

# Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

No. 71

February 1990

\$3.00

<b>The U.S. Invasion of Panama Misnamed 'Operation Just Cause'</b> by Tom Barrett	1
<b>Haitian Masses Resist Right-wing Crackdown and Government Austerity Drive</b> by Michael Frank	4
<b>Rumania Joins Revolutionary Wave in Eastern Europe</b> by Steve Bloom	5
<b>A Letter from Berlin</b>	8
<b>Discussion: Which Way for Poland and Solidarity?</b> by Samuel Adams	10

---

**Exchange of Views:**

**Open Letter to Barry Sheppard**  
by Steve Bloom 14

**In Reply to Steve Bloom's Open Letter**  
by Barry Sheppard 18

---

<b>An Appeal to Reason – The SWP and the Central America Struggle</b> by Samuel Adams	20
<b>Interview with Turkish Revolutionist</b>	22
<b>Notebooks for the Grandchildren (Continued)</b> 36. <b>A Woman's Scream in the Corridor</b> by Mikhail Baitalsky	28
<b>Reviews:</b> <b>Political Insights on Lenin's Organizational Practice</b> by Steve Bloom	33
<b>Marxism and Liberation Theology</b> by R. L. Huebner	35
<b>Pathfinder Mural – Masses Take a Back Seat</b> by Roy Rollin	36

## 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.*

---

*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, No. 71, February 1990

Closing date January 5, 1990

Send correspondence and subscriptions to BULLETIN IDOM, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009.

EDITORIAL BOARD: Naomi Allen, Steve Bloom, Laura Cole, Paul Le Blanc, Sarah Lovell, Bill Onasch, George Saunders, Evelyn Sell, Rita Shaw, Jean Tussey.

INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTING EDITORS: Göte Kilden, Sweden; Daniel Libreros, Colombia; Ernest Mandel, Belgium; Manuel Aguilar Mora, Mexico; Steve Roberts, Britain; Barry Weisleder, Canada.

To subscribe to *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, send \$24 for 12 monthly issues or \$15 for 6 issues to Bulletin IDOM, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009. Back issues are \$3.00 each.

# The U.S. Invasion of Panama

## Misnamed 'Operation Just Cause'

by Tom Barrett

Shortly after midnight on December 20, 1989, the Bush administration launched the biggest U.S. military invasion since the Vietnam war, which ended over fourteen years ago. Combined with the military action has been what may be the biggest campaign of lies and deception as well since the Vietnam war. Every justification which Bush and his spokesmen have presented for this act of aggression is transparently false and can easily be refuted without searching beyond information which has been publicly reported. It is the responsibility of the entire labor and peace movements to refute Bush's lies and to build the foundation for massive protests when a similar invasion is carried out in the future. (See "Condemn the U.S. Invasion of Panama," statement by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency Coordinators, on page 2).

In announcing the invasion, President Bush outlined four major objectives to be achieved: (1) the capture of Manuel Antonio Noriega, to face drug-trafficking charges in the United States; (2) the installation of the "legitimately elected" government of Guillermo Endara; (3) the protection of American lives; and (4) the security of the Panama Canal.

The canal's security was never in jeopardy, either before or after the invasion. The new government, headed by Guillermo Endara, rests only on Yankee military power, and it remains to be seen if it will be able to rule on its own. Of course, the invasion caused a much greater risk to U.S. citizens than if it had not taken place—23 soldiers and 2 civilians died in the two-week military operation. The Panama City area, where nearly all Panamanians live, has been devastated. Over 400 Panamanian civilians (by U.S. count) were killed; over 10,000 are homeless, and there are shortages of food, water, and fuel which are only now being addressed.

Whatever dispute may have existed between George Bush and Manuel Noriega it is the civilian population of Panama which has paid the price, and they know it. It was not until the night of January 3 that Noriega surrendered to U.S. authorities. Apparently, his willingness to surrender was based on the serious possibility that it will be impossible to convict him on drug-dealing charges.

### The Truth About Noriega

For the first time since the end of World War II, U.S. military power has been used with no claim of any "communist threat." How significant this is in world political terms remains to be seen, but it is quite significant in terms of domestic politics.

Because of the massive victories which the peoples of Eastern Europe have won against Stalinism, it is no longer possible to frighten Americans into supporting a military adventure with the specter of a "Russian takeover." Consequently, Bush has justified his overthrow of another country's government by accusing Manuel Noriega of being a cocaine trafficker and of other such crimes and misdemeanors.

Even granting that Noriega is guilty as charged—which has not been proved in a public trial and may never be—Bush's hypocrisy is obvious even to the most casual observer. The CIA, of which George Bush served as director in 1975-76, has never hesitated to collaborate with anticommunist forces who have been connected with international drug trafficking, including Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang, the Afghan *mujahedeen*, and the Nicaraguan contras. Noriega himself collaborated with the U.S. intelligence agencies from the 1950s through 1987, and if he was involved in the cocaine trade, he was not the only U.S. intelligence asset who was.

U.S. officials and the news media have repeatedly called Noriega a monster, with some justification. However, if Noriega is a monster, then Uncle Sam is the mad scientist who created him. He rose through the ranks of the U.S.-created Panamanian National Guard (now known as the Panamanian Defense Forces) as an intelligence officer. He became a close associate of General Omar Torrijos, who was president at the time the Panama Canal Treaty was negotiated, endearing himself to Torrijos by carrying out any dirty task assigned to him. For example, in 1971 Noriega personally killed a dissident priest, Fr. Hector Gallego, by pushing him out of a helicopter. Ultimately he became the head of Panama's intelligence service—the Panamanian equivalent of CIA director. After Torrijos's death in a suspicious plane crash, Noriega's accession to power was viewed favorably in Washington. Even Panamanians who approve of the U.S. invasion have been quoted as saying that the U.S. is only righting the wrong it originally committed in the first place.

Noriega's long association with the CIA and U.S. military has ironically worked to his advantage since he fell afoul of his gringo colleagues. For nearly two years he was able to outmaneuver the U.S. at every turn, staying alive and staying in power. He was prepared for every coup attempt and was not afraid to retaliate against American servicemen and dependents, making Panama one of the least desirable duty stations in the U.S. military. He outfoxed the Americans again briefly this time: while U.S. tanks were surrounding the Cuban and Nicaraguan embassies under the assumption that Noriega would take refuge there, he drove around Panama

City with an entourage for three days and then slipped into the Vatican embassy, one which would be politically unwise to storm. This led to the spectacle of American troops surrounding the embassy and blasting loud rock music in a pathetic and ludicrous attempt to harass the papal diplomats into forcing Noriega out.

The Bush administration publicly stated their objective as the extradition of Noriega to the U.S. to be tried in open court on drug charges. Sources within the military and intelligence communities, however, have indicated that their real objective was to "terminate with extreme prejudice." There is no doubt that Noriega's U.S. lawyers would subpoena secret CIA records as evidence, as lawyers for Oliver North and John Poindexter have done in their Iran-contra trials. The amount of knowledge Noriega has of U.S. covert intelligence activity would dwarf both the Watergate and Iran-contra scandals if it were ever exposed, and he has guaranteed his safety up to now by threatening to tell all if he is put on trial.

### **The Endara Government: Born in the U.S.A.**

As "Operation Just Cause" was first getting under way, Guillermo Endara was sworn in as Panama's president — on a U.S. military base. He even delivered his inaugural address in English. Whatever the results of last year's election may have been, and no matter what Endara's own intentions may be, his authority rests on nothing more or less than the slim foundation of Yankee bayonets.

Guillermo Endara is a labor lawyer and bourgeois politician with liberal political views. He is in many respects a Panamanian parallel to José Napoleón Duarte, the former president of El Salvador. After the 1989 election, which Endara and U.S. observer Jimmy Carter (the former president) claimed Endara won, demonstrations were staged to demand that the majority vote be respected. Noriega's "Dignity Battalions" — in reality, goon squads — broke the demonstrations up and severely beat Endara and his vice-presidential running mate Guillermo Ford. The election results were nullified.

It has been noted, however, that in the months leading up to the election, the United States had already begun its campaign of economic strangulation of Panama. The claim is that many Panamanians voted for Endara in the belief that his election would stop Washington's trade blackmail. It is also alleged that the CIA intervened directly in the Panamanian electoral process, as it is doing at the present time in Nicaragua. There is no doubt about U.S. attempts to influence the Panamanian election, and that the attempts were a clear violation of Panama's sovereignty. Whether or not they made a decisive difference can only be a matter of speculation.

Of course, in Panama "political power flows out of the barrel of a gun." Since the United States set up Panama's standing army in 1968 it has been the real authority in that country — sometimes ruling directly, sometimes ruling through a civilian puppet. Nearly all of Noriega's senior officers have retained their power since the invasion, even

## **Condemn the U.S. Invasion of Panama**

**by the National Coordinators of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency**

**December 20, 1989**

Early this morning, United States military forces invaded Panama. In a nationally broadcast speech President George Bush claimed that the operation was justified on the basis of international law, protecting the lives of U.S. citizens, defense of democracy, and bringing Manuel Noriega to justice for his role in drug trafficking.

This is a hypocritical fraud. The U.S. government has no business in Panama; *none whatsoever*. Its criminal action should be condemned, and people all over the world need to make their voices heard in opposition.

The drug problem in the U.S. is hardly caused by the likes of Manuel Noriega. If Bush really wanted to do something about it he would take the hundreds of billions of dollars spent every year on supporting the U.S. military apparatus in countries like Panama, and use it instead on programs to create jobs, housing, decent schools, and a life for the youth of this

country which could provide a real alternative to the world of drugs.

It is a bizarre logic that claims to be "defending lives" through a military operation that has in fact cost the lives of at least dozens of innocent Panamanian civilians and soldiers, and of U.S. GIs. If U.S. lives were at risk in Panama, they could have been protected far more effectively by simply withdrawing all personnel — military and civilian — from the country and returning the Canal Zone to Panamanian jurisdiction.

Manuel Noriega is no friend of the Panamanian people. He is a petty dictator who was originally installed with the aid and support of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (which was his partner at the time in the drug business). But only the Panamanian people can deal adequately with this problem. And they can do so only if there is no interference in their internal affairs by the United States. That is a prerequisite to democracy in Panama.

The U.S. government's role in Central America and the Caribbean over the past decade — in particular its invasion of Grenada, its support for the bloody contra war against the Nicaraguan people and for the right-wing terrorist regime in El Salvador — demonstrates that it is no friend of national sovereignty for the region. In fact, the revolutions in Nicaragua and Cuba (where the people have already achieved a genuine national sovereignty) and in El Salvador (where they are presently fighting to do so) are the longer-term targets of Bush's

military action this morning. George Bush knows full well that real national independence for the Central American countries would be a mortal danger to U.S. corporate profits there.

The mass media and government of this country have been on a propaganda offensive against Noriega's regime for many months. George Bush took advantage of the public sentiment this has created to justify his military invasion. But Bush's posturing as a friend of Panamanian democracy should fool no one. If he is allowed to get away with his military attack in that country, if there is no massive public outcry of protest, it will only embolden those elements in the U.S. ruling class who would like to return to the days, before the Vietnam war, when Washington felt free to invade other countries, or use covert methods against them, wherever there were governments which didn't conform to U.S. policies.

Demonstrations over the past decade in the streets of this country, demanding that the White House respect the right of self-determination for the peoples of Central America, have severely limited Washington's policy options. Bush's latest attack cries out for a renewed campaign of action by the people of this country to demand:

**U.S. Hands Off Panama!**

**No U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Caribbean!**

those whose complicity in the drug-running and political repression is well known. In the army, Noriega is being succeeded by a junior version of himself.

Whatever legitimacy Endara may have had from the election has been totally erased by his coming to power on Uncle Sam's coattails. Though he may never have intended to be—or to be seen as—a Yankee puppet, that is how the people of Panama City's *barrios* will see him. With such a narrow base of support—limited only to U.S. representatives and wealthy Panamanians, Endara will rule only at Washington's pleasure. He will not dare carry out any policies of which the U.S. government does not approve. After all, Noriega originally acceded to power with Washington's wholehearted blessings.

### International Reaction

The international reaction, especially the Latin American reaction, to the Panama invasion has been a clear diplomatic defeat for the United States. The only world leader who enthusiastically supported "Operation Just Cause" was British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher—whose concern for Latin American sovereignty was amply demonstrated in the massive British raid on the Malvinas Islands in 1981. Other members of the European community said nothing.

Surprisingly, not one Latin American government supported Bush's raid, though Noriega had few friends in the hemisphere. The Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a resolution to deplore the invasion over the United States's sole dissenting vote. Both Colombia and Peru indicated that they will be less willing to cooperate with U.S. anti-drug efforts in the future, an ironic by-product of an operation one of whose objectives was to help stop the flow of drugs into the United States.

After initially refusing to turn Noriega over to American authorities, the Vatican nuncio entered into negotiations with U.S. military and diplomatic representatives at a high school near the Vatican embassy. On Wednesday, January 3, a massive anti-Noriega demonstration was staged outside the embassy. The role that U.S. agents played in organizing it is unknown; however, there is no doubt that resentment against twenty-one years of military dictatorship is real and widespread. Despite the Vatican representatives' denials, the demonstration probably was demoralizing to Noriega and convinced him that he had insufficient popular support to defeat Endara and his U.S. patrons in a head-to-head showdown. The new Panamanian government has charged Noriega with murder, and it is likely that he considered his chances better in a U.S. court on non-capital drug charges than in a Panamanian court on murder charges. The likelihood of Noriega's facing a firing squad in Panama would be strong indeed if the papal representatives had turned him over to the Endara government.

### Bush's Real Agenda—Counterrevolution

By all objective standards, "Operation Just Cause" has not been the smashing success which has been claimed—if one accepts Bush's stated purposes at face value. Far more North Americans (not to mention Panamanians) have been killed

than if the invasion had not taken place. There is concern inside the Justice Department that Noriega may not be convicted on the drug-trafficking charges and that his disclosure of CIA secrets may cause serious damage to U.S. imperialist interests. The real power in Panama will most likely remain with the "Norieguitos" in the army, as Guillermo Endara is seen as nothing more than a Yankee puppet. In an attempt to restore "law and order" the invasion only brought chaos and destruction. This is what Bush calls a "victory"?

However, Bush is not stupid, and however mishandled the invasion has been (the inefficiency of the U.S. military is hardly the socialist movement's concern!), it is hard to imagine how even the best executed military action could have achieved the goals which he publicly set. Why, then, have so many lives been expended? The answer is that the public goals and the real goals of Bush's invasion are two different things. The intention was never to bring Noriega to any kind of justice or to safeguard American lives. That was simply public relations. The real purpose for this invasion has nothing directly to do with Panama at all—it has to do with El Salvador and Nicaragua. Bush has no intention of giving up Ronald Reagan's quest of overthrowing the Sandinistas, and he is now faced with the direct possibility of an FMLN victory in El Salvador, which would be a great victory not only for the Salvadoran people, but for the Nicaraguans as well.

However, even as Reagan was winning elections and showing high approval ratings in popularity polls, the American people never supported his counterrevolutionary policies in Central America. During the Iran-contra scandal hearings, even right-wing legislators such as Warren Rudman of New Hampshire acknowledged that their constituents opposed aid to the Nicaraguan contras and U.S. military action in El Salvador or Nicaragua. With all of its political problems, the anti-intervention movement in the United States has organized successful demonstrations and has convinced a majority of U.S. citizens that Washington should keep hands off Central America. The American people remember Vietnam, and they don't want another one.

Noriega claims—and I, for one, believe him—that he fell out of favor with the United States because he refused to support, and then blew the whistle on, a U.S. invasion plan against Nicaragua which would have involved all the Central American countries—more or less a copy of the 1983 Grenada invasion. By deposing Noriega and installing a Panamanian version of José Napoleón Duarte, Washington hopes to accomplish two things: put in power someone who will cooperate with U.S. Latin American policy and create domestic acceptance for U.S. intervention in the region. Noriega is, after all, an easy target. He is a truly brutal dictator and is probably guilty of drug trafficking. As previously stated, with the great changes in Eastern Europe, Americans are hardly going to be persuaded with the threat of "communist world domination." Consequently, the Bush administration has to find another means to justify military intervention.

Will it work? It is tempting to speculate: the resounding diplomatic defeat in the OAS, the failure for two weeks to capture Noriega or to win any other country's cooperation

in catching him, and the difficulty the massively superior American forces had in defeating the Noriega loyalists should all cause the policy-makers in Washington to think long and hard before they attempt to take military action in El Salvador or Nicaragua. However, socialists and all others who support the right of Latin Americans to determine their own affairs (first among them the Latin American people themselves) will have the final say in Bush's success or failure. *Bush will fail if we redouble our efforts to make him fail.* Anti-intervention activists should: (1) explain that the invasion of Panama must be opposed as much as an invasion of Nicaragua or El Salvador; (2) not allow Bush to make Noriega the issue, but instead focus on the right of the Panamanian people to choose their own government, even

if George Bush doesn't like it; (3) explain that the invasion of Panama is a direct threat to the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran revolutions and put special effort into building a united mass-action anti-intervention coalition which can bring as many people as possible into the streets.

The Panamanian invasion shows clearly that Central America remains one of the most important battlegrounds of world revolution today. Though Bush claims victory now that Noriega has been caught, Latin Americans and North Americans who oppose U.S. domination of this hemisphere can, with well-organized mass action, deny Bush the victory over the Central American revolution that he is seeking. ●

January 4, 1990

## Haitian Masses Resist Right-wing Crackdown and Government Austerity Drive

by Michael Frank

The nation of Haiti suffers from the worst poverty in the Western hemisphere, widespread malnutrition and a continuing economic decline. Despite this, in September, the government of Lieutenant General Prosper Avril imposed austerity measures as a condition for obtaining new loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The response of the Haitian people was a one-day general strike on September 27 which brought the country to a halt.

The demands of the strike included cancellation of the IMF agreement, lowering the price of basic necessities, and an end to the climate of terror which has come to be known as "the insecurity."

The government is attempting to break up the popular organizations that emerged from the upsurge that toppled the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, and has unleashed a wave of repression. Haitians are subject to beatings, arrests, rape, robbery, and murder by soldiers, death squads, and criminal elements linked to the military.

In late September, a coalition of organizations called the National Rally held a press conference and called for a month of protest against the deteriorating conditions, to be capped by a mass demonstration against the Avril government on November 29. Several days after the press conference, three of the participants were arrested: Jean-Auguste Mesyeux of the Autonomous Federation of Haitian Workers, Evans Paul of the Democratic Unity Confederation, and Marineau Etienne of the September 17 Popular Organization. They were beaten for ten hours and exhibited the next day on national television, bloodied and battered, their faces swollen almost beyond recognition.

This attempt to intimidate and demobilize the population backfired. General strikes protesting the beatings and

demanding the release of the three popular leaders were held on November 6, 7, and 22.

The regime's repression has not spared the bourgeois opposition. On November 17, three activists of the party of ex-president Leslie Manigat were assassinated outside of Port-au-Prince.

Having no program to address the economic problems of the country, Avril's goal is to close the political space opened up by the masses when they toppled Duvalier and reinstate the terror and atomization that existed under his reign. The newsletter *Haiti Insight* has been documenting the violent breakup of meetings by section chiefs (local marshals) in the smallest towns and villages.

With few exceptions, the struggle in Haiti has been blacked out by the bourgeois news media in the United States. The U.S. has restored aid to the Haitian government, and, until a mild reprimand by the State Department after the recent arrests and beatings, there had been no criticism of human rights abuses by Washington during the 15 months that Avril has been in power.

The Haitian community in the U.S., however, responded vigorously to the beating and public display of Mesyeux, Paul, and Etienne by organizing demonstrations in New York, Miami, and Boston. In New York, over 200 people protested in front of the Haitian Consulate in a demonstration called by the July 28 Coalition and the Haiti Support Committee.

