Communist Party leadership that claims to represent its interests.

One way Zyuganov has tried to close that gap is to appeal to racist and anti-Semitic feelings, seeking popularity by blaming scapegoats. Zhirinovskiy, who did so well in the 1993 parliamentary elections, is still a significant political factor. Even if he does not win the elections, and he probably won't, his mere presence has already pushed the political spectrum to the right, toward Russian nationalism, and continues to do so. Zhirinovskiy's popularity has fallen, but everyone across the political spectrum, not the least Yeltsin and Zyuganov, has adopted Russian nationalist elements and rhetoric.

With regard to the role of Russian nationalism in the country's politics we need to keep two things in mind: first, that this is not new; Great Russian chauvinism was a significant component of Communist rule in the Soviet period from Stalin on, and there's no sharp distinction between Communism and nationalism in most Russians' minds. Second, the Western-imposed economic reform policies discussed earlier are exacerbating this reactionary, nationalist backlash. One reason for the Communists' success in elections is that they utilize the rhetoric of the right, portraying the ongoing struggle and crisis not as a battle of communism vs. capitalism, but of the West vs. Mother Russia.

Russian Nationalism and the Chechen War

With nationalism comes racism and anti-Semitism, which remain as major problems in Russia. Racist sentiments are directed toward people of color in the southern regions. I was there during a good part of the Chechen conflict, which fueled a lot of racism in Russia. This is a complicated conflict with deep historical roots and a number of factors converging to lead to the war. Chechens, long the focus of Russian racism, pride themselves on their long history of struggle against Russian imperialism.

Chechnya had a number of uprisings against Russian and Soviet influence. For example, during World War I there were armed guerrilla bands of Chechens in the mountains fighting against tsarist rule. During the civil war after the Bolshevik revolution Chechens fought against the White armies, which advocated a Russian empire that would be "one and indivisible"; the Chechens sided with the Bolsheviks, because the Lenin-Trotsky leadership promised freedom and equality to nationalities oppressed by the

tsarist system. Under Stalin, the Leninist policy favoring oppressed nationalities was abandoned, and during Stalin's forced collectivization in the 1930s, armed guerrilla bands again appeared in the Chechen mountains.

During World War II the Chechens were one of 8 national groups uprooted by the Stalin regime and exiled from their homeland for allegedly supporting the Germans. They were allowed to return under Khrushchev in the late 1950s, but needless to say, this left a strong mark on the Chechens' national consciousness.

As for the more recent origins of the Chechen crisis, there are several important factors to consider: not the least of these is that Chechnya is an oil-rich region; also I think we have to understand this conflict in the context of the rise of nationalism, both in Russia and in Chechnya, which, again, is compounded greatly by economic hardship; and thirdly, we need to consider the influence of the mafia, since Chechnya had become a conduit for the drug trade and illegal arms shipments.

The Chechen conflict reminds me a lot of the conflict with Panama and Manuel Noriega that the U.S. government engaged in during the Bush administration. (Except that the Chechens have fought back massively.) When Chechen leader Dzhokar Dudaev seized power in Chechnya in late 1991, he was actually supported by Yeltsin, who even agreed to let Dudaev keep heavy military artillery. The Russian government basically looked away for three years as Dudaev ruled as a brutal dictator, ruined the region's oil-based economy, ran drugs and supported organized crime, and amassed weapons and built his own army. All the while Dudaev claimed independence for Chechnya, boycotting, for example, the 1993 parliamentary elections. Evidently by the end of 1994 Yeltsin had had enough, and (according to rumors) decided over a bottle of vodka at Defense Minister Pavel Grachev's birthday party to storm Grozny and force the "disarming" of the Chechen population. Grachev promised victory in two hours, but fifteen months later the war goes on, with major battles still being fought in late March 1996. Meanwhile, the Chechens have turned to terrorism as a tactic to spread the war into Russia itself.

The stated goal of Yeltsin's military operation was to disarm the Chechen population, but, in fact, as a result of the Russian invasion, Chechens have become more heavily armed than ever before in order to defend themselves. I wrote down what a young Chechen man said in an interview I saw on Russian TV last February because I thought it really captured the sentiments of many. He said, "I don't in any way support Dudaev and his regime, but when your brother and sister die in air attacks by the Russian forces, what are you supposed to do? Earlier, I could not imagine life without Russia, now I can't imagine life with Russia."

Yeltsin got himself in a mess in Chechnya. To grant independence and withdraw Russian troops now would be an admission of defeat and

would be highly unpopular, especially with Russian nationalists. But anything short of independence and troop withdrawal guarantees continued fighting in a very unpopular war, because the Chechens are not simply going to drop their claims and throw down their arms. Should he inherit this conflict, Zyuganov would have to resolve a major contradiction in his rhetoric: the fact that he criticizes the war while at the same time calling for a reunited Soviet Union. Zyuganov is unlikely to grant Chechnya independence, so the war will probably continue for some time.

International Context

These are, as I see it, the major issues facing Russia right now. I think, again, the important thing is to understand these issues in an international context. The popular notion that what we have witnessed since the fall of the Berlin Wall is the "collapse of communism" and establishment of a "new world order" is, I think, inaccurate because it's based on ideological baggage left over from the Cold War period. That is, it is based on a view that saw the Cold War period as a battle between two separate systems, one of which ultimately collapsed and one of which ultimately triumphed.

In my opinion, such a view disregards the many underlying economic links between the two conflicting camps of the Cold War era. For example, one of the main reasons for the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union was the dramatic drop of oil prices on the world market in the early 1980s, which had disastrous effects on the Soviet economy. A major cause of economic woes in countries like Hungary and Poland was the debt crisis of roughly the same period and their outstanding loans to Western banks. These examples point to the fact that all of the countries of the Soviet bloc were dependent all along on Western *capital*, the magic word, which only goes to show the extent to which the two "opposing camps" of the Cold War era were linked economically.

I will conclude with my single greatest fear, which is that with labor weakened and the left in Russia in a state of disarray, "market reforms" and these international economic forces that effectively trap Russia's political leaders and push the whole political spectrum to the right, may eventually unleash such a reactionary backlash that we will actually long for Cold War days. Trotsky's warning that we stand on the brink of either socialism or barbarism rings truer today than ever before. The future is always uncertain and the hope is that a labor-based socialist alternative will eventually emerge, from within the ranks of the organized working class, if not from within the Communist Party. But until such an alternative is developed, the social and political tensions stemming from "market reform" make Russia's immediate future look pretty bleak, to say the least. □

Mexican Unions and NGO's Plan Referendum on Labor Union Rights

by Dan La Botz

This and the following two articles are excerpted from the August 2 Mexican Labor News and Analysis, produced by Dan La Botz and published the 2nd and 16th of every month.

A coalition of Mexican labor unions, social movements, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) plans to carry out a national referendum on workers' rights. At the Workers University of Mexico (UOM) in Mexico City on July 22, 1996, Edur Velasco, a leader of the Independent Union of Workers of the Autonomous Metropolitan University and one of the organizers of the referendum, told the organizing committee that the purpose of the referendum was "to take to all of the workers of the country a questionnaire on their rights."

The questionnaire will ask workers their views about employment, salaries, and labor union rights. Hector de la Cueva, another of the referendum organizers said, "Workers will also be asked their views on the rights of Mexican workers working in the United States, child labor, the social security reform, and forced union affiliation in the informal sector (where street vendors, for example, are forced to affiliate with PRI-controlled unions)." The questions were designed to be crucial, general, and brief. Questions about specific demands of particular groups of workers were not included.

The referendum on labor holds out the hope of opening a window of democracy in Mexico's workplaces and union halls. Organizers hope to set up informational tables and booths near workplaces, in working class neighborhoods, and in union halls from the U.S. border in the north to the border of Guatemala in the south. The organizers hope to reach the majority of the workforce which is unorganized, as well as the minority of organized workers, most of whom are in unions controlled by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Among the organizations participating in this unprecedented survey of workers' views are the First of May Inter-Union Federation; the Authentic Labor Front (FAT); the National Association of Democratic Attorneys (ANAD); and the Civic Alliance (AC). The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) has also endorsed the national labor referendum. The plan calls for the design of the questionnaire by the end of July, the promotion of the referendum or "consulta" through August, September, and early October, and the actual referendum to be held on October 20, 21, and 22. The meeting established three committees: finances, publicity, and outreach.

Eight Questions on Crucial Issues

Following are the eight questions adopted in principle by the organizing committee, though they may be modified or edited before the final questionnaire. Each question is preceded by either an article from the Mexican Constitution or a Convention of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and is to be answered with either "yes," "no," or "don't know."

1. Article 5 of the Constitution: "No person shall be prevented from dedicating himself to the profession, industry, business, or work of his choice, provided it is legal. No one shall be deprived of the product of his labor, except by a court's decision."

Question: Do you think that all pressures or threats by the authorities — such as forced or illegal payments or the forced affiliation of artisans, self-employed workers, and independent providers of goods and services — should be eliminated?

2. Article 123 of the Constitution: "All persons have the right to respectable and useful work; so that the creation of jobs and the social organization of labor as provided for by law shall be promoted."

Question: Do you think that the political economy should be changed so that priority would be given to the creation of new jobs?

3. Article 123 of the Constitution: "Wages should be sufficient to satisfy the normal needs of the head of a family, in the material, social, and cultural areas, and to provide for the obligatory education of the children."

Question: Do you think that the wages of all workers should be raised to fulfill this constitutional mandate?

4. Convention 87 of the International Labor Organization, Article 3 (section 1): "Workers' and employees' organizations have the right to write their own statutes, to freely elect their representatives, and to organize their administration and its activities, and to formulate their program of action."

Question: Do you think that all union representatives, from the workplace to the national institutions such as the National Commission of Minimum Wages, and such, should be elected by means of secret and direct vote by the workers, doing away with all corruption and gangsterism in the life of labor organizations?

5. Convention 87 of the International Labor Organization states in Article 2: "Workers without any previous authorization have the right to

constitute their organizations as they see fit, as well as to affiliate with these organizations, with the only condition being that they abide by the statutes of those organizations." Also, Article 3 (Section 2): "The public authorities should abstain from all intervention which tends to limit this right or to obstruct its legal exercise."

Question: Do you think that all obstacles to unionization, in particular, the anti-constitutional intervention of the government in the life of the unions, should be eliminated?

6. Convention 118 of the International Labor Organization states in Article 3: "All member states for which the present Convention is in effect should concede in their territory to the nationals of all other member states for whom said Convention is equally in effect, equal treatment with its own nationals in all branches of social security [such as education and health care]."

Question: Do you think that migratory undocumented workers, either permanent or in transit, and their families, should have access to medical attention and education on the same terms as the national population, as well as full respect for their human rights?

7. Article 123 of the Constitution: "All labor by children under 14 years of age is prohibited. Those older than 14 but younger than 16 may only work six hours per day."

Question: Do you think punishments should be established for those who benefit from the exploitation of child labor, and discriminate against women workers?

8. Article 123 of the Constitution: "The Social Security Law is for the public good and it shall include insurance for incapacitating injury, life insurance, insurance for involuntary lay-off, health and accident insurance, child care services, and whatever other services provide for the protection and well-being of the workers and their families."

Question: "Do you think that the Social Security Law of December 1996 should be repealed as anti-constitutional and as an attack on the rights of the Mexican people to a public health system?"

NOTE: Organizers of the referendum on labor seek the support of other labor unions, social movements, and organizations in the United States or Canada. Those interested in information may respond to the address of this newsletter (e-mail: 103144.2651@CompuServe.COM). □

Mexican Workers in Struggle

by Dan La Botz

Mexican Social Security Workers March for Wage Increase

Some 8,000 or more members of the National Union of Workers of the Mexican Institute of Social Security marched in Mexico City and other Mexican cities on July 17 to demand an emergency 12 percent wage increase. Union president Antonio Rosado García accused the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS) director Genaro Borrego Estrada of having broken off talks on the wage increase.

At present IMSS doctors receive 2,500 pesos per month and nurses, 1,500 per month, while non-professional staff receive between 926 and 800 pesos per month. (7.6 Mexican pesos equal one U.S. dollar.) Gerardo Ruiz Esparza, administrative subdirector of IMSS, said that no wage increase will be possible because the agency has a budget deficit.

The IMSS workers demonstration was supported by the telephone workers union and by the union of the auto workers of Diesel Nacional (DINA). The Foro group of unions has also endorsed the demands of the IMSS workers.

Other demonstrations took place in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon; in Guadalajara, Jalisco; and in other Mexican cities.

One Hundred Peasants Free Leader from Prison

About 100 masked peasants armed with rifles and shotguns, machetes and clubs freed four prisoners from the jail in Simojovel, Chiapas, on July 24. Among those freed was Martin Ramos Gutiérrez, an activist in the Independent Central of Agricultural Workers and Peasants (CIOAC). The liberation of the prisoners took place without any confrontation with police authorities or other incidents.

Federico Ovalle, a national leader of CIOAC, denied that his organization had anything to do with the events in Chiapas. Another CIOAC leader, José Luis Hernandez, pointed out that there are more than 1,600 outstanding arrest warrants for CIOAC members and that hundreds of peasants in Chiapas remain in jail.

CIOAC has been a leading force in the organization of peasants in that part of Chiapas since the 1980s, and often in conflict with the authorities.

Martin Ramos Gutiérrez and the three other prisoners were being held for the murder of two persons and the wounding of four others on June 19 in El Vergel, Chiapas. The two men who were killed in El Vergel were Eleuterio Gutiérrez Sánchez and Laurio Gutiérrez Sánchez, both activists in a peasant organization (OCOPECh) and in the Labor Party (PT), a satellite of the ruling PRI.

The liberation of the prisoners made front page news in Mexico City daily papers, being seen as another in a series of violent outbursts

by Mexico's poor and oppressed peasants. On May 30, 1996, hundreds of townspeople from San Nicolas de los Garza, a town north of Monterrey, stopped, stormed, and sacked a train carrying corn and beans. Then on July 4 between 800 and 1,000 farm laborers went on a rampage in the San Quintin Valley to protest the failure of their employer, the Rancho Santa Anita, to pay them.

The liberation of the prisoners in Simojovel may also have made headlines because attacks on jails and prisoners have historically been associated with revolutionary situations, from the time of the attack on the Bastille in the French Revolution of 1789.

Zapatistas Host International Meeting to Combat Neoliberalism

During the fourth week of July, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), in the state of Chiapas, hosted the First International Meeting for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism. Over 4,000 Mexicans and international visitors attended the sessions held in five recently constructed "towns" all named "Aguascalientes" after the Aguascalientes Convention of the Mexican Revolution held in 1915.

EZLN leaders and other international delegates called for the creation of an international network against "the system of death," as they described neoliberal capitalism.

Among the issues being discussed at the international gathering is the current state of labor unionism. The group dealing with "Social Issues" will discuss "organized civil society," which includes labor unions, non-governmental organizations, autonomy, urban movements, and peasants; and "excluded civil society," which includes homosexuals, drug addicts, HIV positives, undocumented workers, the aged, children and women.

As can be seen from the list of topics to be dealt with by this working group, the EZLN international meeting does not make workers or labor unions central to its discussion; nevertheless, this is the first time that the EZLN has really placed urban wage workers and labor unions on its agenda, which is an interesting and important development. As noted above, the EZLN has also endorsed the national referendum on labor being organized by the May First Labor Federation.

No Human Rights in Mexico

In Mexico human rights are not respected. That is the conclusion of a document written by the Network of Civil Organizations for Human Rights "All Rights for Everyone," the Civic Alliance (AC), and the Center for Reflection and Labor Action.

The report concludes that President Zedillo's government has violated human rights and failed to abide by Mexican law. The 187-page report, titled "General Situation of Human Rights in Mexico" and released July 17 to the Interamerican Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS), documented the murder of Indian peasant activists and political dissidents, among them 430 members of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) who have been assassinated.

In terms of workers' rights, the document said that Mexico's policies were contrary to freedom of association, the safety and security of individuals, the prohibition of forced or obligatory labor, freedom of expression, judicial guarantees, and equality before the law.

On July 24, after a 10-day stay in Mexico, the OAS commission issued a report which strongly criticized the Mexican government. The justice system, said the OAS commission, was slow, inefficient, prejudicial, prone to corruption, and tended to arbitrary arrest and torture. The commission also criticized the tendency toward the militarization of police functions. The OAS commission also criticized violation of Indians' rights and of human rights in specific states, particularly Chiapas.

Some Recent Social Statistics in Mexico

Unemployment Up: The official rate of open unemployment rose in June to 5.6 percent of the economically active population, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INEGI). (Roberto Gonzalez Amador and Carlos Antonio Gutiérrez, "INEGI: se revierte la tendencia a la baja de desocupación; en junio llego a 5.6 ciento," *La Jornada*, July 18, 1996.)

More than 17 million Mexicans live "precariously" in subemployment, according to Javier Bonilla Garcia, Mexican secretary of labor. The economically active population is about 35 million. (Julio Fentanes, "17 millones estan en el subempleo, dice Bonilla," *Reforma*, July 21, 1996.)

Wages: Of Mexico's total working population, only 34.6 percent receive more than "two minimum wages per day." (Mexican wages are often measured in multiples of the minimum wage, which is about 20 pesos per day.) On the other hand, 65.4 percent of all workers receive no pay or earn less than 40 pesos per day, according to the study "Social development and economic growth," by the Employers Confederation of the Mexican Republic (COPARMEX).

The study found that in Mexico there are at least 40 million poor, out of a total population of 91 million. COPARMEX found that six million workers are illiterate; that 50 percent of the population is not covered by any sort of social security health system; that 20 percent of the population shows a high level of malnutrition; and that the country needs 4.6 million houses. The average education level in the economically active population is 4.2 years; 40 out of 100 students don't finish grade school. Some 21 million Mexicans need basic education. (Raúl

Labor Conflict in the Environmental Ministry

by Manuel Garcia Urrutia M.

The following article is translated from the Mexico City daily newspaper *La Jornada* of July 20, 1996. The translation is by Dan La Botz.

It's almost two years now since we denounced the maneuver of the Federal Tribunal of Conciliation and Arbitration and the Federation of Union of Workers at the Service of the State (FSTSE), at that time headed by Carlos Jimenez Macías, to use administrative measures to do away with the Sole Union of Workers of the Fishing Ministry (SUTSP), violating provisions of the [federal] labor law Section B [Apartado B, dealing with public employees] and Convention 87 of the International Labor Organization (ILO) dealing with labor union freedom. Nevertheless, the fight has not yet ended.

In December 1994, by presidential decree, the Fishing Ministry (Sepesca) changed its name to the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Fishing (Semarnap) and increased its functions, absorbing some activities of other agencies which came to form part of the new agency. Among these quite notably — representing 80 percent of its personnel — is the National Water Commission (Conagua), which formed part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources (SARH).

At the time, the reorganization of Sepesca and the naming of its new head was generally approved by public opinion. Nevertheless, the histories of the union organizations [at the ministries involved] were quite different. While SUTSP was noted for its autonomy and its democratic traditions, the union at SARH was an example of subordination and bossism.

In spite of the fact that the public workers labor law does not permit reelection, it has not been possible to stop the officials from taking control of the unions and extending their power through hacks whom they manipulate like puppets. One of these lifetime leaders is Mario Santos Gomez, who for years controlled the SARH at his will from behind the scenes, but having his base as a worker in Conagua and much to his displeasure, he came to form part of Semarnap.

Obviously the SUTSP became an obstacle to his ambitions and so, in collusion with the FSTSE, he put together a congress with delegates of a sort, to carry out a bureaucratic takeover [*charrazo*], supported in addition, by the arbitrary decisions of the Federal Tribunal of Conciliation and Arbitration, which from its Olympian heights, denied the legal status of SUTSP, and left it in a defenseless state.

Nevertheless, this union refused to give up the fight. It sought an injunction [*amparo*] and presented a demand before the International Labor Organization, winning in both processes. In addition, at present, Human Rights Watch has put forward a denunciation of this conflict in the National Administrative Office of NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement] for its decision. All of these developments are unprecedented, and recently the Federal Tribunal even had to revoke the registration of the union given to Santos Gomez, in order to recognize the previously existing institution, that is, the SUTSP.

The conflict has led to the intervention of the Ministry of the Interior, which wants a representation election in an attempt to annul the representation of the majority of the workers, but there exists a disagreement. The Santos Gomez group wants a quick, open vote — open in order to identify those who vote against — in assemblies held in the workplace. The SUTSP, on the other hand, in accordance with its traditions and with the provisions of Section B [Apartado B], wants elections with enough time to carry out a campaign, and to guarantee universal, direct, and secret votes in the ballot boxes so as to prevent reprisals.

As this doesn't please the old guard leader, he has put pressure on to try to kill that approach.

The workers of Semarnap find themselves at a crucial moment in their labor union life. To elect Santos Gomez would only mean retarding the breakdown of these old labor union practices, now that they don't fit in a country which hopes for a more democratic and representative

environment. For the SUTSP the struggle today is an unequal one, and the only ones who can change the correlation of forces are the workers of Semarnap, and principally those of Conagua.

While Santos Gomez can go into all the workplaces and say whatever comes to his mind, and counts on 713 free, full-time positions, on the agency's transportation system, on the union dues, and all the support of the authorities of Semarnap through its administrative head, Eduardo Almeida Armenta; the SUTSP can't go into the workplaces, the authorities won't talk to it and don't lend it any support, and they have harassed and harmed its members.

For the representation election, the SUTSP has made a call to those who believe in its demand for a democratic labor union. And it has reached out to those who have been led to believe that this is a conflict with a dissident minority, calling for a free election of the leadership. SUTSP has also called for the holding of a Democratic Congress to modify the statutes, lay the bases for a new organization, and for negotiation on the "General Conditions of Work" agreement — which was signed behind the backs of the workers — including respect for the national patrimony represented by Conagua and the Forestry Administration, such as the Aldama Theater, and a fund of the ex-workers of SARH, of which Santos Gomez has already received 15 million pesos from the Ministry of the Interior.

The workers of Semarnap confront the possibility of writing a brilliant page in the history of labor unionism which strives to base itself on the decisions of the people and not on a leader and his clique. Will the labor authorities and the FSTSE also be able to reach so high? Will the officials of the Semarnap respect the will of the workers? Will the workers of Conagua accept the challenge of doing away with their spurious leadership? Anything could happen, given the inequality of the match, but what has already been done is worthy of great respect. □

Llanos Samaniego, "Sólo 34.6 de la población activa recibe más de 2 salarios mínimos," *La Jornada*, July 21, 1996.)

During the first half of 1996, workers' wage increases averaged 18.8 percent, according to Javier Bonilla, Mexican secretary of labor. In the first half of 1995 wages rose only 12.3 percent. (Jesús Castillo, "Crece salario 18.8% en primer semestre," *Reforma*, July 30, 1996.)

Prices Rise: Between November 1994 and June of this year, the prices of basic products have risen between 120 and 400 percent, ac-

ording to the National Mixed Commission for the Protection of Wages. This means that workers now require at least two minimum wages in order to purchase basic goods. (Jesús Castillo, "Subén precios 120%," *Reforma*, July 30, 1996.)

Personal Debt: According to the Citizens Assembly of Bank Debtors, about 4 million borrowers, or about one third of all private bank clients, have given up paying their debts. (Roberto González Amador, "Cuatro millones de personas en suspensión de pagos: ACDB," *La Jornada*, July 21, 1996.)

Worker Health and Safety: Mexican workers suffer 5.8 work-related accidents or illnesses for every 100 workers, according to the Office of the Secretary of Labor. Actually 4.7 workers are injured on the job, while the other 1.1 percent of workers suffer work-related illnesses or are injured while traveling to or from work. Every year Mexico reports 600,000 work-related accidents, which the Mexican Association for Health and Safety attributes "to the negligence of businessmen." (Jesús Castillo, "Se accidentan 5% de obreros," *Reforma*, July 29, 1996.) □

Nicaraguan Elections Loom

by Michael Livingston

On October 20, 1996, the Nicaraguan people will go to the polls for the third time since the 1979 overthrow of the brutal dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza.

Background

In the first national elections, held in 1984, the Sandinista Front of National Liberation, or FSLN, as it is generally known, won an overwhelming victory. In the second national elections, held in 1990, the FSLN — as a result of U.S. economic, political, and military-diplomatic pressure, especially the U.S.-backed Contra war — was defeated in what was perceived at the time as a major upset. Since accepting the bitter verdict of the polls in 1990, the FSLN has struggled, with little success, for a political program that would return it to power. However, since the 1990 elections, Nicaragua and all political forces within it have changed and changed again.

The last major development reported in these pages (see *BIDOM*, September 1994) was the second congress of the FSLN, held in May 1994. At that congress, Daniel Ortega was re-elected general secretary of the party and a policy was reaffirmed that essentially consisted of collaboration with the administration of President Violeta Chamorro, but steps were also taken to democratize the party and increase the participation of women.

These decisions represented the victory of Ortega's "democratic left" current in the FSLN and a defeat for Sergio Ramirez's "majority" current. Ramirez, who had been vice president under Ortega and was a central leader of the FSLN, was not re-elected to the National Directorate, the highest leadership body of the FSLN.

After the 1994 congress, the FSLN underwent a split. Ramirez formed the Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista (MRS; Sandinista Renovation Movement). The MRS, which was formally constituted in early 1995, attracted a number of FSLN legislators and intellectuals — for example, Ernesto Cardenal, the former Sandinista minister of culture; Luis Carrión, member of the National Directorate; and Dora María Téllez, member of the National Assembly and former FSLN commandante. The MRS has attracted only about 10 percent of the FSLN's membership. The main political differences between the FSLN and the MRS at the time of the split included the MRS's greater eagerness to build better relations with the U.S. and its total rejection of armed struggle and militant action (such as strikes). The MRS was explicitly and thoroughly social democratic, and sought formal affiliation with the Social Democratic International.

The Coming Elections

The coming elections differ from those of 1990 in an important respect — the opposition is not unified against the Sandinistas, as it was in the UNO coalition created by the U.S. to run against the FSLN. Instead we see a dizzy array of political parties and forces.

As of this writing, the leading candidate for president is Arnoldo Alemán. Some public opinion polls have shown Alemán to have the support of as much as 40–45 percent of the electorate, far ahead of the rest of the field. The most recent poll, conducted by Gallup in April, showed Alemán to have 33 percent support. Until recently Alemán served as the elected mayor of Managua, a powerful office with a budget almost as large as the national budget. He is also the head of the Partido Liberal Constitucional (PLC; Liberal Constitutional Party), the party of longtime dictator Somoza.

As mayor of Managua, Alemán used patronage and public works projects to cultivate support. He has the public image of a politician who can get things done and has benefited from the unpopularity of the Chamorro government. If elected, it is unlikely that Alemán would return to the dictatorial ways of Somoza, since U.S. policy currently backs electoral regimes that serve the interests of capital rather than military dictatorships that do the same.

The only force with a chance of beating Alemán is the FSLN. The FSLN held a congress on May 3–5 to select candidates for the presidency, the vice presidency, the National Assembly, and the Central American Parliament. As expected, Daniel Ortega was chosen to run for president. In an effort to build a broad electoral coalition for a "government of national unity," the FSLN selected Juan Manuel Caldera Lacayo as its vice presidential candidate. Caldera, a large landowner who remained in Nicaragua under Sandinista rule, was a member of the opposition Conservative party during the Somoza dictatorship. He is a member of the far-right Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), an organization that played a key role in opposing the Sandinista government from within during the Contra war.

The Gallup poll conducted in April (before Ortega's candidacy was confirmed by the FSLN congress and before the selection of Caldera as a running mate) showed 21 percent support for the FSLN.

The FSLN has been hurt by its identification with the unpopular austerity measures of the Chamorro government, and also by its involvement in the *Piñata* (the transfer of cars, homes, and farms to Sandinista supporters after the 1990 election and before Chamorro took office). The split after the 1994 congress is probably not a major factor. Currently, Ramirez and

the MRS have only about one percent support in the polls. An undoubtedly more important factor is the FSLN's total inability to articulate an alternative to the neo-liberal policies of the Chamorro government, policies which have devastated working people and marginalized poor Nicaraguans, the FSLN's primary base of support.

Third place in the polls is held by banker Alvaro Robelo and his party Arriba Nicaragua (literally, Up Nicaragua). Robelo's party is heavily funded and embroiled in financial scandal. He garnered 6 percent support in the April Gallup poll.

In fourth place is Antonio Lacayo of the newly formed Proyecto Nacional (National Project Party). Lacayo is the son-in-law of current president Violeta Chamorro, who is not running again. Until recently Lacayo was minister of the presidency, and functioned *de facto* as president. He garnered 5 percent in the recent poll, in spite of the fact that his campaign appears to violate the Nicaraguan constitutional ban on relatives of current presidents running for high office.

In addition to the four leading candidates and their respective parties, there are twenty other parties contesting for the presidency. Of all the political parties, the FSLN has the largest number of militants and active supporters, and it has the best chance of beating Alemán if it were to develop a political program challenging the neo-liberal policies of the Chamorro government. However, as indicated above, the FSLN has in fact supported those policies. Nevertheless, the prestige it earned earlier in the revolution may help it win a run-off election with Alemán.

If the FSLN were to win, the result would be meaningless for the Nicaraguan masses — given its current political platform.

"None of the Above"

Substantial segments of the Nicaraguan electorate strongly reject all of the major candidates. The April poll, for instance, showed a disapproval rating of 42 percent for Lacayo, 35 percent for Ortega, and 36 percent for Alemán. In addition, a high percentage of voters remain undecided. Thus, the Nicaraguan people are faced with the usual choice under the capitalist electoral shell game of a lesser evil from among the candidates offered.

To make matters worse, the candidates offer remarkably little to choose from in the way of party program — all the top four contenders remain dedicated to the neo-liberal policies of the current government. Thus the Nicaraguan people must select from a range of Tweedledees and Tweedledums.

If no candidate receives 45 percent in the October 20 elections, a second round of elections will be held in which the top two candidates will face off.

Continued Erosion of Revolutionary Gains

The U.S.-funded Contra war, the U.S.-imposed economic embargo, and the U.S. covert opera-

tions against Nicaragua during the 1980s all eroded the substantial gains made in the early years of the Nicaragua revolution. Since 1990 the government of Violeta Chamorro (with the collaboration of the FSLN) has carried out a series of austerity measures that have further eroded the gains of the revolution. These measures, forced upon the Chamorro government in many instances by the U.S. and international capital, have included the transformation of the Sandinista army and police, the privatization of the economy, and the alteration of the Nicaraguan constitution.

In early 1996, General Humberto Ortega stepped down as head of the Sandinista Army. Ortega, the brother of Daniel Ortega and a leading Sandinista, was replaced by General Joaquin Cuadra Lacayo, a supporter of the present government. Since the election, Chamorro has shrunk the army from 100,000 to 15,000, dramatically reduced the budget, and changed the official name from Sandinista People's Army to Nicaraguan Army. General Cuadra has sought to systematically root out Sandinista influence in the officer corps and rank and file, and has tried to forge closer ties with the U.S. military. In July Nicaragua was granted observer status at regional "maritime interdiction" exercises conducted jointly by the U.S., El Salvador, Belize, and Guatemala. While not given the full participation that General Cuadra sought, the general predicted that it is "simply a matter of time" before normal military contacts begin with Washington.

As a consequence of the changes in the army and police force, both are once again instruments of ruling class oppression. In December 1995, for instance, police killed two student demonstrators and wounded many others during a peaceful protest demanding that the Chamorro government obey a Nicaraguan constitutional requirement that 6 percent of the national budget be allocated to higher education. In 1993, when sugar workers in Chinandega went on strike, the sugar mill owners called in the police, who drove the workers into the cane fields and then set the fields on fire. One worker was burned to death and five workers were injured. The mill owners then picked up the tab for the cost of the police operation. The Sandinista police force was previously recognized by international pro-capitalist observers as exceptionally honest. Under the Chamorro government, the reorganized police force has been linked to drug smuggling and human rights abuses.

The Chamorro government has set about reimbursing wealthy Nicaraguans (some of whom now have U.S. citizenship) for land and property seized during the revolution. Nicaragua has already paid approximately \$260 million in claims and estimates that to pay the approximately 3,000 remaining claims, another \$650 million will be needed. This figure is equal to about two years worth of the nation's exports or twice the size of Nicaragua's foreign reserves. To raise this money, the government is privatizing state-owned enterprises, such as the

electric utilities and national telephone system. Obviously such privatization (in which state assets are sold at less than their value) and the reimbursements are both forms of transfer of wealth to the wealthy.

Senator Jesse Helms has been especially active in championing the claims of former Nicaraguans who now hold U.S. citizenship. Helms (chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee) has threatened to cut off aid to Nicaragua should all claims not be paid soon.

The Nicaraguan Constitution, written in 1987 by the Sandinistas, has been changed in a number of ways. The power of the executive has been reduced (including an important prohibition on the current president and relatives of the current president from seeking high office), the power of the Assembly has been increased, the role of the army has been reduced (including a constitutional prohibition against the draft), and, most importantly, the government's involvement in the economy has been reduced. The private sector is now given the key role in the economy. Government involvement in the economy is limited to health, education, and social security, plus physical infrastructure that is deemed necessary but unprofitable. These changes represent the elimination of most traces of revolutionary Sandinismo in the economy and politics of Nicaragua.

The Chamorro government, with the general support of the FSLN, has carried out an IMF structural adjustment program (SAP), which along with the destruction caused by the U.S.-backed Contra war and the general conditions of capitalism in the former colonial parts of the world, has left the Nicaraguan people worse off than ever. The official unemployment rate is now 60 percent, crime has soared to unprecedented levels, hunger has increased substantially (one of the early achievements of the Sandinista revolution was to dramatically reduce hunger in the country), and disease is increasingly widespread, including cholera and dengue fever.

To add salt to the wounds, the education and health care systems have collapsed as a consequence of deliberate government policy. While hospital treatment itself still remains free, patients are charged for everything from medicine and medical records to entering the hospital and having visitors. In 1993, the government announced that it would not spend money on polio, tetanus, and diphtheria vaccines for some 400,000 children. Spending for education has been drastically cut and is now only one-third the amount spent under the Sandinista government (which was forced to divert resources away from education to the defense effort). College education is once again becoming the privilege of the wealthy. The government is even charging for the first three years of primary education, making it hard for the poor to get even this low level of education.

Benefits for U.S.-Owned Capital

While the Nicaraguan masses have suffered and the gains of the revolution been wiped out,

capital has benefited. From 1993 to 1995 foreign investment in Nicaragua has more than doubled, rising from \$22 million to \$56 million. Half of this comes from U.S. corporations. Nicaragua, it appears, is once again considered a good place to invest.

