

Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

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Who We Are

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. We have dedicated this journal to the process of clarifying the program and theory of revolutionary Marxism — of discussing its application to the class struggle both 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 and of establishing a socialist society based on human need instead of private greed.

The F.I.T. was created in the winter of 1984 by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because we opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than half a century. Since our formation we have fought to win the party back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective and for our readmission to the SWP. In addition our members are active in the U.S. class struggle.

At the 1985 World Congress of the Fourth International, the appeals of the F.I.T. and other expelled members were upheld, and the congress delegates demanded, by an overwhelming majority, that the SWP readmit those who had been purged. So far the SWP has refused to take any steps to comply with this decision.

“All members of the party must begin to study, completely dispassionately and with utmost honesty, first the essence of the differences and second the course of the dispute in the party. . . . It is necessary to study both the one and the other, unfailingly demanding the most exact, printed documents, open to verification by all sides. Whoever believes things simply on someone else’s say-so is a hopeless idiot, to be dismissed with a wave of the hand.” — V.I. Lenin, “The Party Crisis,” Jan. 19, 1921.

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Exxon's Big Blunder

by Carmen Wynn

Carmen Wynn is a native of Alaska. She has lived in Seattle and New York, and returned to Alaska in 1979 where she was a state employee in the department of transportation and a member of the employees union. She is now retired and lives in Juneau. (Seward's Day, a state holiday in Alaska, is observed on the last Monday of March each year.)

On Seward's Day ten years ago a young woman, Sharman Haley, addressed a noontime rally on the steps of the state Capitol in Juneau, Alaska. She spoke out against multinational companies, the grip they had gained over Alaska's economy, and the threat of gross mismanagement they posed by their farflung, absentee focus only on profits.

Hearing her remarks on local television that night, a number of legislators were "shocked" and Haley was summarily fired from her research job with the Alaska legislature on the grounds that her "objectivity" was suspect. For the next seven years she fought, with a good deal of local support and a battery of attorneys, all the way to the state Supreme Court and eventually won back her job plus back pay and court costs amounting to a quarter of a million dollars.

Now, ten years after that fateful speech, Haley's concerns have been more than proven valid by the monumental disaster that has struck Prince William Sound as a result of the greed and indifference of Exxon and the Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. — a consortium of eight oil companies including Exxon. "Gross mismanagement" is hardly an adequate description of Exxon's standard operating procedure, which failed to screen and monitor personnel charged with the enormous responsibility of piloting a ship the size of a football field through fragile waters or, in the case of Alyeska, in not having the equipment available to respond to any oil spill at the pipeline terminus in Valdez.

When oil was first discovered on the North Slope, many Alaskans — from subsistence hunters to fishermen — were opposed to a pipeline, fearing contamination to an environment they not only loved but which was their livelihood. Big money and the power it buys won out, of course, and fears were subdued through heavy "public relations" outlays by the oil consortium and the enactment of supposedly stiff laws protecting the environment.

In a free enterprise economy, however, big bucks will buy all the liberty needed to achieve the goal of squeezing out every last dollar of profit. Cost efficient is environment contemptuous. Until now the word "environmentalist" has been a dirty word to many macho Alaskans who feel that jobs are at stake and that any criticism of the despoilers would put those jobs in jeopardy. Whether there will be any change in attitude among these people because of the spill is speculative.

Although there has been sharp criticism and suspicion of the oil industry from a number of state legislators, the unflagging support by others for the oil magnates is indicative of the ambivalence in the state as a whole. An independent

study has concluded that the eight oil companies pumped a total of \$434,000 into state candidates in 1988 alone, more than 80 percent of it to friendly Republicans. The cost was dirt cheap for the assurance of dependable voting. It hardly made a dent in the oil budgets, being less than one hour's after-tax profits from North Slope oil.

As sure as the sun rises, megalithic profit-making institutions are going to fight tooth and nail against any move to lower their take. The so-called tough safety laws were watered down in many cases before being enacted. An example is the draft of a liability law which would have assessed penalties of up to \$50 per gallon for oil spills in addition to actual cleanup costs and damages. It was diluted through efforts of the oil consortium's "boys" in the legislature and estimated penalties for the present spill are only \$2.50 per gallon.

Certain laws were passed, one requiring double-hulled tankers, another that the oil companies maintain oil-spill response gear available on two hours' notice and a \$25 million fund for cleanup costs. The oil companies were able to get these and other provisions declared unconstitutional and the state chose not to appeal.

"There has been no emphasis on environmental compliance since the late 1970s and now we're paying the tab," says Richard Fineberg, Governor Steve Cowper's oil and gas advisor. "We've been living in a dream world and the bubble finally popped." That dream world was paid for with oil cartel bribes. Whenever budget cutting has been deemed necessary, the legislature has unhesitatingly singled out the state's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). In 1987 the agency was so hard hit by budget cuts that many of its staff were on a short workweek. Although some of the funds were retrieved in fiscal 1988, the agency has still not recovered a sufficient budget and staff for its vital task. According to Cowper, DEC agents in Valdez were stonewalled by Alyeska when a recent inspection was requested.

Even now, after the spill, certain paid-for legislators doggedly persist in performing their loyal duty. A bill to restore oil taxes that were reduced in a giveaway in 1981, called the Economic Limit Factor (ELF), is having tough going in the state Senate after passing the House by a narrow margin. A number of Anchorage Republicans are staunchly standing up for their benefactors, saying that "it might result in \$3 billion of oil being left in the ground." (Can anyone really believe that this would be the result of additional tax of 14 cents per barrel?) And "passage would discourage oil industry investment."

Two Major Oil Spills That Could Have Been Averted

by Burt Vulliet

Burt Vulliet was employed as a seaman all his working life, having sailed in the fo'c'sle during World War II and on the bridge in the postwar years. At the time of his retirement in 1988 he carried a master's license. He joined the Trotskyist movement in Seattle in 1943 while still in high school and presently considers himself a Trotskyist as a supporter of the Workers Socialist League.

The present oil spill in Prince William Sound is the largest that the U.S. has experienced. But the world's largest was the *Amoco Cadiz* disaster on the coast of France in 1978. And in both cases the environmental catastrophe could have been averted. The determining causes are to be found in the method of capital operation, not in any unresolvable conflict between the need for oil on the one hand and the protection of the environment on the other.

The *Amoco Cadiz* suffered a mechanical failure in the steering en-

gine, rendering it unable to maneuver in increasingly heavy seas. Tugs were standing by ready to assist, but to accept such assistance would have made the vessel and its cargo subject to claims of salvage, involving heavy costs to the owners.

The captain remained in constant contact with the home office on a single sideboard radio, refusing assistance until it proved too late. Thus a decision that should have been made early on, in the interest of good seamanship, was delayed by fears of capital loss.

The question of good seamanship, or rather the lack of it, figures in the Alaskan tragic events too, as the *Exxon Valdez* ran aground on a well-marked reef. But the central fact in this case is that this body of water need never have been exposed to such a danger. The oil companies opted for the Valdez pipeline terminal on the basis of cost, and they fought a political battle in Congress against the proponents of a trans-Canada

pipeline. The Valdez bill required the tie-breaking vote of then vice president Spiro Agnew to pass the Senate, and this vote put the supertankers on the Alaska run.

But even so, the navigational error that placed the *Exxon Valdez* on the rocks need not have resulted in an oil spill of such magnitude had the tanker been of double-hulled rather than single-hulled construction. The oil industry defeated the U.S. Coast Guard's effort to make double hull construction mandatory. Its objection: double hull tankers cost more to build and operate than single hull without providing a corresponding increase in revenue.

These two decisions, a Valdez terminal served by single-hulled supertankers, were based simply on cost. They placed a vast oil spill on the agenda, awaiting only the kind of human error that occurred in the case of the *Exxon Valdez*. ●

"The ELF as passed in 1981 never was fair," states Cowper. "It's never been anything but a giant tax loophole. All the industry cares about is its profits. The bigger the bottom line the better. The bill in their view has never been about protecting development from marginal fields."

(We might note that Cowper, who here sounds like a hero, in actuality reflects the general Alaskan ambivalence. A Fairbanks lawyer and almost certainly not in the pay of the oil industry, he has readily gone along with most of their requests for additional drilling sites. Oil money has been a boon to the state, contributing, along with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, to rising living standards, and the construction of needed schools, hospitals, highways, etc.)

As for discouraging investment, the oil consortium can hardly wait to get their grubby hands on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). Until now the entire state government was keen on beating the "environmentalists" in Congress to allow the refuge to be opened for drilling. In addition, they want to drill in Bristol Bay on Alaska's southwest coast, one of the world's largest salmon fishing areas! Recently, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund disclosed that the oil monopolies have turned Prudhoe Bay "into a godaw-

ful mess. Crude oil has been splattered all across the tundra and spilled into rivers and streams. Toxic chemicals have been dumped into pits and left to leak." There appears to be a temporary halt to plans for further oil drilling, at least until the furor dies down.

Meanwhile the tortuous cleanup proceeds. Fishermen, environmentalists, and local residents have joined together to try to save the hatcheries, clean the beaches (which will take years), and rescue what wildlife has not already perished. The Soviet Union volunteered a skimmer and Norwegian oil spill experts have been on the scene. At this writing the oil slick is still at large and moving dangerously close to the Kenai Peninsula.

As a service to Alaskan television viewers, the Public Broadcasting System has been furnishing daily updates direct from Valdez. Conservationists throughout Alaska have organized a network that they say will be working for years to clean up Prince William Sound. They also plan to "monitor the oil industry's actions and preparedness" from this time forward.

Continued on page 36

Capitalist Anarchy

The 10.1 million gallons of oil dumped into Prince William Sound last March by the ruptured tanker, *Exxon Valdez*, is not the first such disaster in the world, nor the worst. But it is shocking evidence to millions in the U.S., and especially to Alaskans who are the most directly affected, that the corporate giants of the "free enterprise system" are not benign. They are driven by the profit motive, the motor force of capitalist economy, which defies all controls and restraint.

The history of American capitalism demonstrates that when a government is dedicated to the protection of private profit it is easily controlled by demagogic politicians who willingly serve ravenous corporations and other private enterprise. The pernicious influence of the oil industry in Alaska, as documented in the article by Carmen Wynn on page 1, is only the most recent case in point.

When Congress passed the Clean Water Act of 1972 it assigned responsibility to the Coast Guard for developing and monitoring plans to prevent and clean up oil spills in U.S. coastal waters. In Alaska the state government depended on Coast Guard efficiency and corporate integrity. There was little of either. The Coast Guard shirked its responsibility. The Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, which operates the Port of Valdez oil terminal and the industry agency responsible for environmental protection, falsified its preparedness plans. The first result is thousands of dead sea birds, sea otters, and other wildlife, along with polluted fisheries and beaches.

The Coast Guard commander at Valdez who was supposed to inspect environmental protection plans and enforce hazardous waste regulations has since retired and is presently a salaried employee of Exxon. Meantime Exxon officials provide daily apologies for past negligence, larded with hopeful assurances that the oil slick will wash out to sea, "nature's way of cleansing herself." They also let it be known that Exxon has sustained serious financial losses which must be recovered through tax abatement and a hike in the price of gasoline.

The *Juneau Empire*, a typical capitalist daily paper and staunch supporter of oil exploration in Alaska, now deplors what it calls the "price of betrayal." A recent editorial claims that the oil industry gave assurances that it was trustworthy, that it could be depended upon to react quickly and effectively in the event of an unlikely oil spill. It says, "Alaskans did trust the oil companies," but without mentioning the part of these same editorial writers in shoring up the credibility of those companies.

What is to be done now?

The state of Alaska will need to assume responsibility for the cleanup which will be very expensive, and the oil industry must be made to pay, says the editorial. How? Alaska should cancel the "economic limit factor" tax break—a scandalous gift to the oil industry—and in this way send a \$170 million-a-year message to the oil companies. The message is, "Get

your act together. From this point on, Alaskans are not going to take what the oil companies tell them solely at face value. We want performance, not promises. We want clean operations, not apologies after everything goes wrong."

This is almost identical to the message of most environmentalists. A recent letter in the *New York Times* describes the terrible pollution at Prudhoe Bay, as seen by the writers on a trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. "Merely to remove the accumulated vehicles, buildings, and drilling equipment from this distant place, not to mention detoxifying the polluted tundra and dismantling the roads, airstrips, and pipelines, would take years and hundreds of millions of dollars," they say. Then the inevitable question: "Who will pay?"

Answer: "We must learn from the example of Prudhoe Bay, and set strict Federal guidelines, with rigid monitoring, not only for exploration and production, but also for thorough cleanup of the area after its resources have been exploited."

Such answers are evasions.

The U.S. government which is firmly and exclusively controlled by the capitalist class cannot enforce environmental protection laws even when such laws are enacted. This is the lesson of experience, underscored by this most recent Alaskan tragedy.

The Bush administration pretends that the wreck of the *Exxon Valdez* is no reason to impose restraints on the oil industry. But millions of news readers, radio listeners, and TV watchers in this country must surely think otherwise. The political struggle for enactment of regulatory legislation is necessary and ought to be waged by unions and all other organizations that are threatened by corporate greed.

But more important, enforcement of regulations against pollution must be taken out of the hands of a government that is, in fact, a mere appendage of the corporations that it is supposed to be regulating, and taken over by committees of working people through their unions and other mass organizations. The working people of Alaska, many of whom depend on a clean environment for their livelihood, would be more conscientious in making sure that a tragedy like the *Exxon Valdez* spill would not be allowed to happen in the first place, or that if it did the means would be in place to deal with it quickly and efficiently.

The connection between corporate greed and disregard by the capitalist government and corporations of human needs is becoming increasingly clear as one horrible environmental tragedy follows another. The victims are driven to the inescapable conclusion that capitalism and survival are incompatible. The only remaining choice before humankind today—as has become increasingly clear since the dawn of the nuclear age and even before—is a new social system or extinction. ●

Los Angeles Pro-Choice Activists Celebrate Victory Over Operation Rescue

by Evelyn Sell

Pro-choice forces in Los Angeles organized an impressive countermobilization to Operation Rescue's March 23-25 attempts to close down clinics providing health services for women. Women's rights activists utilized lessons learned during Operation Rescue's first foray into the area on February 11, when opponents of abortion blocked entrances to two clinics while police stood by and allowed patients to be harassed. Carolyn Thompson, who tried to enter the Women's Medical Center for a post-operative checkup not connected in any way with an abortion, said, "They pushed me, grabbed my arms and called me a murderer, and said I would burn in hell and showed me horrible pictures of mutilated fetuses." Pro-choice demonstrators helped Thompson to her car, but she fainted from the pain caused when some of her sutures burst open during the assault.

Alerted that Los Angeles would be a major target of Operation Rescue's National Holy Week of Rescue, feminists organized hundreds of volunteers to defend women's health clinics by surrounding the facilities, linking arms to provide a pathway into the buildings, and proclaiming their support for abortion rights through signs, songs, and chants. Organizers researched likely targets, held meetings with city officials and police, and coordinated with clinic directors to make sure no woman would be denied her right to medical treatment and counseling. These aggressive moves pressured local politicians and religious leaders to repudiate Operation Rescue tactics.

On March 2, a federal judge granted a request for a temporary restraining order to keep anti-choice demonstrators from bodily blocking entrances and to stay 15 feet away from clinics. The injunction was requested by the American Civil Liberties Union and supported by many groups including the California chapter of National Organization for Women (NOW), Planned Parenthood, and Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers.

On March 8 the Los Angeles City Council heatedly questioned police officials about their inaction on February 11. Councilwoman Gloria Molina complained about the double standard used by police who enforce trespassing laws against Mexican day workers and the homeless, but allowed Operation Rescue to block clinic entrances. The council voted unanimously for Molina's motion directing the police to use the same policy in all trespassing cases.

On March 19 a gathering of 300 cheered speakers at a pro-choice rally held at California State University, Long Beach. Sponsored by Planned Parenthood of Los Angeles and Orange counties, the "celebration of choice" event was organized to mobilize people to defend clinics later that week. Other preparations included contacting women who had ap-

pointments at the nine planned parenthood clinics during the March 23-25 period, and offering to reschedule them. Very few chose that option. A Planned Parenthood spokeswoman explained, "More often than not, the women have gotten very angry because their rights to privacy and health care is at stake, and they say they will not be stopped."

Leaders of the Ecumenical Council held a press conference to speak out against Operation Rescue. Lisa Desposito, state director of Catholics for Free Choice, criticized Operation Rescue tactics and defended the right of women to make their own choices regarding abortion.

Operation Rescue founder Randall Terry, who personally led the March 23-25 attacks, had boasted that 3,500 would come from around the country to participate. But less than one-third of that number took part in the Holy Week actions. Pro-choice organizers were able to get the upper hand on the first day of demonstrations by utilizing a carefully constructed battle plan which included training over 900 escorts to aid clients' entrances into clinics. Small pro-choice groups were stationed at numerous clinics while "trackers" followed the Operation Rescue caravan and phoned information to the central headquarters. Once the targeted facility was pinpointed, clinic defenders rushed to the site. This enabled them to get there before Operation Rescue. When the opponents of a woman's right to choose arrived, they were faced with hundreds of chanting pro-choice demonstrators carrying signs stating, "Keep Abortion Legal."

The largest demonstration took place on Saturday, March 25, at the Family Planning Associates facility near downtown Los Angeles. Pro-choice activists had already surrounded the clinic when Operation Rescue arrived at 7:00 a.m. When the police ordered everyone to disperse, the pro-choice defenders moved away quickly, regrouped, and continued their legal protest. Operation Rescue members rushed in to block the entrance. Due to the pressure built up by pro-choice forces, the police arrested and jailed over 700, including national leader Randall Terry. The loss of their leaders caused Operation Rescue to cancel their scheduled post-demonstration rally. Pro-choice activists, however, held a spirited victory rally that night. "We've outsmarted, outmaneuvered, and beat [them]," said Kathy Spillar, national spokeswoman for the Feminist Majority.

The *Los Angeles Times* report noted:

For years, pro-choice activists held press conferences, stuffed envelopes, and gave money to political candidates who support a woman's right to an abortion.

In Los Angeles last week, they fought a war.

They matched their opponents in number. They out-

shouted them. They countered grisly photographs of aborted fetuses with graphic posters depicting a naked woman in a pool of blood on a motel room floor.

If last week's choreographed protests hold any clue to the future tenor of the national debate over abortion, it is in the new stridence shown by the pro-choice forces.

Operation Rescue announced that its Los Angeles campaign was designed to focus attention on the U.S. Supreme Court's reconsideration of *Roe v. Wade*. The group's terror tactics against clinics helped mobilize women's rights supporters in highly visible actions, to show that the majority continues to approve of the 1973 decision legalizing abor-

tion. Alarm over the physical attacks from Operation Rescue and the legal threat posed by the U.S. Supreme Court reconsideration spurred the formation of the Coalition for Safe and Legal Abortion. The March 23-25 events also promoted media attention to the April 9 March for Women's Equality/Women's Lives in Washington D.C.