At the time of this writing, the three men have not been released. For information about demonstrations and solidarity work contact: Haiti Support Committee, 731 W. 183 St., #1L, New York, NY 10033 (212-781-5157). For a free subscription to *Haiti Insight* write: National Coalition of Haitian Refugees, 16 E. 42nd St., New York, NY 10017. ●

# Rumania Joins Revolutionary Wave in Eastern Europe

by Steve Bloom

**January 4, 1990**—Nothing illustrates the rapid pace of change in Eastern Europe today better than the events of the last month in Rumania. On December 4, while writing the article which appeared in our last issue, “Revolution and Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe,” I was able to say, “Only Rumania and Albania have, at least for now, been left untouched by the crisis.” Even at the time we made our final preparations for publication, some ten days or so later, we had no hint of the explosion that was about to erupt. But by the time the January issue got to our readers, millions of Rumanians had taken to the streets, thousands had been massacred by the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu, a genuine state of civil war had broken out as the people moved to defend themselves and were supported by the majority of soldiers in the armed forces, a provisional government had taken power from the old regime, and the dictator himself—along with his wife—had been executed by the new authorities.

It began on December 15, when people first took to the streets of the Western Rumanian city of Timisoara, near the Hungarian border, to protest against repressive conditions and demand the same kinds of democratic reforms which have been won recently in other Eastern European countries. Unlike what happened in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, however—where the old Stalinist apparatuses proved too rotten to put up significant resistance to the growing mass movement—the Ceausescu regime chose to use extreme measures in its effort to repress the population. On December 17, the third day of demonstrations in Timisoara, security forces fired on the crowd, and at least hundreds (initial reports said thousands) were killed. Ceausescu hoped that a little quick bloodshed would, as in China last June, take the wind out of the sails of the protestors. Instead, it whipped that wind into a hurricane. In the uprising that followed, Ceausescu was able to mobilize his security police to put up several days of fierce resistance. But in the end they were subdued.

The level of combativity achieved by the mass movement in Rumania at the end of December reached a higher stage than anywhere else in Eastern Europe up to now. In no other country has an armed conflict proved necessary for the masses to achieve their immediate objectives—an end to the old-line, conservative government and the implementation of democratic reforms.

These latest events add one more to the range of forms that have arisen as an expression of the present crisis of the bureaucratized workers’ states. These fall into three broad categories: 1) those countries where the old-line, repressive Stalinist regimes have been overturned and reform-minded

elements—either from the old bureaucratic parties or leaders of the anti-Stalinist movement—have been installed.; 2) those where the old-line party leaders have themselves begun a process of more or less limited reform, either under the pressure of objective problems or of the mass movement or a combination of the two; and 3) those where they remain resolutely in power, making no concession to either their own crisis or the demands of the masses. What is most significant, of course, is that these countries have proven not to be the impregnable fortresses of bureaucratic rule that many once believed. It is now obvious that they have, for some time, been suffering from a profound internal decay. Repression is no longer able to hold their long pent-up internal contradictions in check, and these have broken onto the scene with such fury that, in a number of cases, the old forms of rule have been swept away almost without a serious battle. One has the sense that, even where the old Stalinist leaderships survive, they are living on borrowed time.

## What Will Happen Next?

In all of these countries the question remains to be answered: What will happen now? The situation is marked by a number of factors that make it extremely unstable. First, and most obvious, is an ideological crisis, which engulfs not only the reform wing of the old parties, but even the main leadership of the mass-based anti-Stalinist opposition. The oppositionists know that they want to do away with the old system, that they want the new one to respect democracy and human rights, and that they have to overcome the economic crisis created by the old regime. But beyond these things there is little in the way of a coherent perspective. Demands that go clearly in the direction of combining socialism with democracy—of an end to the power and privileges of the bureaucrats in order to strengthen the basic egalitarian thrust of society—have been raised prominently by the mass movement. But this has not yet been translated anywhere into a thought-through program by any leadership with a mass following.

One of the reasons for this ideological confusion is, of course, the decades of miseducation about Marxism in these countries. The very terms, “Marxism,” “Leninism,” “socialism,” “communism,” were all co-opted by the Stalinists and identified with their own ideology. The overwhelming majority now rejects that ideology of the bureaucracy. But there is by this time little or no identification in much of Eastern Europe with the original, genuine meaning of these words—and probably even less understanding of the substance behind them. This problem was

expressed clearly by Václav Havel, playwright and leader of the Czech group, Civic Forum, an oppositionist once persecuted by the government who has now become president of Czechoslovakia. In an interview with the Czech CP daily paper, *Rude Pravo*, (reprinted in *International Viewpoint* No. 176) Havel explains:

I do not adhere to any ideology, doctrine, or ready-made worldview defined by someone else. . . . I am simply on the side of truth against lies, on the side of meaning against nonsense, on the side of justice against injustice, and on the side of order against disorder.

He is later asked why the word socialism does not appear in his program:

Because in the Czechoslovak context the word has lost all meaning. We simply do not know what it means. The word must be newly defined, since it has become a ritual incantation. Everything that the ruling group did not like or which it found uncomfortable, or was done freely, was called anti-socialist. "Socialism" it identified with itself.

The most extreme expression of the ideological crisis of the anti-Stalinist opposition in Eastern Europe has come from the new Solidarity government in Poland. Solidarity leader Lech Walesa and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, along with the rest of Solidarity's top leadership, have proclaimed their goal to be nothing less than the dismantling of "socialism" (which they understand as little as Václav Havel, but with less self-consciousness about their own ignorance) and the reinstatement of "capitalism." They have begun to drastically cut subsidies to state enterprises, raise prices for basic commodities, and seek foreign buyers willing to purchase major portions of the nation's industry. The rationale for this is that it is necessary to get the Polish economy functioning again. These leaders say that they do not want to experiment with untried remedies; they want a proven system that works—the same one enjoyed by the Western industrial powers.

However, such a pragmatic methodology comprehends as little about capitalism as it does about socialism. The objective of the *genuine* capitalist powers in the world, for all the praise they are willing to heap on Lech Walesa and company, has nothing whatsoever to do with the economic development of Poland. They have no interest in getting the economy of that country back on its feet. The future of Poland, if left to the tender mercies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), will be an even greater impoverishment, since the policies of the IMF can only push it further and further in the direction of a genuine semicolonial status.

It will probably not take very long before the "practical" solution projected by the Walesa/Mazowiecki leadership runs smack up against this objective fact. And when it does, both Solidarity as an organization and the Polish masses will face some decisive choices. The Polish workers—who built the Solidarity movement in the first place even against the Jaruzelski coup and martial law—are unlikely to sacrifice themselves passively on the altar of imperialist profits. It is possible, of course, that they may be willing to shoulder some of the sacrifices they have been called on to make by their

leaders for an initial period, in hopes for the better times that have been promised in the future. But when the present course of the Polish government simply ends up making matters worse, as inevitably it will, that "honeymoon" period will come to an end. The combativity of the Polish masses will once again become the dominant fact of political life in that country.

### Objective Limits on Reforms

This points up the second major factor that shapes the situation in Eastern Europe today—the objective economic reality which these countries confront, both domestically and on the international scene. To a large extent the ideological crisis we have been discussing flows directly from this objective reality. Reformist solutions—whether of the bureaucratic or anti-Stalinist variety—limit themselves by their very nature to seeking adjustments or alterations on the plane of an "already existing" reality. But in this case that means remaining trapped ideologically between two unacceptable "already existing" alternatives: the continued world dominance of the international bourgeoisie, on the one side, and the misidentification of bureaucratic rule with "socialism" on the other. Unless a way is found to break out of this false dichotomy, it will be impossible to find a long-term solution which genuinely serves the interests of the Eastern European masses.

It is worth looking concretely at how the economic and social reality of Eastern Europe imposes limits on the possibility for success of any of the reformist projects in the bureaucratized workers' states. The USSR is a prime case in point. Gorbachev, shortly after coming to power, announced his now famous, and extremely ambitious, program of "restructuring" (*perestroika*) designed to overhaul completely the way the Soviet economy functioned. To date however, according to all reports, little of substance has actually changed in the USSR. Combined resistance from the old, conservative bureaucratic layers on the one hand, and the workers on the other—both of whom see their material interests threatened by the *perestroika* process—have combined to stifle Gorbachev's economic initiatives.

Poland is another example. Solidarity can proclaim its desire to sell off the assets of the country to the imperialist powers, but actually doing this is another matter. It is not unlikely, after all, that Walesa will experience some genuine problems in finding Western or Japanese industrialists willing to risk their capital in a country with such a combative working class. To Walesa, with his limited appreciation of the situation, "capitalism" means simply a market-oriented system bringing about efficient production and investment. But the international bourgeoisie, being far more class conscious, knows that genuine capitalism in Poland would require a process of wholesale expropriation of surplus value from the workers in order for them to reap the requisite profits. And they appreciate full well the kind of social conflict such a process of exploitation is likely to unleash given Poland's recent history.

This is one of the major reasons why only a violent counter-revolution, in which the Polish workers would be decisively repressed in a major confrontation, could lay the basis for a



*genuine* return to capitalist rule in Poland. That is why the present reforms of the Solidarity regime, no matter how drastic they may become, cannot correctly be characterized as a return to capitalism in and of themselves. At most they are only laying the groundwork for a genuine counterrevolutionary development. In all likelihood, the present Solidarity leadership would become one of the first victims of a real counterrevolutionary process, and even with their strictly empirical and pragmatic approach to things, this objective fact could well compel (though it certainly doesn't guarantee) a change of course by Walesa and company long before such a development actually manifested itself.

These and similar objective factors, as stated before, place a limit on the present process of reform—whether bureaucratically initiated or initiated by the opposition. If the workers of Eastern Europe are to break free from the constraints imposed upon them by this situation, if they are to find a real solution to their economic and social crises, then they must also break free not only from the ideology of the bureaucrats—something that has, by and large, been accomplished—but also from the reformist perspectives of most of the present mass leaders—something that has yet to be achieved. They will have to rediscover a genuine, revolutionary proletarian alternative. This would lay the basis for resolving both the ideological crisis of the opposition and the material crisis of society in Eastern Europe.

Such a solution is now possible, given the active participation of the masses in political and social life in many of these

countries, though it is by no means assured. If it is achieved it will be as a result of a broad experience and a democratic discussion involving the entire population. Contact with the workers' movement outside of Eastern Europe will also be crucial, because this will make it easier for more activists from that part of the world to begin to rediscover the genuine roots, the genuine historical program of revolutionary Marxism. They will then be able to comprehend and explain the reasons for the Stalinist degeneration of the USSR that led directly to their own decades-long subjugation to bureaucratic dictatorship. They will be able to make the necessary distinctions between the contradictory aspects of the situation: an opposition to bureaucratic society, on the one hand, and a support to the social possibilities opened by the Russian Revolution and the creation of genuine workers' states in Eastern Europe on the other. A key element in this can be the process of historical rediscovery currently going on in the USSR—of the genuine program of Leon Trotsky and the Left Opposition, and their struggle against Stalinism.

Though events can take a multitude of different forms in the short term, in the medium-to-long term this process of historical rediscovery will prove decisive. The only alternatives to such a rebirth of a proletarian political consciousness, of genuine revolutionary Marxism, in Eastern Europe are a renewed life for bureaucratic domination (in one form or another) or worse, the *genuine* overthrow of the workers' states and the reimposition of the political rule of the inter-



# A Letter from Berlin

*We recently received from a Berlin reader some personal impressions of the political situation in the two Germanys at the end of last year, after the downfall of the Honecker regime in the German Democratic Republic. Our correspondent warned us that "living in Berlin doesn't mean being an 'eyewitness' of all those exciting events"; also that most of his information comes from the press and other media, that he is "totally overwhelmed and deeply impressed by all those radical changes occurring all over Eastern Europe and the GDR, so there is the danger of losing the necessary critical distance." With these caveats we publish the following excerpts:*

It is absolutely unclear where the GDR is going. There is a strong current which is favoring a genuine way of building up an independent socialist system in the GDR, without secret police and without Western German interference too. They are strongly opposed to any sellout to Western capital and they are opposed to "reunification," which could only mean absorption of the GDR by West Germany, let alone a "Fourth Reich," the great dream of all reactionary forces in this country. The majority of the GDR (e.g., Rudolf Bahro or the famous Stefan Heym) are sharing these independent socialist views as do also a good deal of the skilled workers.

The overwhelming majority of German Trotskyists, most of the rank and file of the former opposition groups like Democratic Forum, Demokratischer Aufbruch, Vereinigte Linke, etc., are favoring an independent GDR and socialism with a human face. But at the same time there is probably an equally strong tendency favoring "Anschluss" and "reunification" at any price.

These are people who are so deeply and so totally destroyed (intellectually, morally, politically) by some forty years of Stalinism and crypto-Stalinism that they have lost any faith in "socialism," identifying this word consciously or unconsciously always with Stalinism, with bureaucratism, with police state, etc. It is always incredible how deeply Stalinism has destroyed the great ideas of Marx, En-

gels, Lenin, and Trotsky, of Liebknecht and Luxemburg for which generations of workers and progressive people have struggled. In this sense the destructive forces of Stalinism have been even greater than those of fascism. . . . You can't win over those people destroyed morally and politically by Stalinism to the ideals of socialism, because they are deeply convinced that capitalism (or "capitalism with a human face," or Swedish capitalism) is much better than any socialism. Naturally it is this last position which is backed up and forged by the Western media, by the politicians (from Kohl and Genscher to Brandt); and I fear that the other current will be voted down by those, not the least due to the bad economic situation in the GDR, in comparison with the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) only not in comparison with Italy, Portugal, or Ireland, a fact which many people permanently neglect.

All socialists in Germany (East and West) fully support the anti-Stalinist upheaval, the antibureaucratic revolution happening in the GDR; but the very question is what sort of socio-economic and political system will replace the old one. Of course, there is not at all any danger of a comeback of Stalinism in the GDR, its structures are fully in retreat and almost destroyed. The men and women in power are no Stalinists but honest reformists of various colors. Many of them and many of the hitherto opposition groups are now faced with the

danger of a massive jerk to the right and it is a gloomy fact that neofascists, racists, and strongly nationalist groups as well as hooligans of various right-wing colors are already in a process of formation in the GDR. The situation could become very dangerous if those reactionary tendencies should gain mass support by those people who have got so frustrated by the old system and who lack clear perspectives. I sincerely hope that the forces of the conscious working class and its allies will prove strong enough to ban this danger.

What makes me quite unhappy too is the fact that the West German working class, the trade unions, and so on, have remained absolutely unpolitical all the time, so that the Trotskyist dream of a united socialist Germany remains for the present the dream of a political minority. The exciting events in the East have had no feedback in the West. It seems incredible but unfortunately it is exactly so.

I am deeply convinced that the enormous socio-economic problems of the third world, the very majority of mankind, cannot be resolved by capitalism. And while these problems remain there can be no satisfactory solution to the complex problems of Europe. Unfortunately many left-wing people here have fallen in depression or lost their speech. Too many question marks for the time being.

December 26, 1989.

national capitalist class. In short, either a revolutionary solution to the crisis will be found, or the counterrevolution (bureaucratic or bourgeois) will inevitably reassert itself.

### What Is the Alternative?

It is not hard to outline the main components of a revolutionary Marxist programmatic alternative for Eastern Europe. It includes a genuine commitment to the institutionalization of socialist democracy at every level of society; the maintenance of state ownership in the means of production wherever this is technologically feasible, but with a commitment to democratic rather than bureaucratic planning, and a satisfaction of human needs as the main criterion for economic decision-making; where state ownership and planning cannot satisfy these needs, any private enterprise solution or market-type institution must be strictly under the control of and subordinate to the overall plan and the mass decision-making of the population as a whole; the total elimination of all bureaucratic privileges, and the complete subordination of the bureaucracy to the needs of society; an active international solidarity with the struggles of other workers against oppression around the world—up to and including support for revolutionary movements in other countries.

At the same time, however, we should have no illusions that a revolutionary proletarian solution—once discovered—will be easy to implement in these countries, or that all of the practical problems can be answered by these few abstract programmatic formulas. That would be a dangerous illusion. A host of concrete material difficulties will still have to be solved. The fact is that *all* of the economies in *all* of the workers' states have suffered grievously because of the destruction wrought by bureaucratic abuse. Their problems range from simple inefficiency and waste to the outright theft of natural resources by the bureaucrats for their own consumption. There can be no doubt that the

problem is severe. It has reached such a state at the present time that—in the absence of an advanced industrial socialist economy willing and able to grant the aid that is necessary for these countries to recuperate economically—some severe and unpleasant remedial measures are probably inevitable. This is especially true in Poland, where the economic situation begins to approach that of a third-world country.

But such an approach can only succeed if the workers undertake it with their eyes open and with a conscious leadership, understanding what is needed and how the end result of the process can ultimately work to their benefit. Working people in such a situation must believe, and it must be true, that they are sacrificing for themselves—not for foreign capitalists, not for domestic capitalists, not for bureaucrats. There must above all be no illusions in capitalism as a “system that works,” nor any idea that there is some fundamental common interest between the workers' states and the imperialist bourgeoisies. If concessions to the imperialists are required—and they may well be required—they must be clearly understood as such. A retreat must never be sugarcoated and presented as a victory, which only disarms and demobilizes the masses.

A conscious, forthright, and serious revolutionary proletarian leadership would make it possible to undertake such a process and see it through to a successful conclusion. Above all else it would appreciate—while certainly seeking short-term solutions to the immediate crisis of the Eastern European economies in the context of the present bourgeois-dominated international economic system—that the long-term solution lies only in the defeat of the international bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism on a world scale. Future historians may well conclude that the present struggles of the working masses of Eastern Europe have made a decisive contribution to that international revolutionary process, in addition to being prime beneficiaries of it. ●

## Discussion

---

*This article develops an analysis which is substantially different in important respects from that expressed in recent articles by Steve Bloom dealing with Poland in the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism. (See "Jaruzelski's Big Gamble," No. 67, "Let's Not Forget the Role of the Masses," No. 69, "Revolution and Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe," No. 70, and "Rumania Joins Revolutionary Wave in Eastern Europe," on page 5 of this issue). Our March issue will carry a specific response to Samuel Adams.*

# Which Way for Poland and Solidarity?

by Samuel Adams

With the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, international capitalism is hell-bent on reversing the collectivist measures taken in the region and restoring capitalism. U.S. imperialism is in the lead in making this happen, and Poland and Hungary are the prime targets. Lech Walesa and his grouping in Solidarity are promoting this as an alternative to socialist democracy for Poland.

When Walesa visited the United States in November, he received an exuberant welcome from the capitalist establishment. *Forbes Magazine* sponsored a reception for him and he met with business executives in New York and Chicago. George Bush, congressional leaders, and AFL-CIO officials all heaped praise upon him.

Although Congress gave Walesa only a small fraction of the \$10 billion he sought for Poland<sup>1</sup> they and the AFL-CIO were glad to provide him with a well-publicized platform for his message. Nearly every sentence he uttered was greeted by stormy applause and he received several standing ovations. He also picked up the Medal of Freedom from Bush and the George Meany Human Rights Award from AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland.

Walesa was toured as the champion of free enterprise trade unionism. He told the AFL-CIO, "Such is the fate of a Polish trade unionist: he has to launch a publicity campaign for private entrepreneurship." Some U.S. radicals who had donned Solidarnosc T-shirts, participated in pro-Solidarity rallies, and trumpeted Solidarity as the wave of the future were understandably taken aback by this. But if the origins and evolution of Solidarity are examined, its present course can be understood.

### Origins of Solidarity

The birth of Solidarity was sparked by workers' revolt against poor living standards and Stalinist repression. Workers fought for and won—however fleetingly—the right to strike and to organize a union independent of direct state control. This union enabled elected representatives of a substantial section of Poland's working class to freely debate policy.

Solidarity held its first congress in 1981. It adopted a program which stated, "We want real socialization of the

system of management and the economy. This is why we are working toward a self-managed Poland."