The Chamorro government has also won praise from U.S. ruling circles. On a visit last year to Nicaragua, First Lady Hillary Clinton credited Chamorro with leading Nicaragua into democracy with grace and courage, and praised Chamorro as the architect of the "new Nicaragua." Hillary Clinton stated: "Peace brings definite rewards. We admire greatly the progress that is being made and the example that is being set."

Revolution Decayed

Little remains of the inspiring revolution save a higher level of literacy, a high level of unionization and mass organization, a formally democratic government, and the political experience of the Nicaraguan people.

How was this revolution destroyed? How did it come to pass that the once inspiring FSLN, leader of the Nicaraguan revolution, should be reduced to a junior partner of imperialism?

To answer these questions we must examine factors external to the revolution, such as U.S. imperialism, and internal to it, such as the FSLN's structure and program. Primary responsibility rests with U.S. policy. U.S. policy caught the FSLN in the vice grip of Contra war and economic embargo. The FSLN sought to escape this vice grip by compromising with imperialism, seeking to defeat the Contras, and finally transferring the conflict to the political terrain of elections within Nicaragua.

They were outgunned, because the U.S. had created a situation of desperation within Nicaragua that eroded the gains of the revolution and then, within this situation were able to organize a political opposition (UNO, the coalition of political parties behind Violeta Chamorro), fund that opposition, and direct its campaign. The U.S. spent approximately \$20 per voter in the 1990 Nicaragua elections. This money funded the UNO campaign. In comparison, George Bush spent \$4 per voter in his 1988 campaign in the U.S.

(For a detailed analysis of U.S. electoral intervention in the Nicaraguan elections of 1990, See William I. Robinson's *A Faustian Bargain: U.S. Intervention in the Nicaraguan Elections and American Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*. Robinson's book is politically significant because it is the first to analyze in detail how the U.S. government, through such institutions as NED — the National Endowment for Democracy — is using elections as an instrument of U.S. imperialist rule in other countries.)

The U.S. government is massively intervening in the current elections as well. At least \$6 million in U.S. funds will be spent in the upcoming elections by the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), the International

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Address to Labor Party Founding Convention

“America Needs a Labor Party That Calls for Economic Fairness and Justice”

Text of Speech by Baldemar Velasquez

The author is president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee.

I'm very grateful for this opportunity to speak to you this morning as a committed trade unionist, as a person committed to building this Labor Party, and as a person of color committed to these things. In the early 1960s, my family migrated from Texas to a little town not too far from here by the name of Port Clinton. We harvested peaches, tomatoes, and the pickled cucumbers you have in your little jars at home. This began my education of what this country is all about.

Before this, all I'd known was a Mexican community in South Texas, where the guy at the grocery store was brown and spoke Spanish, and the people at the corner *tortilleria* were brown and spoke Spanish. Everyone was brown and spoke Spanish. Then on our first trip to Ohio, I saw white people, and this was new to me because they even talked a funny language. I asked my mother, “Mom, who are they?”

We lived in a chicken coop and worked for very little pay. We were never paid what was owed us, but we were 1,600 miles away from home, so we had to take what was given to us. When the season ended we didn't have enough money to get back home to Texas, so we stayed our first winter in Ohio. We had to borrow money from the farmer all winter to heat our house and feed our family. When summer came again we had to work for free, just to pay off that winter's debts. It took us nine years to get out of debt.

First Friendly White — A Union Member

The first white person that I met who was friendly was a co-worker at a fertilizer factory where my dad worked for three months. This man was a unionist. Then I knew there were good white people. I needed to know more about this. Who's responsible for these things, and who oversees these things? When I started school, I didn't know English, but I felt I had to learn it to know what people were saying. Then I learned to read. I read history books and books about farm workers, to understand why farm workers were how they are.

America right now is going through a change, an economic expansion unprecedented in our history. For some reason I've learned to love this country, and I know there is a great need now for people, citizens of America, to shape a vehicle, a mechanism, like this Labor

Party, to give America a new vision of where it's going and a new purpose of what it does.

NAFTA and GATT: Updates of “Manifest Destiny”

Unfortunately, with economic expansion, we have become the bedfellows of greed, avarice, selfishness, and exploitation. Let me say something about the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] agreement, NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] agreement, and the World Trade Organization.

Brothers and sisters, these things do not do anything new; these are legal manifestations of an economic phenomenon that's been going on since the foundation of our country. Let me tell you what the past economic expansion of the last century did. It expanded westward across the United States; it took over the Indian lands, with a policy of genocide, and ended up putting the red people on reservations. It stole the Southwest from the Mexican people. I read in the history books as a young boy that when the Japanese did that they called it “imperialism.” What Hitler did in Europe they called a “barbarous dictatorship,” but I read that when America did the same thing, they called it “Manifest Destiny.”

This was the result of that economic expansion. Now the new wave of economic expansion is global, as you all know. We're learning about it through NAFTA, GATT, and the World Trade Organization. We're shaping policies through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, putting our vision on other countries to make it favorable for American capital to be invested in whatever way it can exploit people in those countries. This is the same thing repeated over and over again.

My friends, this doesn't have to be. This is why America needs new leadership. To this day I share the anger of our Black leaders, of our Indian leaders, and of our Asian leaders, because this country was founded on the slave trade, and the exploitation of the red people, and the land-stealing from the Mexican people. America does not need any new injured or offended people throughout the world. As near as Mexico and the Caribbean, people have been reduced to a market.

Workers in Other Countries Are Not the Enemy

My friends, this is not what America is about. We have to care what happens to the people who are citizens of the countries that are our trading partners. These people are not the enemy. They're working people just like you and I, who want to feed, educate, and clothe their families, the same as we do. Those financial centers, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, are essentially requiring massive privatization in preparation for all these investment opportunities.

Someone has to care whether the Chiapas Indians and their communal *ejidos* continue to be protected under the Mexican Constitution. This is now being forced to change in order to facilitate this foreign investment, and a continued flow of financial bail-out to the rich people of those countries. The displacement of their rural population to the urban areas creates a dream labor market for the relocation of labor-intensive companies, like the garment industry, famous for its sweatshops throughout Mexico, Latin America, and Asia. The rest of the displaced population cannot depend on being domestic workers even in the burgeoning tourist industry. My friends, there is more to life than expecting people to make our beds. We have to do something about it.

The Democratic and Republican political parties are giving fuel to that kind of exploitation. We can't allow that to happen. They are just pitting poor workers in those countries against poor workers and us in this country. When we signed the contract with Campbell's Soup in 1986, the first thing they threatened us with was that if tomatoes were to get expensive in Ohio they would buy more tomato paste from Mexico. What we did was go to Mexico to talk to the Campbell's paste workers and told them they were working too cheap and started an international campaign to get the best contract that union has ever won with Campbell's Soup in Sinaloa, Mexico. The next time Campbell's Soup came to negotiate with us they said nothing about cheap Mexican tomatoes.

We're in the process of developing a working relationship with the Mexican farm worker unions to negotiate for the same companies, in both countries, and we made an agreement to follow those companies. Whatever hole they want to crawl into, we're going in after them.

The Immigration Issue

That brings us to the immigration issue. Ladies and gentlemen, let us not forget what made us a great nation. God has blessed this country because this country reached out to your foreparents. They were the dispossessed, the persecuted, and the unwanted riffraff. A standing welcome, a scriptural principle, is inscribed on the base of our Statue of Liberty. It says, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these the homeless, tempest-tossed to me; I lift my lamp beside the golden shore."

Those of us who are unabashed Christians stand on a different principle, because the Old Testament commands us to treat the alien equally among ourselves. Leviticus 19:33 says: "Where an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord, your God."

The God I know jealously watches over the orphans, the widows, and the aliens. I tell you, my brothers and sisters, that for too many years we in the farm worker community have lost many of our children. These children could have been famous poets, famous doctors, fa-

mous lawyers, and even famous singers, with God-given gifts. We've lost them because they have been relegated to a life in the fields. The same thing is happening because of the imposition of exploitation as the economic philosophy of our country. We have to change all that. America needs a Labor Party that calls for an economic imperative that's based on morality, fairness, and justice for all working people.

Through exploitation we lose generations of young people who cannot share their gifts with us because they are forced to slave their lives away. To this we say, "No more." We say, "No más...No más...No más!"

¡Viva la unión!



Taiwan Impacted by Multiparty Politics

by Jun Xing

The following article is from the July issue of *October Review*, the Chinese-language publication produced by Fourth Internationalists in Hong Kong (mailing address: G.P.O.Box 10144, Hong Kong; e-mail address: or@johk.com).

Not long after Lee Teng-hui won the presidential elections in a sweeping victory earlier this year, the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) suffered a defeat in the legislature when 80 voted against 65 (with 3 abstentions) to pass a resolution requesting the president to renominate the premier. This is a vote against the president's nomination of Lien Chan as premier, and this impasse between the legislature and the administration continues. The ruling Kuomintang is in the minority in the legislature because the opposition Democratic Progressive Party and New Party, joining hands with the independents and rebel KMT legislators, now constitute a majority. This is a new feature of multiparty politics in Taiwan today.

Lee Teng-hui is now in the dilemma of either refusing to renominate the premier, and the opposition in the legislature will block the passing of the budget or the building of nuclear plants, or having to replace Lien Chan by some other person as premier. Either way, Lee has already suffered damage to his prestige and loss of the momentum gained from the presidential electoral victory. The powers of the president have been challenged.

Anger against Lien Chan is expressed over his unimpressive record in the last three years when he was responsible for the administration's policies.

The recent incident in which Lien Chan removed the popular Ma Ying-jiu, transferring him to a harmless position and thus getting rid of Ma's rigorous campaigns against corruption and drugs, is another cause of the anger.

Problems of Unemployment and Immigrant Labor

In Taiwan, in the past years, the economy has been on the decline. According to the Statistics Bureau, unemployment in May 1996 stood at 218,000, an increase of 69,000 over the preceding year. Some academics estimated that the actual unemployment figures stood at around 4 percent instead of the official 2.5 percent. This means 400,000 are without jobs in a system without unemployment relief.

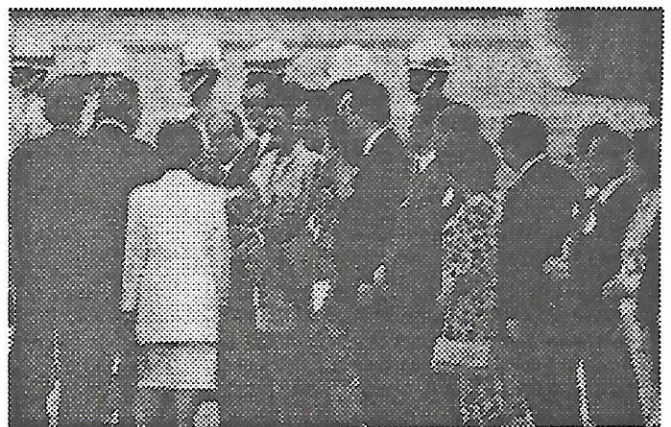
Immigrant labor problems are also serious. Till the end of March, the visas of 387,000 immigrant laborers were approved out of a total of 746,000 applicants. The government estimates there are currently 217,000 immigrant laborers in Taiwan, constituting 2.3 percent of the island's population. The Taiwan Labor Front, however, puts the number of legal and illegal immigrant workers at 450,000, which is more than the indigenous population. The labor movement in Taiwan is now becoming more militant in struggles against lower wages and worsening work conditions due to competition from immigrant laborers.

Women suffer most in this situation. They constitute 80 percent of the unemployed. According to the Taiwan Labor Front's *Labor Report 1996*, published in April,

over 4.28 million women with working capacity were unemployed in 1995. The Equality Law passed on April 10 this year cannot offer much protection to women because there are no penalties levied against employers for sex discrimination. The Statistics Bureau announced that in 1995, women's pay was only 67.8 percent of that of men. Women workers are mostly in low-paid jobs.

The postelection easing of tension between Taiwan and mainland China on cross-strait relations is giving Lee some boost in his political position, and also causing a rise in the Taiwanese stock market. However, this cannot draw attention away from the domestic problems of labor and inter-party politics.

July 2, 1996



Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui greeting supporters

Socialist Strategy and Organization

by Paul Le Blanc

The following is the text of a talk given at a Pittsburgh conference on "Building the Socialist Movement in the U.S." in May 1996.

In my opinion, the strategic and organizational approach developed by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and his comrades in Russia during the opening decades of this century constitutes the most serious and most adequate approach for those who seek to make socialism a living reality. The question for us is how to apply that revolutionary Marxist orientation to our own realities in the United States at the end of the 1990s, which are very different from the realities faced by Lenin. In this talk I will describe what seems to me the best way for us to proceed.

The force with the power and the objective interest to replace capitalism with socialism is the working class — the majority of people on whose labor and life-activity society is totally dependent, and who bear the brunt of all that is wrong and vicious in the capitalist mode of production. The working class includes unemployed workers and non-employed family members of workers. It is composed of women and men employed in many different blue-collar and white-collar jobs, including production, service, and so-called "professional" occupations. They have many different income levels, a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, many different and sometimes conflicting ideas, and so on. This multifaceted "rainbow" working class accounts for about 80 percent of the population.

Working Class Must Win Its Own Freedom

The revolutionary socialist perspective holds as a first principle that socialism must become rooted in the struggles and consciousness of the working class, that the working class must win its own freedom through its own efforts, and that such working-class liberation — and the liberation of all society — will be realized only when political power is in the hands of the working-class majority and utilized to replace capitalism with a socially-owned, democratically-controlled economy in which the free development of each person would be the condition for the free development of all. Our task is defined by this revolutionary orientation.

Marxists must integrate their socialist educational and cultural work with practical political activity that connects with the lives and struggles of masses of working people. They must do this in ways that help to break down the barriers between the various diverse sectors of the working class — women and men, Blacks and whites, young and old, blue collar and white collar, employed and unemployed, and so on. Such barriers can be overcome not by trying to deny or repress people's non-class identities, but by recognizing and validating these identities and struggling against all forms of oppression, not

just class oppression. It is only in this manner, and especially within the context of mass struggles, that the consciousness of large numbers of people can change in a socialist direction.

The fact must be faced, however, that there will be no mass struggles for socialist revolution any time soon. Only a very, very tiny fraction of the American working class has any inclination to go in that direction today. The sizable minority of the working class that is inclined to become politically active today in a progressive direction will devote time, energy, and resources not to socialist revolution but to struggles for reforms.

Struggle for Reforms

Struggles for reforms involve working for gains that can actually be won in the here and now, under capitalism: maintaining and improving living standards, defending and expanding democratic rights, securing more livable conditions in our communities, opposing cuts in social programs, fighting against racist discrimination, defending women's rights, challenging homophobia, pushing for a more equitable distribution of the tax burden, opposing increases in military spending, and opposing imperialist interventions.

Seeking to win such reform struggles within capitalist society is in no way inconsistent with the struggle for socialist revolution. Only if growing numbers of people come to realize that they have common problems which can be overcome through collective action; and only if growing numbers of people develop a deeper consciousness of social, economic, and political realities while gaining practical organizing experience; and only if growing numbers of people find that when they get together in organized mass struggles it is possible to win victories; and only if growing numbers of people discover that capitalism prevents the full realization of their democratic aspirations and human rights — only when masses of people from the working class reach this point, only then will there be sufficient consciousness and organized strength capable of challenging the immense power of the capitalists.

Real, practical struggles around such things will increase the number of the so-called "conscious workers," the vanguard layer of the working class that could provide leadership to the class as a whole in the struggle for a better world.

How Organize Ourselves?

This raises the question of organization — how the most committed and the most socialist-minded elements from this broad vanguard layer are to organize themselves to win a majority for the socialist struggle. The problem with many so-called "vanguardist" groups on the

left is that they mistakenly believe that *they* are the vanguard and that one must be part of *their* group to be part of the vanguard. But actually the vanguard is a layer of the working class, a significant percentage of the class. A revolutionary organization can be considered a genuine party in the fullest sense of the word only when it wins the allegiance of substantial elements from that vanguard layer.

The ingrown and stilted self-conception of the so-called "vanguardists" runs counter to the essence of revolutionary socialism. Socialism comes about only through the most radical and thoroughgoing working-class democracy, and this is brought about only through the efforts of the working class itself, through its own committees, unions, parties, and other organizations.

James P. Cannon, a founder and early leader of the U.S. Communist Party and a founder of American Trotskyism, made the key point very clearly:

The conscious socialists should act as a "leaven" in the instinctive and spontaneous movement of the working class.... The leaven can help the dough to rise and eventually to become a loaf of bread, but can never be a loaf of bread itself.... Every tendency, direct or indirect, of a small revolutionary party to construct a world of its own, outside and apart from the real movement of the workers in the class struggle, is sectarian.

This revolutionary Marxist approach helps to orient us as we seek to build a socialist movement in the United States today. Applying it to Pittsburgh, serious socialist activists need to do several things:

Educational Work

Obviously, there is a need for ongoing socialist educational work — to help deepen our own understanding, and also to help win others to a socialist understanding of the realities we face. The creation of some kind of socialist education collective might make sense to advance this work. But such educational work must be combined with practical political work — against racism, against sexism, against poverty, against war and militarism, against the destruction of our environment, and against all attacks on the rights, dignity, and material well-being of the working-class majority. And this also has organizational implications, because the most effective organizational form for that will not be a small socialist group.

Instead, it is necessary to advance the coalescence of more conscious and activist workers into a mass labor party, the existence of which will open up new possibilities for advancing the cause of the working class, and which will give a more immediate political relevance to our

revolutionary Marxist ideas. Such a labor party is being initiated in June of this year, with the involvement of some of the most progressive sectors of the trade union movement, at a conference in Cleveland, Ohio.

Build the Labor Party

I think we should concentrate on helping to make the Labor Party an effective progressive force in Pittsburgh. To be effective, it must be a fully democratic, diverse, inclusive party of the working class. At first it should engage in non-electoral efforts — in coalition with others — to build the labor movement, to defend the interests of the working class, and to support the struggles of various sectors of that class at workplaces and in communities throughout the Pittsburgh area. This will help build a base for successful electoral action in the future.

To have a sense of how all of this would fit together, picture overlapping and interactive spheres. Some of us would organize a small socialist educational collective, but people in this collective would also be active in a larger labor party club. Through the labor party club, we and other labor party members would be active in coalition efforts of social movements and also in the efforts of the progressive trade union movement.

To implement a revolutionary perspective today, then, we need to develop two distinct

organizations: a socialist education collective, and at the same time a broader, vital, activist-oriented labor party club which we will build with others.

Don't Build a Sect

For such organizations to function effectively they will need to be taken very seriously by us. They cannot be treated as a casual hobby to which we devote a couple of spare evenings each month. We will need to develop cohesive democratic structures which are brought to life by the ongoing infusion of energy, creativity, and commitment from many of us. And at least some of us will need to work collectively to ensure that these things are achieved. As serious socialist activists, we must work together to discuss and decide what we are going to do, then together carry out those decisions, and then evaluate the results in order to do better next time in our ongoing work. Perhaps at least a small circle of us will want to meet on a regular basis and be in frequent consultation, to facilitate that kind of collaboration.

But at this point, I don't think we should devote energy to building a separate revolutionary socialist political party or group — I think this would result in a sect that could carry us away from the educational and labor party tasks at hand. I happen to belong to a couple of socialist groups (Solidarity and the Committees

of Correspondence) which some of you may also wish to consider joining. And there are other socialist groups that one could join. But the kind of collective effort of socialist activists that I've just described should transcend any particular socialist group, and it should be designed to build broadly-conceived socialist educational work and to build an active labor party club, not to build a separate revolutionary grouplet.

Through the kind of socialist educational work and labor party activity projected here, we can connect with other forces, in Pittsburgh and throughout the country, whose activities and orientations are in harmony with this approach. Merging with such forces, we should seek to become part of a local and nationwide current within the new labor party that will help make that party a dynamic factor in radically transforming the political life of this country. To the extent that we are successful in this, we will have built a mass socialist movement in the United States. It is within this context that the strategic and organizational orientation of revolutionary Marxism will become politically relevant in a way that has not been the case in the United States for at least half a century. In this context, we can advance the struggle for a working-class democracy and a socialist future. □

Teamsters End Deadlocked Convention

Continued from page 5

Nomination of Candidates

The convention business also included nominating candidates for 27 international offices, including general president. The nominations, and all matters pertaining to nominations, were controlled by a federal election officer whose authority stemmed from a 1989 consent decree between the Justice Department and the IBT's General Executive Board (then dominated by the old guard). The consent decree allowed the Teamsters' highest officers at that time to escape prosecution on racketeering charges. The Hoffa Junior delegates were on their best behavior during the nomination procedures, which took up more than fifteen hours, spread over four days.

Away from the convention floor, Carey and Hoffa Junior loyalists met face-to-face in prolonged shouting and chanting matches, packed like proverbial sardines into the convention center's broad corridors, deep alcoves, and forty-foot escalators. Despite sergeants-at-arms and a handful of plainclothes cops, in place to keep the rivals apart, there were times when the opposing factions were literally looking down each other's throats. They carried signs and banners, bull horns and hand phones, sirens and whistles. Carey supporters would cry "No Mob Rule," and Hoffa Junior's adherents would shout, "Bullshit!" or "Five More Months," to which Carey's followers would shout back, "Five More Years!" One such confrontation was timed by this writer as lasting an hour and a half.

No wonder that at the caucus meetings people were exchanging home remedies for laryngitis.

Officials Defect from Carey

On the opening day, Carey released a flyer with the names of a thousand delegates who had signed cards pledging to support him. But on the first recorded vote, Carey was behind Hoffa by 24 votes. The margin for Hoffa Junior continued to grow until the difference between them, as measured by the delegates' nomination vote, was Carey 775, Hoffa 954, and 150 delegates not voting. (In half or more of the locals that sent delegates, there had been no contested elections; in those locals, the officials in effect appointed their own people as delegates.)

If Carey had maintained his delegate majority, he would have been called a political wizard by some, because it would have meant that a mature, seasoned trade-union bureaucracy had turned against itself. Nevertheless, Carey *has* persuaded a large minority of the Teamster officialdom to back his reelection. On his slate are several high-ranking officials who opposed him in 1991, and they brought lower-ranking officers with them.

Carey didn't need their support in 1991, when the old guard fielded two rival slates. This time the opposition to reform is united and, as amply exhibited at the convention, well financed and tightly organized. In 1991, despite having only 15 percent of the delegates at that convention, Carey went on to win the election with support from 48 percent of the voting members.

Institutional Crisis

The 1991 election created an institutional crisis. The rank and file had elected an international leadership opposed by the bulk of the officials on all other levels of the union. Since Carey's election, those officials scabbed on the United Parcel Service strike, gave aid and comfort to the bosses during the 24-day freight strike, and continue to sabotage communications between members and the international union leadership, and between local unions. The convention failed to put the Teamsters institutional crisis to bed. If Carey is reelected in 1996, that will not end his conflict with the bulk of the Teamster officialdom.

Carey ended the deadlocked convention several hours early on its fifth day. He explained that the delegates would accomplish little, whether they stayed another four hours, four days, or even four weeks. [A *New York Times* story reported Carey as saying "the fight is not here (i.e. at the convention) but out there," in the election campaign for the union's top posts, to be held in November.] Before adjourning, he announced that the Teamsters General Executive Board had voted to call a special convention after the newly elected international officers take their posts next February. "Our hope," Carey said, "is that these [reform] issues can be taken out of union politics next year and adopted to protect our members' rights and prevent corruption." □

July 24, 1996

A Report on the Formation of the Labor Party

Combating the Invisibility of Class Politics

by John Hinshaw

In early June, over 1,300 trade unionists, community activists, and socialists representing over one million workers met in Cleveland and formed a Labor Party. This was a historic event that indicates a new level of militance and organization on the part of the left wing of the labor movement. The Labor Party could well become the center of a movement to transform the U.S. into a truly humane and democratic society.

The following report examines how the Labor Party fits within the dynamics of class struggle in our country, what its goals are, and how people can help build it.

Clearly, the United States is a society stratified by economic inequality. In our schools, housing markets, or criminal justice system, we are accustomed to (if not happy about) one set of rules for the privileged and another for the grunts. While this has always been true, over the last 25 years, working people have lost a great deal of ground in terms of income and job security. The average compensation of corporate CEOs is more than 100 times the average wages of their employees. After companies announce massive downsizing, Wall Street rewards the company by bidding up the price of its stock. As a result, the average income for full-time workers in industrial jobs has declined 20 percent over the last 20 years. Wages have deteriorated even more dramatically for the one out of every four workers who work part-time.

Of course, these problems are particularly acute for women and/or people of color, who still bear the brunt of social inequality. For instance, Black or Latino workers are three times more likely to be poor or unemployed than their white counterparts.

Only in the realm of political rhetoric and mobilization does class magically disappear. Instead of workers and owners, voters are mobilized to choose between two major parties on the basis of their stand on social or cultural issues such as affirmative action, gun control, prayer in school, or abortion rights. Of course, sometimes the issues that get raised are apparently "class" issues, like defending public education, welfare, or environmental regulations.

The D-R Difference: Midnight Basketball

Yet under the existing two-party system, even when you win, you lose. That's because both major political parties agree on fundamental policies that favor corporate power. Both the Democrats and Republicans advocate aggressive policies that have deregulated and "internationalized" labor markets, starved social

A New Organizing Approach to Politics

(Resolution adopted at the Founding convention of the Labor Party, June 8 1996, Cleveland, Ohio)

Our Labor Party exists in order to build a powerful movement around our new agenda for working people that promotes and protects our rights. We believe that the best way to build this movement is to develop a new dynamic organizing approach to politics that rejects politics as usual.

- Our organizing approach to politics will promote a new agenda by recruiting and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of working people to engage in common non-electoral political activities throughout the year, not just on election day.
- Our organizing approach to politics will recognize that electoral action comes only after recruiting and mobilizing workers with sufficient collective resources to take on an electoral system dominated by corporations and the wealthy.
- Our organizing approach to politics will rely on building a movement that promotes actions to force elected officials and candidates to speak out on issues as we define them.
- Therefore we propose that the Labor Party commit its resources to a strategy based on mass recruitment and political actions that go beyond the electoral process to shift the national debate towards our agenda.
- We call on the Labor Party to mobilize

working people in a bold experiment to develop effective non-candidate/non-electoral—political actions that turn our organizing approach to politics into reality.

- We call on the Labor Party to develop innovative organizing efforts, such as a campaign to restore the right to organize a union, or a constitutional amendment campaign to put the right to a decent job at a living wage directly into the Constitution.
- We call on the Labor Party to go union to union, local to local, door to door to gather support for the Labor Party and its program.
- We call on the Labor Party to call a second convention in two years to assess our campaigns, our recruitment process, and to develop the next steps in building our new organizing model of politics.

Finally, the Labor Party shall appoint a committee on developing our future electoral strategy to report to the second Labor Party convention. The Labor Party will not endorse candidates of any kind, will not run people for office, and will not spend any Labor Party resources on electoral campaigns before an electoral strategy is adopted by a national Labor Party convention, nor before we prove capable of recruiting sufficient numbers of working people around a new agenda.

services for the poor, and shifted wealth and power to the already privileged. Both the Democrats and the Republicans agree that the vast majority of society (although not corporations) need to embrace the market — they just disagree about how fast it should happen. Both parties agree on the need for more prisons and police as a way to contain crisis. The Democrats passed a harsh and vindictive crime bill with midnight basketball; the Republicans maintained the crime bill but stripped it of midnight basketball.

The mass media, itself dominated by a handful of multinational corporations, strive to keep the focus on personalities and minor policy disputes (the narcissism of small differences) instead of on the ongoing policies that work against the interests of 80 percent of the population. Given that elections only offer a choice

between "tastes great" and "less filling" look-alikes, it is no surprise that most workers simply don't vote.

Why Business Unionism Can't Fight Corporate America

But what about workers' organizations? Don't unions defend workers' interests in the political realm through their PAC money? After all, the \$35 million that the AFL-CIO is spending this year ought to do the trick. Unfortunately, many existing unions are severely limited by the ideology of "business unionism."

Since the end of World War II, business unionists have focused on wages and benefits for their members rather than issues that confront the working class as a whole. After the late 1940s, the union leadership didn't care if GM

made overpriced, poor-quality cars, as long as their members got good wages and the union got its dues. In large part this is because radical workers and/or organizations were largely driven out of the unions during the Cold War era by conservative unionists, companies, and the FBI. It's hard to have "working-class consciousness" without organizations that represent all members of that class.

In fact, much of the militant rhetoric of the AFL-CIO, like that of Clinton himself, tries to contrast "outlaw" corporations to "good corporate citizens." The rhetoric ignores the fact that it isn't just some companies that are shredding jobs or abandoning our communities to maximize profits — all companies have to be "lean and mean" to survive.

Workers' disorganization in the workplace or their communities has been exacerbated by their cooptation by the pro-capitalist parties, notably the Democrats. In spite of Clinton and the Democrats' record of intensifying the free-market assault on working people's organizations, incomes, and communities, the AFL-CIO monies will largely go to "fight the right," which is equated with the Republican Party. Even if the Democrats could regain the House and Senate, that would return us to 1993, when Clinton and the Democrats passed NAFTA and GATT but not legislation extending health care to all or prohibiting employers from hiring permanent replacement workers (scabs) during a strike. While the AFL-CIO has lobbied for legislation that benefits all workers, as it is doing now by trying to raise the minimum wage, this positive move doesn't break the unions from the Democrats. The pro-corporate policies of the two major parties, and their corruption, are so pervasive that a new kind of politics is required for ordinary people.

There is a need for a movement that can advance the interests of workers over the narrow interests of capitalists and their political allies. The Labor Party is the first attempt to establish a nationwide political party based on the unions in the U.S. It represents a fundamental break with business unionism and the two-party system.

Is the Labor Party a Fundamental Break with Capitalist Parties and Bureaucratic Unions?

Much of the excitement that people feel about the Labor Party, and felt at the convention, was generated out of the sense that the Labor Party may provide an answer to the twin failures of the Democratic Party and bureaucratic unions. Right now, there are about 50,000 members in the Labor Party, which is open to all individuals, to unions, and to designated workers' support groups. Right now, most of the people and power in the Labor Party come from its unions. Six national unions, two major regional unions, and hundreds of locals have endorsed the Labor Party. Two long-time "left unions," the UE (United Electrical workers) and the ILWU (Longshoremen) endorsed the Labor Party, as

did the UMW (United Mine Workers), which has a long and militant history.

Other endorsing unions included the traditionally conservative BMW (workers who build or maintain railroad track), the California Carpenters, the CNA (California Nurses Association), and the AFGE (non-postal Federal Government employees). However, the biggest force at the convention was OCAW (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers), best known as the union of Karen Silkwood.

Representatives from over a hundred endorsing local unions of postal workers, autoworkers, janitors, machinists, etc., were also in attendance. The Labor Party also encouraged the participation of supportive workers' organizations — such as CLUW (Coalition of Labor Union Women), CBTU (Coalition of Black Trade Unionists), and Black Workers for Justice. Most delegates received some monies from their unions or organizations to attend, but the vast majority paid their own way to attend this historic event.

The convention approved a constitution for the Labor Party and a platform consisting of 17 major planks. The delegates pledged to build the Labor Party in their communities and organizations so that over the next two years thousands more working people will join the fight against the corporate domination of the United States. The various planks of the platform together put forward the radical idea that the policies of the government should favor the vast majority of the population rather than keeping companies profitable at any social or environmental cost.

What Can We Learn from the Convention?

While more than 1,300 delegates were in attendance, the convention favored those workers who were the most organized. Each major union that endorsed received 100 votes at the convention, and endorsing local unions also received proportional representation. Since 80 OCAW locals and 46 UE locals had endorsed and sent delegates, these two organizations had the majority of the almost 3,000 votes at the convention. Local LPA (Labor Party Advocates) chapters, which have to have a minimum of 20 members but generally have about 50 members, had collectively fewer votes than one or two local unions with 15,000 members. The 100 or more at-large delegates shared two votes.

The system clearly rankled some members from chapters or small locals who saw their lusty voice-votes overwhelmed by a handful of orange voting cards (representing 100 votes) held up by a few union officials. For some, this is proof that the union bureaucracy is still firmly in charge. Most delegates acknowledged that unions bring far greater organizational and financial resources to the Labor Party and deserve (and in some cases demand) commensurate representation. Furthermore, the system kept unions or chapters near to Cleveland from packing the convention. Moreover, while voting was stratified, access to debate was not — even at-large members could make motions, debate

points, or raise points of order. The motions ranged from the absurd to the profound but all received due consideration. Suggestions made in public or private by organizations such as BWFJ (Black Workers for Justice) or the Workers Unity Network on the need to take a stronger stance against racism were quietly adopted into the already existing resolutions.

Furthermore, the system of weighted voting encourages people to organize more members into chapters, to get more local unions to endorse, or to get their international union to endorse the Labor Party. Thus, while the system was hierarchical, it was democratic and encourages further organization.

Unfortunately, while most delegates came out of the convention enthused to build the base of the new party, a vocal minority is already declaring that the Labor Party has been strangled at its infancy by the UE/OCAW labor bureaucracy. This critique focuses on the stance the convention adopted toward electoral politics.

The Debate Over Electoral Politics

Many Labor Party members wanted to run candidates for office this year. Frankly, it would be a little disturbing if there weren't members chafing to field candidates this year. But the dominant position was that this would be a premature move. Large numbers of workers will have to be educated, organized, and prepared to fight in order to fundamentally challenge corporate power in the U.S. Some serious party-building activity lies ahead of us before we are ready to move. The door is left open for ballot initiatives (such as to guarantee a minimum wage or the right to strike). By the next convention, the Labor Party will reconsider the electoral option. It is likely that over the next two years an ongoing debate will have taken place within chapters and unions over how to best proceed on this front.

Implicit in the bid for an immediate electoral strategy was a legitimate concern that the Labor Party not end up as just a pressure group within the Democratic Party. For that reason, supporters of the immediate electoral option proposed a motion that the Labor Party would never endorse candidates from the major pro-capitalist parties. (After a vigorous debate on this point, this motion was defeated.)

Generally speaking, the move for an immediate electoral strategy was led by the Communist Party, various small left groups, and angry unionists led by a faction of the Longshoremen. This "coalition" was a mishmash. The CP wanted to be able to mobilize to "fight the right" (which they define as the Republicans), while ultraleft groups or non-CP trade unionists each had their own, mutually conflicting goals. However, many in this camp distrusted the leadership of the Labor Party, the OCAW, or the UE, and believed they were out to abolish the chapters (which have the greatest CP and left participation) in favor of a completely union-centered party. This did not occur.

