

# Bulletin in Defense of Marxism

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## Who We Are

The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* is published monthly (except for a combined July-August issue) by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. We have dedicated this journal to the process of clarifying the program and theory of revolutionary Marxism—of discussing its application to the class struggle both internationally and here in the United States. This vital task must be undertaken if we want to forge a political party in this country capable of bringing an end to the domination of the U.S. imperialist ruling class and of establishing a socialist society based on human need instead of private greed.

FIT members and supporters are involved in a broad range of working class struggles and protest movements in the U.S. We are activists in unions, women's rights groups, antiracist organizations, coalitions opposed to U.S. intervention, student formations, and lesbian and gay rights campaigns. We help organize support for oppressed groups here and abroad—such as those challenging apartheid in South Africa and bureaucratic rule in China, Eastern Europe, and the USSR. We participate in the global struggle of working people and their allies through our ties with the world organization of revolutionary socialists—the Fourth International.

The FIT was created in the winter of 1984 by members expelled from the Socialist Workers Party because they opposed abandoning the Trotskyist principles and methods on which the SWP was founded and built for more than half a century. We tried to win the SWP back to a revolutionary Marxist perspective, and called for the reunification of Fourth Internationalists in the U.S. through readmission to the party of all who had been expelled in the anti-Trotskyist purge. The continuing degeneration of the SWP reached a qualitative turning point when it formally severed fraternal relations with the Fourth International in June of 1990. Our central task now is to reconstitute a united U.S. sympathizing section of the Fourth International from among all those in this country who remain loyal to the FI's program and organization as well as through the recruitment of workers, students, Blacks, women, and other activists who can be won to a revolutionary internationalist outlook.

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# Forging Unity in the Mideast Anti-Intervention Movement

by Steve Bloom

There has been a groundswell of anti-intervention activity in the United States since George Bush deployed troops to the Middle East. For example, in New York, on September 13, a protest meeting was organized at Cooper Union by the local Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East. The meeting, with Ramsey Clark as a featured speaker, drew an overflow crowd estimated at around 2,000 people. A similar number showed up for a teach-in at the University of California Berkeley campus one day later on September 14.

Picket lines and rallies have been held all across the country—numbering in the hundreds, or thousands, depending on the city. On October 20, simultaneous nationally coordinated protests are planned in many cities. The local coalitions organizing these actions have received hundreds of endorsements from individuals and groups from many different political points of view.

Still, a serious problem has arisen for the movement. While many local groups and coalitions, like the one in New York that sponsored the Cooper Union meeting, have a clear-cut focus, demanding the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Persian Gulf, others have insisted that the movement must also oppose Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. On September 18 a national meeting was held in New York which created the "National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East." It adopted a condemnation of Iraq as part of its founding political platform.

## Behind the September 18 National Meeting

The forces that organized the September 18 meeting included many of the traditional peace and disarmament groups in the U.S.—Mobilization for Survival, the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, the War Resisters League, etc. They, and others who agree with their point of view, argued during the discussion at the meeting that without a strong statement of opposition to the Iraqi invasion and annexation, the movement in this country will be unable to reach the American people. These same forces also tended to look to the United Nations as a force which can effectively bring peace and justice to the Middle East.

Others at the meeting disagreed. They argued that a condemnation of the Iraqi invasion would divert the focus from U.S. imperialism and would exclude people from a national effort to organize against the war—since there were many in the anti-intervention movement who feel that this is neither necessary nor appropriate. In fact, during the morning session of the meeting, when the largest and most representative group was present, the body voted several times, by at least a two-to-one margin, in favor of dropping any language condemning Iraq from the program of the group. The chair, however, did not recognize these votes as decisive, insisting instead on further discussion. Much later in the day, after the meeting was already scheduled to have adjourned and many people had left, a vote in favor of the condemnation was carried.

The proposals concerning the United Nations were also controversial. The U.N. is, after all, the very vehicle that the United States is using as political cover for its intervention into the

region—just as it was the cover for the U.S. invasion of Korea in the 1950s. Our movement should express no confidence whatsoever in the U.N. That organization has never had any real independence from the imperialist powers, and this fact is underlined today by the willingness of Gorbachev and the old Warsaw Pact countries to go along with whatever Washington asks. We can be sure that any solution to the present Mideast crisis engineered by the U.N. will not be in the interests of the peoples of the region.

It became clear during the course of the discussions on September 18—despite the appearance of an open discussion about demands and slogans—that the organizers of the gathering had come there *determined* to put together a national coalition which would express its condemnation of Iraq. No other decision would be accepted. At one point, Dave McReynolds of the War Resisters League stated it bluntly when he took the floor. He explained that if the morning session decided to reject a condemnation of Iraq, or if it even decided to table the question to another day, then his organization would not return to the meeting after lunch. It was obvious that he was speaking not only for himself, but for a substantial wing of those present.

## An Unnecessary Split

The result of this is a clear organizational and political split in the Mideast anti-intervention movement. This was unnecessary, and could have been avoided. The movement will now have to work very hard to keep it from having extremely negative effects.

The responsibility for this split lies with those who have stated their absolute refusal to participate in any coalition that does not condemn Iraq. The demand, "U.S. Out of the Middle East," need not inherently exclude anyone who wants to raise other aspects of a broader political program. There has been no effort in the New York coalition, for example, to stop those who want to explain their opposition to Iraq's annexation of Kuwait from doing so. This point of view was put forward from the platform on September 13. But anyone who does not agree with a condemnation of Iraq *will* find it difficult to participate in a national coalition that formally makes this issue a central part of its platform.

Therefore, unity can only be forged around the one central demand that everyone in the movement agrees with: "U.S. Troops Out!" We will simply have to agree to disagree on other things. Everyone must have the right to express one's own particular point of view on any and every question at demonstrations—on leaflets, signs, and banners—and all perspectives, so long as they oppose U.S. intervention in the Persian Gulf, should be included on the speakers' platform during rallies. Different viewpoints should also be given time at teach-ins and other educational events. That is the basis on which the movement can unite and move forward.

It is unfortunate that those who want to condemn Iraq could not bring themselves to participate in a united national coalition based on such an approach. But given the fact that they have insisted on their own national coalition, a broader unity—between their coalition and the other forces in the movement—can still be achieved

in action. All who oppose U.S. intervention in the Persian Gulf must agree to mobilize our forces together, on the same day, even if we respond to the call of different coalitions and march under different banners. Both wings of the movement should be listed as cosponsors of events and represented with speakers at rallies and other activities.

For our part, the Fourth Internationalist Tendency will make clear that the position we support is defense of Iraq against the aggressive war policies of U.S. imperialism. But we will also make clear that we distinguish this from giving any support whatever to Saddam Hussein against the Iraqi and other Arab masses. To the contrary, we support the overthrow of the brutal, dictatorial Hussein regime and its replacement by a workers' government in Iraq.

It is an extremely positive sign that the September 18 meeting agreed to endorse and support the October 20 actions, since they were initiated by forces which disagree with raising the "Iraq out of Kuwait" idea. Further united efforts will have to be organized in the future. For this to happen, both wings of the movement must recognize that they do not, and cannot, speak for the movement as a whole. They will have to work actively to coordinate their efforts and bring about an ongoing series of united events.

### Importance of Democracy

One key element in all of this, for both national and local coalitions, will be the question of democracy. In the end, mechanisms must be put in place whereby rank-and-file activists

and all organizations that are part of the coalitions will be able to make the fundamental decisions about how the fight against U.S. troops in the Mideast should be organized.

In an important sense, the September 18 meeting—by refusing to abide by the original majority decision to drop language condemning Iraq—violated an elementary aspect of such democracy. In a different sense, however, those forces who insist that they want to organize a coalition that will include this condemnation have every right to do so. What they should not have done was pretend that they were organizing an open meeting, where the delegates who came would have a right to discuss and decide this and other programmatic questions. People should have been informed in advance that basic elements of the program were predetermined, and those who disagreed would then have been able to make an informed decision about whether they wanted to attend the meeting on that basis.

But problems with democratic functioning are not limited to the "condemn Iraq" wing of the movement. They also exist, for example, in the New York Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East. Two well-attended general meetings of the coalition have been held to date, with well over 100 people present at each one. Extremely limited time was allotted at these meetings for an open discussion of issues facing the movement. No votes were taken on any question. Decisions about what will appear on leaflets, who will speak at rallies, etc. (even the agendas for the meetings themselves), had all been made in advance, with neither rank-and-file activists nor representatives of most of the

## Grass Roots Opposition Grows to Gulf War

Organized opposition to U.S. intervention in the Persian Gulf has grown dramatically over the last months. New coalitions have been formed in many cities which, along with existing groups, have organized demonstrations, teach-ins, and press conferences.

October 20, a national day of protest called by the New York Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East, is a focus for much of this local organizing. Events are planned in at least 13 major U.S. cities, including New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Boston, Hartford, Atlanta, Houston, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Solidarity actions in other countries will also take place.

The September 18 meeting in New York City, called to establish the National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East, had representatives of coalitions from Chicago, Los Angeles, Portland, Austin, San Diego, Philadelphia, New York, Milwaukee, Burlington, New Haven, Washington D.C., Seattle, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Tucson, Berkeley,

San Francisco, Syracuse, and Boston—as well as one representing the state of Florida.

To date the largest events, numbering in the thousands, have taken place in New York and the San Francisco Bay area. But many other cities have organized events. In Minneapolis/St. Paul two teach-ins each drew between 150 and 200 people. In Cleveland, the Committee Against U.S. War in the Persian Gulf held a town meeting that attracted 100 on September 22. The Burlington Peace and Justice Coalition organized a speak-out of 100 on August 22. Educational forums have also been held in Austin, Milwaukee, Seattle, and San Diego.

Demonstrations drawing in hundreds have taken place in most major U.S. cities, including Tucson, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Los Angeles, San Diego, New York, San Francisco, Baltimore, Cleveland, Portland, Chicago, and Milwaukee. In other cities, such as Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and New Haven, smaller weekly vigils of protest have occurred.

An important feature of the current protests is the opposition of members of the armed forces. Requests for counseling have increased dramatically, according to reports. Two marines, Eric Larsen and Jeffrey Paterson, have both publicly refused to be sent to Saudi Arabia, and have publicized their opposition to the war at rallies and in the press.

Equally significant is the participation of people of color in the teach-ins and speak-outs. In Berkeley, Carlos Munoz, professor at the University of California and an organizer of the 1970 Chicano moratorium against the Vietnam war, condemned U.S. military intervention in the Persian Gulf. In the New York City teach-in, prominent speakers included Black social worker Ella Horne and John Jones, a Black combat veteran of Vietnam and leader of a New Jersey housing coalition. African Americans also spoke out at the Cleveland town meeting.

Compiled by Michael Livingston

coalition's component organizations having the opportunity to make their voices heard. Neither of these meetings had an opportunity to vote for, or ratify, a coalition steering committee or leadership. Although the group has raised the right demands and has correctly maintained a mass action perspective—and this has limited the impact of these problems of democratic functioning so far—in the long run the coalition will restrict its political effectiveness if it continues to function in such a manner.

The importance of real democracy in the movement is one of the lessons that activists today can learn from the struggle against the Vietnam war during the late 1960s and early '70s. During that effort, periodic, democratic decision-making conferences were held on a national scale to plan events. Every activist who attended had voice and vote. In between conferences the broadest possible steering committee, or continuations committee, was put together, open to a range of views. Similar types of democratic decision-making mechanisms were organized on a regional, local, and even campus-wide basis.

The sense of participation that every opponent of the war gained as a result of this was one of the real factors that gave the anti-Vietnam war movement its breadth and strength. We will need a similar breadth and strength if we are to effectively build a movement today to oppose U.S. aggression against the peoples of the Middle East.

### Other Issues Facing the Movement

Closely related to the issue of the United Nations, mentioned earlier, is the whole problem of negotiations as a road to "peace." Both wings of the movement have raised slogans which talk favorably about negotiations: "Support for peaceful diplomatic efforts to end the Gulf crisis" (New York Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention), "Diplomatic and peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflicts with the help of the United Nations, the Arab nations, and other international bodies" (National Campaign for Peace in the Middle East).

Negotiations between various forces may, of course, play a role in settling this conflict as they have in the past. Nevertheless, it is a mistake for activists in the U.S. to call for negotiations or to give them any political support. Whatever the formalities of the situation—whether it turns out to be Arab states sitting down to talk with each other, or negotiating directly with the imperialist powers, or with the U.N. acting as a "mediator"—the fact is that under current conditions the United States armed presence will be the real controlling power at the negotiating table. That is unacceptable.

The U.S. government has no right whatever to negotiate—or to influence negotiations about—the future of the Arab East or any other part of the world. To call for negotiations while U.S. troops remain implies that we think Washington *should* be part of the process. In the end Arab leaders may be forced to negotiate with George Bush or with the U.N. If they are put in such a position they have every right to pursue such negotiations. But *our* demand should simply be for the U.S. government to get out. We are opposed to Washington's participation, explicitly or implicitly, in any negotiations. In fact, if activists in the U.S. simply take a clear principled position that the U.S. must unconditionally withdraw all its military forces, that will put the most pressure on the government to look toward a process of negotiations, rather than unleashing a murderous and destructive war.

The Palestinian issue and Israeli expansionism also lie at the center of the Persian Gulf dispute. The present anti-intervention

movement creates an opening to expose imperialism's sheer hypocrisy and the blatant double standard applied by those who piously wrap themselves in "international law." In the case of Kuwait, the U.N. condemned Iraq's occupation and annexation and approved U.S. military intervention along with harsh economic sanctions. By contrast, Israel's 23-year-old occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory is rewarded with extensive military and economic aid to the Zionist state by successive U.S. governments.

There is a greater opportunity now to educate people in the U.S. about the Palestinian cause and to make links between activists in this country and the Palestinian movement. One of the most effective ways this can be done is by inviting Palestinian speakers to rallies, teach-ins, and mass actions where they can explain their struggle and its relation to the present crisis.

On the domestic front, both wings of the movement have linked the fight against troops in the Middle East with the lack of essential government services and programs here in the U.S. This is a powerful argument in our antiwar arsenal. The renewed U.S. spending on war and militarism comes after hopes were raised earlier this year of a "peace dividend" to improve the conditions of life enjoyed by people in this country. Though the capitalist politicians never had any intention of increasing spending on social programs, the widespread talk along these lines deepens the present sense of betrayal felt by many.

### Good Prospects

A significant opportunity now exists for organizing against the U.S. war moves in the Persian Gulf. The movement has started out on the proper footing by keeping its focus on mass actions—demonstrations, rallies, picket lines, teach-ins, etc.—with a clear demand for complete and immediate U.S. withdrawal.

Right now this demand is supported only by a small minority in the U.S. Even among those who have been part of the peace and anti-intervention movements in the past—for example, around Vietnam and Central America—a significant number have failed to speak out against Bush's policy in the Mideast. Some have even given it their support. But even if this "national consensus" supporting the use of troops in the Persian Gulf may be widespread at the moment, it nevertheless remains extremely shallow. The underlying cynicism about politicians and big oil, deepening economic problems in this country, the reactionary nature of the Saudi and Kuwaiti governments which George Bush is preparing to go to war for, and the general antiwar sentiment that continues as the legacy of Vietnam, are all at work—undermining support for the present policy.

It does not require much probing to see these factors bubbling to the surface of public opinion even now—especially working class public opinion, or in the Black and Latino communities. In the event of an actual war, there is a question whether Bush will continue to enjoy support for his aggressive Mideast policy. The October 1 *New York Times*, for example, reports the results of a recent poll which found that "9 out of 10 Americans are not ready for their country to start a war."

It took forces in the U.S. which opposed the Vietnam war several years to win majority support for our views. By contrast, the factors mentioned above give the Persian Gulf antiwar movement a potential for much more rapid growth. A united anti-intervention movement, through education and mass action, can help erode Bush's support in a hurry, and possibly even prevent the outbreak of a U.S. war against the Arab masses in the Middle East. □

# U.S. Labor and the Persian Gulf Crisis

by Richard Scully

U.S. workers were not consulted, but the AFL-CIO's president has thrown the federation's support behind U.S. imperialism's aggressive war in the Persian Gulf. In a front-page article in the September 3 *AFL-CIO News*, Lane Kirkland pledged the federation's backing for "the commitment of all necessary resources to strengthen and sustain" U.S. troops in the Middle East. Echoing George Bush's rhetoric, Kirkland said that "the sons and daughters of working Americans once again are on the firing line in the defense of vital interest of the free world."