A pro-choice activist explained "When people feel they are losing something — or that they have nothing left to lose — they take to the streets." Abortion rights were won when feminists marched in the streets, and repeated mass mobilizations are needed to defend and extend those rights. ●

April 4, 1989

Modest March 18 El Salvador Protests Held

Actions called by the Stop the U.S. War in El Salvador coalition took place in 50 cities March 18-20. For the most part they were of modest size. The actions were called to coincide with the elections held in El Salvador. March 18 was to be the focus of legal mass marches and rallies while March 20 was slated to feature "direct action" protests blocking military or federal government facilities.

The major components of the national coalition, which was open only to invited groups, consisted of the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), Central American Refugee Network, SANE/Freeze, and the Pledge of Resistance. Ad hoc coalitions were established in a number of cities to organize the local actions.

The size of the protests estimated by the organizers exceeded not only official police estimates — notorious for their understatement — but even those of some veteran movement observers. For example, 3000 were claimed by organizers in New York, while many felt that no more than 1500 participated. Substantial actions of several hundred took place in Chicago and San Francisco, while Los Angeles had the largest turnout of the day, 2000 to 3000 depending on whose estimate one accepts. Other actions were much smaller.

According to reports in the *Guardian* more than 450 were arrested in

March 20 civil disobedience in New York, Washington, San Francisco, and other cities. In Chicago there was a problem when 30 people left the legal march to block traffic, resulting in arrests that some were not prepared for.

The coalition should be applauded for taking the initiative in calling for actions. Their modest size can be explained by several factors.

● The objective situation is clearly less favorable today than in past years. The illusion that a fair peace process is at work in Central America, the new bipartisan consensus worked out by Bush and Congress, and the long period of demobilization of the movement through last year's election campaign, all worked against turning out large numbers.

● The coalition was relatively narrow and made little real effort to involve broader forces in the planning of the actions.

● The political thrust at many of the actions themselves, as well as in much of the organizational work that led up to them, was explicitly one of solidarity with the FMLN, rather than simple opposition to U.S. intervention. While a big majority of the U.S. population is opposed to intervention, only a small layer of radicals is prepared to work actively in support of the armed fighters in Central America. And the emphasis on "direct action" civil disobedience,

which was considered more important by many of the central organizers than the mass action portion of the event, turned many off, especially within the labor movement.

● The narrow focus and organizational base of the coalition precluded substantial participation by labor and religious forces that built previous mass anti-intervention actions such as the April 1987 march on Washington. These genuine mass organizations, key to mobilizing large numbers, do not come into actions controlled by small groups, where they can have no active input.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with building solidarity with the FMLN, the FSLN, or others struggling against U.S. imperialism. There is a place for such work within the movement and revolutionary Marxists support all forms of solidarity with revolutionary fighters.

But solidarity is not a substitute for building a mass movement against U.S. intervention — which in fact remains the best contribution we can make to assisting the struggles in Central America and elsewhere. Such a movement can only be effectively built with a political focus on the basic democratic right of self-determination and an organizational structure based on democratic functioning, open to all. Building such a movement remains a vital task today. ●

Problems of the Eastern Airlines Strike

by Bill Onasch

The following is an edited version of a talk given at the Twin Cities Socialist Forum in Minneapolis on March 18.

The tremendous attention given to the Eastern Airlines strike by the mass media and in the editorial pages of the major newspapers indicates the importance attached to this fight. In recent years the unions have taken a drubbing in the airlines industry as indeed in most industries. Strikes have been broken and thousands of airline employees have lost their jobs to so-called “permanent replacements”—that is strikebreakers—while thousands more have been laid off. Most workers in the industry have been forced to surrender concessions to the carriers in wages, hours, and working conditions.

Many expected the strike to be short-lived. They anticipated that the pilots would continue to work and that Eastern could contract out enough of their maintenance work to keep the bulk of their planes in the air. With the strike appearing to be ineffective, they imagined that the machinists would crumble quickly and many would return to work. Either the International Association of Machinists (IAM)—the union representing mechanics, ramp workers, and baggage handlers—would be smashed completely or at least would suffer a humiliating defeat, forced to accept whatever terms Eastern’s top boss Frank Lorenzo dictated.

That’s the way it was supposed to work. The employers, the media, the politicians, and even the IAM leadership, all prepared for this scenario. They didn’t count on the intervention of a long-absent factor in airlines class struggle—solidarity from the rest of the labor movement, above all from the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA). As an Eastern spokesman so eloquently put it “You can’t fly planes without pilots.”

Labor Relations in the Transportation Industry

Before going on with an analysis of this current strike, I think it is useful to review some of the history of the transportation industry since World War II, and its labor relations, which has created the present relationship of forces for this struggle. First of all, one thing we should keep in mind is that capitalists are not dedicated to producing and selling particular goods and services. Capitalists are in business to make profits. They shift capital continuously from industry to industry seeking to maximize profits. More and more this is done with a short-range fixation on the “bottom line” with little or no regard for long-term effects on the economy as a whole, the ecological impact of their economic activity, or the social ramifications of their economic policies. Huge conglomerates of unrelated companies are put together, and then frequently broken up, through shaky leveraged buy-outs (LBOs).

Recent examples of this process abound: US Steel not only changed its name to USX—it greatly scaled down its steel-making while becoming one of the major petro-chemical producers. General Electric has divested itself of most of its household appliance operations while becoming one of the top financial credit companies. Studebaker-Packard remained a diversified industrial giant long after it stopped producing automobiles. The PennCentral got completely out of the railroad business to concentrate on its real estate properties.

So when we discuss the transportation industry we should remember that we’re not dealing with a group of capitalists interested in developing what’s best for the transportation needs of the United States. We’re dealing with capitalists ready to shift capital in and out of the transport sector depending on where the greatest profits are at any given time.

At the end of World War II rail dominated North American transportation. The bulk of goods, passengers, and mail were moved across America’s rail network—the world’s best at the time. But since then there has been a dramatic restructuring of transportation with tremendous growth of air and road transport accompanied by a gutting of rail. There are several interrelated factors which account for this development:

- Because of the vast, continental size of the U.S. market, developing a strong air transport system made economic sense. The movement of passengers and mail for distances of over 500 miles or so by air is clearly better served from almost every economic or ecological point of view. Unfortunately, the other factors are not so beneficial.
- The dominance of those sectors of the capitalist class controlling the auto and oil industries dictated the policies leading to the explosive growth of the automobile for personal transportation and trucking for freight.
- The capitalist class wanted to reduce the tremendous potential economic power of rail labor which was virtually 100 per cent unionized, though fragmented into dozens of craft unions.
- The shift away from rail allowed the capital accumulated in the rail industry to be funneled into more profitable sectors. While every other major industrial country continued to maintain, or even improve, their

rail systems—almost all of them nationalized properties—North American rail has been reeling backwards for nearly half a century.

Now the supply-side capitalists who talk the loudest today all demand that the government stay out of the economy and allow the marketplace to decide. But this revolution in transport could not have been accomplished without massive intervention by the capitalist-controlled state. How many tens of billions were spent on interstate highways and urban freeways? Without them there would be no room for the cars and trucks (even with them it appears there's no room) and certainly the road system could never have been built by private capital.

Likewise with the airline industry. How many privately built airports, with their complexes of radar and radio equipment, do you know of? The airline carriers have had relatively little training costs for their skilled workers. Almost every pilot and navigator has been trained by the air force or navy. And, especially up through the 1970s, the government paid out enormous subsidies to the airlines for the shipment of mail. Without this massive state contribution to the privately owned carriers the airlines would never have gotten off the ground, so to speak.

Transportation plays a unique role in capitalist society. Virtually every economic activity depends on transportation to one degree or another. Relatively cheap, dependable transportation is the goal of most capitalists and consumers. In most capitalist countries, including the advanced imperialist ones, the railroads and airlines are state-owned and managed in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole. The United States and Thatcher's Britain—where there has been "privatization" and deregulation of airlines and bus companies and a long-term goal of privatizing rail—are notable exceptions.

U.S. capitalists have historically demanded some protection against extortion by the transport capitalists through the intermediary of government regulation. Regulations guaranteed maintenance of service to less lucrative markets as well as restraining greed in the establishment of tariffs.

Labor has been well regulated as well. The Railway Labor Act was extended to include airline as well as rail workers. This law, enacted in the 1920s, provides for government intervention to delay or end strikes, and even to impose a contract settlement. These corporate-state-type provisions have been used on numerous occasions in rail, most recently last fall when Congress imposed a contract upon the workers of the Chicago Northwestern which decimated operating crews.

Airline labor has tended to imitate rail labor with its division into numerous craft unions, only on a much weaker scale. Only the Air Line Pilots Association dominated any one craft. Other crafts were divided up among the IAM, the Teamsters, Transport Workers, Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks, Federation of Flight Attendants, and numerous independent, one-carrier unions. There have been frequent and vicious raiding wars among the unions. And, unlike rail up to the most recent period, airlines workers never won master contracts with the entire industry, only agreements with individual carriers that sometimes varied considerably in wages and working conditions.

Nevertheless, from the end of the Second World War up to the 1980s, airlines labor relations were relatively stable and peaceful. The industry was expanding and profitable and very conscious of its public image. There were some strikes from time to time but never any real efforts by the carriers to fundamentally challenge the unions. Jobs at airlines became attractive, well-paid, secure positions.

Recent Changes

This began to change even before the coming to power of the Reagan administration and its commitment to supply-side economics. It was the Carter administration that began deregulation of the airlines. This was billed as a great opportunity for consumers. With the marketplace deciding and greater competition, fares were supposed to come down. Initially this was true. Fare wars erupted as completely cut-throat competition sought to drive the weaker, or less ruthless, capitalists out of the business. Corporate raiders, flush with junk bonds, appeared on the scene to take over some carriers while driving others out. Completely new and nonunion carriers, such as the short-lived People's Express, came out of nowhere. The number of flights into major lucrative markets multiplied while smaller towns lost service—sometimes completely.

There's not much the carriers can do to reduce costs in the airline industry. Maintenance cutbacks are risky and can be counterproductive. Advertising has to be increased in competitive situations. People's Express found that selling coffee and sandwiches instead of providing them as part of the fare never really found acceptance. Driving down labor costs is the only viable option to increasing profits in a cut-throat situation.

The first victims of the antilabor drive in the airline industry were not actually airline employees—they were the air traffic controllers employed by the federal government. These workers were not the ones you would ordinarily expect to find in the vanguard of the labor movement. Virtually all white males, they were very highly paid. Their union—the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO)—was one of only two national unions that endorsed Ronald Reagan in 1980. Their quarrel was not over wages but intolerable working conditions that resulted from deregulation. Controllers in the busiest air centers were swamped by mushrooming numbers of flights. When they got no relief for their grievances, they went on strike.

Now there may be a lot of restrictions on the right to strike in this country but, in theory at least, all workers covered under the National Labor Relations and Railway Labor acts are guaranteed the right to collective action. But government employees have no such protection. They are forbidden to strike (though there have been some successful illegal strikes against the government such as the 1970 postal strike). President Reagan never batted an eyelash as he fired every single striking PATCO member.

Responsibilities of Trade Union Bureaucracy

The union movement denounced Reagan's strikebreaking. Its official leadership made PATCO a central issue in

the massive Solidarity Day demonstration in Washington which drew several hundreds of thousands of participants. But they took no practical steps in solidarity. Just think of what the pilots could have done. They had a very good case from a safety point of view for refusing to fly. The IAM, Transport Workers, Teamsters, and others had the legal right to honor the PATCO picket lines. But aside from a half-hearted boycott of air travel by union bureaucrats, which didn't last very long, nothing was done to put pressure on the air carriers and the government.

The fact of the matter is that the union bureaucracy cynically used the smashing of PATCO as an argument that strikes had become ineffective and that under Reagan at least it was necessary to be practical and negotiate concessions with the employers. This approach was taken in virtually every industry and most especially among the airlines.

The IAM is today billed as a militant opponent of concessions. It is led by an avowed "socialist," a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, the principal U.S. social-democratic group. But the IAM has agreed to one give-back contract after another throughout the industry—including earlier agreements with Eastern. The entire union bureaucracy must accept responsibility for the sorry state of the union movement today after more than ten years (beginning on a big scale with the Chrysler bailout in 1979) of surrendering jobs, wages, pensions, benefits, and working conditions.

The carriers' attack on the unions developed in a big way in 1983. Frank Lorenzo demanded that Continental Airlines machinists give up 600 jobs and agree to up to 40 percent wage cuts for nonskilled workers. When the IAM responded with a strike, Lorenzo started massive hiring of strikebreakers. The pilots continued to fly, scabbing on the IAM. But Lorenzo wasn't satisfied with just breaking the IAM. Skillfully utilizing the bankruptcy law, he abrogated all union contracts. After briefly shutting Continental down completely Lorenzo agreed to rehire about a third of the work force at half their previous pay. At that point the ALPA and the flight attendants decided to join the IAM on the picket lines. But it was too late. Lorenzo managed to break the unions completely and has operated Continental ever since with a totally nonunion work force.

Also in 1983 United Airlines was able to get a give-back contract from the IAM that established a two-tier wage plan. The ALPA resisted the two-tier and went on strike in 1985. But the strike was broken and today there is a three-tier wage agreement at United.

Pan Am defeated a 1985 strike, establishing a two-tier wage system, greatly expanding the use of nonunion part-time workers, who receive no benefits, and eliminating hundreds of ramp, cleaning, and food service jobs.

In 1986, TWA, headed by corporate raider Carl Icahn, who merged Ozark into TWA, demanded wage cuts of up to \$2 per hour. Only the flight attendants resisted with a strike but they were quickly replaced with scabs leaving three thousand strikers without jobs.

Shortly after Lorenzo's bankruptcy maneuver at Continental, Eastern Airlines, then headed by former astronaut Frank Borman, also cried poverty. The IAM, ALPA, and the Transport Workers Union all agreed to an 18 percent pay

cut. In return, the workers were to receive stock in Eastern of dubious value and some union bureaucrats were given seats on Eastern's board of directors. Further wage cuts were agreed to in 1985. In 1986 the flight attendants gave back even more, accepting a four-tier wage spread including super-cut-rates for Latin American-based workers.

The IAM has resisted further concessions to Eastern since its takeover by Lorenzo's Texas Air. Lorenzo sought to use this fact to divide Eastern workers presenting the machinists as selfish elitists, not willing to share the burden of making Eastern profitable.

IAM Seeks Government Intervention

One of the peculiarities of the Railway Labor Act is that union contracts never actually expire. They are merely subject to amendment from time to time, mainly for the purpose of adjusting wages. Until there is a new agreement, the old wage rates stay in place. Historically, particularly in rail itself, this has been a great advantage to the carriers. Wage agreements have typically been stalled for two to three years. Eventually the employers may have to pay retroactive wage increases but in the meantime they keep control of this money, earning millions of dollars in interest. But this advantage disappears when the carrier's goal is not wage increases but wage cuts. While Lorenzo has been eager to slash the wages of IAM workers the IAM has been content to stall, maintaining the status quo.

Finally on March 4 the legal situation freed both the carrier and the union to take action in support of their demands. The IAM devised a strategy not based on their own strength, which they estimated to be quite weak, and not on a genuine campaign to win massive labor solidarity, which they both feared and doubted, but instead a plan to force further government intervention. They hoped that an imposed settlement by a presidential board, or by Congress, would be less devastating than what Lorenzo was demanding. There was also the possibility that Lorenzo, frustrated with his inability to get further concessions, might sell Eastern to a more enlightened capitalist.

To further their objectives the social democratic leadership of the IAM mapped out a militant sounding plan of action. They boasted that they would not only shut down Eastern; they would picket other airlines, the nation's railroads, and perhaps even aircraft manufacturing plants as well. They raised the prospect of a complete national transportation tie-up. The only way to prevent such an unfortunate disruption of the nation would be for President Bush to do the right thing and intervene to stop both the strike and Lorenzo's wage cuts.

It never occurred to these responsible bureaucrats that this great potential power could be used to fight for genuine improvements for Eastern's workers rather than for government intervention. These "socialists" merely wanted the capitalist state to ease the burden of further give-backs to the employer. John L. Lewis once remarked that the American labor movement reminded him of the biblical story about the lions being led by asses. Such a comparison is even more appropriate today.

The last few days before the strike were marked by much irony. While the capitalists usually support government intervention to end strikes since it is generally a useful tool to intimidate the workers, this time they smelled blood at Eastern. They wanted to cheer Lorenzo on in his union-busting and thought it would be a shame for the government to give the embattled Eastern workers even a temporary reprieve. Prestigious journals such as the *New York Times* started cranking out editorials urging Bush not to "give in" to the unions by invoking an emergency truce. Bush got the message. For the first time in history a U.S. president disregarded the recommendation of his own advisory board and declined to intervene in the Eastern strike. Instead he pledged to close up the loopholes in the Railway Labor Act that permit sympathy strikes and so-called "secondary boycotts"—actions banned under the Taft-Hartley Act applying to all other (nontransportation) unions.

Although everyone acknowledged before the strike that sympathy strikes and boycotts by air and rail workers would be legal, the carriers managed to get injunctions against these actions—much to the disappointment of rail workers who had been eagerly awaiting the opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity. After it became clear that—much to their surprise—the Eastern pilots were going to honor the IAM lines thus shutting down Eastern, the IAM bureaucrats decided not to pursue the national tie-up they had threatened.

The pilots' action confirmed the old maxim that it isn't the unions or radicals that organize workers—it's the greed of the bosses. Lorenzo not only took away tremendous economic concessions from Eastern workers—he also offended their dignity and self-respect. And he had lied to them so many times that few trusted his offers to cut a better deal with the pilots if they would help him smash the IAM.

The pilots are not exactly wild-eyed radicals. Most of them were trained in the officer corps of the armed forces. They have wages and a life-style far greater than almost any other group of workers. But they don't like to be pushed around.

One Eastern pilot, who had been shot down and imprisoned during a bombing raid in Vietnam, described to a reporter how Lorenzo tried to intimidate pilots. He said, "We don't scare easily. We've lived through real danger." That seems to be the dominant mood among Eastern pilots and an attitude that has spread to pilots of other carriers who also remember how Lorenzo smashed the ALPA at Continental.

Limited Perspectives

While the recognition that Lorenzo is an s.o.b. who can't be trusted has fueled the militant response by all Eastern workers and the tremendous sympathy and solidarity that has come from the rest of organized labor, most of them have not yet advanced beyond Lorenzo to generalize about the employers *as a class*. This is a weakness that leaves their struggle vulnerable to manipulation by the consciously class collaborationist bureaucracy.

The bureaucrats have long been looking for a replacement owner for Eastern as their alternative to class struggle methods for solving the problems of the workers. The ALPA

has retained Farrell Preston Kupersmith, associate managing partner at the prestigious accounting firm Touche Ross, to organize their fight against Lorenzo. Kupersmith, who has skillfully used video-taped messages, is credited with forging the pilots' unity in shutting down Eastern. He also did a remarkable job in uncovering the complex financial structure of Lorenzo's Texas Air empire, which owns both Continental (which earlier had absorbed Frontier and People's Express) and Eastern. He has "leaked" damaging stories about Lorenzo to the business press—including a notorious one in the *Wall Street Journal* which led to a brief ban of that publication from Eastern's magazine racks. But Kupersmith is no Ray Rogers (organizer of corporate campaigns against J.P. Stevens, Hormel, Campbell Soup, and others) just as Touche Ross is not Corporate Campaign, Inc. (Rogers' organization for assisting unions).