While the interim National Committee (the *de facto* leadership of the party) will mostly

come from the national unions, the chapters will have five members on the National Committee (though they will share only one vote). The door is also left open to unions or chapters that recruit large numbers of members.

In the end, the vote was lopsidedly against an immediate electoral strategy. The "failure" to field candidates signaled to some ultraleftists that the Labor Party is really a "Democratic Party Advocates." While many delegates favored an immediate electoral strategy, it isn't clear what this would have meant. The language contained in the motion favoring an immediate electoral strategy gave complete autonomy to state or local chapters to field candidates. For members of the Communist Party (CP) or Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), which have already endorsed Clinton, this would presumably mean that Labor Party chapters would work for Clinton against "the right."

"Hard left" groups, like the Labor Militant tendency or the International Socialist Organization, argued that in order for the Labor Party to be a "real party" it has to immediately run candidates — although their own (presumably Bolshevik) organizations do not do so. Their argument seemed to be that without immediate electoral campaigns, millions of workers would be disillusioned by the new political party. Many trade unionists countered that the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) has run numerous candidates but failed to gain a broad base in the working class.

While the national Labor Party would not incur the financial debt from such endeavors, the political costs (or to be fair, the possible gains) would be shared by all associated with the Labor Party. Several trade unionists cautioned that while leftists could retreat from ultraleft adventures back to their own sects, the labor movement, if it acted prematurely, would be left to pick up the pieces — and would have lost its chance to reverse the capitalist onslaught. Furthermore, fielding candidates this fall would not just keep members from organizing, it would place the Labor Party on a collision course with the AFL-CIO leadership — and the "don't ask, don't tell" policy of most non-endorsing unions toward the Labor Party would be lost.

A New Kind of Politics: Working-Class Self-Organization

Most Labor Party activists recognize that labor will have to do more than just break the AFL-CIO's love affair with the Democratic Party. First and foremost, labor must once again become a movement — not just a series of workplace organizations run by paid staff that every two years attempts to re-elect Democrats. Workers will have to become the center of a broad-based movement capable of taking on the entrenched economic, political, and cultural power of privilege and capital. You can see this in the electoral strategy of the Labor Party.

The Labor Party seeks to organize, educate, and mobilize workers on an ongoing basis. The Labor Party takes the view that even unionized

workers aren't really organized — they're just members of organizations. Many unions have functioned like workplace insurance organizations — the union bureaucracies collect dues and "service" their members by running the organization in whatever way they think serves their members' interests. The service model worked reasonably well as long as unions could afford bureaucracies and employers didn't attempt to destroy them. Those days are gone, and if the union bureaucracy doesn't go too, unionism might not outlast its atrophied leadership.

"Service" Model vs. Organizing Model

Some national unions, like the UE and OCAW, have sought to break with the "service" model and shift to an "organizing" model on the theory that an active union membership will defend itself as well or better than a few lawyers or staffers. The president of OCAW has a steering committee made up of rank-and-file workers from refineries, chemical plants, etc. With many plants in poor, Deep South regions of the country, OCAW has entered into community coalitions with environmentalists and members of the surrounding communities.

The United Electrical Workers have done a good job of holding their own in these difficult times. They've helped to organize Mexican workers in factories that have relocated from the U.S. Such workers now have helped to organize inner-city factories in Milwaukee. Recently, 2,500 graduate students won the right to be represented by the UE because "the members run the union." In short, the UE doesn't just want to look good — it is out to win. Even more remarkable, the UE has accomplished this feat with only 40,000 members — which is well under the threshold of viability for service unions (like the Rubber Workers, which recently joined the Steelworkers; or the Allied Industrial Workers, which recently merged with the Paperworkers). Several years ago, the UE sold its New York City headquarters and moved to Pittsburgh — and hired more organizers at wages that cannot rise above those of the factory workers they represent.

Credit is given to the UE even by many rank-and-file members of the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE). (The IUE was set up as a conservative alternative to the UE in the early days of the Cold War.) I talked with some IUE members from a GE plant in Lynn, Massachusetts, who were very impressed by the level of participation in local union affairs in a UE local in Erie, Pennsylvania. Routine local meetings brought out as many or more UE members than attend IUE meetings at contract time.

New Organizing Tactics

The organizing model of unionism is bringing new tactics and institutions to the forefront of the labor movement. The Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP) has organized thousands of immigrant workers in low-paid factories or housing trades once dominated by white union workers. Rather than tar-

get a few job sites, LAMAP has sent organizers into entire communities to reach workers. Mexican and Chicano drywall workers have waged successful campaigns to organize the residential housing market, and these efforts have helped move the California Carpenters to the left. Ethnic and community solidarities have proved crucial for Black Workers for Justice in North Carolina and the Chinese Staff Association in New York City. BWFJ has maintained minority status unions at a number of work sites, helping to show that workers who stand by each other can do much to protect themselves from employers.

While the vast majority of Central Labor Councils (CLCs) have a bare-bones staff that mostly focuses on endorsing local Democrats, a growing number of CLCs have provided the center for remarkable community-labor coalitions. In Milwaukee, the CLC helped to ensure that the new convention center was built with union workers — and that 25 percent of the apprentices were young people of color.

As insurance companies have taken over hospitals in California, nurses saw their wages and working conditions (as well as the quality of care of their patients) deteriorate. They saw that the American Nurses Association wanted to be "professionals" even as the gains of the last 20 years were under assault, so they dumped the ANA and formed the militant CNA. In order to protect themselves, and their patients, the CNA has organized a ballot initiative that places severe restrictions on for-profit companies' ability to short-change health-care workers or consumers.

While those unionists who have waged innovative, militant campaigns are clearly not the only wing of the labor movement, they are those most clearly identified with the Labor Party. There are indications, such as the recent change of leadership in the AFL-CIO, that labor's old guard of business unionists is weakening. The new nationwide Labor Party could help to consolidate labor's most militant wing as it fights for control of the house of labor.

What is the Party's Program?

There are 16 planks in the Labor Party platform. The first calls for a constitutional amendment to "guarantee everyone a job at a living wage." Others call for universal health care, an end to corporate welfare, tax reform to make the rich pay their share, and laws that would end corporate domination of the political process. One of the most innovative planks calls for high-quality, public education not just through high school but through college as well. Students would receive a stipend while attending college. Furthermore, every seven years, every worker would have the option of taking a year off for further education.

The planks are reforms that would radically transform the lives of working people for the better. Plank number six calls for "Less Work, More Money." It would institute a 32-hour workweek without loss of pay. Everyone would receive a minimum of 20 paid days of vacation a year. Compulsory overtime would be abolished — any overtime worked would be double

time. For every two hours of overtime, companies would also be required to give workers a paid hour off.

While many would say that the scale and scope of the platform is utopian, many leftists have argued that the party is far too timid. It is true that there is no call for nationalization of the economy and the language on abortion rights is limited. The intention is not to write the perfect manifesto but to have one that addresses workers' problems caused by ever more ruthless employers and politicians. The only way to realize these demands would be to attract widespread and militant support from the working class. The lessons of mass struggles will educate us all about the nature of capitalism and the possibilities for socialism.

What Will Local and State Chapters Do?

Much of the focus of the Labor Party will be to attract support from union leaders and members, but a crucial arena of action will be in the state and local chapters. Chapters require twenty members and an endorsement from a labor organization. After that, chapters enjoy broad autonomy in the task of party building. Locals could work on and/or endorse ballot initiatives, such as the CNA's efforts to protect health-care from corporations or to raise the minimum wage. Another important area would be to support workers on strike, for instance, by raising funds for the newspaper workers in Detroit or building the boycott of the Knight-Ridder or Gannett chains.

The goal of the party is to become an effective political party with organization on the state, county, local, and ward level. Once state or county chapters have 1,000 members, they will receive a seat and vote on the National Committee (which directs the Labor Party in between conventions). Although party leaders indicated that they would create a national newspaper and hire organizers, building the party into an effective political force will largely be the responsibility of the members in the chapters.

Immediate and Medium-Range Tasks

Until the next national convention in two years, it is the responsibility of Labor Party members and supporters to build the party's membership and base in the working class. It is particularly crucial to attract active trade unionists because these workers have a high degree of organizational experience built in constant battle with their employers.

Taking the Pittsburgh chapter as an example, we would want also to build support for our party's program in other workers' organizations, such as the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, or in progressive organizations, such as the Alliance for Progressive Action, the Thomas Merton Center, NOW, etc.

In the short term, the Pittsburgh chapter needs to be formally established. It will be necessary to explain that serious, but fraternal differences in tactics with the Western Pennsylvania chapter (over whether to "fight the right"

in November) makes another chapter necessary. This chapter will need to quickly build a financial base capable of supporting an organizer. About \$200/week could and should be raised over and above support for striking workers or the national office.

The best way for the Pittsburgh chapter to build the party is to participate in the workers' movement. We need to not only support union struggles but take an active leadership role in these efforts. We need to support "road warriors," strike support committees, and efforts to raise the minimum wage.

There is no need for another "talk shop," but self-education will be an important means of attracting and keeping new members. Members should be prepared to give talks on the need for a labor party and how it is helping to build the labor movement. Short courses or workshops on working-class history, including that of women and people of color, as well as public speaking, etc., will help to prepare us for the battles ahead.

Breaking with Bureaucratic Unionism: Race, Gender, and Reds

The Labor Party also represents an effort by numerous workers to overcome the legacies of racism, sexism, and the Red scare. In a labor movement that has long been a kind of bureaucratic "identity movement" of conservative white men, the Labor Party Advocates attempted (and in many ways succeeded) in opening the party to radicals, women, people of color and the 75 percent of the working class that aren't members of trade unions.

The U.S. labor movement has had a mixed history of confronting the working-class's political disorganization. Business unionism didn't aggressively challenge racism or sexism — and often helped to maintain the Balkanization of the workplace. Until the 1970s, the United Steel Workers dealt adequately with wages and benefits in the steel industry; however, it often cooperated with steel firms in discriminating against black and women members. While these policies may have benefited some individual workers, who essentially took someone else's job, the USW's policy did not benefit all of its members or the working class as a whole. Furthermore, it did little to help its former members when the mills closed down in the 1970s–1980s.

In contrast, I would argue that the leadership of the Labor Party has indicated that it recognizes and respects the need for solidarity for the working class as a whole. In preparing the program of the Labor Party, the leadership listened to dissident members who argued that the pre-convention draft of the program was not sufficiently responsive to concerns of women and people of color.

There was a substantial difference between the draft program of March 1996 and the final program adopted in June, and the difference resulted from the fact that the leadership responded to pressure from below. At the convention, the leadership respected differences of

opinion and was flexible and principled in the procedure it followed for the adoption of the constitution and program of the party.

In a number of ways, the Labor Party seems to be making a decisive break with the worst aspects of the labor movement. In the Labor Party's preamble, it pledges to represent unemployed as well as employed workers. The party accepts immigrants (whatever their legal status) as part of the working class and therefore as part of the Labor Party. The party recognizes that because of the long history of racism and sexism, women and people of color have important concerns that need to be addressed within the context of a working-class analysis of U.S. capitalism. Finally, the Labor Party is embracing at least part of labor's radical tradition. Much like the UE's constitution, there is language protecting party members on the basis of political differences as well as race, nationality, etc.

How Might the Labor Party Differ From a Reform/Social Democratic Party?

Some radicals are legitimately concerned about whether the Labor Party is interested in mass mobilization, in organizing the unorganized, in presenting a genuine challenge to the status quo. There is also a general concern about why socialists should join a party that seems willing to fight only for reforms, if fairly radical ones. The chief difference between the Labor Party and other independent political initiatives is that it doesn't seek to be the party of progressives, liberals, or environmentalists but that of the working class. The Labor Party believes that by fighting for the interests of the majority of society, it will be possible to fundamentally restructure society. Some radicals or socialists would argue that fighting for reforms will only lead to failures like the Democrats or the British Labour Party.

The first answer to these arguments is a practical one: the vast majority of militant workers don't consider themselves revolutionaries but are willing to fight for reforms. Second, the Labor Party's program is, in a sense, a transitional program that will mobilize and radicalize larger sections of the working class in the course of the fight for reforms.

For the immediate future, the Labor Party is looking to unionized workers for membership and leadership. In part, this is because unions have greater resources that can be brought to bear. This is not the only reason. Unionized workers have a higher level of democratic rights (e.g., they can argue with their employer and still keep their job) and a higher level of organizational experience. Local union leaders represent other workers in real struggles with the employers; failures at this level can result in lost houses, pensions, etc. These perspectives and leadership skills will be needed in the Labor Party if it is to commit itself to struggles and win. However, organizing the organized is not enough, and the seriousness of the Labor Party will be measured by the extent to which it can

play a role to provide the basis for further organization of the working class.

What to Tell Your Co-Workers and Friends

Every person who is fed up with business as usual should become an active member of the

Labor Party. No longer do activists have to feel as though their local struggles will not effectively challenge corporations or their political allies. Now we will have a national network of allies whom we can support, learn from, and struggle alongside of.

The Labor Party isn't perfect. Every member

can probably see some area for improvement in the party's leadership, platform, or constitution. The organization is young — it is open to serious debate. It will evolve. Its success will be made more likely by the active participation of each additional person.

Join us.

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Reprint from Duluth "Labor World"

History in the Making: Labor Party Holds Founding Convention

by Peter Rachleff

The following article by labor historian Peter Rachleff, who teaches at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, appeared in the June 26 issue of Labor World, publication of the Duluth, Minnesota, Central Labor Council.

As soon as I walked into the Cleveland Convention Center, it was clear that something very special was happening. Men and women in union hats and jackets queued up in front of signs reading "Chapter Delegates," "Officers of Endorsing Locals," "Officers of Non-endorsing Locals," "At Large Delegate," "Members of Endorsing International Unions."

At a long table to the side, others stood in line to buy T-shirts and buttons reading "History in the Making: Labor Party Founding Convention, Cleveland, June 6-9, 1996." The hallway buzzed with enthusiasm as delegates greeted old friends or introduced themselves to members of their unions from other cities.

Inside the cavernous meeting hall, 1,400 delegates and hundreds of observers sat at long tables, the walls draped with huge colorful banners illustrating major events in American labor history. Twenty microphones were positioned throughout the floor, while on the platform sat leaders of the endorsing international unions — the Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), the United Electrical Workers (UE), the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), and the California Nurses Association (CNA).

For three and a half days, this room would throb with energy as delegates hammered out a constitution and platform of the new Labor Party.

At the Minnesota table, fifteen delegates sat. Another dozen Minnesotans sat with union delegations elsewhere in the hall. Among us were activists from the United Transportation Union (UTU), the Teamsters, the Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers, the Machinists (IAM), Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU), the Carpenters, AFSCME [American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Em-

ployees], the Amalgamated Transit Union, two retirees, two legal assistants, and me, a college professor who carries cards from the Writers Union (UAW Local 1981) and the Communication Workers of America (Workers Education Local 189).

We were joined by Paul Rasmussen, a founder of the Packinghouse Workers Union in Minnesota in the 1930s, now a resident of Florida, who made the trek to Cleveland at the age of 85 in order to participate in the founding of the Labor Party.

This was obviously no ordinary labor convention. For instance, despite the important parliamentary business at hand, when word reached the floor on the first afternoon that the Mayor of Cleveland (Michael White, Democrat) had asked the Ohio state legislature to gut the public employee collective bargaining law so that he could slash jobs, wages, and benefits, delegates voted unanimously and enthusiastically to suspend the meeting and proceed to City Hall for a public protest. We stood in the rain, blocked traffic, chanted slogans, and sang songs. We were beginning to feel and flex the power that a Labor Party could bring to American politics.

This demonstration seemed to add an air of commitment and common purpose to the delegates. Over the next three days, there were heated debates, motions, amendments, and points of order, information, and personal privilege as we worked our way paragraph by paragraph through a draft constitution and platform. At about 7:00 on Saturday night, when the final draft of the Constitution received unanimous endorsement, the tired but exhilarated delegates rose spontaneously to hold hands and sing "Solidarity Forever."

The Constitution establishes a structure for the Labor Party which tries to balance the resources, influence, and voice of local chapters,

on the one hand, with that of the endorsing international and local unions, on the other. While the bulk of the power within the Labor Party and its Interim National Council will rest with representatives of the international unions, local chapters will also have their representation and voice. The initial organizers of the Labor Party entered the convention determined that this new party must be grounded in the labor movement if it is to succeed, and the final structure reflects that orientation.

This was also the case with the central strategic issue which concerned the convention — how soon to enter electoral politics, by running or endorsing candidates for office. The Labor Party's organizers felt strongly that we need to build our organizational base before we enter elections, and after several hours of debate, a majority of the delegates agreed with them. The party will hold off on running candidates until after its next convention, to be held within two years.

In the meanwhile the party's chapters will pursue "an organizing approach to politics." Discussion of this concept revolved around initiative, petition, and referendum campaigns, pressure for labor law reform, education and agitation around the economic, political, and social issues detailed in the platform, and "union to union, local to local, and door to door" efforts to bring the Labor Party's message to working people.

How widely the message will spread, how effectively it will be spread, and how popular it will become is now in the hands of the many delegates who went to Cleveland, and our many brothers and sisters in the labor movement who agree that "the bosses have two parties; the workers ought to have at least one of their own." □

Sorting Out the Debate at the Labor Party Convention

by Bill Onasch

One of the hottest topics of debate at the Labor Party Founding Convention was the question of electoral activity. Some wanted to baptize the newborn party by plunging directly into the turbulent waters of local elections this November with LP candidates. Others argued for endorsing independent candidates who support the platform adopted by the founding convention. Still others favored a policy of "cross-endorsement" — a variant of the "inside-outside" strategy of supporting "good Democrats" as well as running some Labor Party candidates. But in the end a big majority voted not to run or endorse any candidates before the party's second convention, to be held within two years.

This debate reflects not only the diversity of forces who have come together to launch the new party but also the general political immaturity of the U.S. working class. The debate was sometimes further confused as questions of principle were often mixed in with short-term tactical judgments and even legal opinions. This discussion will continue and will be crucial in determining the character and viability of the fledgling party. Despite our small size — and our own organizational fragmentation — so-

cialists can play an indispensable role in clarifying and enriching this process.

Does Politics Equal Elections?

The bosses have done a good job over the years of selling the notion that politics equals elections. All disputed questions are supposed to be decided by elected officials and their appointees. A precondition for any effective influence on politicians in office is to offer them endorsement and financial support in the electoral process. Political parties are machines for turning out votes for candidates for these offices, and little else. This is all supposed to be democracy in action.

In the reality of class society, of course, elections are not the deciding factor in much of anything except to determine which individuals will hold what offices. While the ruling class always has some divisions within itself over secondary issues, it is generally able to forge a broad consensus on fundamental questions. The ruling rich, who have completely dominated the two main parties, which in turn have monopolized the electoral arena for more than a century, don't have to rely on lobbying to have their consensus implemented — they *select* their most reliable stewards to hold office.

Change Comes from Mass Struggles, Not Elections

But from time to time mass political struggles erupt outside the prosaic forum of elections. One of the enduring myths of American political life is that Franklin D. Roosevelt — with his celebrated New Deal — was responsible for many social reforms and the ascendancy of organized labor. The fact of the matter is that when FDR ran the first time, he had little support from, or interest in, the labor movement — which was in any case, largely dormant at the time. Roosevelt's initial program emphasized fiscal responsibility, and scant attention was paid to the plight of the millions of unemployed and the tens of millions more seeing their wages and hours of work slashed.

But during Roosevelt's first term big political changes shaped up outside the accepted framework of the two-party electoral shell game. Simple strikes soon took on the character of civil war in places like Toledo, Minneapolis, and San Francisco, in 1934. Soon after, the CIO launched organizing drives in mass production industries that challenged fundamental order through tactics such as the sit-down strike and

mass picket lines. There were mass demonstrations of the unemployed. Armed farmers stopped foreclosure auctions. In Minnesota, the Farmer-Labor Party won some of the top political offices and relegated the Democrats to the status of a minor "third party." The Communist Party experienced phenomenal growth and began to exert considerable influence not only in the trade unions but also in many Black communities, and among well-known intellectuals.

The New Deal was a reaction to this mass, uncontrolled, and largely nonelectoral political activity on the part of masses of working people. FDR sought to contain, control, and coopt this challenge to the stability of capitalist rule. The modest reforms he supported — Social Security, the Fair Labor Standards Act, unemployment compensation, the Wagner Act, etc. — were a small price to pay for defusing an explosive social threat.

A Myth Is Born: Democrats as "Friends of Labor"

Subsequently, during and after World War II, labor leaders were incorporated into ceremonial positions within the Democratic Party. In Minnesota the Farmer-Labor Party was dissolved into the Democrats. Ever since then, we have been told by politicians and union bureaucrats alike that the Democrats are, if not the labor party, at least "labor's friends," to be supported at almost all costs.

But while organized labor has been kept relatively tame for decades, other parts of the working class and the oppressed have frequently caused trouble. There was the mass civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s, which won substantial gains for African Americans. The movement against the Vietnam war, which lasted nearly a decade, and involved tens of millions of Americans in one form or another, not only had an enormous impact on U.S. military and foreign policy but also generated a lasting skepticism about politicians and their institutions. With little sympathy from Establishment politicians the modern feminist movement took to the streets in the 1960s and '70s and gained important advances for women's rights. Environmental achievements were also won mainly because of activists building public opinion that could not be ignored.

In all of these movements there was pressure to direct them into electoral politics — usually into the Democrats. The victories of the civil rights movement led to the creation of a layer of thousands of Black elected officials (BEOs) around the country. Now in power, many of these BEOs have attempted to imitate Establishment politicians and have tended to hold back further mass struggles in the Black communities. The National Organization for Women, after briefly flirting with the idea of creating a new women's rights party, has now pretty much tied its future to the Democrats.

So even in the United States, where class consciousness is low, we can see that politics has been much broader than election campaigns

Continued on page 60



NJ Labor Party convention delegates Mike Doklia (seated) and Ray Stever.

A Report to Friends on the Labor Party Founding Convention (Excerpts)

by Frank Lovell

I. Background and Organization

This convention was not a hastily called affair. The serious effort to organize a labor party based on the union movement began more than five years ago (before the 1992 presidential election), launched by the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) with Tony Mazzocchi (former secretary-treasurer of the union) in charge of the project. He proceeded from the beginning very methodically, first by conducting surveys of union membership attitudes toward the idea of a labor party.

At every juncture along the way Mazzocchi and other organizers were surprised by the favorable responses they received. Over the years there came eventually the tentative decision to organize Labor Party Advocates chapters with dues-paying members, and then some of these chapters decided to organize regional conferences. Always there were far more participants than anticipated. And this was the case right up until the time of the convention in Cleveland, which opened June 6 with a welcome speech by the head of the Cleveland AFL-CIO Central Labor Council Frank Valenta. But the site was not the one originally planned.

On the eve of the convention it had to be moved from the main ballroom of the Sheraton Hotel into Cleveland's convention center to accommodate the flood of delegates who registered in the final weeks before it opened at an additional cost of \$75,000. One thousand three hundred sixty-seven delegates registered and were seated, and an additional 1,000 or so visitors attended. The convention center hall where the convention was held was packed. The delegates came from 44 states and the District of Columbia.

Inside the hall large murals portrayed the history of American labor, the work of labor artist Mike Alewitz. And there was lots of activity outside the hall (sales of literature, T-shirts, and buttons) and in the public access ways outside the center itself. On the morning the convention opened I was there a little early and had a chance to watch the delegates and their friends stream into the hall. It looked like a crowd headed for some of the mass rallies we used to have in the days of the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations.

When the convention was called to order it looked to me as if the majority was white male in the 40-50 age bracket. There was a noticeable presence of gray beards and more vocal and numerous groups of women in practically every delegation. Blacks were relatively few and I thought not well represented. Chicanos were represented by more prominent and articulate speakers. The convention adopted its rules of

procedure, elected a constitution committee and a program committee, and its work began. The keynote speech was given by Bob Wages, president of OCAW.

The presiding committee, comprised of LPA organizers (including Mazzocchi) and two designated "parliamentarians," announced that each session of the convention would be chaired by a representative of a different union.

Keynote Speeches

I thought the convention got off to a good start with the keynote speech. Then Brian McWilliams, president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), spoke under special privilege because he had to return to San Francisco for contract negotiations with the waterfront employers' association. Both he and Wages spoke about the need to organize a party that represents the needs of the working class against the encroachments and exploitation of the employing class. And they spelled this out in some detail, explaining that they are not seeking to organize a "third party" within the established parliamentary electoral system. The labor party is different from the employing class parties and must be completely independent of them.

Discussion and debate on the proposed constitution was a continuation of some preliminary discussion that had occurred in several LPA chapters prior to the convention, and this revealed the inexperience of the delegates and of the chairperson, who tried to answer questions and made rulings that could not be explained and did not facilitate an orderly discussion. But at the end of the discussion (which carried over into the second day) it seemed as if most delegates were satisfied with the outcome, which was to adopt the proposed constitution with few changes, its purpose being to provide an organizational structure with democratic guarantees. No one seemed surprised or impatient with the inexperience of others, probably because it was a first-time experience for everyone present. This was an authentic labor party convention based on a segment of the organized union movement — unprecedented in the history of U.S. unions.

II. Program and Perspective

A large part of the second day was taken up with further discussion on the constitution, which seemed to move slowly until Wages took over the duties of chairing the sessions. Two lively guest speakers relieved the tedium. Jim Hightower delivered one of his folksy stump speeches, which started the day off well, and at the beginning of the afternoon session Elaine

Bernard (who delights in ridiculing bourgeois standards, the vaunted "work ethic," and family values) put the delegates in a good humor.

The decisive and most revealing debates began late that second day and continued until adjournment on the fourth and final day, but not before the convention had adopted its basic programmatic document, "A Call for Economic Justice." This is a most reasonable and very radical document, calling for: jobs for all at living wages; an end to bigotry; universal access to quality health care; high quality public education for all; make the wealthy pay; and end corporate domination of elections. This is a nineteen-page document defining the needs of working people.

The controversial issues were: (1) the place and importance of the former Labor Party Advocates chapters in the new party; (2) the question of running Labor Party candidates in elections this year or endorsing so-called independent candidates; and (3) whether to use the word "abortion" in the party's program.

Not all these matters were of the same weight or championed by the same unions or group of unions, nor were the union delegations always united when it came to voting on these issues. But the organizers of the convention were firm in their initial positions and gave ground slowly, without allowing any fundamental changes.

I think the debates revealed two more or less clearly defined political tendencies at the convention. One tendency was led by the convention organizers and those who supported the work that made the convention possible. Their initial plan and present vision was frequently stated and carefully explained by Mazzocchi and Wages at different times in the course of these debates.

At one point in the debate over whether to run candidates for public office, Mazzocchi explained that running Labor Party candidates is neither wise nor feasible at this time because the party has no funds and must be subsidized by the unions, and union funds cannot be used for partisan political campaigns. The other basic argument in support of this position is that the Labor Party needs time to grow and gain broader support within the union movement and among the great mass of working people.

Behind both arguments lurks the fear that local Labor Party forays into the electoral arena at this time will subject the whole idea of a working-class party to subversion and enfeeblement by so-called third party forces, landing it in the stagnant swamp inhabited by liberal Democrats.

On the other side were arguments advanced by many delegates from LPA chapters and by

some union delegations, led by the ILWU. The ILWU delegation collaborated with the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) delegation to work out some sort of compromise formula that would be acceptable to the Labor Party organizers and also allow some leeway to local chapters to experiment with electoral activity. Attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable became complicated, but the formulation eventually submitted for a vote by the longshore delegation was the following:

Local chapters, county organizations, or state organizations of the Labor Party may endorse independent labor candidates on the state or local levels who declare themselves as independents. Such bodies may also run Labor Party candidates on the state or local levels, provided that such candidates will be run without incurring any expense to the national Labor Party. Independent labor candidates who receive endorsements and Labor Party candidates must conform to the platform and program of the Labor Party as adopted at this Convention. Finally, neither the Labor Party nor its chapters, county organizations, and state organizations shall endorse candidates from other political parties.

This lost.

A revised resolution, "A New Organizing Approach to Politics" (reprinted elsewhere in this issue), was submitted jointly by the constitution and program committees (as a result of the discussion, and in the hope of resolving some of the difference). It was adopted. It says, in part:

...the Labor Party shall appoint a committee on developing our future electoral strategy to report to the second Labor Party convention. The Labor Party will not endorse candidates of any kind, will not run people for office, and will not spend any Labor Party resources on electoral campaigns before an electoral strategy is adopted by a national Labor Party convention, nor before we prove capable of recruiting and organizing sufficient numbers of working people around a new agenda.

This resolution suggested non-electoral activities: "bold experiments"; seeking more union endorsement; a campaign to restore the right to organize unions; and a call for a second convention in two years.

The convention adopted a "Labor Party Implementation Agreement" (submitted jointly by

the constitution and program committees), which established an Interim National Council, consisting of representatives of union bodies which endorse and contribute to the Labor Party, and five members in good standing of officially chartered Labor Party chapters "to be elected at an annual national convention of Labor Party chapters." *Thus, the convention endorsed the chapter structure of the Labor Party and provided for its continued existence and separate decision-making convention.*

Unions represented on the Labor Party Interim National Council are OCAW, UE, ILWU, Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, California Nurses Association, American Federation of Government Employees, United Mine Workers, California State Council of Carpenters, Farm Labor Organizing Committee, "and others to be determined."

By giving chapters representation on the Interim National Council, the Labor Party Implementation Agreement resolved the dispute over the chapters, amicably I believe, for the time being. □

Labor Party Discussion

Excerpts from a Report

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

The document by Marilyn Vogt-Downey, from which we have taken excerpts, has been circulated rather widely among Labor Party supporters. A comment is in order on the point made that "people are looking for an alternative." There is of course a real political vacuum in American life now, especially noticeable in an election year. This is reflected in the support that demagogues like Perot and Buchanan have been able to win. But the reality remains that the Labor Party doesn't yet have a base large and solid enough to begin fielding candidates. It can begin to fill that vacuum by publicizing its platform, engaging in actions like support to the Detroit strikers, and other activities. — Eds.

I attended the convention as a delegate from one of the 36 participating chapters of LPA. A chapter is a group of at least 20 LPA members who have the sponsorship of a union local [or other labor organization].

The New York Metro Chapter, of which I am a member, is sponsored by the Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA), which hosts the chapter at its offices at 220 West 23rd Street in Manhattan. The OSA sent a delegation of its own, separate from the New York Metro Chapter, as one of the 118 supporting locals [which had endorsed LPA]...

One high point of the conference came on Saturday afternoon [June 8], when the constitution was finally adopted. Bob Wages, then chairing the meeting, announced something

like: "We now have a Labor Party in the United States," and the delegates all rose to their feet at once and cheered and then joined hands and began singing "Solidarity Forever." It was a very inspiring moment indeed.

Inspired by Those in Struggle

Another high point came later when the podium was turned over to striking and/or locked-out workers who came to tell their stories. A large delegation attended from the striking *Detroit News* and *Detroit Free Press* workers, as well as others who are locked out or on strike in the Midwest.

Also attending as a delegate was Mike Griffin, formerly a "road warrior" for the locked-out Staley workers of UPIU Local 7837 in

Decatur, Illinois, whose heroic struggle against the A.E. Staley company and its owner, the giant international conglomerate Tate & Lyle, was defeated last year.

In keeping with the action proposal ["A New Organizing Approach to Politics"; reprinted elsewhere in this issue of *BIDOM*], which calls for the new Labor Party to "build a powerful movement around our new agenda for working people that promotes and protects our rights," Bob Wages proposed and the body adopted a motion strongly urging the AFL-CIO leadership to call a national labor mobilization in Detroit to support the striking Detroit workers. [See the text of the resolution elsewhere in this issue.]

The spirit of militancy and determination of the workers in struggle who addressed the con-

ference actually seemed to qualitatively transform the gathering, planting the conference deliberations squarely in the center of the times and dramatizing the urgency of conference business.

Where Did the Official Proposals Come From?

The constitution, action proposal, and program ("A Call for Economic Justice") were the product of workshops conducted in LPA chapters and union locals around the country over the past several years, particularly in the OCAW, the union where support for the labor party began and has its deepest roots.

Thus, the proposals presented to the conference were not the product of smoke-filled, closed-door discussions by a small body of union officials but of discussions among hundreds of workers over a protracted period.

Nevertheless, despite the deliberative origins of the proposals presented to the body, many amendments from the floor to all three proposals from the podium were accepted as friendly by the representatives of the committees that developed the final drafts, sometimes without debate and sometimes after long debate.

Points of Contention

In closing I want to summarize the issues involved in the three debates: how the national leadership will be established, whether the party will pursue electoral or non-electoral politics, and how to include references to reproductive choice (support legal abortion and opposed forced sterilization).

1. **National leadership.** The constitution proposed and ultimately adopted does not provide for any elected leadership. Instead, although the convention is the highest decision-making body, a National Council will be formed to conduct business between conventions. It will be composed essentially of representatives of various endorsing internationals and local unions. The National Council will establish an Executive Board, which will conduct business between Council meetings.

Some chapter delegates argued that the national leadership should be elected by the delegates at the convention. They argued that the idea of a non-elected leadership would alienate militant workers already fed up with the anti-democratic way many unions are run and distrustful of the existing union officialdom.

The supporters of the official proposal argued that at this early stage, while the party is still barely embryonic, when its union support is deep in the membership in very few unions, to base the National Council on representatives from the international union and union locals based on a numerical ratio is actually more democratic than it would be to simply elect people from the convention floor. Moreover, the convention delegates do not really know one another.

The motion for an elected National Council and Executive Committee was overwhelmingly defeated.

2. **Electoral or non-electoral politics.** Of course a political party is supposed to run can-

didates, right? Well, in theory, this is certainly an option. Most people in this country probably think that is all a political party is for. However, the action proposal...explicitly states that this new Labor Party would not endorse candidates of any kind or run candidates for office or spend Labor Party funds on electoral campaigns before the next convention could consider and adopt a set of guidelines.

Instead, the action proposal declares that the Labor Party... "rejects politics as usual." It goes on to say that the Labor Party will [be] "recruiting and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of working people to engage in common non-electoral political activities throughout the year, not just on election day."

The ILWU presented an alternative proposal which was different from the official proposal [in] stating that the Labor Party *could* endorse independent candidates on a state or local level (not national as yet) as long as the candidates' program conformed with that of the Labor Party. (It should be noted that an amendment proposed on Friday [June 7], early in the discussion of the constitution, that the Labor Party *would not* support candidates of either the Democratic or Republican parties, was defeated.)

The ILWU proposal, brought in late Saturday morning, sparked a hot debate.