Other news items in the same issue of the paper show how the U.S. government, the leader of this "free world," is dealing with workers at home. Here's what they say:

- "The government has not acted to correct the problems of health care."
- "Federal employee unions blasted the Bush administration for releasing an alternative pay plan that contains only a 3.5 percent pay raise for federal employees, and for threatening to lay off government workers because of the impasse in budget negotiations."
- "With President Bush's actions today, federal workers' salaries are now, on average, 30.24 percent behind their counterparts in the private sector."
- The Steelworkers union "unanimously adopted a task force report on freedom and democracy that urges reform of labor laws in the United States and Canada to protect the right to strike and the right to organize and to promote democracy in the workplace." (The *AFL-CIO News* points out that the Striker Replacement [scab] bill is still in committee. Even if Congress were to adopt it, Bush is certain to veto it.)
- The National Association of Letter Carriers president Vincent R. Sombrotto expressed that union's "outrage over the president's veto of Hatch Act reform legislation and the administration's effort to force NALC out of the government's health benefits program."
- "The Laborers union declared an Occupational Safety and Health Administration proposal to delete regulation of worker exposure to

tremolite, anthophyllite, and actinolite fibers from the agency's asbestos standard is 'scientifically flawed' and 'impractical.'"

AFL-CIO unions are in sharp conflict with the Bush administration's policies at home over wages, benefits, health care, safety, the right to strike, and the right of public workers to participate in political activity. But the national leadership calls for all-out support for the Bush administration's Persian Gulf policies because these supposedly are "in the defense of vital interest of the free world."

During the Vietnam war, George Meany, Kirkland's predecessor as AFL-CIO president, articulated the rationale for the labor leadership's support for U.S. foreign policy, with all its imperialist wars of aggression and military intervention. In a May 3, 1965, speech to the federation's Building and Construction Trades Department, Meany said:

It is up to all of us, on affairs outside the boundaries of this nation, to have one policy. We can disagree in here, but we cannot disagree outside the boundaries of the nation, and have an effective foreign policy.

So I urge you in your own communities to follow the AFL-CIO position, to back up the commander-in-chief. There is no other way for freedom to survive.

This idea that workers, the bosses, and the bosses' government are all one big happy family when it comes to foreign policy has been challenged somewhat by sections of the labor movement over the issues of aid to the Nicaraguan contras and support for El Salvador's antilabor death squad government. But the "support the president" theme is being widely promulgated in labor's ranks today as the bureaucracy goes all-out on behalf of Bush's Persian Gulf policies.

## What About the Ranks?

With congressional bipartisan unity behind U.S. intervention policies in the Persian Gulf, the endorsement of those policies by the labor officialdom, the daily bombardment by the media, and the whipping up of war fever in the country, it is understandable why few organized workers have to date joined antiwar activities. But their support for U.S. military action in the gulf is fragile and subject to erosion as the situation unfolds.

U.S. workers do not have to be told that the oil monopolies are deeply involved and that they are profiteering from the crisis. Workers see this firsthand every time they buy gas. And they don't like it. Nor is there a "red menace" in the picture, which has hitherto been used as an argument for workers to sacrifice their living standards without protest.

As prices soar, layoffs mount, and budget cuts eat further into social programs, workers will ask more and more how the government can afford the billions it is spending in the Persian Gulf (not to mention the billions for the public bailout of private savings and loan companies) when it says it doesn't have money to deal with workers' needs and social services at home.

The unease with the U.S. military buildup in the Persian Gulf is also keenly felt by hundreds of thousands of working families who have someone in the region facing death if shooting actually starts. And just as in Vietnam, there will be a disproportionate number of Black and Latino casualties once the killing commences, which helps explain why polls show far less support for Bush's policies among those sectors.

In the final analysis, it is the working class which has the potential power to stop U.S. imperialism in its tracks. That is why it is essential to approach trade unionists and urge them to join the antiwar cause. This was done at New York City's huge Labor Day march, when activists with the Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East distributed to all union contingents leaflets calling for "No Vietnam War in the Middle East." Leafleteers reported a positive response.

Here and there individual labor leaders at various levels are speaking up against the rush to war with Iraq. The Coalition to Stop U.S. Intervention in the Middle East, based in New York City, was able to get ten local union presidents plus a slew of other officers to endorse the October 20 antiwar demonstrations. Referring to the struggles of working people in the United States, Richard Trumka, president of the United Mine Workers of America, said on Labor Day, "It is not the war in Saudi Arabia, but it is a class war—the kind of war that is being fought at Eastern Airlines and Greyhound" (*Militant* 9/14/90).

(Continued on page 8)

# Is There Any Progressive Content to Iraq's Invasion and Annexation of Kuwait?

by Steve Bloom and Tom Barrett

In the last issue of this magazine Samuel Adams and Dave Riehle take issue with Tom Barrett's article on the Mideast crisis in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 77. They object in particular to the characterization of the Iraqi invasion and annexation of Kuwait as "unjustifiable" and Barrett's comment, "We must . . . call upon Iraq to remove its troops from Kuwait and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty."

The position taken by Adams and Riehle is based on a number of stated or implied theses: First, they argue that Iraq's action and Hussein's willingness to confront the USA constitute a step forward for Arab unity and self-determination, one which has mobilized the masses of Palestinian and other Arab peoples and moved their thinking in the direction of a clearer class consciousness. Second, they draw an analogy between the ouster of the Kuwaiti government and the overthrow in the 1950s of "feudal monarchies in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya"—saying that all of these constitute historic advances for the Arab people. And third, they contend that Iraq's continued occupation of Kuwait, in the context of the U.S. intervention, is an act of self-defense against imperialism that deserves our support.

If Adams and Riehle were right about even one of these things, they might have a legitimate argument for their point of view. They are, however, mistaken on all counts.

### Hussein and Arab Self-Determination

The fight of the Arab peoples for unity and self-determination is a progressive struggle which revolutionary Marxists support. This does *not*, however, mean that we support any and every action which is carried out in the name of Arab unity and self-determination—even, or especially, if masses of people have illusions about what is at stake. The revolutionary workers' movement has to make its own objective judgment: does the action in question truly advance in this direction? In this case the answer is no.

Self-determination is a basic democratic right. It can be exercised only by peoples who have been able to free themselves, at least to a significant degree, from coercion and outside pressure. The main obstacle to the self-determination of oppressed peoples around the world is, of course, imperialist military and economic power. But this is not the only thing that stands in the way. The neocolonial governments that rule in the third world, often in dictatorial fashion, constitute a formidable obstacle to self-determination, one that must be overthrown before a real fight against imperialism can even be started.

The absolute, brutal, dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein represents just such an obstacle to Arab self-determination. It is no ally of that struggle. Hussein denies any and all

democratic rights to the Iraqi people. He is unlikely to become the champion of democratic rights for the Arab peoples as a whole. No Arabs, not even Iraqis, voted for the annexation of Kuwait. That action was decided on unilaterally by Hussein himself, and his decision does not bring true Arab unity and self-determination one day closer. In fact, its practical effects will move that goal further into the misty future.

Hussein's pan-Arab nationalist rhetoric is simply a cover for an expansionist, Iraqi-nationalist, ideology. He is incapable of carrying his ideology through to the end, of course, because Iraq will never be able to compete with the real bully boys of imperialism. But that does not change its reactionary content, nor the reactionary consequences of Hussein's invasion and annexation of Kuwait.

Our attitude toward Hussein's pan-Arab posturing must be similar to the approach we take toward George Bush's hypocritical pronouncements about democracy and freedom in the Middle East. We are for democracy and freedom, but George Bush is a fraud—as demonstrated most recently by the U.S. invasions of Grenada and Panama, and its decade-long war against the people of Nicaragua. We are for pan-Arab unity against imperialism, but Saddam Hussein is a fraud—as demonstrated by his eagerness to accept U.S. and other imperialist aid during the recent war against Iran. Hussein's present military adventure is undertaken solely for the private enrichment of the Iraqi capitalist state at the expense of Kuwait. It has no progressive content whatsoever.

Significant illusions—in the Arab world and elsewhere—have been generated not only by Hussein's rhetoric but also by the fact that he has chosen to directly confront imperialism in the present crisis. The invasion by imperialist troops has stimulated mass actions in the Middle East. But it stretches things considerably to assert, as Adams and Riehle do, that "The Arab masses see more clearly than before who their enemies are and they are learning from this experience to think more along class lines." How can this be true if any significant number have come to believe that Saddam Hussein is their friend?

The Arab revolution, if it is to be successful, will require considerably more than anti-imperialist rhetoric and self-serving military incursions by Arab dictators. It will require the overthrow of the Saddam Husseins of the region as well as the emirs of Kuwait. Anything that cuts across this understanding cannot help the Arab masses to "think more along class lines."

It is not even true, as Adams and Riehle contend, that the Palestinian and other Arab peoples are universally in support of Iraq's actions. The September 5 issue of the Israeli publication *News From Within* prints the text of a leaflet issued by a number of prominent Palestinian leaders. It talks about "the

nonlegitimacy of the acquisition of land by force, and the unacceptability of resorting to military options in solving conflicts among states which may involve the occupation of sovereign states, including the continuing of Israeli occupation of Arab lands and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait." We would argue with such an absolute formulation of the question. But it shows that at least some on the Palestinian left understand the problems that exist when the military initiatives of Saddam Hussein—who is called the "Butcher of Baghdad" for good reason—become a rallying cry for the Palestinian cause.

### Capitalism vs. Feudalism

The second thesis on which Adams and Riehle base their argument is both simpler, and at the same time more difficult, than the question of Arab self-determination. This is because they do not actually state what they think, but only imply it through an analogy:

It was a historical advance that the pro-imperialist feudal monarchies in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya were overthrown in the 1950s and '60s. Their replacement by bourgeois nationalist regimes represented an advance in the struggle by the colonial Arab masses for self-determination. . . . It was also an objective advance that the artificial, comprador regime of the Kuwaiti oil sheiks has been abolished. It is possible to recognize this without giving any political support to the bourgeois regime of Saddam Hussein, just as it was necessary to support the nationalization of the U.S. oil companies in Mexico by the Cárdenas regime in the 1930s without giving support to the bourgeois government he headed.

Depending on what this paragraph intends to say, it is either completely mistaken from a simple, factual point of view—about the class character of the Kuwaiti regime—or else theoretically unacceptable.

The analogy between the ousting of the emir and the overthrow of "the pro-imperialist feudal monarchies in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya" implies that Adams and Riehle are basing their argument on a class difference between the emir's regime and the bourgeois government of Saddam Hussein. Only this could justify their assertion that the replacement of the emir by Hussein as Kuwait's ruler represents an "objective advance." But such a viewpoint is completely mistaken. Although the regimes of Saddam Hussein and the emir of Kuwait had different historical and social origins—one bourgeois and the other feudal—in the present-day context there is no fundamental class difference between them. The Kuwaiti ruling family is nothing more and nothing less than a group of capitalist oil barons. This has been the source of its wealth and power, not feudal social relations.

However, the use of the term "comprador" by Adams and Riehle to describe the emir's regime implies something else. This is a description Marxists give to *bourgeois* layers in a dependent country which are totally subservient to the interests of imperialism. And if Adams and Riehle understand the bourgeois nature of the Kuwaiti regime then they are making a more fundamental mistake. Because without any *class* difference between Hussein and the emir the analogy with events in Egypt, Iraq, and Libya breaks down. In a fight between two groups of Arab capitalists over the profits from Kuwaiti oil there is no stake whatsoever for the international working class

or the Arab masses. It is completely unacceptable, then, to describe the emir's ouster as some kind of "objective advance."

Despite what Adams and Riehle assert, it is *not* possible to acknowledge that the governments of both Iraq and Kuwait were bourgeois and *at the same time* support the overthrow of the emir by Hussein as an "objective advance" *without implying political support for Hussein's regime*. The analogy with Mexico does not hold up. In Mexico revolutionary Marxists supported an *anti-imperialist action* by a bourgeois government which *already held state power*. We did not—indeed, could not as a matter of principle—endorse *the taking of state power* by such a bourgeois government. In Kuwait, however, Adams and Riehle express support precisely for Hussein's *seizing of state power*, that is, the replacement of one bourgeois government by another. That is very dangerous stuff for revolutionary Marxists to start playing around with.

### For the Unconditional Defense of Iraq Against Imperialist Attack

We stand clearly for the defense of Iraq in any war between that country and imperialism. This is not a point of disagreement here. The problem, however, is how to best carry out such a defense.

No one has argued, and it would be difficult to do so, that the initial Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was any kind of act of self-defense against imperialism. It was an intra-Arab military intervention resulting from an argument over the price of oil. One could possibly contend, on the other hand, that the annexation—which occurred after the imperialist buildup—constitutes such an act of military self-defense. But this seems dubious. In what way does the continued presence of Iraqi troops in Kuwait, or the formal incorporation of that territory as part of Iraq, improve the chance of military success against an invasion by U.S. and other imperialist troops?

Iraq has little chance against a real U.S. military assault in either case. The main way in which Iraq can be defended against imperialism is political, not military—by mobilizing massive international public opinion against any imperialist adventure. Hussein's invasion and unilateral annexation cut across the possibilities for doing this.

### Kuwait! Self-Determination?

The issue in the present crisis cannot be posed in terms of Kuwaiti self-determination, though some have tried to approach the problem in this way. Kuwait as a separate nation-state is an artificial creation of imperialism, as indeed all of the present Arab countries are. The only Arab population that has a special claim to self-determination is the Palestinian community—as a direct result of Israeli oppression. Otherwise, the question has to be looked at as one of self-determination for the Arab masses as a whole.

But this logic applies equally to Iraq. Iraq has no more inherent right to annex Kuwait, though it has long claimed the territory, than Kuwait has to exist as a separate state. Kuwait emerged as a geographical entity—a British "protectorate"—around the turn of the century. The emir was part of a traditional native ruling caste and was not, in that sense, a purely artificial imposition of imperialism—as were the monarchs



placed in power in some of the other Arab nations. The British used the separation of Kuwait to full advantage, forcing Iraq to concede the formal independence of the oil-rich minstate when political instability threatened imperialist interests in the region. But to believe that Kuwait is, therefore, “rightly” part of Iraq, and that Hussein is somehow carrying out a progressive historical mandate by reunifying his country, is to give just as much legitimacy to the imperialist division of the Arab nation as any call for Kuwaiti self-determination.

### Slogans for Action and Political Positions

There was one formulation by Barrett that did contribute to confusion rather than help to clarify things. His article was written before we became aware of the emerging debate within the U.S. anti-intervention movement concerning demands: Should activists here “condemn Iraq” or even raise the slogan “Iraq Out of Kuwait” in addition to calling for “U.S. and Imperialist Troops Out of the Persian Gulf” (see article on page 1). In thinking the problem through after that discussion began, we could see that Barrett’s formulation, “We must . . . call upon Iraq to remove its troops from Kuwait and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty,” could easily be subject to misinterpretation.

We are completely opposed to any demand along these lines by the U.S. anti-intervention movement. A motion on this question was unanimously adopted by the delegates to the FIT national conference on September 1. It explained, “there are different viewpoints among anti-intervention activists about the Iraqi annexation. No one should be excluded from helping to organize around the central demand of ‘U.S. Out Now!’ More importantly, however, any call by the U.S. anti-intervention movement for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces would tend to be seen as putting qualifications on our demand for U.S. withdrawal—no matter what our intentions might be. That would create serious problems. Our demand for ‘U.S. Troops Out!’ must be unconditional; there cannot even appear to be a *quid pro quo* in this case.” (The full text of this motion appeared in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 78.)

Barrett’s comment was not intended to discuss slogans for action by anti-interventionists in this country but something different: what general attitude *revolutionary Marxists* should take toward the Iraqi invasion. We believe that Iraqi withdrawal would be in the broad interests of the Arab masses and of the international working class. We call for it in that sense only, and not at all in the sense of a slogan or demand to be raised in an agitational way.

Revolutionary Marxists should favor the withdrawal of Iraqi military forces from Kuwait—even though, under present circumstances, this would mean the restoration of the emir’s rule. There is simply no alternative if we really stand for the democratic rights of all of the Arab peoples. The ending of Hussein’s effort to impose his dictates on Kuwait would constitute a step toward the end of his dictatorial rule over the Iraqi people. And that, in turn, would contribute to the possibility of genuine self-determination in the region as a whole—toward the democratic fusion of Iraqi, Kuwaiti, and other Arab peoples.

Adams and Riehle misunderstand Barrett’s point on this. They argue against applying any “principle of sovereignty,” but no such principle was appealed to in Barrett’s article. The

point about the restoration of “Kuwaiti sovereignty” is simply a recognition of the present *contingent* reality. It is a consequence of the way things have worked out *in the present case* where there is no viable class or pan-Arab alternative to which we can appeal to take power in either Iraq or Kuwait.