But from the beginning serious questions existed over the direction Solidarity was headed. Its leadership was strongly influenced by clerical and reactionary nationalist pressures. They looked to U.S. imperialism and its labor lieutenants for guidance and help. Lane Kirkland and Irving Brown, a well-known CIA agent working for the AFL-CIO, were invited to speak to Solidarity's 1981 congress. While the Polish authorities did not permit them to attend, the AFL-CIO leaders established strong ties with Solidarity, providing it with over \$5 million dollars, which the federation had received from the U.S. government, and opening an office for it in Brussels.

As Solidarity's dominant leader, Walesa was surrounded by an inner circle of trade unionists, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, and dissident professionals and intellectuals. When martial law was imposed in 1981 and Solidarity was made illegal, Walesa was among those arrested.

From 1981 to 1989, despite jailings and an underground existence, Walesa and his close supporters maintained contact. During those eight years allegiances and alliances were formed, out of which was to come the leadership of the "new" Solidarity.

During the same period, there was tremendous activity by Solidarity's rank-and-file supporters against the Jaruzelski dictatorship. An incredibly sophisticated network of independent operations was developed to keep up the spirit of resistance. About 500 publishing operations issued thousands of underground newspapers, bulletins, periodicals, and books while video studios produced uncensored documentaries and news reports. So the alternative message to Jaruzelski came through despite every attempt to suppress it.

### Solidarity Regains Legal Status

Between 1980 and 1987 the purchasing power of most Polish working class families, which was not great to begin with, fell by nearly 17 percent, according to the government's own statistics. Like other debtor nations, Poland was under intense pressure to impose austerity measures on the

workers to pay its debts. With the economy lurching toward disaster, and with bankers and foreign governments refusing to liberalize credit restrictions without far-reaching economic and political changes, Poland's Stalinist leaders felt compelled to try to use Solidarity to bail them out. The only way to ram through an austerity program while avoiding massive strikes and possible civil war, they reasoned, was through collaboration with the Solidarity leaders and the Catholic Church, with which the Walesa wing of Solidarity had blocked in its early struggles against the government.

So the new Solidarity was permitted to surface, but at a price. At the "round table" discussions that ensued, Solidarity became part of the "establishment" in exchange for which it agreed to a number of concessions. These included reserving seats in the SEJM, the lower house of Parliament, for the United Workers Party (the Stalinist political arm) and its allies. Extraordinary powers were to be granted to the president, slated to be Jaruzelski, such as the right to veto legislation passed by Parliament and to dissolve Parliament. The *nomenklatura* system, which gave the bureaucracy almost total control of Poland's vast administrative apparatus was preserved.

To qualify for partnership status in the government, Walesa and Solidarity had to prove they could control the workers by preventing or ending strikes. They were not always successful. Last fall, for example, according to one account, Walesa was called in to conciliate a strike in the Katowice mines, but had to leave after being booed by striking miners and threatened with being chucked out in a wheelbarrow.<sup>2</sup>

Once the round table discussions were concluded and preparations made for the coming elections, Solidarity had to decide which candidates to put up. Voters were confronted with a highly structured choice: a slate put forward by the ruling United Workers Party and one advanced by the very tightly knit inner circle of about ten seasoned oppositionists around Walesa, with virtually no input from Solidarity's rank and file.

The new Solidarity was far different from the old. In its earlier period, before being crushed by state repression, Solidarity projected a flowering democracy. The resurrected Solidarity was much more of a top-down operation. The inner circle sought to fill all possible seats (not reserved for the Stalinists) in the Polish Parliament and to maintain a central authority in choosing candidates.

Many of the candidates selected were acceptable to activists in the regions they were slated to represent. Some were not. Local groups with their own candidates argued sharply with Solidarity's leadership but disputes were resolved in favor of Walesa's group. This in turn precipitated criticism over the lack of democracy. One candidate for Senate, Jozef Slisz, acknowledging the criticism, said, "From the beginning it wasn't democratic. You can create democracy [only] if you aren't up against a system that has all the power. We must be realistic."<sup>3</sup>

The spring campaign heightened expectations that the people would actually have a say on what measures the government to be elected would enact. But Solidarity's candidates did not run on the basis of a clear program or platform. That was to come later.

In the main election in June, Solidarity won nearly half the seats in the SEJM and Senate combined. It now holds 99 out of 100 seats in the Senate. The Stalinists hung onto barely half the total seats they had occupied just weeks before. But the biggest blow they suffered occurred when only two of those on the "national list" — a bloc of 35 seats in the SEJM reserved for them — survived the election.

What happened was that a grass-roots movement, not endorsed by Solidarity, had urged voters to "cross off the Communists" on the national ballot. And that's precisely what the voters did.

The election results were a shock to the Stalinists, who faced a loss of power. But they adapted their tactics to their main strategy, which was to put Solidarity in a position where it would have to assume responsibility for Poland's sinking economy and lose the popular base necessary to institute political changes designed to curb the Stalinists' power.

After the run-off elections, a political deadlock developed in the Polish Parliament, with no group immediately able to form a government. The deadlock was eventually broken when the Peasants Party and the Democratic Party, formerly coalition partners of the Stalinists, defected and joined with Solidarity. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Solidarity leader with particularly strong ties to the Catholic Church, was then elected prime minister by a lopsided vote of 378 to 4 with 41 abstentions. A coalition government of Solidarity, the United Workers Party, and the other smaller parties was then constituted, with leaders of the Church being a de facto part of the coalition.

Incidentally, just as the Stalinists needed Solidarity, so Solidarity — with its present orientation — needed the Stalinists as enforcers of an austerity program and to appease the Kremlin. That is why Walesa and his group supported Jaruzelski's election to the presidency and why they agreed to the retention by the Stalinists of their absolute authority over the army and the police.

### The State of Poland's Economy

The Solidarity-led government inherited a shattered economy. Inflation is running at an annual rate of 900 percent. With cuts in state subsidies, prices jumped 107 percent in the third quarter of 1989. When the government lifted price controls on food on October 1, 1989, bread prices alone shot up thirtyfold. A further wave of hyperinflation which could drive prices up to a 1,000 percent annual rate is widely predicted.

Everything from soap to apartments is in chronic shortage. Soup kitchens are spreading throughout Polish cities. Pensioners and workers with low fixed incomes are finding it impossible to make ends meet. Yet the country's budget deficit, which is 10 percent of the gross national product and 30 percent of the budget itself — together with the other problems of the economy — makes it difficult if not prohibitive to provide an adequate "social safety net" for the victims of the government's austerity policies. Exacerbating this critical situation is Poland's foreign debt, which exceeds \$39 billion and which drains off money that could be used to help meet consumer needs and to build new, modernized plants. Disparities in income are also growing and will mount in the

future. Layoffs, legal now as a cost-cutting measure, are escalating as the government cuts subsidies to steel mills, shipyards, and other sources of employment. The growing private sector cannot absorb the new jobless.

Poland is not without resources which, if properly utilized, could help relieve its economic plight. The nation has abundant zinc, copper, and coal. Its agriculture, 75 percent of which is in private hands, is capable of meeting the country's food needs. The problem is that farms have been starved for machinery and fertilizer. Investment has been astonishingly inefficient. And farmers hold back food products because they say fixed prices are too low. For example, according to agricultural economist J. B. Penn, in September farmers sold only 1,000 of the 15,000 hogs they had brought to the first wholesale hog auction held since the 1940s.

### Solidarity's Program

Solidarity's program is to encourage production and efficiency by lifting controls and letting prices rise, restraining wages and keeping any increases below climbing inflation, ending subsidies to industries, and allowing layoffs and bankruptcies. In addition to selling off large chunks of state-owned enterprises, credit will be tightened and interest rates will rise. Hundreds of thousands of workers will be dropped from "unproductive" jobs.

In an article titled "Polish Economic Plan Is Boldly Capitalistic," the December 4, 1989, *Wall Street Journal* describes Solidarity's perspective this way:

If sheer audacity can transform a sick, Communist economy into a healthy, capitalist one, then Poland's new leaders may well succeed. The reform plan they described to U.S. officials last week was breathtaking in its candor and its scope.

Unlike their Soviet counterparts, who still worry about the excesses of capitalism, the Polish leaders have abandoned all vestiges of socialist rhetoric and are rushing open-armed toward Chicago-style free-market economics. Finance Minister Leszek Balcerowicz told visiting U.S. business and government leaders that this week he will unveil a budget that severs the umbilical cord to state-run enterprises, cutting all subsidies roughly 50 percent. Over the next three weeks, the government plans to enact 21 new laws laying the groundwork for private enterprise. And by early next year, most prices will be decontrolled and a stringent anti-inflation monetary policy put into place.

An intense young economics professor, Mr. Balcerowicz seems to harbor few illusions about the cost of his harsh plan. He acknowledges that bankruptcies will soon become common in Poland, which currently has no bankruptcy laws. And he forecasts that unemployment, previously unknown to Polish workers, will exceed 300,000 next year, out of a work force of 18 million. *Labor Minister Jacek Kuron told U.S. Labor Secretary Elizabeth Dole that over the next few years as much as half of the work force will probably have to find new jobs.* (Emphasis added.)

Balcerowicz also told U.S. officials that "changes were needed to allow a transformation from communism to U.S.-style capitalism. We don't want to try a third way," he said, responding to critics who have argued that Poland should try to meld socialism and capitalism. "We have had enough experiments here, let wealthier countries experiment." [*Wall Street Journal*, 12/1/89]

As noted above, the very heart of Solidarity's program is turning over Poland's resources to foreign capitalism. Walesa has offered 20 percent of state-owned industry to the Germans, as much again to the French, and 10 percent to the Kuwaitis. (He told West German bankers he hopes for an "invasion" of foreign investors, according to *Newsweek*, 11/13/89.) Add to this the Canadians, the British, the U.S., and other potential buyers and the figures add up to some 200 percent.<sup>4</sup> While in the U.S., Walesa "told a press conference that the government owns 90 percent of the Polish economy, and 80 percent of it is for sale." [*Washington Post*, 11/18/89]

Walesa's hopes for massive U.S. investments are not likely to bear fruit, certainly not in the short run. Most U.S. investors consider the Polish economy too risky now for investment. The very high inflation rate, among other considerations, makes it difficult for companies to make a profit and they are insisting that severe austerity measures be taken *before* they invest. But Solidarity's plans to devalue the zloty and make it convertible, which would otherwise be an incentive for investors, will drive that inflation rate even higher. So will the lifting of price controls and the ending of industrial subsidies. Moreover, large U.S. banks recently have been setting aside substantial reserves for possible losses of international loans and they do not view Poland as being attractive for investments, at least for the period ahead.

Because of the hesitations of foreign investors, increasing thought is being given to "employee stock ownership" schemes as an adjunct to privatization. But few Poles can afford to buy shares of the stock, according to skeptical observers. Walesa disagrees. He says Poles have between \$3 billion and \$5 billion hidden in mattresses and desk drawers which could be utilized for that purpose.<sup>5</sup>

Solidarity's leaders make clear that their plans to resurrect capitalism in Poland have long-term objectives. The removal of restrictions on land and real estate ownership to restore private property is being proposed as a *permanent* feature of the economy.

As an immediate priority, Solidarity seeks to comply with the dictates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which requires it to impose austerity conditions on Poland's workers. In return the country will almost certainly receive \$1.3 billion in standby credits from the IMF. But real income of Poles, as Balcerowicz admits, may plunge 20 percent in 1990.

To get the Polish working class to accept its austerity program—which means massive unemployment, the elimination of food subsidies, and a cutback on social services—Solidarity is calling on workers to sacrifice, forgo striking, and stop demonstrating. But Poland's workers are increasingly spurning this appeal and opposition to Solidarity's program is developing all across the country. In

addition, farmers' representatives have attacked the Solidarity-led government's program, saying they prefer guaranteed minimum prices to the risks of a free market. This despite the fact that farmers have complained that nationwide food and processing cooperatives, dominated by the United Workers Party, are monopolies that dictate unfavorable prices.

Finally, as part of its accommodation to imperialism worldwide, Solidarity's leaders refrain from solidarizing with national liberation struggles. They do not, for example, condemn U.S. war policies against Nicaragua and the FMLN in El Salvador. Nor have they, as of this writing, denounced the U.S. invasion of Panama.

### Solidarity's Loss of Support

Solidarity's membership, once nearly 10 million, is now down to about 3 million. Its ranks are riddled with disillusionment and disgust with the leadership. Many former Solidarity activists no longer support the organization. They disagree with its policies and they complain they were shut out of its decision-making process. An underground "Fighting Solidarity," composed of a small but intense youthful faction, denounced the electoral agreements made earlier with the Stalinists as a corrupt bargain.

A new opposition is building in Poland today, opposition to both the Stalinists' Polish United Workers Party and to Solidarity's leaders. These new forces oppose the austerity package and the penetration of capitalism into Poland. They are calling upon Polish workers to fight to protect and improve their living standards, and to hang on to the social gains of the past, which include guaranteed jobs, medical care, social security, and housing. Even the Stalinist-led union federation of OPZZ is vowing to resist the government's starvation policies. A rebellion against the government is growing at the grass roots. It is taking place both within Solidarity and outside of it.

The need of the hour is to unite the forces in the workers' movement that can fight for power based on a program of socialist democracy and internationalism:

- Preservation of the social ownership of the means of production and the social gains from the past four decades.
- Genuine workers' democracy in all aspects of life; utilization of market mechanisms to be undertaken only on the basis of thoroughgoing discussion and approval by Poland's working class and only under its strict control.<sup>6</sup>
- Elimination of the privileged bureaucratic caste and the *nomenclatura* system.
- Support national struggles for self-determination and against imperialism. This means in the first place solidifying with the anti-Stalinist upsurge throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union toward the construction of a socialist society based on democratic workers' rule.

Solidarity's current leadership does not support any part of this program. That is why it must be opposed and replaced.

Trotskyists, the historic international left opposition to capitalism and Stalinism, have long called for political revolution to oust the Stalinist regimes, while leaving in place state forms of property. That is the answer to Poland's problems, not the privatization and capitalist restoration that Walesa and his grouping advocate and are today attempting to impose.

Revolutionary socialists can help explain and clarify the role Solidarity's leaders are playing today by analyzing the group's development and contradictions. A particularly helpful statement in this regard has been provided by Daniel Singer:

In August 1980, when Lech scaled the fence at the Lenin shipyards, he stood for the workers' right to strike. Today, when Solidarity declares a regional strike, he advises those same workers not to join in so as not to antagonize the bountiful Polish-American investor, Barbara Piasecka-Johnson. When Solidarity was founded, Walesa stood for the right of workers to have an autonomous organization to defend themselves against exploitation. Now he is ready to sell that birthright, if admittedly for more than a fistful of dollars. . . .

As a bold strike leader, the effective head of a huge labor union, a brave and cunning resister during the years of martial law, Walesa the electrician symbolized the revival of the labor movement in Eastern Europe. As such, whatever his foibles, our tribute to him was legitimate. Today, as he dons the mantle of a latter-day Marshal Pilsudski, the prewar dictator who saw himself as standing above all classes and parties, Walesa neither needs nor deserves the sympathy or support of the left. The blessing of George Bush is much more precious to him.

As the drama gathers pace, it is necessary to scan the quickly shifting scene of Eastern Europe to find those who refuse to identify socialism with the now shattered neo-Stalinist model and still hope to forge a society different from theirs and from ours. Though the ideological climate is not very propitious for such people at this stage, they do have a future and we should stand by them.<sup>7</sup>

December 27, 1989

### NOTES

1. Congress voted \$852 million. In addition Poland is slated to receive as much as \$4 billion in Western aid in return for its agreement "to far-reaching economic changes" [*New York Times*, 12/24/89]. Western capitalist nations are also preparing a \$1 billion loan to back Poland's currency.

2. "Lech's Labor Lost?" by Janine R. Wedel, *World Monitor*, November 1989.

3. Ibid.

4. "After the Wall: A New Socialism?" by Daniel Singer, *The Nation*, 12/5/89.

5. *Newsweek*, 9/4/89.

6. Walesa is moving in the opposite direction. On December 12, 1989, he proposed that Poland's Parliament give the government "special powers" so that it can rule by decree in "restructuring the economy."

7. See footnote 4.

## Exchange of Views

---

Late last summer, the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* received a copy of an 11-page letter written by Barry Sheppard to the Political Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. Sheppard was an important leader of the SWP for more than a decade, part of a generation which emerged from the youth radicalization of the 1960s. In his letter he clarified some of the events that led to his resignation from the party the previous year and asked to be allowed to function as an active supporter—a status he was denied.

The issues Sheppard raised are important to those who identify with the historical tradition of the SWP in this country—the tradition of the Left Opposition against Stalinism from 1928 to 1938, and of the Fourth International, the world organization of revolutionary socialists founded at the end of the 1930s. But they also have a more general importance for the broad-ranging discussion taking place among many activists today about the problem of constructing a revolutionary leadership: What is a Leninist party? Do we need to build one in the U.S.? Can it be made to function democratically, or will democracy always be subordinated to centralized leadership? What is the relationship of organizational questions to political and programmatic ones?

Steve Bloom, managing editor of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, presents some thoughts here which are relevant to these and other questions. During the 1981-83 period Bloom and Frank Lovell formed an opposition grouping in the SWP leadership—the Fourth Internationalist Caucus in the National Committee. This was in response to an effort by national secretary Jack Barnes, in collaboration with Sheppard and other central party leaders, to engineer a radical transformation of the SWP's most important programmatic foundations behind the backs of, and without discussion by, the membership of the party as a whole. The Trotskyist Tendency, consisting of Nat Weinstein and Lynn Henderson on the National Committee, also opposed the anti-Trotskyist policies of the Barnes grouping during this period.

In order to accomplish its political goals, the SWP leadership carried out a series of frame-up trials and expulsions against members who objected to their new line or who even raised a modest question about it. This included many of the most experienced older generation of SWP cadre. The expulsions culminated, in January 1984, with the mass purge of dozens of dissidents, or suspected dissidents, who remained inside the party. Those expelled during this period can now be found in three different organizations: the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, Socialist Action, and Solidarity.

The publication of Bloom's "Open Letter" was delayed so that Sheppard would have an opportunity to read the text and send a reply. In December Sheppard joined Socialist Action. Then, at the beginning of January, we received his reply to the "Open Letter," which we print, beginning on page 18. It will be obvious to readers that Sheppard does not respond to any of the political questions taken up by Bloom concerning issues he himself posed in his letter to the SWP PC. But it will not be obvious to newer readers that statements in Sheppard's reply present a false picture of the function of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, the program and activities of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, and the relations between the three organizations formed as a result of the SWP leadership's purge of dissidents. The section "Who We Are" on the inside front cover of this magazine helps explain some of these questions. Steve Bloom will present an overall reply to the points in Sheppard's letter in a subsequent issue.

## Open Letter to Barry Sheppard

by Steve Bloom

September 19, 1989

Dear Barry,

I have had a chance to read your letter of July 9 to the SWP Political Committee. Even if we in the Fourth Internationalist Tendency wouldn't agree with everything you have to say, it is interesting that you have come to some of the same conclusions that we have. An important point is how the party leadership, yourself included, based its projections in the turn to industry on the idea of an imminent mass radicalization of the U.S. and international working class, and how this was wrong. You write:

At the 1979 World Congress of the Fourth International, Jack Barnes made a report on the turn to industry, which was adopted. The decade that has since

passed has confirmed the correctness of the general line of this report and the correctness of the turn. But it contained one argument in favor of the turn which has turned out to be incorrect. That was the prediction that on a world scale and including in the imperialist countries, "a political radicalization of the working class—uneven and at different tempos from country to country—is on the agenda."

You further point out that:

Not only was this prediction wrong, but things evolved in the opposite direction in the imperialist countries, including in the U.S. . . . But for years we have acted on the assumption that the political radicalization of the



working class was beginning or just about to begin, which has led to ultraleft errors in our political work in the factories, and an organizational “tightening up” in the branches in preparation for the political radicalization that always seemed to be just around the corner.