I participated in a meeting of a pro-electoral-policy caucus over the lunch break, attended by some 75 delegates, many of them members or supporters of the Labor Militant and *The Organizer* currents in LPA chapters. Many of these delegates feared that the ban on electoral politics was no more than the product of a deal worked out between Tony Mazzocchi and John Sweeney (president of the AFL-CIO) along the following lines: Sweeney [this is the supposition] would agree not to attack the Labor Party if the Labor Party would agree not to run candidates or attack Sweeney for squandering AFL-CIO money and resources by backing Clinton and other Democrats.

After lunch, Tony Mazzocchi himself took the floor to oppose the ILWU proposal. He pointed out, first, that much of the current material and staff support [for the Labor Party] from participating unions would be illegal under the Taft-Hartley law if the Labor Party were to run candidates. The Taft-Hartley law forbids unions from participating in electoral politics except through particular designated funds, like those of COPE [Committee on Political Education]. If the convention voted to run candidates, the Labor Party would immediately lose the bulk of such material support from unions, which is so vital to it right now.

In addition, Mazzocchi argued, the Labor Party was too new to run candidates. We first need to consolidate our strength and establish constituencies deep in the unions, so that we can actually hold a candidate accountable if one get elected. Two years is not too long a wait to begin to launch an effective electoral challenge — a blip on the screen of history, he said. He urged the delegates to reject the ILWU proposal.

Despite Mazzocchi's motivations, I voted for the ILWU proposal because I felt that there should be some allowance for running candidates, both because so many people are looking for an alternative and because I felt that running candidates was a way to help build the party.

In retrospect, I believe that I was wrong. [Emphasis added.]

Not only is the Labor Party too weak to hold a candidate accountable, as Tony said. But I actually heard delegates who I thought knew better speaking in favor of putting the Labor Party on the ballot in favor of — *liberal Democrats!* [Emphasis added; and this has actually happened in the case of the Buffalo LP chapter, whose charter has now been suspended. It is also possible that some ILWU delegates had in mind that the Labor Party would support "progressives" like (Democrat) Gus Newport in the San Francisco Bay Area. — Eds.] If the Labor Party were to begin like that, by supporting Democrats in some regions of the country, it could quickly fragment and die.

3. **On reproductive choice.** Under the section in the program "Guarantee Universal Access to Quality Health Care," there is a clause demanding "informed choice and unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women."

An amendment was proposed which explicitly stated that the Labor Party supported legal abortion and an end to forced sterilization. A representative of the program committee explained that such a clause had initially been included. However, the clause was subsequently removed because the wording seemed to play right into the highly charged atmosphere surrounding abortion. Instead, the authors sought to place abortion back among other medical procedures (where it belongs) and return it to the realm of "family planning" to which the Labor Party rightly demands "unimpeded access." Making an explicit reference to abortion, it was argued, would only provoke problems without adding anything.

The supporters of the amendment argued that precisely *because* women's access to legal abortion is being so seriously challenged and because the issue is so abused, the Labor Party *should* take a bold stand from the start, both to support women's rights and to serve as a pole [of attraction] for the majority who do support choice.

The amendment was defeated 1,753 against and 729 for. There was a voice vote, and then to ensure that everyone was satisfied with the count, votes were carefully counted by a raising of the voting cards. I voted for the amendment and was very much upset that it was defeated.

Again, in retrospect, I think I voted the wrong way. [Emphasis added.]

I understand the logic of the clause as it exists, that it fully supports unimpeded access to abortion without saying so explicitly, that it returns abortion to its proper place in the discussion...

A learning process is going on, and it is only beginning. □

Building the Labor Party in Cleveland, Ohio

by Jean Tussey

The historic opening day of the founding convention of the Labor Party at Cleveland's Convention Center on June 6 was one of the best kept secrets of the news media.

The second day a front-page headline on *The Plain Dealer*, Cleveland's only daily newspaper, announced: "White wants collective bargaining law blunted...Calls on lawmakers, Voinovich to revive 'management rights.'" (Mayor Michael White, Democrat, is the "liberal" mayor of Cleveland, elected with union support; Voinovich is the governor of Ohio.) Relegated to a back page was a report headed "Unions try to form U.S. labor party in convention here."

The response to the Democratic mayor's attack on workers' rights by the 1500 or more delegates and visitors was massive. They adjourned the convention at about 4:30 on June 7, second day of the convention, to join a protest rally at City Hall, which is quite close to the Convention Center. The *Plain Dealer's* front page on June 8 carried a four-column picture (in color) and a banner headline: "Labor takes protest to the streets."

"Angry union activists from across the country poured into the streets outside City Hall yesterday...to protest Mayor Michael R. White's call for labor reform. The chanting crowd...closed Lakeside Ave. during rush hour and at one point swarmed the mayor's lawyer, who slipped away with the help of security guards," the paper reported.

Convention Joins Local Protest

The rally was called by the Cleveland AFL-CIO to protest against Democratic Mayor White's letter to the president of the Ohio Senate, in which he called for revising the state collective bargaining law and sought more power for management, fewer rights for city employees.

Chaired by Cleveland AFL-CIO President Frank Valenta, a member of Labor Party Advocates (who had also greeted the delegates at the opening of the convention), the rally included such speakers as Cleveland AFL-CIO Executive Secretary Richard Acton, State AFL-CIO President William Burga, and local officers of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and of police, firemen, and other public employee unions.

"Drizzling on Your Shoe"

Bob Wages, president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW), who had just been chairing the Labor Party convention, gave a particularly rousing speech at the rally. He

spoke along these lines: "We never thought, just as we arrived here in Cleveland to talk about forming a Labor Party, that the Democratic mayor of Cleveland would be the proof of everything we're talking about. Here's a man elected with the blood, sweat, and tears of the labor movement, and now he's pissing down your leg..."

Wages continued: "It's a classic case, where a political candidate stands up with you, pats you on the back, has his arm around your shoulder. And all the time he's *drizzling on your shoe*."

Chants at the mass rally — the largest in Cleveland since the anti-Gulf War protest movement — ranged from "Mayor White Must Go" to "Labor Party Now" and the singing of "Solidarity Forever."

AFL-CIO President John Sweeney happened to be in town June 7 to address the Cleveland City Club and a "town meeting" that followed, with his "America Needs a Raise" campaign. He did not appear at the Labor Party convention or the mass demonstration. But he was quoted as saying, "It may be time for a new mayor."

The demonstration broke the silence of Cleveland radio and television media on the Labor Party convention. Reports of the action in support of the Cleveland labor movement and interviews with delegates were on the evening news. Local weekly alternative newspapers continued to provide coverage in the weeks that followed, as have numerous e-mail writers on Internet, opening broader discussion of the Labor Party in the community as well as in the unions.

The most comprehensive treatment appeared in a weekly tabloid, *The Cleveland Free Times*, of June 12-18. It featured in-depth coverage of the convention by News Editor Elizabeth Chamberlain, with the headlines "Work in Progress" and "A party is born in Cleveland at the Labor Party Advocates convention." (A version of Chamberlain's first-rate article is in the July-August *Z* magazine.)

Photos of the delegates on the front page and four inside pages showed them voting, speaking, and listening in the Convention Center, and demonstrating in the street "against the mayor's letter denouncing the right of government workers to unionize."

Cleveland AFL-CIO Responds

At its regular monthly delegates meeting on June 12, the Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor passed a resolution calling for defense of the state's collective-bargaining law. On the suggestion of Maryanne Young, delegate from Bakers Local 19 (and secretary of the Cleveland

LPA chapter), the body voted to send a letter of thanks to the Labor Party for the convention's support of labor's protest against Mayor White.

(Earlier, at the Labor Party convention, Cleveland teachers had circulated a flyer thanking the delegates for their support against the anti-union mayor, who is also threatening to drive down wages and conditions for city teachers.)

A Steelworkers union delegate at the June 12 federation meeting introduced a motion to establish a committee to investigate recall of Mayor White. He later agreed to withdraw his motion at the request of several other delegates and officers. The reasoning was that instead of focusing on one individual (who will be up for election in 18 months, together with the City Council), the Cleveland federation should "take the protest to the streets" as they had done on Friday, June 7.

"You are leading the way for labor," Ohio State AFL-CIO President Burga told the delegates, "with your statement and rally last Friday...The City Council unanimously passed a resolution against the mayor's position. We sent a copy to every local in the state...there are public officials, Republicans, who would like to change the law — but this was a Democrat!"

"The action started here is going to grow... We need to focus on three state issues," Burga concluded: a prevailing (union) wage for the construction trades, against privatization for public workers, and against weakening the workers compensation law.

"What we're doing is not just for organized labor, but for all workers," Valenta added. "We will not privatize, we will organize!"

"Work in Progress"

For Cleveland Labor Party Advocates, the convention marked the end of the first phase of educating and organizing for a national party to represent the interests of the working class. But as the *Free Times* accurately described it, building the new young Labor Party is still a "Work in Progress."

A platform was adopted dealing with current trade union issues, but it also included "social issues" of concern to all workers as well as those of special interest to Blacks, Latinos/Latinas, and women, as represented in the caucuses formed at the convention.

Five years ago, on October 27, 1991, about 50 unionists and other Cleveland-area social activists attended a meeting and reception for Tony Mazzocchi, national LPA organizer based in and supported by the OCAW. Since then the Cleveland LPA chapter has held regular, demo-

cratically conducted monthly business meetings, elected officers and committees, and organized educational outreach. Harold Mitchell, president of Local 100 of AFSCME served as chairman, and meetings were held at the centrally located AFSCME hall.

Hundreds of trade unionists and others attended three major regional educational conferences jointly organized by the Cleveland, Detroit, Youngstown, and Toledo LPA chapters. These conferences were held December 4, 1992, in Detroit, September 11, 1993, in Hudson, Ohio, and December 10, 1994 in Toledo. They featured panel discussions (and debates) by union and community representatives, on labor party history and issues of concern to labor party supporters both in the U.S. and in other countries.

A major breakthrough in winning local trade union support was a conference September 17, 1995, at the Painters District Council hall, followed by a breakfast meeting with Tony Mazzocchi for discussion with local labor leaders. (The Painters had been the first Cleveland area union after OCAW to endorse LPA.)

The conference, utilizing an OCAW educational workbook — *Corporate Power and the American Dream: Toward an Economic Agenda for Working People* — and led by union members, attracted building trades union officers and others, including the dynamic leaders of Bakery Workers Local 19, Barbara Walden, president, and Maryanne Young, administrative assistant.

With their assistance Cleveland LPA was able to arrange meetings for Mazzocchi with the

Building and Construction Trades Council, and with the executive committee and the delegates meetings of the Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor. Local 19 also provided headquarters and other assistance for the LPA national staff, organizers, and committees the week before the convention opened.

Building Cleveland Chapter Continues

Cleveland LPA members arranged meetings for Mazzocchi with the officers of Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU) Local 546M, Communication Workers of America (CWA) Local 4340, and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 47.

During the convention Cleveland members participated as delegates from the local chapter or from their unions, served on registration, platform, and constitution committees, and networked with delegates from other cities in caucus meetings.

On July 28, the chapter steering committee met to consider problems and challenges facing us in the next phase of building our fledgling independent Labor Party in the unions and in the community.

Before the convention several key local labor leaders who had not yet endorsed LPA were invited to attend as observers. Some did. But one key figure with a record of progressive positions declined. "We can't have a strong



Labor Party convention delegates join Cleveland trade unionists demonstrating at Cleveland City Hall

labor party until we have a stronger labor movement," he said, citing divisions and defeats of the past period.

Our response was, and is: "Which comes first — the chicken or the egg? We can't have one without the other. Now is the time to strengthen the labor movement by organizing the unorganized into unions, by solidarity actions in support of striking workers and their communities, and by building the Labor Party as an independent force against the profit-driven corporations and their political power."

The discussion — and the struggle — continues. □

July 29, 1996

Detroit Striker at Labor Party Convention

Continued from page 6

Detroit newspapers turned more brutal than ever the minute they turned a record \$56 million profit in 1994. One million dollars a week just wasn't enough for them.

I wasn't surprised at the newspapers' behavior. It's the industry trend. And as we all know by watching the stock market lately, beating up on workers pays big dividends.

Alone, none of us has a chance. Together, however, those of us in unions can turn the tide. And a labor party could be just the vehicle needed to unite us.

It is time to unleash the power of the labor movement. All of our unions have talked about an injury to one being an injury to all. Now, we must insist they — and we — walk that talk.

Many of you here have shown tremendous solidarity with us in this strike. And now, I'm asking you, I'm begging you, to continue standing with us. And I guarantee you, we will be there for your next struggle against corporate and capitalist greed.

We must show these corporations and the government that you cannot trample on the rights of hard working, decent people without

facing the wrath of hundreds of thousands and even millions of workers nationwide. We must *never* relent — not now when the stakes are higher than they've ever been.

We must show those who seek to destroy the working class that we outnumber them and we can outvote them, outmarch them, and God knows we can *outsmart* them. We have the power. Now let's use it.

And that means that auto workers, teachers, teamsters, and journalists must pay attention, must unite, and must be willing to sacrifice. We cannot let apathy and petty differences divide and destroy us. Those of us who wear white collars must stand with those who wear blue collars. If we don't, the labor movement will have more Caterpillars, Staleys, PATCOs. We just don't have the luxury of watching such devastating blows from the sidelines any more.

If you doubt that this newspaper strike is yours and all of labor's to fight, just look at the anti-labor, anti-worker, near fascist headlines in the scab papers these days. Gannett and Knight-Ridder are the largest newspaper conglomerates in this country. Together they own hundreds of newspapers, television stations, electronic pub-

lishing ventures, billboards, etc. They literally control public opinion internationally. If we lose this strike, I don't think labor will *ever* get a fair shake in the popular press again. Imagine how a scab would cover your contract talks. Your strikes. Concerns about outsourcing.

This strike isn't about money. It never was. For me, this strike is about preserving some semblance of a fair and free press and about preserving the integrity of collective bargaining. I'm probably one of those crazy idealists, but the very principles that drove me into journalism in the first place — justice, truth, the fight for the little guy — are the same principles that keep me on the picket line. And if I've learned anything about my profession over these several months it's that fairness, justice, truth doesn't always mean telling all sides of a story. Sometimes, it means recognizing that while there may be many sides of a story, there is ultimately a right side and a wrong side.

We are with you — standing on the right side, the side of decent hard-working people, the side of my union, the side of your union, the side of a *labor party!* □

Why the Lack of Interest in Cleveland?

Press Lords Black Out Labor Party Convention

by Charles Walker

"All the news that's fit to print."

— *New York Times*

Although Cleveland, Ohio, was the site of June's founding convention of the Labor Party — this country's first national party of, by, and for trade unions — actually Denver, Colorado, was the party organizers' first choice. But then a major Denver hotel went non-union, and heavily unionized Cleveland became the host city to the convention's 1,400 delegates.

Cleveland is the hub of an industrial and commercial metropolitan center with a population of nearly 3,000,000 that fans out from Lake Erie's eastern shoreline. So naturally, the national press chronicles some of the city's daily doings, like the feats of the Cleveland Indians, last year's American League baseball champions. Then for a decade or more, journalists informed the nation about the late Teamster President Jackie Presser, a Mob confidant, an FBI stool pigeon, and native son of Cleveland.

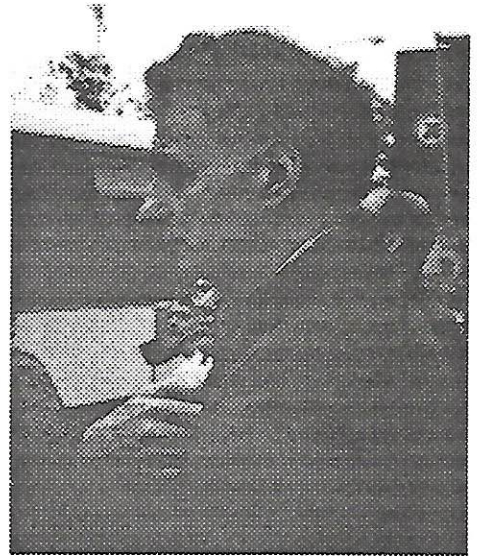
Also, from time to time the national press still memorializes Cleveland's one-time civic leaders, John D. Rockefeller, monopolist and founder of Standard Oil, and Mark Hanna, a banking tycoon of the Robber Baron era. In short, for at least a century the national press has kept its eye on Cleveland and its important personalities and events.

Blackout No Accident

Certainly, then, it's no accident that the nation's press found so little space to report (if only for the record) that the Labor Party convention took place, let alone detail the Labor Party's debates, resolutions, plans, and program. Of course the Labor Party's organizers didn't expect that the mainstream press would treat the convention with more magnanimity than is given to most "labor news." Nevertheless the media was invited to witness the Cleveland proceedings, says Labor Party spokesman Bob Kasen, who added: "But the papers didn't understand what we were doing."

Who would have expected, though, that the national press would virtually black out all convention news? Especially since the party's planners tempted the press with speakers like consumer advocate Ralph Nader, radio commentator Jim Hightower, and one-time California Governor Jerry Brown.

Only the Cleveland press reported (on its front page) that on the second day of the Labor Party convention the delegates recessed and took to the streets to protest the Democratic mayor's intent to tear up collective bargaining agreements with city workers. The Labor Party delegates joined up with demonstrators led by city and state AFL-CIO officials. Together they



Ralph Nader

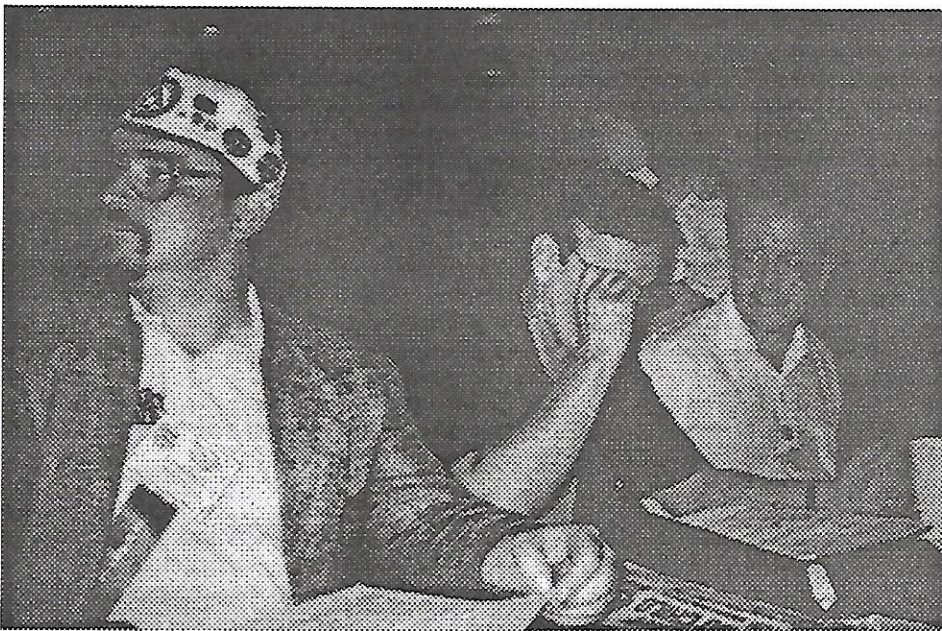
massed in front of city hall, closing down a major thoroughfare during rush hour.

Labor Party Needs Its Own Press

One day the Labor Party must have its own press as an organizer, teacher, and inspirer of labor's ranks. For now, only a few readers will learn that it was also in Cleveland that an elderly Labor Party delegate had been on hand to hear railroad labor leader and socialist presidential candidate Eugene V. Debs speak, following his release from federal prison in 1921. Debs had been imprisoned for more than two years by Democratic President Woodrow Wilson and finally released by Republican President Warren Harding. By ironic coincidence Debs spoke in the same auditorium where the new Labor Party was launched.

The Labor Party's organizing slogan is, "The bosses have two parties; we need one of our own." The newspaper bosses' blackout suggests a complementary slogan for the new party: "The bosses have a press monopoly; we need a press of our own." Fortunately such a major undertaking is highly practical, as evidenced by the ability of modest-sized but dedicated labor-based organizations to consistently turn out informative, readable, and professional-looking newspapers and magazines.

June 18, 1996



Labor Party convention delegates representing the New Jersey Labor Party Advocates Chapter and the New Jersey Industrial Union Council.

A Review of Press Coverage on the Labor Party Convention

by George Saunders

The big business press pretty much blacked out news of the Labor Party convention, as Charles Walker points out in the preceding article. The few exceptions proved the rule. The *Los Angeles Times* (June 5) and *Boston Globe* (May 13) had articles before the convention, but not after, so far as we know. The *Newark Star-Ledger* sent its labor editor Don Warshaw to Cleveland and carried at least two articles about the convention, and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, not surprisingly, had coverage on nearly every day of the event. (The national TV networks, and “talk radio” also blacked out the news.)

Other exceptions to the blackout were a syndicated column by labor writer Phil Dine, dated June 14, which appeared in the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and some other papers; also, a short but enthusiastic item in the *Guardian* of London on June 13 headlined “Americans try out Labour.”

Of course the scab newspaper companies, Knight-Ridder and Gannett, whose holdings include *USA Today*, said nothing, but the Detroit newspaper strikers’ paper, the *Detroit Sunday Journal*, carried an excellent short article by striker Margaret Trimer-Hartley (who also addressed the Labor Party convention; see the text of her speech elsewhere in this issue).

Trade union papers provided some coverage. Besides the article by Peter Rachleff in the Duluth labor paper reprinted elsewhere in this issue, there was an article in *Racine Labor* (Wisconsin) by John Heckenlively. The ILWU’s *Dispatcher* outdid itself, in its June 26 issue, with an eight-page “Special Pull-out Section” on the Labor Party convention. This gives a very detailed account, with many photos and the full text of ILWU President Brian McWilliams’s speech to the convention, plus excerpts from other major speakers. All in all, the main article by Kathy Wilkes is quite favorable despite the ILWU’s disagreement on electoral policy.

The liberal and radical weeklies and monthlies took varying perspectives. Jane Slaughter’s two-page report in the July *Labor Notes* and Dan La Botz’s two-page article in the July-August issue of *Against the Current* gave accurate accounts that were quite positive.

Incidentally, Dan La Botz included an interesting sidelight on one of the many “hospitality suites” hosted by various organization outside the convention hall:

“FLOC [the Farm Labor Organizing Committee] filled a dining room with a hundred people, who listened as Baldemar Velasquez recounted the history of FLOC’s eight-year campaign to organize Campbell soups and Vlasic pickles. Velasquez then turned to the new Labor Party and made a mystical prediction:

Brothers and sisters, you have no idea what an historic occasion this is, such hope and such expectation. In the spiritual realm of life, the heavens are shaking, the nations are trembling, the earth is rattling. We are witnessing a reordering of forces that will shake this world, based on the people who roll up their sleeves and go to work every day.

Cockburn Negative

Not at all positive about the convention was Alexander Cockburn (*The Nation*, July 1). Although he was not at the convention, Cockburn’s *Nation* colleague JoAnn Wypijewski was, and his remarks were “based on her observations.” He was incensed at the convention’s decision not to run candidates and at the OCAW’s “rigid non-electoral stance.” Cockburn pictured the “conventioners” as asking each other: “Don’t the organizers understand that to Americans, parties mean personalities and programs and elections?” (Of course the convention did have personalities, and it adopted a program, but he ignores that.) Elections were the key issue for Cockburn. Yet he showed no desire to understand the arguments against immediate electoral activity. And he came to highly cynical conclusions, citing some mysterious, unnamed sources:

“No less than three highly experienced labor organizers (not delegates) separately confided to JoAnn roughly the same thought. Maybe the Labor Party is nothing much more than a bid by Wages and the OCAW to build some backup muscle for the union and its allies as a ‘progressive’ pressure group inside the AFL-CIO.”

Reed Answers Cockburn

Cockburn was answered in the *Village Voice* by Adolph Reed Jr., who ridiculed the *Nation* columnist’s “dire, secondhand tale of an undemocratic sham perpetrated by labor bureaucrats, who presumably organized the party just to sell it out.”

Reed went on:

“Cockburn’s rush to fantasize about the workings of dark, Byzantine conspiracies is consistent with his increasingly eccentric politics... [his] romanticized notions of the ideal insurgency; as Cockburn’s own writing shows, this can extend to judging proto-fascist white militias [as] more authentically ‘populist’ than trade unions because they’re less bureaucratized.”

(A very valuable, detailed account by Adolph Reed Jr. on the inner workings of key convention committees appears in the August *Progressive*. We discuss it at length in our article on p. 46.)

Readers are urged to consult Laura McClure’s excellent, rounded summary of the convention in the *Labor Party Press*, the Labor Party’s newly designed newspaper, which includes the Party’s constitution and program in a four-page insert. The Labor Party is producing 25,000 copies of the newspaper. Copies can be ordered by writing to the LP at PO Box 53177, Washington DC 20009-3177.

Internet surfers will want to “hit” the *Labor Party News*, the on-line voice of the Labor Party on the Worldwide Web (<http://www.igc.apc.org/lpa/>).

David Bacon: LP “Only in Its Infancy”

The July 8 *Nation* had a much more balanced and useful article by David Bacon. He described the currently existing political action apparatus of most unions, and of “labor councils, state labor federations, and the AFL-CIO itself... The Democratic Party overwhelmingly gets that support. Unions... try to kill bad legislation and initiate proposals of their own, and to elect politicians willing to listen to their needs. This is the system founded by Samuel Gompers, who headed the American Federation of Labor at the turn of the century”

“It is the tension between the failure of Gompersism and the fact that the alternative to it is only in its infancy that shaped the convention’s debate over electoral strategy.” (Emphasis added.)

John Nichols

The August *Progressive* magazine — in addition to the article mentioned above by Adolph Reed — ran a three-page article by John Nichols, an editorial writer for *The Capital Times* in Madison, Wisconsin, who “covers electoral politics for *The Progressive*.” (Nichols also had a good article about the media’s noncoverage of the convention in the June 13 *Capital Times*, titled “Bias Against Labor Warps Political Coverage.” He reported that Pacifica Radio and National Public Radio did air brief stories on the founding of the Labor Party.)

In his *Progressive* article, Nichols expressed frustration over the “decision not to run candidates for at least two years.” This, he said, “told American voters who hunger for an alternative that they will have to wait for political deliverance.”

(The idea that workers can organize and act in their own interests, to carry out their own “deliverance” outside the electoral arena, somehow got lost here.)

Quoting Debs — and Nader

But Nichols balanced his disappointment and impatience (“you ain’t a party if you don’t have candidates,” he quoted a New York delegate). He gave a good estimate of the historic importance of the convention — “the most serious attempt to form a labor-based political party in America since the great political agitation of 100 years ago, which led a young railroad union

leader named Eugene Victor Debs to confidently declare, "I am a Populist, and I favor wiping out both old parties so they will never come to power again."

Nichols also quoted Ralph Nader's remarks to the convention from the floor as an at-large delegate: "This is the birthplace convention of the new labor movement for the twenty-first century — a movement to contain the wild excesses of corporations and to end their control over our politics, our culture, our very lives."

The Go-Slow Approach Presented...

The "run candidates now" arguments in Nichols's article were tempered by an objective presentation of what he called "the slow-as-you-go approach." He quoted Tony Mazzocchi's dictum: "We have to learn to walk before we can run."

"In Mazzocchi's view, a Labor Party must be constructed carefully over the long term to avoid the catastrophes that have occurred when small parties have launched big-ticket national campaigns prematurely, only to see their energy dissipate after a single election defeat.

"That's what happened in 1924, when the old American Federation of Labor and the Socialist Party threw in behind the Presidential candidacy of Wisconsin Republican Senator Robert M. La Follette. And that's what happened in 1948, when left unions and the still-strong Communist Party backed former [Democratic] Vice President Henry Wallace's Progressive Party campaign.

"More recently, new party initiatives — such as the People's Party of the early 1970s and the Citizen's Party of the early 1980s — failed because of their inability to appeal to core Democratic Party constituencies, most particularly organized labor."

Nichols reviewed the "impressive roster" of union support for the Labor Party, "accounting for well over a million members," and acknowledged the argument that this is "still a very small force within the overall labor movement." And he quoted Carl Rosen, the UE leader from Chicago: "What will happen [if the Labor Party runs candidates immediately] is that we will marginalize ourselves, we will get slaughtered, and we may never recover from that."

... But Electoral Illusions Prevail

Nichols recorded these arguments, but in the end came back to a fixation on electoral illusions, devoting the last third of his article to quotations like: "the way you get political power is by electing people to legislate in your interests — not the interests of the bosses" (Connie White, a legal secretary from Los Angeles); and "we can't wait twenty years... We need to start winning some elections now."

This last quote came from John Lembach, an IBEW official from Rochester, New York, who heads a group called the Upstate Labor Party, "which has already endorsed several winning candidates." Nichols does not report whether

New Labor Party Platform, Mission Detailed

The following letter to the editor appeared on June 24, 1996, in the *New Jersey Herald*, a daily paper published in Newton, New Jersey.

Editor:

I read with interest Robert E. Johnson's letter "Political philosophy suggested for new party" in the June 19, 1996, *New Jersey Herald*. [His main suggestion is that we need a party that calls for guaranteed jobs or a guaranteed livelihood for all.] Thousands of Americans, if not millions, would agree with him, including myself. And there is good news for all of us: a new political party has been founded, with a platform along much the same lines as suggested by Mr. Johnson.

At a convention held in Cleveland, Ohio, June 6-9, 1996, the Labor Party was launched. Nearly 1,400 delegates attended, from almost all the 50 states, representing nine international unions, hundreds of local unions and central labor councils (including the New Jersey Industrial Union Council), and state and local chapters throughout the country. These elected delegates represented about 2 million people. Among those in attendance were former California governor Jerry Brown and consumer advocate Ralph Nader. I had the honor to attend as a member of the New Jersey chapter delegation, which included representatives from the entire length of our state. I was pleasantly surprised to read in the *Newark Star-Ledger* that 135 New Jerseyans attended the Labor Party founding convention.

The idea for this new party came from Tony Mazzocchi, an official of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW). He and his union began organizing in 1991, and by 1994 the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE) and Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE, a railroad union) had joined OCAW in the organizing campaign. Many locals of New Jersey's largest union, the Communications Workers of America

(CWA), also participated. They recognized that the Democratic and Republican parties both represent, not this country's hard-working families, but a wealthy elite which is out of touch with the realities that nearly all of us face day after day on the job and in our neighborhoods.

However, the Labor Party's mission is to represent *all* of this country's working people — not just union members — of all races, of both genders, of all generations. While politicians who falsely claim to speak for us, like Pat Buchanan, seek to divide male from female, white from Black, and native-born from immigrant, the Labor Party is working to unite all of us who depend on our weekly wage to feed, clothe, and shelter our families.

The Labor Party's platform calls for a constitutional amendment to guarantee a job to every American able to work. It calls for universal, single-payer national health insurance. It calls for working hours which enable us to devote time to our children and families, and it calls for reforming labor laws to give working people a level playing field in collective bargaining.

The Labor Party will not be fielding candidates this year. We have not yet signed up enough members or raised enough funds to mount a serious campaign for public office anywhere in the country — yet. When the thousands of people who share Mr. Johnson's justified dissatisfaction find out about the Labor Party, I am confident they will support it and put Labor Party candidates in office in Trenton and Washington. Those who wish to join the Labor Party or get more information may contact us at: Labor Party, P.O. Box 583, Avenel, NJ 07001.

— Tom Bias
Sparta, NJ

these "winning candidates" belong to one of the bosses' parties.

Nichols also quoted Luisa Gratz, of the ILWU international executive board, who made the motion for running some local candidates now: "The Labor Party has to be an identifiable entity in our communities. And the way we become an identifiable entity... is by running and endorsing candidates."

(Gratz and others did not address the difficulty that immediate endorsement — of, say, liberal Democrats like Gus Newport in the San Francisco Bay Area or Tom Fricano in Buffalo — would negate the whole aim of *independence* from the bosses' parties, of labor *speaking for itself*.)

"In These Times" Reports

James Weinstein's article "Conventional Wisdom" in *In These Times* (June 24 - July 7) was fairly favorable and objective. He focused on the role of chapters in the Labor Party and on the electoral question.

The chapters, he wrote, "are a crucial part of the scheme for the new party. They provide a way for the majority of working people who don't belong to a union to participate, and chapter members — who come to the party at their own initiative — are likely to be more active in future political campaigns than the average union member. But chapter delegates were also the main dissenters. Many came with a deep distrust of union bureaucracy, and most came determined to start running candidates immediately. A wide variety of Trotskyists enlivened the ranks of the chapter members by clamoring for imme-

diate action, and for going it alone.” (It didn’t occur to Weinstein that, besides self-styled Trotskyists, there were many former Stalinists favoring the “immediate action” position.)

On the electoral dispute, Weinstein had this interesting observation: “Finally a delegate from Local 1781 of the Machinists union spoke openly to the issue that had festered beneath the surface of two days of debates. Implicitly acknowledging that this attempt to create a labor party still represented only a small fraction of the movement, he argued that the party needs to organize actions, marches and picket lines to win rank-and-file support in other unions. The non-electoral policy proposed by the leadership, he added, was designed to ‘avoid a head-on clash with the main body of the labor movement.’ And that is a necessity, if the Labor Party is to grow into a genuinely meaningful political party.” (It wouldn’t have occurred to Weinstein that this Machinists delegate might actually be — a saner “variety of Trotskyist.”)

“By the end of the day,” James Weinstein concludes, “a small handful of delegates remained unconvinced, but the overwhelming majority had come to see the logic of the situation. [Emphasis added.] While an independent formation, like the New Party, can attempt to build an electoral movement by running candidates for office at the local level, the Labor Party must find ways to grow without offending or threatening the political strategy of the larger movement of which it is still only a small part. The AFL-CIO is spending \$35 million to elect a Democratic Congress and to re-elect Bill Clinton this year. The last thing it needs — and the last thing it would tolerate — is a rival on the left undermining its efforts. As a nonelectoral organization, on the other hand, the Labor Party may strengthen the main movement’s hand.”

Socialist Action

Another Weinstein, Nat — not to be confused with the social democratic former Stalinist James Weinstein — had a nearly four-page article favorable to the Labor Party starting on the front page of the July issue of *Socialist Action*, publication of the small Fourth Internationalist group of the same name. “During the course of the convention” and as a result of the “educational nuts-and-bolts discussion of how a mass labor party can be built,” in his view, “the great majority of delegates” became convinced “that this labor party was real.” (We may be wrong, but we suspect that a lot of them were already convinced, and that Nat Weinstein himself was among those newly convinced by the course of the debates.)

Be that as it may, he gives a sensible evaluation of the decision not to add wording to the Labor Party’s constitution explicitly op-

posing Democrats and Republicans, since this was implicit in the constitution and program as a whole. It was “understood by all that the new party was created for the purpose of opposing both parties of the bosses.”