Nevertheless, whatever legitimate confusion might have arisen because of specific formulations in Barrett’s article, the approach taken by Adams and Riehle—who see the Iraqi invasion as a positive, anti-imperialist event—should be rejected. Barrett was completely correct when he characterized Iraq’s military actions as “unjustifiable” from a proletarian internationalist point of view.

### Iraq’s Real Grievances

Those who support Iraq’s invasion and annexation of Kuwait can point to a number of legitimate Iraqi grievances against the Sabah regime. Some of them are cited in an “Opinion and Analysis” article by Arvind Akitante titled, “Don’t jump the gun on condemning Iraq” in the October 3 issue of the *Guardian*. All of the accusations Akitante makes against the Kuwaiti monarchy are true. Kuwait *has* slant-drilled to extract oil from the Rumailah oilfield, which is on Iraqi territory. Kuwait *does* insist on Iraqi repayment of its war debt, even though Kuwait was a strong supporter of Iraq’s invasion of Iran. Iraq *does* face a crushing debt burden imposed on it by imperialism—debt which could never have been repaid at the oil prices prevailing on August 2, when the invasion took place.

However, we must look a little deeper at this reality and ask: Who is the “aggrieved” party here? The answer is: the *Iraqi bourgeoisie*. These are the folks who have suffered because of Kuwait’s actions. Iraq is losing *money*, and for that reason Saddam Hussein, who is nothing more nor less than the Iraqi national bourgeoisie’s political representative, launched the war against Kuwait.

Since World War II military conflicts in the world have often been between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces. Radical activists can, in that context, sometimes forget that one of the worst forms of capitalist oppression is war itself—that is, the sending of working class youth against other working class youth, to kill and be killed in the interests of capitalist profits. It is one thing to take up arms in defense of national liberation or proletarian class interests, such as in Vietnam or Nicaragua. It is quite another to die because of the Iraqi bourgeoisie’s inability to meet its debt obligations. Yet that is all that is at stake in the conflict between Saddam Hussein and the emir of Kuwait.

### What About the Demands of the Imperialists?

What about the argument that an Iraqi withdrawal is precisely what the imperialists, too, are demanding? That cannot be decisive for us. This is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that the interests of the international working class have converged momentarily with formal demands made by the imperialists. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan springs to mind as another recent example. The Fourth International took a stand—though, it is true, with some confusion at the start—for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. The imperialists demanded the

same thing. A similar problem existed, in a somewhat different form, in the case of General Noriega in Panama. His rule conflicted with the interests of both Panamanian working people and U.S. imperialism.

What distinguishes a revolutionary Marxist approach from that of the imperialist governments in such situations is the way we propose to bring about a solution to the problem. The imperialists insist on imposing their wishes by military force—either directly with their own forces (as in the Mideast or Panama) or indirectly through the arming of others (in a case like Afghanistan). We insist, to the contrary, that the imperialists have no right whatsoever to intervene, that they keep their bloody hands off. We fight for a resolution of the problem that involves the democratic participation of the masses of those peoples directly involved.

This is not a small difference. As long as the revolutionary Marxist movement in this country and around the world is in the forefront of those organizing visible public protests to demand “U.S. out of the Middle East” (or “U.S. Hands Off Panama” or “No Aid to the Afghan Guerrillas”), no one can possibly confuse our approach with that of George Bush.

## What Is at Stake In This Discussion?

We doubt whether there is any question of basic principle involved in the difference between what we have written here and the general line of the article by Adams and Riehle. What we are discussing is a legitimate disagreement among working class revolutionaries—a disagreement over our assessment of specific facts and the weight we give those facts in our overall analysis.

What we decide on this question is, nevertheless, important. While we all agree on the kind of movement we need to build in opposition to Bush’s intervention, the questions raised by the present Mideast crisis go far beyond this relatively simple problem. We can use this opportunity to deepen our understanding on the broader programmatic and theoretical implications of the situation. These will surely have an impact on our analysis as the present crisis, and future crises, continue to unfold. □

## Labor (Continued from page 4)

### *The Vietnam Experience*

AFL-CIO leaders managed to continue the federation’s official support for waging the Vietnam war through its conclusion. But sentiment against the leadership’s policies mounted steadily until it became a majority.

Today a new generation of workers faces what could be a catastrophic war. This generation was heavily influenced by the antiwar movement during Vietnam and is less inclined to swallow the government’s propaganda. More women in the workforce have dramatically changed its composition. Polls show they have less enthusiasm than some of their male counterparts for the policy of military intervention and war. The *New York Times* reported on September 2 that there is a strong class division regarding the war, with lower-paid and more oppressed sectors of the population expressing less support for it.

The labor movement’s top officials and the proimperialist Democratic Party politicians whom they support have placed obstacles in the way of winning labor to an

antiwar position. But the challenge can and must be met. Bush is getting ready to sacrifice workers in uniform in the interests of the oil monopolies and the banks, and union members have a right to speak out on that as well as on his domestic policies. They need to know the truth about the antilabor and repressive character of the monarchist regimes being supported by U.S. imperialism in the Persian Gulf.

Fact sheets should be circulated among U.S. trade unionists showing how 80 percent of the workers in Kuwait, because they are “foreign,” have no rights: they cannot belong to unions, or vote, or become citizens, or have any other workers’ rights. U.S. youth are to be used as cannon fodder to restore the corrupt emir and the royal family to power. As for Saudi Arabia, striking workers have had their hands chopped off; trade unions, political parties, organizations of foreigners, public demonstrations, and criticism of the government are all prohibited; and the country is ruled by one family which has *never* held elections. In both Kuwait and

Saudi Arabia women are treated as virtual slaves. Bush can easily point to Saddam Hussein as a bloody tyrant, but the reactionary nature of the Saudi and Kuwaiti regimes is ignored—just as Hussein’s crimes were ignored when he was Washington’s ally.

Sectors of the labor movement with a progressive/left tradition and program previously broke with the AFL-CIO’s foreign policy line in April 1987, when they mobilized tens of thousands of workers into the streets for the Central America/anti-apartheid actions. A new effort now to involve these unionists and others is surely called for at this critical moment.

“No More Vietnams!” “Don’t Send Workers to Fight the Rich Man’s War!” “Not One Drop of Blood for One Drop of Oil!” Those are the messages that must be taken to the labor movement as part of our struggle to prevent a murderous and unjust war, and in order to get the U.S. out of the Persian Gulf. □

October 2, 1990

# Election Victory in Ontario Signals Opening for Left

by Barry Weisleder

*Barry Weisleder is a member of Socialist Challenge/Gauche Socialiste, sympathizing organization of the Fourth International in the Canadian State, and president of Local 595, Ontario Public Service Employees Union.*

Although the New Democratic Party is an arch-reformist workers party, its stunning September 6 electoral victory in Ontario heightens the crisis of Canadian imperialism.

Ontario is the largest and richest province in the Canadian state, with over 40 percent of the population and the bulk of its industry. By a quirk of the undemocratic, constituency winner-take-all electoral system, the labor-based NDP was able to capture a majority of the seats (74) with less than 38 percent of the vote, to the former ruling Liberals' 32.4 percent (36 seats), and the Conservatives' 23.5 percent (20 seats).

The closest the NDP, or its social democratic forerunner the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, ever came to forming a government in Ontario was in 1943 when the CCF came within four seats of overtaking the Tories, who then held onto power for the next 42 years.

However, the election of the first ever NDP provincial government in Ontario represents more than just some parliamentary history in the making. It opens a little wider the road to political action for hundreds of thousands of working people, women, natives, youth, visible minorities, and other oppressed layers of the population. Many, if not most, working people see this as their victory, as a big blow to the corporate elite, and that now is the time to begin to take control of our destiny.

But there can be no reliance on this government, which remains steadfastly a bourgeois government within a bourgeois state.

Already NDP Premier-elect Bob Rae has gone out of his way to issue abundant assurances to big business that they have nothing to fear from the new provincial administration.

Most business leaders understand this quite well, without being told; nonetheless, business will fight tooth and nail against every mild, reformist initiative of the new government. They will seek to vilify and isolate the NDP, and hasten the return of their more reliable political representatives, their big business parties of first choice, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

And within the state apparatus, long-tenured and powerful political mandarins, bureaucrats, jurists, and chiefs of police will apply the brakes and pull every lever to stymie and smother every attempt at minor reform.

## The End of the 1980s, Here Comes the Future

How did the NDP victory come about, and what does it mean for labor, the social movements, and the left in Ontario?

The NDP victory was not the result of a radicalization of the masses. But it does reflect the deep dissatisfaction of the working class with governments that have increased taxes, diminished social services, and undermined job security.

Broad layers of the people are also fed up with the siren songs of the privateers and profiteers. They've noticed that "free" enterprise doesn't distribute opportunity, much less wealth—it merely concentrates both.

Then there's the resentment of arrogance and manipulation, triggered by the premature election call. It turned what was to be a droll summer exercise into a rather prickly political experience.

Moreover, the rejection of the Liberals, who were elected in 1985 as a minority government, and in 1987 with a majority—both times on the promise of sweeping reform—indicates now that we are in a new political period. Today many workers are prepared to test political alternatives hitherto considered "too risky" because they are very annoyed at, and distrustful of, the familiar politicians they've come to loath.

More than that, the old reliable, rigidly ordered world is gone. Stalinism being in an advance state of decomposition, the imperialist bourgeoisie has been deprived of a useful political bogeyman to instill and/or invoke the fear of "socialism" in the masses. Former Liberal premier David Peterson now knows firsthand that such red-baiting and fear-mongering has lost much of its political punch.

And then there's the crisis of the federal state. When the Meech Lake Accord died, something snapped in the ideology of the ruling class. Since then the psychological shackles of domination have been slipping badly across the country. This is especially apparent in the rise of Quebecois and aboriginal peoples' struggles. Images of armed native blockades, and Quebecois independentist sentiment at a peak, ensure that the summer of 1990 will not soon be forgotten.

The point is, in post-Meech Canada, everything is in question, everything is up for grabs.

It is also a situation of growing social and political polarization. The recession is upon us. Thousands of jobs have been lost in industry. Capital is relatively mobile. Yet the majority of the population wants social justice and an interventionist government to bring it about. The reformist NDP is ill-

equipped to steer through such treacherous and potentially pestuuous waters.

On the far right too, forces are gathering for the struggle ahead. In fact, ironically, the NDP with only 37.6 percent of the vote, was enabled to capture many constituencies because parties like the anti-French Confederation of Regions Party, the anti-abortion Family Coalition Party, and the fanatically free enterprise Libertarian Party took tens of thousands of votes away from the Conservatives. The Green Party took far fewer votes away from the NDP, and generally trailed the far-right parties. But the total vote of the minor parties surpassed 7 percent—triple their 1987 results.

### Choices Facing the NDP

So what should the NDP do? Clearly, it should move to bolster its narrow base—and expand it—by taking bold and decisive actions in the interests of the working class and oppressed. The NDP should seek to mobilize those who stand to gain by the reforms it has promised: increasing the minimum wage, improving welfare benefits, strengthening the rights of workers and their unions (especially in terms of workplace safety, injury compensation, and the scourge of strikebreaking), ending the auto insurance rip-off, and putting a halt to land speculation and rent gouging.

The NDP could rally hundreds of thousands to a campaign to make the corporate rich pay for major improvements in childcare, public housing, social services, education, and environmental protection. The party would inspire and involve even more people by democratizing the electoral and policy-making process, by leading a mass campaign of protest and noncompliance with the federal Goods and Services Tax, and by refusing to enforce any new federal, anti-choice abortion law.

But the NDP cannot succeed by being content to “rule from above,” much less by betraying its commitment to implement progressive and significant social change.

Yet, with the benefit of historical hindsight, socialists have reason to suspect that the NDP, like its predecessors across Canada and around the world, will precisely seek to “rule from above,” minimize popular involvement, and put the needs of capital ahead of any commitments to labor and the oppressed.

### NDP Retreats Before It Gets Started

Already the evidence is mounting. The day after his election, Ontario NDP leader Bob Rae reneged on his opposition to Toronto’s failed bid to host the 1996 Olympics—which would have meant underwriting outgoing-premier Peterson’s commitment to cover deficits in the billion dollar range, thus devouring funds projected for promised social program expansion.

The same day, Rae seemed to put in doubt the NDP’s commitment to phase out all nuclear power expansion. He also deemphasized the bite that the promised new corporate tax would put on business. Surely this is a prescription for alienating the social and labor movement activists who helped the NDP catapult to victory on September 6.

Later the world learned that instead of a much publicized \$23 million surplus, the Liberals bequeathed the NDP a \$700 million deficit. Having been betrayed, whom will the NDP betray?

This sets the stage, in the context of hard economic times ahead, in the social polarization that looms ahead, for a confrontation between workers and the government.

Labor bureaucrats are trying to head off any such confrontation, even now, by issuing “their” party a blank check for its first term in office.

Nonetheless, struggles will occur—outside the NDP, in the street, on the campuses, in the plants and communities. It’s already evident. The labor industrial scene vividly demonstrates the restiveness of workers. More than 36,000 are now on strike at companies in the auto, steel, transportation, and forest product sectors.

And surely struggles will occur inside the NDP too.

### Build a Class Struggle Left Wing

The NDP will attract many new members over the next couple of years. Some will join in order to feed at the governmental trough. Some will want to ride the popular bandwagon. Yet many will be inspired by visions of a socialist Ontario.

Even among the new large flock of NDP MPPs, 25 of whom (that is, over one-third of the total) have been active in the labor movement, there are several left-wing local movement activists who accepted nomination never expecting to be elected and who would have considerable difficulty voting for social cutbacks or public sector back-to-work legislation.

We may include in the latter group several of the 19 NDP women MPPs—a record high for female representation by any party in the Ontario legislature.

The NDP left will soon have a wider than ever audience. Not just inside the NDP, but outside the party too.

The commercial media will be only too happy to amplify internal as well as external criticism of the NDP government—so it is important that left critics couch their criticism of the NDP leadership in the framework of criticism of the capitalist system and the forces of big business and the growing right wing.

Nonetheless it will be crucial that socialists maintain a critical and independent stance, while agitating for socialist policies and extraparliamentary mass action inside the NDP.

In the period ahead there will be much better opportunities to build a class struggle current inside the NDP and the unions. Such a current, also drawing on leading activists from the other social movements, will furnish a broader basis for the revolutionary alternative to reformism and social democracy.

But those forces on the left which, on the one hand, abstain from the struggle to forge this alternative inside the NDP, or on the other hand, dissolve into the NDP without maintaining an independent socialist structure and program will both miss and weaken the greater possibilities that the new situation now presents. □

## Native Americans confront the state

**IN SCENES** horribly reminiscent of the massacres of native peoples by white armies in the 19th century, the Canadian armed forces employed more than 3,000 soldiers and over 350 armored vehicles in early September to occupy the whole of the Mohawk reserve of Kahnawake on the south bank of the St. Lawrence river, less than ten kilometers from Montreal. They also surrounded the last twenty armed resisters and a hundred other Native Americans on the Mohawk reserve of Kanesatake, 20 kilometers north west of Montreal.

**MICHEL LAFITTE**

**T**HE ONLY Mohawk territories that are not occupied either by the Sureté de Quebec (SQ — the Quebecois police force) or the Canadian army are the hunting grounds of Donnacona, 50 kilometers north of Montreal. But 95% of the Mohawks of Quebec<sup>2</sup> live in the occupied areas.

The current crisis is only the culmination of several centuries of attempted genocide by all the regimes of European origin in the Americas, and of active or passive resistance from the native peoples.

For several years, the Conservative federal government of Brian Mulroney has been slashing public expenditure. Native peoples have been among the foremost victims of this policy — cuts in subsidies for health and social welfare, reduction of the personnel of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, cuts in the money

## Important Dates in the Mohawk Struggle:

*(Taken from fact sheet prepared by The American Indian Community House, Inc.)*

- April 11—Mohawks at Kanesatake (Oka) set up barricades in defense of their ancestral lands against expansion of a local golf course.
- July 11—Canadian officer dies as Mohawks defend themselves against a police raid at Kanesatake. He was shot after police tear gas blew back into their faces. No autopsy has been made public.
- July 12—Mohawks at Kahnawake block Mercier bridge in support of the people of Kanesatake.
- August 27—Quebec government breaks off negotiations.
- August 29—Mohawks and Canadian forces jointly begin dismantling of barricades at Kahnawake and the Mercier bridge. Oka remains barricaded. No food or medicine is allowed through the police barricades. Sureté de Quebec (police) continue to deny in the press that there is any restriction of food or medicines.
- September 3—The Warriors state that they won't surrender to the Sureté de Quebec. They would rather die.