Kupersmith has acknowledged that he worked against the unions in Lorenzo's earlier bankruptcy scam at Continental. He told the *Wall Street Journal* that Touche Ross switched sides this time around because they "have a pro-business bias, but the system here is being abused." Addressing an ALPA strike rally he exclaimed, "This is not labor versus corporate America—this is values versus a criminal."

Kupersmith and the ALPA bureaucrats would like to engineer a pilots-backed takeover of Eastern. The IAM does not appear so anxious to get into the airlines business itself but they are actively promoting the idea of getting a new owner. Incredibly one of the names being bandied about is Carl Icahn—the corporate raider at TWA who smashed the flight attendants union.

I can't predict what will come out of the bankruptcy proceedings resulting from Lorenzo's filing Chapter 11. Lorenzo may very well be forced to sell Eastern, either in its present form, or in bits and pieces. We can be sure that the bankruptcy judge and any prospective new buyer[s] will put pressure on the IAM, and probably the other crafts as well, for further concessions. And we can be further assured that the bureaucrats are willing to make more concessions. If there is no peaceful settlement through the bankruptcy process we may yet see a back-to-work order from Bush and/or a congressionally imposed contract.

It is possible that the Eastern workers, as a result of their struggle, may give up less than if they had accepted Lorenzo's demands. It is likely that even if the IAM had agreed to Lorenzo's concessions, Eastern would have been forced into bankruptcy in the not-too-distant future. But one thing's for sure—the bureaucracy's wheeling and dealing to find progressive capitalists and a benevolent government is a dead end.

Experience over the past decade confirms what revolutionary socialists have been saying for a long time: the tactics of business unionism that could get by during the 1950s and 1960s in a period of economic boom are disastrous today in a time of growing crisis. And even militant, democratic struggles, such as the fight of Hormel workers and the paper workers, are hard pressed when limited to isolated groups in one company or industry. Strikes are not outmoded as some claim. They still can be powerful weapons. But strikes

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Collective Bargaining and Democratic Unionism

by Richard Scully

Elements of a new leadership and significant opposition currents are emerging today in the U.S. labor movement. They are challenging the program, policies, and methods of operation of the old-line leadership on many fronts.

Although the situation is uneven in different unions and in different parts of the country, there are a number of outstanding examples of this growing trend:

- The election of Jerry Tucker as director of United Auto Workers region 5 and member of the international executive board; the announcement by Don Douglas, also an opposition New Directions supporter, that he will run for director of merged Detroit area regions 1 and 1-B; and the spread of the New Directions movement to other sections of the UAW.
- The election of Tony Mazzocchi as secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union; his assumption of responsibility to coordinate the union's political action program and his ongoing activity in support of a labor party.
- The emergence of a new leadership in the Mine Workers resulting in more democratic rights for the membership. (Incidentally, the miners' international president Richard Trumka told a 1985 convention of the Newspaper Guild, "This country has one party with two branches, both apparently subservient to the interests of big money and the power of multinational corporations.")
- The continued growth of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) and the victories won for union members' right to vote directly for election of the union's top officers and the right to reject a contract offer by simple majority vote.
- The Mail Handlers' victory in winning autonomy rights from the Laborers International Union.
- The widespread opposition in many unions to the AFL-CIO's support for U.S. foreign policy, forcing some changes in the Federation's position on Central America and military spending.
- The Eastern Airlines strike and the significant breakthrough in union solidarity and militancy. The president of the Air Line Pilots Association, Henry Duffy, reflects this when he says, "The ALPA has changed in a fundamental way. Are we more militant? Sure we are. It's a sign of the times." — *New York Times*, March 19, 1989.

The Collective Bargaining Process

One of the key problems that any new leadership in the U.S. labor movement must take on is how the collective bargaining process functions. Developing a program to strengthen the collective bargaining process by ensuring greater participation of the rank and file is a priority task today. The question in the negotiation of every contract is whether the membership is exercising genuine democratic control, from the framing of demands to the vote to ratify or strike.

One recent example of where such control was exercised involved Local 26 of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union in Boston. The local concluded negotiations with area hotel owners on December 1 last year, less than two hours before a scheduled strike. They secured impressive gains, including wage and benefit improvements, an educational trust fund, and an employer financed trust fund to provide affordable housing.

Local 26 won its fight only because its members were fully involved every step of the way. They negotiated with a 164-worker committee, ensuring that every member got news of the contract talks. They mobilized two thousand workers for a strike authorization rally and made it clear that they were prepared to do whatever was necessary to keep out scabs. They reached out to other unions and community organizations for support and they confronted the employers with the kind of united power that brings results at the bargaining table.

There are similar positive experiences in other unions that could be cited. (See for example the article, "Nine Days That Shook Oregon or: How OPEU Became a Union," by Ann Montague, *BIDOM* May 1988.)

But the prevailing pattern is far different. It is still one of manipulation of the collective bargaining process by the labor bureaucracy in ways calculated to prevent the rank and file from having meaningful input. In order to develop a strategy to combat this, it is necessary to understand why and how it developed, and how it works.

Employers' Offensive

U.S. workers have been taking a severe beating since the onset of the world economic crisis in 1974-75:

- After adjusting for inflation, average weekly paychecks last year were 15 percent smaller than they were in 1973 (*Wall Street Journal*, March 20, 1989).

- The average family income of the poorest fifth of the population declined by 6.1 percent from 1979 to 1987, while the highest-paid families' income rose 11.1 percent (*New York Times*, March 23, 1989).
- Earnings of workers who lost jobs in durable goods industries fell an average of 21 percent from \$344 to \$273 a week.
- Pay and benefit cuts for steelworkers, after allowing for inflation, totaled \$4.5 billion just between 1983 and 1988.
- In the retail industry, 40 percent of workers are part-time and their wages now average \$4.17 an hour as compared to \$7.05 for full-timers.
- Only one-third of the jobless get benefits today, compared to 76 percent a decade ago.
- In 1970 U.S. workers had the highest living standard in the world; today they rank seventh.

Union contracts negotiated over the past 15 years have seen concession piled upon concession. Wages have been cut. Cost of living clauses have been stripped from many agreements. The divisive tier system has been widely adopted. Modifications of existing health and welfare plans have been agreed to, resulting in greater costs for workers. Other benefits have been reduced. Restrictive work rules, including compulsory overtime, have been imposed, eliminating jobs and intensifying speed-up. The "team concept" and "quality of work life" circles have spread, weakening union consciousness and obscuring class divisions and interests.

Local unions belonging to the same international have been pitted against each other in competition for jobs. The companies conduct this whipsawing operation to see which local will surrender the most in pay, benefits, and conditions. Then management decides which plant will be closed and which will continue to operate.

The program advanced by top union leaders to cope with this employer offensive has failed to stem the tide of declining living standards, plant shutdowns, and union busting. Official policy promotes protectionist trade legislation — which excludes some products made in other countries from entering the United States and results in other countries erecting trade barriers which reduce jobs in U.S. export industries. It supports multi-tier wage and benefit systems — which compel new employees to work for less, thereby undermining union solidarity and jeopardizing the jobs of older workers whom the bosses replace with lower-paid new employees. And it relies on Democratic Party politicians, who inevitably side with the employers whenever there is a showdown situation. These kinds of measures have not saved a single job.

The official leaders of the U.S. labor movement try to avoid a struggle wherever they can. They are committed to a defense of the capitalist system, and believe that it is their responsibility to guarantee the profits of the bosses, arguing that only employers who are profitable can "provide jobs" for workers. From this flows their attempt to pressure union members into making whatever concessions the companies *claim* are necessary to keep them profitable and competitive. Such an approach disarms the union and makes it a hostage to the capitalists' greed. After all, no corporate executive ever believes that profits are high enough.

At the same time, the union officials who demand that their members give in to the bosses' demands never make concessions themselves. Their salaries, often in six figures, continue to climb and are not interrupted during strikes.

A Visible Countertrend

Today, however, the labor officialdom faces a growing problem. There is increasing ferment among a rank and file that has been pushed to the wall. "Fight Back, Not Give Back!" is becoming the rallying cry of more and more workers. The new attitude is fueled by the fact that corporations are currently making record profits. Here is how a recent *Business Week* article describes the situation:

Everyone knows that labor has lost its clout at the bargaining table. Everyone, that is, but rank and file union members. In the past few months members of several large unions have angrily rejected contracts negotiated by their officers. The resulting turmoil has threatened to unseat several union leaders and caused confusion for employers.

Five years into the recovery, many union members no longer want to hear complaints about high labor costs. Union workers see strong profits at many companies and good pay hikes for nonunion employees. So when their leaders agree to modest settlements rather than risk a strike, members lose patience. ("Union Members Say: 'Thanks, But No Thanks,'" July 18, 1988)

Powers of the Union Leadership

As the old-line bureaucrats find it more and more difficult to negotiate take-away contracts at the behest of the bosses they feel increasingly compelled to exercise tighter control and restrict the participation of the union rank and file. This is the only way they can achieve their objective of maintaining peace with the employers by selling cheap contracts to their members, while keeping dues dollars flowing and holding strikes to a minimum.

In order to implement that objective, such leaders have consolidated enormous powers for themselves to influence the course of negotiations. At the top of a union's hierarchy sits the international president, who is frequently given the authority to: prevent contracts from being signed or even voted on; authorize strikes or deny strike authorization; conduct negotiations on a national level and intercede in negotiations being conducted by local unions; authorize extension of picket lines beyond the initially struck facility or deny such authorization; call off a strike; distribute millions of dollars in subsidies to local unions on a selective basis or cancel such subsidies; place local unions in trusteeship; hire and fire international staff; hire and fire regional directors and department heads (where they are not elected pursuant to constitutional provisions); order an audit of the books of a local union; direct the legal staff; control what information the members receive, including the contents of union newspapers and other publications; chair meetings of the international executive board and direct its activities; and make decisions in between meetings of the board either individually or with other top officials.

Local union officials, some with strong bureaucratic tendencies, may also have wide latitude in running their locals. Many of them willingly follow the lead and emulate the policies of the international officers whose ranks they would like to join.

What are some of the ways these union officials—both international and local—use their powers to circumvent, distort, and abuse the collective bargaining process in order to undercut effective and meaningful rank-and-file decision making? And what are some of the alternatives?

Denying the Forms of Democracy

● *Collective bargaining without workers*

The labor bureaucracy has devised a number of techniques to deny members a voice in the collective bargaining process or to limit that voice. One classic example was the Saturn agreement negotiated by the UAW with General Motors prior to the hiring of any workers. The pact was approved by the UAW's International Executive Board reportedly with only one dissenting vote.

Saturn is by no means unique. There have been many contracts negotiated privately between union officials and employers covering work places not yet in operation. It is part of the strategy of organizing from the top down. In exchange for union recognition the company gets a cheap contract. The labor leaders get more dues dollars. The workers subsequently hired get the proverbial shaft.

An alternative program to counter this would require union leaders to negotiate *tentative* agreements subject to the approval of the workers once they are hired, or to make ratification contingent upon agreement by local unions or divisions of the international which might be affected, or both.

● *Involving the Government*

The U.S. labor movement has a long and proud tradition of opposing governmental intervention in its affairs. When the government attempted to take over the Teamsters Union through its RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act) lawsuit, the labor movement united in denouncing it. Similarly, trade unionists have historically fought antilabor legislation like the Taft-Hartley and Landrum-Griffin acts, which severely restrict unions in organizing and conducting effective strikes, and permit federal officials to regulate the internal affairs of unions.

But when it comes to collective bargaining, the story is different. The labor movement frequently invites the government to intervene to effect settlements, while the rank and file gets pushed to the side.

In the Eastern Airlines strike, labor leaders launched a campaign for President Bush to set up an emergency board. While this course would have given the striking machinists some short-term material advantages—maintaining wages and benefits for several weeks without cuts or reductions—these were outweighed by the potential negative consequences of governmental intervention. The result could have been a legislatively imposed ending of the strike. Members of Congress would have voted it, not the IAM membership.

That very thing happened in a 1988 strike at the Chicago Northwestern railroad, when Congress ended up deciding

the terms of a settlement on September 9. The result was takeaways and the elimination of at least 700 jobs out of 2,400 held by members of the United Transportation Union. As one UTU official put it, "They put railway labor back 100 years and, consequently, the little man has been beaten down again, through the corporations by the politicians."

Bankruptcy courts, judges, governors, mayors, the federal mediation and conciliation service, and other government agencies are appealed to by union bureaucrats who have a difficult time talking to their own members. But the membership should be the ones to decide whether any of these arms of government get involved in *their* negotiations. And the membership should be educated to be wary of such intervention—including from so-called friendly Democratic Party politicians—and to understand that there is no substitute for the mobilization of the rank and file as the key to winning a decent contract.

● *Localized or Fragmented Bargaining*

The last few decades have seen a breakdown in national bargaining in auto, steel, packing, and other major industries. Instead of unions dealing with the industry as a whole and setting standard rates, they increasingly deal with companies on a one-by-one basis.

Even where companies are unionized in workplaces across the country, that does not necessarily mean that they are parties to national contracts. Kroger, Safeway, and other organized food giants negotiate different contracts with local unions in different areas, the result being a maze of different provisions governing wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Where there are national contracts, local unions still negotiate local conditions. But this has been expanded to allow companies to play one group of workers off against another.

In this way, top union leaders diminish the input of the rank and file. For example, a concessionary contract may be negotiated with a company in one area. Workers in another area, employed by the same company, had no say or voice in those negotiations, yet find themselves effectively bound by the results. They may be denied strike sanction if the issue in their negotiations is to secure or maintain what has already been surrendered.

The answer to this problem, of course, is for all locals to be joined in a single bargaining unit and to negotiate a contract with uniform rates and benefits. If more than one contract must be negotiated, there should at least be common expiration dates.

● *"Off the Record" Bargaining*

Another way to take the members out of the collective bargaining process is for the leadership to secretly conduct negotiations with management without the negotiating committee present. These are so-called "off the record" sessions and they are usually held in plush hotels or remote locations where rank-and-file union members are not likely to go.

At "off the record" negotiations, the union leader attempts to ascertain what the company's final offer will really be ("How much do you have?") and the company tries to gauge what the union's bottom line demands are ("What do you have to have?"). Frequently an agreement is reached. Then

the formal bargaining resumes (or begins) with the workers' negotiating committee present. The union leader can posture, masquerade as a militant, and pound the table demanding significant improvements. The employer's representative takes a hard and seemingly intransigent line. Eventually there is movement by both sides and they arrive at the predetermined agreement.

Whether the union's negotiating committee is aware that a charade is taking place, disguised as genuine collective bargaining, depends on the committee's experience, perception, and sophistication. But the salient point here is that the real bargaining—as opposed to the sham—has taken place in the committee's absence.

There is nothing wrong in principle with an individual union leader meeting privately with a company representative for the purpose of negotiating a contract, as long as two conditions are met: the workers know about and authorize the meeting *in advance*; and they are given a full and accurate report of what takes place. In the absence of these conditions, "off the record" meetings are nothing but an elitist substitute for workers' meaningful participation in the collective bargaining process.

● *The Two-Thirds Vote*

Most union constitutions require a two-thirds strike vote. But what happens if a majority of the workers vote to reject a company offer, yet less than two-thirds vote strike authorization?

For years the Teamsters resolved this question by requiring a two-thirds vote to reject a contract. Anything less than that and the contract was deemed approved. Only now do the Teamsters say they are ending this arbitrary practice.

But other unions have the same problem: a majority has voted not to ratify the contract, yet two-thirds of the workers have not approved a strike. The simple bureaucratic solution is to take the decision making out of the hands of the rank and file and have the contract approved by the union's executive board. That is the common practice.

Militant rank-and-file oriented union leaders address this issue differently. They hold discussions, work to solidify the membership, get it in a fighting mood, and hold open the threat of another strike vote, which may produce the needed two-thirds majority. This kind of activity creates the pressure needed to move the employers to make a more acceptable offer. If not, the members, after full discussion and a sober assessment of their position, will have to decide their course of action, which may mean another strike vote or accepting what's on the table. But the decision should be the members' and it should not be bureaucratically imposed.

● *The Contract Summary*

If an agreement has been reached between the employer and the union's negotiators, a "summary" is generally presented to the members at a ratification meeting. If the summary accurately sets forth the agreement, there's no problem. But what happens if it doesn't?

In 1982 the membership of United Food and Commercial Workers Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota, was provided a summary of the agreement reached with the George A. Hormel Co. It specified there could be "no reduction in wages and benefits." But when the company cut the hourly rate

from \$10.69 to \$8.25 under a "me too" clause, the arbitrator found no such language in the actual agreement. The workers had ratified a contract believing they had certain protections which it turned out they didn't have at all. This is not an uncommon occurrence.

The constitution of the United Mine Workers of America, adopted as part of the reform movement that toppled the corrupt Tony Boyle administration, requires a written *verbatim* copy of any agreement be submitted to each member, with an intervening period of time to study it before a vote is taken. Other unions would do well to emulate the miners in this respect.

● *The Mail Ballot*

If workers will not approve the company's offer at a meeting, they can always be asked to do so through a mail ballot sent to their homes. That was the device used by UFCW international union officers when they could not get the Hormel workers to end their 1985-86 strike. The tactic failed, however, when the rank and file voted to reject the company's offer and continue their strike, even according to the international's own count of the mail ballots.

The mail ballot can be used to circumvent the collective bargaining process by barring the questioning, discussion, debate, confrontation of views, and influencing of the undecided which open meetings allow. Such meetings are indispensable for the democratic functioning of a union, and they provide the best vehicle for making union leaders and representatives accountable for what they have negotiated.

Sending ballots to homes is intended to get greater expression from more conservative workers who might not attend union meetings. Then, too, there is the hope that spouses and other family members will help influence the worker to avoid voting to strike, with all the hardships and sacrifice that may entail.

Committed union members invariably oppose the mail ballot alternative. They want the exchange which meetings bring and they harbor suspicions on the fairness and regularity of a vote conducted through the mail. Even if, for practical reasons, mail ballots are unavoidable, there should be guarantees of meetings preceding them where the issues can be freely aired.

● *Side Agreements*

While proposed contracts are customarily presented to the membership for ratification, the same is rarely the case with "side agreements," i.e., the memoranda or letters of understanding between company and union representatives designed to clear up ambiguities or omissions in the master agreement.

These can be of great importance to the rank and file, for they may deal with such crucial questions as seniority rights, bumping, transfers, wages, benefits, and conditions. Yet the union leadership in effect bargains on its own—no committee of the workers present, no control by the membership, no general ratification vote.

The alternative to this practice would be a strict rule that *all* proposed amendments to the contract—for that is what they are—must be submitted to the members for approval *before* they are signed. And the elected negotiating commit-

Coming Next Month in the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism:*

- An Analysis of the Elections in the USSR
- Recent Events in Soviet Georgia
- The Agreement Between Solidarnosc and the Polish Government
- Hundreds of Thousands March in D.C. for a Woman's Right to Choose

tee should be integrally involved in the bargaining which produces those amendments.

Denying the Essence of Democracy

Through all of these undemocratic mechanisms union officials maintain their ability to manipulate collective bargaining and impose conditions on their own memberships. But in addition to denying the forms of democracy, what is even more important, they violate its *essence*. Those "leaders" whose overriding priority is to avoid a strike and win membership approval for what may be an inadequate contract have developed methods for accomplishing this as a result of years of practice and experimentation.