Nat Weinstein comments: “In the opinion of this writer, such a compromise was justified as a temporary tactic given the fact that many workers versus employer confrontations are looming on the horizon that could rapidly shift working-class politics in this country toward the left. Moreover, the orientation toward building the Labor Party from the ground up would put the new party in position to take full advantage of such an eruption of class struggle.”

He concludes his article: “All those interested in helping to change the world should join and help make the new Labor Party a real force for change.”

It is good to see this addition to the ranks of Trotskyists who are building the Labor Party. Interestingly enough, Nat Weinstein’s current position in favor of building the Labor Party contrasts with the approach of the June issue of *Socialist Action*, which gave inordinate stress to the fact that the LPA office in San Francisco had portraits of Democratic Party politicians on the walls.

The Militant

The Militant, voicing the views of the Socialist Workers Party led today by the Jack Barnes team, in its July 22 issue, expressed a rather jaundiced view of the proceedings (almost in the spirit of Alexander Cockburn). It certainly didn’t call on SWP members to get in and build the Labor Party.

An article titled “New ‘Labor Party’ won’t run candidates,” a seemingly objective report by Susan Zarate, OCAW member and SWP candidate in San Francisco, left out any mention of the convention’s mass demonstration against Cleveland’s Mayor White. Zarate mentioned a “special point on ‘solidarity’ towards the end of the convention,” but didn’t report the convention resolution to support the call for a nationwide march on Detroit to back the newspaper

strikers there, or the raising of over \$6,000 dollars for the Detroit, Tosco, Uno-Ven, and Trailmobile strikers, let alone the aid given to striking Liverpool dock workers, who also had a representative at the convention.

Zarate’s article was accompanied by another, “SWP candidate gets good response.” The SWP is running James Harris for president in the 1996 elections. The article had Harris presenting the current SWP line, and at the same time revealing its ignorance of what is actually going on in the Labor Party:

“The starting point of OCAW and other union officials promoting the Labor Party is not the beating working people are taking, Harris maintained.”

If Harris had read *Corporate Power and the American Dream*, the workbook used by OCAW and LPA in educational workshops, he would have seen that “the beating working people are taking” is precisely its starting point, as it is the starting point of the Labor Party program, partly derived from those workshops.

The SWP line is that union officials are only concerned with “their own social status, generous salaries, and perks.” It makes no distinctions among union officials, and therefore can’t account for either the difference between Sweeney-Trunka and Kirkland or the difference between Mazzocchi-Wages and Sweeney. Some sections of the union officialdom are responding to pressures from their ranks as well as to “the beating working people are taking,” and this creates openings, like the Labor Party, where rank-and-file fighters and conscious socialists can play a role, as we have argued in the pages of this magazine in previous issues.

“Without Fighting — No Winning”

All this is a closed book to those who have been miseducated by the Barnes team. The SWP presidential candidate was asked by a Detroit newspaper striker, “Do you have any opinions about what it takes to win a strike these days?”

Presidential candidate Harris replied, as reported by *The Militant* (we’re not making this up):

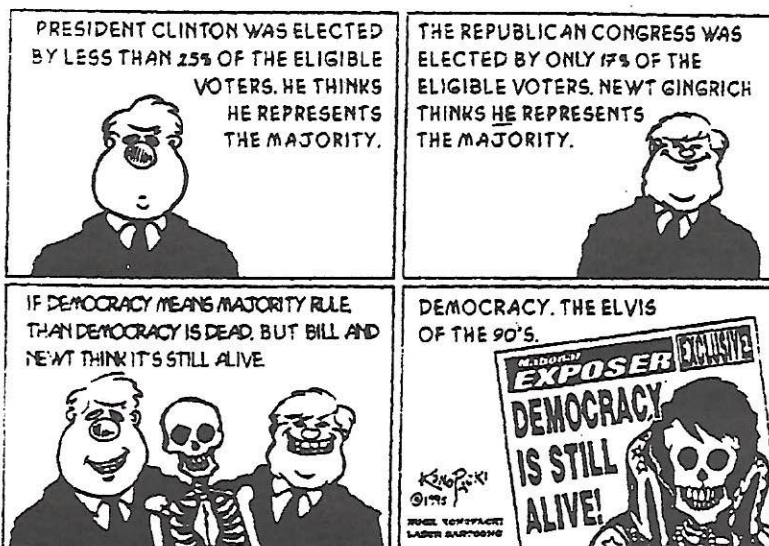
“You’ve taken the first step to charting a course to win — fighting,” said Harris. “Without fighting you can’t even begin to pose the question of winning.”

Shades of the Little Red Book. “Dare to struggle, dare to win.”

The Militant goes on:

Harris pointed to the recent trade union conference in Cuba as an example of the fighting capacity and capabilities of working people. “They’re pointing the way for all of us. They’ve maintained their sovereignty and independence against great odds. Ultimately we need a workers and farmers government, like they have in Cuba,” Harris said.

Continued on page 59



The Seattle Area Labor Party

by Rita Shaw

This article is based on a telephone interview with the author, recently retired president of Lodge 1380 of the Transportation Communication Union (TCU).

The Seattle LPA chapter got started seriously only a year and a half ago. We had two public meetings with an attendance of about 80 each, then a meeting of about 110 last year. Activities especially picked up when word of the founding convention came.

Our LPA chapter received its first local union endorsement from the Greater Seattle American Postal Workers Union (APWU), and regular LPA business meetings were held at the APWU office. Then a local of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE) endorsed and made its office available to us, in the old Labor Temple downtown. My local endorsed last fall. Another endorsing union is the ATU (Associated Transport Union), representing the Metro bus drivers of King County (the Seattle area). Also three ILWU locals endorsed (longshoremen, clerks, and pensioners). A representative of OCAW came down from the oil refineries at Anacortes, north of Seattle, and spoke at one of our monthly business meetings. A glaziers and painters local also endorsed just before the convention.

We have an informal but effective steering committee, four elected officers, some endorsing union representatives, and nonaffiliated activist members, who took on the responsibilities for the chapter. Last fall the LPA national office sent us a general membership list of about 200 in the state of Washington as a whole. We continued to add to that list, and by early May we had 250 members. That gave us five full votes at the convention; so we could have had 25 delegates, but in the end only 10 members went as chapter delegates.

A number of others went as delegates from their locals. We later learned that the huge International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 751 (at Boeing) sent two delegates as observers to report back to their union. We hadn't even known about that before the convention. We are still finding out about union representatives that went who we hadn't heard about. We estimate that a total of 30 or 40 from Washington state as a whole went to the convention.

Just before the convention we had a lot of discussion around the program and structure of the forthcoming Labor Party. The chapter basically voted to accept the draft platform circulated by the national Executive Committee until they had heard the discussion at the convention.

I was a union delegate from my local. Our chapter delegation was divided fairly evenly, half and half, between union members and non-members (who wish they were in unions).

At the Convention

Many of those who went had never been to a large convention of any kind, let alone a union convention. They had difficulty at first in understanding why it was necessary to rely so heavily on parliamentary procedure to keep the business

of this large body going. They had the feeling that individual rights were being violated.

But they rapidly began to learn how parliamentary procedure works. It's important for people to learn it and understand it, to see that it can be used to guarantee an open, democratic meeting.

Some of our delegates felt that the Labor Party must run candidates immediately in order to be viable. There was a lot of intense discussion on this point. Some went around buttonholing delegates from national endorsing unions, to ask them: "Will we ever run candidates?" They would report back to others in our delegation what the union members had said. And after a lot of heated discussion they came to understand all the reasons why we can't do this at this time. It was an intense learning experience for these three or four people, which might otherwise have taken years.

Since the Convention

Prior to the convention we had already made plans for a report-back meeting that would be held in a larger hall, with wider publicity, at the end of June. That was done, and we had about 85 people attending. Those reporting expressed various points of view. Some reported honestly that they were disappointed that we were not running candidates. One reporter ended up saying it was disappointing that we don't have a clear direction. I couldn't restrain myself. I interjected, "That's not true." He said, "Well, I guess Rita disagrees, but she'll take that up when she speaks."

But before my turn came, Sarah Ryan, vice president of the Greater Seattle APWU, started out her report by saying, "I agree with Rita. We do have a direction. We have a lot to do. We're going to have to pick and choose about how and when to do all the things we have before us."

Anyway, we have started to proceed. We've been having our regular meetings. We've established a committee to work on the structure and bylaws of the Washington state chapter, we hope to have that ready in late September or in October, to bring to the chapter for its approval, then send it to the national leadership for their approval.

We've put out one small piece of literature. It's very basic. It just says, "No to the Republicans, No to the Democrats, Yes to the Labor Party," and reports briefly on the establishment of our party. It has a coupon on the back that people can fill out and send in to join.

The first place this was distributed — with participation by some chapter members carrying the Labor Party banner — was the Gay Pride demonstration in Seattle on June 30. We started getting back responses to these leaflets to our P.O. box, some with money, some asking for more information.

We're now trying to determine what kind of literature we're going to need, what we can get

from the national, what we'll need to work up ourselves. We have a very active outreach committee. A new committee has started trying to figure out how to organize tabling in different areas or at public meetings, and so on.

Cultural Workers and Artists Caucus (CWAC)

We have a small group here that met with Mike Alewitz, who was in Seattle at the end of June for the Jobs with Justice national conference. They met with Mike, who heads the Cultural Action Committee of New Jersey's Industrial Union Council, to discuss forming a cultural workers group here in support of the Labor Party. They call it the CWAC (Cultural Workers and Artists Caucus) of the Labor Party.

We've already been going out to various unions. We had a very interesting and successful presentation to members of an AFGE local who work at the veterans hospital. The AFGE of course is one of the nine endorsing internationals, and these local members wanted to know what's going on, what came out of the convention.

These union members had some very interesting and practical questions. They liked the program, but wondered, How are we going to pay for this? To have a guaranteed job or a guaranteed income? We pointed to the yearly \$200 billion in the federal budget that goes for corporate welfare, subsidizing big business, and also to unnecessary and wasteful military spending. I also pointed out that my union had as part of its contract with the Burlington Northern railroad company what's called "merger protection." We're guaranteed five days work or five days wages. If as a result of rail mergers we don't get work, we're guaranteed five days wages per week anyway. And the railroad is making so much money (through all sorts of automation and increased productivity) that it can afford this.

Carrying Out a Dual Mission

We're now thinking through how to carry on. We believe we have a dual mission, and our two aims interact and reinforce one another. One is to reach out to other unions for endorsement, support, aid, and for union members to join the Labor Party. The other aim is to reach workers who are not organized in unions or who won't hear their unions' message because they don't go to meetings. And we want to reach younger workers.

One of our active chapter members (who belongs to the Machinists union) has children who are involved in the Seattle music scene, so we hope, through them, to reach younger people.

We're beginning to think through how to do this, how to get ready, to have the necessary literature and people. Probably in the fall we'll start speaker training workshops, so that people can have some practice first, before they go out to speak. We believe in working in a way that new people can start to participate and learn and become competent.

We don't believe in having chiefs, on the one hand, and little followers who implement things, on the other. We believe in developing a whole movement of capable organizers for the Labor Party and its ideas. And eventually that will feed in with helping to organize the unions into supporting the Labor Party and building a mass movement based on the workers. □

Labor Party Convention

A View from the Hinterlands

by Mike McCallister

The author is chair of the South-Central Wisconsin chapter of the Labor Party and an officer of AFSCME Local 2412.

One of the biggest delegations to the Labor Party founding convention came from one of the country's smaller cities: Madison, Wisconsin. The South-Central Wisconsin chapter organized 45 people to come to Cleveland, many riding the chartered bus.

Since November 1995, Madison-area Labor Party Advocates has won the endorsement of 15 local unions, along with the area's central labor body. Thus nearly every delegate was a union member, and about half were representing their locals. Politically, our delegation was diverse, though mostly to the "left" of the LPA leadership. We arrived with high hopes and a certainty that we were making history. We left with a realization of the hard task we face in building a real party of the working class.

Endorsing Internationals "in Control"

You could tell the minute you walked into the convention hall that the primary endorsing unions, the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, United Electrical Workers, and International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, were determined to keep control of the weekend's events. Delegates from those (and other endorsing) internationals were seated at the front of the hall. The second-class endorsing locals were in the middle and the untouchable chapter delegates were at the back.

This tight control was emphasized again in the discussion over convention rules. In his only session as convention chair, Bob Clark, vice-president of the UE, spent much of his time ruling motions out of order. Clark's heavy-handedness was perhaps even too much for the leadership itself, as he disappeared from the chair for the rest of the convention.

Delegates were greeted Friday morning by newspaper headlines which drove home one of the main reasons we had assembled. Cleveland Mayor Michael White, a liberal Democrat elected with labor support, was caught complaining about the state's public-employee collective bargaining law. Because the city has failed to bargain a contract with the city's police and firefighters for over two years, White urged the state legislature to repeal the statute, which he said was stacked in the unions' favor. Later that day, virtually the entire convention moved down to demonstrate at City Hall, later marching through the streets of downtown Cleveland, chanting "We want the mayor out!"

Most of the time, however, delegates worked at the mundane, though historic tasks of adopting the party's constitution and platform. There were three major fights and innumerable smaller battles, as the delegates discussed virtually every paragraph of the constitution drafted by a committee organized by the leading unions. While important language placing the Labor Party on the side of workers around the globe was adopted from a floor motion, the internationals vetoed anything that the drafting committee didn't approve.

Organizational Points

While the high-profile fights over electoral strategy and the platform drew most of the attention from convention observers, two organizational points stood out. From the perspective of the chapters, where most of the grunt work of organizing the party is carried out, these may have been at least as important. The composition of the National Council, the party's leadership body, keeps the affiliated internationals firmly in the saddle for the time being. The constitution as adopted would have created a council consisting almost exclusively of those internationals. The interim plan agreed to at the convention puts the emphasis on organizing, both inside the unions (who have to recruit 10 percent of their members to the party) and in party organizations (local, state, or regional organizations with over 1000 members get a seat on the council). Chapters will get a single vote on the interim council, divided five ways, after a convention of chapters is called, probably next year.

The other point which might have significantly hampered organizing were the proposed affiliation fees for local unions. While the party needs money to be a viable force on the political terrain, the already difficult political task of convincing mid-sized locals to join this party would have been considerably harder if a \$500 fee (for locals bigger than 100 members) went with it. After many protests from the floor, and an additional hearing, the committee agreed to lower the fees. Individual dues remain at \$20 per year, with the unemployed, retired, and those earning less than \$10 per hour getting in at half price.

The Electoral Debate

As expected, electoral strategy was the central debate. LPA founder Tony Mazzocchi of

OCAW had been saying for months that the Labor Party would not run candidates "initially." It was the convention's job to define what "initially" meant. Various forces attempted to launch the discussion in the context of the constitutional debate, but a separate document delaying electoral action till the next convention in two years, adopted by both the constitution and platform committees finally arrived Saturday morning. This discussion marked the first time the united front of OCAW, UE, and ILWU broke down, with the longshore workers proposing to leave local areas the option to run candidates in the intervening period.

For a moment there, it looked as if the ILWU amendments would not even reach the floor. Debate had been closed while the motions were being distributed to the delegates. A subsequent request for a roll-call vote on the committee document allowed OCAW President Bob Wages to declare a lunch break to broker a deal before all hell broke loose. After lunch, language requiring the LP to recruit "hundreds of thousands" of workers to the party before taking the electoral field was deleted from the committee document, and another hour of debate on the ILWU amendments was permitted. The local-option language was then defeated, and the original motion passed.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The convention displayed many of the strengths, and more than a few of the weaknesses of the U.S. labor movement. The delegates' quick response to the mayor's challenge surprised even the bureaucrats of the local labor council, who called the action, but those same delegates by a substantial majority ruled out any Labor Party electoral challenge to White, or any other politician who sells labor out, for the next two years. If the AFL-CIO would ever adopt the platform presented by this Labor Party, it would mark a sharp left turn for the labor movement. Yet the party has virtually no foreign policy, aside from promoting higher labor standards in countries the U.S. has trade agreements with.

While there was a lot of disappointment expressed on the bus ride home to Madison, many of us believe that there is nothing wrong with this party that more organizing can't solve. Our task is to bring more workers, union or not, to our banner. □

UE Organizer Defends LP Convention

Posting by Sam Smucker

Convention delegate Paul Zarembka, chair of the Buffalo, New York, LP chapter, made a post to the discussion conference "labr.party" on the Institute for Global Communications (IGC) computer network. Zarembka criticized the convention as being "undemocratic" and opposed several of its decisions. The following response to Zarembka's posting was made by Sam Smucker, who was a convention delegate from a UE local in Iowa City, Iowa.

Brothers and Sisters,

I am an organizer with the UE and I really must disagree with several points that Brother Zarembka makes in his assessment of the Labor Party convention.

1. Undemocratic Structures?

Voting was distributed to delegates by the amount of union members they represent. It seems to me to be reasonable that OCAW, which represents roughly 100,000 union members should receive 100 votes, while a local union that represents 200 should receive 3 votes and a chapter representing 50 people should receive 2 votes. Brother Zarembka is correct in saying that this was never voted on, but of course how can you vote on the weight of voting?

The National Council (basically a national steering committee) and much of the constitution are designed so that when (and if) larger unions come into the Labor Party they will have a say in what is happening. Chapters will receive one vote on the National Council in total. The logic to this is that this is a Labor Party rooted in the union movement. The unions are headed by an elected leadership representing large numbers of working class people. The chapters are small groups of self-selected individuals with very little base beyond those individuals, and they give only a minute amount of monetary support to the Labor Party.

I felt that the proceedings were basically democratic in the sense that all had input and that representative majorities usually came to overwhelming consensus. As in any floor debate there was a losing side and a winning side. And the deck was stacked heavily in favor of the International unions, which were more or less of one mind.

But, let's be realistic. Only about 8 percent of the union movement was represented there. The entire thing was put on by a couple of relatively small, financially strapped unions, which nevertheless threw \$100,000 into the convention. They certainly were not going to let anyone who walked in off the street control it. After all, the leaderships of these unions are elected, and they do have to be responsible to their membership, whose money paid for our new Labor Party.

2. The Floor Debate

The resolutions moved from committee were passed with several changes to both the consti-

Adolph Reed Answers Critics on Abortion

In his column in the July 1 *Nation*, Alexander Cockburn was highly critical of the Labor Party convention, although he did not attend it. He based his criticism, he said, on what he gleaned from his *Nation* colleague JoAnn Wypijewski.

Adolph Reed Jr., in the *Village Voice*, roundly refuted Cockburn's interpretation of the Labor Party's position on reproductive rights.

"Cockburn," writes Reed, "repeats an absurd rumor that our stand on abortion is 'to

the right of the Democratic Party.' The Labor Party program calls for comprehensive, universal, single-payer health care, 'publicly administered and funded, delivered by a non-profit system.' It further specifies 'informed choice and unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women.' This pro-choice statement goes well beyond the Democrats by *guaranteeing universal access.*" [Emphasis added.]

tution and the platform. In general the purpose of these committees was to create a document which had the support, on most issues, of the majority of the delegates, so that every single point would not have to be debated. This was the case. Nonetheless, there were endless amendments proposed from the floor (and voted down) many of which (although certainly not all) were frivolous, or the spirit of which (if not the exact same wording) was already captured in the document being amended.

Because of the endless amendment motions we did not even get through the constitution until late Saturday afternoon. There were several important changes suggested from the floor and almost all of those were accepted as friendly amendments by the committee, or else the committee recessed and made a compromise proposal once they realized the house was divided on some issue. Such changes had to do with the amount of dues for endorsing bodies, and representation on the National Council for local unions with as few as 2,500 members (reduced from the original proposal of 15,000). These were some very significant changes and were almost unanimously approved once the committee made the changes.

(As far as I know, this is a totally appropriate procedure under Robert's Rules. The committee changed its proposal in order arrive at a platform approved by the majority. There were very few votes that were not overwhelmingly one-sided. When there were close votes or extensive disagreements the committee would recommend changes or accept amendments instead of leaving the house divided with a close vote).

3. The Platform

The platform was 19 pages long (with 16 major sections) and everyone wanted to tag on his or her special amendment to it. Delegates continually voted down things that were clearly in the spirit of the platform, but basically unnecessary.

Despite the dozens of amendments offered there seemed to be only two real debates: whether to add the word "abortion" to the platform and the pace at which we become an electoral vehicle.

First of all, the platform is the most pro-choice platform of any real political party I know. It clearly states support for "informed choice," and the committee stated that it was their intention that this meant a woman's right to have an abortion. Furthermore, any family planning medical procedure would be free of cost. The majority of delegates, I felt, thought that the word "abortion" would divide working class union members and they did not want to play into that trap. I heard today that FLOC would have walked (with their entirely Catholic membership) if the proposed amendment had been added. Jane Slaughter of *Labor Notes* said it best. I paraphrase: the pro-choice side won this debate and to add the word "abortion" would just be needlessly sticking it in the face of those who lost.

(By the way, this vote went to a division of the house and a card count by the sergeants-at-arms. Then before the total was announced OCAW and UE caucused and reconsidered their positions. In the end both remained unchanged. The OCAW and UE delegates did not vote as a block on this issue, although a majority took the

majority position. And the UE national officers abstained their 100 votes because our membership was divided.)

On Running Candidates Now

The majority opted for establishing an electoral committee which will make a proposal for an electoral strategy to the next convention in two years. This gives the committee a lot of latitude depending on whether the Labor Party has grown significantly over the next two years.

I'm sorry that Brother Zarembka worries about OCAW and UE running the show. I hope he will feel better when unions with a million

members or more, such as SEIU, the Teamsters, and the UAW are running it next time.

Only if that happens will we have created a real mass-based Labor Party. The way I see it, the electoral strategy is set up to bring in the big unions and to allow the endorsing unions to fund the Labor Party as a non-electoral organization for the time being.

If you don't like the leadership of the big unions, then you should try to change that leadership from the inside, but we aren't going to build a serious Labor Party without the institutional resources and membership allegiance of the biggest unions. The other option is the well-tried quixotic route.

Enthusiasm about the Future

Overall, I sensed a good deal of enthusiasm about the future of the Labor Party. I heard that the SEIU official delegation was watching the proceedings in earnest and seemed pleased (10 percent of SEIU's members were represented on the floor). The Carpenters were also well represented.

There is certainly a lot of work to do. We need especially to get as many locals, districts, and Internationals to become endorsers as possible. It's a long road ahead. It seems to me that patience and planning are what's needed.

In solidarity. □

Debating the Convention

by Andrew Parsons

The author was a delegate from the Arizona statewide LP chapter.

I strongly disagree with Earl Silbar's one-sided account of the convention [posted on a computer network "discussion conference" on June 10; Silbar, of AFSCME Local 3506, was a convention delegate].

[Silbar didn't report that] there were 9 international unions and over 300 other labor bodies represented, as well as 36 chapters. Except for the abortion debate (where a substantial number of the unions voted on both sides on a difficult issue; more on that below), and the electoral action debate (where the ILWU was the only significant union force on the side of running candidates right now), *all of the union delegates were strongly united with a large portion of the chapter delegates* in approving the main decisions of the convention.

Many of the union delegates are also chapter leaders, but they chose to come as union delegates because they got more votes that way. There were also many socialists among the majority forces. What Silbar doesn't understand is that this is a LABOR party, not another tiny leftist third party.

In general, the debate at the convention often split over a vision of the party as a left-wing party or a party rooted in the working class as it actually exists right now.

People representing thousands of union members have the right to more votes than people representing a 20 or 30 member chapter. It was obvious to everybody there that a few of the chapter delegations had been captured by ultraleft sectarians who were obstructing the serious work of the convention by raising pointless "points of order" and "points of personal privilege" and proposing endless silly amendments. If anything, the chairpersons should have clamped down on them sooner.

The sectarians tried to get votes by demagogically pitting the chapters against the unions. On a per person basis they had at most a quarter of the 1367 delegates there. On a voting strength basis they were much weaker.

For example, as a chapter delegate from Arizona, I had 3/5 of a vote. My friend, the delegate from Arizona's statewide Teamster Local 104, had 16 votes. To my mind that was entirely fair. I'm part of a 70-member chapter; he was representing 7000 workers.

On the Electoral Debate

The debate was not between running candidates and not running candidates. It was between building a mass LABOR party first, through publicizing our program and through actions in the streets, so that we can run candidates in the near future that can win, as opposed to running token propagandistic campaigns for the purpose of making certain leftists feel good. We don't want another pathetic losing third party, we want a winning *first* party.

The convention voted to have the National Council establish a committee to plan our electoral strategy and report to the next convention in two years. We are building for the long haul. We need to get a lot bigger and get a lot more unions involved before we take the step of running campaigns.

The Labor Party right now represent one million workers. But there are 16 million in the organized labor movement.

We have a lot more work to do.

On the Abortion Debate

The vast majority of people on both sides were strongly in favor of the right to choose. Many women delegates spoke against the motion that wanted to explicitly insert the word "abortion" into the text of the platform. The platform that

was approved calls for "informed choice and unimpeded access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women." So under our platform abortion would be free! The only thing is that the platform does not mention the word.

The word (but not the essence) was left out in order to preserve unity with the many working people who have religious objections — including the mostly Mexican-American delegates from the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, who would have walked if we called explicitly for abortion. This was compromise language that FLOC and feminists worked out together.

Most Progressive Set of Documents

This is the most progressive set of documents in recent memory to come out of a cross-section of the U.S. labor movement representing over one million workers. The constitution calls for a National Council that is diverse and takes specific measures to ensure that. The section on opposing bigotry is strongly worded against discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, disability, national origin, immigrant status, national origin, creed, sexual orientation, or native language. It is for affirmative action.

If you aren't happy with the decisions, you'll have a chance to change them at the next convention, assuming you can find support for your ideas among some large body of workers. If all you can do is whine about how tiny groups weren't given more votes compared to huge organizations, then by all means go off and form your own tiny leftist organization. The rest of us will go on and do the historic work of building the Labor Party. □

From Discussion on Computer Network Conference

On Buffalo Chapter's Endorsement of a Liberal Democrat

The following exchanges appeared on the discussion conference "labr.party" on the Institute for Global Communications (IGC) computer network on July 25-26. The first posting, by Buffalo LP chapter chair Paul Zarembka, was in response to an e-mail inquiry.

On 25 Jul 1996 OTSNorth@aol.com wrote:
Re: Mazzocchi Attempts Rescinding Buffalo Chapter's Charter

What the controlling unions fail to grasp is the zeal, excitement, and enthusiasm of activists tasting this once-in-a-lifetime chance. We are going to make mistakes. Can we afford to kill any and every chapter making mistakes? No!

The Buffalo chapter leadership was wrong. It jeopardized the whole chapter. They will probably get the charter restored. They should rescind the decision to endorse [a local candidate] and appeal for reinstatement. I would like to hear from Paul Z. of Buffalo on his plans to get the chapter back, please.

Thanks. Theresa

From: Paul Zarembka
Re: Mazzocchi Attempts Rescinding Buffalo Chapter's Charter
Theresa,

Your posting is so cogent that I really think I should try to do the best I can with a response, even though it will not fully satisfy you. There are two reasons you won't be fully satisfied. First, I don't know all the answers. Second and more important, in having served as chair of the chapter, I do not want to point fingers within the chapter even though I have my own opinions.

I will list various things, and will also not list other things. What I won't list is what would too clearly point a finger, also current discussions which are still in process.

1. All Buffalo Labor Party members are still Buffalo Labor Party members.

2. The proposed agenda for the meeting distributed by myself before the meeting did not include any endorsement item. It was added by motion at the meeting by an individual member.

3. You write, "The Buffalo chapter leadership was wrong. It jeopardized the whole chapter." I ask you not to assume that the four elected officers were or were not involved. One was not there in any case. We run democratic meetings and votes go the way votes go and the leadership did not control the agenda. This vote was split. I don't want to say more.

4. You write, "I would like to hear from Paul Z. of Buffalo on his plans to get the chapter back, please." I respect the question. But it is a joint process of all of us involved and the result will be the chapter's result.

5. Originally, I posted the query about when and if the interim National Council had met,

because the sudden receipt of the certified letter from Mazzocchi shocked me and there was no message on my answering machine or on e-mail to alert me (coming back from 16 days vacation). Subsequently I learned that the event had been widely talked about before I knew anything about the expulsion.

6. I suspect you are on the mark when you write, "What the controlling unions fail to grasp is the zeal, excitement, and enthusiasm of activists tasting this once-in-a-lifetime chance. We are going to make mistakes...."

Whatever your own politics are, there clearly are Labor Party members in Buffalo who want Tom Fricano, a UAW President and registered Democrat, to defeat the Congressman Bill Paxon, Chair of the Republican House Campaign Committee. It is not my intent here to take a personal position for or against it, but just that it is a fact of the LP environment in Buffalo, N.Y. (I had spoken at the Buffalo AFL-CIO Council meeting before the convention in very positive tones about the LP; in that Council it is "obvious" that unionists support Fricano.) That is where your comment about enthusiasm is on the mark.

Now one last thing and this is me only — no one else in the chapter is responsible in any way for this sentiment. I take expulsion as an enormously important event for the Labor Party, perhaps because we know of the after-effects of the 1948 CIO expulsions. I do not agree that any such decision should be made by a single individual, or set of individuals, outside the prescribed process described in the Labor Party constitution. And if I were in a position to vote inside a prescribed process, I would be extremely conservative, not take a light decision (which is not to say that I would always vote no), and would try to defend due process to the maximum of my ability.

I would like to take this opportunity for particular thanks to those of you who have phoned me or e-mailed me with comments and helpful ideas and, more generally, support.

In Solidarity, Paul Zarembka

From: OTSNorth@aol.com
Paul:

Thank you for your reply. It answers a lot of questions. As for my politics, I support a clean break with the bosses' parties. I do not support endorsing candidates of those parties. Individually LP members can do what they like. Organizationally, it is the responsibility

of elected officers to keep us out of trouble with the feds and to help build the LP.

We have a similar situation in RI [Rhode Island]. It was proposed at our last meeting that we get around the LP directive by setting up another organization to run candidates. This is a real danger for us. After a meeting with Tony [Mazzocchi] on July 24, where 3 officers of the chapter attended, we will probably not do it.

Thanks again for your answer.

Theresa

From: Stew802@aol.com
conf.igc.apc.org)

In a message dated 96-07-26 02:16:35 EDT, zarembka@acsu.Buffalo.EDU writes (regarding Buffalo LP chapter's endorsement of Tom Fricano):

"The proposed agenda for the meeting distributed by myself before the meeting did not include any endorsement item. It was added by motion at the meeting by an individual member."

Paul,

It is my feeling that the motion should have been ruled out of order since it was in direct opposition to the goals and strategies outlined in the Labor Party Constitution and, therefore, the Chapter Charter. It is kind of like considering a motion to decertify the Union at a Local Union meeting.

Of course this is easy for me to say with the benefit of hindsight, but it might be worth bearing in mind at other Chapters where this problem might arise. (By "this problem" I mean proposals being made which will jeopardize your Charter if adopted.)

Fraternally, Mark Keith

From: Ken Johnson (stagectr@brutus.bright.net)

The response by Mike Keith was, to put it mildly, very charitable and kind. I find it difficult to accept that anyone could fail to understand a chapter's FIRST move in discussing an endorsement would be to contact the national leadership to inquire as to the possibility of an exception to the convention's resolution. This business of disclaiming responsibility by sort of saying, "Well, gee, that's what the members of the chapter wanted to do, so what choice did I have?" is just ridiculous.

Ken Johnson

Advancing a Program to Build the Labor Party

by Jerry Gordon

In the May-June issue of *BIDOM*, Tom Barrett and George Saunders take issue with the Workers Unity Network (WUN), not because of the positions we advance in the labor party movement (which they say they agree with), but because we struggle for those positions in chapters, unions, supportive workers organizations, and among the rank and file, as well as in top leadership bodies. Barrett/Saunders basically oppose such a struggle because they feel the leadership is on the right track on all the main questions.

WUN's purpose from its inception has been to conduct a struggle for its program, which includes bringing the issue of support for the African American liberation movement to the very forefront of the labor party program. Indeed, in the call to WUN's founding conference, we stated:

Blacks and the working class as a whole cannot win freedom and real power in the U.S. so long as this country is led by the two parties of big business. But an independent labor party which challenges that rule can only be effective if it has significant organizational leadership and a sizable base among African American workers. It will get this leadership and participation only by championing the struggle for equal rights and Black empowerment.

Similarly, we believe the party must struggle in a resolute way in support of women's rights and must ensure women a central leadership role at every level.

At the March 23-24, 1996, Labor Party Advocates National Executive Committee meeting in Cleveland, the leadership submitted an initial draft program which contained 11 sections. The last section, titled "Genuine Equality of Opportunity," states:

We recognize that an integral element of economic justice is the guarantee of equal access to the society's benefits from all its members. Just as we oppose suppression of the rights of working people internationally, we also oppose all practices that suppress the rights and opportunities of American workers through discrimination or scapegoating. Therefore, within our program that makes a firm commitment to decent jobs for all working people, we support vigorous enforcement of existing anti-discrimination legislation. This includes affirmative action, which was developed historically as a policy of last resort when reliance on the "good faith" efforts of employers to break down entrenched patterns of racial and gender segregation had repeatedly and unequivocally failed.

That was all the draft program had to say on the subject of racism and sexism. It was silent on the need to forge an alliance between the labor movement and oppressed nationalities. It never mentioned "Blacks" or "African Americans." It took no stand on the attacks on major-

ity Black voting districts. The word "women" appeared nowhere in the statement, nor was there any reference to a program of action to advance the cause of women's liberation.

Now, let's go back to the Barrett/Saunders article. There is not a single word in it criticizing this draft program. Others writing in *BIDOM* were not so reticent. Indeed, on the same page as the Barrett/Saunders article, there is a sidebar by Paul Le Blanc which begins with the words, "The most serious deficiency that many people will see in the draft program — and something which has been sharply raised in more than one discussion I have heard — is the failure of the draft Labor Party platform to address issues of systematic discrimination and oppression based on race, gender, etc."

Barrett/Saunders ignore this deficiency and instead spend their time criticizing the Workers Unity Network, which had as a central purpose working to overcome it.

Specific Criticisms by Barrett/Saunders

With this background in mind, let's take up specifically where Barrett/Saunders think WUN is going wrong. They make these criticisms:

1. The Network should not be advancing a resolution calling for organizing the South "since LPA is in no position to carry it out" and since both opponents and proponents of LPA support organizing the South.
2. The first draft "Principles of A Labor Party Program" "could be adopted as a general statement of what the Labor Party stands for, with more specific questions being left open, to be decided later." In other words, WUN should simply have accepted the program initially offered and not attempted to strengthen it.