### Update:

The Canadian army left Kanesatake September 30 and say they will pull out of Kahnawake at the end of October. It is assumed that the Sureté de Quebec—which is particularly disliked by the Mohawks—will replace the army.

Twenty-six women and fourteen men released from the treatment center were arrested and put in military barracks where the Sureté had free access to them. There are reports of beatings.

Efforts have begun to raise a \$5 million fund for legal expenses. For more information contact the Mohawk Nations Office in Kahnawake, 514-638-4750.

The Canadian government has purchased the land in question and claims that it will give it to the Mohawks once it determines who is their "legitimate representative." The golf course is not going to be expanded.

### Protest against the assault on the Indian people:

Tom Siddon, Federal Minister of Indian Affairs (Phone: 613-995-4988, Fax: 613-995-1686)

Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (Phone: 613-992-4211, Fax: 613-995-0101)

Sam Elkins, Minister of Public Safety (Phone: 418-643-2112, or 514-684-9000, Fax: 418-646-6168)

Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa (Fax: 418-643-3924)

allocated to post secondary education for native peoples, and so on. The response of the native peoples has been very varied, ranging from rallies and demonstrations to occupations and lawsuits.

The question of land rights also remains very central to the concerns of native peoples. The events of this summer were sparked off by a police attack on July 11 on a barricade erected by Mohawks on the reserve at Kanesatake. The thousand Mohawks of the area were attempting to stop the municipality of Oka from transferring land that they have claimed for over 150 years to a private golf club. The historic burial ground of the reserve, as well as the only virgin pine forest to survive in the region, are also found on these lands. No level of government (municipal, provincial or federal) had agreed to negotiate. Only some ecologists, concerned about the forest, had given their support to the Mohawks. It seemed to be a minor conflict. But small conflicts become big when they take on the character of a symbolic and exemplary struggle.

On July 10, the mayor of Oka asked the SQ to implement a judicial injunction from the Superior Court of Quebec instructing the Mohawks to dismantle their barricades on the roads and railways which cross the reserve and the municipality of Oka. The Mohawk community strengthened the barricades and about 15 armed members of the paramilitary group, the Warriors Society of the Mohawk Nation, previously absent from the reserve, joined the community.

On July 11, over 100 SQ agents attacked the barricades using heavy assault rifles, concussion grenades and tear gas. In the shooting that followed, an SQ corporal was killed, in circumstances which remain unclear. The SQ, which has become accustomed over the past ten years to brutalizing native peoples, encircled the reserve and stopped the entry of provisions and medicines.

In solidarity, members of the community of Kahnawake, protected by armed warriors, established barricades around the reserve to the south west of Montreal and cut all access to the Mercier bridge across the St. Lawrence river. They threatened to blow up this bridge (one of five which give access to Montreal from the south bank) if the SQ attacked the Kanesatake community again. The SQ immediately encircled the Kahnawake reserve with their own barricades, depriving the 7,000 permanent inhabitants of the reserve of supplies and medicine. Some

2,000 armed policemen surrounded the two reserves until the entry into action of the Canadian armed forces on August 29.

On July 12, the minister of Indian Affairs in Quebec, John Ciacchia, agreed to negotiate at Kanesatake. The subsequent negotiations have been disrupted by the repeated refusal of the provincial government and, later, the federal government, to discuss any thing other than the



lifting of the barricades and the unconditional surrender of the armed natives. The federal government offered to buy the lands of the Oka golf club, but this was to be done with funds already allocated for the reserve.

### Propaganda campaign and racist mobs

The mass media exploded in denunciation of the Mohawk "terrorists". The general sympathy among the Quebecois population for the Mohawks began to erode under the tide of anti-Mohawk declarations coming from all the bourgeois politicians and virtually all the media. A phenomenon new to Quebec emerged — angry racist mobs, led to a large extent by former policemen of the SQ and heavily

infiltrated by previously marginal far right groups. But it was the "anti-terrorist" declarations of Mulroney and Quebec premier Robert Bourassa which legitimized the racist mobilizations.

As for the leader of the Parti Quebecois (the main nationalist party in Quebec), Jacques Parizeau, his denunciation of the "weakness" of the Bourassa government has only opened the road to the xenophobic nationalist sects.

The frustrations of pro-independence Quebecois have thus been channelled into traditional ultra-Catholic and ultra-anglophobic themes. Slogans have appeared against "the new Anglo-Iroquois alliance"<sup>3</sup>.

The roots of the current crisis can be found in the history of the native nations and their relations with white Canada.

Nobody knows the size of the native population of North America before the first European colonists arrived at the beginning of the 17th century. One thing is certain — it was very much bigger than traditional white historiography has maintained. Some scholars estimate that

there were at least a million people speaking Iroquoian (farmers, unlike many other native Americans who were nomadic hunters) before the arrival of diseases transmitted by the Europeans. The demographic and social impact of the epidemics which raged in the course of the 16th century was enormous.

After an initial period of collaboration, the native peoples began to resist the genocidal incursions of the colonists and the French, English, Dutch and Swedish armies. One of the first groups to lead this resistance in the north east of the continent was the Iroquois confederacy. And the Iroquois nation<sup>4</sup> which was located the furthest to the east and bore the brunt of the European attacks was the Mohawk nation.

150 years before the establishment of

1. The Canadian armed forces consist of a small number of professional soldiers (40,000), equipped and trained primarily for counter-insurrectionary struggle. Only the Israeli army has a higher ratio of officers and non-commissioned officers to ordinary soldiers and a higher ratio of mobile arms.

2. There are between 80,000 and 100,000 people in Quebec who identify themselves as being of native origin, out of a total population of 6,500,000 — between 1.0 and 1.5%. French speakers constitute 80% of the population and English speakers 8%. Other ethnic groups, of recent immigrant origin, are for the most part integrated into the still dominant anglophone community.

3. In 1608, Samuel de Champlain, the leader of the first French colonists, attacked the Mohawks. Between 1608 and 1667, there were three wars between the French colonists and their native allies and the Iroquois (in this case their Mohawk compo-

nent). In these wars, the Iroquois accepted arms first from the Dutch and then from the British. In the course of the wars, the Iroquois won several victories against the French colonists.

These are characterized by official historiography as anti-French massacres. During the conquest by the Iroquois of territories controlled by the Hurons (Wendats), allies of the French, three French Jesuit missionaries were killed, becoming the "holy Canadian martyrs" of Catholic hagiography.

From 1667 onwards, there was a peace treaty between the French, the Iroquois and the Hurons and it was at this time that the reserve of Kahnawake was established.

4. The term "tribe" is completely chauvinist — as the African film maker and author, Ousmane Sembène, has ironically put it, "Is it not obvious that 14 million Hausas are only a tribe whereas 200,000 Icelanders constitute a nation?"

the first European colonies, around 1450, five people-nations which spoke variants of the same language, and which occupied all the north of what is now New York state, united. This union of the Mohawks, the Onondogas, the Oneidas, the Cayugas and the Senecas<sup>5</sup> called itself, and still does, "Haudenosaunee" or the Confederacy of the Long House. The European invaders called them the Iroquois, and the mythology propagated in Quebecois school books and in the hagiography of the "holy Canadian martyrs" of the Catholic church<sup>3</sup> testify to the power and tenacity of this confederacy.

The structure of this confederacy was complex, combining the broadest unity with the minimum of coercion. Each nation was divided into an equal number of matrilinear clans. Each clan of each nation had the right to a certain number of representatives to the Confederacy Council, who interpreted and applied the Great Constituent Law. These representatives (who the whites called "chiefs" although they were not military chiefs, the latter being named only provisionally, for the duration of a struggle) were named by the matriarchs (the Mothers) of the clans. The biggest and strongest nations on the military plane (the Mohawks in the east and the Senecas in the west) had less representatives than the others to block any desire for domination. The goal was a consciously chosen unity. Without complete consensus, nobody could pretend to act in the name of the Confederacy.

### **Native peoples divided during Revolution**

This structure, at once centralized and democratic, made the Haudenosaunee the most powerful native people of the north east of North America<sup>6</sup>. At the time of the American Revolution, the Confederation was not able to arrive at a unanimous position. The Mohawks opted for an alliance with Britain, whilst some small groups allied themselves with the rebel colonists and the majority remained neutral.

After the defeat of the British, the majority of Mohawks and a great part of the five other nations crossed the new white frontier and settled on reserves in what became Quebec and Ontario. But they never recognized this frontier, and in 1792 a treaty between Britain and the new American republic confirmed the right of the Iroquois to pass unhindered across the frontier with their goods. There are today nearly 25,000 Mohawks in all, and 10-12,000 in Quebec, on the three reserves of Akwesane, Kahnawake and Kanasatake and in Montreal itself.

Successive white governments, whether US or Canadian, have not been content simply with stealing the land of the native peoples, or killing them with alcohol, disease or bullets. They have always tried to assimilate them to bourgeois values —

individual private property, male domination and capitalist democracy with suffrage restricted to men.

Over a period of years, white federal governments have created Band Councils (on the Canadian side) and Tribal Councils (on the US side) to administer the funds "granted" to the native peoples.

Generally less than 20% of the inhabitants of the reserves participate in the "elections" to the Band Councils or the Tribal Councils — they are perceived at best as being irrelevant and at worst as a simple relay of white power.

The relationship of the native peoples of Canada to the anglophone/francophone division of that country has been complex. In the 19th century, the beginning of an alliance was forged between French speakers and a big part of the native peoples of British North America against the anglophone drive to assimilate them. The majority of the native and mixed race peoples of Quebec and the Canadian west used French as a second or maternal language. At the time of the execution of the mixed race leader, Louis Riel, in 1885, there were mass demonstrations in Quebec leading to the mobilization of the Canadian army.

### **Iroquoian language dying out among youth**

To counter this alliance, the federal government decreed in the early part of this century that English would be the only language taught on the reserves. This had two effects amongst the Mohawks. Firstly, Iroquoian became a minority tongue as a maternal language amongst the Six Nations, almost disappearing amongst the youth. Secondly, English replaced French as the language of communication with the white majority, distancing the Mohawks from the Quebecois majority. Amongst the other native nations of Quebec, only those denied official recognition by the white bureaucracy retained French as a language of communication with white society.

Yet the tradition of the "Long House", of the Great Law, has never totally disappeared among the Six Nations. In the 1960s, amidst the revolt of all the non-white peoples of North America, a movement developed that was both a renewal of native culture and a demand for territorial rights.

Unnoticed by all but a few whites, the Long House, the traditional socio-cultural-religious (and in the final analysis, political) structure, began to regain its influence among the Six Nations. This was particularly true amongst the Mohawks. The "traditionalists" contested the Band Councils, with growing success.

In the mid-1970s, the Long House sanctioned the creation of the Warriors Society, according to the tradition of the Great Law where the military leaders were sub-

ject to the authority of the representatives of the clans and the nations. They were to replace the white police forces and defend the rights of their people.

Since World War 2 more and more young Mohawks, on the Canadian side as much as the US, have found employment in the US Marines. It was the Mohawk veterans of the Vietnam war who were to constitute the Warriors.

The macho ethos of the Marines did not prepare these Mohawks for a protracted struggle. When some Seminole native peoples in Florida found a legal loophole in the mid-1980s which allowed them to open lucrative casinos on their reserve, the US government found the ideal way to foster "native capitalism" as a solution. Congress speedily adopted the "Indian Gaming Act" encouraging the creation of such casinos.

Some of the Warriors, impatient in the face of the apparent impotence of the "old guard" of the Confederacy, were seduced. On the US side of Akwesane casinos were opened, creating a few hundred jobs at five or six dollars an hour for Mohawks, whilst the "investors" pocketed millions.

Because of this situation, a conflict developed between the Warriors and the Confederacy Council, tragically culminating in a mini civil war at Akwesane in the spring of this year. Since then Akwesane has been occupied by the Suretés from Ontario and Quebec and by the State Troopers of New York.

At Kahnawake, there was also a conflict about gambling and the sale of cigarettes<sup>7</sup>, although this dispute never degenerated into physical battle.

### **Competing political structures on reserves**

Thus at the beginning of the current crisis, there existed three more or less competing structures on the Mohawk reserves — the Band Council, the Confederacy Council and the Warriors Society. But the frontiers between the different groups were not very clear. Mohawk culture does not promote vendettas or permanent political factions and extremely fluid alliances between currents are common practice. A form of permanent election of representatives, recallable at any time, was part of the Great Law of the Six Nations. On the other hand, native Americans, like any other people, are not immune from internal conflicts or even sometimes the settling of accounts.

The refusal of all layers of government and media to even try to recognize and understand the native nations explains in part their confusion in the face of the multiple changes of the Mohawk delegation to the negotiating table. But this has also served as a pretext to repeatedly break the negotiations and finally to send the army onto the reserves.

On August 12 the government accepted the Mohawks' demand that a team of

observers from the International Federation of Human Rights investigate the situation. Their report, made public on August 26, criticized the failure of the federal and provincial governments to respect the agreement on the free passage of provisions, medicine and spiritual leaders. On August 27, when the Bourassa government again suspended negotiations and resorted to the army, the observers withdrew.

At Kahnawake, the army and the Warriors agreed to dismantle the barricades without bloodshed. At Kanesatake, there was no agreement but it seems that the matriarchs of the clan intervened to block any attempt at armed resistance by the Warriors.

Meanwhile the negotiations reached deadlock, even though the federal government said for the first time on September 1 that it was ready to negotiate on the territorial demands of the community of Kanesatake. The SQ has not yet intervened, leaving that to the army, but hundreds of agents still surround the two reserves. The SQ can be expected to make many arrests — they have already been accused of maltreating and even torturing Mohawks arrested since the assault on July 11. At Kanesatake, 30 arrests are already reported.

### Silence of the workers organizations

The most worrying aspect has been the weakness of the non-Mohawk response to the events. Certainly there has been a movement of solidarity with the Mohawks amongst the Quebec population. But it is essentially limited to left groups, as well as some ecological, artistic, or left Christian currents. The big organizations of the workers movement, in anglophone Canada as well as Quebec, have been conspicuous by their silence. There is a lot of work to do.

Solidarity has been much more massive and active amongst the other native peoples of Quebec and Canada. They have built barricades of solidarity (and in defence of their own demands) on the roads and railways in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia. There has even been an attempt to divert a river in Alberta, by the Lonefighters, a Warrior-style group amongst the Peigane nation<sup>5</sup>.

In anglophone Canada, there have also been movements of solidarity amongst whites but these were fundamentally of the same nature as in Quebec. All the bourgeois parties and provincial governments have proclaimed their solidarity with the federal and Quebecois governments, with the exception of the government of the North West Territories, where native peoples are in a majority.

The New Democratic Party, the social democratic party of anglophone Canada, has denounced the use of the police and army (whilst deploring the fact that the

Warriors are armed). But the NDP's provincial parties, concerned with winning the next elections, have not followed this lead. And in Quebec, the NDP has no real presence — its sole deputy in Quebec comes from the south bank of Montreal and has been remarkably absent this summer.

The bourgeois parties and the Canadian-English media are using the crisis and the racist reaction of a fringe of Quebec's francophone population to portray the Quebecois nation and the whole of Quebecois society as xenophobic and narrow minded. Premier Bourassa, PQ leader Jacques Parizeau, the far right nationalist groups and the racist mobs have all given to the enemies of national liberation in Quebec their best weapon — the comfort of their own moral superiority.

The Canadian government's decision to use solely francophone troops against the Mohawks is not accidental. It placates the francophone racists and the anglophone anti-Quebecois forces whilst at the same time reinforcing the tensions between the Mohawks and the francophone majority of Quebecois society.

At the moment of writing all is not over. The repression will surely continue. The effects inside the Six Nations are not yet clear. Reactions of despair cannot be ruled out amongst young Native Americans who can no longer bear the continued genocide against their people and who have nothing in particular to lose.

### Ambivalent role of Warriors' Society

The prestige of the Warriors Society has grown thanks to the police and military intervention, but its dubious practices inside the communities (violence against opponents, defence of the casinos and trade in cigarettes, and so on) continue to undermine its prestige and its long term credibility.

The Confederacy Council is participating for the first time since the mid-1920s in negotiations with white governments, which constitutes an indirect form of recognition. But these governments have accepted it as a moderating force, a counter weight to the Warriors. This can only undermine its credibility amongst the youth and the most active and angry forces in the Six Nations. If the Council cannot regain its influence amongst these forces, it is foreseeable that the government will once again exclude it from all consideration in favour of a return to the chiefs of the Band Council.