We agree with your fundamental point here. The turn itself was correct; the premise of a working class political radicalization, however, was not. And the insistence that there was, indeed, such a radicalization going on in the face of all evidence to the contrary caused damage to the party. For now we can leave aside any nuances, as well as other problems, related to the turn.

We also concur with your assessment that it was a serious mistake to cancel the party convention in 1983: “The worst error the majority made . . . was to not hold a convention in 1983, although one was constitutionally due.” You recount conclusions you came to after reviewing the actions of Cannon and Trotsky in the 1940 faction fight against the petty-bourgeois opposition:

One of the central lessons of the 1940 split contained in [*Struggle for a Proletarian Party and In Defense of Marxism*] is that in any such struggle *political clarity* must take priority over the organizational questions. But this the majority failed to do [in 1980-84]. The political questions in dispute . . . were not clarified fully at all.

Elsewhere you state, “The failure to hold a convention in 1983 to clarify the issues in dispute reversed the correct priorities between the organizational and political questions, directly contrary to the lessons drawn by Cannon and Trotsky in the above-mentioned books.” So we have a few areas of common ground that can begin to provide the basis for a clarification of thinking. That is all to the good. But it is also important to discuss those issues where we are still far apart.

You continue, for example, to support what your letter characterizes as Jack Barnes’s “correction” of Trotsky and permanent revolution. To be precise, however, Barnes *completely rejected* Trotsky’s overall analysis and programmatic perspectives. And this remains the most important question in dispute. In an important sense your position on this stands in complete contradiction to all the positive things you say in your letter about the tradition of Cannon and Trotsky. Because the primary factor that was responsible for undermining the democratic tradition in the SWP was *precisely* the question of permanent revolution—the *political* rejection of Trotskyism.

The cancellation of the party convention in 1983 was not an accident, not an isolated mistake. It was the logical culmination of an ongoing process of undermining party democracy that began overtly in 1981 and in fact had been going on for some time before that. The convention was cancelled *for the very purpose of avoiding a political discussion*, and for no other reason. If you think back, you will surely have to recognize this, whether or not you had personally thought through the full implications at the time. This may be painful, but it is important for us to recall what actually happened in order to draw the necessary lessons from our experience.

Long before 1983 a decision was made to introduce Barnes’s “correction” on permanent revolution gradually, *without a discussion in the party*. That was a fateful choice, a choice to try to substitute a decision by the party leadership for discussion and decision by the party as a whole. And, we should note, it was not even the entire elected leadership of the party that was involved here, but a small group of self-selected comrades—what could, scientifically, only be described as a clique—who had taken it upon themselves to substitute their own thinking for that of the democratically chosen leadership bodies, as well as the membership.

A substitutionist ethic such as this is totally alien to the tradition of Cannon and Trotsky. It is the hallmark of a *bureaucratic* mode of functioning, and the decision to proceed in that way led, step by logical step, to all of the bureaucratic measures later imposed to silence those who disagreed. Let’s take a look at how things unfolded.

As early as 1979 central party leaders determined that permanent revolution was wrong and needed “correcting.” From the visible signs at the time no one could have suspected this, but in retrospect it can be clearly demonstrated. The leadership chose not to bring its new views before the party at the conventions in 1979 or 1981. Steve Clark even wrote an article in the 1981 preconvention discussion bulletin—in response to a challenge by Nat Weinstein—specifically denying that any change was being considered in the party’s appreciation of permanent revolution. This compounded what had been (up to then) merely a dishonest silence. Steve Clark told an outright lie to the party—with at least the acquiescence of others in the leadership. From that point on it became very difficult to turn back, to begin to do things in a Leninist, in a Cannonist, fashion.

Instead of opening up a discussion in the party, as should have been done, those who were rethinking permanent revolution introduced their views through classes at the newly reestablished leadership school after 1979. In this way an entire cadre was educated in the anti-Trotsky line before individual party leaders started to drop hints about it to the organization as a whole.

When things did begin to come out into the open, the leadership was *immediately* confronted with the necessity to suppress discussion. Shortly after the 1981 convention a series of “Lenin classes” were organized in the branches. Here we were taught about Lenin’s pre-1917 theory of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry” in a totally scholastic and schematic way. Anyone who wanted to take up the relationship of this idea to Lenin’s later evolution, or discuss it in light of Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, *was prohibited, by administrative fiat, from doing so*. When comrades asked what was behind these classes politically, what they were trying to achieve, we were told that there was no ulterior motive. We were “just studying Lenin.” That was the second lie to the party.

Then, to commemorate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, in November 1981, Doug Jenness wrote a *Militant* article which hailed Lenin’s discarded “democratic dictatorship” theory as having “effectively armed the Bolsheviks to carry through their historic task.” Trotsky was not mentioned in this article, except as a historian of the Russian Revolution. To some of us this line on things seemed odd.

Party leaders insisted that Jenness's article had no particular importance. It was merely his "personal view" and did not represent any official reevaluation of history. That was yet another lie.

Les Evans took it on himself to write a critique of the Jenness article, explaining a traditional Trotskyist outlook on the question of "democratic dictatorship" vs. the dictatorship of the proletariat. Frank Lovell and I made a motion at a National Committee meeting that Evans's article be published in the *Militant*. I will never forget that experience, because comrades on the NC even voted down the part of our motion which proposed that they be given a copy of Evans's manuscript in order to read it for themselves before deciding the substantive question. In doing so they took their guidance from the central party leadership, whose need to suppress information, to put a lid on discussion and on the free exchange of ideas, was so great that an alternative viewpoint became a danger even in the hands of an elected leadership body made up almost entirely of a hand-chosen cadre.

Although it was quite impossible to completely suppress debate in the party once things had been opened up in the press, a concerted effort was made along these lines. A host of organizational norms were discovered that no one had ever known about before—such as the prohibition against members of different branches speaking to or corresponding with each other. At one point National Committee members were even barred from reporting back to their own branches that there were disagreements in the committee. But despite it all, more and more comrades were beginning to figure out that something was going wrong, and they were trying to find a way to express their discontent.

In fact, the effort to suppress dissent eventually became one of the prime factors in generating it. As trials were staged and expulsions were carried out, many could see the frame-ups for what they were, and this contributed to the growing opposition. We were constantly told that this rising tide was all the result of a conspiracy by those of us on the National Committee who opposed the new line. But any experienced Leninist leader should have realized that such a reaction from the ranks was inevitable in a situation such as that one.

By the time Jack Barnes decided to openly tackle permanent revolution—first obliquely by way of his "workers' and farmers' government" thesis and then openly in the infamous "Their Trotsky and Ours" speech at the YSA convention on New Year's Eve, 1982—it was assumed that most comrades would be so poisoned by the slanders against the opposition, or so intimidated by the overall atmosphere in the party, that no one would dare to react. Instead, however, there was renewed dissatisfaction.

At this point we can see more clearly what was behind all the talk, which began around this same time, of "tightening up the party to prepare for the radicalization of the working class." It had nothing whatsoever to do with any radicalization of the working class—real or imagined. It was simply a myth created in order to provide cover for all of the bureaucratic methods employed to silence the opposition. Of course, once the purge was successfully carried out this myth had to be perpetuated. Otherwise it would have been

exposed. Its continuation also served to inoculate those who remained in the party against associating with the expelled. And it could be used to intimidate members who might have been inclined to think, since the "anti-party elements" were no longer around, that internal party life should return to the democratic norms of the past.

In your letter you accept this "tightening up to prepare for the radicalization" myth at face value. You draw the conclusion that "the party should not have been 'tightening' norms in this past period and presently," but base it on a different assessment of the state of radicalization. Yet no one has so far explained why a mass radicalization of the working class should require an organizational tightening up of the revolutionary party. Quite the contrary, it seems to me, if we want to recruit and integrate large numbers of newly awakening workers. The organizational discipline we need in such a period will have to be achieved through a *political* process—the collective experience that both old members and new recruits will go through as part of building the revolutionary party—not through establishing rigid rules and regulations.

You are also faced with a bit of a contradiction here. Apparently you are still willing to repeat the assertion made against the opposition in the early 1980s, when the leadership declared that we were violating *long-established party norms* (looking for "ammunition" to try "to justify . . . breaking . . . the organizational principles of the party" your letter asserts). But this idea cannot maintain its credibility when put alongside of your statements about the leadership establishing "tighter" norms and organizational controls. Activities that had always been common in the party were outlawed during this time in the name of "defending organizational principles." These were not *established* party organizational principles, but new "norms" that were made up as we went along in order to "tighten things up."

Whatever you may think about the tactics of the opposition on one or another occasion, it is absolutely clear—and can be easily established from the record—that *our* efforts were focused on achieving political clarity. We appealed *at every opportunity* for the organization of a discussion on the disputed questions in the party, and each time our appeal was rejected. The responsibility for what happened, therefore, has to be borne by the majority leadership. Instead of organizing the political debate, as it should have, it purged the opposition. That is the bottom line. Every component of the Fourth Internationalist movement in the U.S. has suffered as a result of this tragic default. The SWP, which seemed so strong and impregnable after the expulsions, has in fact suffered most of all.

The overall point should be sufficiently clear from this record. The violations by the party leadership of Leninist *organizational* procedure during the 1981-84 period, including the cancellation of the 1983 convention, flowed from a *political* objective: overthrowing 50 years of Trotskyism in the U.S. *without a discussion and democratic decision by the party as a whole*. Any leadership can make a mistake on this or that organizational question. But a consistent pattern of abuse against democracy is only consistent with a *political* agenda that is *totally alien* to the needs of a proletarian party.

If we are really interested in returning to the organizational tradition of Cannon and Trotsky, it will be necessary to develop a more profound and more consistent critique than the one you provide in your letter. If the SWP is to survive and grow again into the kind of party which can lead American working people in a struggle to overcome the most powerful ruling class the world has ever known, it will have to reconquer the Fourth Internationalist program which inspired you and me, along with a whole generation of youth in the 1960s and early '70s. This includes a proper understanding of permanent revolution, the transitional method, support for the political revolution in the bureaucratized workers' states, the united front, and the *absolute necessity* for proletarian democracy in our own party and in the workers' movement as a whole.

In order to understand what happened to the SWP's traditional norms of political discussion and internal organizational democracy it's necessary to look at the completely uncritical orientation toward Fidel Castro and the Cuban revolution advocated and carried out by Jack Barnes over the last decade. The F.I.T. maintains the traditional appreciation, established by the SWP in the 1960s, about the many positive attributes of Castro and the Cuban Communist Party—most importantly the firm commitment of this current to support revolutions in other countries throughout the Caribbean and in the rest of the world.

But on certain key issues the Cubans have always had their weaknesses. Leninist organization is one of these: i.e., internal democracy in order to discuss and decide policy combined with unified action in the public arena to carry out decisions of the majority. There is no discussion permitted on any fundamental questions within the Cuban CP or in Cuban society as a whole. The leadership—ultimately Castro himself—makes all decisions on such questions, and discussion in the ranks is concerned only with how best to carry out these leadership decisions. This, however, is clearly the organizational model for the party which Jack Barnes has been trying to create at least since 1979. Isn't it obvious that this is totally incompatible with returning the SWP to the tradition of Trotsky and Cannon?

The question of party democracy is not a luxury, or something that is important only in the abstract. It has a host of practical implications. Interestingly, it was the undermining of party democracy even before the 1981-83 period that blocked a correction on the very question—the turn to industry—which you now recognize as the basic source of your own problems. You explain how it was “only after I got into industry that I began to have doubts about our characterization of the period, and began to raise some of these points in a partial way.” That was in the mid-1980s. But there were comrades, both in industry and out, who tried years before to tell the party that the projections for the turn were unrealistic. What happened to them? Were they given a reasonable hearing for their point of view? You know as well as I do that they were not.

An atmosphere had been created, even before the political dispute broke into the open in 1981, where *any* disagreement (even questioning) was equated with disloyalty. Had that not been the case, I am convinced, the errors on the turn could have easily been corrected as early as the end of the 1970s.

Though dating its origins at a later point, you recognize this problem and call it a “paranoia in the central party leadership” with regard to the turn. But clearly this leadership mentality was not confined to the question of the turn to industry. It was a generalized paranoia. *On all of the questions in dispute in the party*, the extreme reaction, the recourse to administrative measures to avoid a discussion, only indicated a profound sense of political weakness.

Can there be any doubt that as a result of all of this the party has changed dramatically from the organization which you and I both joined in the 1960s? In those days discussion and intellectual debate flourished in the party—comrades were encouraged to think problems through for themselves and come to their own conclusions. Today the party stresses conformity and obedience to the line presented by the leadership.

The SWP used to be active and involved in a host of mass movements, but more than that we always tried to analyze the problems confronting those movements and help to chart a road forward. Today the dynamic interaction with the mass movements has all but disappeared. At times SWP members remain active in struggles, but the idea that revolutionaries have an obligation to fight for a better policy than the one put forward by bureaucratic or petty-bourgeois misleaders seems to have been forgotten.

In the 1960s and early '70s we had a vision of a future socialist society in the United States, but we tried not to substitute abstract propaganda on this for a genuine discussion with activists about the day-to-day problems of the struggle that they faced. In the recent period, however, a completely abstract reference to the “Cuban model” has replaced any effort to creatively explain, in a language that U.S. workers can be expected to understand, a revolutionary Marxist solution for the imperialist crisis.

And all of us used to have an understanding of the dynamic conflict necessary to build an international revolutionary organization. We knew that individual, nationally based groups, with different traditions, different levels and kinds of experiences, could combine to create a world party that would be far stronger than any of its component parts. Now, the international policy of the SWP leadership has reached such a state of bankruptcy that it wants its cothinkers *in Sweden* to make the sale of an *English-language* publication, the *Militant*, one of their top political priorities. At the same time, as you point out in relation to the last world congress, any effort at a serious discussion within the Fourth International has been abandoned.

Thinking about the changes that have taken place in the party over the last ten to twenty years, I was very interested in your account of how the National Committee placed its members under discipline in 1987 “to support the line adopted by the NC in their interventions at the active workers' conference” of comrades involved in the coal industry. You point out the clearly undemocratic implications of such a decision. It meant that party leaders might have been compelled, in an *internal* discussion, to support positions that they did not agree with, and rank-and-file members would have had no idea that the conference was in fact being artificially manipulated. I remember, when I first joined the SWP, learning about similar “leadership discipline” prac-

ticed by Stalinist or sectarian political groups, and being told that this was completely anathema to the genuine Leninist and Cannonist tradition of the SWP.

How do you think all of these changes in the party came about? What is their cause? How can the political and organizational deterioration be reversed? What can we, and others, learn from the experience that the SWP has gone through? People, like ourselves, who have been trying to build an effective revolutionary socialist party in the U.S., have an obligation to address ourselves to these questions. The answer to them lies, primarily, in coming to grips with the political roots of the SWP's organizational crisis, since the purely procedural questions will always prove to be subordinate, in the final analysis, to the political and programmatic ones.

I must add that I was particularly struck by your statement about the present policy of denying party membership — except in the most unusual cases — to anyone who will not make the turn to industry after a six-month trial period. When I look at the individuals I know in the present central leadership of the party — Jack Barnes, Mary-Alice Waters, Steve Clark, Doug Jenness, Larry Seigle — I see a group of comrades who have, collectively, spent not one day of their lives working in industry. What's more, unless I am mistaken, they have spent not a single day of their lives — since they left the university — working anywhere except in the party apparatus.

You say that “the implication [of this policy] for present SWP members who are not in industry is clear,” which is true enough. But stop and think for a moment. Do you believe that the implied solution you detect — the elimination of all those not in industry from the party ranks — will be applied to these leading cadre? Of course not. Doesn't that speak volumes about the gulf which these “leaders” have created between themselves and the party rank and file?

All of this crept up on us gradually. We noticed it at different times. Now you are suffering from the same kind of high-handed treatment, bureaucratic maneuvering, dishonest discussion, rumor campaign, and, no doubt, slanderous accusations that we experienced before you, and others experienced before us. When these disastrous methods first began to be employed they were not systematic, and were therefore difficult to combat even though they made some of us uncomfortable. They emerged as occasional abuses by leading comrades, based no doubt on reasons of expediency. But occasional abuses resorted to for reasons of expediency were easily transformed into bad

habits, practiced routinely. Now those bad habits have crystallized into new norms of organizational functioning.

What will be necessary to change this is a fundamental reversal of the destructive policies of the past decade. Comrades who were driven or thrown out of the SWP should be welcomed back. The norms of *democratic* centralism as practiced by Lenin, Trotsky, and Cannon will have to be reestablished. There should be an honest, open, democratic, and thoroughgoing debate on such questions as are raised in your letter, and mine.

I was glad to see that you have reconsidered the whole question of the exclusion policy imposed against the expelled opposition — banning us from forums and bookstores. That policy remains in force against the F.I.T., and continues to have the damaging effect that you describe. But that is merely a symptom of a broader problem, not a problem unto itself. The need to ostracize those who are no longer in the party, the difficulty in collaborating with anyone who is not seen as being completely loyal to the present leadership, is merely an extension of the whole bureaucratic siege mentality, the “paranoia” that you refer to. Every disagreement, even the smallest, becomes a threat. Individuals who raise those disagreements need to be ruthlessly cut off from contact with the party for fear that they might infect others.

The SWP itself was the main loser when party leaders refused to allow us to collaborate on *Militant* sales and election campaigns after our expulsion. The same is true when they reject *your* request for status as an active supporter.

The most important thing, it seems to me, is for us to begin to function in a different way, to begin the absolutely essential process of discussing political differences rather than handling them through denunciations and administrative measures. Since you affirm your continued agreement with Barnes on the most important programmatic matter, permanent revolution, it should be possible for us to engage in an open debate about the wisdom of his “correction” on this question — either in the pages of this magazine or in any other forum that you might consider appropriate. That would be educational for both of us, and for anyone else who reads and thinks about our exchange. I extend an open invitation to you, from the leadership of the F.I.T. and the editorial board of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

I welcome your reaction to this specific proposal, as well as to any of the other problems I have raised in this letter.

Comradely,  
Steve Bloom

## In Reply to Steve Bloom's Open Letter

by Barry Sheppard

First of all, I would like to clarify one point in comrade Bloom's “open letter” to me. In referring to the struggle in the SWP in the early 1980s, he states: “The responsibility for

what happened, therefore, has to be borne by the majority leadership. Instead of organizing the political debate, as it should have, it purged the opposition. That is the bottom

line." I completely agree with this statement, and that is just the conclusion I meant to be drawn by any reader of my July 9, 1989, letter to the SWP Political Committee. Any organizational violations by the minorities must be seen in this context, which makes any rehashing or redebating of them a sterile exercise.

I also agree with comrade Bloom's statement that "The cancellation of the party convention in 1983 was not an accident, not an isolated mistake. . . . The convention was cancelled *for the very purpose of avoiding a political discussion.*" However, I have a different view of how and why the party began to use such methods, and why they have been deepened and extended to the point where the SWP today is in deep crisis.

Rather than going into my own view of the past and my analysis of the roots of this crisis in the SWP, I would like to take the opportunity that the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* has afforded me to discuss what should be done about it now.

Symptoms of this crisis include more expulsions of comrades who raise dissenting views, the fact that many good comrades in industry are just dropping out, loss in total membership, attempts to control all kinds of personal behavior under the guise of "fighting our way through to the norms of a turn party," more frame-up trials, the fact that the SWP has adopted only two political resolutions this entire decade (in 1981 and 1985), etc. The question is, what are we going to do about it? How can we save what cadres we can and rebuild a revolutionary party in the U.S.?

It is in answer to this question that I think the comrades in the F.I.T. should reconsider their present course. I understand from discussions I have had with F.I.T. members that the F.I.T. believes revolutionists outside the SWP should have as their main orientation the attempt to correct the SWP itself, and that this is the function of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. From what I have been told, this is your main disagreement with Socialist Action, who have set about to build a new organization, with a public newspaper, which you think is wrong.