3. It is wrong to organize "factional formations" to intervene in the LPA development, at this point it is premature.
4. It would be all right if the WUN proposals were included in the programmatic recommendations coming out of the LPA Executive Committee but, if not, WUN should not "counterpose" its proposals to those of the LPA leadership. This could set off an "internal power struggle."
5. It is wrong to say the WUN resolutions reflect basic working class issues which a labor party must address in a resolute and forceful way.
6. It is wrong for WUN to urge the labor party convention to make "a complete break with the bosses' parties and [run] independent working class candidates, where a sufficient base exists." Instead, labor party supporters should be allowed "to vote as their conscience (and consciousness) dictates."
7. WUN's proposals could be utilized by "the nitwit sectarians" for their own narrow purposes.

Let's consider these criticisms one by one.

1. On Organizing The South

The largely non-union South remains a central battleground in the class struggle in the United States. Southern workers are forced to endure lower wages, fewer benefits, and more oppressive working and living conditions than workers in other parts of the country. For this reason, the South continues to be a haven for runaway plants and has the effect of depressing the standard of living of workers nationally.

A large Black proletariat is concentrated in southern states. Organizing these workers would empower them and enable them to play more of a leadership role in the workers move-

Support for Democratic Rights and Freedoms

The following statement was submitted by members of the Workers Unity Network to the March 23-24, 1996, meeting of the National Executive Committee of Labor Party Advocates.

We stand for equality in the workplace and equality in society as a whole. Accordingly, we oppose discrimination against any sector of the working class based on race, nationality, gender, age, religion, creed, sexual orientation, or immigrant status.

We support measures including affirmative action to compensate for past and present discrimination. We also support equal pay for equal work and equal pay for comparable work (pay equity).

We stand for political representation and democratic rights for all. We support the gains of the civil rights movement and we oppose efforts to roll back those gains, including the attempts to dismantle Black majority legislative districts designed to give political representation to those denied such rights from the days of slavery to the present.

We support women's right to privacy and to exercise their own choice in matters concerning their own bodies. We, therefore, support the court's holding in *Roe v. Wade*.

ment as a whole, as well as in the African American liberation movement.

Barrett/Saunders speak highly of Black Workers for Justice (BWFJ), which has been struggling for 15 years to get the labor movement to commit massive resources to organizing the South. Yet when members of BWFJ submitted a resolution asking the labor party to support this objective, Barrett/Saunders — for reasons which are inexplicable to me — oppose it! They argue that the AFL-CIO already calls for organizing the South, so we don't need to mention it in the Labor Party's program. Shall we then delete the demand for repeal of Taft-Hartley for the same reason? Should we comb through the Labor Party's program and remove from it everything the AFL-CIO favors? Surely, this is frivolous reasoning.

A further objection by Barrett/Saunders: why put a call to organize the South in the labor party's program when the party is "in no position to carry it out"? Shall we then expurgate from the program all planks, including the call for banning the hiring of scabs, which the fledgling new party cannot foreseeably "carry out"? If so, not many planks will remain!

The fact is that the Labor Party has an important contribution to make to the struggle to organize the South by pressuring the AFL-CIO to implement its stated program. Moreover, by raising the question of organizing the South, the Labor Party helps educate workers on the importance of this issue to the working class and to the Black liberation struggle.

2. On the Adequacy of the Initial Draft Program

As a result of the intervention of members of the Workers Unity Network and others, the initial draft program was significantly strengthened. The program adopted by the founding convention of the Labor Party contains the following planks, which the initial draft omitted:

- Condemnation of all forms of terrorism against African American churches.
- Condemnation of police brutality.
- Defense of majority Black voting districts.
- Support for statehood for the District of Columbia.
- No discrimination because of race, gender, ethnicity, disability, national origin, age, creed, sexual orientation, or native tongue.
- Defense of immigrant workers' rights.
- Comparable pay for women.
- Pro-choice on reproductive rights.
- Strong sanctions against sexual harassment.

The first four of these planks were added to the program during the course of the convention, thanks to the initiative and leadership of the Black workers caucus, supported by its allies.

Barrett/Saunders endorsed the initial draft with none of these provisions in it, arguing they could come later. Yet these planks were won in the here and now at the Cleveland convention,

without causing the divisiveness and splits of which Barrett/Saunders were so fearful.

What is particularly troubling in all this is Barrett/Saunders' belief that the most oppressed sections of the working class should hold back in asserting their rights around specific issues so as not to risk alienating certain union officials. That is hardly the message one would expect to find in a revolutionary socialist journal.

3. On Prematurely Organizing "Factional Formations" to Intervene in the LPA Development

The Workers Unity Network is not a "factional formation." It is a loose network with a constructive program that it takes to the workers movement, in which its members function, and to the labor party. It seeks to discuss and link up with those who share its views, and to convince others of the correctness of its program. How is that "factional"?

Of course, now that the Cleveland convention is behind us, we have the benefit of hindsight to determine whether WUN functioned in a factional way. The record speaks for itself: WUN members took many initiatives in fighting for the Network's program, helping organize a Black workers caucus, a Latina/o caucus, a women's caucus, getting the convention to call for a national labor march in Detroit in support of the striking newspaper workers, and advancing international labor solidarity by organizing a well-attended gathering addressed by labor leaders and labor party leaders from other countries.

Obviously, others besides WUN members were involved in these initiatives. But starting with the WUN meeting the first night of the convention (attended by 117 people), it became clear that having an organized formation in the field committed to a consistent class line contributed to producing positive changes in the program adopted by the convention as a whole. The result is that the Labor Party is better positioned now to reach out to the most oppressed sectors of the working class and win them to its cause.

There was nothing "premature" about having a formation in place with such a perspective. Without it, activists would have had less opportunity to share ideas and experiences in order to influence events in a positive direction.

4. On Taking Proposals Only to the LPA National Executive Committee and Not "Counterposing" WUN's Program to the LPA Leadership

This reflects the "follow the leader" methodology Barrett/Saunders adopted. As noted earlier, they would have settled for the diluted and inadequate program initially put forward by the leadership.

Certainly Tony Mazzocchi played an outstanding and indispensable role in pulling together significant forces in the labor movement and organizing a very credible founding convention. For this he deserves immense credit.

But that doesn't mean that class conscious workers should follow uncritically all aspects of the Mazzocchi group's orientation as to how a labor party should be built. Mazzocchi said early on, "We aren't organizing around a 'progressive' agenda. We're trying to organize the working class around their economic interests, and many of them are opposed to the 'progressive' agenda." Do Barrett/Saunders agree with that kind of narrow economism?

Of course, a "progressive agenda" means a commitment to the Black freedom struggle, the struggle of other oppressed nationalities, women's rights, gay rights, etc. Should we have passively acquiesced to omitting these from the Labor Party agenda?

Alexander Cockburn, writing in the July 1 *Nation*, says, "Mazzocchi has always made it clear that he regards social issues as poison to the embryo party." The Workers Unity Network, from the beginning, has taken the opposite view. We have argued that the "social issues" must be squarely addressed, that the Labor Party — like the union movement — must speak out strongly and unambiguously on behalf of the most exploited and oppressed sectors of the working class, that every effort must be made to win these sectors to the party.

So, yes, we have for some time "counterposed" our perspective to the one advanced by some in the labor party leadership (as shown in their initial draft program). And we would never accept the idea that the struggle over the conflicting perspectives should be fought out only in the top leadership body. That is an elitist and bureaucratic notion, and it is appalling to see it advanced in *BIDOM* by the journal's two managing editors.

For the record, WUN made every effort to convince the Executive Committee of its position. At the March 23-24 meeting, where a dozen of the 60 people present were members of the Workers Unity Network, we proposed an alternative to the Section 11 language submitted by the leadership (see sidebar).

The proof of the pudding is, of course, in the eating. The final document adopted by the convention contains excellent planks on economic questions. But it also addresses the "social issues" far more forthrightly than in the original.

The program is not all we would like it to be. But it is a good start. And the Workers Unity Network, through the struggle it conducted with its allies, helped contribute to the final product.

5. On What Issues Are Basic to a Labor Party

Barrett/Saunders argue that a labor party could still do much without addressing the basic issues raised by the WUN resolutions.

But a labor party in the U.S., unless it breaks cleanly and definitively with the bosses' parties; unless it champions the struggles of national liberation movements and wins workers of color to its banner; unless it fights resolutely for

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Once Again on the Value of Consensus in the Process of Building the Labor Party

by Tom Barrett and George Saunders

Adolph Reed Jr., in his article "Building Solidarity" (August issue of *Progressive* magazine) discusses how the Labor Party platform was worked out and exposes the fallacies of the "run candidates now" approach, which was defeated at the convention.

Reed sets his evaluation of what happened, and its implications, against the background of the real, practical functioning of trade unions in the day-to-day conflict with employers.

Reed writes: "Workers in a particular shop are in the same basic position and share the same basic interests relative to their employer. Recognizing these common interests is the essence of a union, the foundation from which the bargaining unit, the trade-union local, the international, the federation of internationals, and the [labor] party arise.

"Because its glue is concrete objectives, union solidarity necessarily requires negotiation, compromise, and toleration of differences. It's no accident that trade unions are the most racially integrated voluntary associations in American life. People don't always overcome their prejudices, but they have to learn to accommodate each other. That necessary accommodation, and the pragmatic, mutual interests it serves, can subsequently break down racist, sexist, nativist, or homophobic tendencies.

"The labor movement has by no means always lived up to this potential. That's one of the reasons it has fallen on such hard times. Business unionism and willing participation in the system of racial and gender hierarchy have led to defining the boundaries of the 'we' too narrowly, even to the point of actively organizing to preserve white, male privilege. Too often, unions have upheld a false distinction between 'economic' and 'social' issues to avoid challenging racial and gender injustice. Nevertheless, the model of union solidarity is our only path to building the kind of mass movement we need to realize a progressive national and global agenda."

Incidentally, the great potential of organized labor, and its real accomplishments, as described above, are the reason why we and many other former members of the Socialist Workers Party (before it degenerated) supported the need for radicals to get back into the unions once the Cold War anti-Communist witch hunt atmosphere had receded in the 1970s thanks to the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the overall radicalization of the '60s. Those who wish to radically change and improve the existing social system need to be in the unions or working with them, for example, in the Labor Party, because the organized working class is the most powerful and practical

engine for such change, as Marx observed a century and a half ago.

Object Lesson in Power of Union Solidarity

An "object lesson in the power of union solidarity" can be seen, Reed says, in the way the Labor Party's program and constitution were developed and adopted.

The committees that drafted these documents, he stresses, each *worked as a collective*.

"The program committee, of which I was a member, over a three-day period constructed a program document based on more than 160 resolutions submitted by chapters and individual members, results of research and workshops conducted by the Labor Institute with several thousand unionized workers, and intense deliberation among ourselves. We made all our decisions through deliberation and consensus, talking through each section until we agreed on its substance and language unanimously."

Reed, together with Howard Botwinick of the Central New York Labor Party Advocates (LPA) chapter, with input from Les Leopold of the Labor Institute, had drafted a program which was reviewed and discussed in March by LPA's interim National Committee, then circulated and discussed among LPA chapters and members. (The text of that draft may be found in last month's *BIDOM*.) The final version of the program adopted by the convention was a great improvement on the March draft.

An example of the responsive way the program committee worked, functioning as a collective with thorough deliberation and consensual agreement, may be seen in some new wording that appeared near the beginning of the final text. It reflects a proposal submitted to the platform committee by Paul Le Blanc of Pittsburgh LPA (a member of Workers Unity Network, incidentally). Le Blanc's wording and his motivation for it were also printed in last month's *BIDOM*.

"We can curb corporate power only if we unite around a common vision of economic justice and fairness. Real democracy includes all of us. We work in all kinds of occupations, and come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. We are women as well as men." (Section 4 of the Labor Party constitution, "End Bigotry: An Injury to One Is an Injury to All.")

How the Program Committee Worked

Reed continues his account of how the program was arrived at:

"Once the program committee had generated a consensual draft, we met with the constitution

committee, made up of representatives of five of the major endorsing union bodies, to receive their suggestions and concerns. Although the committees differed seriously on certain issues, we struggled, negotiated, and compromised until we all could unite comfortably around each section of the program document. Everyone on the committee came away proud of what we had accomplished and enriched by the process.

Reed mentions the "truly exemplary group of colleagues," in addition to Botwinick and himself, who served on the platform committee:

"...David Campbell of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, Local 1-675; Kit Costello of the California Nurses Association; Linda Jenkins of the Communication Workers of America, Local 1180; Kathy King of the Northern New Jersey LPA chapter; Don DeMoro of the East Bay LPA chapter; Les Leopold and Mike Merrill of the Labor Institute; and Calvin Zon of the United Mine Workers."

Reed explains that the two committees recognized that "supporting each other's work without reservations was necessary for moving the convention's agenda along. We also understood that such support could emerge only from a participatory process in which we negotiated consensus on our proposals for the larger body and then explained the consensual positions — including the negotiations and compromises reflected in them — to the constituencies represented. This in turn was the basis for building a wider solidarity as the union delegations caucused among themselves and determined whether and how to operate as a coherent bloc on the convention floor."

The Disagreement over Running Candidates

Then Reed takes up the snag this process ran into over the controversial question of running candidates now.

"The importance of this solidarity-based democracy was clearest in the debate about electoral politics. A joint proposal from the program and constitution committees prohibits Labor Party entities from running or endorsing candidates for office at least until the 1998 convention. The proposal went to the major union delegations just as the program and constitution drafts had.

"One major union delegation, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), dissented from the larger union consensus and introduced an amendment from the floor that would have permitted state and local entities to run and endorse candidates [now]. After considerable, lively debate, the amendment was defeated, largely (but not ex-

clusively, since many LPA chapter delegates also voted against it) on the strength of the other unions' bloc voting."

Reed argues that the disagreement over running candidates reflects two distinct conceptions of politics:

"On the one hand was an idea of political action that is ultimately a form of bearing witness, taking a public moral stand as a self-justifying act. In this view the most important criteria shaping the positions and strategies that we adopt are existential, primarily a matter of indicating who we are and what we stand for and believe.

"On the other hand was a view of politics as an incremental organizing activity. From that perspective, positions and strategies must be tempered by the need to appeal to people who don't already agree with us on all points but who can understand that we address their interests as no one else does.

"The *practical principle* [emphasis added] is to try to create a program and vision that can reach and educate the broadest possible base without sacrificing a working-class agenda... This is the mind-set, for instance, that shaped the program's emphasis on the economic and class content of what are often characterized as 'social issues.'"

Building on the Model of Union Solidarity

Reed continues:

"The idea is to build a coalition on the model of union solidarity: developing a base, consolidating it, expanding it, consolidating again, and so on. This is what the joint committee's political action statement meant by an 'organizing model of politics,' a strategy based on intensive, issue-based organizing of the old-fashioned shop-to-shop, door-to-door technique. The paramount objective is to reach out to people who aren't already mobilized in left politics, to begin a conversation that builds a movement."

Reed comments on the widely noted division that seemed to arise between the front of the hall, where the union delegations were seated, and the back of the hall, where the chapter delegations were.

"Proponents of the witness-bearing approach came disproportionately — though again *not exclusively* — from the at-large and chapter delegations, and the union delegations were most solidly rooted in the organizing approach, though many people from the chapters also supported the organizing view." (Emphasis added; the delegations we were part of, the New Jersey and Arizona LPA chapters, voted solidly for the organizing approach, as did many other chapters or chapter delegates we were aware of.)

We would agree with Reed's observation on this matter: "...the nature of trade-union work imposes a practical and strategic discipline often lacking these days on the left." (Again, the emphasis is ours.)

Practical Arguments Not Answered
Reed points out that no one who argued for running candidates now responded directly to the several, very practical opposing arguments. These were:

"(1) opting for an electoral strategy [now] would by law cut off access to the trade-union treasury funds needed to finance the [Labor] Party; (2) a number of key international unions and locals that have endorsed the Labor Party would withdraw their support if we were to enter electoral politics at this point; (3) other unions that would consider endorsing us wouldn't do so if we were to get the electoral route prematurely; (4) we don't have the strength [now] to be successful electorally, and running losing campaigns only demoralizes our base and drains resources because political candidacies are an ineffective vehicle for organizing; and (5) even if we were to win some offices, we aren't strong enough to keep officeholders in line, to keep them from — or help them avoid — rolling over for corporate interests.

"The responses to these very concrete and practical points were uniformly abstract and evasively moralistic — the stuff, that is, of bearing witness." (Reed also asks, since when did running in elections become a "litmus test" for supposed revolutionaries?)

Reed concludes:

"The failure of disciplined strategic thinking on the left is a serious problem. It reflects and stems from the extreme demoralization and isolation that has plagued ['the left'] for two decades. We'll never be able to build the kind of movement we need unless the left can find its moorings and approach politics once again as an instrumental, rather than an expressive, activity. Emulating the model of union solidarity would be a big step in the right direction."

We agree.

Final Note: A Discussion on "Democracy"

We conclude by reprinting the following exchange that appeared on a computer network conference discussing the Labor Party. The first contribution is by a certain Maggie Coleman; she is answered by Adolph Reed Jr.

"As one can read from all the 'male centric' names in the organizing list, and as one can see from the dual membership — one for individuals and one for large unions, the message is clear: no women and minorities need apply. — *maggie coleman mscoleman@aol.com*"

Reed's response was as follows:

"Do you have a clue who this person is? I don't know what she means by 'male centric names on the organizing list'; I don't even know what she means by 'organizing list.'"

"I do know that the LPA Interim Executive Committee was about 40–50 percent female, between 10 and 20 percent Black, and roughly 10 percent Latino, not counting FLOC [Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a mostly Latino union], which is an endorsing international. The

program committee was half female and one-third Black. The constitution committee was roughly similar in demographic composition and FLOC had a representative on it.

"As to dual membership, it's certainly not unusual for unions to have institutional membership in a LABOR party. Moreover, what is there to recommend a notion of 'democracy' that gives the same voice to someone who represents no one, whose commitment is a \$20 membership and a ticket to Cleveland, who may or may not have been involved at all in building the organization and trade unions that represent thousands of people and have committed substantial organizational resources?

"For those who don't want to be part of a party centered in the unions in this way, there is the New Party. May their tribe increase. Frankly, I sometimes got the impression that some of the self-righteous posturing from the 'left' at the Convention smacked of the kind of petit bourgeois entitlement I see in the undergraduates I teach — a blithe lack of recognition about how we happened to get to Cleveland in the first place, how we got into the Convention Center, where the resources and effort came from to make it happen. Endorsing unions did it. And of course they want and should have a significant stake in what their resources are used to do.

"The presumption that that's an outrage that silences other voices is both naive politically and smacks of self-indulgence. Of course, the [Labor] Party can't be and shouldn't be built exclusively on the unions, but it also can't be built without their resources. And those resources won't be committed without the endorsing unions playing a key role. Which is as it should be; for all their limitations, the unions are where the working class is organized politically in so far as it is organized politically as a class at all.

"The weighted voting system for the National Council is only an extension of the weighted voting system for the Convention, which was a condition of delegate selection and participation laid out six months in advance. Accepting delegate status meant accepting weighted voting; therefore, when one or two affronted 'democrats' objected early in the Convention that lack of one-person, one-vote was a travesty, it was tantamount to arguing that we should be [somewhere else] rather than in Cleveland.

"One more point about these charges. Of the total of 1,367 delegates all but about 110 — the latter were the at-large caucus, many of whose members, ironically, insistently struck the posture of the voice of the unrepresented masses — were elected representatives from larger bodies, LPA chapters and trade union bodies. This translates into all but 2 of the more than 2,900 votes allocated. There has been no similarly representative gathering on the left in my memory. That's not chopped liver on the democratic front." □

The Important Issues in the Middle East Conflict

by Tom Barrett

Professor Morris Slavin's letter (printed on the following page) was surprising to us. We have never made a secret of our solidarity with the Arab people's struggle against the Zionist state of Israel at any time during this journal's twelve years of publication. *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* continues the Fourth International's support of the Arab Revolution and intransigent opposition to Zionism, both of which have been integral to the FI's program since its foundation in 1938.

Since its launch in 1983, the *Bulletin IDOM* has written primarily for readers already committed to revolutionary socialism. For them, the issue was never whether or not to oppose the state of Israel, but rather what could be done to help the Palestinian Arabs win the right to self-determination in *all* their historic homeland.

Professor Slavin is a friend and supporter of this journal who nevertheless supports the state of Israel. His letter is a reminder that many of our readers, including radicalizing trade unionists — rank and file members and elected officials — do not share all the assumptions made by revolutionary Marxists. It is therefore necessary and important to explain why socialists support the Arab revolution, and why that is relevant to the labor struggle in the United States. The labor movement has launched its own political party, and of necessity its program initially has limitations in the interests of breadth and unity. However, revolutionists have the obligation to educate and explain important political issues *now* so that in the future labor's political representatives will be able to go beyond the programmatic limits imposed on them at this time.

To be sure, there is a much broader awareness of Israel's true nature today than at the time of the Six-Day War in 1967. Those who oppose — or even question — U.S. support to Israel are no longer automatically subject to accusations of anti-Semitism. Working people throughout the world today see Israel's armed forces not as a band of courageous idealists but as a powerful professional fighting force, with state-of-the-art technology and weapons, including the world's most popular semiautomatic assault rifle, the Israeli-manufactured Uzi. When Menachem Begin and his Likud coalition came to power it put to rest any notions of a "progressive" or "socialist" state of Israel. Begin's and his associates' terrorist activities during the British Mandate period (1918–1948) were again brought to public attention. And the Palestinian uprising of 1987–90 — the *intifadeh* — ex-

posed the true character of the Israeli occupation and the suffering of the Arab masses.

But recognition that the Israeli state has done things which are oppressive is not the same as understanding that the Israeli state is *inherently* oppressive. Acknowledgment that the Arabs have legitimate complaints against Israel is not the same as supporting their right to self-determination in all of Palestine, let alone a pan-Arab state which would break down the borders which have divided the Arab world since the end of World War I. Most importantly, a desire for Middle East peace is not the same as opposing U.S. military aid to Israel and U.S. military intervention in the Middle East as a whole — such as the infamous Gulf War of 1990–91.

The broad moral and historical issues — whether or not the Jews are a nation which has a right to self-determination and whether or not the Jews have a historic right to that section of the eastern Mediterranean coast between Lebanon and the Sinai peninsula — are beyond our scope here. Readers interested in pursuing those issues, which are important, should read *The Jewish Question* by Abram Léon (published by Pathfinder Press). Léon was a Belgian revolutionist and a close friend and teacher of our late comrade Ernest Mandel. Mandel escaped Nazi imprisonment and survived the Holocaust. Unfortunately, Léon did not; he perished in the Auschwitz death camp as World War II was drawing to a close.

Our focus is, and must be, the present-day reality of Zionist occupation of the land of Palestine, and the oppression of a Third World people by settlers of European origin. This has much more relevance than abstract theoretical debates over national rights or land claims based in ancient religious tradition. Let there be no confusion: the state of Israel is imperialism's outpost in the Middle East. The struggle of the Arabs to regain their country is an inseparable part of the worldwide struggle against imperialist domination. For revolutionary Marxists this is not a subject for intellectual debate, but for uncompromising battle.

Zionism: Rooted in Colonialism

The modern Zionist movement has its origin in the 1890s, during the high tide of European colonialism. Its most prominent founder, the Hungarian Jewish journalist Theodor Herzl, witnessed a groundswell of anti-Semitism in France around the case of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish army captain falsely accused of spying for Germany. (In 1894 Dreyfus was sentenced

to life imprisonment on Devil's Island; in 1906 he was completely exonerated and reinstated in the army with a promotion in rank.) Reacting to the mobs' cries of "Down with the Jews!" Herzl called on Jews to establish a state of their own, where they would no longer be threatened by anti-Semites in the streets or in the centers of power.

From the beginning, Herzl's proposal for a Jewish state involved territory in the colonial world — in Africa or Asia, where the Great Powers of Europe had carved out "spheres of influence," protectorates, and direct possessions. Palestine, then under Turkish rule, was the most desirable location, but it was not the only one considered by the founders of Zionism. Present-day Uganda, for example, was an alternative location considered by the early Zionist movement. The first congress of the World Zionist Organization (WZO) in 1897 decided, however, that Palestine was the movement's first and only choice. Jewish colonization began shortly thereafter.

The Zionist propaganda machine has over the years repeated the lie that throughout history Muslims have hated and oppressed Jews. The historical record shows something different. In all societies where Islam was the dominant religion — and "dominant" is the operative word — Jews have been tolerated and allowed to prosper economically, though they were excluded from the government and army, as were Christians. The period of the primitive accumu-



Letter to the Editorial Committee of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*

I would like to ask Tom Barrett a few questions before commenting on his recent lead article on the Middle East. Why does he think that Arab nationalism is superior to Jewish nationalism? If not, why does he fail to acknowledge that Jews, like Palestinians, have a right to their own state? Why does he speak only of "Palestinian masses," never of Israeli (or Jewish) masses? And why does he deny the possibility that both Jews and Palestinians are entitled to live in peace?

To begin with, Barrett uses the words and expressions like "Zionism," "Zionists," "Zionism and imperialism," "brutality of the Zionist occupation," "Zionist forces," as pejorative terms. Until recently the anti-Israel, and, at times, the anti-Semitic states in the Middle East spoke of the "Zionist entity," never of Israel. Barrett writes in this chauvinistic tradition.

In the very first paragraph Barrett makes the incredible statement that Rabin led "the Zionist troops in capturing the West Bank and Gaza Strip...." The implication is clear: the purpose of the 1967 war was to capture the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Not one word that Israel was fighting for its very existence in 1967! Can anyone who calls himself an internationalist, writing in a Marxist journal, seriously doubt that on the eve of the Six-Day War Israel was faced with an invasion of Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces, encouraged by Stalinist Russia? That Nasser and his henchmen were predicting "massacres" of the Jewish population comparable to the massacres of populations during the Crusades? None of this is of any consequence for Barrett.

Moreover, Barrett slanders Rabin as being responsible for the suffering of Beirut's people, and gives the impression that they were right in celebrating his assassination at the hands of an Orthodox Jewish fanatic. The Israeli army, under Rabin's leadership, was victorious in defending the wretched remnants of the Holocaust and the few lucky ones who lived outside Hitler's Europe. There's the "Zionist" crime! They defended the Israeli Jews successfully. Had the Arab armies and their Palestinian allies been successful does Barrett think that there would have been any

kind of a "peace process" with Israel, a peace even in quotes?

Barrett's statement that "the fundamental character of the Zionist state cannot be preserved without a constant state of war," is unworthy of a reply. Any objective observer, not only an alleged internationalist, knows that Israel was willing from the beginning to surrender conquered territory for genuine peace with its neighbors. Witness the return of Sinai, the transfer of Palestinian towns to the PLO, and the current negotiations over the Golan Heights. Can Barrett cite any other state whose ostensible character requires "a constant state of war"? Or is this characteristic "fundamental" only to a Jewish state?

Is Barrett serious when he declares that "Israeli society has come to depend for low-paid labor"? [*sic*] Of course Palestinian labor is exploited. This is the nature of capitalism. Capitalists will seek low-paid labor whether they are American, German, or Israeli entrepreneurs. But it is questionable whether any modern economy, including "the Zionist economy," is "dependent" on low-paid labor.

Barrett reduces the complex conflicts among the states of the Middle East and between Israelis and Palestinians to "the drive of imperialism." Of course the imperialist powers have always been interested in exploiting the region for profit ("oil and turmoil"), but can anyone deny that the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is one of two competing nationalisms, cultures, and religions for control of the same territory? Therein lies the tragedy in the region. Imperialism is not alone that "requires stability in the Middle East"; its people also require it.

As to Arabs "taking on the Israeli army," it seems to me that the reluctance of some Israeli soldiers to act as cops in repressing Palestinians is to their credit. The large demonstration for peace with Palestinians at which Rabin was killed is proof that "the peace process" has many supporters. These Israelis, not only the leaders of the Labor Party, realize that continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza would have "disastrous consequences" for Israel. All the more reason to make the peace process a genuine one. None of this denies the courage and

commitment of young Palestinians struggling against the occupation of their land.

Barrett states that the "peace process" (always in quotation marks) will not end the Palestinians from struggling "for self-determination in all parts of their homeland." If this were true, many would urge the Israeli people and their leaders not to engage in any kind of peace process — with or without quotation marks. For what is Barrett saying? He is declaring exactly what the Palestinian fanatics and their Arab supporters are announcing. Our homeland is the entire territory occupied by "the Zionist entity." In other words, the Jews have no right to an independent existence; there should be no Israeli state.

I don't believe this, any more than I believe that the Palestinian masses will never accept the right of Jews to live in a state of their own. When some of us were young Trotskyists we advocated a binational state, with Palestinians and Jews sharing power in a state of their own. Too much blood has been shed by both, however, to expect this kind of solution today. But there is no reason to doubt that a United Socialist States of the Middle East can become a viable alternative to the problems of the Middle East today. An anti-imperialist bloc against big power intervention in the area, and an end to the strife between and among these states, can also heal the war between Israelis and Palestinians.

No Marxist questions the fundamental right of the Palestinians to have a state of their own; nor does any internationalist question the right of Jews to live under their own state. Even Barrett agrees that though flawed and limited, the peace process is a partial victory for Palestinians. It is also a partial victory for the Jewish masses who long for peace with the Arab neighbors.

Finally, if a socialist society is ever to emerge from the ethnic conflicts of the Middle East, a gradual peace process, though flawed, must first lead to a genuine peace. When Israelis and Palestinians begin to trust each other "the masses" of both nations can begin to challenge the system that exploits them. There can be no class struggle when all classes of a nation are menaced by their neighbors.

—Morris Slavin

lation of capital was a time of terrible anti-Semitic oppression in Europe. After King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella defeated the last remnants of Islamic power in Spain in 1492 (the precondition for their financing of Columbus's voyages), they expelled — or brutally killed — all those who would not accept the Roman Catholic religion. Spain's large Jewish population was driven out *en masse*. They found refuge in the Islamic Ottoman Empire, and to this day a dialect of Spanish can be heard spoken in Istanbul by their descendants.

Islam traditionally has not been tolerant of all religions, but throughout history Islamic states did tolerate Christianity and Judaism, since all three religions revere the same single deity. In Ottoman Turkey, which ruled in Palestine at the time of the first Jewish colonization, Jews and Christians enjoyed considerable autonomy, though they continued to be excluded from the army and government unless they converted to Islam.

When the first Jewish colonists arrived in Turkish-ruled Palestine in the early years of this century, they were welcomed by the Arab in-

habitants, in stark contrast to the pogroms which were driving Jews out of Eastern Europe. The anti-Semitism which pervaded Christian society to a degree which is hard to imagine today did not exist in the Arab world at that time.

Yet within a generation Jews and Arabs were fighting each other with the kind of intense hatred that we see today in Bosnia. How did it happen?

The answer is that the Jewish colonists were — *colonialists*. When it became clear to the Palestinian Arabs that the European Jewish immigrants were not there simply to escape op-

Let There Be No Mistake

Morris Slavin asks, "Why does [Barrett] think that Arab nationalism is superior to Jewish nationalism?" This is a false question, out of the context of the real situation. The issue is not Jewish nationalism in the abstract, but the Jewish nationalism of the state of Israel, and, yes, I support Arab nationalism and reject Israeli nationalism. I reject the notion that Israeli Jews have any right whatsoever to a state in the Middle East, binational, partitioned, or otherwise. This internationalist not only questions but completely opposes the so-called "right" of Jews to live under their own state at the expense of the Arabs or any other people who have been the victims of colonialism. And in 1971, the year I joined the Socialist Workers Party, the SWP's national convention overwhelmingly reaffirmed that position.

The traditional socialist attitude toward nationalism is to oppose it, and rightly so. The socialist society for which we strive is a world in which national borders have been erased and war has become nothing but a bad memory. Marx and Engels proclaimed this aspiration in *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, and it retains its validity today. However, the division of the world among the European imperialist powers during the final decades of the last century (joined by the United States and Japan as the century ended) complicated matters. Additionally, the struggle for self-determination of oppressed nations within old empires, such as tsarist Russia and Hapsburg Austria, required a positive response by the workers movement. Lenin explained clearly that the socialist movement had an obligation to support the nationalism of the oppressed and to oppose the nationalism of the oppressor. Thus, the new Soviet government unconditionally granted the right of self-determination to all the nationalities oppressed in the tsarist prisonhouse. The Third International supported and aided bourgeois nationalist movements in China and Turkey during the 1920s while opposing the nationalism that led too many so-called socialists to support their governments during World War I — motivated by the idea that "there can be no class struggle when all classes of a nation

are menaced by their neighbors," as Professor Slavin expresses it.

One must ask if Professor Slavin would equate the nationalism of the Black African people of South Africa with the nationalism of the Afrikaners, who, after all, have lived in South Africa for nearly 350 years, nearly as long as English-speaking settlers have lived in North America. They made an attempt at "binationalism" — partitioning the territory and separating the races. The policy was known as *apartheid*, and its final defeat in 1994 was a great victory for oppressed peoples throughout the world. White people have full civil and democratic rights in the new South Africa, but they are a small minority in a population in which every citizen has one vote. And Professor Slavin is well aware of the fear within Israeli society that Jews may someday be a minority in their "own" state.

Lastly, the one thing the current Middle East negotiations will not achieve is peace. Even if a Palestinian state is established — something which Benjamin Netanyahu has pledged not to allow — and even though the PLO has renounced its goal of the destruction of the Zionist state (which in my opinion is a concession bordering on betrayal) there will be no peace as long as the state of Israel exists. The Arab minority within Israel will continue to fight for its homeland just as the Catholic nationalists in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland have done, even though a predominantly Catholic republic exists in the Twenty-Six Counties and even though the Protestants are the majority in the North.

The Arabs have never had a problem with Jews living in Palestine, nor will they in the future — that has been made explicit by Palestinian leaders. But there can be no "Socialist United States of the Middle East" or any such ultimate goal unless the national aspirations of the Arab people for complete independence from imperialism are fulfilled. And they can depend on the Fourth International and the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* for whatever aid and solidarity we can extend.

— Tom Barrett

pression in their own countries but to take over and establish an exclusive Jewish state, peaceful coexistence in the land of Palestine ceased to be possible. The problem was compounded by the Zionists' close collaboration with the British Empire, which took over Palestine after the Turkish defeat in World War I.