The Mohawks and the other members of the Six Nations will surely experience

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some painful and sad discussions and debates in the months to come. But 400 years of genocidal interventions have not yet vanquished them and they know well how to handle such debates.

The tasks of Quebecois progressives are clear. It is necessary to demand the immediate withdrawal of the armed forces and police from the reserves, as well as the unconditional withdrawal of all accusations pending against the Mohawks around the events of Kahnawake and of Kanesatake. The land sought by the Oka golf club should be recognized as belonging to the Mohawks of Kanesatake. On a wider level, it is necessary that all levels of government recognize the right of the native nations to sovereignty and self-determination.

Those who desire the independence of Quebec have every interest in renewing the old alliance between Quebecois and native peoples against the common enemy, the Canadian state. White militants must prove themselves in the defence of the rights of the native peoples of North America. "We are all natives in somebody else's eyes"<sup>9</sup>. ★

5. One of the first rights colonists arrogate to themselves is the right to name the colonized. Thus the names "Mohawk" and "Seneca" correspond in no way to the actual names of the nations in question, Ganienkehaka and Tsomnantouan respectively. For the moment, the peoples themselves still use the names given them by the whites. This can be expected to change shortly.

6. In the 18th century, another nation of Iroquois origin, the Tuscaroras, refugees from Virginia, entered into the confederacy which became the Six Nations Confederacy.

7. The native peoples do not pay customs duties or sales tax and can thus sell cigarettes much more cheaply than white traders outside the reservations.

8. The Peiganes are fighting against the construction of a dam which will destroy a complete region of the south of the province, submerging lands that are sacred to them.

9. The quotation is from a song by the Quebecois singer, Sylvain Lévesque.



## Latin American Marxism: The Relaunch

by Sergio Rodriguez

*A whole series of recent developments—the U.S. invasion of Panama, the collapse of the bureaucratic systems in Eastern Europe, the defeat of the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan elections, the failure of the United Left in the Peruvian elections, the growth of social democratic currents inside some revolutionary organizations, and the successes of the United States' strategy of "low intensity conflicts"—formed the background to the meeting of political parties of the left from Latin America and the Caribbean which took place July 4, 1990, in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The meeting gave the participants an opportunity to confront these new challenges. Among those present was Sergio Rodriguez, a leader of the Mexican Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), the Mexican section of the Fourth International, who sent us the following account of the conference.*

The meeting was hosted by the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), strengthened by the recent elections in which it got 31 million votes. The PT has 650,000 members and is the main influence in the most powerful trade union federation on the continent, the United Workers Central (CUT).

There were discussions on five main topics: the capitalist offensive in Latin America; the crisis in Eastern Europe; the current situation in Cuba; certain experiences of the Latin American left; and our project for a socialist and democratic society.

The discussion on the capitalist offensive involved an attempt to assess the present balance of forces and the austerity measures now being applied in Latin America. The Movement for Socialism (MAS), an Argentine organization founded by the Trotskyist Nahuel Moreno, claimed that the mass movement is more on the offensive than ever, whether in Eastern Europe, the third world, or the imperialist centers.

According to the MAS, the big losers today are the imperialist governments and the bureaucracy of the so-called "socialist countries." This analysis was rejected by the rest of those present, who found the MAS's assertion that the invasion of Panama was the swan song of imperialism especially hard to take.

Most of the organizations present explained the difficulties currently being experienced by the Latin American revolutionary movement by two factors; firstly the arrogant attitude of imperialism, taking advantage of the policy of peaceful coexistence and perestroika, and secondly the use of the foreign debt and the "structural adjustments" demanded by the IMF, which are an essential economic means of disciplining our people. We tried to arrive at a deeper understanding of these processes and outline a way of confronting them, in the face of Bush's plan for a free trade zone including Latin America, the United States, and Canada.

### **Discussion on Crisis in Eastern Europe**

The discussion on the crisis of the regimes in the East focused on why it happened and the meaning of these events. For the great majority of the participants, the events represented a crisis of the model of bureaucratic domination. It was something of a surprise to hear the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Dominican Republic, Narciso Isa Conde, describing what was

happening with the traditional Trotskyist phrase "a political revolution."

The talk was all of the "fall of the bureaucracy," the "transition to socialism," the "crisis of the single party model," the "absence of socialist democracy," and so on. Most of the delegates insisted on the necessity of an answer to an urgent strategic problem: the reestablishment of the connection between socialism and democracy. PT leader Marco Aurelio Garcia explained the necessity of multipartyism in the construction of a socialist society. He pointed out that the achievement of a whole series of democratic rights—universal suffrage, religious freedom, national rights—had not been and should not be entrusted to the bourgeoisie. In fact, democracy remained a terrain of struggle between the bourgeoisie and the society, headed by the workers. But, as he insisted, the bourgeoisie's present hegemony on this terrain needed to be contested.

Carlos Aldano Escalante from the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) began his presentation of the situation on the island with the claim that: "Cuba is not in crisis and will not be." This was something like an attempt to exorcise the clear dangers threatening a revolution dear to the whole Latin American left. Aldano explained his views on the question of the single party, which he presented as a tactical rather than strategic problem depending on the objective conditions of imperialist encirclement. He said that the Cubans are faithful friends and had often supported Soviet actions that they did not agree with. He cited the example of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which the PCC first of all analyzed as politically and morally unjustifiable. It was the need to give political support to the Soviet friends that changed this position.

### **Conditions for Democratic Elections in Cuba**

Joao Machado, a PT leader, called on all the organizations present to come out clearly in defense of the Cuban revolution. Nonetheless he drew a sharp distinction between the question of the single party and the limitations of democracy in Cuba.

The representative of the Mexican PRT pointed out that nobody present had demanded that the PCC organize elections on the bourgeois democratic model, nor even on the Nicaraguan model—which the Sandinista ex-foreign affairs minister, Miguel d'Escoto, defined as a ballot conducted with a pistol to one's forehead. But he also underlined that there was no counterrevolutionary army in Cuba, nor a powerful bourgeoisie intent on treachery, and that the island had not just suffered six years of war. Thus the conditions existed in Cuba for real free elections, given that money would not be a source of inequalities. Multipartyism is a democratic right, and Marxism does not fear the battle of ideas.

Another PT comrade, Jose Dirceu, said that the main problem in Cuba stemmed from the fusion of the party and state. Aldano, who had defended in a very laconic way the execution of Ochoa, stated that the separation of party and state would be a key point at the next PCC congress.

This meeting marked the end of one period and the beginning of another. For some it confirmed the end of the period of armed organizations and the start of institutional activity, as shown by the experience of the M-19 in Colombia, an ex-guerrilla organization whose presidential candidate Navarro Wolf has accepted the post of minister of health in the new government of Gaviria.

### **Question of Armed Struggle Reassessed**

Others saw a more profound meaning—the left had come to the end of a time when it saw the revolution as a confrontation between two camps or blocs. The collapse of the "socialist camp" has affected not only the left's strategy but also its vision of practical politics as well. Nobody wants to be identified any more with the bureaucratic deviations of the so-called countries of "really existing socialism." The question of armed struggle—in many respects

a reaction to the militarism of the state—has also been approached differently; such a decision cannot be the authoritarian decision of a small group of courageous militants, it must have legitimacy based on the democratic sentiments of the population.

The turn of the wheel has also affected organizations that are not engaged in armed struggle. The Brazilian PT, the Peruvian United Mariateguist Party (PUM), the Uruguayan Tupamaros, and the Mexican PRT are at a crossroads. How to combine the struggle in the institutional framework and a revolutionary strategy for social transformation?

The question of the development of people's power is a fundamental part of a resolution of this contradiction, since it rejects neither institutional participation nor the development of armed struggle. Popular power is a school of revolutionary strategy, taking up the struggle for reforms as a way of preparing for power; it struggles for a model of democratic socialism while educating the masses in democratic participation in the capitalist framework. There are some dangers in this line—including the confusion of popular power and charity—a traditional mistake of the Latin American left.

Some present compared the Sao Paulo meeting to the experience of the Latin American Organization of Solidarity (OLAS—an anti-imperialist front founded in the 1960s under Cuban influence).

However, there are two very important differences. Firstly, the left does not today have a model, such as Cuba was at the time, which dominates its political and theoretical considerations. Furthermore, this meeting reflected the pluralism of a revolutionary thought that wants now to break with all dogmatism. This is the consequence of the appearance of a new left on our continent. The gathering was thus a rejuvenating experience in the middle of the crisis of the international socialist left. □

## Defend Mexican Trotskyists—and Free Elections!

Four members of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (Revolutionary Workers Party, PRT, the Mexican section of the Fourth International) were murdered on August 16 in Jolalpan in the state of Puebla, while defending the Jolalpan town hall. Those directly responsible for these killings are armed groups of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the party that has ruled Mexico for 70 years.

The town council of Jolalpan was won in the local elections by a slate including members of the PRT. The new council took over on February 15. This victory was formally recognized by the Electoral College of the Local Chamber of Deputies, as well as by the state government authorities. Since the day the new council took office, which was carried out in a peaceful and legal way, a group of PRI members stationed themselves at the entrances to the town hall, trying to block the town council from functioning. Throughout this time, they have been mounting all sorts of provocations, which culminated in the August 16 clash.

For their part, the authorities of the state of Puebla have not only not apprehended those responsible for the PRI attack, but have arrested other PRT comrades, who at this writing remain in prison. The clash was not, as the Puebla government represents it, the result of a conflict of armed groups of both parties (the PRI and PRT), but an attack by an armed PRI group against the legally constituted municipal authorities. Its purpose, therefore, is to oust the people's elected representatives by maneuvers clothed in a false appearance of legality overriding the will of the people of Jolalpan.

We appeal to all democratic and progressive forces to send telegrams of protest and support for the Mexican PRT. They should be sent to Mariano Piña Olawa, Constitutional Government of the State of Puebla, Palacio de Gobierno, Puebla, Mexico. Copies should be sent to the PRT via Edgardo Sánchez Ramirez, Avenida Xola 181, Colonia Alamos, C.P. 03400, Mexico, DF, Mexico. □

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# Poverty and Income Trends in the U.S. Today

## From the 'War on Poverty' to the War on Welfare

by R. L. Huebner

As President Bush prepares to sacrifice another generation of young people to defend the "American way of life"—this time over oil in the Persian Gulf—it is worth taking a moment to look at what that way of life increasingly means for millions of Americans who do not vacation in Kennebunkport, Maine, and who do not enjoy the spoils of war and profits from the oil industry.

Although the American way of life has historically meant very different things for different sectors and classes within the United States, for many the dream of abundance or even relative security is surely far from their reality. In fact, fewer and fewer Americans can expect to achieve even what their parents achieved in the way of job security and material well-being. The corporate restructuring of the American economy in the past 20 years has resulted in the downward mobility and constriction of life opportunities for the immense majority—not to mention the emergence of a permanent underclass and the specter of grotesque atomized poverty seen daily in the ruins of cities like New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles.

The reverse side of the growing poverty, of course, is the outrageous intensification of profits for the few. This is verified even by the somewhat muted and disguised figures of the government census bureau. A cursory examination of government statistics for the past several years confirms the common sense observation that the gap between rich and poor is growing—this despite an economy that was characterized up until 1988 as "on the road to recovery." In fact, the data show that the income gap between rich and poor families in the late 1980s was wider than in any year since the census bureau began collecting such information in 1947.<sup>1</sup>

### **Annual Income Inequality**

These figures are startling. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the wealthiest fifth of all American families received 44 percent of the national family income for 1988.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the poorest fifth of families received 4.6 percent of that income. For the wealthiest individuals this was the largest annual income share ever recorded; for the poorest, one of the lowest. Middle income families fared only slightly

better than the poorest in comparison to previous years. For example, the second poorest fifth of all working families received only 10.7 percent for 1988, while the middle fifth received 16.7 percent. Both these percentage figures are the lowest ever recorded by the census bureau.

These data demonstrate that not simply the gap between the rich and poor but also the gap between the rich and "middle class" is growing and has never been wider in the postwar era.

Other data from the 1988 census report tell a similar story. From 1979 to 1988, the average income of the poorest fifth of families fell 6.1 percent, after adjustment for inflation, while the average income of families in the middle fifth remained essentially unchanged. However, the average income of the top fifth rose 12 percent—or \$9,100 per year. And the average income of the wealthiest one-twentieth of all families rose 15.6 percent—or \$17,900 per year.

The gains made by the rich were made obviously at the expense of poor and middle income workers. More than 13 percent of all Americans—31.9 million people, fell below the poverty line set by government officials at \$9,435 for a family of three. Of course, many times that number hover precariously around the poverty threshold and have in years past only been kept from falling into "officially recognized" poverty by ever dwindling government aid programs. Not surprisingly, these programs—minimal though they are—have been precisely those programs under attack for the past decade by Republicans and Democrats alike. The success of the employers' and government's attack resulted in the income of the average poor family falling \$4,851 below the poverty line in 1988.

### **Personal Assets**

However, measuring real wealth and poverty by annual income inequality is only one indicator of the massive disparity that exists in the U.S. today. Another is personal assets and here the measure is more startling. A University of Michigan study conducted in the late 1970s showed that 5 percent of American families had 40 percent of all personal wealth, while the bottom 50 percent accounted for only 3 percent of the net worth of all Americans. The top 20 percent of families in this

country have three times the net worth of the bottom 80 percent.<sup>3</sup>

Statistical abstracts for the same period show that the wealthiest one percent of individuals accounted for one-fourth the value of all gross personal assets, worth \$1,000 billion. This same class holds 56 percent of all corporate stock, 60 percent of the bonds, and nearly 90 percent of all trusts.<sup>4</sup>

But such figures tend to occlude the reality behind the percentage point. The falling rate of profit for American corporations since the economic crisis of the early 1970s has meant, concretely, not a falling rate or diminution of power and privilege for the few, but a drastic falling rate of life expectations for the many. This is borne out by the near systemic crisis of health care services and housing which impacts upon tens of millions of Americans.

### **Housing and Health Care**

In the United States today some 60 million Americans are either entirely uninsured (for medical coverage) or underinsured—and this in one of the most viciously expensive medical systems in the advanced industrial world. Two-thirds of such un- or underinsured persons are fully employed. It is generally thought by social workers and welfare agencies that 40 million American young people will receive no (or very little) health and dental care in their lifetime—and this at a time when the life expectancy rate is dropping significantly for various groups (e.g., the average life expectancy rate for Black men in Harlem is 49 years); infant mortality is on the rise (especially amongst people of color and lower-paid layers of the working class); and diseases associated with malnutrition and deficiency are making a comeback.

Affordable housing—traditionally at the heart of the "American dream"—is becoming more and more scarce, like the unionized jobs that formerly paid for it. The government recognizes three million homeless in the U.S. today. New York alone fails to house 50 to 80 thousand. On any given night some 100 thousand children are homeless in the heartland of America. But this is hardly surprising given the fact that one in every five American children lives in poverty and the proportion is rising every year. (In 1988-89 it was estimated that 14.4 percent of white children, 44.1 percent of Black children,

and 37.8 percent of Hispanic children were living in poverty.)

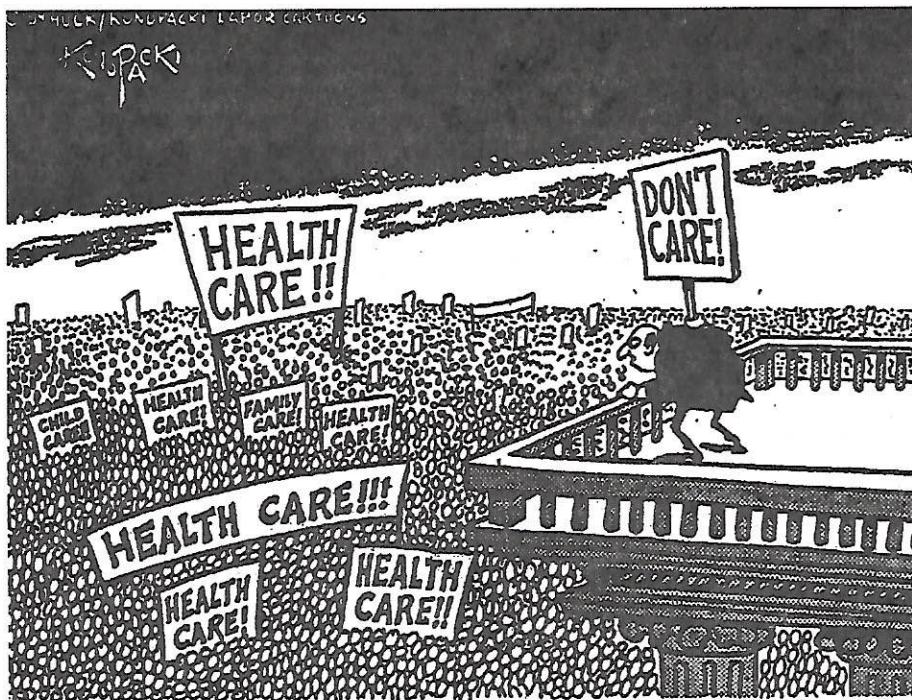
But the housing crisis is not limited solely to the homeless—who experience it most severely. The *New York Times* reported on September 26 that “doubling-up” (the phenomenon of two or more families sharing an apartment), “once mainly the plight of the poorest of New York’s poor, has now become an affliction of the working class.” In the more easily counted city projects of New York more than 100,000 people live “doubled- or tripled-up.” And the spectacle of multiple families occupying single family dwellings is not limited even to the poorest of the working class. Increasingly this is a phenomenon that extends to middle income earners. Jaime Estades, a social worker for District 65 of the United Auto Workers, says that housing is the “most serious” problem of the union’s Hispanic members, “ahead of finances and health.” “We’re talking about people who are working, who are members of the union,” Mr. Estades said. “The American dream does not exist for them.”