I don't want to reraise old debates, but discuss the situation as it exists today — which, I believe, is much more ripe for an

orientation to the SWP than at any time since the minorities were driven out. There are real opportunities to influence SWP members, to recruit those being expelled and those who are dropping out — opportunities that didn't exist before. So in a sense I agree with an orientation to the SWP. I also agree that the SWP is an *obstacle* that we cannot just go around.

But I would suggest that the way to deal with this opportunity is precisely to build a new organization. Those comrades being expelled or dropping out who are not destroyed as political people will want to continue to be part of a Leninist organization, even if only the nucleus of one. My own example is a case in point. While there is a political convergence that underlies my joining Socialist Action, I would not have joined if SA wasn't seriously trying to build a party. There will be others now in the SWP who will do the same as I have done. If the forces in F.I.T. were to join in this process, even greater impact on the SWP could be made.

We can reach more people in the SWP by not only talking about the need to reestablish "the norms of democratic centralism as practiced by Lenin, Trotsky, and Cannon" (I would add Dobbs), but by working to build one. I do not believe that outside the context of actually constructing a Leninist party can discussion about its norms, or its program, including the question of permanent revolution, or its political positions, be meaningfully carried out. The *practice* of an organization is the testing ground and final arbiter of such discussion, and publishing a political newspaper is a key part of that practice.

Moreover, to have a correct orientation to the SWP does not consist in having an exclusive or main focus on it. Without some organizational clout of our own, I don't think we could influence it in any way at all. *With* an organization that is deeply involved in all facets of the class struggle, that is working out its line on all the main questions of world politics in that context, the situation changes. The SWP will be forced to relate to us more and more, opening new opportunities to reach its ranks.

I appeal to the comrades of the F.I.T. to join in this effort by fusing with Socialist Action. ●

# An Appeal to Reason – The SWP and the Central America Struggle

by Samuel Adams

In certain respects, the relationship of forces in the recent period has turned *against* the Nicaraguan revolution. This is the result of four developments: the Soviet Union's further withdrawal of support for the Sandinistas as Moscow tries to fashion a deal with U.S. imperialism; the greater unity of the U.S. ruling class in dealing with Managua (the Senate voted 95-0 on October 31 to condemn Ortega for ending the cease-fire with the contras, the House of Representatives followed suit two days later by a 379-29 vote); the increased danger of overt U.S. military intervention in the wake of George Bush's invasion of Panama; and the further deterioration of Nicaragua's already ravaged economy.

The situation is critical. If ever there was a time when the masses of Nicaraguans depended on the people of the U.S. to mobilize support for their right to self-determination, this is it.

Yet it is precisely at this time that the Socialist Workers Party has chosen to focus its attention on what it deems are the Sandinistas' mistakes in governing Nicaragua. As a corollary, while giving lip service to continued solidarity with the Nicaraguan revolution, the SWP has adopted a perspective of trying to reorient the U.S. anti-intervention and solidarity movements, to make solidarity with Cuba the central priority.

It is not the purpose of this brief article to take up point by point the SWP's numerous criticisms of the Sandinistas. No doubt, Nicaragua's government has made serious errors, and it is perfectly legitimate for revolutionaries to say so. At the same time, it is this writer's opinion that the SWP grossly understates the objective problems that the Nicaraguan revolution faces – especially the limitations imposed upon it so long as the revolution does not spread to other Central American countries and beyond – and incorrectly thinks these problems can be substantially resolved by some alternative course proposed by the SWP. (James P. Cannon, principal founder of the SWP, thought that all revolutions in other countries were only tentative until the revolution in the U.S. is successful.)

The main question to deal with here is: What is the overriding responsibility for revolutionary socialists in this country at this crucial juncture with regard to Nicaragua? Our answer: to build the biggest mass movement possible to demand "U.S. Hands Off Nicaragua!!" This demand can most effectively be fought for through the creation of a unified national anti-intervention coalition focused on Central America, which can call and organize coordinated actions.

But the SWP has shown little interest in building this kind of movement. The SWP has organized forums recently to

discuss what the Sandinistas are doing wrong, but it does not discuss how the Central America movement can be built here, how more trade unionists can be involved in it, how a national coalition can be established, etc.

The SWP's skewed priorities are actually counterproductive and harmful to the anti-intervention cause. Their effect is to divert the attention of activists away from Nicaragua and El Salvador, which, along with Panama, are the key battlegrounds *at this moment* where the fight against U.S. imperialism is being most sharply waged.

Suppose during the Vietnam war, while the U.S. government was carpet-bombing North Vietnam, the SWP had made its principal concern the harm the Stalinist rulers of that country were doing to the cause of socialism, ignoring the question of how to most effectively build a mass antiwar movement? Of course, today, the U.S.'s sabotage of the Nicaraguan revolution is less visible than the carpet-bombing of North Vietnam, but that makes the task of revolutionaries – to find ways to raise the consciousness of people in the U.S. – all the more important. To take another, more recent, example, suppose at the height of the confrontation between the Pittston strikers and the company, the SWP started a campaign against UMWA president Richard Trumka on the grounds that he is giving incorrect leadership to the union?

Such sectarian moves would be about as reasonable as the one the SWP has recently made in prioritizing the dissemination of its views on the Sandinistas' alleged errors, instead of concentrating on building opposition to flagrant U.S. interventionist moves against Nicaragua and the Central American region as a whole.

It seems clear that the SWP has withdrawn members who were taking leadership responsibilities in the Central America movement, shifting them to other areas of activity. The party still supports Central America demonstrations and other actions when they are called. But it takes no part in helping to initiate them when they are objectively necessary. The SWP was conspicuous by its absence from the national meeting of Central American groups on October 8, 1989, to plan actions for the coming months. (See "U.S. Anti-Interventionists Move Toward United Action," *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 69.)

When actions do develop, even spontaneously, the SWP is caught flatfooted. Not functioning as an integral and active part of the anti-intervention movement, it can only react to what others do. When thousands of people in cities across the country took to the streets to protest the killing of Jesuit priests in El Salvador, the SWP showed up with its literature

tables, but not much more. In an editorial on the situation the party said:

Unions, antiwar organizations, and other democratic-minded people everywhere have an obligation to demand that Washington cease all backing for the Salvadoran regime and its bloody repression. The state of emergency should be lifted immediately and the FMLN's proposal to the Organization of American States that it immediately organize a cease-fire should be backed" (*Militant*, November 24, 1989).

Leaving aside for the moment whether the last demand is appropriate, the unanswered question for the SWP is how these demands are to be realized, indeed even how they are to be presented in a way that can show that they have significant support among the American people. Not a word in the editorial about the need to mobilize in order to manifest our opposition to the right-wing terror-squad government in San Salvador!

Counterposing the need for solidarity with Cuba to solidarity with Nicaragua is as divisive as counterposing it to solidarity with the revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Guatemala, or the rest of the region. In the first place, defense of the Nicaraguan revolution *does* constitute solidarity with Cuba. If the U.S. government were successful in overthrowing the Sandinistas (as they succeeded in overthrowing Manuel Noriega in Panama) and defeating the

liberation struggle in El Salvador, it could then more easily do what Alexander Haig advocated in 1981: "Go to the source"; i.e., Cuba.

In assigning priorities, Marxists seek always to pinpoint where the most critical front lies at a given moment in combatting imperialism. While Cuba is unquestionably one of the U.S.'s top targets, Washington's *active efforts today are directed elsewhere, in particular at Nicaragua and El Salvador*. That's why the immediate and overriding need today is *defending the Nicaraguan revolution and building solidarity with El Salvador's liberation forces*. If this can be done effectively and successfully, it will be of tremendous benefit to Cuba in preserving the revolution there. Moreover, the SWP today, unlike during the Vietnam war period, has a large proportion of its membership based in industrial unions. They could play a significant role in strengthening the labor constituency and thereby the entire anti-intervention movement.

The Socialist Workers Party's response to the December 20 invasion of Panama—the priority it gave to building forums and to participation in protest demonstrations—could be the beginning of a "rectification" of previous abstentionist and sectarian policies. The SWP can make a difference in effective building of the March 24 national demonstration against U.S. intervention in Central America now under way.

December 28, 1989

## Major Labor Confrontation in Mexico

On Friday, January 5, thugs set upon workers at the Ford Motor Company plant in Cuautitlan, Mexico. They beat six outside the plant and fifteen inside. Two were hospitalized. Early Monday morning, January 8, when only a maintenance crew was at work, a large body of armed men entered the plant, isolated the maintenance crew, donned company work suits, and began attacking workers as they reported for the regular work shift. Eight workers were shot and three others had to be hospitalized for other injuries. One of those shot is in grave condition with wounds in the chest and abdomen.

This is the latest development in a confrontation that began late last year when the company fired most members of the democratically elected executive committee of the local union and subsequently cancelled payment of the Christmas bonus, to which the workers were entitled. This provoked job actions, work stoppages, and street demonstrations.

After the recent attack the thugs retreated, and the workers took possession of the plant. They demanded punishment of those guilty of the attacks, democratic election of union representatives, and full payment of bonuses and profit sharing as promised in previously signed agreements. They also launched a campaign to get messages of solidarity and support from unions and other workers' organizations, as well as protests to the Ford Motor Company and the Mexican government.

For further information on the situation at the plant, contact: Democratic Workers Movement of Ford Motor Company, Dr. Lucio, 103 Edificio Orion, A-4, Desp. 103, Mexico D.F. Mexico. By phone (in Spanish): Manuel Fuentes, the workers' attorney, 011-525-578-1556; to the plant directly, 011-525-761-8111.

# Interview with Turkish Revolutionist

*The following interview was given by Sungur Savran, a Turkish revolutionary socialist and editor of the Marxist journal *Sinif Bilinci*, to Tom Barrett of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* on July 27, 1989.*

**Q.:** What is the level of Turkish economic development, and what role does Turkey play in the world economy?

**A.:** Well, to make the answer clear, let me say from the outset that Turkey may be considered a sort of semi-industrialized underdeveloped country, certainly dependent on imperialism, of the type that one finds in Latin America, such as Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, etc., or in South and East Asia, such as South Korea, etc. It is not usually included among these countries because, for one thing, it wasn't as conspicuous as an element within the world economy before 1980. Secondly, it's much less developed industrially than the countries I have just mentioned. It would possibly be classified among those countries, but would be at the lowest level of industrial development among that family of countries.

Turkish capitalist development was based on an active intervention by the state within the context of the Great Depression of the '30s—the same type of intervention one saw in the case of the Latin American countries. That was the beginning of industrial capital accumulation, which after the war transformed itself on the basis of what had been achieved by the intervention of the state and state economic activity in the industrial arena into a more regular type of capitalist industrial development on the basis of the activities of private capital. In fact, the decades of the '60s and the '70s saw, within the context of the long postwar world economic boom, quite a rapid development of the industrial front and overall in the Turkish economy—on the basis of a sort of indicative planning, the sort that you find also in India. What is most important is that now industry plays the major role in the economy. Its share of GNP has already surpassed—at least a decade and a half ago—that of agriculture.

Services are, of course, very important. But that implies the development of the country into a type of modern socio-economic structure. Firstly, you have now an industrial working class which is quite strong, possibly the strongest in the Middle East. Secondly, you have an increasingly urban population. You now have something like 20 percent of the population living in the cities—not all of them big cities, obviously, but which are considered statistically to be urban areas. Thirdly, with the transformation that one saw in the orientation of Turkish capital and of the Turkish bourgeois state in the '80s, you now have an increasing integration of both the economy, but also of the society—in ideological, cultural, and even political terms—with the world economy and with imperialism.

So it is now being transformed not only economically, but sociologically and culturally into a much more modern society than it used to be, much more of a typical capitalist country than it used to be. This is important because in the past, especially in the '60s, but to a certain extent in the '70s, too, there was a very dominant tendency within the Turkish

left that talked of a feudal structure, or a semi-feudal structure, and therefore of the necessity of a bourgeois revolution, a democratic revolution. That has been discussed elsewhere in the third world, too. Obviously for us it is programmatically excluded—even in a less-developed capitalist society—in the context of the twentieth century, in the context of imperialism. It has now become totally out of touch with the reality of Turkish society, where the political scene is in fact dominated by urban social struggles and by the working class in its relationship to the bourgeoisie.

Concerning the relationship of Turkey to the world economy, let me first say the period between the '30s, when industrial capital accumulation first started, and the mid-'70s was, despite minor differences among the subperiods, a time of continuity on the basis of an inward-turned import-substitution type of industrial capital accumulation. With the onset of the world crisis the Turkish economy entered into a sort of triple crisis, which one should take up in its elements because it also explains the basis of the 1980 military coup, decisive for the current period. The three dimensions were: 1) an extension of the crisis of world capitalism; 2) a sort of conjunctural crisis, where you had a serious crisis of overproduction and overaccumulation; 3) and this was possibly the major decisive dimension with respect to class struggles, a crisis of the type that one saw earlier in some Latin American countries (such as Brazil and later Argentina and Chile, etc.)—a crisis of the specific pattern of capital accumulation over the last four decades in Turkey which necessitated a restructuring of the whole pattern of socio-economic relationships and the political superstructure.

Further into the '80s the Turkish bourgeois capitalist class opted for the type of "export-led growth" that was the basis of Brazilian capital accumulation, South Korean capital accumulation in the '60s and the '70s, and that changed the whole relationship of the Turkish economy with the world economy. What is important about this is that Turkey is now, to a certain extent, an important supplier of some industrial commodities to the Middle Eastern markets. This is the first time in Turkish history that a very high proportion, 60 to 75 percent, of Turkish exports are now made up of industrial goods. This is a very significant transformation.

There are three dimensions to the Turkish position within the world economy. It is now a supplier to the Middle Eastern markets; it has an increasingly important relationship with the European Community of which it is supposed to be an associate partner. But Turkey has now applied for full membership, which will, even if it materializes, take a long time. This is very important for Turkey itself, and also important for the relationship between European capital and the Middle East. And thirdly, it is now being presented



by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the so-called international financial community, imperialist banks, etc., as a showcase for the other third world countries for its very strict adherence to IMF policies. So these are the most important aspects of Turkey's relationship to the world economy.

**Q:** What were the political conditions which led to the military coup in 1980, and what is the political situation today?

**A.:** We should separate out the more profound causes of the coup from the more immediate causes. Let me just get done with the immediate causes, because those, of course, have been used to a great extent by the military itself as a pretext for their coup. The immediate background to the coup was the state of almost civil war that one had in Turkey in the late '70s. I'm not saying that there was a civil war, which raises more questions. There was very widespread political terror and violence going on inside the country, almost in every sector of the country—big cities, the central Anatolian plateau, and towards the east where you have strife between the two different religious communities of Turkey (the Shi'ite, what we call the Alawite, and the orthodox Sunnites). In the east you also have problems in the Kurdish areas, which is something we will probably come back to, so I'm not going to take it up at length.

So this was the capital used, so to speak, by the generals in trying to justify their coup. However, the more profound causes, as has amply been demonstrated by the practice of the military dictatorship—by what they did when they were in power—was something related to the problem I discussed already about the crisis of capital accumulation in Turkey in the '70s, especially in the second half of the decade. There were two things involved: The coup was preceded by the so-called "January 23 Measures," in January 1980. These were promoted by [Turgut] Özal, who is now prime minister but was then deputy to [Süleyman] Demirel, the other right-wing politician. They jointly promoted these new measures, easily summarized by the concept of export-led growth. This was the beginning of the reorientation of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Now this, as we know from experience in other third world countries, requires new types of relationships between capital and labor on the one hand, and on the other a much stricter control by the state of the laboring classes from the point of view of their political rights.

The political regime that existed in Turkey between 1960 and 1980 was a type of semiparliamentary regime with a ban on communist groups, but quite liberal apart from that. And even left-wing groups, that is, Marxist groups of the Stalinist variety, existed legally in this period. So this type of political regime combined with a very high level of working class and youth political activity, reaching the level of gigantic mobilizations on the part of the working class at certain times throughout these two decades. That was a barrier to the new setup, to the restructuring of Turkish capital, to the reshaping

of relationships between labor and capital. To do away with this political regime and with the power of the working class organizations was the basic aim behind the military coup. Its goal was to do away with the crisis of capital accumulation in the '70s.

There was a very high level of political repression after the coup. It cannot be compared with what happened in Chile under Pinochet or what happened in Argentina during the period of the dictatorship. However, there were hundreds of thousands of people jailed, tens of thousands of people who are still in prison—convicted for different political reasons—tens of thousands of people who underwent very serious torture in police headquarters. At least twenty-five left-wing people were hanged during the first three years of the dictatorship. Political repression came down on the left, the trade union movement, and the Kurdish movement.

They also jailed fascists, who were very strong, but released them at the end of three or four years. Very little torture was inflicted on them. A couple of them were hanged. On the other hand, mainstream bourgeois politicians were jailed for a very short period of time, but then they came back to the political scene after the mid-'80s. The important part of the dictatorship's policy was not only the widespread violence, torture, and repression they implemented with respect to working class movements, the student movement,

etc., but that it totally reshaped the political superstructure of the Turkish state by changing the Constitution, taking away the fundamental rights that were to a certain extent guaranteed by the old 1961 Constitution, and changing the laws that regulated industrial relations—

of course, very much in the favor of capital.

Strikes were banned in many centers of economic activity and made very difficult in the remaining sectors. There had been two major trade union federations ever since the mid-'60s. One of them, the older one with very close ties to the state, what we call the American trade union type—Türk-Is [Turkish Labor] was the name—acts as an intermediary between the state and the working class. Then there is a second one which split away from Türk-Is—DISK is what it was called—which was a splinter to the left.

DISK stands for the Revolutionary Federation of Trade Unions. However, let me add that "revolutionary" in Turkish parlance does not necessarily mean "revolutionary" in the Marxist sense. It referred more, at its foundation in 1967, to the traditions of the Kemalist revolution, which was considered anti-imperialist and all that, but not a socialist revolution. It is used in the same way that "revolutionary" is often used in Latin America, for example by the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). However, DISK is not *that* mainstream. It was growing in strength all throughout the '70s, although towards the end of the '70s under the impact of the bureaucratic practices of the leadership, it was stagnating to a certain extent. It has been banned, though it still hasn't legally been totally closed down because the Court of Appeals has still not given its verdict. The trials

---

*'There was a very high level  
of political repression  
after the coup'*

---

went on for years and years; the final verdict hasn't come, although it's now been almost a full decade since these trials started.

The working class was almost disorganized. They have gone back to Türk-Is, and now they're trying to force the Türk-Is leadership to change its orientation, with a lot of difficulty of course because of the old structures of this trade union federation. But what this has done, in fact—when combined with a lot of changes on the economic front, the necessary orientation for export-led growth—is change radically the relationship of forces between the two major classes, the bourgeoisie and the working class. They have been in the forefront of the political struggle in Turkey since the mid-'60s, early '70s. The period we're now going through is still defined by the same balance of forces, but it's being challenged on an increasing scale by changes in the under-currents within the class struggle.

The current political situation can be said to be a continuation of the regime set up by the military dictatorship. As we know, Turkey passed over to a type of parliamentary democracy after 1983. Turkey has had elected governments since 1983, but there are severe restrictions even on bourgeois politicians of the old period, which have been relaxed very gradually. There has been a very slow opening up of political life in the last six years. Now the situation in 1989 is very different from the situation in the early 1980s under the military dictatorship, and even from the situation of 1985. One shouldn't be misled into thinking that Turkey is still under that rule of the military dictatorship. This is not true. The military are in the wings but there is still a lot of space for political action, even for socialists—though of course a lot of repression is going on, too. However, one should also say that the underlying balance of political forces is still bad. This shouldn't be thought of as a new period, at least until the spring.

One mistake is being made constantly regarding the Turkish situation. Because Özal is now in a very shaky situation—his vote has been falling, his party has been losing support throughout this period, and he is now negotiating—the other two bourgeois parties may be taking over. One of them is social democratic. The other is the party of Demirel, the major bourgeois politician of the '60s and '70s. People think that if Özal falls that will mean the end of the regime set up by the military. I do not think that this corresponds to the truth at all. There has been no major questioning of the overall political structure that came out of the military regime. That is yet intact. I think that in order to bring this structure down we need a definite shift in the balance of forces between the classes and not between different bourgeois political parties.