The process begins with imparting information to the members on a selectively negative basis: other workers have given similar concessions, or worse; the company took a strike over the same issues elsewhere and refused to budge; the company's financial records have been examined and there isn't any more there; the company can't afford what is being asked if it is to remain profitable and competitive; etc.

If these arguments don't work others can be invoked: the company will replace you; it will break the strike and bust the union; it will shut down; it will move south or out of the country, etc. This list is almost inexhaustible.

Pessimism, negativism, gloom, and doom—these have become the hallmark of many union misleaders. Their aversion to taking on the boss is made apparent. Their no-win strategy is designed to intimidate, dampen enthusiasm, and narrow the options so that workers feel they have no alternative but to swallow what the company has offered. After all, why undertake a fight when your own leadership tells you you can't win it and when they let you know they won't support you?

The essence of democratic decision making in the collective bargaining process is the right to choose freely on the basis of access to *all* the relevant information and without fear induced by a leadership in cahoots with the boss.

How successful have these leaders been in ramming through contracts the members were prepared to resist? Quite successful for the first several years after the employers' antilabor offensive intensified in the mid-1970s. But, as previously noted, times are changing. UFCW Local P-9's strike in 1985-86—supported by 3,000 local unions across the country—was a watershed. While the strike was

crushed with the aid of the UFCW International leadership, it left an undeniable legacy.

Today more and more unions are engaging in battles against their employers, with or without their leadership's support. *Business Week* (cited above) acknowledges the trend: "Some unions are likely to test their muscle against management, even if it means running over their own leaders in the process."

Looking Ahead

Two interrelated things are needed within the labor movement to push this trend forward. One is caucuses open to all members and organized at all levels—local unions, district and regional bodies, international unions, central labor councils, etc. These should be organized around a program of unity and solidarity in the struggle against the bosses for contracts with better living standards for workers. These caucuses will be effective if they are based on independence from the government and relate labor's immediate economic needs to broader social programs such as a national health care system which is so vitally needed today. The fight for such programs can strengthen the labor movement and solidify its ties with its allies in the community.

Along with this we need a thorough housecleaning of the present labor bureaucracy and its replacement with a new breed of leaders, solidly committed to these same principles and to the needs of the rank and file—leaders who never have to be reminded which side of the struggle they are on.

The main problem in collective bargaining today is the class-collaborationist policies of the top union leaders. The pattern for too long in the U.S. labor movement has been for leadership at the local level to capitulate to those officials when pressured to avert a militant struggle. P-9 ruptured the pattern. But it had to leave to the future—to other workers and to other unions—the deepening of the struggle for a democratic labor movement.

A top priority of that struggle today must be the fight on the collective bargaining front, for it is here that millions of workers directly engage their employers and test their leaders. A new, reconstituted labor movement will put an end to the bureaucratic abuse of the collective bargaining process and return control of unions to the members who, after all, *are* the union. ●

The Left and Electoral Politics: Lesser Evil, Populism, or Working Class Independence?

by Wayne McElyea

The 1988 elections offered big opportunities for labor and the left. The stunning success of Jesse Jackson's primary campaign graphically indicated that millions of working people of all races were eagerly looking for a radical alternative to the present political establishment. Dissatisfaction with the candidates and platforms of the two major bosses' parties was even greater than usual resulting in the biggest abstention rate in living memory. A bold independent campaign would have been welcomed by many who felt that the Bush/Dukakis race was totally irrelevant to their interests.

Of course such a campaign did not develop. Jesse Jackson, the union bureaucracy, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), the Communist Party, the *Guardian*, all supported Dukakis as the necessary "lesser evil." Some on the left, such as the socialist group Solidarity, abstained, limiting themselves to advocating the future formation of an "independent" Rainbow. The Socialist Workers Party, historically the main force of independent socialist election campaigns in the post-World War II period, confined themselves to a narrow propaganda campaign existing almost exclusively in the pages of the *Militant*, not taken seriously by anyone, least of all the SWP itself. The opportunities were squandered.

Since the election there has been much rumination about the electoral situation by the left and the union bureaucracy. Publications such as *In These Times* and *Monthly Review* have made the point that Dukakis would have had a real chance to win if he had pursued an aggressive liberal campaign. *Monthly Review* dusted off an old "economic bill of rights" from Franklin Roosevelt's 1944 campaign promises as an offering to Democratic Party ideology that could win.

Perhaps Dukakis could have won with a Harry Truman-style campaign. The polls support such a possibility. But this argument is only important if you accept the historic proposition of "lesser-evilism," that is, if you confine your options to supporting the least objectionable candidate of the ruling class. Most of what passes for "the left" in this country does indeed support this proposition and will continue to function as tactical advisers to, as well as doorbell-ringers for, the Democratic Party. But those seeking a genuine break with capitalist politics would have expressed no joy had a "liberal" Dukakis been elected.

Some remember, or at least know from a study of history, that Harry Truman won in 1948 with a Harry Truman-style campaign and the indispensable support of most of the labor movement. He proceeded to use the Taft-Hartley Act—which he had symbolically vetoed, safe in the knowledge that it would be overridden by Congress—more than any other president has. He also launched the witch-hunt inaccurate-

ly attributed to Senator Joe McCarthy, took the United States into the Korean war, mobilized the cold war, and developed the hydrogen bomb. Nevertheless, compared to Stevenson, Kennedy, Johnson, Humphrey, and Carter—other lesser evils supported by the left—Truman was probably the most "progressive."

Two Alternatives

Those forces who reject the lesser evil shell game appear to be largely divided between two principal strategic alternatives. One, advocated by Solidarity and the left wing of the social democracy, the Socialist Party USA, is a new progressive third party either based on, or modeled on, the Rainbow Coalition. The other, advanced by some union officials such as Tony Mazzocchi, secretary treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, and revolutionary Marxists in the Trotskyist tradition, is the concept of a working class party based on the trade unions. There appears to be renewed interest in both alternatives.

Earlier this year the *New York Times* printed a short essay on the "Op-Ed" page by Bernie Sanders entitled "This Country Needs a Third Political Party." Sanders has received national prominence as the only recent sitting mayor (of Burlington, Vermont) who describes himself as a socialist. Last year he narrowly missed being elected to Congress as an independent, garnering 38 percent of the vote compared to 41 percent for the victorious Republican and only 19 percent for the Democrat. Obviously Sanders knows something about electoral politics.

Sanders used the limited space available to him in the *Times* quite well, delivering some telling arguments against the two-party swindle. He points out the bipartisan culpability for war in Central America, environmental destruction, lack of national health insurance. Sanders effectively deals with the question of voter apathy:

The two major parties not only fail to provide serious solutions to the enormous problems facing our society but, in many instances, don't even discuss the issues. Given the level of the current political debate, the interesting question is not why half the people don't vote but why half the people do.

Sanders advocates the creation of "a new, third party progressive political movement to represent the needs and interests of working people, minorities, the elderly, farmers, environmentalists, peace activists and all people who believe they are not represented by status quo politics."

In the December issue of *Labor Notes*, Kim Moody makes similar arguments. Moody takes up the proposition that Dukakis could have won with a liberal image.

The lesson of 1988 would seem obvious: to motivate working class non-voters of all races and to win back disaffected blue collar voters, you need to project a populist or working class-oriented program. The problem with this easy lesson is that the Democratic Party is not controlled by closet populists or crypto-New Dealers. It is dominated by a coalition of business-financed neo-liberal and neo-Dixiecrat politicians who have become entrenched in Congress and in a majority of state governments.

He goes on to demonstrate how Democrats receive more PAC (Political Action Committees, mainly corporate) money than the Republicans and how many wealthy Republicans parlay their chances by contributing to the Democrats as well. Of course all of this was true with the *real* New Dealers as well as any "crypto" ones but that doesn't detract from Moody's general point.

Moody also examines the Democrats' commitment to labor-management cooperation and their fondness for "Quality Circle" schemes (incidentally also in the tradition of the New Deal).

In politics as in unionism, people are inspired by adversarial, partisan practices. They may settle for "partnership" as a lesser evil to layoffs or Republicans, but apathy and cynicism are the result.

Voter turnout, as well as defeat, is a measure of this cynicism. It has been declining for years, but in 1988 it hit the lowest point since 1924. Only 49% of the electorate went to the polls, compared to 53% in 1984.

Like Sanders, Moody comes out strongly against support to the lesser evil.

The debate on political strategy that follows this election must go beyond a critique of campaign rhetoric and tactics. Progressive labor activists need to take a second look at this "party of the common man." Efforts to change this party have not only failed, but have compounded the problem in some ways.

The 1988 Jackson campaign showed that millions of voters, Black and white, will respond to a populist message of social solidarity. . . .

Labor, the Jackson forces, and the other social movements have the opportunity to channel their numbers and power into building a new political party with a program of social solidarity and economic security that can inspire and mobilize working class people.

History of Populist Electoralism

Such a concept is hardly new of course. In the latter part of the 19th century a mass Populist Party developed, mainly among farmers but with some support among the urban middle class and workers as well. An important component of this movement was the first substantial unity of Blacks and whites in political action. What happened to this promising

party? Its "populist message" was cynically co-opted by William Jennings Bryan and the Democrats. The Populists followed their message into the Democratic Party where they were liquidated as a political force.

In 1948, during a rare cold war interruption of the Communist Party's support to the Democrats, Henry Wallace's Progressive Party was launched. Wallace preached a populist message and friendship for Stalin's Soviet Union. But Truman's "populism" outflanked them from the "left." After a disappointing vote, the Stalinists returned to the Democrats, never to leave again, and the Progressive Party melted like frost on a windshield.

In the late 1960s, a variety of radicals from the antiwar, student, and civil rights movements, as well as some left groups, came together to form the Peace & Freedom Party. The new party made a particularly impressive start in California where it was able to overcome the hitherto impossible barriers to third parties getting on the ballot. But this party soon ran out of steam. There could be no viable consensus among the diverse ideologies represented within it. As the social movements that propelled its activists into motion receded, they tended to find other interests and dropped away. Today the P&FP exists as a fleshless skeleton, its continuing California ballot status a bone to be fought over by various irrelevant sects and cults.

Some common threads run through these and other less successful experiments with third parties:

- They all lack a class analysis of society, abstracting specific issues from the broader class struggle. For revolutionary Marxists, class remains the dominant — though not sole — factor in social relations. Without a class compass you easily lose your bearings. Without class consciousness you are vulnerable to demagogic co-optation by the political hucksters of the ruling class.
- They have all been primarily middle class in the composition of their activists. Historical experience throughout the world has amply demonstrated that middle class movements cannot play a sustained leading role in politics. Such movements are quite volatile, swinging wildly between feverish activism to total collapse. In the long run, middle class-based political movements inevitably either attach themselves to the workers' movement, if it is vibrant and attractive; bourgeois politics if that appears more "realistic"; or else totally disintegrate. In times of severe crisis, if there is no viable working class alternative, they can in extreme cases become the mass base for fascist movements. We can even see such an incipient trend among some desperate farmers today. This is not to disparage middle class activists. It is crucial for the working class movement to win the support of the working farmers, family business persons, professionals, artists, students. Their support can be won with a vigorous, principled, and tactically astute approach.
- Such formations have always failed to adequately integrate electoral activity with other kinds of political action. Invariably the priority is placed on elections both fostering the illusion that the electoral and legislative arenas are the crucible of social change and

diverting needed attention and energy from mass non-electoral struggles.

What Is the Alternative?

The only way to avoid the weaknesses of past and present movements for a third party is to build a party on the granite foundation of the organized workers' movement, or else one that is based on the Black or other communities of oppressed nationalities in the U.S. We need a party that clearly explains the class character of society, that champions the interests of the working class and oppressed, as opposed to the capitalist class, and that opens the door for participation in its structure, or through principled alliances, to the activists in the social movements and to the middle class. We need a party that not only hustles votes every two years but also supports strikes, demonstrations, organizing drives.

A powerful organizational base to launch such a party exists—the trade union movement with more than 17 million members, tens of thousands of functionaries, hundreds of publications, and billions of dollars in its treasuries.

Presently this great power is thrown behind perfidious "friends of labor" in the bosses' parties, mainly the Democrats. This is a natural extension of the class collaborationist policy practiced by almost all of the union bureaucracy in the negotiation and enforcement of contracts with the employers.

But there is growing evidence that the ranks of the labor movement are becoming fed up with collaborationism both on the shop floor and in the electoral arena. This sentiment is reflected in some small but important sections of the union leadership.

This past January Tony Mazzocchi spoke about the need for a labor party to a gathering of about 100 unionists organized by the St. Paul Trades & Labor Assembly Speakers Club. While in the Twin Cities he was also interviewed by the Minneapolis *Star-Tribune*. In both settings he pulled no punches. Here are some excerpts from his interview:

Q: Aren't you afraid a labor party would steal votes from the Democrats and guarantee victory for Republicans? Isn't that why we've had a two-party system for most of our history?

A: I saw no differences of substance in the last election, only differences of nuance. American voters have gotten very sophisticated. They recognize that the major parties are not serving their interests, and that's why 50 percent didn't even vote. That 50 percent is our constituency.

Q: What would be the agenda of your party?

A: There are two concepts I want to talk about. One is reparations. I think American workers are owed something for the dislocation, unemployment, and wage stagnation they suffered in the last eight years. There's plenty of capital around—690 billion dollars spent on defense from 1982 to 1985, 19 billion dollars pulled out of pension funds during the 1980s. The second is a superfund for workers. In the area of toxic wastes we now accept the notion that those who create toxic waste should pay for its removal. A superfund for workers would do something similar. With a tax on industry it would guarantee that either workers have a job or that they be paid the wage they were earning until they get gainful employment.

Q: Let's get a little more specific. Where would you start in today's legislative landscape?

A: The first thing would be absolute repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act (which places various restrictions on union boycotts, picketing, and organizing). Secondly, we should take work site inspection and citation duties away from the feds and give them to workers. The right to act is a powerful right, and workers are capable of doing more.

Q: What are you doing concretely to organize a labor party?

A: I'm not at liberty to discuss everything. I'll say this much: I'm talking to a lot of rank-and-file people and surveying their interest, and I'm finding a lot of interest. I'm also the head of my union's Committee on Political Education (the union's political funding wing), and I'll use that to explore interest in a labor party.

In his remarks to the St. Paul meeting Mazzocchi raised the notion of possibly organizing labor party clubs that would initially serve as a forum for discussion and formulation of program but not run candidates for the first few years. Clearly he recognizes that moves toward a labor party will precipitate a bitter showdown struggle with die-hard labor skates and he is thus moving cautiously. But move he has and we can be assured that this veteran survivor of more than four decades of union in-fighting is convinced that there is some substantial sentiment for a labor party among the ranks which can be tapped.

Those who truly want to break with capitalist politics would do well to emulate Mazzocchi by "talking to a lot of rank-and-file people and surveying their interest" in a labor party. Regardless of the immediate outcome of Mazzocchi's project, this is the indicated next step forward. ●

Corporate Campaigns, the Trade Union Movement, and the Hormel Strike

by Bernard Daniels

In *Labor Notes*, issue of September 1988, Jane Slaughter wrote an article in the column "Viewpoint," on "Corporate Campaigns: Do They Work?" Her answer was an ambivalent one. "A corporate campaign allows the union to win large amounts of publicity and to be seen by the community as the side taking the moral high ground, two components of victory which are often lacking in traditional labor struggles. But the muscle of economic pressure—whether it comes from the company's corporate allies or from lost production—must come into play, and quickly enough to make the difference."

This is an article well worth reading. It is not only interesting but most timely given the state of the trade union movement today. Too little attention has been given to the questionable features of the corporate campaigns. What is really involved is the question of a correct strategy for the trade union movement of today in struggles with the huge conglomerates, becoming huger all the time.

Ray Rogers, the originator of the corporate campaign strategy, is undoubtedly a person of honesty and integrity, as well as personal courage. He has demonstrated a willingness to put his life on the line in the struggles in which he has been involved. But the question is not his personal qualities. It is the correctness or incorrectness of his strategy. The failures of the P-9 and International Paper strikes has conclusively demonstrated the incorrectness of the corporate campaign strategy. It is true that Rogers came into the International Paper strike at a late date, but his strategy did nothing that helped turn it around and the strike ended in a bitter defeat for the union (as did the P-9 strike). That is the bottom line.

Ray Rogers does not scorn the traditional methods of mass mobilizations, mass picket lines, community support, united actions with other locals and unions, etc. It's just that his primary focus is on pressuring the heads of other conglomerates or banks with which the struck company is affiliated as a main weapon in the strike. This is the schematic of the corporate campaign. The only problem with it is that it doesn't work.

Do the old, traditional methods still work, i.e., the mass picket lines and the mass confrontations, such as occurred in the early thirties, in the Minneapolis Teamsters' strike, the Toledo Autolite strike, and the rise of the CIO? What should be done in the face of the National Guard, as well as the local police and the courts? Rogers shies away from confrontations with the National Guard, which is the chief strikebreaking force of the U.S. ruling class. He relies upon his nonviolent pressure of bank presidents and boards of directors of major corporations as well as national boycotts.

The trade union movement must come to grips with the \$64 question—how do we confront the National Guard, the local police, the goon squads, the "replacement workers" (scabs)? Unless and until this question is answered and resolved the trade union movement is stymied and will go down to defeat after defeat. Since the corporate campaign does not work should we then go back to the old strike traditions, the sitdown strike (occupation of the factories), mass picket lines ready for confrontation, flying squads (roving pickets), defense guards, "educational" work, etc.? Well, why not, and if so, why not say so? Dave Riehle, however, in the context of an otherwise excellent article in the November issue of *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, entitled "U.S. Radicals and the Trade Union Movement," takes Socialist Action to task for a pamphlet on the Hormel strike in which they are sharply critical of the P-9 leadership for failing to call mass picket lines which they (SA) indicate would have won the strike.

Says Riehle, "The authors of the SA pamphlet give little weight to the fact that there *was* a mass picket line in Austin that closed the plant—that was what brought in the National Guard. That is simply passed over as though it had little further significance. The fact is that once the National Guard has arrived, the tactics of mass picket lines is placed in an entirely different context. Mobilizing mass picket lines in the face of military occupation and martial law is not the same as mass picket lines when you are only dealing with local police and scabs."

The question is still begging. What should the strikers do when the National Guard is brought in? Disperse, hide, fold their tents? What? Let Farrell Dobbs take the floor. In his four-volume Teamster series, Farrell deals rather extensively with the National Guard. In his first volume, *Teamster Rebellion*, he says at one crucial point, "All supporters of Local 574 were asked to report to strike headquarters at four A.M. the following morning, Wednesday, August 1, to resume mass picketing in defiance of the military. If the troops fired upon us, the union would be in grave danger of defeat, but there was better than an even chance they wouldn't, because Olson couldn't afford it politically. *In any case, we had to take the risk or the strike would be broken.*" (emphasis added) No one can read the chapter entitled "Military Strikebreaking" without understanding that the union was ready to battle the National Guard and Governor Olson to the death.

Art Preis, author of the superb book, *Labor's Giant Step*, was one of the young organizers and leaders of the famous Toledo Autolite strike in 1934. He was a leading participant

in the strike (later to become labor editor of the *Militant*). Preis describes one of the first battles with the National Guard. It is worth quoting extensively.