Overcrowding is expanding even though the real estate market in places like New York and California is in a slump. Housing prices have fallen and some rents for luxury apartments have declined, the *Times* article explains, “but this has had no discernible effect on the shortage of housing for the city’s less affluent.” According to Eric Weinstock, director of the housing research project of the Community Training and Resource Center, “It really doesn’t matter much to these people that a studio apartment that was selling for \$120,000 has dropped to \$90,000.”

The majority of New York’s working people will continue to find themselves held “rent hostage” by greedy landlords and slumlords. Apartment rents, like real estate, are priced out of proportion to wages in most large cities today. While the median renter’s income was \$16,000 last year, the average one- to two-bedroom apartment in New York City—including many of the most impoverished and crime-ridden areas—rented for at least \$600 to \$700 a month—or \$8,400 per year. Conventional guidelines set by housing authorities suggests that a family making \$20,000 a year can afford a monthly rent of about \$500. For those living on smaller incomes, the *New York Times* article reports, the choice is quite literally having “money for rent and no money for food, or money for food and no money for rent.”

### ‘Reagan Revolution’

This is the real world and way of life of many, if not yet most, Americans today.



It’s a far cry from the “American dream” that still brings scores of immigrants to this land. Of course, the reality facing most immigrants upon arrival was rarely the American dream. The nightmare is captured in the lyrics of Lou Reed’s 1989 album *New York*. In a song entitled “Dirty Blvd.” he writes of a young Hispanic boy, Pedro, who lives with his nine brothers and sisters in the (city-funded) Wilshire Hotel.

This room costs 2,000 dollars a month,  
 You can believe it’s true.  
 Somewhere a landlord’s laughing till  
 he wets his pants.  
 No one here dreams of being a doctor  
 or a lawyer or anything;  
 They dream of dealing on the dirty  
 boulevard.  
 “Give me your tired and poor I’ll piss  
 on ’em”—  
 That’s what the Statue of Bigotry  
 says—  
 “Your poor huddled masses,  
 Let’s club ’em to death and get it over  
 with  
 And just dump ’em on the  
 boulevard.”

This was the “Reagan Revolution”—no massive upheaval of social structures and institutions, but a calculated and deliberate intensification of business as usual in late capitalist America. The so-called “war on poverty” of the 1960s had given way to the real war on welfare of the 1980s. As social spending and programs were cut to rebuild an imperialist army and line the pockets of defense industry contractors, tax breaks

and incentives were given to the individual and corporate rich. Deregulation and relaxation of child labor laws would make possible new levels of union busting and exploitation as the ruling class reasserted its chosen way of life—not that of the vast majority. The so-called other America—those who work for a living and sell their labor power daily for ever dwindling wages—have no part in that way of life which finds its champion in George Bush. The war he’s preparing to wage in the Middle East is to defend the life-styles of the ruling rich he represents—a way of life American working people can no longer afford to support.

As capitalist America increasingly reveals its inability to house and feed and provide decent jobs and health care for its citizens, it will be the responsibility of working people and others oppressed by capital to assert a new way of life and a new social order. Such can only be achieved after breaking decisively with the one presently represented by George Bush. □

### Notes

1. Much of this information was taken from the “Analysis of Poverty and Income Trends,” provided by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in 1988, 236 Massachusetts Ave. N.E., Suite 305, Washington, D.C., 20002.
2. These are the latest figures available from the census bureau.
3. Published in *American Society, Inc.*
4. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1978*, pp. 475-76.

## Draft Political Resolution

*The following draft political resolution was discussed by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in the weeks leading up to its sixth national conference in September and at the conference itself. The conference delegates decided that the **Bulletin in Defense of Marxism** should publish the text in order to gain a broader comment and discussion from our readers before it is put into its final form. We invite you to send suggestions and comments—either for publication or simply for consideration by a final editing commission.*

# Revolutionary Internationalism and the Struggle for Socialism in the United States

As the 1990s open, we see masses of people in motion throughout the world, struggling for freedom, democracy, and a better life. There has been a profound growth in the belief that society should be controlled by its people, that its resources should be utilized not to enrich powerful elites but to benefit the majority. This is the context for struggles now going on, and those to come, by working people, women, Blacks, and others of the oppressed in the United States. The perspectives of revolutionary socialism are essential for the triumph of these liberation struggles.

### The International Framework of U.S. Politics

The overall framework for the U.S. political situation is an international reality which involves several dimensions:

- **A worldwide crisis of overproduction and stagnation.** The anarchy of capitalist production, based upon private ownership and blind competition, is becoming more and more incompatible with rational planning. The competitive drive by individual capitalist conglomerates for the largest share of the market means wasteful duplication and ultimately unsold goods. The expansion of the consumer market is coming into conflict with the need of the capitalists to drive down wages and extract greater surplus value from the workers they exploit directly as employees.
- **A sustained challenge to U.S. economic hegemony.** U.S. dominance was established in the capitalist world economy at the end of World War II. A challenge to this has been mounted by other imperialist powers (such as Japan and Germany). In addition, there has been a significant growth in competition from the newly industrializing countries (such as South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, etc.) and also from bourgeois forces in other so-called third world countries. It is no longer certain that U.S. capitalism will continue to be "Number One."
- **The crisis and partial collapse of the bureaucratized workers' states.** This has a dual character, one aspect of which is beneficial to world capitalism. A powerful (even though inconsistent and reluctant) adversary to imperialism in world politics has been undercut. The regimes of the USSR and Eastern Europe will now be less inclined than ever to assist anti-imperialist struggles. The so-called "collapse of communism" also appears to eliminate a "collectivist" (noncapitalist) alternative model of economic development. All of this has opened up the possibility for expanding markets and investment opportunities in the partially collapsed workers' states for U.S.-based and other multinational corporations—though this remains insufficient to overcome the crisis of capitalist overproduction. The other side of this reality involves the fact that Stalinism has historically been an ally of imperialism. Its disintegration undercuts an important source of unprincipled compromise, disorientation, and betrayal that has severely and often fatally damaged the workers' movement and liberation struggles for more than half a century. In addition, the popular democratic expectations and militant working class upsurges in the USSR and Eastern Europe are a source of great instability not only in those areas, but also far beyond. This poses a threat to the stability essential for the normal functioning and health of the capitalist order.
- **The further internationalization of the capitalist labor process.** Increasing numbers of people in the countries oppressed by imperialism are drawn into the proletariat. We see a new intensification by world capitalism of national competition between workers. In the imperialist countries themselves, therefore, the capitalists have been far more effective in driving down the wages, living conditions, and working conditions of the working class. One aspect of this development is an increasing flow of immigrant workers into advanced capitalist countries, changing the composition of the working class there, and also contributing to shifts in occupational structures, wage rates, trade union organization, etc.
- **The third world debt crisis, combined with the financial crisis in the U.S.** The third world debt crisis has made many of the countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America more vulnerable than ever to the pressures of the imperialist countries—with the International Monetary Fund imposing policies and restructuring which are devastating for indigenous working people yet highly beneficial to multinational corporations. The other side of the reality, however, is that these immense debts are owed to major institutions in the advanced capitalist countries, and there are questions as to whether they can ever be repaid. Nonpayment could ultimately have dire consequences for world capitalism, and even now the problem is a serious destabilizing factor. At the

same time, the United States itself is forced to cope with its own internal financial crisis—the government deficit, the savings and loan fiasco, etc. This internal economic dilemma represents a dangerous drain and destabilizing factor, with damaging effects on the quality of life. It could contribute to economic collapse.

- **The classical tendency for the rate of profit to fall.** This has come into play in the current period in a manner which has motivated many corporations to cut back in investments to maintain and modernize their productive capacity. They seek instead more profitable (often non-productive) investment outlets. This has resulted, for example, in the decline of the U.S. steel industry, as the corporations which once concentrated their resources in steel production have abandoned many mills in order to secure higher profit rates from expanded holdings in the oil industry, real estate, etc. Related to this is a *crisis of infrastructure*: decapitalizing the railroads and other sectors of transport, along with decades of neglect in maintaining public sector responsibilities on highways, bridges, sewers, etc., has brought the infrastructure of U.S. capitalism literally to the brink of collapse.

The destructive and oppressive dynamics of the capitalist system, as well as the capitalists' exploitation of the working class and their strategy for beating back the power of the labor movement, have increasingly assumed a global character. In fact, in each sector of the world revolution there are at least the beginnings of working class ferment and insurgency which, combined with the objective factors generating them, create the potential for a far-reaching proletarian internationalism greater than anything seen since the end of World War I. This is only a *potential*, however, and will not automatically come into being. Without serious efforts on the part of conscious revolutionaries rooted in the working classes of various countries, it is not likely to be realized.

### U.S. Ruling Class Politics and Policies

The ruling class in the United States consists of several layers and factions which wield great power, although they represent only a tiny percentage of the population. The richest one percent of the population receives as much income overall as the poorest forty percent, with the top ten percent holding 70 percent of the wealth. Between one and five percent of the population controls between 80 to 90 percent of the economy—factories, mines, banks, natural resources, communication and transportation systems, the mass media and entertainment industry, educational and research institutions, a variety of services, production of food and other agricultural products, grocery and department store chains, etc., etc. This economic power directly translates into political power. The government exists to protect this social reality, by maintaining policies of procapitalist law and order inside the United States. It conducts a foreign policy which is in harmony with the needs of the 500 immensely powerful capitalist corporations.

The courts, police, and military have been utilized to repress any efforts at social change. But it has not been possible to maintain the minority rule of the capitalists simply through brute force alone. It has also been necessary to employ various techniques and strategies to legitimize capitalist authority and

power. Two major political parties compete with each other in elections. This provides only the illusion of democratic choice since both are dominated by capitalist political programs, economic interests, and financial contributions. There is a formality of free expression, pluralism, and social reform—won through more than two centuries of popular struggle—giving many the sense of an open and basically progressive social order. An ever-present divide-and-rule strategy fosters racism, national chauvinism, sexism, homophobia, and other prejudices which tend to separate people and weaken collective efforts. Most recently, legitimate popular concern over addictive drugs has been utilized to attack civil liberties, terrorize Black communities, and justify military operations abroad.

In spite of all the advantages of rich natural resources and modern technology, U.S. capitalism is marked by a general failure to solve society's problems and to meet the needs of all its people. It cannot, even in the best of times, live up to its own promises of providing liberty, justice, equal opportunity, and a decent life for all. A look at the homeless in any major U.S. city today exposes the failures of the present system.

Increasingly, people are reacting to this. Tremendous technological advances and productive capacities contrast sharply with the decline in the living standards and quality of life for the majority. This has spurred calls for the elimination of poverty, for decent housing and health care for all, improved education, and expanded recreational and cultural facilities. The drive for profits—regardless of the resulting pollution which threatens destruction of life on our planet—has aroused growing environmental concerns and activism. The vision of a democratic society, cultivated by spokespersons for the ruling class, clashes with grim realities, leading to battles to end all forms of discrimination based on race or ethnicity, gender, age sexual orientation, and national origin. Although sophisticated scientific facilities exist, the government does very little to find a cure for AIDS, while heightening discrimination against homosexuals by blaming them for the spread of this tragic disease. The lesbian and gay liberation movements have taken this up as a central issue along with their struggle to defend and extend their civil rights.

Meaningful changes have been won, improvements can be gained, and the possibility for a socialist transformation exists because there is a force which has the capacity to challenge the capitalist power: that force is the great majority of people whose labor is necessary for the functioning of the economy and society as a whole.

### Working Class Politics

The social and economic crisis increasingly bears down in various ways on the majority of the U.S. population. This makes it possible to build alliances between different sectors. These alliances will be firmer if an important truth is realized: the income of the overwhelming majority is basically tied to the price paid by the capitalists for labor power. This is the case whether they are white collar or blue collar, middle income or low income, regardless of race or ethnicity or gender or sexual orientation or age or geographical location. The great majority of the people in the United States, approximately 80 percent, are part of this broadly defined *working class*.

In the 1950s and early '60s much was made of the "middle class" incomes and status given to substantial sectors of the industrial working class. This resulted from the relative prosperity of U.S. capitalism at that time, combined with gains won by the labor movement in the 1930s and '40s. Today, the unmistakable trend involves the proletarianization of greater sectors of the population and a sharp decline in the real income of most blue-collar and white-collar workers.

Unlike some of the theorists who proclaim the rise of "post-industrial" society and bid "farewell to the working class," we recognize that the industrial working class remains central to the functioning of the U.S. economy and also to the progressive struggles of working people and the oppressed in the United States.

At the same time, we recognize the importance of the general proletarianization of the population—including the tremendous growth of nonindustrial sectors of the working class. This development is also linked to the changing composition of the American working class in terms of gender and race or ethnicity. In 1989 women constituted nearly 45 percent of the U.S. labor force (a figure which continues to grow), while remaining concentrated in lower-paid clerical, sales, and service sectors. African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans (many of whom are recent immigrants) represent an increasing proportion (in many areas of the country, a majority) of the workers in both industrial and nonindustrial enterprises. Issues of racism and sexism have, therefore, become central to the fight for workers' rights, while struggles of broader social movements—of oppressed racial and national minorities, of women, of youth, against militarism and imperialist wars, for protection of the environment, for better education, more livable cities, etc.—logically take on an increasingly *proletarian* content. We see the increased importance of organizing the unorganized (industrial and nonindustrial), especially in the workplace through trade unions, but also in communities and broader social movements.

We completely reject a false conclusion that some draw from this fact. It is not the case that specific issues having to do with race or sex, democratic rights, environmental concerns, etc., should simply be subordinated to some allegedly more important "proletarian" cause. Rather, it must be recognized that these specific social struggles and movements, each vitally important in their own right, have a *class* dimension. They are interrelated because the same class—the capitalist class—necessarily resists the full (unprofitable) realization of all the just demands of these struggles. They are interrelated because the full victory of each is in the interest of the various sectors of the working class and, in fact, of the working class as a whole.

The working class must think socially and act politically. This means that working people must not only think about their own individual problems; they must recognize that their problems can be understood only as part of a larger social reality. What's more, these problems cannot be solved individually, but require far-reaching political action: individuals linking up with many other people, and various social sectors joining forces around a working class program.

Such a working class political movement must also, to borrow a phrase from the ecology movement, think globally and act locally. As we've stressed, our national and local problems

cannot be understood apart from developments taking place on a world scale. If we want to change the world, however, it is necessary to build struggles for change where we are, and on specific issues around which large numbers of people can be mobilized, in a specific workplace or community. In order to be successful, however, such struggles must assume national dimensions, and in the world today can be truly practical only by developing strategies and alliances on a global level. Working class internationalism is not simply a generous sentiment—it is a burning practical necessity.

The implications of this understanding must lead working class and socialist activists to support and participate in a variety of social movements, seeking to help them advance toward their specific goals while at the same time helping to make people conscious of the interrelationships between the movements and the class orientation that can lead to victory. Methods of work and tactical approaches must be developed which can draw increasing numbers of working people into such movements.

It is also necessary to help draw the already existing labor movement (in particular the trade unions) into supporting and participating in the various progressive social struggles. Through this process, what is understood as "the labor movement" assumes much broader dimensions than simply organizations focused at the workplace around the elemental struggle on wages, hours, and working conditions. It will help the unions to conquer a broader vision of themselves and their social role—helping to cut across the narrow "job-trust" mentality that is prevalent today. Of course, trade unions themselves are vital institutions for the defense of the needs of working people. Without a strong, democratic, socially conscious trade union movement, it is unlikely that the working class will be able to win its freedom from capitalist oppression. Solidarity with organized labor must be built and deepened throughout the various social movements and among working and oppressed people as a whole.