**Q.: What's the current state of the trade unions and the working class political parties?**

**A.:** As I said before, DISK was closed down, so hundreds of thousands of workers found themselves without a trade union, and they were the vanguard of the Turkish working class. These were the most active elements of the Turkish

working class. There was a period of hesitation about what to do, and trade union activities were banned during the first three years of the decade. So these workers moved over into Türk-Is, and as a result the structures of Türk-Is itself started to be challenged. The old bureaucracy had total control of Turkish trade unions, and they are big unions: Türk-Is has something like 1½ million members, which is not unimportant in a country where the whole working population is something like 18 million and the whole population of wage workers, not just industrial workers, but all wage workers, is about 5½ million. So 1½ million is not unimportant, obviously.

Now, these workers started to challenge the Türk-Is leadership. What we had this spring was the most important event in the period of the military dictatorship, and I think it is bound to change to a certain extent the political situation in Turkey. There was a massive upsurge of the workers' movement in the month of April, right before and for a full month after the elections that we had at the end of March 1989. In all different ways, throughout these two months, thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of workers came out onto the streets, sometimes trampling the legal restrictions brought about by the military regime, sometimes finding devious ways of making their actions legal—such as going massively to the hospitals of the Social Security System. They reported sick, but by the thousands. Their actions constituted veritable marches, which are not permitted. (Marches and demonstrations are subject to very severe restrictions on the Turkish political scene.)

This took place all over the country, even in remote rural areas—where you have road construction workers, for instance, and you have never seen working class activity of any type. It was all over the country, one million workers at different periods were involved, so this was a shock to the bourgeoisie. No one was expecting this sort of militancy on the part of the working class.

It should be said that this didn't really turn political. It was very much restricted to economic demands. However, economic demands are sometimes transformed, if they are militant enough, into political demands. In the Turkish case the most serious example was for a general strike, which is totally outlawed not only in the latest period but in the history of the whole Turkish Republic. They were in fact demanding something illegal, which turned that movement political, at least at that level.

Here we see the beginning of a shift in the balance of class forces. The bourgeois political front was totally in disarray; it didn't know what to do in the face of this movement. At least the liberal section was saying that we have to liberalize, change laws, give them more space so that they don't grow more radical, so that the socialist movement doesn't get in touch with the working class. They were very explicit about all this. So this was the beginning of a change in the relationship of forces among the classes. This can also have some impact on the leadership of Türk-Is. It has a congress coming up at the end of the year. We'll see what happens at that

---

*'The current political situation can be said to be a continuation of the regime set up by the military dictatorship'*

---

congress. It may even cause, in the medium term again, a splinter away from Türk-Is if those structures cannot really be toppled. One expects, of course, a unified sort of movement with the leadership of Türk-Is overthrown. But if that proves impossible, the mass movement may go in some sort of different direction.

As for the political parties, the Turkish left is rich in factions and groups with different political orientations. You have every conceivable type of political orientation that you can think of internationally on the Turkish left. At least 50, probably 100 different groups exist, but they are all illegal, with the exception of one, which is an ex-Maoist group turned very right-wing within the context of the socialist movement. It has become an appendage of the bourgeois-democratic parliamentary system.

Two things are important on the Turkish left: one, the Communist Party is becoming more and more significant, and has now, for the first time in Turkish history, the possibility of becoming a legal party under the impact of different elements—such as Turkey's relationship to the European Community, the challenge of the Kurdish nationalist movement, and the challenge of this recent workers' movement—pushing the bourgeoisie into a type of liberalization. The Turkish CP has transformed itself in an incredibly short amount of time from a very rigid type of Stalinist party into a party with the new political culture of the Gorbachev orientation. It is demanding to be legalized by completely shedding its old program, accepting NATO, accepting the European Community, flirting, let us say, with the religious movement, flirting with Demirel and the right-wing parties in Turkey, etc. It has moved very much to the right, but it is much less sectarian. They're now even debating with us, which would have been inconceivable in the '60s and '70s.

The other important element on the Turkish left is the tendency for recomposition, and even, I would say, regroupment. The defeat of 1980—it should be underlined that it was a defeat for the working class and for the socialist movement, a very serious defeat with all the consequences that one saw for example after the 1905 revolution in Russia, all the demoralization, the disorganization—and what has been happening in the bureaucratized workers' states in the '80s and especially Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* has had a deep impact on the Turkish left. What you have now is a constant soul-searching, especially on the part of centrist groups, which have come out of a sort of guerrillaist tradition of the early '70s. They have differentiated among themselves; there have been constant splits through the '70s and the '80s. Now they are evolving on an increasing scale, even influenced by the ideas of revolutionary Marxism. In fact, revolutionary Marxism has now for the first time a sort of audience within the Turkish left, which makes us very hopeful for the future.

**Q.:** What kind of work is the Turkish Trotskyist movement doing, and what are its opportunities?

**A.:** Just let me add one thing with respect to the last question, and that is, there are lots of parties within the socialist movement. However, only one is legal, because it has a program which is acceptable to the existing regime.

With respect to the Trotskyist movement, Turkish Trotskyism does not have a long history. In the '70s there was the first handful of people, very few of them from the older generation, most of them very young, who for the first time were defending Trotskyist ideas in Turkey. There were some Trotskyist publications in the '70s, which weren't, however, very influential. The Turkish left had to a very great extent been crystallized in the '70s into different and quite strong groups with sometimes hundreds of thousands of militants and sympathizers. So it was very difficult to influence the militants of the other groups.

In the '80s, with the recomposition and the reassessment of old programmatic, theoretical, and political ideas of the far-left within the Turkish socialist movement, Trotskyism came to have an increasing audience—both on a theoretical plane and within the practical political sphere. At the theoretical level what we now have is an important theoretical journal, which has proved to be important, called *Sinif Bilinci* [Class Consciousness]. It's now selling in the thousands, which is quite important, I would say.

In the political arena, the Trotskyists have been present and even, to a certain extent, conspicuously present and in a leading position along with some other groups in the latest activities of an emerging coalition of socialist forces which are trying to reassert class independence at the level of legal parliamentary politics. We

joined with several different groups in two elections, one in '87 and one in '89, in the context of two referenda. What we tried to do was to challenge the total domination of bourgeois political forces over political life, and to try to get across to the working class and the youth the necessity of working class independence at the political level. At this level we were active; we were one of the leading forces in the coalitions. The last time it was nine different groups which were engaged in this electoral bloc. In the 1987 elections we even had two candidates out of five who were our comrades. So, Trotskyism has been at the center of these debates regarding the regroupment of the Turkish left. There is a very important discussion and debate on the question of regroupment, with different currents coming together to form a single party on the basis of a clear program.

**Q.:** I'd like to take up the question of oppressed nationalities in Turkey.

**A.:** Which is a question of tremendous significance, tremendous importance for the future of both Turkey and the Middle East in general.

Let me first just mention one national question—we don't have the time to go into it—and that is the Armenian one. With the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Armenians in the early part of this century, you now have this posed as a very specific national question in the context of the political life of Turkey. However, there is only a very small Armenian

---

*'Turkish Trotskyism  
does not have  
a long history'*

---

minority now living inside Turkey, so that makes the Armenian question a specific kind of problem, which is not at the moment important politically in the internal life of the country. It is, of course, important internationally speaking. But I will put that question aside because it is a very specific question, although it is important, historically speaking.

The major question concerns, of course, the Kurds. The Kurdish so-called minority in Turkey is roughly one-fifth of the population (as far as we can tell, because there is no serious census taken). They comprise around 10-12 million people living in the east and southeast of Turkey. They have been tremendously repressed all throughout the republican period, ever since they helped the Turkish armies beat both the Greeks and some imperialist armies in the so-called Independence War. After the republic was founded they were put down, and even the existence of the Kurdish national group in Turkey was denied. It was denied up until 1988.

Probably your readers will know that the Kurdish nation has been divided into the geographical territory of four different states— Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. The Turkish Kurdish population is the most important one. The Kurdish population in the Turkish state has been the most severely repressed, because in the '30s they really gave a big battle against the Turkish state, and they were put down on different occasions and killed by the thousands, perhaps tens of thousands. They are the most repressed: I say this because even their existence has been denied, and they cannot speak their language in public, and there is no cultural activity on their part. Printing in Kurdish is forbidden in Turkey, while this is not the case with the Syrian, Iraqi, and Iranian Kurds— although they are oppressed, too.

What you have is a national consciousness of the Kurdish population that grew considerably in the late '70s and especially in the '80s. A guerrilla war was started in 1984, which went on for years and years. It had its atrocities, with the army killing, harassing, and torturing civilians, applying the typical tactics of bourgeois armies in the third world against rural populations— of the type one sees in Central America, for instance, or Peru. However, regardless of the orientation or the methods of the organization that has been carrying on this guerrilla movement, one should say that the Kurdish population definitely has a right to self-determination. This is our position. We are for a unified Kurdish movement determining its fate within all four states together. We are for a unified solution to the Kurdish problem. We are obviously, as revolutionary Marxists, for total self-determination with all its implications for all the fragments of the Kurdish nation within the different states of the Middle East. I think the Kurdish revolt will definitely be a major component of the Middle Eastern revolution. It will probably be the connecting link between revolutions in the different countries in the Middle East, and especially Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.

**Q.: Just to follow up, is there any kind of unity in practice among the different Kurdish populations, in Turkey, Iran,**

**or Iraq? Do Barzani's forces have any influence within the Turkish state, and so forth?**

**A.:** There have been relationships among the different components of the Kurdish national movement. However, it should be said that the different components of the national movement have been played one against the other by the ruling states— be it Iranian, Turkish, or Iraqi— so that a unified Kurdish national movement is in fact a prerequisite for the success of the struggle of the Kurdish nation.

**Q.: Another question concerns the interaction of the religious communities and the problem of the far right.**

**A.:** The fascist movement in Turkey in the decade of the '70s was the strongest in Europe— if Turkey is partially considered a European country and partially Middle Eastern. It has been dealt a blow to a certain extent by its position in the period of the military dictatorship because it has no sanction from the ruling classes, and most of its cadre went away from the fascist party into the ruling party of Özal. However, they are always waiting in the wings; they have reconstituted their movement. They now have a political party which has obtained 3½ percent of the vote in the latest local elections, and in one city they even won the elections for mayor. And so they are making a certain comeback, although they are definitely not as strong as they used to be in the second half of the '70s. They have come to the level where they were in the first half of the '70s, which is of course ominous enough.

Concerning the relationships between the two major religious groups of Islam in Turkey, the Alawites and the Sunnites: the Alawites (who number in the tens of millions— we don't have an exact

figure— between ten and twenty), part of them Kurdish obviously, have been since the earlier periods of the Ottoman Empire the oppressed national group inside Turkey. So they have provided most of the cadre and the militants of the left and the socialist left, too. There has been constant interaction between this national-religious subgroup and the Turkish left. In the '70s the fascist movement simply provoked the Sunnite majority against the Alawites. There was in fact one major massacre of Alawites in the southeastern town of Maras, which resulted in the death of at least two to three hundred Alawites. Other attempts were stopped by the combined forces of the left and the Alawite minority.

So the question may rise again. However, this time I think— and this is the important point about the current period— in spite of the fact that the major Sunnite orthodox fundamentalist religious party, which is now called the Party of Welfare, got close to ten percent of the votes in the latest local elections— this does not imply that there is a threat of a religious takeover of the type that one had in Iran. Despite the existence of this movement, the fascist movement itself has now reoriented itself toward religious ideas. So the rise of fascism, if that ever comes, will be in a religious garb, too, I think, in the future— a Sunnite religious garb, which will make the threat of friction between the two groups even stronger in the coming period. So we have to be on watch for

---

*'What you have is a national consciousness of the Kurdish population that grew considerably'*

---

religious fundamentalism which, although it doesn't threaten to take over in the near future, can present the Turkish left and secular forces with a threat in its two different aspects — fascist and fundamentalist.

**Q.:** Is there any problem of conflict with respect to the Jewish or Christian minorities, especially in European Turkey?

**A.:** Jews were always harassed by the fascist movement in the '70s. They are a very isolated minority. Of course, there has been this attack on a synagogue in Istanbul, but that was the consequence of struggles within the Middle East, repercussions of international struggles. The Jews haven't really been harassed or repressed by the state. Of course, their rights are restricted. A minority has been moving to Israel, and their numbers are becoming reduced over the long run. But they are not really repressed on a day-to-day basis. They only have certain restrictions on their civil rights.

With respect to Greeks the problem is more serious. There is a very sizable Greek minority in the geographical area where the Turkish state is now found, but because of the Greek-Turkish war in the early '20s, the invasion of the Greek military forces into what is now Turkey, relations were very strained. Even in the '70s and '80s there is a constant friction between the Greek and the Turkish states, which both ruling classes exploit for their own chauvinistic reasons.

However, there is one important outstanding component of Greek-Turkish relations, of which Turkish internationalists should be very careful: that is the existence of Turkish troops on the island of Cyprus. Since Cyprus is an independent state as a result of an international conference, it is obvious that this cannot be justified on any grounds. So these troops should be immediately withdrawn from the island. The political problems of the island itself and the relationships between the two communities there, the Greek and the Turkish communities, are, of course, complicated. However, the troops cannot be justified at all. Neither can the existence of the so-called northern Cypriot Republic, the Turkish republic, be justified on any ground. One has to be for a federal, unified state in Cyprus.

**Q.:** Could you speak about the relationship of Turkey to the United States, Soviet Union, and Bulgaria?

**A.:** Let's start with the U.S. Now, ever since the '50s, the relationship of Turkey to the U.S. has been a very special one. There are U.S. military bases in Turkey monitoring activities and spying on the Soviet Union — which have been a major bone of contention between the Turkish left and the Turkish student movement, on the one hand, and the Turkish ruling classes and bourgeois political forces on the other. Turkey is a member of NATO; Turkey even sent regiments for the Korean War to aid the U.S. forces. It seems that if you take an overall look at the Middle Eastern situation since the late '70s, with the Afghan situation, with the fall of the shah, with the increasing problems of Israel — and Israel is an exceptional situation anyway — Turkey seems to be the major gendarme, so to speak, of the U.S. in the Middle East.

It has a very strong army of 850,000 people, which is the second biggest army of NATO. Turkey is not the second richest or second most populous country of NATO, so this is obviously very incongruous but also significant. It is now much more of an industrialized and modernized country than before. It has, of course, its links to the Middle East economically and to the European Community. Obviously, the fact that it is a neighbor of the Soviet Union and Bulgaria on two sides, controlling the Straits, etc., makes it a very important element in Middle Eastern politics for the U.S., and — one should say this emphatically — its army and intelligence services are very much intertwined with their counterparts in the U.S. This is a major problem that has to be solved by the Turkish revolution.

With respect to its relationship to the Soviet Union: this is tainted by centuries of enmity between tsarist Russia and Turkey. Unfortunately the Turkish population at large is very much anti-Russian because of this. Therefore they are, partially because of this, quite anticommunist — I mean the peasantry, I'm not talking about the working class. This sentiment has been reduced by a process of attrition and erosion. Now, in the '80s, one can no longer say that there is this kind of anti-Russian sentiment in the urban population.

But the Soviet Union has had very good relations with Turkey on the diplomatic level. And they have even had the preposterous attitude of being very relieved with the military dictatorship of the '80s, simply because they didn't want a break in relations when that regime was so pro-American. One can say this, and it is very telling, I think, that there has been much more criticism of all

the violence and repression under the military dictatorship from Western Europe than from the Soviet Union. In fact, Ergun, the head of the junta, who is now unfortunately also the president, and who is going to be voted into a temporary extension of his presidency this coming fall by all the parties which consider themselves very democratic, visited the different capitals of the bureaucratized workers' states while he was the head of the junta, and was even awarded the Dimitrov Order of Distinction. There are cordial relations. There is really no serious friction between the Soviet Union and Turkey.

In the case of Bulgaria: the rise of chauvinism in Rumania and Bulgaria — Rumania with its Hungarian minority and Bulgaria with its Turkish minority — has caused relations now to be very tense. The right-wing forces in Turkey are hysterically calling for the army to go into Sofia, which is of course unimaginable, but this puts the Turkish socialist movement, either in its Stalinist or anti-Stalinist variety, in a very difficult position, and gives the Turkish state additional "chips" in covering up for its repression of the Kurds. "Look what the socialists are doing to their minorities" is the sort of reasoning you find nowadays.

**Q.:** How do you think the Turkish political situation is going to develop in the next few years?

*(Continued on page 32)*

# Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

## 36. A Woman's Scream in the Corridor

They often put a third, even a fourth person in the cell with Ramensky and me. Extra cots were dragged into the cell, even though it seems that during the tsarist period not more than one prisoner was held there. Beyond the window, the night was dark when the lock clanked and they brought in an old man who was shorn, shaking, gray-faced, but well-dressed in a neat uniform. In those years, uniforms had been introduced for many departments, even those of a purely civil nature. It was a sign of belonging to the state apparatus.

Our new recruit's uniform no longer had any stripes or buttons on it, which meant that he had already gone through the trimming operation. All his strength used up, he collapsed on the cot. We were not able to start a conversation with him. Before reveille, as you know, conversations were prohibited. But even without words, the state of this poor soul became clear to us from the smell emanating from him. Volodya held his nose and covered his mouth so as not to laugh. I found the situation humorous myself and the old man pathetic. He began to cry with big childlike tears, begging the guard to please let him out for a minute, just for a little minute. And the latter whispered in response: "Quiet! You're supposed to sleep. Lie down!"

The guards were accustomed to everything and they are not allowed to feel sorry. The old man got totally undressed, rolled his suffering trousers into a bundle, and lay down under the rough blanket. In the morning, having washed away his tears and everything else, he told us his story. He was a worker in a large enterprise.

His job had been to look after supplies. His first and favorite duty was to take care of the menu, medical care, dacha, several cars, wife, and other ceaselessly expanding needs of the institution's chief. Our new acquaintance described how he had loyally carried out his duty. And he

never went hungry himself. They brought the chief live fish from a special fish farm somewhere far away. But it was decided to dole out a couple of fish to this one and that one, our poor friend among them. "And why, oh my God, why did they put me in prison? I tried so hard — so very hard!"

"Of course, I did tell this little anecdote. Doesn't everyone tell one once in a while? In the office, where no one else could hear, you blurt one out to a friend. And your friend does that too. After all, you've known each other for years. Then something goes wrong. And one of you ends up in prison. Why?"

And gradually, day after day, being artfully heated up by the investigator, our anecdotist became more and more embittered against those who along with him told anecdotes but were left unarrested and got live fish, holiday trips, and — in individual envelopes — sweet rewards nowhere listed on any register. And, embittered, he asked us:

"Really, isn't it my duty, as an honest man, to expose these scoundrels, these bureaucrats, these fat anti-Sovietees?"

He himself had already lost about five kilos, then it was ten, and was no longer a fat bureaucrat. He listed his acquaintances: "One told why Zhemchuzhina was imprisoned, another gossiped about Allilueva, a third laughed at the slogan 'catch up and overtake,'<sup>1</sup> a fourth kept a notebook with coded anecdotes. Each was designated by a code. For example: 'I love sweets,' is a terrible anecdote about Comrade J.V. Stalin."

Carried away by the exposés, our truthseeker forgot that a person who has been arrested is not allowed to call those who have not been arrested comrades. According to the rule, he had to say: "A terrible anecdote about Mr. J.V. Stalin."

It soon became clear to Volodya and me that he had given the investigator the names of almost all of his coworkers.

*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.*

Surely more than one cell received gray-faced people in uniforms with their stripes ripped off who were to be summoned with the whisper: "F's. Get dressed for interrogation."