The duplicity of British diplomacy during that war was remarkable even by turn-of-the-century imperialist standards. In 1916, with British encouragement, Sherif Hussein of Mecca, the great-grandfather of Jordanian King Hussein, declared a *jihad* (holy war) against the

Turks, who had attempted to tighten central control over their disintegrating empire. The flamboyant Colonel T.E. Lawrence led the uprising jointly with Sherif Hussein's son Faisal. Britain promised a kingdom of Syria to Faisal and a kingdom of Iraq to his brother Abdullah in exchange for their war against Turkey, which was allied with Germany.

In 1917, however, Foreign Secretary Arthur James Lord Balfour made a different and contradictory promise to the WZO. The Balfour Declaration declared Britain's support for the formation of a "National Home for the Jewish

People" in the territory of Palestine. In contrast to the thousands of Jewish socialists who opposed the imperialist World War, Zionists supported their governments in the war. The Balfour Declaration was intended to win Jewish support for the British cause, and many Zionist colonists in Palestine, including David Ben-Gurion (who was to become Israel's first prime minister), joined the British army.

The British had no intention of keeping either promise, as it turned out. One of the first acts of the new Soviet government upon taking power in November 1917 was to publish all the secret diplomatic agreements hidden in the archives of the tsarist regime and the Provisional Government. Among them was a document called the Sykes-Picot Agreement, negotiated secretly between the British and French governments in 1916. It outlined a division of Turkey's Middle Eastern territories between Britain and France, which gave the British control of the oil-producing regions and an overland route to India. Colonel Lawrence and Prince Faisal attended the post-World War I Versailles conference, vainly attempting to negotiate independence at least for the Hijaz region on the eastern bank of the Red Sea (which includes the holy cities of Mecca and Medina). The U.S.-supported conquest of the Hijaz by King Abdulaziz ibn Saud of the Nejd (the central desert region of the Arabian peninsula, of which Riyadh is the center) put an end to any dreams of a Hashemite kingdom for another generation and created the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 1922 the newly-formed League of Nations put its stamp of approval on British rule in Palestine in the form of a "Mandate" to govern until such time as the country was "ready" for independence.

The Outbreak of Violence

Resentment by the Palestinian Arabs toward the Zionist settlers was not, however, provoked by diplomatic agreements of which the overwhelmingly peasant population had little knowledge. Rather, the acquisition of land by Jews from absentee landlords and the subsequent eviction of the tenant farmers created tinderboxes of anti-Jewish hostility in the Palestinian cities. Extremist leaders on both sides staged provocations on numerous occasions during the 1920s and 1930s.

For example, the Zionist Revisionist Movement, more commonly known as Betar, was a direct ancestor of the Herut party, the largest component of the opposition Likud coalition in Israel. It was led by the demagogue Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose followers chanted, "Italy for Mussolini, Germany for Hitler, Palestine for us! Long Live Jabotinsky!" This group openly favored the total expulsion of all Arabs from Palestine. On the other side were agitators such as al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti (highest ranking Islamic cleric) of Jerusalem. In 1929, he seized upon a march by Zionists to the Western (Wailing) Wall and accused the Jews of attempting to take over the al-Aqsa Mosque, the location from which Muhammad is said to have ascended into heaven. The ensuing violence left

over 200 people dead, a roughly equal number of Arabs and Jews.

Jewish immigration into Palestine sharply increased after the Nazi victory in Germany in 1933. Though the British government denied that it planned to give all of Palestine to the Zionists and furthermore promised to restrict Jewish immigration, Arabs were not satisfied, and in 1936 began a six-month general strike and uprising which required massive British military intervention to bring under control.

Supporters of Zionism within the workers movement, no doubt including Professor Slavín, will consistently point out the links between the Arab leadership and the Third Reich during the British Mandate period. It cannot be denied. The correspondence between the Grand Mufti and the Nazi government has been published and is available for anyone to inspect. In it Husseini expressed his support for the Nazis' world conquest and for their plan to exterminate the Jews. In contrast to the Palestinian struggle of the post-1967 period, the Arab uprising of the 1930s was not simply anti-Zionist. It was anti-Jewish. That is the unfortunate reality, and to deny it only gives Zionism credibility which it does not deserve.

There were two causes for the Arab leadership's support of the Nazis, but they stemmed from one fundamental cause — the Arab leadership's class character. The displaced peasants and urban slum dwellers were led by a wealthy elite of absentee landlords, merchants, lawyers, and clerics. This city-based aristocracy had been wealthy and powerful when Europe was going through the Dark Ages, and they thoroughly resented any Europeans, whether British or European Jewish, threatening to displace them from their position at the top of Palestinian society. But at the same time, they had every reason to be concerned lest the dispossessed peasants and urban workers direct their anger at *them*, since it was they who were most responsible for their poverty and oppression to begin with, including the original sale of land to the Zionists. So, they attempted to lead their people to hate the Jews for *who they were*, rather than for *what they did*, because in terms of acts of oppression, the Arab *efendi* were as guilty as the Zionists and had been guilty for a lot longer.

History has conveniently forgotten that within the British Empire there were a number of anti-imperialist movements which were politically allied with and financed by Britain's imperialist enemies. Today we equate the Indian independence movement with Gandhi's Indian National Congress; however, during the 1930s and through World War II, there was another nationalist organization, the Indian National Army, led by Subhas Chandra Bose. There was no secret about where it got its money, its weapons, and its propaganda voice — Japan. The Japanese had no problem exploiting the legitimate resentment of the Indian people against the British imperialists for their own purposes, and a pure-and-simple nationalist like Bose was ideally suited for such a role. Similarly, Germany made use of bourgeois nationalists, in-

cluding al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini, throughout the British Empire and countries where Britain had strong influence. Britain forced the Nazi-sympathizing Reza Shah of Iran to abdicate his throne in favor of his son, who ruled until 1979. Juan Perón's hostility toward Britain and friendliness toward Germany was the consequence of Britain's long domination of the southern cone of South America, and after World War II, many Nazi war criminals found a safe haven in Argentina. Perón as well encouraged violent attacks against Argentina's relatively large Jewish population.

Violence among the three factions — the Zionists, the Palestinians, and the British — continued until 1939, when the British issued the well-known White Paper, which essentially blamed the Zionists for the trouble. Whether the Foreign Office actually held the Zionists to blame is a matter for speculation; the truth was, Britain could not afford a pro-German population in such a strategically important region, and they had to make concessions in order to stabilize the situation. They promised to curtail Jewish immigration and to defend the Arab population from attacks by Zionist paramilitary forces.

Zionism and Fascism

During the 1930s and World War II thousands of Jews fought with great courage against fascism — on the battlefields in Spain, in underground resistance organizations, in refugee rescue missions, and in doomed uprisings like that of the Warsaw Ghetto — and a large proportion of them gave their lives. Their concern was saving their people from the Nazi Holocaust and getting them to countries where they would be safe. The safest destination of all was the United States, and labor and socialist groups in this country — including the Socialist Workers Party — demanded that the U.S. government "Open the Gates" to all refugees, especially Jews, whose lives were directly threatened by fascism.

By contrast, the Zionist groups had a different motivation, the formation of the state of Israel. Their leaders were quite clear. In 1938 David Ben-Gurion stated, "If I thought it were possible to save all the children of Germany by taking them to England, and only a fraction of them by transporting them to Eretz Israel, I would choose the second solution. For we must be concerned not only with the lives of these children, but also with the history of the people of Israel." While the SWP and other working-class organizations were demanding that the Roosevelt administration abolish all restrictions against Jewish immigration into the United States, the Zionist groups abstained from the struggle. Whether or not that was decisive in the U.S. government's refusal to abolish Jewish immigration quotas we may never know; however, had the U.S. opened its borders to the refugees there is no doubt that thousands of people who died at the Nazis' hands might have been saved.

A right-wing minority of Zionists, including the Betar movement, actually collaborated with the Nazis in Germany, sharing a belief in racial

purity and a desire that Jews and non-Jews be separated. The historical record shows that the Third Reich was far more repressive against Jews who favored integration of Jews within German society. A Gestapo memorandum, quoted by Kurt Grossmann in "Zionists and Non-Zionists under Nazi Law during the 1930s" (yearbook, Vol. VI, p. 310) states: "the members of the Zionist organization, for the reason of their activity oriented toward emigration to Palestine, should not be treated with the same severity as is necessary for the members of German Jewish (assimilationist) organizations."

Such collaboration, to be sure, was rare; furthermore, it would be inaccurate to state that the Nazis supported Zionism, as their favorable correspondence with the Grand Mufti demonstrates. If anything, the Nazis were playing the same two-faced imperialist game with the Palestinian Arabs and the right-wing Zionists that the British had been playing since World War I.

Zionist Terrorism

Armed Zionist groups grew rapidly during the Arab General Strike and uprising of 1936–39. The Haganah was the army which had the official sponsorship of the World Zionist Organization; it was led by David Ben-Gurion. In addition, other Zionist groups sponsored armed militias, including Stern, Palmach, and Irgun Zvai Leumi. The Irgun had its origin in the Betar movement, and was led by Menachem Begin, who became prime minister of Israel in 1977. The Stern gang was led by Yitzhak Shamir, who himself served two terms as Israeli prime minister.

After the publication of the British White Paper in 1939 the Zionists abandoned their hope of achieving statehood under British sponsorship. In 1944 they launched an armed uprising to overthrow the British Mandate and to force the Arabs out of Palestine. It was a campaign of terrorism and — to borrow a phrase from the slaughter in the Balkans — ethnic cleansing. Overseeing the ethnic cleansing on behalf of the Haganah in the Tel Aviv–Jaffa area was Yitzhak Rabin.

In 1947 the British abandoned their Mandate and turned over responsibility for Palestine to the newly organized United Nations. The UN developed a partition plan dividing the territory between the Jews and Arabs and putting the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem under international control. The plan was acceptable to no one. In May 1948 the Zionists declared their independence as the state of Israel, and the surrounding Arab states sent troops to support the Palestinian Arabs in resistance.

When the right-wing Likud coalition won a majority in the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) in 1977 and its leader Menachem Begin became prime minister, the world was reminded of the brutal acts of terrorism committed by the Irgun under his leadership during the 1947–48 period. Begin was personally responsible for blowing up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem with over 500 people inside. The Irgun also carried out one of the most brutal massacres in modern Middle Eastern history at a village near Jerusa-

lem called Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948. The chief representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Palestine at the time, Jacques de Reynier, was on the scene shortly thereafter. The following is excerpted from his report (published in his book *In Jerusalem a Flag Waved Over the Line of Fire*, Geneva, 1950):

Moreover, the Jews have signed a pledge to respect the Geneva Convention and my mission is therefore an official one. This last statement provokes the anger of this [Irgun] officer who asks me to consider once and for all that here it is the Irgun who are in command and nobody else, not even the Jewish Agency with which they have nothing in common.

My [guide] hearing the raised voices intervenes... Suddenly the officer tells me I can act as I see fit but on my own responsibility. He tells me the story of this village populated by about 400 Arabs, disarmed since always and living on good terms with the Jews who encircled them. According to him, the Irgun arrived 24 hours previously and ordered by loudspeaker the whole population to evacuate all the buildings and surrender. There is a 15 minute delay in the execution of the command. Some of the unhappy people came forward and would have been taken prisoners and then turned loose shortly afterwards toward the Arab lines. The rest did not obey the order and suffered the fate they deserved. But one must not exaggerate for there are only a few dead who would be buried as soon as the "clean up" of the village is over. If I find bodies, I can take them with me, but there are certainly no wounded.

This tale gives me cold chills. I return to Jerusalem to find an ambulance and a truck that I had alerted through the Red Shield... I arrive with my convoy in the village and the Arab fire ceases. The [Jewish] troops are in campaign uniforms with helmets. All the young people and even the adolescents, men and women, are armed to their teeth: pistols, machine guns, grenades, and also big cutlasses, most of them still bloody, that they hold in their hands. A young girl with the eyes of a criminal shows me hers still dripping. She carries it around like a trophy. This is the "clean up" team which certainly has accomplished its job very conscientiously.

I try to enter a building. About 10 soldiers surround me with machine guns aimed at me. An officer forbids me to move from the spot. They are going to bring the dead that are there, he says. I then get as furious as ever before in my life and tell these criminals what I think about the way they act, menacing them with the thunder I can muster, then I roughly push aside those who surround me and enter the building.

The first room is dark, completely in disorder, and empty. In the second, I find among smashed furniture covers and all sorts of debris, some cold bodies. They have been cleaned up by machine guns then by grenades. They have been finished by knives.

It is the same in the next room, but just as I am leaving, I hear something like a sigh. I search everywhere, move some bodies and finally find a small foot which is still warm. It is a little 10 year old girl, very injured by grenade, but still alive. I want to take her with me but the officer forbids it and blocks the door. I push him aside and leave with my precious cargo protected by the brave [guide].

The loaded ambulance leaves with orders to return as soon as possible. And because these troops have not dared to attack me directly, it is possible to continue.

I give orders to load the bodies from this house on the truck. Then I go on to the neighboring house and go on. Everywhere I encounter the same terrible sight. I only find two persons still alive, two women, one of whom is an old grandmother, hidden behind the firewood where she kept immobile for at least 24 hours.

There were 400 persons in the village. About 50 had fled, three are still alive, but the rest have been massacred on orders, for as I have noticed, this troop is admirably disciplined and acts only on command.

The Irgun saw to it that news of the Deir Yassin massacre was used to terrorize and intimidate Arabs throughout Palestine, in the hope that they would flee from the slaughter. To a great extent they were successful, and the first wave of Palestinian refugees began filling camps in British-controlled Transjordan (later the Kingdom of Jordan). Two generations have now passed the account of Deir Yassin on to their children. Just as Jews have kept alive the memory of the Holocaust, Palestinian Arabs will never forget the events which led to their dispersal from their homeland.

The Arab Revolution: An Integral Part of the World Anticolonialist Revolution

Zionism began as a colonialist movement in the 1890s. The post-World War II period saw the end of colonialism in a march that began with the victory of the Indian National Congress in 1947, ending nearly three centuries of the British Raj, and culminating with the Vietnamese victory over the United States in 1973 and its final victory over the puppet Saigon regime in 1975. Imperialist world domination was put in serious jeopardy during these two decades, and how it managed to weather the storm would be the subject not of another article but of at least an entire book.

Following the Israeli victory in 1948, the corrupt monarchies imposed on the Arab world by imperialism were swept away one by one by bourgeois nationalist movements. The one exception was the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan, which survived the assassination of King Abdullah primarily because of the political astuteness of his grandson, the reigning King Hussein. (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates have historically had a more complex relationship with the imperialist powers and a considerably smaller and weaker layer of bourgeois intellectuals from which a nationalist movement would naturally develop.) Rival branches of the Arab Socialist Union (also known as the *Ba'ath*, or Rebirth party) have held power in Syria and Iraq since the 1950s, and the successors of the charismatic Gamal Abdel Nasser, who came to power in 1952, continue to rule in Egypt today. The confrontation between Nasser and the alliance of Britain, France, and Israel over his attempt to nationalize the Suez Canal in 1956 and the landing of the U.S. Marines in Lebanon

in response to the overthrow of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958 kept State and Defense Department attention focused on the Middle East; however, the most important crisis — because it involved the Arab masses — was the struggle of the Algerian people to win independence from France. A meeting of fewer than ten people launched the National Liberation Front in 1954. In 1962 it won state power, having been the catalyst for the fall of the French Fourth Republic in 1958.

In Kuwait City in 1958, a young Palestinian engineer, who had served in the Egyptian army in the 1948 and 1956 conflicts, presided over a similar meeting. His name was Yasser Arafat, also known by the *nom de guerre* Abu Amar. The organization which emerged is known as the Palestine National Liberation Movement, whose Arabic initials spell out the word "victory," in Arabic *Fateh*. From the beginning al-Fateh represented a clear change of political direction in the Palestinian struggle. It consciously saw itself as part of the worldwide anticolonialist struggle and was directly influenced by the Algerian revolution then in progress. Its program called for a "Democratic Secular State" in Palestine, in contrast to the Grand Mufti's aim of an Islamic state, and it saw Zionism, not Judaism, as its enemy. Most importantly, it sought to create a Palestinian fighting force, rather than the armies of the Arab states, to fight for Palestinian liberation.

The message that only the Palestinian people themselves could liberate their homeland from Zionism found a receptive audience in the aftermath of the humiliation of June 1967. As Zionist forces captured the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights, the population in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon swelled, and those who remained behind found themselves living under a harsh military occupation.

Early in 1968 Fateh forces engaged the Israeli army at a small West Bank village called Karameh. The Palestinian commandos acquitted themselves well in combat and forced the Israelis to retreat. News of the battle spread like prairie fire from the Gaza slums to the camps in the Jordanian desert. Later in the year, Arafat and his allies were able to wrest the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the Nasserite Ahmed Shuqeiry and transform it into a coalition of al-Fateh and other guerrilla groups fighting to win back their country.

In the early years, the PLO was a genuine coalition of guerrilla groups; all the groups' programs were rooted in the bourgeois nationalism which prevailed in the anticolonialist movements of the 1945-75 period. Some claimed to be Marxist, though their ideas came more from Mao Zedong than from Karl Marx or V.I. Lenin. Others followed the "Arab Socialist" ideology of the Ba'ath parties. Just as the military rulers in Damascus and Baghdad were rivals, rival groups within the Palestinian movement followed the lead of the two Ba'athist factions. Arafat and the Fateh leadership held more closely to the traditions of the Arab revo-

lution and the strong influence of the Algerian struggle. Nevertheless, Fateh and all the Palestinian factions recognized their connection with the anti-imperialist uprisings under way in the Portuguese African colonies, in South Africa, in Northern Ireland, and most importantly, in Vietnam.

Armed Struggle and Terrorism

Because the Palestinian leadership based its program on pure-and-simple nationalism rather than a combined national and class struggle, they were much more concerned with military tactics and weapons acquisition than with mobilization of the broad masses. In their view, Palestine would be liberated by uniformed commandos engaging and defeating the Israeli Defense Forces in combat. To varying degrees, all the Palestinian guerrilla groups saw the workers and poor people in the camps, Arab towns, and city slums as passive spectators rather than as the agents of their own liberation. In so doing, they completely missed the real lesson of the Algerian revolution, which defeated French imperialism precisely because of the involvement of the broad masses.

What "pure-and-simple nationalism" means is the objective of national independence with no thought to fundamental *social* change. Another name for such nationalism is "bourgeois nationalism," since the modern nation-state came about with the rise to power of the city-based propertied classes of Western Europe, often referred to by the French term "bourgeoisie." In the Palestinian context, it meant replacing the Zionist state with a Palestinian Arab state — nothing less, but then, nothing more. Beyond a vague commitment to democracy and secularism, the nationalist program contained no provision for *which* Arabs would rule. And, as the entire world is witnessing now as Yasser Arafat presides over a semi-state called the "Palestinian Authority" under the provisions of the Oslo agreements between the PLO and the state of Israel, the nationalist goal has been a government like any other, except that the positions are occupied by Palestinians.

Within the PLO coalition, some of the organizations claimed to have a proletarian or socialist program. Al-Fateh did not; it maintained a firm commitment to its program of a "democratic secular state" and argued openly that social revolution had to wait until a later time. Those groups claiming to be socialist, however, were actually influenced by Maoism, which is not a proletarian ideology. Mao Zedong and his colleagues in the Chinese Communist Party mobilized the millions of Chinese peasants (predominantly) to fight against the Japanese invaders, and the war of liberation was able to maintain its momentum against the corrupt and oppressive Chiang Kai-shek regime, ultimately overthrowing it and sending it fleeing to Taiwan. Even during the 1945–1949 period, the Chinese Communist Party appealed to the people on the basis of nationalism — liberation from the Japanese and from all colonialist domination. In the last analysis, groups such as the Popular Front

for the Liberation of Palestine have had the same program as al-Fateh, but with an added sprinkling of Chinese-flavored rhetoric.

To be sure, the aspirations of the Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese — and Arab — peoples for national independence and liberation from all forms of colonialism were legitimate in and of themselves. The anticolonialist struggles dealt real blows to the capitalist classes of Britain, France, and the United States. Because capitalism had imposed itself on the so-called Third World from outside, to fight against foreign domination was in itself a fight against capitalism, and for that reason Britain, France, and the United States fought viciously against the "wars of national liberation," most especially in Vietnam, where first the French and then the U.S. sought to maintain puppet regimes in South Vietnam. In some cases, nationalist struggles have ultimately overthrown capitalist power, when the local capitalist classes were inextricably linked with the dominating country, even when the revolutionary leadership originally did not intend to make a socialist revolution. The most positive example is the Cuban revolution of 1959, which survives to this day and deserves our continuing solidarity.

Nearly every resistance movement throughout history which has challenged an occupying power has used sabotage and attacks on both military and civilian targets away from the battle lines. The spokesmen for the occupiers have inevitably classified those tactics with one term: "terrorism." Their hypocrisy stinks to the heavens. The Nazis accused the Partisan forces in France, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia of terrorism while justifying the Holocaust. Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon accused the Vietnamese of terrorism while U.S. forces carried out carpet bombing with napalm, concentration of the Vietnamese into "strategic hamlets," and even massacres such as occurred at My Lai in 1968. And even while crocodile tears are shed generations later for the "poor American Indian," it should never be forgotten that the Native peoples in this country fought back against the whites' invasion by all the means at their disposal, including total massacres of white settlements. In retrospect, who can condemn them?

In the conflict between the Zionists and Palestinian Arabs both sides have carried out attacks against civilian targets. Israel has no moral right to call on the world to condemn "Arab terrorism" when it is responsible for the Deir Yassin massacre, the bombing of the King David Hotel, the machine-gun attack in Hebron, and the routine dynamiting of Arab houses when a family member is suspected of being a resistance fighter. It is true that innocent lives have been lost on both sides of this conflict, and that is without question a tragedy.

The problem with the airline hijackings, bombings, and other acts of individual violence on the part of Arab fighters has not been their moral aspect; the problem is that such acts are in fact counterproductive, and one of the first leaders to recognize that was in fact Yasser

Arafat himself, who has for over 25 years rejected and opposed the individual terrorist activities carried out by other resistance groups, most especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command and the Black September organization. Such acts have the effect of enraging and uniting the enemy rather than demoralizing and dividing them. They also reduce the broad working masses to mere spectators in the struggle, rather than active participants.

The elitist notion that a band of dedicated fighters can substitute themselves for the workers and peasants, rather than mobilizing the workers and peasants to fight on their own behalf, flows from the notion that the wealthy "educated" classes have the right and obligation to rule the "unwashed rabble." It is fundamentally no different than the notion that the bankers and businessmen have "earned" the right to exercise power over the people of this country, albeit through the intermediaries of lawyers and bureaucrats. In a struggle against imperialism, however, it is a sure loser. There has not been a single successful revolution — not one, regardless of its leadership or program — which has succeeded without the active participation, indeed the total mobilization, of the great mass of the people. That, in the words of Wobbly poet Ralph Chaplin, is a power "greater than the might of armies magnified a thousand-fold."

In the last analysis, then, the bourgeois nationalist program is in contradiction to the mass mobilization required to win national liberation in those countries dominated by imperialism. This has been the political dilemma facing the Palestinian struggle since its rebirth at the end of the 1960s.

The Intifadeh: The Masses Rise Up

In 1987, beginning in the slums of Gaza, the Palestinian Arabs took matters — and paving stones — into their own hands. Directly inspired by the youth of the South African Black townships, Arab teenagers directly confronted the Israeli occupation forces, first in the Gaza Strip and then in the West Bank. As we explained in our December-January issue, the Arab children, armed only with rocks, accomplished more in three years than grown men armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles accomplished in nearly twenty. They succeeded in demoralizing the Israeli troops and creating a moral and political division within Israeli society. It was more than anything this uprising — in Arabic *intifadeh* — which forced the Israeli government, with the strong encouragement of the U.S. and British governments, to embark on what has been called the "peace process."

The Intifadeh was precisely the kind of mass struggle which can develop into a genuine revolution. It originally professed loyalty to the PLO, but the PLO was not exercising any kind of leadership over it. The participants were not uniformed commandos to be faced on a battlefield but part of the general population, and children at that. The Israeli occupying forces were not hardened mercenaries but citizen-sol-

diers (Israeli youth are all required to serve in the armed forces), many — perhaps the majority — of whom are simply idealistic young men and women who truly believe in a democratic state based on the moral principles of Judaism. They were trained to defend the Jewish state from armed enemy troops in conventional warfare; they were not trained for urban occupation. Faced with a crowd of ragtag adolescents armed only with rocks and bottles, they often hesitated to fire their weapons.

The U.S., after its experience in Vietnam, and Britain, after its experience in Northern Ireland, understood that Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank could not be maintained. They counseled the Israeli leaders to follow the example of the F.W. de Klerk of South Africa and work to achieve a negotiated settlement which would leave the state and economic relations fundamentally intact and unchanged. As we explained in December, the Israeli leaders astutely seized the opportunity when the PLO's fortunes were at a low ebb.

The Intifadeh, lacking an organized leadership with a revolutionary vision, could not develop into a social revolution and, consequently, could not sustain itself more than a few years. However, what it accomplished can never be undone. It gave the broad Arab masses a taste of political power and showed how Zionism could be defeated. It won genuine concessions, including an end to occupation over large sections of the territories seized by Israel in 1967. It demonstrated to the entire world the real nature of the Israeli occupation and in so doing forced the United States to stop giving Tel Aviv a blank check for continued military operations against the Arab people and to encourage them to negotiate a settlement as quickly as possible. The Intifadeh's accomplishments, like the small victory at the village of Karamah in 1968, will not be forgotten.

Israeli Society Today

The inauguration of Likud leader Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu as prime minister on June 18 marked a genuine watershed in Israel's history. Not only is he the youngest person ever to hold the office, he is the first not to have participated in the fighting which resulted in the Zionist state's formation in 1948 — indeed, he was not yet born. He grew up in suburban Philadelphia, and though he is not the first American to hold the office — Golda Meir (originally Myerson) was from Milwaukee — he is much more connected to right-wing political forces in the United States than any of his predecessors, whether Labor or Likud. During his tenure as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations he was a regular guest on ABC's "Nightline" and other current affairs interview broadcasts. He became familiar to millions of Americans when, as Israel's deputy defense minister under Yitzhak Shamir, he gave glowing support to George Bush's war against Iraq in interviews on every major network, especially the Cable News Network (CNN), in flawless English, spoken with an American accent.

Politically, he is closely associated with that network of reactionary intellectuals known as "neoconservatives," which includes Sydney Hook, Irving Kristol, *Commentary* magazine publisher Norman Podhoretz, and former U.S. ambassador to the UN Jean Kirkpatrick. Ronald Reagan brought the neoconservatives into his administration, and Netanyahu looks up to Reagan as one of his political role models.

His narrow victory over incumbent Prime Minister Shimon Peres (Labor) highlighted the deep divisions within Israeli society and the great changes which have come about during the state's nearly half century of existence. Though no doubt Professor Slavov would be reluctant to acknowledge it, it is Netanyahu, not Peres, who represents what Israel has become. It becomes clearer when one recognizes that among Jewish voters Netanyahu's majority was not so narrow.

In many ways Israel has not changed so much as its image — in the perception of its own people as well as those in other countries. During the 1950s and 1960s Israel presented itself as a nation of brave *kibbutzniks* making oranges grow in the desert and defending themselves from Arab dictators and potentates who wanted to kill all Jews, even though the Israelis wanted only peace with their Arab neighbors. That was never the reality. The *kibbutzim* (collective farms) never amounted to more than a small percentage of Israeli agriculture; most farming was done on land which had been cultivated by Arab peasants for generations, and the attempt to grow fruit and vegetables in the Negev desert turned out to be an ecological disaster. But it was the popular image which attracted contributions to Israel from foreign governments, especially the United States, and from wealthy private citizens, primarily but not exclusively Jewish.

Since the 1967 war the image has changed considerably. Israel's support to the U.S. war in Vietnam, made clear by Golda Meir in 1969, and recognition of the Arabs' legitimate grievances against Israel and their connection with the rest of the struggling Third World — aided in no small measure by the Fourth International — have made support to Israel a right-wing cause, especially in the United States. That, in turn, strengthened the political right within the state of Israel, contributing to Labor's first-ever defeat in the elections of 1977.

But besides the changes in perception, there have been important changes in social reality as well since the 1967 war. The most important has been the economic integration of the occupied territories, with their Arab population, into Israeli society. A detailed exploration would be well beyond the scope of this article; we have space only to describe what has happened.

Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza were willing to work in Israel for lower wages than Israeli Jews would normally accept — just as immigrants from Latin America and Asia are willing to do in the United States. By the end of the 1970s the lower-tier jobs in the Israeli economy were more often than not filled by Arabs, creating at the same time a mutual dependence

and resentment between the Arab workers and their Jewish employers. Conversely, a shortage of housing in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities, combined with the desire of right-wing Israelis to ensure that the West Bank would never be returned to the Arabs, led to the formation of Jewish settlements in West Bank Arab towns. These communities are for the most part only residential — the Israeli Jews who live in them generally commute to jobs in established Israeli cities, especially Tel Aviv.

As the West Bank and Gaza became more interdependent with the pre-1967 state of Israel, the basic character of the Jewish state began to be called into question, and many Zionists — within and outside Israel — became alarmed. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza had put thousands of Arabs — most of them hostile to Israel — under Israeli jurisdiction. The concern was that because of an Arab birth rate which was nearly double that of Israeli Jews, it was conceivable that Jews might become a minority within the state of Israel. That eventuality became much more likely if the West Bank and Gaza were permanently annexed. To date, Jewish immigration has balanced the higher Arab birth rate, but because of issues such as violence and housing, immigration has been threatened, and many of the new immigrants are right-wing zealots or poor Jews from Middle Eastern and North African countries, many of whom require public assistance. It is uncertain how long such immigration can be sustained.

This demographic reality is an important reason why Israel has embarked on the so-called "peace process" and why it is unlikely that Netanyahu will reverse course. Annexation of the West Bank and Gaza would in fact be more harmful than beneficial to Israel; it is in the Jewish state's best interest to divest itself of the occupied territories as quickly and inexpensively as possible. Its imperialist patrons in Washington and London have so advised as well.

Why American Workers Should Demand an End to U.S. Support to Israel

Strife in the Middle East is of great concern to U.S. and multinational corporations; consequently, without peace in the region there is always the threat that young American working people will be sent into battle to defend the ability of the all-powerful oil companies to make profits. It happened in 1991; had George Bush not withdrawn U.S. forces after Iraq had been forced from Kuwait, it is most probable that a prolonged war would have ensued, with many more U.S. casualties as the troops fought on the Iraqis' own territory. Working people in this country for the most part supported Bush's war, though there were very large demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco against it. However, it is doubtful that support could have been sustained through a prolonged conflict. It would be better, however, if thousands of young people on both sides didn't have to die.

What events over the past nine months have shown is that even if leaders who were once

intransigent enemies — such as Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat — shake hands and negotiate a peace agreement — that does not mean that there will be peace. Rabin is dead, assassinated by an Israeli opponent of his peace policies, and his successor Shimon Peres has been defeated at the polls. Young Palestinians are still committing individual acts of violence against Israeli soldiers and civilians, but now they follow the leadership of Islamic organizations, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, rather than the PLO.

Netanyahu, in his inaugural speech to the Knesset, pledged that Israel will never allow the formation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories, that Israel will never return east Jerusalem to Arab rule and that an undivided Jerusalem will remain Israel's capital, that Israel will never return the Golan Heights to Syria, and that Israeli settlement in West Bank Arab towns will continue with government encouragement. Nabil Sha'ath, a central leader of the PLO, called Netanyahu's remarks a "declaration of war." And he was right.

However, Netanyahu recognizes that even if Israel agreed to everything the PLO is calling for, that would be no guarantee of peace or that the exclusively Jewish character of the state of Israel could be maintained. The PLO dropped from its charter its goal of the state of Israel's destruction. That was a great concession on its part. But even if the juridical entity called "Israel" was maintained, if (1) the Law of Return were amended to allow Palestinian refugees to return with the same right to citizenship as any Jew anywhere in the world; (2) the state put an end to programs designed to ensure a Jewish majority in the population; (3) discrimination against Arabs in housing and public services were outlawed, and (4) Arabs were allowed to take professional and skilled trade jobs in the Israeli economy and that pay scales on all levels were equal between Arabs and Jews, Israel's fundamental character would be changed, and for the overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews that change would be unacceptable. The experience of the final phase of the struggle against white supremacy in South Africa (1984-1994) shows that such a thing can happen.

Israel and South Africa: Parallel Societies

In this regard, the parallels between Israel and South Africa are particularly revealing, especially in light of the abolition of apartheid and institution of African majority rule in that country. Pre-1994 South Africa was, like Israel, a colonial-settler state, that is, a state in which people of European origin held power over those of indigenous origin. The white settlers in South Africa, however, first arrived in the seventeenth century, not the late nineteenth or early twentieth, and their society had an established economy and social structure which was not imposed from outside or from a preconceived schema. White South Africans had gone through their own difficult nation-building experiences, such as the Great Trek of the early nineteenth century — the migration from the

Cape Colony to the Orange Free State and Transvaal to escape British rule — and the Boer War of 1899. Though the Boers lost that war, they won *de facto* independence in 1910 with the granting of Dominion status to the Union of South Africa.

The ties of white South Africans — especially those of Dutch ancestry — to their countries of origin are far more dim and distant than those of Israeli Jews; their state had, for better or worse, deep roots in the African soil; they had the experience of several centuries on the African continent and many decades of self-rule — and formal independence after 1961. Their claims to a state of their own — even discounting the Biblical justifications often cited by white South Africans as well as by Zionists — were in fact more legitimate than the Israelis' claims. And yet they could not withstand the struggle of the Black African majority for civil rights and majority rule based on the principle of one person, one vote.

In reaction to post-World War II anticolonialism, white South Africans in 1948 — the same year that the state of Israel was founded — voted out Jan Christiaan Smuts's United Party and voted in the militantly white supremacist National Party, led by Hendrik Verwoerd. The Nationalists proceeded to enact a system of brutally racist measures which went by the name of *apartheid*. Though racial segregation had always been South African policy, *apartheid* in fact sought to expel Black Africans from South African society and South African territory, the same policy favored by Jabotinsky and his heirs toward the Arabs within the territory of Israel.

At the same time, South Africa took a friendly attitude toward the newly-formed state of Israel. The Nationalist government permitted South African Jews — and Johannesburg even today has the world's third-largest Jewish community, after Tel Aviv and New York — to fight in the Israeli army, and many did. (The United States, by contrast, revoked the citizenship of any American, Jewish or not, who fought for Israel or any other foreign government, a policy upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of an American Jew who served as a fighter pilot for Israel in the 1948 war.) Israel's foreign minister in the Labor governments of the 1960s and early 1970s was a South African, Abba Eban. Israel's biggest export commodity during its first decades, cut diamonds, depended on the import of rough diamonds from South Africa. In the 1980s Israel became one of the world's leading exporters of weapons, especially of the popular Uzi assault rifle, and one of its biggest customers was South Africa.