Then followed one of the most amazing battles in U.S. labor history. "The Marines had landed" in the form of the National Guard but the situation was not "well in hand." With their bare fists and rocks, the workers fought a six-day pitched battle with the National Guard. They fought from roof tops, from behind billboards and came through alleys to flank the guardsmen. "The men in the mob shouted vile epithets at the troopers," complained the Associated Press, "and the women jeered them with suggestions that they 'go home to mama and their paper dolls.'"

But the strikers and their thousands of sympathizers did more than shame the young National Guardsmen. They educated them and tried to win them over. Speakers stood on boxes in front of the troops and explained what the strike was about and the role the troops were playing as strikebreakers. World War I veterans put on their medals and spoke to the boys in uniform like "Dutch uncles." The women explained what the strike meant to their families. The press reported that some of the guardsmen just quit and went home. Others voiced sympathy with the workers. (A year later, when Toledo unionists went to Defiance, Ohio, to aid the Pressed Steel Company strike, they found that eight percent of the strikers had been Na-

tional Guardsmen serving in uniform at the Autolite strike. That was where they learned the lesson of unionism.)

There is one more short quote from Preis which should be made on the question of sitdown strikes:

Under proper conditions, the sitdown is the most effective strike tactic ever devised. Although used in this country as far back as 1892 and employed by the IWW before World War I, the sitdown became a veritable tidal wave during the first two years of the CIO. It swept all before it in the period following the conquest of GM.

There is much more by Preis on how to fight the National Guard and *win* strikes. If it takes militant confrontation to break military strikebreaking then *so be it!* Dave Riehle does not mention the SWP pamphlet on the Hormel strike written by Fred Halstead. Unlike Halstead's great book, *Out Now*, in which he presents a balanced history and assessment of the anti-Vietnam war movement in the U.S., his pamphlet on the Hormel strike, entitled *Hormel Meatpackers Strike*, is an uncritical, sycophantic eulogy of the P-9 leadership. There is no criticism whatsoever of the corporate campaign strategy. Jake Cooper, author of the SA pamphlet, pays due respect to the militancy and leadership qualities of Jim Guyette and Ray Rogers, which distinguished them from the ordinary run of trade union bureaucrats, but his critical approach is a valuable contribution to the trade union movement. ●

Dave Riehle Responds

Bernard Daniels and Linda Kellam (see letter to the editor in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, Jan. 1989) take exception to my estimation of the role of mass picketing in the P-9 strike (*BIDOM* Nov. 1988). A similar view to theirs is developed at length by Jake Cooper and Nat Weinstein in the Socialist Action pamphlet, *Lessons from the P-9 Strike*.

The question might be asked whether it is not presumptuous for this question to be discussed at all in publications whose circulation is numbered in the hundreds, and by those who command no wide influence and authority within the labor movement. However, we know very well from history and our own experience that things can change very rapidly in periods of social struggle, and that those who yesterday were confined to small circles often end up in the forefront of great struggles, because they are the people with definite ideas about what should be done. The leaders of the 1934 Minneapolis Teamster strikes could not have succeeded in leading that struggle to victory, maneuvering among all the obstacles and pitfalls that arose, if they had not settled in advance, through theoretical debate and discussion, as well as prior experience, questions such as the correct orientation to the AFL, the role of reformists like Farmer-Labor party governor Floyd Olson, the necessity of fighting for industrial unionism, the key role of the un-

employed and women in strikes, and so on. Our perspectives and aspirations are well served by similar debate today.

What is at issue in this debate? Among other things, we are trying to understand what happened when a new working class leadership was pushed forward, breaking with the bureaucratic training and prevailing practice of their organization, and initiating bold, new mass struggle. How did they begin to grapple with the challenge of *what to do next?*

Struggles of workers who have not had prior experiences in class struggle action and who have not been educated in the class nature of capitalist society often begin under the influence of two actually contradictory factors — one, illusions that the objectives of the struggle can be achieved more easily than is actually the case, once they are brought to the attention of those who dispense justice in this world, and two, a willingness to struggle, utilize methods of mass action, and appeal to potential allies for support.

The actual course of struggle is determined by how these two factors exert reciprocal influence and speed or retard each other.

There are plenty of examples from history. One of the most famous and dramatic is the massive demonstration of workers in St. Petersburg in 1905, marching to the Winter Palace to petition the tsar, led by the priest, Father Gapon.

As we know, they were met by troops who shot them down in the massacre known as Bloody Sunday. Shortly afterward, revolutionary struggle created the first soviets.

The famous 19th century painting by Robert Kohler shows a group of ragged workers gathered at the steps of the boss's home, the factory looming in the background. They have obviously arrived on a spontaneous impulse, to deliver their complaints to the lord of their universe. Some of the workers are beginning to pick up stones. . . .

The Knights of Labor even admitted employers and other nonworker elements into their organization. Spontaneous workers' struggles then often naively took their grievances to the clergy, the middle class shopowners, the schoolteacher, the town lawyer, anybody whom they thought had exhibited sympathy for their plight and could intercede with the powers that be and appeal to reason and decency.

Met with rebuffs, or clubs, in most cases spontaneous strikes were dispersed quickly without even involving more than a small minority, the ringleaders fired and the rest of the workers soon driven back to work by hunger and deprivation. Usually they found little or no sympathy from the professional do-gooders, who, it turned out, were dependent on the big bosses for their income and status.

Sometimes, things turned out differently. James P. Cannon described a different process in a talk he gave in 1955 on the IWW.

Sometimes, he said (this was in the pre-WW I period), a group of workers in one corner of a huge plant would get fed up and walk out — maybe a few hundred — as had happened many times before with no result.

But this time, there would be a little group of Wobblies in that corner of the plant. And the first thing they would do is establish a picket line, and try to stop the next shift from going to work. And the next thing they would do is send a telegram to Vincent St. John, the general organizer of the IWW, in Chicago, saying: "Send Help!"

And the call would go out for all footloose rebels to head for the site of the strike — experienced organizers who could raise funds, make speeches, and organize picket lines.

And great struggles developed, involving thousands of workers and inspiring tens of thousands more. But even in those cases the employers had great resources, and the workers, even with the help and solidarity of the IWW, very little, and all too often they were driven back to work and the strike broken. Even the great struggles at Lawrence and Paterson, with all their sweep and pageantry, and broad sympathy among the working masses, did not succeed in establishing lasting gains or stable organizations. As we know, it took another generation, and a different context, for the industrial unions to win recognition and establish themselves in the mass production industries.

And it wasn't because the IWW didn't know how to organize mass picket lines. Cannon describes one of the innovative IWW tactics — the continuous picket line — as thousands of workers surrounded the entire plant in an unbroken chain.

But the bosses were still too strong, and the workers not sufficiently organized, aroused, unified, confident, and led to overcome the advantages of the employers. Even though the workers had a revolutionary organization like the IWW

to call upon for help; even though the Socialist Party had tens of thousands of members, trade union leaders, elected public officials, newspapers, and so on; even though the workers were willing to struggle and sacrifice; with all that and more, they could not conquer the industrial corporations and win simple union recognition — that had to wait until the '30s.

Why was that? Did they use the wrong tactics? I don't think anyone who is reading this will reduce it to that. Broad historical factors militated against it — monopoly capitalism was expanding enormously, riding roughshod over everything and everyone. In a certain sense, the wide *political* radicalization of workers at that time was an expression of the inability to make any headway in the economic struggle against the employers. An adequate discussion of all these factors is beyond the scope of this article. But the conclusion is clear enough — all the tactical imagination and boldness was not enough to overcome the objective historical limitations of that period. It had to wait to a later time, new experiences, and a devastating crisis of the capitalist system.

Which means that, in the last analysis, the ability of strikes to impose their demands on the employers is a function of the overall relationship of class forces.

It is possible to derive a paralyzing fatalism and sense of futility from this general truth, as for example, the SWP does, deferring all meaningful struggle to the future, pending the arrival of new crises, and projecting a "lazy administrative" blueprint constructed on the model of "first" and "then," as Trotsky once said.

But it is also possible to make an opposite error. In spite of the particularism of those who see a fatal error in the failure of the P-9 leadership to call mass picket lines to confront the National Guard, those who advance this position share a common method with the fatalists — they proceed from broad generalizations to a specific tactical conclusion.

It is necessary to analyze, not just proclaim. "If it takes militant confrontation to break military strikebreaking, then *so be it!*" says Bernard Daniels.

Tactical questions can only be answered concretely, with reference to the actual situation — that is, the relationship of forces, an estimate of present and potential allies and enemies, the direction and momentum of the struggle, the mood of the workers, the political situation prevailing locally and nationally, and other factors that influence and modulate the circumstances under which all action will take place.

It is necessary to select the right tool, a problem which is not solved by prefabricated solutions, as factory workers humorously recognize when they say: "Don't use force — get a bigger hammer."

Tactical thinking is not simply knowing that mass picket lines are a mighty weapon in strike struggles, but knowing where to begin.

Tactics are derived from a general frame of reference and objectives, or, if you prefer, a political outlook, philosophy, ideology, etc. From our general revolutionary socialist perspective and experience, we derive a strategic framework of *mass action*, and from that we have specific tactics such as mass picket lines, or "militant confrontation," or "the old strike traditions," as possible forms of action.

It should be noted, however, that it is not only from this angle that specific tactics like mass picket lines can be

derived. In real life, in actual struggle, similar tactics can be selected for their utility in advancing the specific objectives of those engaged in struggle for opposite ends. Thus it has been demonstrated quite recently that the reactionary "right-to-life" forces have no compunction about adopting tactics such as mass demonstrations, picket lines, and even sit-ins and civil disobedience.

P-9's revolutionary potential, if I may put it that way, was not simply in its decision to stand up against concessions, nor in its willingness to use mass mobilization and direct appeals to all kinds of potential allies, but first and fundamentally in its *independence*. That is what made its fight so explosive, what shook up the union piecards and the employers, and what made their struggle so inspiring to millions (literally) of workers. Local P-9, as has been said before, answered only to its own members, and it relied on the broadest forms of democracy to reach its decisions. That's what made it different, even from other important labor struggles of the 1980s with similar components. And it is ultimately only this independence, which really means *class* independence, that can overcome four decades of obstacles erected against workers debating, deciding, and acting in their own interests—that is, the union bureaucracy, the antilabor laws, the arbitrators, the labor boards, capitalist politics, and so on.

But it was P-9's very independence that meant in some ways it had to start again from the beginning. They had to find out for themselves, retrace some steps, make their own mistakes, and sometimes pay a high price. Although P-9 and the Austin Hormel workers had a great tradition and history, the mechanism for transmitting that historical memory, a revolutionary party, was absent. Those connections had to be painstakingly reforged.

So when the P-9 leaders sent that telegram that said: "Send Help!" they didn't get Vincent St. John, Bill Haywood, Jim Cannon, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, and Frank Little. They didn't even get Frank Ellis. They got Ray Rogers. They could have done worse.

Ray Rogers, so far as I could tell, felt that any form of militant confrontation that was anything but nonviolent civil disobedience would be utilized by the company and the government to justify repressive measures, could not overcome the forces of the state, and would be isolated and defeated. This was based, I think, on a somewhat inadequate understanding of the civil rights movement of the '50s and '60s. On the one hand this view underestimated the ability of militant struggle to arouse and inspire class solidarity, and on the other, was an overestimation of the power of a moral example to mobilize (middle class) public opinion and compel the bankers and bosses to do the right thing.

This coincided to a large degree with the existing consciousness and preconceptions of most of the P-9 members and leaders. These were not the hungry and ragged battalions of 1933 that forced Jay Hormel to capitulate to the Independent Union of All Workers. The idea that the problems they were trying to resolve could be taken care of by forcefully bringing them to the attention of public opinion was quite persuasive.

After all, it was quite unreasonable that the most profitable employer in the industry, Hormel, should demand wage cuts.

It was unreasonable that injury rates should be 200 percent per workers per year. It was quite unreasonable that the Hormel Foundation, whose bylaws called for placing the welfare of the Austin community first, should not take action to correct these wrongs. It was unreasonable that the public officials belonging to the Minnesota Democratic *Farmer-Labor* Party should not respond favorably. But what was important was that Local P-9 was prepared to put up a fight.

Ray Rogers did not reject mass mobilization and struggle and had some real optimism and confidence in the rank and file. He also had, not coincidentally, extensive experience both in the fight for democracy in the United Mine Workers and in the J.P. Stevens boycott.

At the same time, he felt that moral pressure on the banks and their corporate allies could neutralize, divide, and embarrass them into capitulation. This view involved an underestimation of what was actually at stake, an underestimation which the bosses did not share. Rogers also underestimated employer class consciousness and solidarity, which does not permit them to be divided by mere maneuvers.

Bernard Daniels cites my report: "The authors of the SA pamphlet give little weight to the fact that there *was* a mass picket line in Austin that closed the plant—that was what brought in the National Guard. That is simply passed over as though it had little further significance. The fact is that once the National Guard has arrived, the tactic of mass picket lines is placed in an entirely different context. Mobilizing mass picket lines in the face of military occupation and martial law is not the same as mass picket lines when you are only dealing with local police and scabs."

Daniels' response is: "The question is still begging. What should the strikers do when the National Guard is brought in?"

Daniels' answer is clear: "If it takes militant confrontation to break military strikebreaking, then *so be it!*"

That is, having reached the general conclusion that militant confrontation is the answer to military strikebreaking, we then proceed directly to mass picketing without reference to any specific, immediate, and concrete factors.

At the Third Congress of the Comintern in 1921, the strategy of immediate and universal revolutionary action was debated, with the Russian leaders, with all their authority deriving from their leadership of the 1917 revolution, demonstratively placing themselves on the "right." This discussion is worth reviewing again.

Trotsky, one of the main reporters, spoke against "the illusion of the uninterrupted offensive."

"What happens after a partial defeat?" he asked. "There sets in a certain dislocation . . . , there arises a certain need for a breathing space, a need for reorientation and for a more precise estimation of the reciprocal forces, a need to offset the losses and to instill into the masses the consciousness of a new offensive and a new struggle."

"The decisive battle," he said "requires a corresponding preparation. Preparation for us means the creation of the sympathy of the broadest masses. The idea of replacing the will of the masses by the resoluteness of the so-called vanguard is absolutely impermissible and non-Marxist."

"But to understand this properly, to discern in a move backward, in a retreat, a component part of a unified

strategic plan—for that a certain experience is necessary. But if one reasons purely abstractly and insists on always moving forward, if one refuses to rack one's brain over strategy and insists on everything always moving forward, on the assumption that everything can be superseded by an added exertion of revolutionary will, what result does one then get?" (Report on the Balance Sheet of the Third Congress, July 14, 1921, from *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, Monad, 1971)

Let us return to the mass picket line that closed the plant. That did not come about by accident. It was prepared, insofar as it was possible to do so. First, prior to the opening of the plant to scabs on January 20, 1986, three labor food caravans to Austin had been organized by the Twin Cities P-9 Support Committee. They had been designed to gather the maximum possible support from the unions, mobilize it in highly visible caravans to Austin, and link it up with the Hormel workers at mass solidarity rallies when the food was delivered, a conception that came most forcefully from Jake Cooper, the chairman of the Food Committee, a veteran Trotskyist, and a participant in the great Teamster and packinghouse struggles of the past.

This laid the basis for the next step. When the Hormel Company announced their intention to bring in scabs, after P-9 rejected the company's contract offer in December 1985, a mass meeting was proposed by the Support Committee in the Twin Cities where P-9 president Jim Guyette could present the union's position to a labor audience. The meeting was called for in a letter signed by some 30 union officers, stating their solidarity with P-9. In addition, a news conference was called preceding the meeting at which local union officials appeared and called for the formation of a "Labor Solidarity Brigade" made up of volunteers willing to make themselves available to aid P-9. "Labor Solidarity Brigade" buttons were printed and sold at the meeting at which Guyette spoke, Sunday, January 19, the day before the plant opened. Volunteers were signed up for the brigade. About 600 workers attended the meeting at the St. Paul United Auto Workers (UAW) hall, with attendant media coverage. Everything was done to create the atmosphere of an action-oriented mobilization by Twin Cities unionists in direct support of the strikers in Austin the next day.

A caravan left for Austin early enough to participate in the early morning picketing around the plant. Everything built to a peak of tension as the scabs were awaited. The Austin workers had been inculcated with the idea that other unions could be won to their struggle over the past year, especially through the support activities emanating from the Twin Cities. Nevertheless, all this had been initiated by an ad hoc committee, representing a small segment of the labor movement, particularly of its leadership. Meantime, P-9 had been faced by more or less open opposition from its own International, including barely concealed encouragement for P-9ers to scab on their own strike.

There was a massive turnout at the plant that morning, several hundred were there from the Twin Cities. A nonconfrontational picketing arrangement had been organized by Ray Rogers, built around cars circling the roads on the perimeter of the plant in both directions. The idea was that the congestion would obstruct the scabs trying to get to the

plant. The automotive picketers, however, were obeying the local police, who were directing traffic, and the scabs were driving right into the plant unmolested. While conforming to the initial tactical directions of the union, the picketing was clearly failing to achieve its purpose. At this point, one of the picketers, a UAW leader from St. Paul, stopped his car in front of the main gate and raised his hood. Apparently he had car trouble. This obstructed the traffic circling the plant, but the cops directed them to keep moving. Somehow, picketers started getting out of their cars, taking the keys with them, and walking up to the main gate to see what was going on. A massive, immovable traffic jam was created and the scabs were frozen out of the plant. For the first time, a tremendous sense of what they were collectively capable of surged through the pickets, and the plant was shut. Seeing that it could be shut down, workers began to rapidly take action to keep it shut and seal it off from movement in or out. At that moment, the relationship of class forces shifted, and the workers were in control of the plant site and the streets surrounding it.

Within hours of the closing of the plant, the National Guard troops, who had undoubtedly been on standby, were on their way. The following day the troops were at the plant gates, but with orders not to intervene actively. The strikers were able to maneuver around them and keep the plant closed on Tuesday. On Wednesday, new reinforcements arrived, in the form of the state highway patrol, who used force to disperse the strikers and open up the plant while the Guard secured the plant itself. That was the end of mass picketing at the Hormel plant except for a couple smaller confrontations involving only a few hundreds, weeks and months later. The struggle reached a new peak shortly after the plant closing, when Austin pickets succeeded in shutting the Hormel plant in Ottumwa, Iowa, as hundreds of workers there honored their picket line.

This was not sustained, however, as the company fired hundreds and continued to operate the plant with a reduced workforce.

Ray Rogers was indicted under the 1917 criminal syndicalism law, posing a serious threat to the strike leadership. Although this was eventually dropped, Guyette and Rogers and 16 others were reindicted later under felony riot charges, which were eventually reduced to misdemeanors after a vigorous defense campaign, and many months later.

The momentum of the struggle was broken. The ruling class demonstrated their willingness to use whatever force was necessary to reopen the plant. This was a *decisive* change in the situation. This has to be recognized. You are not going to physically overcome massive armed forces short of insurrection. As I pointed out in my report, in six different sets of circumstances in Minnesota, the National Guard has been called out in packinghouse strikes, in 1921, 1948, 1959 and in 1986. In every one of these situations, including the 1948 South St. Paul strike, which had influential Trotskyists in the leadership, including the United Packinghouse Workers district director, the sequence of events was almost identical. *Once the Guard was called out there was no further mass picketing.* The strikes did not have identical results, because the overall relationship of class forces was different. But that is

what happened, under widely varying circumstances and leaderships.