The success of trade union struggles is especially dependent on the development of alliances, mutual assistance, and joint efforts between unions and labor federations of various countries—in order to be effective in the struggle against multinational corporations seeking to undermine and defeat workers through antiunion strategies of global economic restructuring. Unless labor develops its own independent foreign policy, it will continually be swindled and outflanked by the capitalist employers and politicians.

The logical direction of this entire orientation leads in the direction of the creation in the United States of a new political party, a *labor party*, based on the struggles and needs of the working class, developing a broad program of social change and deepening democracy—culminating in the creation of a socialist society.

### The Trade Union Movement

Organized labor in the United States, measured statistically, is at the lowest point since the early 1920s. Less than 15 percent of all workers are in unions, and less than 10 percent of workers in private industry are organized. Real wages declined by 8 percent over the decade of the 1980s, a decade that was notable for an antiunion offensive by the employers unprecedented

since the union-busting 1920s. Strikebreaking is a deliberate and frequent policy of the employers today, and the use of scabs has become widespread and virtually unchallenged by the unions.

The union bureaucracy, concerned with maintaining an amicable relationship with the employers rather than organizing a fight for what the workers need, has put up no effective resistance to the erosion of wages, benefits, and working conditions and even of the unions themselves. Gains achieved for the whole of society as a result of the upsurge of the 1930s—such as unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, minimum wage, and social security—have been drastically eroded throughout the last decade. Today some 30 percent of the U.S. population is without any health care insurance at all.

Workers are responding. Although union membership has declined markedly, the unions are still rooted in basic industry. It is there that they must be challenged if the employers are to fulfill the logic of their offensive, which is to totally defeat the unions and dismantle them. Even partial moves in this direction have brought powerful although isolated responses: P-9, Pittston, Phelps-Dodge, etc. More confrontations will come as the employers drive ahead. The large number of prolonged and bitter strikes during the 1980s shows that workers are unwilling to be reconciled with their declining standard of living and assaults on their organizations—even though the number of

strikes per year has declined almost uninterruptedly since the 1950s.

It is in the course of such struggles that the leadership of the unions will be reconstituted. The authority, political and moral, of the union bureaucracy, is at an all-time low, and dissident movements are making headway throughout organized labor. Some of the most prominent are in the United Auto Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, but many others exist with varying degrees of success.

The central importance of basic industry does not mean that activity among service and clerical workers, particularly in the public sector, should be ignored. These are the most rapidly expanding areas of the U.S. economy and also those in which there is the most sustained growth in new union membership. In the past few years, we have seen a number of successful struggles carried out by workers in the fields of health care, education, communications, hotel and food services, as well as by the large pool of clerical workers, especially those employed by governmental or educational institutions. It is significant that a major proportion of these newly organized workers are women and people of color.

Because of the particular social conditions faced by Black, Latino, and Asian American workers, as well as by working class women of all racial and ethnic groups, this latest wave of union organizing frequently addresses a broadened agenda beyond the questions of wages, hours, and workplace condi-

## Why I Joined the FIT

*At the sixth national conference of the FIT in September, three of the observers formally joined the organization. As a special feature we are publishing brief statements by each of them explaining the reasons why they made this decision.*

Several years ago I received a letter from George Breitman. It was about the time of the beginning of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* and I did not yet understand the full crisis in the Socialist Workers Party. I had dropped out of the SWP by 1978. I knew then that their approach to the trade unions and to placing their cadre in industry was nothing more than revolutionary dilettantism. I had seen it firsthand in rail and steel in Chicago, and later I noticed how they bounced their cadre from one union job to another. I knew this would look crazy to the working class people they would meet. It meant that individual members would never stay long enough in any one place to earn their fellow workers' respect, and it meant that the SWP cadre would never have a serious interest in their jobs or their unions.

By the time I responded to George's letter he was very ill. After about a year, Frank Lovell and I were in regular correspondence. Following closely the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* and the progress of the FIT, I soon concluded that the FIT's approach was the approach of longtime SWP leader Jim Cannon. This was best illustrated by the FIT's position of trying to win the old party back to its historic program.

Last June I traveled to the Twin Cities for a union convention. In Kansas City I visited FIT members, and in the Twin Cities I visited several more. All of them were eager to talk about their politics, and I was especially impressed by the quality of their commitment. One member made a special impression on me. A strong union person and former strike leader at Iowa Pork, he had never been in the SWP. He understood the politics of the Fourth International and of the U.S. trade union movement, but most of all he told me how FIT members had really been intent on helping them during their strike (and that was before he was a member), while the primary interest of other groups had been opportunist.

On the long drive back to Dallas I had plenty of time to think. It was probably around Pryor, Oklahoma, that I decided to join the FIT. On September 2, during the FIT conference, I did just that. There are big changes ahead, and I urge all interested to help us in the reconstitution of a united sympathizing section of the Fourth International in the U.S. I urge all readers of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* to join and build the FIT.

Gary Kennedy—Dallas



tions. Such unions are in the forefront of struggles for affirmative action and pay equity (comparable worth) and, likewise, tend to give attention to debates on other public policies, such as parental leave, health insurance, and reproductive rights. At times, this new layer of union activists plays a supporting role in the anti-intervention and antiwar movements as well. The reemergence of a broadened social agenda in this sector of the labor movement is a very important development, as is the increasing inclusion of women and people of color in leadership as well as rank-and-file union roles. Such developments have the potential to greatly strengthen links between the labor movement and other social struggles. They are also likely to lead to sharpened class conflicts between employers and workers who are fighting for their rights on several fronts at once.

To date, despite the embryonic fight-back, no significant layer of the union rank and file has developed a determined, authoritative leadership armed with a class-struggle program. Yet nothing else can lead the struggles of the future successfully. As in past periods, those who have definite ideas about what to do and also have an organic connection with the workers and their organizations will be tested in the struggle. If they respond skillfully and correctly, they will have an opportunity to gain mass influence and play a part both in the next upsurge of U.S. labor and in the reconstruction of a class-conscious vanguard of the American working class.

### **The Black Liberation Movement**

The African American communities have been hardest hit by the capitalist class drive to lower working people's living standards. Though there is deep-going anger and resentment over the injustices which have actually gotten worse over the past decade, no leadership has yet arisen which has been able to channel that resentment into effective political action. Some potential Black leaders have been elected to public office—usually as Democrats—over the past twenty years. They have, in turn, opened individual opportunities within their machines for a "Talented Tenth" who have tended to subordinate African Americans' collective interests to their individual career goals. Those potential leaders who have not chosen to play by ruling class rules have often been unjustly imprisoned or have fallen victim to police or extralegal violence. In some areas of the United States, however, conscious revolutionaries are developing as Black leaders. It will be necessary for them to chart an effective program of action and contend successfully with the reformist forces for the leadership of the African American struggle.

Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition is based on the Democratic Party political machines that have developed in the African American community. It fundamentally accepts the capitalist system as it is, seeking only "practical" reforms and inclusion of the Black middle class in the existing capitalist structure. Therefore, it is incapable of advancing the fundamental interests of the overwhelmingly proletarian African American people. While providing comfortable lives for a few, it offers only rhetoric to the majority. The Rainbow strategy is no real alternative to the desperation of crime- and drug-infested neighborhoods, crumbling housing, substandard schools, limited or nonexistent job opportunities, violence, and

disease. A recent study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that male life expectancy is higher in Bangladesh than it is in Harlem.

Instead of Jackson's reformist program, the situation calls for a revolutionary alternative based on the principle of African American self-reliance and independent organization. Many in the Black community raise the demand for national self-determination which, as it is popularly understood today, is not necessarily counterposed to fighting for full rights of citizenship in U.S. society, including basic human rights. Affirmative action, school desegregation, and ending housing discrimination continue to be important goals for the Black liberation movement.

Struggles against violence by the police and racist civilians (such as Howard Beach and Bensonhurst in New York) clearly demonstrate the need to affirm the Black community's right to self-defense. Even if today that self-defense will be primarily a political one—organizing and mobilizing public opinion to curb the most virulent racist elements—revolutionary Marxists understand full well that the Black community will at times be forced to organize other forms of self-defense as well. We unconditionally uphold its right to do so. Identification with the African continent—by fighting apartheid and working for multicultural education, among other things—is also a component of the struggle for self-determination. Many young African Americans are for the first time being introduced to Malcolm X's ideas. These fit the broad category of revolutionary nationalism as that term has been understood by our movement in this country, even though Malcolm did not refer to himself as a nationalist. Making Malcolm X's writings available and popularizing and explaining his vision are important ways to build a powerful movement for self-determination.

The percentage of African Americans in the basic industrial-working class is larger than their percentage in the population as a whole, and if present demographic trends continue, that proportion will increase. More African Americans belong to the AFL-CIO than to any other organization. By fighting for their rights as African Americans, as well as for general working class demands, Black workers, organized in such groups as Black Workers for Justice, can play a leading role in the formation of a class-struggle left wing in the organized labor movement.

White supremacy has been a foundation of American society since the first slaves were sold at Jamestown in 1619. The national liberation of the African American people is an essential component of the socialist revolution for which we are working. That socialist revolution is necessary if African Americans are to achieve their liberation; conversely, however, without a revolution by Black people for their own liberation, the socialist revolution in the U.S. cannot take place.

### **The Women's Liberation Movement**

Over the past two years, the women's liberation movement has undergone a dramatic and significant development which has made it one of the most vibrant focal points of struggle in U.S. society today. The most visible part of the women's movement at the present time revolves around the struggle to keep abortion legal and safe. Millions of women and men have been thrust into active protest as a result of recent Supreme

Court decisions and legislative actions restricting access to abortion and threatening to overturn the 1973 landmark decision of *Roe vs. Wade*. There are also efforts to counter ongoing attacks by the right-wing's so-called "right to life" movement. Of most significance in this fight-back are the two recent national mobilizations called by the National Organization for Women (NOW), which were supported and built by a broad array of pro-choice forces and their allies.

Recently developed local and statewide pro-choice coalitions have organized defense of women's health clinics attacked by Operation Rescue and have called citywide and regional demonstrations. This kind of direct action is crucial for insuring women's reproductive rights.

Labor opposition to attacks on abortion rights has grown. Many unions have passed pro-choice resolutions and have become prominent as endorsers of pro-choice demonstrations, and union speakers and contingents have become clearly visible at such actions. Given the increased presence of women in the wage workforce and in unions, and also the centrality of reproductive freedom to women's ability to exercise control over their lives, the labor movement represents a very important ally in this struggle.

The basic slogan for the current stage of the pro-choice movement is "Keep Abortion Legal and Safe." Many add the demands that abortions should also be affordable for all women and that forced sterilizations must consistently be opposed by pro-choice advocates. These have been especially important issues for working class women and women of color. In addition, sex education and availability of contraceptives are issues taken up by important currents in this movement.

The most serious weakness of the current pro-choice movement is its tendency to rely on Democratic and Republican party politicians to protect and promote women's rights—despite years of repeated betrayals by the two capitalist parties. This type of political activity has diverted energy and resources away from grass-roots organizing and mass actions, which are the most effective means to safeguard and expand women's

rights. While continuing to campaign vigorously for major-party candidates, NOW has launched a commission to explore the possibility of helping to create a new party which would address a range of issues and problems—including women's rights, economic justice, racism, and the destruction of the environment.

Three other areas warrant special attention: violence against women; pay equity and comparable worth; and so-called "family issues."

Violence against women has prompted the creation of battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers, educational campaigns about child sexual abuse, and a variety of projects and demonstrations. The recent revival of "Take Back the Night" marches shows two positive differences from those held in the 1970s: (1) the emphasis is now on women themselves ensuring the safety of our streets and resisting violence rather than relying on the police to provide such protection, and (2) the focus is on all forms of violence against women, wherever they take place—in homes and workplaces, during dates and social gatherings, and on campuses—not just attacks occurring in the streets.

The demand for pay equity is linked to the increased number of women workers and patterns of employment which trap women into "traditionally female" low-wage jobs. The efforts to achieve pay equity between men and women has been pursued on a very piecemeal basis, usually through individual union lawsuits or through studies and then adjustments in wage scales. This issue could spur a wider campaign, particularly by trade unionists, since all workers would benefit from more equitable wages.

So-called "family issues" are more accurately *social policy* issues. They include: provisions for parental leave, childcare, and medical benefits. Each of these needs has become particularly crucial, given the changing nature of the U.S. economy, including the rapid incorporation of women into the paid workforce as well as the steady decline of working people's wages. Although seen by many as "women's

## Why I Joined the FIT

I discovered the Fourth Internationalist Tendency through a personal contact almost three years ago. He'd been a committed social activist for over twenty years; I was just forming my political orientation. I have since realized that I was originally politicized, by default, in my home environment, and thereafter by "life experience," without having been fully conscious of it. I also became aware that my inherent radical nature and instinctive understanding of class struggle and oppression were valuable assets requiring definition, development, and direction. This potential needed to be linked to a logical system of thought, namely a Marxist approach to social reality.

The FIT, a serious and informed revolutionary Marxist organization, provides a framework for my theoretical and practical political education. The New York Local Organizing Committee sponsors forums, class series, and educational. These challenge me to stretch and grow as a political activist. The *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*, another source offering a solid Trotskyist perspective, is evidence of the FIT's perseverance in getting the truth out.

This summer I attended the Fourth International's youth camp in Belgium (see *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 78). That week of intense international solidarity sealed my decision to participate in building a revolutionary movement in the U.S. and worldwide. Finally, and most importantly, I joined the FIT because of its membership and what they stand for (and against). I have enormous regard for their commitment to a truly democratic process both in our own organization and in the social struggles we actively support.

Lisa Landphair—New York City

demands," these social policy issues are critical for all working people and should serve as the focus for intense and broad-based struggles.

### The Environmental Crisis

The environmental destruction caused by U.S. capitalism is recognized as a threat by growing numbers of people, including some of the capitalists themselves. In recent years, being an "environmentalist" has become fashionable among politicians, media celebrities, and corporate public relations specialists. But while such mainstream environmentalism is embraced by the elite, our interest is focused on the primary victims of pollution, and on the organized foot soldiers of opposition to environmental destruction.

Workers are doubly threatened by health hazards—first in the factory and second in the home. In 1987, a study by the United Church of Christ reported that the overwhelming majority of toxic waste sites are in areas heavily populated by African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans. Poisoned drinking water, childhood cancers, dangerous beaches, and foul air are radicalizing many who have never before been politically involved. The construction and operation of nuclear power plants creates a threat to life which will haunt future generations. Coalitions which include community activists, labor groups, and neighborhood organizations have been aggressively fighting back against the environmental assault in their communities. This creates genuine opportunities for the deepening of class consciousness, working class organizing, and militant struggle. A key link in effective struggles is for environmental activists to develop alliances with those who work in industries responsible for pollution.

Contrary to the claims of elitists in the environmentalist movement, the ongoing pollution and threatened destruction of life on our planet is not due to irresponsibility—through littering, "overpopulation," etc.—of the majority of the people. Nor is the problem one of "too much technology." Rather, it arises from the development and systematic misuse of technology according to the destructive logic of capitalism, a logic which places corporate profits before real human or ecological needs. This has been mirrored in so-called "postcapitalist" societies by bureaucratic arrogance and irresponsibility.

Marxists have a special responsibility for developing a comprehensive analysis and strategic approach around this question. We must show that a harmony is possible between a democratically controlled technology, genuine human needs, and the earth's ecological balance. This includes concern over urban environments—the elimination of poverty, the guarantee of clean and safe cities for all who live in them, with decent housing for every person. It also includes eliminating the environmental dangers generated by militarism.

### Struggles Against War and U.S. Intervention Abroad

Throughout the 1980s there have been recurrent upsurges of antiwar and anti-imperialist sentiment in the United States. The majority of protesters have not been consciously anti-imperialist, but the objective reality is that these interrelated movements have seriously restricted the room for maneuver of the U.S. ruling class. Significant sectors of the population have

organized solidarity efforts to oppose U.S. intervention and to build support for liberation struggles in Central America, the Middle East, Southern Africa, and elsewhere. There is also a more traditional peace movement which has opposed the threat of nuclear war for more than four decades. Many protest events have taken place over the past ten years demanding the safe removal of nuclear waste materials, an end to the production and transportation of nuclear weapons, to the docking of nuclear-armed submarines and ships, and to the construction and operation of missile sites.