Even if a peace settlement is agreed to along the state of Israel's borders, even if an independent Palestinian state is founded in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, even if Jewish settlement in those territories is halted, the second-class status of Arabs within Israel will remain. It will only be a matter of time before the kind of civil rights struggle which overturned not only *apartheid* but the entire system of white rule in

South Africa (at least on the governmental level) begins within Israel's borders. That is a conflict which the Jewish state cannot win in the long run.

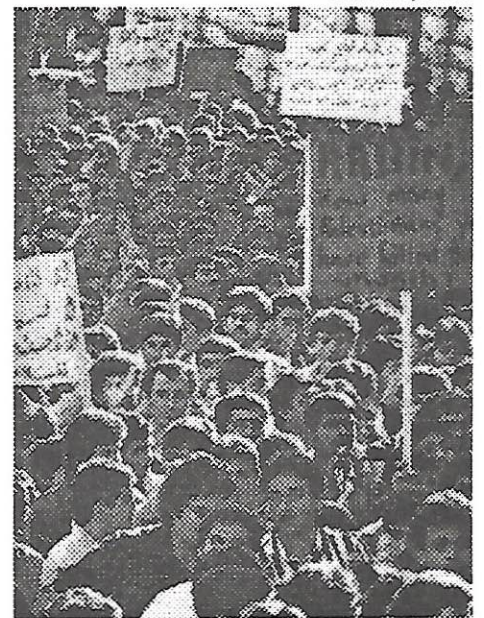
There is no doubt, however, that the victory of the African National Congress has reduced the level of tension in southern Africa, and there has been no threat to the security of the white minority in that country. The ANC government has, rather, taken strong measures to protect the whites' physical and economic security. The class conflicts, to be sure, are intensifying, but that is quite another matter.

The same would be true in the Israeli state. As long as the state guarantees the dominance of one group, defined essentially by religion but also somewhat by national origin, over another, there will never be peace, and the possibility that U.S. troops will be sent in to intervene will always be present. That should be unacceptable to American workers. Legitimacy of racism anywhere — and that is what Zionism is in its fundamental nature — legitimizes it everywhere. Too much blood has been shed in our own country for us ever to retreat on that issue.

American workers are beginning to take political action around the economic issues which affect their day-to-day lives, and that is inevitable. However, as the North American Free Trade Agreement shows most clearly, international affairs have a great bearing on our jobs and wages. And as events in Bosnia have demonstrated, U.S. military intervention rarely solves many problems in the world. Young American workers should not be sent into these faraway places to die.

For that reason, the Middle East *is* a labor issue. Workers in this country *do* have a stake in Middle East peace, which can only come about when the Arabs' aspirations to self-determination are completely fulfilled. Israel stands in their way. And for that reason, our support to the Arab cause remains unshakable, and will remain so until its final victory. □

June 23, 1996



"The Most Talented of Our Younger Writers"

Isaac Babel, *Collected Stories*, trans. David McDuff (New York: Penguin, 1994), \$11.95; and *1920 Diaries*, trans. H.T. Willets (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), \$20.

Reviewed by Joe Auciello

Trotsky, in his autobiography, *My Life*, termed Isaac Babel "the most talented of our younger writers." Babel probably did not survive the decade in which those words were written. A victim of Stalinist terror, the exact circumstances of his death are unknown. He was arrested suddenly, though not unexpectedly, in the spring of 1939 and may have been shot in Lubyanka prison. Or he may have perished a few years later in a labor camp. The official death certificate, not an especially credible source, claims he died in 1941.¹

What has survived is Babel's literary work. His best writings were *Odessa Stories* (1924) and *Red Cavalry* (1926), published together in English in 1955 as *The Collected Stories*, in a translation by Walter Morison. This is the best-known edition, and the one to which David McDuff's new translation of the stories must be compared.

To speak of Babel's work as "surviving" is not entirely accurate, though certainly his published stories have found appreciative readers. At the time of his arrest several manuscripts and notebooks were seized — none of these have been recovered. Apparently no copies existed. The 1920 diary escaped this fate by accident; it had been left with a friend, and Babel's widow did not receive it until the mid-1950s. Only in 1990 was it published in its entirety in Russia.

The diary Babel kept in 1920 is a slim volume; in translation it takes up fewer than 100 pages. As a book in its own right, the literary and historical value of the diary is negligible. One learns as much about the Polish-Soviet war from the 1920 Diary as one does about the American Civil War from Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*.

Babel wrote for the First Cavalry Army's daily newspaper, and so, in addition to accounts of the brutal conditions of war itself, the diary is full of the grim, homely details of a war correspondent's life: incessant movement from one battle scene to the next, discomfort, hunger, illness, petty annoyances and politicking amongst the members of divisional headquarters. This makes for painful reading at times, but it does little to illuminate the history of the war for the general reader. Had one of Babel's colleagues written this diary, its publication would be of interest exclusively to academic historians and specialists in Polish or Soviet history.

But, of course, the 1920 diary is the product of a master of the Russian short story and for that reason a good deal of interest is attached to the work. For several reviewers the diary is notable as an expression of Babel's struggle for self-identity, especially his Jewish identity. There is some truth to this opinion. The Polish-Soviet war was fought in an area containing a large Jewish population that was especially persecuted by the Poles and White Cossacks. (The very first story in *Red Cavalry* tells of a Jewish father murdered by the Poles in front of his daughter.) Babel had enlisted under an assumed name which disguised his Jewish origin, so a certain irony and tension exists in his relation to the Jewish civilian population.

However, the reviewers, by emphasizing their own concerns, are reading more into the text than is warranted. Certainly, Judaism was nothing new to the young man who, a few years later, wrote: "On the insistence of my father I studied Hebrew, the Bible, and the Talmud until the age of sixteen." Oppression against Jews in the Russian empire was hardly a secret. Babel had witnessed a pogrom as a child and was well aware that he had been denied admission to the University of Odessa because the quota of Jewish students had been filled for that year. A Jewish identity was not something Babel needed to discover, though he was concerned for the fate of the Jews who inevitably were victims in the Polish-Soviet war.

It would be more accurate to say that Babel's real struggle was between his communist ideals and the reality of the war. The frequent mistreatment of Jews and his own role, his complicity, was a part of this struggle. Early in the diary, on July 11, the Red Army had taken a town, and Babel records the following: "... same old story, the Jews have been plundered, their bewilderment, they expected the Soviet regime to liberate them, and suddenly there were shrieks, whips cracking, shouts of 'dirty Yid.' I was besieged by a whole circle of them."

The next day Babel rides through different small villages, noting the cleanliness and prosperity. Then he speaks of himself and the people there: "... it's hot, I feel lazy, sorry for them, with all those horsemen rummaging around, that's what freedom looks like at first sight. I took nothing, although I could have, I'll never be a real Budyonny man." (The reference here is to General Semyon Budyonny, founder and commander of the First Cavalry Army. A crony of Stalin's, Budyonny ended up as a marshal of the Soviet Army; in 1941, he revealed total incompetence in face of Hitler's invasion.)

Reviewers who admire Babel as a writer have been reluctant to see him as a committed, loyal communist. As a result, they fail to understand him and the source of his turmoil in the war. The diary records his increased anguish at the widening gap between Bolshevik theory and "Red" Cossack practice. In Babel's account, both in the diary and in his stories, the Red Army was not made up of poster heroes and Red icons; the Soviet Army also looted, raped, and murdered prisoners. A month after the entry previously quoted, Babel wrote a note to himself: "I must look deeply into the soul of the fighting man, I am trying to, but it's all horrible, wild beasts with principles." And, three days later: "... our army is out to line its pockets, this isn't a revolution, it's a rebellion of wild Cossack men." This viewpoint, also evident in *Red Cavalry*, provoked an angry letter of protest from Budyonny.

Nevertheless, for Babel, communism was the only personal and social option and the only hope for the future. Inspired by the Second Congress of the Third International, Babel lyrically commented, "now all is clear: there are two worlds, and war between them is declared. We will fight on endlessly. Russia has thrown down the gauntlet. We shall advance into Europe and conquer the world. The Red Army has become a factor of world significance."

So he pressed on, recording his bleak impressions for some unforeseen use. In the diary itself there is no reference to the writing of fiction in the future, although by 1920 Babel had published some short stories. Whether or not Babel planned to use the diary as raw material, it did have a more immediate, practical purpose: it served as a release of conflicting emotions, and it provided a means of imposing order on chaotic events. The diary gave Babel a measure of control over his life; he became an observer of war rather than its victim.

For us, readers in 1995, the value of the 1920 diary is that it allows greater insights into the stories that became *Red Cavalry*. We see what Babel invented, what actual events he used, and how these events were arranged for the larger purposes of fiction. We see what characters speak for and to Babel's own emotions and ideas. Subtleties and hints in the stories are often treated more directly in the nonfiction journal.

From reading the diary we gain a larger appreciation of the stories.

Babel's short stories are usually quite brief, one to five pages, and based on incidents, encounters, and conversations. There is no space for elaborate plots which, at any rate,

1. According to Russian writer Vitaly Shentalinsky, in his *KGB's Literary Archive: Discovery of the Ultimate Fate of Russia's Suppressed Writers* (London, 1995), none of Babel's manuscripts survived, at least not in the KGB archives. Shentalinsky reports that apparently, after interrogations, a confession, and a trial, Babel was shot on January 27, 1940.

are of little interest to Babel. He is concerned with character and the portrayal of an emotion or state of mind. So the stories are slight, economical, with minimal but precise description and terse statements. More is suggested than is explained or revealed.

Often the reader is placed in the role of the observer/narrator of the stories, and we are left on our own to intuit the purpose and import of words or actions. Typically, we feel the significance of the story all the more deeply as we construct its meaning, as our awareness and understanding of its events grow, or as we reflect on an abrupt, sharply worded conclusion. Consider, for instance, the four-page story, "After the Battle," where the narrator has failed his comrades, at least in their estimation, and so quarrels and fights with them, concluding: "The evening flew up towards the sky, like a flock of birds, and the darkness laid its wet wreath upon me. I was exhausted and, bent under the sepulchral crown, moved forward, begging fate for the simplest of abilities — the ability to kill a man." The irony of the closing sentence is all the more poignant when we recollect that nowhere in his arguments did the narrator ever concede or reveal the wish for this simple ability — the lack of which forcibly set him apart from his comrades.

Babel's *Collected Stories* comprise a brief volume: three hundred pages, representing about 25 years' work. This is a sign of his characteristic literary style — precise, exact, concise. The stories suggest a man who was a sharp observer, one with an eye for the revealing detail. Boris Souvarine noted Babel's "attentive, amused observer's eye" and commented with some envy that in their walks through Paris, Babel "detected things that a seasoned old Parisian like me no longer

noticed but that sparked droll, pertinent ideas in him" ("Last Conversations with Isaac Babel," *Dissent*, summer 1981).

In his new book, *The Golden Age Is In Us*, Alexander Cockburn cites Babel's well-known statement on writing and style, his literary manifesto, from the story, "Guy de Maupassant" — "A sentence is born both good and bad at the same time. The whole secret lies in a barely perceptible twist. The control handle must be warm in your hand. You must turn it only once, never twice... No steel can pierce a heart so icily as a period planted in the right place." (This version is taken from the Andrew R. MacAndrew translation.)

The last sentence is more familiar as it is rendered by Walter Morison: "No iron can stab the heart with such force as a period put just at the right place." In the *Collected Stories*, David McDuff gives us: "No iron can enter the human heart as chillingly as a full stop placed at the right time." This last version is surely the least satisfactory; "enter" is a pale verb by comparison, "full stop" is too technical, connoting a Western Union telegram instead of literature, and the importance of the punctuation is more accurately asserted by reference to its placement, not time.

Unfortunately, David McDuff's translation sings off-key throughout the collection. In one of Babel's best known stories, "My First Goose," the narrator, a "milksoy" with glasses on his nose, is assigned to a Cossack regiment where he is met with gross rudeness and continual slights. He, in turn, asks an old woman to roast the goose of hers he has killed. When she responds, "Comrade... all this business makes me want to hang myself," he shoves her and forces her to obey him.

This callous behavior earns the Cossacks' approval; they refer to the narrator as

"brother" and call him to join them. As he sits with them to eat, the Cossacks ask what he is reading in *Pravda*, and the narrator "loudly, like a deaf man triumphant" reads to them Lenin's speech to the Second Congress of the Comintern. Later, as the narrator and his Cossack companions fall asleep, the story concludes with the climactic sentence: "I had dreams and saw women in my dreams, and only my heart, stained crimson with murder, squeaked and overflowed."

Note how jarring the word "squeaked" is here. A heart heavy with murder might be expected to resound more vividly than a mouse or a door hinge in need of oil. In Walter Morison's translation the sentence reads: "I dreamed: and in my dreams saw women. But my heart, stained with bloodshed, grated and brimmed over." Certainly "grated" is preferable, as it suggests a loss, a shredding, as conscience rubs against memory.

David McDuff's new translation provides us with a more complete and uncensored version of the stories, which is to be welcomed. Unfortunately, the overall quality of the translation is no improvement over the more familiar Walter Morison version, which is still available in print.

Whatever edition one chooses, Babel ought to be read. A master of the short story, he has created haunting, unforgettable glimpses of the human heart in crisis. Lionel Trilling, in his appreciation of Babel, refers to the short stories of his contemporaries: James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, and Ernest Hemingway. Though his literary output was far less, his literary achievement equalled theirs. Babel deserves to be placed among such writers, and his work deserves to be as widely known. □

Nicaraguan Elections Loom

Continued from page 19

Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute. We do not yet know how much will be spent covertly, but if the previous election is any guide, the covert funds will be substantial as well.

The FSLN leadership also made mistakes, including a lack of party democracy, a lack of independence for the mass movements from the state, and a lack of democracy within the mass movements. Given the power of imperialism to exploit these mistakes and create the overall conditions of suffering, the U.S. bears the most responsibility for the fate of the Nicaraguan revolution.

(Another significant factor is that no effective worldwide campaign developed in defense of the Nicaraguan revolution comparable to the international movement in support of the Vietnamese during their war against U.S. domination. The bureaucratized workers states, especially the USSR and China, failed to give adequate military and economic support, and the worldwide popular move-

ment to defend Nicaragua never gained the scope it had in the days when Che Guevara called for "two, three, many Vietnams." Nicaragua is also — relative to Vietnam, for example — very small in land area and population, extremely impoverished, with a relatively small industrial working class. Thus Nicaragua's capacities for resistance against the wealthiest and mightiest military power in the world, failing revolutionary support from outside, were fatally limited.)

U.S. imperialism sought to punish Nicaragua and make it an example of what happens if you seek to free yourself to shape your own destiny. For the time being, imperialism has unfortunately succeeded.

From the mid-1980s on, under the relentless pressure of imperialism, with insufficient support from revolutions elsewhere and with the errors made by the Sandinista leadership, the revolution decayed.

Since the 1990 elections, the Sandinistas also bear serious responsibility for worsening the travails of the Nicaraguan masses. While the FSLN took some steps toward greater

party democracy, in freeing the mass movements from party control and including greater numbers of women in the leadership, it failed to develop a political program defending the interests of the masses of Nicaragua. As long as the Sandinistas continue to follow their current collaborationist and essentially social democratic political program, it will make little difference to the Nicaraguan masses who wins the upcoming elections.

We should not count the FSLN out, at least not yet. With the loyalty and political experience of tens of thousands of militant activists, the FSLN still remains the only organization in Nicaragua out of which a renewed revolutionary struggle could develop.

Readers interested in following the elections can call the Nicaragua Network Hotline at 202-544-9360. Information on the hotline is updated weekly. References for this article are available upon request from the author c/o BIDOM. □

July 22, 1996

Advancing a Program to Build the Labor Party

Continued from page 45

women's liberation; and unless it stands four-square for international labor solidarity, cannot succeed, regardless of gains it might appear to make in the short run. It is important to say this now during the very formation of the Labor Party, and to keep saying it every step along the way. Whether or not resolutions projecting this point of view can be adopted at a founding convention is not the test of whether they should be introduced and fought for. The real test is whether they correspond to the interests of the working class and whether, even if not adopted, they can serve some useful educational purpose. Since Barrett/Saunders say they agree with WUN's five resolutions, why were they so opposed to their introduction?

6. On The Electoral Question

Barrett/Saunders quote me as saying, "Finally, WUN advocates a complete break with the bosses' parties and running independent working class candidates, where a sufficient base exists."

They incorrectly infer from this statement that we advocate exclusion of or restrictions on unions and unionists who support Democratic candidates in electoral activity conducted *outside* of the Labor Party.

At the January 6, 1996, meeting of the Workers Unity Network, those present, representing a wide range of views, unanimously approved a position opposing the Labor Party's endorsing any candidate of the Democratic or Republican parties while at the same time opposing any kind of organizational steps against unions or individual Labor Party members who, *outside of the Labor Party*, engage in electoral activities in support of such candidates. We consider any kind of electoral activity in support of the bosses' candidates to be harmful to building a labor party, but that is a problem that must be dealt with through education, experience, and

debate within the Labor Party, not through organizational measures.

So, Barrett/Saunders misunderstood what WUN stands for. But there are deep differences between WUN's position on electoral questions and the views they express in their article. They write, "Working people in local areas will not need to be told to run independent working class candidates for office when that becomes a realistic option. Seeking to pass a motion to this effect can serve no positive purpose."

The positive purpose passing such a motion serves is to establish the Labor Party as a genuinely independent workers party, as opposed to those who would make it a pressure group only ("a non-electoral party"), a vehicle for supporting "lesser evil" Democrats (as the Communist Party and others advocate), or as an instrument for popular front fusion-type electoral activities.

Does the Barrett/Saunders article address any of these dangers? Not at all. They seem to think their perspective will prevail without a conscious effort to advance it, obviating the need for WUN type resolutions on the electoral issues.

But look at the record. First, Mazzocchi favors a non-electoral party and, while he has given some ground on this question, he did succeed in winning a two-year delay in even considering running candidates. He will likely continue to resist any form of electoral activity in support of worker candidates.

Second, a large majority of the delegates at the founding convention made clear they favor supporting some Democrats electorally. Some will, predictably, oppose running independent working class candidates if doing so would jeopardize electing "our friends" in the Democratic Party.

Third, as for a fusion, popular-front type perspective, consider Bob Wages's comment, made at the end of the June convention: "If we remain non-electoral for the near future, and have discussions that leave room for fusion

candidates, *running both on our line and that of the Democrats*, I think other unions will be interested." (Emphasis added.) (See *The Nation*, July 8, 1996.)

So, a major challenge looms for proponents of independent working class politics from a number of different directions. And Barrett/Saunders do not contribute to meeting that challenge when they disparage efforts by Workers Unity Network members and others of like mind who are struggling to convince the Labor Party members that we must break cleanly, totally, and definitively with the Democratic Party.

7. On WUN's Proposals Being Utilized by "The Nitwit Sectarrians" for Their Own Narrow Purposes

Barrett/Saunders say they agree with the content of all the WUN resolutions. But they wish we wouldn't struggle for their adoption because they say this will give an opening to the sectarians.

Sectarrians inevitably have a presence and create problems in the process of building a labor party, and they must be fought. But never by failing to project a program that is objectively in the interests of the working class and the labor party itself.

The sectarians don't need WUN in order to do their thing. And they receive no encouragement from us. The important thing is that the Labor Party convention succeeded in adopting a constitution, a program, a document on the electoral question, and a proposal on implementation — all without serious disruption or interference by sectarian elements.

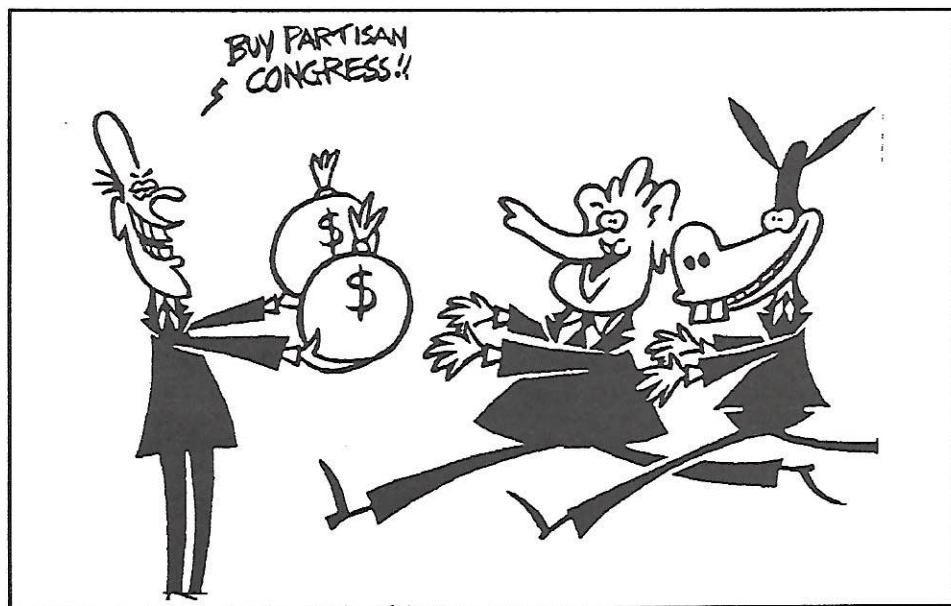
On the Need to Conduct a Struggle in the Labor Party

James P. Cannon, principal founder of the Socialist Workers Party, made some trenchant comments about the role militants should play in the labor party:

It is true that the simple fact of the formation of a labor party, by itself, would have a profound influence in speeding radical and even revolutionary developments. But those who are satisfied with that might as well retire from the field and let the automatic process take care of everything. The automatic process will not take care of anything except to guarantee defeats. The conscious revolutionists, however few their numbers may be in the beginning, *are a part of the process*. Their part is to help the process along by telling the whole truth.... Those militants who know the score on this ought to organize themselves in order to conduct their struggle more effectively." (*BIDOM*, March-April 1996.)

Frederick Douglass said it a long time ago: "Where there is no struggle, there is no progress." That, rather than "don't rock the boat," ought to be the animating spirit guiding *BIDOM's* co-editors in projecting a direction for class conscious workers in the labor party movement. □

June 28, 1996



Letters

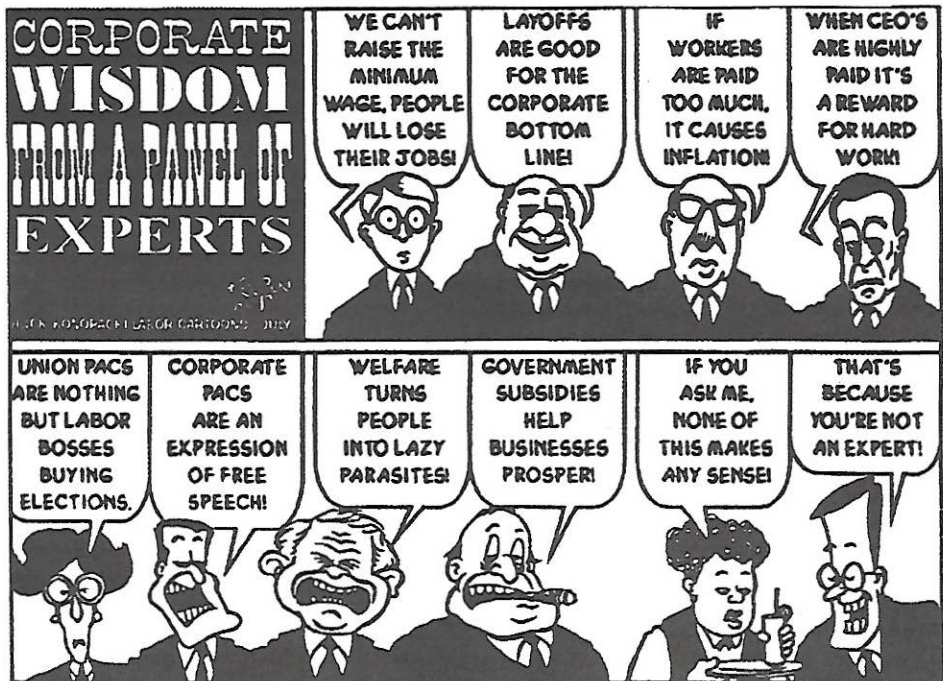
"For Every Great Fortune, a Great Crime"

I thoroughly enjoyed David Jones's article, "The Rich Really Are Different," in the January-February issue and thought it one of the more enlightening pieces I have read in a long time.

I wanted to point out the source for one of the article's section headings — "For Every Great Fortune, a Great Crime." It deserves attribution and some comment. The statement comes from a Balzac novel, translated as *Père Goriot* or *Old Goriot*. The words are spoken by one of the more notable villains in nineteenth century European literature, Vautrin, who is educating the hero, a young man from the provinces, into the ways of bourgeois society. The conversation, which runs for several pages, is a scathing and cynical indictment of bourgeois morality and values which echoes some of Marx's comments on money in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Not only, according to Balzac's Vautrin, is there a great crime behind a great fortune; that crime is not prosecuted or punished because the means of acquiring the fortune constitute the normal order of bourgeois life. Criminal behavior, under capitalism, is respectable behavior.

Marx and Engels themselves were quite familiar with and greatly admired Balzac, despite the fact that his political sympathies were antagonistic to theirs. Engels, in a well-known letter on art written in 1888, referred to Balzac as a "master of realism" greater than Zola. From Balzac's description of French society in the first half of the nineteenth century, Engels said, "I have learned more than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together."

Marx's daughter, Eleanor, noted that Balzac was one of the authors to whom Marx "again and again returned." Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, wrote: "He ranked Cervantes and Balzac above all other novelists... He admired Balzac so much that he wished to write a review of his great work *La Comédie Humaine* as soon as he had finished his book on economics." Of course, Marx did not live to complete *Capital* and never produced more than fragmentary comments about literature.



Later Marxists, however, have written extensively on Balzac; Arnold Hauser in *The Social History of Art*, Volume 4, and Georg Lukács in *Studies in European Realism* are the most notable.

I hope my enthusiasm here does not sound too pedantic; I only wanted to point out how well the quotation you selected fit within the Marxist tradition. Again, it was a pleasure to read Jones's article and from it be reminded of Balzac's novel.

Joe Auciello
Wayland, Massachusetts

Letter from Russia

Dear comrades!

I am writing to you as an activist of the Committee for Workers Democracy and International Socialism (Komitet za rabochuyu demokratiyu i mezhdunarodny sotsializm; or KRDMIS). We are a revolutionary Marxist organization. We stand on the positions of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky. We stand for the creation of a new, revolutionary proletarian International based on such principles. We publish our newspaper *Rabochaya Demokratiya* ("Workers Democracy") six times a year; its print run is 5,000 copies. We have

begun to publish a [four-page] weekly bulletin (in a run of 400 copies). We have our organizations in Moscow, Leningrad, Perm, Tula, and Saransk [in the autonomous region of Mordovia, central Volga region]. We would like to exchange documents, newspapers, and other literature of our organizations with you. Our address is c/o Aleksandr Savchenko, abonentskii yashchik 27, Saransk, Mordovia, Russia 430023.

With communist greetings,

Aleksandr Savchenko

[Note: Comrade Savchenko's letter was accompanied by a "Workers Democracy" leaflet against the Chechen war addressed to Russian workers and two copies of the weekly bulletin *Rabochaya Demokratiya*. We hope to have translations from those in the next issue of our magazine. — Eds.]

Correction

[We are informed by *BIDOM* contributor Eileen Gersh that in her article on the Fourth International's programmatic document dealing with the worldwide crisis of the environment (in a previous issue of *BIDOM*), she meant to refer to the editor of *The Ecologist*. (NOT, as was printed, "The Economist.") — Eds.]

Sorting Out the Debate at the Labor Party Convention

Continued from page 29

and lobbying. The truth is that the most important reforms won by working people and the oppressed have been achieved by political movements outside the electoral process and outside the two major parties. And all attempts to bring these movements into mainstream electoral politics have led to their deformation or even demise.

Mass Disinterest in Electoral Politics

We should also note that there is little mass enthusiasm for electoral politics. The majority of the working class generally doesn't bother to vote. "Mandates" have been claimed — such as Gingrich's Contract With America — on the basis of support by as little as a quarter of the eligible electorate.

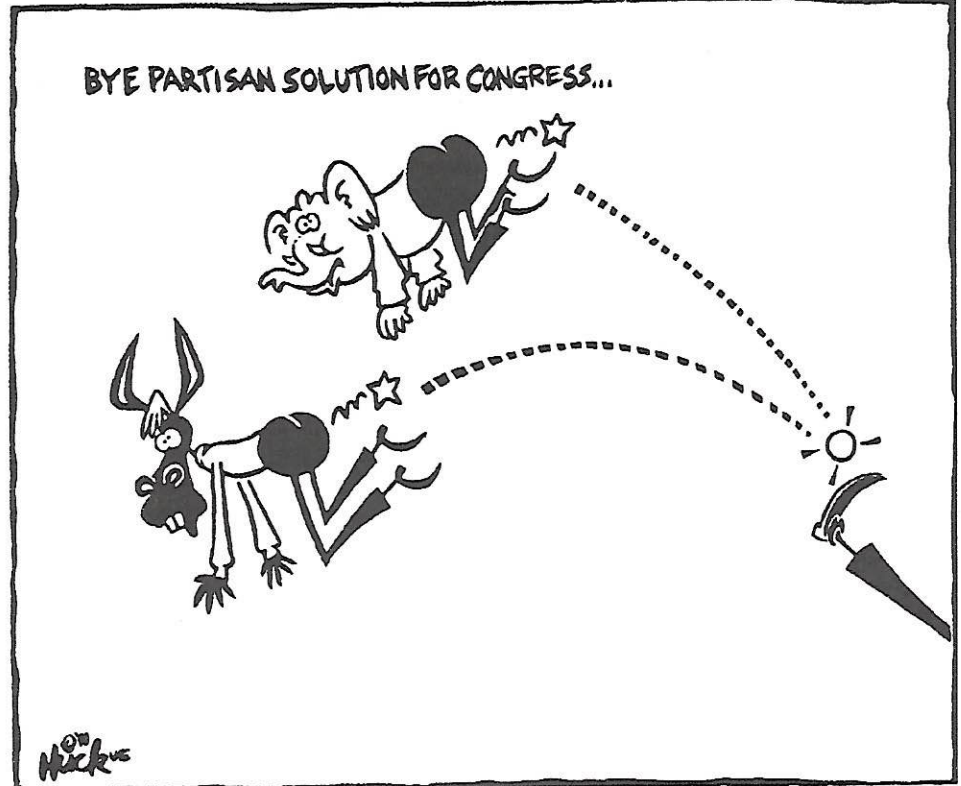
Some conclude from all this that elections are a distraction that should best be ignored. They fall into a wide range of currents — anarchists, syndicalists, "power grows out of the barrel of a gun" urban guerrillas, counter-cultural collectivists, and many more. None of these groupings have an impressive track record and none are likely to be a significant factor in working class politics. But there is also an important current within the leadership of the Labor Party that believes the LP should remain a nonelectoral formation, an activist pressure group that can help lead movements for reforms. They envision the Labor Party as sort of a working class version of the Christian Coalition or United We Stand America. Here we have to sort out considerations of principle and tactics.

Labor Party Still in Organizing Stage

As a matter of tactics, I agreed with the leadership proposal that the LP not get involved in electoral activities before the second convention. While the founding convention was a qualitative step forward from the low-key preparations made by LPA, the Labor Party is not yet a genuine mass party.

At this stage, it's still more of an organizing committee than a mass party.

Nowhere is it in a position to make more than the barest token effort at running an election campaign. Attempting to run candidates in 1996



would be a wasteful distraction that could only emphasize its present organizational weakness. The LP's limited cadres and financial resources can best be used in popularizing the program, relating to working class struggles, and recruiting additional union affiliations and individual members.

But LP Can't Stay Permanently Nonelectoral

But it would be a serious error to elevate this sound conjunctural tactical assessment into a perpetual principle. Most workers may be skeptical about professional politicians and the major parties, but they have by no means given up on the constitutional electoral system being the cornerstone of democracy. While they might understand the reluctance of the Labor Party to rush into premature election contests, they will

not take seriously a party that says it will never run in elections.

The working class needs a party that can lead in *all* aspects of politics. We want to be in the streets and on the picket lines. We need to sponsor forums, debates, produce pamphlets and position papers. We want to revive working class culture through concerts, exhibits, plays, dances, picnics.

We also need to move toward fielding candidates in elections. And we don't have to wait until we think we can win. Campaigns — provided there is a minimum critical mass to fuel them — can be effective in getting out ideas and recruiting people to the party. We can take as our model the kind of campaigns run by Gene Debs and the old Socialist Party. We're not yet ready for that, but we've got to work toward that if we are to present a credible alternative to the bosses' parties. □

Roundup of Press Coverage on the Labor Party Convention

Continued from page 38

So in reply to a question about what it takes to win a strike these days, *The Militant* is telling the Detroit striker, "We need a workers and farmers government." Not a word about mobilizing support for the Detroit strikers, as the

Labor Party convention did. Not even the notion that building the Labor Party is precisely a step toward a workers government.

The Militant was being sold outside the convention. Some of us asked why its then-current issue said nothing about the Labor Party or its

convention. We were told that it did! It reported that a Pathfinder literature table would be at the convention. □

An Appeal to All Readers and Supporters of Bulletin IDOM

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Who We Are

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

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

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

Through this magazine we seek to clarify the history, theory and program of the Fourth

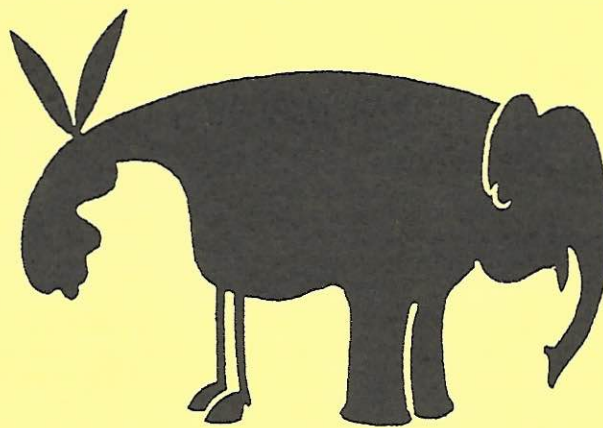
International and the American Trotskyist tradition, discussing their application to the class struggle internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist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

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

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

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"WHAT MANNER OF BEAST IS THIS?!"

CARTOON BY GARY HUCK

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