Even though these different events demonstrated that the ruling class did not exclude recognizing unions and even granting wage increases under all circumstances, in every one of these strikes it is clear that it was intolerable to them to accept a union mobilization closing the plants with its own, independent power. The ruling class *as a whole* recognized this as a fundamental shift in the relationship of class forces and intervened decisively with massive military force to end it. This shifts the whole struggle to a different, and higher, plane. The only adequate working class response to this action is a *general strike*. "What should be done in the face of the National Guard?" *That* is what *should* have been done. As far as I know, no serious component of the left, not to mention the labor movement, raised this proposal, because it was so clearly and absolutely excluded as a possibility. The union hierarchy above the local level was unified in support of the United Food and Commercial Workers bureaucracy and the Democratic governor who formally authorized the Guard's incursion into Austin. But some serious people did suggest further mass picketing, which does seem easier to achieve than a general strike. After all, the P-9 leadership could call for mass picketing, while it would obviously take far broader forces to even raise a call for a general strike.

But this is formalistic thinking. Although most workers sympathetic to P-9 would not have expressed the situation in the terms I just did, they had no trouble grasping the basic dynamics. The peak of mobilization for *struggle* was on January 20 and 21, because, given the relationship of forces at that time, it was *possible to shut the plant through mass picketing*. Under a *new* relationship of forces, embodied by the National Guard and the state troopers, the situation was *changed*. The plant was reopened. *Because* this intervention shifted the struggle to a new and higher plane, it could only be overcome by a countermobilization of opposite and equivalent forces, expressed most directly through a general strike—or an insurrection. The essential content of this was grasped by masses of workers, both Hormel workers and sympathetic unionists elsewhere, who could easily see that further mass picketing could only be, at best, a protest.

Since mass picketing could not have a *practical* effect on the struggle, that is, since it could not shut the plant in the face of the military occupation of Austin, that *in itself* removed the possibility of mobilizing masses of workers who were not about to struggle for something they knew in advance could not be accomplished, especially without the support of the great majority of the existing union leadership.

What could be mobilized in Austin on special occasions was *solidarity*. On February 15 and April 12, 1986, thousands of unionists from all across the country showed up in Austin to march and rally in support of the Hormel workers' inspiring struggle. They showed up in large numbers because they grasped that the solidarity demonstrations were an *effective and practical* way of extending the maximum possible aid to the struggle *at that juncture*. They weren't just foot soldiers that could be marched into Austin to carry out any given battle plan. They were people who thought and reached conclusions. That is why only about 500 or so turned out for the picketing and blocking of the plant gates on Friday, April 11,

which did not succeed in shutting the plant for more than a few hours, and which any reasonable person knew could only be essentially a symbolic protest.

The truth is the obstacle to further mass picketing after January 21 was the real, objective situation, and the understanding of that by the masses of workers who supported the strike, not the failure of the P-9 leaders to call the right pitch.

The appeal to the examples of Minneapolis and Toledo in 1934 is not valid. Although Dobbs says in *Teamster Rebellion* that Local 574 had decided to "resume mass picketing in defiance of the military" on August 1, this can be misunderstood. In the 1934 strikes, the Minneapolis Teamsters *never* put up picket lines, in the sense of standing in front of a truck terminal with a picket sign. This was not needed at the beginning of the strike, since all the workers were already out. Picketing took the form of mobile flying squads, consisting of up to 15-20 cars, each with four or more strikers, which would swoop down on scab movements and stop them. This form of picketing never stopped, including under the National Guard occupation. An escalation of this form of struggle was undertaken on August 1 to demonstrate the iron determination of the union to fight on. This necessarily took the form of guerrilla action against individual trucks. It was in no case going to reverse the decisive military position held by the National Guard in the city.

It was the ultraleft Communist Party which had attacked the strike leadership for not organizing mass pickets in the face of military occupation. Local 574 had raised the call for a general strike by the Central Labor Union as forcefully as it could, but the CLU leaders, tied to Olson, the strikebreaking Farmer-Labor Party governor, did not act. Most of the trucks in the city were operating by the beginning of August, with thousands of military permits issued, and no guerrilla action was going to eliminate that. The decision to come to terms with the union was made in the context of widening class struggle nationally, several years of mass struggle of the unemployed, an unprecedentedly devastating economic crisis, and especially the factor of simultaneous militant mass strikes in Minneapolis, Toledo, and San Francisco, all under the leadership of radicals.

In Toledo *thousands* of workers engaged in running battles with the National Guard in a situation where there were five times as many workers as troops. Many, if not most of them, were not Autolite workers, but unemployed mobilized by the Lucas County unemployed organization. In both Minneapolis and Toledo, the strike leaders were able to mobilize thousands of unemployed workers on a daily basis at the peak of the struggle. These struggles took place in the context of widening combat nationally, and were really not just strikes, but semi-insurrections.

P-9, on the other hand, was the *exception* to a general retreat by the labor movement. In addition, they were isolated in part from potential allies, especially other packing-house workers, by the unified hostility of the labor officialdom. P-9 was on the defensive, facing felony charges against its leaders. It had every reason at that point to give the highest consideration to defending its legal status, keeping its leaders out of jail, and appealing for active solidarity, trying to gain time to reverse the unfavorable relationship of forces within the labor movement. Confronting the Nation-

al Guard could not have been sustained. P-9 could mobilize at best 500 or so pickets from Austin at that point. The Twin Cities is 100 miles away, and the active forces in the Support Committee there, which represented very little in terms of authority and influence in the Twin Cities labor movement, could mobilize in *Austin* at best 150-200. Maybe an equal number could be counted on to show up in response to the general publicity and a highly charged atmosphere at events subsequent to January 21, leaving aside big solidarity demonstrations which took place on weekends, when the plant was closed. The confrontations cited in Minneapolis and Toledo were in major industrial cities with thousands of employed and unemployed workers available on a daily basis, not a one-horse town like Austin with a single industry employing 1,500 workers, 500 of whom were scabbing.

The P-9 leadership recognized this and gave maximum weight to trying to garner the widest possible material and political support in order to sustain their own ranks and try to overcome the unfavorable relationship of forces within the labor movement. To do this they needed time, and they were right to emphasize that over what could only have been futile and adventurous confrontations with overwhelmingly superior military forces.

It is inconceivable under all these preceding circumstances that "mass picket lines," called even with the authority of the P-9 leaders, could have been really "mass," given the decisive shift in the situation after the incursion of the National Guard. They would have only been a few hundred, simply outnumbered by the 800 National Guards. The possible success of this tactic in this context could only have been predicated on the hope that bold action would galvanize qualitatively larger forces, what Trotsky called in his 1921 report "the false theory of the initiating minority which by its heroism shatters the 'universal wall of passivity' among the proletariat."

"The trouble with revolutionary subjectivism," he said, quoting Herzen, "is that it mistakes the second or fifth month of pregnancy with the ninth."

The critics of P-9 who put forward mass picket lines as the missing ingredient in what could have otherwise been a vic-

torious strike are wrong to elevate any tactic to the level of a universally valid principle. To say this does not deny the obvious, that the objective of a strike is to shut down productive activity. Maybe the P-9 leaders didn't see that clearly enough. They did recognize that once the National Guard had arrived in Austin, and once the attempts to shut down the Ottumwa and Fremont plants had failed, continuing their struggle meant proceeding on different fronts. What they consistently understood and attempted to carry out was an *extension* of their struggle, first through trying to close the other Hormel plants, and then trying to mobilize support, when they were blocked on the direct action front.

If you could criticize the P-9 leaders for anything, I think you have to say their weakness was not that they didn't call mass picket lines, but that they were not class conscious. This could, and can, be overcome only with patient explanation, and further experience. I am convinced in any case that even if the P-9 leaders had been revolutionary socialists and seasoned class struggle fighters of the highest strategic and tactical maturity, the outcome would have been essentially the same.

If you want to cite *Teamster Rebellion* against the P-9 leadership, you must also read to the end of the story. In spite of all their class struggle savvy and know-how, the revolutionary leaders of Local 544 could not hold their position when larger forces beyond their control created a changed and unfavorable situation. If you study the situation that unfolded, especially in 1941, as the combined forces of the union bureaucracy, the judiciary, the labor boards, the state government, the FBI, and the employers moved against the 544 leadership, you'll see that the sequence of events—receivership, indictment, etc.—is almost identical to Austin in 1986-87. It took seven years for the relationship of forces to shift sufficiently so that the 544 leadership could be crushed in 1941. The same process was compressed into a much shorter time in Austin, but in both cases the subjective factor of leadership was not, and could not, have been sufficient to overcome the unfavorable situation, save with a new rise in the class struggle. ●

Centennial of Vincent R. Dunne

by Dave Riehle

April 17 of this year marks 100 years since the birth of Vincent Raymond Dunne in Kansas City, Kansas. Ray Dunne was one of the pioneers of American communism, and in 1928 he and 20 other Minneapolis Communists were expelled from the Communist Party for their refusal to endorse the expulsion of James P. Cannon, Max Shachtman, and Martin Abern, the three national party leaders who had come out in support of Trotsky in his struggle against the degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Communist International.

Ray Dunne and his close friend and comrade Carl Skoglund led this pioneer cadre of worker-Bolsheviks in Minneapolis as they reoriented themselves after their expulsion from the CP and the pariah status that was imposed on them by their former comrades. In 1929, the Minneapolis Trotskyists adopted the perspective of organizing the Minneapolis truck drivers and inside workers into an industrial-type union via the mechanism of the Teamsters Union, affiliated with the conservative American Federation of Labor and dominated by a narrow, craft union outlook. This was a sharp break from the policy of the Communist Party, which advocated revolutionaries withdrawing from the existing "reactionary" unions of the AFL and creating "red" or revolutionary unions, thus effectively isolating the militants from the bulk of the organized workers. Opposition to this sectarian, dead-end, and self-defeating policy had been one of the major issues raised by the Cannon faction in the CP, to which many of the expelled Minneapolis Communists had belonged.

As is well known, they eventually succeeded in being admitted to General Drivers Local 574 of the Teamsters Union in Minneapolis, a small local of about 150 members, and won key leaders of the local, especially 574 president Bill Brown, to their perspective. Their stunning success in leading three militant strikes in 1934 converted 574 into a mass industrial union of 5,000 workers and laid the basis for the organization of the over-the-road drivers in the Midwest area, for the first time, into the Teamsters Union. The Teamsters International doubled its membership in only a few short years under the impact of this organizing drive, and established itself as the largest union in the AFL. Its extension to the trucking industry nationally made the Teamsters an organization of over one million members by the 1960s.

In 1941, eighteen leaders of the Minneapolis Teamsters and the Socialist Workers Party were convicted under the Smith Act, repressive federal legislation that made it a crime to advocate revolutionary ideas, and were sentenced to prison, victims of the Roosevelt administration's drive towards war. Thus ended a seven-year period where the applicability of the revolutionary socialist trade union program had been tested out in life, and where a new chapter of class

struggle history had been written. That experience remains an encyclopedia of revolutionary trade union strategy and tactics. Readers are referred to the four books by Farrell Dobbs, which record this history from 1934 to 1941 from the vantage point of a central leader of the struggle. In addition, the documentary film *Labor's Turning Point*, produced by Minnesota Public Television, provides a good account of the 1934 strike.

Ray Dunne remained an active member of the SWP until only a few months before his death in February 1970, at the age of 80, and his life cannot be adequately reported in this brief space. One of his last political activities was his appearance, along with about a dozen other leaders of the 1934 strikes, at a convention of the Young Socialist Alliance in Minneapolis, in 1969, attended by almost 1,000 young revolutionaries, where the Teamsters' struggles were commemorated in a talk by Farrell Dobbs, national secretary of the Socialist Workers Party.

Ray Dunne was not a prolific writer, although his political influence was extensive and profound. Even though he was clearly a mass leader of enormous ability, his ultimate concern was the construction of a revolutionary vanguard party that could play the indispensable part in making a socialist revolution. He served on the district committee of the Minnesota Communist Party from the early '20s until his expulsion and was a national committee member of the Socialist Workers Party and its predecessors from 1928 on. Ray participated in the discussions in Mexico with Trotsky that produced the founding document of the Fourth International in 1938, known as the "Transitional Program." His long revolutionary experience and great acuity was highly valued by Trotsky, who saw this document as a codification of the method and experiences that could link a revolutionary nucleus to the struggles of the masses. As is evident in the accompanying article, which appeared in the October 22, 1938, *Socialist Appeal*, at that time the national organ of the SWP, Ray Dunne gave careful consideration to this problem, especially as it was expressed on the soil he was most familiar with, that of the U.S. trade union movement.

This article was written at the zenith of the influence of the Trotskyists in the Midwest labor movement, when the Minneapolis Teamsters were the most dynamic component of the area unions. Consequently, these are not merely speculative thoughts on what ought to be done, but an exposition of a revolutionary trade union strategy which was actually being implemented on a broad scale. The article is not simply an item of historical interest, but one which remains relevant today, and can be studied fruitfully.

The central unresolved question before the American trade union movement at that time is still unresolved today—the question of independent political action. The American

workers still have no mass political party of their own, and, as Dunne said, "the economic crisis posed problems which the unions could not solve." How true this is today, as American workers see the social gains won during the great upheaval of the '30s dismantled during the economic stagnation of the '80s, at a much more rapid rate than in other advanced capitalist nations, where the working class social gains find some medium of defense in the mass labor parties which exist in all other industrialized capitalist economies.

Many conjunctural factors have changed since this article was written. The U.S. Communist Party, at that time in the leadership of unions representing a third or more of the CIO membership, today has little influence on the affairs of the unions. The AFL and CIO, of course, merged into one monolithic class collaborationist organization in 1955, after the momentum of the proletarian rebellion of the '30s expressed through the CIO had exhausted itself and many of the founding militants had been driven out or won over to accommodation with capitalism.

But for the revolutionary movement in particular, which must come to grips with the question of orientation to the mass labor movement anew, with a cadre which came to political maturity after the last labor upsurge in the post-World War II period, many of the questions Dunne discussed retain all their relevance today. Even more, the *method* of approach to the question of the unions, combining rich practical experience as a union builder with theoretical understanding, is something that needs to be studied and assimilated. This is especially true since the Socialist Workers Party, which up until this decade still embodied the revolutionary proletarian orientation that was its heritage from worker-Bolsheviks like Cannon, Dunne, Skoglund, and others, has now degenerated severely and begun to reproduce many of the methods of trade union approach, or nonapproach, that would once have been characterized as petty bourgeois, sectarian, and abstentionist by the SWP.

"The task of our party," Dunne says, "consists of gaining influence over the trade unions — more, of winning, through the trade unions, influence over the majority of the working

class. We can only succeed in this," he emphasizes, "if the methods used by our party in the trade unions help to build the unions, to strengthen them, to increase their influence among the unemployed, the farmers, the oppressed minorities, and the small people of the city."

Clearly, this cannot be achieved by abstentionism concealed under the guise of some superrevolutionary formulation. "Because the Socialist Labor Party and the IWW answered 'no' to the question: shall revolutionists work in reactionary trade unions? they doomed themselves to sterility."

Dunne makes an interesting observation in light of the romanticism attached to the CIO today by many radicals who idealize the CIO of the '30s. He points out that in reality the AFL "has not only withstood the effects of the depression and the competition of the CIO, but has even managed to gain a million new members."

"Unlike the Communist Party, which up until the spring of 1937 favored the AFL over the CIO only to swing overnight to the other extreme," he says, "the Socialist Workers Party has no fetishism for either set of initials."

Further, Dunne says, "on the road ahead, it is not impossible that a third national union grouping may arise."

These possibilities were foreclosed by the onset of the Second World War, which brought to an end the semirevolutionary period of the '30s. The renewal, on a higher plane, of class struggle action in the immediate postwar period was cut off by the onset of the cold war and the prolonged stabilization of postwar reconstruction. That period, too, is now behind us and the prolonged capitalist crisis of the 1980s is once again opening up prospects for renewed struggle on the part of the organized working class, at a time when the reactionary political atmosphere in the unions has dissipated more than at any time since the postwar labor upsurge.

The question of revolutionary trade union strategy is more and more beginning to have some practical significance for U.S. socialists. The year 1989 is indeed a fitting time to turn with renewed attention to our predecessors and teachers like Vincent Raymond Dunne. ●

From the Arsenal of Marxism

Revolutionary Tasks and Work in the Trade Union Movement

by V. R. Dunne

This article is reprinted from the October 22, 1938, Socialist Appeal, then the national organ of the Socialist Workers Party.

A Marxist understanding of the state and of the role of the revolutionary party as the vanguard of the class, without which the class cannot raise itself to power, results in our having a different attitude towards work in the trade unions than that held by any other organization claiming to represent the American workers.

Alone of all parties in the United States, the Socialist Workers Party advocates that only a workers and farmers government, basing itself upon nationwide councils of elected representatives of the workers and farmers, can solve the economic and social problems facing the masses. It flows from this concept that our party must extend its influence to

all sections of the economic organizations of the workers and farmers — particularly of the workers, because it is the working class that will lead all the oppressed in the onslaught on capitalism and the fight for a socialist America and a socialist world.

Our Task

The task of our party consists of gaining influence over the trade unions — more, of winning, through the trade unions, influence over the majority of the working class.

We can only succeed in this if the methods used by our party in the trade unions help to build the unions, to strengthen them, to increase their influence among the unemployed, the farmers, the oppressed minorities, and the small people of the city. That the trade union work of our party, limited in scope as it has been up to now, has been based on a correct policy is verified by the truly remarkable way in which unions in which our members are active and influential have thrived.

Because the Socialist Labor Party and the IWW answered “no” to the question: shall revolutionists work in reactionary trade unions? they doomed themselves to sterility.

Because the Socialist Party and the Lovestone group have degraded socialist politics to the level of trade union politics, their work in the mass movement has not resulted in diverting the labor movement from subservience to the capitalists.

The movement for the Fourth International took shape in America and throughout the world not only in the fight against the theories of “socialism in one country,” of “social fascism,” etc., but in the struggle against the theory of dual “red” unionism fostered by the Communist International until 1936. Lenin in 1920 had demonstrated theoretically, in his *Left Communism*, that for communists to turn their backs on reactionary unions and invent new “revolutionary” unions was to render “the greatest service to the bourgeoisie.”

The Reactionary Stalinists

But the Communist parties throughout the world had long since turned their backs on Leninism. When the “Communists” reentered the trade unions following 1934 they continued to wear the leading strings of the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy in Russia. With the drift to the right of Soviet policy, the trade union work of Browder’s party has developed to the point where today this group is the most reactionary force in the labor movement. Whereas the fortunes of the Greens and the Hillmans are, after all, bound up with the fortunes of the movements which they head, the fortunes of the Stalinist unionists derive from Stalin and his clique.

Unlike the Communist Party, which up until the spring of 1937 favored the AFL over the CIO only to swing overnight to the other extreme, the Socialist Workers Party has no fetishism for either set of initials.