Our guest suffered from thrombophlebitis. He began to complain energetically to the cellblock orderly and to the doctor. And he succeeded in getting taken to the prison hospital.

The days he was with us were days abounding with stories about women. The call from the blacksmith Slobodsky, to talk about women instead of politics, was not at all a local recipe, but found a broad response from sea to sea. Our guest apparently sought to conceal his former extreme fascination with politics (in its anecdotal form) with a torrent of reminiscences about women. He relished the details, and one got the feeling this wasn't the first time that he had entertained listeners with them. Volodya's stories were much more decent but in the presence of such a listener, Volodya did not want to tell them. And he later explained to me why: "He's a swine. I don't like him. He'll want to know all the details."

At the same time, Volodya told the investigator about his women, possibly in a more restrained way. And the investigator meanwhile scrutinized the photo-negatives.

And it must have been on just about the second or third night after the departure of our lodger with his conversations about women that we heard a story of a woman about herself—a story consisting of only a very few words.

In the middle of the night, we were awakened by the terrible scream of a woman: doors slammed in the corridor, we heard the hurried steps of booted feet (which means the officials—the guards do not stomp their feet that way), and a woman screamed: "Svetlanochka! Svetlanochka! Give me my Svetlanochka!"

For a minute, she was quiet. Most likely, they had covered her mouth. But again a resounding scream burst forth:

"Svetlanochka!"

We raised ourselves from the bunks in confusion and tried to figure out what was happening. At night, we were quiet, pretending to be asleep, even if we didn't sleep at all. We decided that the woman had gone mad and no longer responded to the threats and so they had transferred her from the woman's section, where she could get everybody worked up, to our corridor. Men are more tranquil. They get agitated but they don't shout "Svetlanochka."

Most likely, it seemed to me later, after the many stories I was to hear about similar situations, they had taken away her tiny baby. She had been arrested with the child, taken to prison, and there had the child torn from her arms.

A woman in prison needs to be very strong. You sit before an investigator, your hands folded on your knees, and filthy profanity such as you've never heard pours down on your head. This is repeated every night; during the day you may not sleep. And finally, tormented by these insane nights, on the chair fastened to the floor, you sign the interrogation record. Get it over with for God's sake, and send me to a camp! And will they give me back my Svetlanochka? But they will not. And she is still so young that she does not even look ugly in the quilted prison pants.

If you are no more than the wife of a man who has been declared an enemy of the people, they don't even have to build a case against you and they don't even make a pretense of pinning a charge on you. They simply issue a sentence. Stalin's bloody revenge was not confined to the men but extended to their wives and young children. You get eight years in a corrective labor camp. And they ship you to Karaganda or Yaya, near Tomsk. And you end up in Yaya and they sit you down at a sewing machine and you work until you have no strength to work, 12 hours a day.

You remember the description of the Ford production line which you read at one time and you would like to invite its authors to visit you here.

And when the factory official Osipyuk walks past with his brow knitted, you hunch over and stitch faster on the machine.

Osipyuk stops by the sorting room and takes a soldier's tunic from a pile of finished needlework. "Why isn't the seam straight? Why, I ask you?"

And, without glancing at the sorters who are numb with terror, he casts the ruling: "The whole brigade to the punishment cell!"

Before the uniform has the blood of a Russian soldier spilled on it, it is saturated with the tears of Russian women.

Where is he now, this former official of the camp sewing factory Osipyuk? Once having entered the nomenclatura orbit [the bureaucracy], he circulates in it his whole life. Maybe not as an official of labor camp production, but as the administrator of an industrial complex or the director of a confectionary works. The Osipyuks and Kornevas do not need to be rehabilitated. They have never been prosecuted or investigated, like we have. They have nothing to worry about.

And indeed, this Osipyuk is an honorable party member. He has no obligation to care who you were. In his moral code there is no article saying he has to be interested in those he tortures. You are given to him and he is told: "This is the wife of an enemy, so don't show her any extra consideration." And he doesn't. Today he sends the entire brigade to the punishment cell because of something Ivanovna did, and tomorrow the same brigade again goes there for something Petrovna did. The wives of the enemies may know who Osipyuk is if they manage to come out of his punishment cells alive. But he does not have to know who they are. If a hangman starts getting concerned about the tears of his victims, he won't fulfill his plan.

I must tell you about Nina Lasovaya.

For more than 30 years I had not seen the dear unusual Nina, a member of the Artemovsk Komsomol, whose intellect and integrity Grisha Baglyuk had openly admired; not since 1929 when I visited Boris, Maryusa, and her in Moscow. Nina, it will be recalled, was not yet married to Vladimir, whom I'll call Karkhanov. He was one of the veterans of the Odessa Komsomol, who worked later in the Donbass where they had become acquainted. In 1937, Nina already had two sons. Her husband, Karkhanov, worked as the secretary of one of the regional party committees in Moscow.

And the day came for him to be arrested.

He had party friends and coworker comrades. Many of them were also arrested. There were few who escaped such

a fate. The secretary of the Moscow Party Committee then was N.S. Khrushchev.

But of all Karkhanov's party friends who weren't arrested, who had seen that he—a participant in the Odessa underground—was selflessly devoted to the revolution and of unimpeachable honesty, of all these friends, only one spoke up for him: Nina. True, she was his wife.

The most serious charge against Karkhanov was that in his region the construction of bathhouses was proceeding too slowly. And there were a few other analogous crimes. Nina did not know what her husband had been accused of, but she knew who he was just as his other friends did.

In the morning, after the nighttime search, she rushed headlong to where thousands of wives went in those years to make their appeals. And she did not go to simply make an official inquiry about him but to plead for him. Not having the least doubt that there was some misunderstanding, she said: "I am convinced of his innocence. He is as much a criminal as I am. Then arrest me too."

But they refused. "Comrade Nina," they said, "you are an honorable party member, and we have no reason to arrest you. Go home."

They knew that she would come back. They played cat and mouse with people, as they had done with Grisha, releasing him for two hours, and as they did with the rest of us, providing the counterweight just as our term was to have ended.<sup>2</sup> And she did come back, again and again.

"Arrest me; he is as much a criminal as I am." She thought that if they were to arrest her, whose innocence was indisputable, this would hasten an investigation of the misunderstanding in connection with her husband. She was after the truth. But she did not understand what was taking place. And the game continued. When the mouse was almost half-dead with exhaustion, the cat, narrowing its yellow eyes, said:

"We are not going to arrest you, we are only taking you into custody for a while."

And they held her for eight years. Relatives took one of her sons away somewhere and the second son ended up in a special children's home, like all children of enemies of the people.

Her husband was dead, but she did not know it. She was imprisoned in the Karaganda camps, a huge camp complex with such a vast number of prisoners that it is difficult to imagine it. Who could find one specific grain of sand in that large sandpile? But her boy thought that he could find his mama.

Once, the children's home lost its charge, Genka Karkhanov. The boy ran away. He was caught, but he ran away again. He wanted to find his mama.

I do not know how long the hungry and ragged boy rode in freight cars and knocked on unfamiliar doors. He was looking for his mama in an enormous camp where prisoners were numbers. In a factory, where some of the workers were not prisoners, there was a brave woman. She understood that the mother the child was looking for was a labor camp prisoner; and she took the boy into her care, searched until she found Nina, and let Nina know: "I have your Genka."

Children have run away from the children's homes before Genka did and after him. But not one set such a task for

himself and so courageously achieved it. You boys and girls his age, you can dream up any adventures you want, but none will compare with this reality because the reality here was the camp.

However much I have told, I have not told the whole story. As for Genedy, he doesn't talk about himself, and Nina doesn't have the strength to speak. Sobs choke back her words.

The boy lived in the city and Nina lived in the camp. For the first time in the history of the camps, it was necessary—without the officials knowing about it—to get someone, small but big as life, into and not out of the camp. And they succeeded and hid him. Nina soon served out her term and it was no longer possible to conceal her son. Later she found her younger boy. Then came approximately ten hard years of life as a marked person, a former camp inmate, who is allowed to live only by the grace of the powers that be. When she was rehabilitated (and her husband, posthumously) she learned the formal charge for which her husband had been killed: slow construction of the public baths. Both were readmitted to the party; his body lies nobody knows where, and she lives in Moscow. I telephoned her and she was happy about that and told me to come and visit her at once.

What can one say? Almost nothing remained of her former beauty. She wanted to hear about Grisha Baglyuk. Tears streamed from her eyes but she kept insisting: "Go on, go on!"

After that we talked a little about various things but she again and again returned to the same topic. And Nina said:

"Do you know, Misha, that it was I who went to the regional committee about you, do you remember, back in 1929?"

"Let's not think about that Nina! It's bad enough that I have tormented you with these recollections without you now starting to torture yourself!"

"No, I want you to know! Do you remember? You came to visit me at Bolshaya Polyanka? You were going on about something or other. And the next day, I went to the regional committee and told them. And about Lenin's testament, too."

"Nina, stop it, for Christ's sake!"

"No, no! let me finish. Would you believe that I did that with a pure heart? I was convinced that it was what an honest communist must do. My God, how low I was!"

And tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks.

When I had crossed the threshold, it had seemed to me that nothing remained of her former beauty. No, it remained; the overriding beauty was still there.

I cannot condemn her for ignorance nor Yeva either nor the thousands of other rank-and-file communists, educated by the rule that it is impermissible to deceive the party. And that was still only as early as 1929. Eight years later Nina still believed and only her arrest shattered the dream. But there is no need either to get the times mixed up with one another. After 10 or 12 years, the only ones who did not know the truth were those who lived in the most remote countryside or those who, while living in Moscow, had stopped up their ears. Only a totally naive simpleton or a racist blind with hatred could have believed the articles about the "cosmopolitans" [Jews].

Many acted in a fainthearted way. But it is necessary to tell people about this if you want to regain a fragment of their



respect. The time has come when human respect has to be won anew.

Nina is seriously ill. I did not hurry back for a second visit with her so as not to torment her again but only inquired after her by phone and asked her to forgive me for what I had done.

"What do you mean, Misha? How could I be angry at you for that?" Her voice sounded clear on the phone. It was still exactly as it had been in her youth.

\* \* \*

Before returning to the tale of my investigation, I will finish telling about Volodya Ramensky. He was summoned with his things before I was and we were separated forever. Whether he was given permission to leave, as he had hoped, or whether he was sentenced, I do not know. All the same, I would like to see him in order to refresh my memory on a point or two.

One time after a personal search, with the words "bend over and spread your legs" still ringing in my ears, I said to Volodya in a fit of temper: "I am amazed that anyone would do this kind of work on their own accord!"

Volodya blew up.

"You don't respect state security workers? They are only doing their duty. And you say insulting things about them! They have their orders."

My lieutenant was somewhat understating the responsibility of the Mr. Fidgets [the jailers] for what went on. A warden is not a soldier but a person who has enlisted, a volunteer. Those who don't like looking at people's anuses could selflessly apply to a collective farm and could receive — instead of a military ration, a uniform, and money — Stalinist workday units [the meager wage rates for collective farm workers during the Stalin period and until the late 1960s].

But I would have forgotten about this conversation if you could forget the command "bend over" or if you could forget how, out of fear of starvation, the punishment cell, or a beating, you carried out all the humiliating orders of the hangmen.

My investigation came to an end. About my mama, my sisters, and my children, the investigator expressed himself thus: "They are all scum; your whole family has to be pulled out by the roots."

He repeated several ancient moss-covered anecdotes about Jews as weighty proof that they too were all scum and must all be rooted out, or at least sent east even farther than the Chechens had been sent.<sup>3</sup>

The investigator knew well the addresses of my children. He described in detail the road from the Semenovsk outpost to their home as if he had been there himself. Could he have already apprehended them? He clearly wanted me to think that he had them in custody.

I understood that we had here a man of rare veracity. It cost him nothing to arrest them. Fifteen years ago, I had seen young people arrested for the edification of their fathers. Every day I expected him to say: "Now you get a face-to-face meeting with your kinfolk."

And into the office they would lead my son, with a shorn

head and sunken cheeks, holding up his pants; or my daughter, who had undergone a personal search.

To make the investigation complete, my major led me into the office of his superior, Col. Metan. He was delighted with the colonel.

"This is Metan! He had a conversation with Bukharin."

They led me into the colonel's office, which was much more nicely furnished than Lenin's office had been. But I didn't notice any books. Metan was writing not books but materials for eternity. "To be preserved forever" was stamped on all the files of the investigation of our cases. Metan was the author of more than one.

The colonel, gray and imposing, confirmed that he had spoken with Bukharin. Was he boasting? Yezhov's assistants, like Kashketin and Metan, knew too much for Stalin to let them live. But did they keep one such specialist around to teach the replacements?

The investigators of the new type did not quote Italian lyrics like my Sherlock Holmes of 1936. And they were quite different from my investigators in Artemovsk and Kharkov in 1929, that is from the ingenuous people of the 1920s. The ingenuous age had passed and would never return.

Metan had me sit on a sofa (such is approach No. 1) and offered me a "Herzegovina Flor" cigarette as a treat for those under investigation. (He and his coworkers were issued the best cigarettes at public expense. So that properly speaking, I wasn't smoking his cigarettes but he was smoking mine.) He said confidentially:

"It isn't possible that you (the formal you and not the familiar you, also part of approach No. 1) did not make contact with any of your friends? Do they speak Jewish?"

"No. They are Russians, Mr. Colonel."

"No, I mean the Jews. For example, Gorbatov."

"Gorbatov knows only *tsimmiss* and *khokhma* [that is, just a few Yiddish words]."

"Really? Then you must have collaborated with him in Russian?"

"No, we never collaborated in Russian, either."

Metan, apparently, didn't have enough time for my case to apply the tougher approaches, Nos. 2, 3, and 4. They led me out.

I do not want to lie and make believe that I acted like a hero during the interrogations and didn't sign anything. I signed if the case concerned only me or was merely a repetition of things that were already well known. But when the investigator tried to implicate me with people who were still alive, I refused. They tried to link me up with my senior officer. But I wouldn't go along with it. They tried still harder to tie in Gorbatov. But I defended him — that is, denied I had anything to do with him — as best I could. And I guess I was successful: Gorbatov died in his bed and not in a camp, although the investigator told me: "We've got very bad laureates and your military decorations are worth about as much. You can be good a thousand times, but make one mistake and you're finished. Understand?"

And now, in these recollections, I told about my visit with Boris in 1929, which I kept secret from the investigators. Reading what he wrote about the Trotskyists having killed Kirov and Gorky, I don't know what to think: had they, in fact, been able to convince him that that was really true? It's

too bad that Borya did not live to hear the truth about how Grisha Baglyuk was killed.

Sitting in a corner, three meters from the investigator, I saw lying on his desk my old case record. He checked it and derived inspiration from it. According to it, I had endured the designated punishment. But by the new way of evaluating my punishment, it should have been significantly greater. We will compare the debits and the credits and obtain a new balance.

For the modernization of crime, one can add, by the way, Point 11 of Article 58: an anti-Soviet group. Two is a group. The major invariably wrote in the record: "counterrevolutionary meeting." It consisted of me and Serov. No third person was added, but it became a group.

Point 11 was put into effect and it sewed all the cases up. Even in the camp, two or three years later, the investigator there (each camp had such a position) presented me with photographs. But the camp captain was a prudent fellow: they certainly pay generously. What did you say? You do not recognize them? To answer "no" means no trial. The Moscow major was zealous. He tried to build a case on a "no."

The tsarist gendarme questioned Kibalchich whole days at a time. A guard stood beside him and made sure he never had a chance to shut his eyes. In 1936, this torture was resurrected. I knew a fellow who went through a 72-hour-long interrogation conveyor. The interrogators worked in shifts continually asking one and the same question. Over the years, the conveyor system was perfected with the introduction of nighttime interrogation plus daytime prison regulations. But the major, who rested up during the days still

sometimes wanted a snooze at night. And so, it would happen that in the middle of an interrogation, he would be summoned to see some official who also worked basically at night, like Stalin's entire apparatus did. The major would then summon the guard on duty and say: "Take the prisoner to the box."

"The box" was a small stone cubicle about one square meter in area, in which you could only stand or sit. They would lock you up in there for one, two, three hours. A row of boxes stood in all the corridors of Butyrka prison and the other vanguard prisons of the Native Land. The song "Churches and Prisons We Will Raze to the Ground" continued to have relevance.

But isn't it time for a break? Guard, take him to the box!  
[Next month: "Consider Yourself Lucky"]

## NOTES

1. Zhemchuzina was a victim of the campaign against "cosmopolitans," a code name for Jews, in the early 1950s. Allilueva was the name of Stalin's wife. "Catch up and overtake" (capitalism) was a slogan of the forced industrialization drive in the early 1930s.

2. By "counterweight" Baitalsky means an additional term in the labor camp tacked on at the end of the original term. Baitalsky develops this metaphor in episode 29 in the April 1989 *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

3. The Chechen and Ingush peoples, who were joined by Stalin into the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936, were deported en masse from their homeland in Central Asia in 1944 by Stalin, as were numerous other mountain peoples, and their republic was abolished. After Stalin's death the Chechen and Ingush peoples — what was left of them — were allowed to return home and their republic was reestablished.

## Turkey (Continued from page 27)

A.: I am quite optimistic about the possibilities of the Turkish political situation in the next few years. The major reason for this is the upsurge in the workers' movement that we have witnessed this spring. There are very important structural constraints that limit the maneuvering room of the Turkish ruling classes and the Turkish state, one being its relationship to the European Community, which is economically the major route opted for by the Turkish bourgeoisie. This puts severe restraints on their room for maneuver because of the importance of the organized workers' movement in Europe, which has its impact on Turkey. The second major constraint is the Kurdish movement, which I think will go on picking up more strength in the coming period. The Kurdish movement obviously is the major ally of the Turkish working class in the struggles to come. The third major component is the working class, and the rise in the workers' movement is the major component that makes me optimistic.

We have now seen the opening of a new period, where the change of mood of the working class — even if the movement

doesn't rise in the near future — an increasing consciousness of young workers, of a new vanguard of workers, will be very important for the activities of the socialist movement. Those elements of the Turkish socialist movement, including of course the revolutionary Marxists, who are fighting for class independence throughout the second half of the '80s, will now find a much stronger social basis on which to draw.

I am very optimistic for the development of a strong revolutionary movement in Turkey in the near future. It has to be added that being at the crossroads of Western Europe, Europe in general, and the Middle East, and having a very important Kurdish minority, and with its role of gendarme in the Middle East for the U.S., the political situation in Turkey has to be watched carefully. It may have a lot of impact on the Middle East and on the European situation, too, in the near future. But I think the Middle Eastern revolution will certainly include Turkey as a very important component. ●

## Political Insights on Lenin's Organizational Practice

*Lenin and the Revolutionary Party*, by Paul Le Blanc, introduction by Ernest Mandel. December 1989, Humanities Press, New Jersey. \$55.00 in hard cover.

Reviewed by Stuart Brown

These are days of increasing political ferment in the USSR, Eastern Europe, and China—a ferment which offers an opportunity for large numbers of working class activists in these countries and throughout the world to recapture the humanitarian and democratic essence of Marxism for the first time in decades. It is especially appropriate that this new book by Paul Le Blanc should be published at such a time. Le Blanc's work contributes nothing less than another weapon in the hands of those who want to fight for historical truth and against its bureaucratic and bourgeois falsifiers.

In his preface Le Blanc also suggests the importance of Leninist organizational principles for "third world" revolutions (such as those in Central America), and in his concluding chapter he offers a critical discussion of their relevance to such advanced capitalist countries as the United States. More than this, the book is a work of history, exploring how Lenin's approach to revolutionary party-building arises from the humanism, working class activism, and scientific approach to political economy inherent in Marxist thought.

Since Lenin's death there have been many studies of his organizational thinking written from many points of view. These range from the accounts of genuine revolutionists who are sincerely trying to understand and apply his approach, to simplistic reductions developed to satisfy shallower intellects, to purely academic studies which create a lifeless caricature, to atrocious apologies for Stalinism, to slanders perpetrated by defenders of bourgeois society. But Le Blanc's book has a unique character. It certainly falls into the

first of our categories—those who are honestly trying to understand and apply a Leninist methodology—but it is not simply another study of Lenin's thinking on the organizational question. It is one of the few efforts, and certainly the most extensive, to look at this problem systematically in the context of Lenin's political program for the Russian and international Marxist movement of his time.

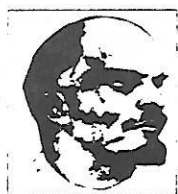
In his introduction, Le Blanc explains that "the Leninist organizational perspective can be said to have gone through six phases of development from 1900 to 1923." These are discussed more fully in the book as a whole:

- the initial period after the founding of the newspaper *Iskra* around the turn of the century;
- the revolutionary period of 1905-1906;
- the triumph of reaction from 1907-1912;
- 1912-1914, when "the Bolshevik party, unified on the basis of a revolutionary class-struggle program, outstrips the . . . non-Bolshevik RSDLP";
- the First World War; and
- the period of revolution and victory, 1917-1923.

One is struck, in reading this sketch, by the way in which Le Blanc defines the specific phases of Lenin's thinking on *organizational* questions by the *political* events and the social context in which they developed. This is, in fact, completely consistent with Lenin's own methodology, as Le Blanc amply demonstrates in his further development of this history.

But Le Blanc's underlying thesis is that too often students of Leninist organization, even sincere and honest militants, have tried to understand it without this all-important political and programmatic foundation. Such an approach has tended to make them see things in a schematic way, as simply an *organizational* formula called "democratic centralism."

### LENIN AND THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY



Paul LeBlanc

With an  
introduction by  
Ernest Mandel

"Paul Le Blanc's book represents an excellent analysis of the development of Lenin's conception of the revolutionary party, from its inception until the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution."

— Ernest Mandel

Special 20 percent discount for readers of the  
*Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*: \$44.00

Order from: F.I.T., P.O. Box 1947, New York, NY 10009

Depending on their personal predilections, social backgrounds, national situations, or cultural prejudices, individuals may tend to emphasize one or another side of this dialectical duality. Based on such purely abstract understandings, Lenin himself has not infrequently come in for criticism as deviating too far one way or another from the proper balance between democracy and centralism. By grounding his own assessment in Lenin's material world and the concrete political and programmatic discussions he faced, however, Le Blanc avoids this kind of formalistic approach and makes an important methodological contribution.

Le Blanc's scope is sweeping, which is one of the book's major strengths. He is not trying to pick and choose periods when Lenin's approach to organization might reinforce some personal viewpoint of his own. He offers us a broad canvas and tries to capture the totality of Lenin's thought, as well as his evolution, on this question. He largely succeeds.

Another strength of Le Blanc's study is its approach of extensive, direct quotation from Lenin himself, with the author's personal comment interspersed primarily as a means to help the reader understand the quotations and put them in their historical context. There is more than enough of the genuine Lenin here so that anyone can have confidence in an honest presentation of his views. Le Blanc has not tried to write a book in which he develops his own particular *interpretation* of Lenin. It is rather a book of Lenin, explaining himself. Yet it is also not simply a book of quotations, which, when offered by themselves can create their own sources of misunderstanding. Le Blanc provides detailed notes to aid us in coming to our own opinion, based on a well-informed understanding of what Lenin's words meant in the context that he wrote them.

Surprisingly, Le Blanc—who does not pretend to be a disinterested bystander in developing his presentation—finds himself in basic agreement with Lenin during *all* of the organizational disputes within the Russian Marxist movement at *each* of its differing political conjunctures. I say that this is surprising because the author of *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* is by no means an uncritical reporter, much less a sycophantic follower of Lenin.

The book's general accord with Lenin's organizational conclusions at every phase in the development of the Russian and international Marxist movement is so convincing precisely because Le Blanc takes an extremely critical approach. He considers the most important of questions about Lenin's practices that have been posed in the past, along with some new ones which he poses himself for the first time, and provides convincing answers—explaining why, in his view, Lenin's conceptions were in fact the most reasonable application of revolutionary Marxism on an organizational plane under the given circumstances. He also effectively debunks some of the myths that have grown up about Lenin, for example, that he held an "iron grip" over the party as a personal dictator; was intolerant of any disagreement; believed that the party, or its majority, or its leadership, were always right; etc.

One thing that helps Le Blanc in appreciating the depth and adaptability of Lenin's organizational conceptions is his own experience as an active revolutionist in the United

States, attempting to build a revolutionary Marxist party here that can accomplish the same thing that the Bolsheviks did in 1917. A new-left radical in the 1960s, Le Blanc joined the Socialist Workers Party in the '70s. As the leadership of that party degenerated, and began to openly revise the party's program during the 1980s, he became a supporter of the opposition within the SWP and, after his expulsion, became a member of Socialist Action.

As the disagreements among the different tendencies of expelled SWP members developed in the months after the mass purge in January 1984, Le Blanc at first sided—because of a convergence of political views—with the minority in SA which would ultimately go on to participate in the fusion that created Solidarity. He never joined Solidarity, however, and instead came to the conclusion that his experiences in SA and its minority tendency confirmed the importance of the programmatic perspectives being developed by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, which he joined in 1985.

Le Blanc has, therefore, had plenty of opportunity to think about the problems of party-building posed for Leninists in the U.S.A. under varying conditions. From his experience in a movement that rejected Leninism entirely he decided to join an organization that was, at the time, the only genuine application of it in this country. But the SWP during that period was already in a process of profound change, and on the verge of transforming itself into something quite different—an organization that became a caricature of Leninism. In Socialist Action Le Blanc found himself in a group that took the SWP's traditional *forms* of organization (including some of the caricatures) and elevated them to the level of political principle—falsely believing that the essence of Leninist organizational practice could be found in copying institutions and structures. The formation of Solidarity posed the essence of the Leninist organizational problem in still another form: To what extent can the political (i.e., principled and strategic questions) be subordinated to the purely organizational (i.e., problems of how to build a new group of necessarily disparate individuals)?

It is doubtful whether, without this personal experience, Le Blanc would have been able to develop the richness of Lenin's own thought as well as he has in this book. Ideas that are conquered through struggle always provide a more profound appreciation than those that are simply handed to us in the shape of easy-to-digest formulas.

Le Blanc ends his study at the time of Lenin's death, with some words in his final chapter about what happened afterwards—the victory of Stalin in the USSR and the Comintern, and the complete transformation of Lenin's organization into a counterrevolutionary bureaucratic apparatus. These events, and their social/political/organizational consequences are developed further by Ernest Mandel in his introduction to *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (more, therefore, by way of a postscript but no less valuable for that).

Any reader genuinely interested in Leninism and its practical application will find this study an important and thought-provoking contribution, which fills a significant gap in our appreciation of this great Marxist thinker and his approach to building the revolutionary party. ●

# Marxism and Liberation Theology

*Marxism and Liberation Theology*, by Michael Löwy. *Notebooks for Study and Research*, Number 10, 1988. Published by the International Institute for Research and Education, Amsterdam. 39 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by R. L. Huebner

Ever since Marx coined his frequently misunderstood phrase "religion is the opium of the people," Marxists and non-Marxists alike (including a host of anti-Marxists) have uncritically assumed that there existed a distinctive Marxist theory or sociology of religion. What in fact has existed for some time is, rather, a plethora of theories or analyses of religion from various Marxist perspectives—but no general theory as such. These so-called Marxist analyses of religion have ranged from the somewhat dogmatic and dreary accounts of German social democrats (e.g., Dietzgen, Bebel, Kautsky)<sup>1</sup> to the utterly inadequate and reductionistic accounts of vulgar Stalinists. Fortunately, there has existed another tradition within Marxist cultural studies which has included a rich analysis of religious movements and ideas. Antonio Gramsci, Ernest Bloch, Lucien Goldman, and Otto Maduro represent a different strain within historical materialist approaches to religion which recognizes the complex and, at times, paradoxical nature of religious movements.<sup>2</sup> Now adding to that tradition is the extremely useful and insightful account of Michael Löwy, *Marxism and Liberation Theology*.

It is time Marxists realize something *new* is happening. It is of *world historical* importance. A significant sector of the Church—both believers and clergy—in Latin America is in the process of changing its position in the field of the class struggle, and going over with its material and spiritual resources to the side of the working people and their fight for a new society.

So begins Löwy in his brief but perspicacious account of Latin American liberation theology. "All this," he argues, "signifies a theoretical and practical challenge to Marxists. It shows the shortcomings of the 'classic' Marxist conception of religion—especially in its vulgarized version, reduced to the materialism and anti-clericalism of the eighteenth century bourgeois philosophers." To meet the new challenge posed by the development of liberation theology and a revolutionary form of Christian praxis requires, according to Löwy, "a renewal of the Marxist analysis of religion." Löwy has begun that analysis (and renewal) in the present volume.

Beginning with a brief overview of various Marxist approaches to religion, Löwy self-consciously identifies himself as working within the tradition of Bloch and Goldman in the attempt to uncover the critical-utopian function of liberation theology. True to the critical method of Marxism, Löwy situates the origins of liberation theology both within the institutional framework of Catholicism and the larger social arena of class struggle in Latin America. Liberation theology

emerges in his account as a simultaneous response to the converging crisis of both the church and society in the 1950s and 60s. However, Löwy differs from most standard commentators on social movements and theology in Latin America by rejecting both bourgeois functionalist accounts of liberation theology's development as well as vulgar materialist or populist accounts.

The process of radicalization of Latin American Catholic culture which has led to liberation theology did not start, top-down, from the upper reaches of the Church, as the functionalist analysis pointing to the hierarchy's search for influence would suggest, nor from the bottom up, as argued by certain "populist" interpretations, but *from the periphery to the center*.

Central to that periphery was a growing and radicalizing sector of priests and lay pastors brought into closer contact with various "communities of the oppressed." Their attempt to address the needs of the masses forced them to confront the social and economic origins of oppression and exploitation. This in turn required a greater openness to the social sciences in general and Marxism in particular.

The phenomenal growth of "Base Christian Communities" amongst popular sectors of the rural and urban poor throughout Latin America and the development of liberation theology forced the church to reevaluate its historical role in the Southern hemisphere. In 1979, after decades of struggle within the church, the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) at Puebla, Mexico, defined the church's position vis-a-vis Latin American social reality as a "preferential option for the poor." In that same year hundreds of thousands of Christians would participate in the revolutionary struggle that overthrew Somoza in Nicaragua. The Sandinista National Liberation Front acknowledged the role of radical believers in its *Declaration on Religion*:

Christians have been an integral part of our revolutionary history to a degree unprecedented in any other revolutionary movement in Latin America and possibly the world. . . . Our experience has shown that it is possible to be both a believer and a committed revolutionary at the same time, and that there is no irreconcilable contradiction between the two.

Löwy writes that in Nicaragua "a new slogan was born, that the Sandinista crowds would chant again and again: *Entre Cristianismo y Revolución no hay contradicción!* [Between Christianity and revolution there is no contradiction!]."

The convergence of revolutionary forces and radicalized Christian believers in Nicaragua is not an isolated event. Löwy traces the influence of liberation theology in Brazil and El Salvador as well. In fact, one can find the development of "theologies of liberation" throughout the neocolonial world today. In Asia and Africa as well as Central and South

America, people of faith have found resources in their religious traditions that provide, at once, both a theological and normative critique of dependent capitalist societies and moral legitimacy for active involvement in revolutionary struggles.

But this should come as no surprise to Marxists. The objective interest of subordinate classes in achieving maximal autonomy in relation to dominating classes necessitates the struggle to achieve cultural autonomy—including religious autonomy. Liberation theology is a system of religious thought and practice that both favors and advances the objective interests of dominated classes. In cultural situations where religion continues to play a decisive role in the lives of popular classes, it will increasingly become a weapon in the class struggle. As Michael Löwy writes: “In many countries of Latin America the revolution will either be

made with the participation of Christians or will not be made at all!” ●

## NOTES

1. Joseph Dietzgen, “The Religion of Social Democracy,” *Philosophical Essays* (Chicago, 1912); August Bebel, *Christentum Und Sozialismus* (Berlin, 1901); Karl Kautsky’s work on religion is uneven. His *Foundations of Christianity* is far less problematic and confused than is his work on primitive religions and the Reformation.

2. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith (London, 1971); Ernest Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity* (New York, 1972); *Principles of Hope*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1986); *Man on His Own* (New York, 1973); Lucien Godman, *The Hidden God* (London, 1964); Otto Maduro, *Religion and Class Conflicts* (Maryknoll, NY 1982). For perhaps the most important contemporary North American treatment of liberation theology see John R. Pottenger’s *The Political Theory of Liberation Theology* (New York, 1989).

# Pathfinder Mural—Masses Take a Back Seat

by Roy Rollin

If art is indeed the mirror of society, as Marxists generally believe, then the Socialist Workers Party’s “Pathfinder Mural,” painted on the side of its West Street headquarters in Manhattan overlooking the West Side Highway and the Hudson River, is an apt reflection of the wholesale degeneration which that organization has undergone.

No doubt its creators fancy their work as being in the best traditions of “revolutionary art,” particularly the murals and frescoes done by Diego Rivera in the 1920s and 1930s. However, if any comparisons are to be made they would have to be with the Stalinist calling card of “socialist realism.” The mural depicts history as the work of a selected group of superhuman great leaders, the present inhabitants of the SWP’s revolutionary pantheon. Their larger-than-life portraits are being churned out of the Pathfinder printing press—the central unifying theme of the mural—and tower above the mere mortals who make up the demonstration of working people at the bottom of the wall. In this variant of the “great man” theory of history (there is only token female representation amongst the great portraits) the masses are presented as mere walk-ons, waiting to be summoned onto the stage of history.

One can only contrast this approach with the orientation of a Diego Rivera. In his frescoes, depictions of revolutionaries—ranging from Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, to Zapata (to name only a few)—abound. Yet not only are they depicted as flesh-and-blood human beings, warts and all, they are always to be found amongst the masses, not above and apart from them as larger than life demigods. They are equals, showing through common experience and action the

superiority of their program and perspectives and, in the process, earning the respect and support of the workers and peasants. This is a process which is entirely alien to the consciousness of the present leaders of the SWP—whether it be in a painting or in a factory.

Much in the same vein, early Soviet poster art rarely focused on Bolshevik leaders. The hero-worship and substitutionism such “art” encourages had long been a *bête noire* within the Russian radical and workers’ movement. Indeed, this was something that Lenin and the Bolsheviks had actually fought against as part of the struggle to build a movement and, after October, a society in which working people could begin to actively control their own destinies. If anyone was to be seen as an Atlas, capable of holding up (or, better still, overturning) the world, it was the workers, peasants, and soldiers themselves—not Lenin or any other Soviet leader. Early Russian satirical art included far-from-flattering cartoons of the Bolshevik tops—something that would become unthinkable in Stalinist Russia, where not only were Trotsky and other victims of Stalin’s frame-ups erased from history, but also the pockmarks of “The Great Father of the People,” Joseph Stalin.

The Pathfinder Mural, with its hero-worship mentality, is an artistic monument to the same kind of bureaucratic approach to history and politics that brought us the “leading role of the party”—which the masses of workers in Eastern Europe and the USSR are today so magnificently wiping from the face of the earth through their own collective self-activity. ●

## Protest the Desecration of the Pathfinder Mural

On December 20 vandals splashed paint on the recently completed Pathfinder Mural on West Street in Manhattan. The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* joins with the many citizens of New York and others who have condemned this affront to the right of free speech and free expression in our society.

## F.I.T. DIRECTORY

- Bay Area: P.O. Box 971, Berkeley, CA 94701
- Boston: Mary Scully, 56 Prince St. #3, Boston, MA 02113
- Cincinnati: Kate Curry, 1136 Franklin Ave., Apt 1, Cincinnati, OH 45237
- Cleveland: George Chomalou, 4671 Dalebridge Rd. #202, Cleveland, OH 44128
- Kansas City: P.O. Box 30127 Plaza Station, Kansas City, MO 64112

- Los Angeles: P.O. Box 480410, Los Angeles, CA 90048
- New York: P.O. Box 1947, New York, NY 10009
- Pacific Northwest: P.O. Box 17512, Seattle, WA 98107-1212
- Philadelphia: P.O. Box 28838, Philadelphia, PA 19151
- Pittsburgh: Paul Le Blanc, 840 Heberton, Pittsburgh, PA 15206
- Twin Cities: P.O. Box 14444, University Station, Minneapolis, MN 55414
- Washington D.C.: C. Faatz, P.O. Box 25279, Washington, D.C. 20007

### Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

\_\_ 1 year: \$24 \_\_ 6 months: \$15 \_\_ 3-month intro: \$5

- With an introductory 3-month subscription, receive a free copy of the pamphlet "Organizing for Socialism, The Fourth Internationalist Tendency – Who we are, What we stand for" (a \$1.00 value), by Bill Onasch.
- With a 6-month or 1-year subscription, receive a free copy of "A Year of Decision for U.S. Labor – The Hormel Strike and Beyond," by Dave Riehle and Frank Lovell (a \$2.50 value).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Write *Bulletin IDOM*, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009

### International Viewpoint

A unique fortnightly magazine with news and analysis of the international class struggle from a revolutionary Marxist perspective, published in Europe.

\_\_ 1 year: \$47 \_\_ 6 months: \$25

- With a 6-month or 1-year subscription, receive a free copy of "A Tribute to George Breitman – Writer, Organizer, Revolutionary," edited by Naomi Allen and Sarah Lovell (a \$5.00 value).

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Write *International Viewpoint*, P.O. Box 1824, New York, NY 10009

## **BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS FROM THE F.I.T.**

---

*Upheaval in China!* by Tom Barrett and Xiao Dian \$1.00

*A Tribute to George Breitman: Writer, Organizer, Revolutionary*, Edited by Naomi Allen and Sarah Lovell \$5.00

\* \* \* \* \*

### **MATERIALS FOR A HISTORY OF TROTSKYISM IN THE UNITED STATES:**

*Trotskyism in America, the First Fifty Years*, by Paul Le Blanc \$3.50

*Organizational Principles and Practices*, Edited with an introduction by Evelyn Sell \$3.50

*Revolutionary Traditions of American Trotskyism*, Edited with an introduction by Paul Le Blanc \$5.00

\* \* \* \* \*

*The Rocky Road to the Fourth International, 1933-38*, by George Breitman \$1.50

*Organizing for Socialism: The Fourth Internationalist Tendency—Who we are, What we stand for*, by Bill Onasch \$1.00

*Trends in the Economy—Marxist Analyses of Capitalism in the Late 1980s*, by Carol McAllister, Steve Bloom, and Ernest Mandel \$3.00

*Don't Strangle the Party*, by James P. Cannon \$1.25

*American Elections and the Issues Facing Working People*, by Paul Le Blanc, Bill Onasch, Tom Barrett, and Evelyn Sell \$5.00

*Leon Trotsky and the Organizational Principles of the Revolutionary Party*  
by Paul Le Blanc, Dianne Feeley, and Tom Twiss \$5.00

*Permanent Revolution in Nicaragua*, by Paul Le Blanc \$3.00

*A Year of Decision for U.S. Labor—The Hormel Strike and Beyond*,  
by Dave Riehle and Frank Lovell \$2.50

*The Trenton Siege by the Army of Unoccupation*, by George Breitman \$1.75

*The Transitional Program—Forging a Revolutionary Agenda for the United States*, by Evelyn Sell, Steve Bloom, and Frank Lovell, Introduction by Paul Le Blanc \$4.00

*Platform of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency* \$.75

---

**ORDER FROM:**  
**F.I.T., P.O. Box 1947,**  
**NY, NY 10009**

---

## **New from the F.I.T.:**

---

**Our Bodies!**  
**Our Choice!**  
**The Fight for Reproductive Rights**  
by Evelyn Sell

\$1.00

Order from: F.I.T., P.O. Box 1947, N.Y., NY 10009