Mistakes of the CIO

The CIO has accomplished a great historic task in organizing the heavy industries, a task that the craft unions could

never have accomplished. The new CIO unions succeeded, not only because they were industrial in form but because they utilized militant and revolutionary tactics (sitdown strikes, etc.) to gain their goal. Had the CIO continued its original policy of organizing the unorganized, of concentrating on the basic industries, of avoiding raids on established AFL unions, there is little doubt but that, despite the blows of the depression, it would today be in a far better position in the American labor movement.

Desperate for organizers, Lewis committed a tragic error in opening wide the doors to the Stalinists in return for their unconditional support.

Weakened by the defeat of “Little Steel” and the hammerblows of the new depression, the CIO organism could not shake off the Stalinist poison. On the West Coast and elsewhere the Communist-controlled CIO has followed a brutal and callous anti-working class policy of raiding the AFL, of violating the picket lines of unions under the control of the progressives. In Minneapolis, the Stalinized section of the CIO has not hesitated to connive with the bosses against the AFL, even to appeal to the courts for an injunction against the latter.

On November 14 in Pittsburgh, the CIO will hold its first national convention, at which will be decided the question of who is to control that body: the workers or the Stalinists in a bloc with Lewis or other CIO leaders. It can be said bluntly that only to the extent to which the CIO rids itself of Stalinism can it recover its lost ground and develop.

The Strength of the AFL

A phenomenon not sufficiently appreciated by the students of the labor movement, not by Stolberg, and not even by certain of our own comrades, is the manner in which the AFL has not only withstood the effects of the depression and the competition of the CIO, but has even managed to gain a million new members. The AFL, having an experienced organizing staff and great sums of money at its disposal, was better able than the CIO to take advantage of the groundswell of organization which swept across the country and to stabilize itself when the newly organized unions faced the ravages of the depression.

Despite the Greens, the Wolls and Tracys and Freys — incurably narrowminded, selfish, jealous, divorced from the ranks — the AFL finds itself, after three years of the CIO, with a membership approaching the all-time peak figures of 1919. To be sure, the AFL in the struggle to maintain itself, has used the organizational forms, and even, at times, the militant tactics, which it officially condemned in the CIO. This has a special meaning for us.

The AFL convention recently ended in Houston was marked by the fight which Tobin led against the executive council for unification of the AFL and CIO. Tobin today finds himself and his International Union in a commanding position in the American labor movement. The Brotherhood of Teamsters is the largest national body in the Federation and has an almost unlimited field for expansion. With the strategic position of the drivers in American industry, the IBT can play an important role in unifying the movement.

The Road Ahead

On the road ahead, it is not impossible that a third national union grouping may arise. The history of unionism in other industrial countries indicates that such a formation is not out of the question. Forces that might go to make up such a body are Dubinsky's ILGWU; the Printers; the Teamsters; the Sailors; the Auto Workers and Rubber Workers, etc. Should such a formidable group arise, it would have the power to bring great pressure to bear upon the top leadership of both the AFL and CIO.

It is evident that unless labor succeeds in itself unifying its armies, Roosevelt, acting for American capitalism, will intercede to bring about unity from outside and above, in a way that can only have disastrous consequences for the independence of the trade unions.

The Unemployed

Of the 35,000,000 workers, almost half are today unemployed. Any trade union policy that does not provide for these unemployed will bring disaster to the working class.

The AFL nationally has disregarded the problem.

The CIO under the pressure of the depression, which hit the mass industries harder than the skilled trades, has after too much delay tackled the problem in many localities. On the initiative of progressives, many CIO unions have unemployed sections, thereby binding the jobless to their working brothers. In areas like Detroit, these unemployed sections have achieved tremendous proportions and have been a major factor in maintaining the union's hold on the workers.

Both bodies or the new united movement will have to intervene much more vigorously on behalf of the unemployed if the jobless millions are to be saved from fascism.

Political Action

No sooner had the CIO organized the great basic industries when the new economic crisis posed problems which the unions could not solve. The CIO was forced to take steps toward independent political action of the working class. These first moves have been timid and bureaucratic. Nevertheless, they represent an advance over the Gompers tradition, and it is the duty of progressives to encourage this process and to give to the growing movement a bold program.


Historic Role of SWP

If the Socialist Workers Party, the American section of the Fourth International, is to rise to its historic tasks, it must redouble its work in the union movement. The last year has seen us making great strides forward in both the AFL and CIO. But we are progressing much too slowly. Time is short. It is truer than ever that our most important field in the coming period will remain in the trade union movement.

No one claims that our party has said the last word on the problem of the relationships between the revolutionary party and the trade unions, or that we have achieved the final formulas which will guide us in all the twists and turns of an American union movement that is becoming increasingly complex. But our policies are Bolshevik policies and represent the accumulated experience of decades in the world union movement.

Armed with these policies, our cadres can attract all that is healthy in the movement, can expand into proletarian armies that will lead behind them the American masses in the revolutionary onslaught against the cruel system which is preparing only greater misery, and against the insanities of imperialist war. ●

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But What Is Happening Among the Soviet Masses?

by Steve Bloom

The *Militant* newspaper, which reflects the viewpoint of the Socialist Workers Party, has been strangely silent over the past couple of years about events in the USSR. While the entire international workers' movement has been keenly following and commenting on the development of glasnost and perestroika, until April of 1989 only a single article by Doug Jenness had appeared in that publication—his "Learning About Socialism" column in the December 2, 1988, issue. Jenness took the opportunity of that column to dismiss the new developments in the USSR as simply a bureaucratic maneuver, with little importance for revolutionary Marxists. Nothing substantial will change in the Soviet Union, he explains, until there is a revolutionary communist party that can overthrow the bureaucracy.

And how do we get from here to there? Don't Gorbachev's democratic reforms, despite his bureaucratic purposes, reveal a vast ferment in all layers of Soviet society and present an opportunity for the average citizen to read, hear, and discuss ideas which have been banned for 60 years? Doesn't this make a positive contribution to the process of constructing a revolutionary communist party? Are we for such democratic reforms or against them? Jenness is silent, though it is clear from reports and comments made by SWP leaders and their international cothinkers on a number of occasions that they have chosen to roll the entire glasnost-perestroika phenomenon into a single package and declare themselves opposed to the whole thing. In this way they stand against the *democratic reforms* that are the basis for the new independent activity of workers and masses of the oppressed nationalities in the USSR *as well as the anti-working class economic measures* which the bureaucracy is attempting to impose, making no distinction between these two aspects of the situation.

One is tempted to pose a simple question: in a bourgeois country if the ruling class is forced to allow democratic rights—even if for its own reasons—do proletarian revolutionists reject those rights, or refuse to fight for them, just because we reject the political objectives of the bourgeoisie? Such an idea represents the height of sectarian thinking. So why should we fail to be the best advocates for the political reforms in the USSR which go under the name of glasnost, or refuse to fight for their extension and deepening even though we are completely opposed to the bureaucratic goals of Gorbachev?

With such a position, representatives of the SWP would have a hard time explaining themselves to the average Soviet worker (or even to the average citizen of the United States). It is understandable why the *Militant* has, up to now, main-

tained a profound silence on this question. However, in the April 7 issue of the paper, Fred Feldman ventures an analysis of the March 26 elections in the USSR, under the headline, "Gorbachev Gains in Soviet Elections." I guess this event was just too significant for even the *Militant* to ignore.

Need for a Marxist Analysis

The headline itself is a most remarkable statement. Can anyone really interpret the election returns in the USSR as a victory for Gorbachev, full stop? Feldman explains, "The election campaign in the Soviet Union served to direct discontent with social and economic conditions into channels that lent momentum to the political and economic measures that Gorbachev is advocating."

This idea may be arguable in a formal sense, but if we want to understand the essence of the matter it is necessary to dig a bit deeper. The problem is that Feldman poses the situation purely as a struggle between *two wings of the bureaucracy*—Gorbachev, with his effort at perestroika, and the more conservative elements that oppose his reforms. Therefore he draws the conclusion that "a setback was dealt to those within the party and government apparatus who have slowed or obstructed implementation of perestroika, or economic restructuring."

But what is most important in this situation is not the struggle between the two wings of the bureaucracy, but the openings that have begun to occur for genuinely independent organization on the part of the Soviet masses. This is the real factor in the equation that we Marxists must concern ourselves with. Feldman leaves it out entirely. To be sure, these openings for the masses found only modest expression in the course of the election campaign, but even these modest expressions represent a dramatic turnaround from the situation in the USSR only a few short years ago. It should be clear to any reasonably objective observer that *the elections accelerated a process of development of independent political action by the Soviet working class and by the oppressed nationalities of the USSR*. This, not the formal victory of the Gorbachev wing of the bureaucracy, is fundamental.

Feldman himself notes some of the manifestations of this reality in his article, even though he chooses to ignore their real import:

Party nominees were running unopposed for about 380 of the popularly elected seats. A majority of voters could, and in several cases did, block election of some unopposed candidates by crossing off their names.

And further:

The election campaign and results highlighted the growth of demands for economic and political autonomy in the Soviet Union's Baltic republics—Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.

In Lithuania, Sajudis, a nationalist group, won 31 out of 42 seats. Two top government figures were defeated by Sajudis candidates.

Janis Vagris, party chief in Latvia, won by only a narrow margin over a candidate who openly advocated separation from the Soviet Union.

In Estonia the founder of the nationalist Estonian People's Front won more than 80 percent of the vote in defeating the Communist Party candidate.

Feldman also discusses the overwhelming vote for Boris Yeltsin, who received 89 percent of the vote against an official candidate. He describes Yeltsin's platform as ranging "from denunciation of official privilege to calls to restrict the influx into Moscow of workers and peasants from other parts of the country," apparently giving equal weight to these two points. In fact, however, Yeltsin has become an individual with an immense prestige and following primarily because he has called for the *complete elimination of all bureaucratic privilege*, whatever other deficiencies there might be in his perspectives. This in and of itself says something about the mood of the Soviet workers today.

Unevenness and Contradictions

What all of this shows is that, far from being a peaceful "channeling" of the mass discontent by Gorbachev, the elections represented one part of a much larger, extremely profound and contradictory process, filled with danger for Gorbachev and the Soviet bureaucracy. If today that discontent was expressed through the bureaucratically organized and limited channel of the elections, that is primarily because this was the channel that the masses had available at that moment. If the election results represent a formal victory by the Gorbachev wing over its more conservative bureaucratic rivals, it just as surely represents a *growing challenge to bureaucratic rule as a whole* from the Soviet masses. And for us, this second reality is ten times more important than the first.

The challenge of the masses is still in its embryonic stages, disorganized, confused, filled with contradictory elements, even in danger of being exploited by right-wing elements. But what can we expect when the pressure-cooker of Stalinist repression that has been building up for more than half a century begins to explode? The bureaucrats in the USSR are fully aware of this problem, and are desperately seeking a way to contain the explosion, to put the steam back into the kettle if they can. Revolutionary Marxists in the United States and elsewhere cannot be less conscious that this is the driving force today of the situation in the USSR. Indeed, it is the very heart and soul of the conflict within the bureaucracy.

It is hardly a "gain for Gorbachev" or for any wing of the bureaucracy in the USSR when a significant number of unopposed candidates are soundly rejected by the population,

any more than it would be a gain for the Democratic Party in the United States if a number of unopposed Republicans were defeated in the same manner—were this possible given the U.S. electoral system. It would rather tend to shake up the entirety of ruling class politics in this country. Nor can Gorbachev take much comfort in the impressive showing by the nationalist candidates in a number of the non-Russian republics. Whatever his formal pronouncements after the elections, Gorbachev is well aware that the results represented a challenge to him, far more than they represented a victory.

Cuba's Influence on the SWP

All of this should be obvious to even a casual student of revolutionary Marxism. So it seems almost inexplicable that the SWP should have taken the line it has on the Soviet elections and the process of political reforms as a whole. To understand what is behind this, one has to look at the SWP leadership's present infatuation with Cuba and Fidel Castro, and at Castro's own attitudes toward glasnost and perestroika.

At the same time that Gorbachev has attempted to resolve the crisis of the Soviet economy through a restructuring along the lines of a capitalist market system, Castro has launched an opposite effort in Cuba. He found that the previous attempts to stimulate the Cuban economy through market mechanisms were generating destructive tendencies, and launched a "rectification" campaign to correct the problem. This involves a return to the idea of moral incentives and voluntary labor for the common good, rather than material reward, as the basis for stimulating economic productivity in Cuba.

The ideas which are now emanating from the Soviet Union under the impact of Gorbachev's reforms constitute a significant problem for Castro, since they challenge both his new turn on the economic front and, perhaps more importantly, the idea of his monopoly on political leadership which has always been a central ideological cornerstone for the Cuban regime. An apparent rift between Cuba and the USSR has been the result.

Since the entire international orientation of the SWP, beginning in the early 1980s, has revolved around a project of regrouping revolutionary forces in the world through Cuba and the Castro leadership, the SWP's political analysis during this period has been strongly influenced by what it perceives to be its diplomatic needs vis-à-vis the Cuban regime. Therefore, it was incumbent on the party leadership to find a way to oppose the glasnost political reforms, along with the economic restructuring along capitalist political lines in the USSR. The result has been the kind of shallow analysis presented by Jenness and Feldman, a profoundly mistaken dismissal of the political reforms as nothing but a bureaucratic maneuver by Gorbachev.

In early April Gorbachev paid a visit to Cuba, and at least outwardly the reaction of Castro was friendly. A statement was issued in which both Gorbachev and Castro explained that they had no interest in imposing their own approach to economic development and political leadership on the other.

Continued on page 36

An Old House in Coyoacan

Here, in one of the Mexican capital's districts, Lev Trotsky's grandson cherishes the memory of his grandfather

This house surrounded by a tall stone wall in a quiet and narrow street of Coyoacán, one of the Mexican capital's districts, is visibly older than its neighbours and far less chic. Few know the real history of this house, where Lev Trotsky lived in the late 1930s until his death in 1940.

ESTEBAN VOLKOV

Passing through a low entrance way in the wall, I see a dark wet park, washed-out laneway leading to an ugly concrete slab with a hammer and sickle engraved on it and a red flag at half-mast — this is his grave.

Behind it there is a small, grey-stone house with little windows. This is where Esteban Volkov and I headed.

Sturdy and smart, despite his sixty odd years, with shortcut grey hair and light eyes, looking very much like his grandfather. I can judge about the grandfather solely from photographs on the walls. Here there is a low bed with a plaid bedspread, an ancient plywood wardrobe painted to look like wood, and a little writing desk looking more like a kitchen table.

Similar ascetism (I dislike the word "poverty" although poverty, of course, it is) is typical of the entire decor of the house — painted walls, wretched furniture, nothing superfluous, no decorations. An uncomfortable, empty, cool house....

Esteban Volkov was born, if my calculations are correct, in 1926 in Russia and his name was Seva. His mother, Lev Trotsky's daughter, committed suicide in a state of grave depression. Seva was adopted by Trotsky's son — Lev Sedov. When yet a child, he was taken abroad, having evidently changed his name. He roamed for long around the cities and villages of Europe and America until, in 1939 at the age of 13, he found himself at his grandfather's home in Coyoacán. This is how he became Esteban.

A chemical engineer by education, he worked in the pharmacological industry, doing scientific research, and is now on an old-age pension. He doesn't speak Russian, having forgotten it.



Q.: Have you always been in charge of the house-museum, Esteban? Or did you start this only upon retiring!

A.: This is my duty to my grandfather's memory. I have spent all my free time here, meeting visitors and maintaining the museum financially. As you can imagine, there has always been more than enough on my plate. Formally the museum belongs to Mexico's government which bought this house after Trotsky's death. Regrettably, government subsidies are not enough, I am not rich myself and I can't keep up the museum at my own expense or invest any significant amount of money in it. We rely on voluntary donations.

Q.: Do many visitors come here!

A.: The numbers vary. On weekends up to 40-50 persons come, mostly foreigners — Germans, French and Americans. Recently visitors from the Soviet Union also started coming.

MURDER AND

ASSASSINATION

The next room is Trotsky's bedroom. Its furniture is just as Spartan as in the first. The same low bed with its plaid bedspread, the same plywood wardrobe. Only the doors are heavy and made of metal, and the shutters on the window are plated with metal. The walls are riddled with bullet holes.

"On May 24, 1940, at 4 a.m., a group of armed men made their way into the courtyard, killing a guard," Esteban says. "On breaking in, they opened fire with submachine guns. They fired some 200-250 rounds, but it was dark, they were in a hurry, and Trotsky was lucky that time — he stayed alive. He escaped death by a sheer miracle. But he was destined to live only three months. On the morning of August 20, 1940, Lev Trotsky was assassinated by

Mercader, a Spaniard, who had been able to worm himself into the confidence of my grandfather's closest aides. I remember Mercader, having repeatedly spoken to him. Tall, handsome and muscular, he passed himself off as a Belgian journalist. As a boy of 14, I was fascinated by him. My grandfather was killed over there in the next room, in his study.

Q.: Who do you think was behind this?

A.: For me the question is clear: Stalin.

Q.: Are there any documents to confirm this supposition?

A.: In all probability, these documents, too, can be found in some archives. I do not have them at my disposal. But judge for yourself — one of the leaders of the first assassination attempt was David Alfaro Siqueiros, already a well-known artist, and besides a member of the Communist Party of Mexico and a former officer of the international brigades in Spain. He clearly sought to fulfil Stalin's orders. And in 1940, immediately after the assassination, Mercader was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union....

By that time Stalin had only one serious political rival in the communist movement — Lev Trotsky. Even if stripped of real power and even if isolated from the world by these walls, he was a strong adversary who was dangerous because of his thorough knowledge of Stalin's personality. The dictator had already done away with other people who were dangerous for him. Just recall — Bukharin, Rykov, Zinovyev, Kamenev, Kirov.... Moreover, at that time he was working on Stalin's biography on a contract from a Western publishing house. He didn't want to do this, but the need to find the means of livelihood made him write that book.

Q.: How objective was that biography?

A.: Of course, it wasn't full of praise of the "father of the people". It lacked the lies, the distortion of historical facts, and the false testimonial which distinguished Stalin's official biographies. This was a psychological

portrait of the tyrant and dictator. A true-to-life portrait. Here's just one thought from the foreword: "Stalin's power amounts to a modern form of a Caesarism. It is an undisguised monarchy, only without a crown and still without heredity.... He is standing not on earth, but atop the most colossal of all apparatuses. Stalin captured the apparatus because he had been invariably loyal to it. He betrayed the Party, the state, the programme, but not the bureaucracy."

I am sure that this work accelerated Trotsky's death. Moreover, he didn't sink as low as personal hostility, for him Stalin was an exclusively political enemy who had vulgarized the substance of Marxism and socialism.

Q.: And Trotsky stood up for both Marxism and socialism?

"Yes, he did. He gave his life to this," Esteban replied abruptly, slamming the book which he had just been quoting.

FAR AWAY FROM RUSSIA

I could not dispute the grandson's opinion about his grandfather. Not out of delicacy, not because "*de mortuis nil nisi bene*" (say nothing but good of the dead).... Simply I don't have, nor can I have, my own opinion about Trotsky to contrast to Esteban's. Like the overwhelming majority of Soviet people I haven't read Trotsky's works in order to grasp the substance of his errors, and am not aware of his views on socialism and Marxism. The few denunciations of Trotsky in our history textbooks are about as convincing as the legend about the Immaculate Conception.

I had no arguments with which to counter Esteban.

We passed into the study filled with books. The complete collection of Lenin's works in Russia, three volumes of Pushkin's, a collection of Gogol's, short stories by Zoshchenko.... All the rest — in French, German, Spanish....

On a broad writing table — an unfinished manuscript, spectacles broken during that short struggle with the

assassin which ended so tragically for Trotsky, books, reference materials.

Q.: Esteban, judging by these books, your grandfather did not forget Russia. You must remember whether he experienced nostalgia and felt like wanting to return to his country.

A.: He felt miserable here. He was greatly attached to Russia. Russia for him was his youth, the revolution, his whole life. My grandfather often started discussions aloud with his comrades, dead and alive. He kind of played chess with them. He raised objections to himself from their positions which, of course, he was perfectly aware of. He re-experienced his youth and revolution.

I am far removed from politics. I have read few classics of Marxism. But I am convinced that the revolutionaries of Lenin's school owed their strength to tolerance for someone else's opinion, to readiness for discussion and dispute. Lenin and Trotsky were more often adversaries than allies, but it could never occur to Trotsky to conceal his views for fear of punishment. Disagreement and dissent are not a crime. They became crimes in the epoch of Stalinism. But today new winds are blowing in the Soviet Union. Fresh winds. I pin very great hopes on glasnost.

My four daughters and I, who are Trotsky's closest relatives, have passed on a request to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico for Lev Trotsky's juridical rehabilitation addressed to the Supreme Court of the USSR. We want him to be cleared of the charges of espionage, sabotage, etc. The accusations of Stalin's times are not worthy of the great revolution of which Lev Trotsky was an important part.

As I was leaving, I again saw the concrete tombstone with the hammer and sickle and the inscription in Latin characters: "Leon Trotsky".

Mikhail BELYAT,
our own correspondent in Mexico
Mexico City

Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

30. Vorkuta, Kotlas, Kirov

Rubashkin was freed six months before me and left on foot with a sled. Two other comrades remained in the mines, and they still had to endure a great deal. And fourteen years later, all three of us met again—in Vorkuta, where else? But we never found Rubashkin.

Volodya Serov spent his five years on the Usa. Arrested before me, he was freed earlier, but waited to leave with me. We moved down the Usa with the first barge. Then we disembarked and walked some fifty kilometers and finally caught a train—one of the first trains on the Pechora railroad. It was not yet officially operating, but the workers used it.

First in the taiga, and further on in the tundra this miraculous railroad line was built by people in rope shoes and gray fustian caps with earflaps. How long did it take them to build a line about 1,200 kilometers long, and moreover, without mechanical help, using only shovels, picks, crowbars, and wheelbarrows?

The governmental decision was made in 1937. The projected plan was delivered in 1940. And the railroad itself was finished by the end of 1941. A fantastic achievement!

How many people with shovels in their hands had to be placed along the entire route in order to create a legend in such an incredibly short time? The number of convoys brought here on barges and driven here on foot is incalculable.

How many cross ties did these people lay? And how many of these people are themselves buried under them? Now the guard towers are gone, and the dead have been forgotten.

Fifteen years later, in 1955, next to our camp zone in Vorkuta, genuine city streets had been built, on which tall buildings stand. And that summer, they began to dig the foundation ditch for a new school, and they found human

skeletons. They were in a heap, barely covered with dirt. Prisoners were digging the ditch. Some of their shovels flung aside the intermingled skulls, ribs, and hands; others scooped everything into a new pile. Passersby tried to peer through the cracks of the fence surrounding the site, but the convoy official dispersed them.

“Move along, citizens. There’s nothing here that concerns you.”

In fact, why would a skull concern them? The skull is a very simple object. But a pile of skulls? A pile means that all of the dead were buried at one time. What did all these people die of at one time? Starvation? An epidemic? Were they shot? No one knows. All of you disperse now. There’s nothing here that concerns you.

The unearthed bones were taken away somewhere. Soon a school went up over the secret grave. In the school, students learn the geography of their native land and its history.

We travel along the miraculous Vorkuta-Kotlas line.

Those who completed their terms in May and June 1941, but did not get further away than the main line, were caught in Kotlas immediately upon leaving the train and sent back, whole convoys at a time—“until further notice,” they were told. This time the new term was not a term as such; no one elaborated; no one ever got around to letting you know. Further notice could come in a month or in twenty years. Those who were still in Vorkuta automatically had their terms extended, also until further notice. Everyone without exception got a term added on. There had previously been a certain amount of red tape connected with the added term. Now there was none.

I was lucky. Before the war broke out I was able to make it past Kotlas and to settle in Kirov, knowing nothing about the new order.

In 1977, a manuscript totaling hundreds of pages arrived in this country from the Soviet Union—the memoirs of Mikhail Baitalsky, who was in his middle 70s at the time and living in Moscow. His work consists of a series of nine “notebooks” which describe his life as a Ukrainian Jewish revolutionary militant. He narrates how, as a teenager inspired by the October revolution, he joined the Communist Youth, tells about his participation in the Red Army during the Civil War years that followed 1917, his disenchantment with the developing bureaucracy under Stalin, and his subsequent experiences in Stalin’s prison camps. To the very end of his life Baitalsky remained devoted to the ideals of the October revolution. He says that he is writing “for the grandchildren” so that they can know the truth of the revolution’s early years.

The first installment and an introduction by the translator, Marilyn Vogt-Downey, appeared in Bulletin IDOM No. 36, December 1986.

In Kirov, I lived first with Kostya Goroshko, an old Kom-somol member from the Artemovsk printers' cell. We had seen each other in the camp administration office where we had received our passports, stamped "issued for a reason." For five years a small river had separated us and we did not know about one another.

Kostya and his wife — his wife-to-be then — in the good old days in Artemovsk had taken part in the variety show collective "Blue Workshirts" [see Baitalsky's Notebook II, Part 12, "Friendship with Grisha," in *BIDOM*, Sept. '87], and drank tea with rolls in the apartment we shared with the Baglyuks. Manya was adored among the editorial staff for her cheerful and kind disposition.

When several Communists were arrested in Artemovsk, workers at the printshop where the out-of-favor Donbass writers' journal *The Face of the Mine* was published, Manya and her younger brother Yuri left quickly for Kirov to get out of harm's way. Kostya was already in the camp. But Manya was not arrested. She was magnanimously allowed to wait for her husband, and she waited a long time.

Manya took me in like a brother. Kostya did not find his son at home. He was on holiday at a Pioneer camp, about forty kilometers away. The three of us decided to visit him on the next Sunday.

Vitya clutched his father to himself with all his strength. Then he looked up and said:

"Papa, you are just the way you were before. Well, almost."

Manya laughed and cried. I turned away and began to look at the journals. We were sitting in the reading room. On the table was a back issue of *Ogonyok* (The Little Flame) with a full-cover photo of Molotov and Ribbentrop, minister of foreign affairs in Hitler's Germany, shaking hands. I skimmed through the article about the meeting between the two ministers. The word Nemetsi [Germans] had not been used in our press for some time. Now the press said Germans. Nemetsi had its roots in the 500-year-old word nemoj ["mute"], but we had to show our respect for the Aryan-Germans. In the same way, for several years now our people had not been told either in the newspapers, in fliers, or on the radio about what was taking place in fascist Germany. Stalin did not want to provoke a German attack, as it was later explained. But they were not afraid to write about England. The wisdom and sagacity of Stalin consisted in making concessions to fascism precisely because it was more aggressive than non-fascism. Since the Aryan protector [Hitler] is offended by the truth, we will abstain from it; and Ribbentrop will smile upon us.

It was Sunday morning, June 22, 1941 [the day after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union]. Manya had not yet wiped away her tears when there was a call for us to go immediately to the assembly hall. Molotov was speaking over the radio.

Before the war, Kirov was a sleepy town, with only one large enterprise. The machine plant, where I had one week ago become a metal worker, had arisen from a former artel that manufactured concertinas.

The city was transformed by a wave of evacuees. Never before had the city seen so many new arrivals. My parents were evacuated from Odessa, bringing with them their sewing machine, two suitcases full of odds and ends, and

Raya's two children Nelly and Erik. Raya was in a camp far away in Siberia and no one had heard anything about her husband since he was arrested four years ago. They thought he was alive somewhere but had been deprived the right to correspondence. Such a status existed, which concealed from relatives that the person had been shot.

The old folks brought the children all the way to Kirov, but the sewing machine was blown up by a bomb. Taking my mother's last shirt in exchange for ten potatoes, my landlady (I had left Manya's apartment since there were five of us) blamed the new arrivals for everything: "They drop in here unexpectedly with their money and they pay whatever you ask — where they get all that money, God only knows!"

"And you, madam, don't you ask whatever you think you can get?" I said.

"How dare you! What a smart mouth we have here!" She got angry.

Soon Nina arrived, and right after her Vil. Yeva had sent them here from Moscow. No matter how self-centered you may have been as a child, no matter how adult life may have distorted you, there always lives somewhere in your thoughts a person the sight of whom makes your heart stand still. You take a breath. Yes, this is my boy. But he is no longer a boy. Nina was still small and a good little girl. But Vil had become big and awkward.

"You know what?" he said to me. "The best thing for me to do would be to get a job in the factory, even as a blacksmith's striker."

"Maybe. I'll talk with my supervisor tomorrow."

What tormented our 17-year-old sons in those years when their fathers were in the camps? The adults knew almost nothing, but the kids knew even less than that. They themselves had no clear understanding of what was worrying them. And then came the war. Many things were turned upside down. The best traits of a revolutionary people came to the surface and everything that yesterday had produced doubts and fears moved into the background. I was surprised at myself after one battle, recalling that I had shouted: "For the Fatherland! For Stalin!" It was impossible not to shout this. By the way, in some postwar films still shown today, they have for some reason cut the second half of this call from the soldiers' mouths. Why correct history? It needs to be explained. We need to tell our youth that they made us shout these things.

And Vil, when he was outside Warsaw and received a serious head wound that blew away a piece of his skull, tossed and turned in delirium, and was most likely repeating those same words. Our children were tossed between truth and lies, maybe in a troubled way feeling something but knowing nothing. It was not the piece of their skull blown away that harmed them, but what was mixed up inside it; and this happened not near Warsaw or Berlin, but in school in the later classes.

For Nina and Nelly, four years younger, it was simpler: We need to help Grandma. We need bread. Nina worked as a milling machine operator at the same factory I did and Nelly worked at another one closer to home. Nina and I had to walk five kilometers with her. She was thirteen years old.

Potatoes were very expensive at the market, and Mama had no more shirts. A lathe operator worked with me at the

shop, a young man with round, bird-like eyes and the white eyelashes of an albino. At home a little cow mooed and a piglet grunted. He chewed pork rind and kept admonishing: "You have to know how to live. Here: see how I'm doing."

I often hesitated at the threshold of the shop. I had come here by way of the Vorkuta-Kotlas railroad line and I had no layer of fat under my skin.

The futile nine-day hunger strike that I had endured so well while the khaki [guard] dogs were growling at us showed on me now. Although then the sense of hunger dulled after the third or fourth day, the weakness spread throughout the body.

At the Usa health station, where they got us back onto food, there was a very cautious regime. When I left it, the comrades invited me to help myself to their parcels. I was already feeling a little sick but I ate and ate. This insatiable hunger remained for a long time. And the fear of being hungry is a repugnant, pathetic, vile fear. I realize it, I understand it. But despite myself, I cannot overcome it.

We ended up a huge family in Kirov. It seemed to me that because of malnutrition, everyone stayed small. Mama had turned into a tiny thing. It seemed as though the girls would never outgrow their children's dresses. Father was almost bent in half. But he never lost confidence that he could still do everything necessary for the sake of Raya's children. He would tirelessly gather kindling along the railroad where they were building a new platform, and use the kindling to heat up his little stove that he had rigged up in our room. Along the road home from work, he would also bend down and pick up every tiny piece of wood he could find. In the spring, he placed a small bed alongside the house and all summer slept in the yard. The boys dug potatoes from the neighboring yards.

Father served as a guard at a meatpacking house. Apparently, the head of security could read in the face of this bent-over old man that he would never take to hiding sausage and ham under the flap of his sheepskin coat.

Once, on coming home, father told us that from a neighboring post they had shot a thief who had crawled through the fence with his booty.

"And if he had crawled through your section of the fence, would you have shot him, Papa?" the kids wanted to know.

"Are you kidding? Shot a human being? I might have frightened him by firing into the air. He would have dropped that meat."

Father heated up his little stove in the mornings with about ten small pieces of kindling so that Mama could make bread from flour and water — zatirukha, she called it. Mama fed the workers in the family, that is, everyone except herself and seven-year-old Erik. If anything was left in the pan, she gave it to Erik.

It reminds me of the Indian Passuk from Jack London's

story. She died from exhaustion so that Sitka Charley, her husband, could live. Passuk gave her portion to Charley and this saved his life. Mama took from herself for the six of us. What did that extra spoon of zatirukha mean to each of us? Was it worth her torturing herself? I do not know if the kids thought about these actions on the part of their grandmother. I never did. I treated my mother in an unworthy manner and even now I cannot find the spirit to tell everything.

Many years later Nina said to me: "If there is anything in me that is good, it is only thanks to Grandma and the time we spent in Kirov."

Naturally, I am partial toward my mother. In the 1950s, mother wrote to me in the camp. Her letters had to go through the censor. The censor was on the staff of the camp and crossed out even things like "We are having bad weather here." "Weather" may have been a code-word. They did not limit the letters one could receive, but mail was seriously delayed and a fair amount was crossed out.

We would go up to the window and say our names, and the censor would hand over the letter. I walked up. The censor — a grim, middle-aged woman — answered: "I remember your name well, prisoner. Your mother's letters are the ones I take out of the packet first. Who is she?"

"An ordinary woman," I answered. "She even makes mistakes when she writes."

"Listen, prisoner, I am not holding back her letters. I'm sure you thought: 'If a person is a censor, she is therefore not human.'"

I went away.

About two days later, an acquaintance came up to my bunk and said: "Hey, the censor-lady wants to see you."

I went and got a new letter from Mama. She was 70 years old then. Not long ago, at the age of 79, she wrote me and said: "As long as I can walk, I must be helping someone."

In her lived an innate intelligence, which penetrated her every word, even one written incorrectly. She was a seamstress. She never finished school and taught herself Russian. But she read books all her life, and she passed on a love for books to our family. She had never even held the Talmud in her hands and, of course, never read the words "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" in the original. But it was on the basis of this rule that she raised her children. Her influence is evident in her grandchildren and very likely will be evident in her great-grandchildren as well.

My Mama was the soul of our family. Thinking about her, I believe: I can be that way too. I need only try very hard. A person is capable of remaking oneself by one's own efforts. This is where maturity begins.

[Next month: "Russian Patriots"]

Oil Spill (Continued from page 2)

Exxon's contribution, in view of the magnitude of the problem it created, appears to be minimal. Yet their public relations department is hard at work. On April 5 they had the temerity to announce that volunteers may do more harm than good. "If we get a whole influx of volunteers, there is nowhere to really keep them and they would really create more of a problem." The state, however, seems to have solved that problem without consulting Exxon. It sent two state ferries to the scene to transport supplies and house and feed the cleanup workers. In fact, Governor Cowper has called in the Coast Guard to help, stating that Exxon is "too bureaucratic" — an ironic twist to the prevalent notion that only private enterprise is efficient.

"Exxon's sluggish response to the disaster may reflect the fact that under Alaska law it is cheaper for the company to pay civil penalties than it is to mount an aggressive cleanup effort," oil spill experts said recently. At that, it will be a bargain for them unless the state can win a suit for additional damages based on gross negligence.

On April 3, almost exactly ten years after Sharman Haley's outspoken stand on greedy multinationals, another noon-time rally took place on the Capitol steps. Protesters shouted

"Make Exxon Pay" and waved signs that read, "Exxon Stashes the Cash and Passes the Buck," "Exxon Slick, Cruel and Slimy," "Oil Companies Break Promises, Break Lives, Break Hearts," and "Alaska, Land of the Midnight Sump." They urged support for a number of changes in Alaska law for protection of the environment. Among them was a demand that tankers larger than 100 deadweight tons (the *Exxon Valdez* was twice that size) be barred from sailing in Alaskan waters. Another is to reenact legislation requiring double hulls on all tankers. Under that legislation Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. would be required to keep 10 barges loaded with 100 miles of oil spill containment booms on hand in Valdez harbor and a skimmer vessel no further away than Seattle.

Allen Stein, an 18-year-old fisherman and a leader of the demonstration said, "Exxon has put profits before environmental protection and that must change." How many disasters caused by corporate greed and indifference must occur before change will actually take place and the earth made safe for the rest of us? ●

Eastern Airlines (Continued from page 9)

alone — especially isolated one-company strikes — cannot effectively defend working people today. We need to mobilize on a class basis, with the widest possible solidarity, to beat off the employers' attacks.

And we cannot restrict ourselves to pure "bread and butter" issues. If the labor movement is to survive, much less make gains, it must do as Trotsky urged: think socially and act politically. The capitalist organization of the airlines industry means higher fares and deteriorating service for travelers and shippers as well as declining living standards and working conditions for industry workers. Pollution and congestion demand a reversal of dependence on cars and trucks. Rail must be revitalized. No capitalist and no capitalist-dominated government is going to tackle the problems of transportation. The only force with significant social weight and the material interest to deal with the crisis of transportation is the working class.

The labor movement should take up the demand of nationalization of transportation, operated in the public interest under workers' control. We need a transportation plan providing a sensible balance between air, rail, and road transport.

Of course no such plan could be adopted without the political organization of the working class. As long as the

bosses maintain a political monopoly labor fights with both hands tied behind our backs. A labor party, based on the potential strength of organized labor, and appealing to the unorganized and unemployed workers and the racially oppressed, is no longer a utopian dream: it is a vital and necessary step if the labor movement is to survive.

Now this doesn't mean that we demand that the Eastern workers adopt the slogans of a labor party and nationalization of transportation as the price for our support. We support their current struggle unconditionally. It is an important fight. Millions are looking at it sympathetically. It has aroused solidarity on the widest scale seen in years. It has demonstrated once again that whenever workers are given a realistic choice between fight and surrender they will fight and the great majority of the working class admires and supports such fighters.

We in the F.I.T. will do what we can to promote solidarity with the Eastern workers. At the same time we will try to interest all workers in a discussion of the kind of strategy and tactics the labor movement needs to adopt if we are to beat back the greedy and ruthless assault of the employers on our hard won living standards and working conditions. ●

USSR Elections (Continued from page 30)

Perhaps this reflects a genuine accord, one which could mean a softening of Cuba's opposition to glasnost and perestroika in the Soviet Union. That, in turn, might affect the approach of the *Militant* and SWP leaders in their discussions of events in the USSR today. But even if that should prove to be the case, and it is far from certain, the long silence

of the *Militant* on events in the USSR, broken on only two occasions with dangerously one-sided analyses, will still stand as a stark reminder of the dangers inherent in basing one's political analysis on diplomatic considerations, rather than on an independent revolutionary Marxist appreciation of world events. ●

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