These organized currents have been subject to dramatic ebb and flow over the past decade. They have not maintained themselves as *mass movements* over long periods. Often they have shrunk down to small handfuls and marginal networks. But at times one or another of these causes has been able to mobilize masses of people, ranging from tens of thousands to more than a million, in demonstrations and other highly visible public events. The level of activity can rise as world events, such as the Persian Gulf crisis, galvanize people into action once again. Such revivals can be expected, because U.S. imperialism is impelled by its very nature to use its military and economic power to attempt to subjugate peoples around the world.

The progressive thrust of the organized antiwar and anti-intervention movements has often been blunted by narrow lobbying efforts and support to politicians in the capitalist parties. Sometimes the energies have also been diverted away from mass protests by those stressing individual moral witness type actions. Other misguided efforts have involved advancing demands and slogans which give partial support to imperialist policies. One example of this is calling for "negotiations" between popular liberation forces or revolutionary governments and U.S. imperialism or its puppets. Liberation forces and revolutionary governments have every right to negotiate with the imperialists. They may at times even be forced to make concessions. But anti-intervention activists in the U.S. are not under the same compulsion and have a different responsibility: to build popular pressure for the immediate and unconditional cessation of all intervention and war moves of the imperialists. The U.S. has no right to negotiate the future of other countries.

The most effective activities have been those which have mobilized the largest numbers of people by uniting many different layers of U.S. society. Demands which have had the broadest appeal include: opposition to the U.S. government's installing and propping up repressive regimes and financing counterrevolutionary forces ("No Contra Aid!" and "End All U.S. Aid to El Salvador!"); support for using U.S. resources to meet the needs of working people ("Jobs Not War!" and "Cut Military Spending—Fund Human Needs!"); and endorsement of the democratic right of peoples in other countries to decide for themselves what kind of society to have ("Support Self-Determination!," "U.S. Hands Off Cuba!," "End U.S. Occupation of Panama Now!" and "U.S. Troops Out of the Persian Gulf!").

### The Struggle Against Imperialism

The struggle against war and U.S. intervention abroad cannot be understood apart from the struggle against imperialism. This is highlighted by the dramatic U.S. war moves in the oil-rich

Middle East, in response to the threat against U.S. corporate interests posed by the ambitious Hussein regime of Iraq.

Often the word "imperialism" has been employed simply as a term of propagandistic abuse, or as a catchall involving any form of aggression by one country against another. Since this concept is central to our approach, it is necessary to explain what we mean by it. *Imperialism* is an analytical concept utilized by revolutionary Marxists to define a *stage of capitalism* involving: 1) the growth of large capitalist corporations and their domination of the economy; 2) the merging together under corporate control of different branches of industry; 3) the interpenetration of financial and industrial capital; 4) the growing entanglement of corporate power and state power; and 5) the global reach of competing capitalist interests of various countries for raw materials, markets, cheap labor, and lucrative investment opportunities.

An important aspect of imperialism is the economic subjugation, superexploitation, and also political-cultural degradation of areas with less developed industry—especially in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America—by the advanced capitalist powers. Another important aspect is the use of militarism and war to protect and advance the interests of the imperialists, in some cases against each other (as with World Wars I and II), in some cases against "Communism" (the cold war and nuclear arms race), and in some cases against radical national liberation struggles (Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador, etc.), in some cases against bourgeois nationalists in the third world (recently in regard to Panama and Iraq).

While violence and injustice can come from other sources than imperialism (Stalinist regimes, the dictatorships of petty-bourgeois and bourgeois nationalists, and others have proved fully capable of immense crimes and large-scale killing against their own people as well as against other peoples), imperialism is the primary and most constant source of war and oppression in our time. This shapes our approach to antiwar struggles.

We unconditionally favor the elimination of all nuclear weapons, which can destroy civilization and life on our planet. At the same time, we do not favor "peaceful co-existence" between the imperialist powers and those whom they threaten and oppress. Rather, we favor the elimination of imperialism.

We call for *self-determination* for the peoples of all countries where imperialism seeks to impose its own preferred governments and solutions. We demand immediate, unconditional U.S. military withdrawal from all countries. We say "not one person and not one penny" for the U.S. war machine or for the support of repressive "pro-U.S." governments in other countries. Instead, the resources squandered on militarism should be used to meet the needs of working people here in the United States—just as the resources of imperialist-exploited countries should be controlled by their own people.

The liberation of working people in the United States is intimately linked with the liberation of all countries from imperialism.

### Revolutionary Socialist Strategy

Revolutionary socialists help build struggles, organizations, and movements to defend both the immediate and long-term interests of workers and the oppressed. Immediate demands and reforms won under capitalism are essential to help people survive and improve their situations in the here-and-now. Even limited gains are important, because they give people a sense of their own power and heightened confidence in their ability to win victories through collective action. This is vital in developing organizational skills, encouraging persistent struggles of the working class and other layers, and furthering political consciousness.

There are several general principles that revolutionary socialists utilize as we help to build broad struggles and movements. These principles, expressed through the concept of *the united front*, include:

## Why I Joined the FIT

I first started working with the comrades of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency in 1986. I had recently moved to Minnesota and was active in the P-9 support committee. FIT comrades played a vital role, taking on key assignments, providing leadership, and doing their best to make sure that the work of the support committee got done. I was impressed with their effort—its quality and their nonsectarian stance.

Later I had the opportunity to work with them again on women's issues, Central America, and local labor questions. They were a constant source of encouragement to me, and the quality of their work impressed not a few activists in the Twin Cities. People told me so more than once.

For anyone serious about fighting injustice no single issue or combination of issues is enough. Injustice in today's world is systemic. Capitalism is the problem and socialism is the solution. We desperately need a society based on the elimination of oppression and exploitation in all its forms. The only program I know of that points the way forward to the creation of a truly liberating human society is that of revolutionary Marxism. Through reading the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* I saw how the comrades in the FIT are armed with this revolutionary program. I began to understand why they are so effective in their work and so serious about the tasks confronting all of us.

I consider it a privilege to have joined the FIT. I now stand with a group of comrades linked, through the Fourth International, with like-minded revolutionists across the globe. Together we are fighting for the world socialist revolution.

John Daniel—Baltimore

- non-exclusion, which provides a place for everyone in the struggle who agrees with the specific demands being fought for, regardless of viewpoints held on other questions;
- a specific demand or set of demands which enables many forces with different general perspectives to work together for a common goal;
- internal democracy based on rank-and-file decision making, which helps participants learn how to organize and lead the struggle;
- political independence, to prevent attaching the struggle to the electoral bandwagon of any ruling class party or politician.

A mass-action orientation is the only one consistent with exerting maximum pressure on the powers-that-be.

As long as capitalism exists, however, the gains won by working people and the oppressed will always be partial and can always be eroded or overturned. It's necessary to fight for reforms in ways that raise revolutionary consciousness, strengthen organization for more intense fights against capitalist institutions, and establish strong links between all those with a common interest in an end to the system of oppression. Battles for reform will then contribute to the process of fundamentally changing society.

Revolutionary socialists also work in a sustained and non-sectarian manner to build a revolutionary party. We are guided in this by a creative application of Marxist program and methodology to the solution of the social problems of our time. This party must be rooted organically in the life and struggles of the working class and of all oppressed groupings. The only way a revolutionary party can gain authority is by proving in life that it has the program, strategy, and activists to win struggles. Through the tests imposed by real battles, such a party will show its capacity for leading the revolutionary transformation of society.

Our own organization, the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, seeks to play a revolutionary role in today's struggles, but it is *not* the party we have just described, nor does such a party presently exist in the United States. It remains to be built, by serious-minded activists who are presently involved in various political groups and by new layers who are just becoming involved in the class struggle and other efforts for social change.

One key component of our approach to this party-building task is our revolutionary internationalist orientation. Today the Fourth International is the only revolutionary current on a world scale that includes real national organizations from every continent, seeking to advance class struggles in their own countries and fighting for socialism. Its cadres are active in combating vote fraud and disappearances in Mexico, in building the Workers Party of Brazil, in the French antiracist movement, in the British anti-poll tax protests, in the fight for socialist democracy in the USSR and Eastern Europe, in the struggles against apartheid in South Africa, against Zionist oppression in Palestine, against the colonial subjugation of Northern Ireland, and in many other struggles of working people, of women, among oppressed nationalities, peasants, etc. Although reactionary U.S. legislation prevents us from formally enjoying membership in this world party of socialist revolution, we participate in its work to the fullest extent possible.

These, then, are the four basic strategic points which guide us: 1) working to advance every mass organization and popular struggle, even for partial reforms, in a revolutionary manner; 2) building united front efforts with other forces and fighting to keep them nonexclusionary, democratic, politically independent, and focused on mass action; 3) party building around a clear programmatic perspective; 4) collaboration with international co-thinkers. Taken together, they represent the basic elements of a revolutionary Marxist strategy in the United States today. □

## **It happened too late for this issue of the *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism***

### **Massacre of Palestinians by Israeli Troops in Jerusalem**

(Watch for coverage in our December issue)

## From the Arsenal of Marxism

*This article first appeared in the Militant, April 6, 1964, at the height of the civil rights movement, and employs the terminology of that period. George Breitman and the Socialist Workers Party early on recognized the importance of Malcolm X's developing political thought for revolutionary Marxism and the struggle for social justice in the United States.*

*Breitman, a founder and leader of the Socialist Workers Party, is best known for his books and articles on Malcolm X, including **The Last Year of Malcolm X: The Evolution of a Revolutionary** and three volumes of Malcolm's speeches. He was also chief editor of the 14-volume series **Writings of Leon Trotsky (1929-1940)**. After his 1984 expulsion from the Socialist Workers Party, Breitman was a founding member of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency. He died in 1986.*

Conservatives and liberals, white and black, have never had any use for the Black Muslims. But they aren't happy about Malcolm X's departure from the Muslims, the policies he is expounding or the new organization he is trying to build. Malcolm in an independent role is from their standpoint "more dangerous" (to the status quo) than the Muslims.

In this they show sound instinct. The organization Malcolm is trying to build will not be just one more out of many. Thanks to the policies he is now formulating and to his exceptional talents and prestige, it has the potential of transforming black nationalism from a progressive idea into an influential movement; of bringing together sizable militant and radical forces that are now disunited or dispersed; and of strongly influencing and raising the consciousness and combativity of the Negro community as a whole. Moderates have as much reason to be worried about this development as radicals to be encouraged.

What are the distinctive features of the program Malcolm is developing now?

**1) A positive, activist attitude toward the immediate, day-to-day struggles for better jobs, schools, and housing.**

This is an important departure from the position of the Muslims. Their hands-off policy prevents them from joining or influencing the hundreds of thousands of Negro militants engaged in such struggles. Malcolm will now be able to lead as well as join the kind of fights he was previously restricted to watching and commenting on from the sidelines. Moderate Negro leaders are already visibly sorry about the change because they have no illusion about the difference it will make.

Simultaneously, Malcolm has vigorously cut through the dilemma that paralyzes the Muslims and some non-Muslim black nationalists. In action he is demonstrating that it is possible to be involved in the daily struggles against discrimination without in any way compromising or abandoning the belief that separation, rather than "integration" (in this society), is the only way to achieve equality.

Malcolm's position on this question now corresponds roughly to that of Rev. Albert B. Cleage, chairman of the Freedom Now Party in Michigan. Cleage's direction was different—he started out as a pure-and-simple integrationist and moved from there to nationalism, while Malcolm took off from the point of separatist abstentionism before reaching his present position. But their conclusions are similar, and their arguments and example will do much to make nationalism a more effective force in the mainstream of the Negro movement.

**2) An advanced position on self-defense.**

By boldly proclaiming the right of Negroes to defend themselves against physical attack by racists, and urging them to form rifle clubs in areas where the government fails to protect them against violence, Malcolm is raising the banner valiantly unfurled several years ago by Robert F. Williams, of Monroe, N.C. (And his proposal is being distorted and misrepresented by the capitalist press and Negro liberals just as

maliciously as Williams's was.)

The difference between Malcolm's stand on self-defense and that of pacifists like Rev. Martin Luther King and James Farmer of CORE is too obvious to require comment. But it is worth noting that Malcolm's present position is different from the Muslims' too.

The Muslims believe in self-defense too, and say so, and this is one of the things in their favor. But while they defend themselves, their attitude to the question of self-defense for the Negro people as a whole is abstract; and sometimes it is inconsistent. Elijah Muhammad was publicly critical, from a standpoint like that of the pacifists, about Malcolm's statement on rifle clubs. So Malcolm's position goes beyond the one he expressed as a Muslim minister.

**3) A different approach to politics.**

Malcolm's position on politics is not yet completely worked out. But he is already far ahead of both the Negro liberals and

### Malcolm X Spurs Civil Rights Forces

## His Stand Can Unite and Build Movement

by George Breitman

the Muslims. Unlike the liberals, he condemns both capitalist parties. Unlike Muhammad, who blows hot and cold about independent black political action, Malcolm pledges active intervention in the 1964 election to keep Negroes from being "victims of a political sellout again."

His plans in this connection will not be released until later, and he says his group's attitude to the recently formed Freedom Now Party still remains to be determined. But whatever the intermediate steps may be, and even if it does not occur immediately, Malcolm's movement will become an important and explosive factor in American politics.

#### 4) Promotion of black unity.

Malcolm is trying to bring about cooperation between Negroes despite differences of ideology, religion, politics, etc.

Without demanding that anyone surrender his beliefs, any more than he is surrendering his own, Malcolm wants those who advocate "integration" through struggle and those who advocate "separation" through struggle to band together in support of such things as rent strikes, school boycotts, repeal of frisk and no-knock laws, etc.

Malcolm remains a Muslim in religion and is organizing a "Muslim Mosque, Inc." in Harlem. Despite this name, it will be open to, and seek to function as a center for, Negroes of any religion or no religion. Time will tell if he has chosen the best name for the broad purpose he has in mind. In any case, religion will not be a barrier to united black action as far as he is concerned.

Nor, apparently, does he intend to fall into the trap of demanding loyalty affidavits or anti-communist oaths from those who want to join or help the struggle.

Malcolm's seriousness about helping to achieve black unity is unmistakable, and his understanding of the relation between black unity and other phases of social struggle is out of the ordinary too. When he says, "There can be no black-white unity until there is some black unity. There can be no workers' solidarity until there is first some racial solidarity," he is not, unlike some black nationalists, claiming that working class solidarity is impossible or unnecessary but is explaining one of the conditions through which it may be achieved on a broad and lasting basis.

#### To Avoid Sellout

Revolutionary socialists will certainly agree that a meaningful and mutually beneficial labor-Negro alliance will not be forged until the Negro people are organized independently and strongly enough, numerically and ideologically, to assure that their interests can't be subordinated or sold out by the other partner or partners in any alliance.

Will Malcolm, with these and other new policies and tactics, be able to build a big movement? Only the struggle itself will decide that. But I think Malcolm is right when he says that his present views reflect the feelings of the mass of Negroes. In my opinion he has formidable assets as well as difficult obstacles, and he stands a better chance of supplying militant leadership

to the Negro struggle today than any other well-known Negro figure in America.

If Malcolm's brand of black nationalism catches on and spreads, what will the effects be?

It will exert stronger pressure on groups like the NAACP and CORE than the Muslims did. It will put their leaders on the spot, forcing them to act more militantly or to be discredited, bypassed, and discarded.

A civil rights movement coming under the influence of Malcolm's ideas will speed up developments in the labor movement, posing the issues of discrimination and tokenism in the unions and in the plants more sharply than they are posed now. Unionists would be compelled to take sides plainly for or plainly against the Negro. In the process some new allies might be found for the Negro struggle among unionists who recognize how disastrous it would be for the labor movement to lose the support of the Negro community; at the very least, illusions about the Meanys and Reuthers would be dispelled, and that certainly would be a gain.

The spread of Malcolm's ideas would do more to frighten Congress into passing civil rights legislation than 16 marches of the type staged in Washington last August.

It would also serve to strengthen and unite the hundreds of local militant organizations now functioning separately throughout the country—either in a federation coordinating their activities, or in a single national movement.

A big movement of the kind Malcolm is organizing might give the Freedom Now Party the impetus, cohesion, program, and national leadership that it has lacked up to now. Or it might possibly supersede and replace the Freedom Now Party as the predominant national expression of independent black political action.

The Muslims would feel a heavy impact too. For the time being, Muhammad and Malcolm are trying to avoid any direct clashes. But the

dilemma that gripped the Muslims before Malcolm's departure has not been resolved, and it will inevitably flare up again if Malcolm's policies get mass endorsement. The Muslim organization is not going to collapse because Malcolm has left, but it has lost some of its dynamism. If Malcolm's movement grows, the Muslim organization as a whole will have to make a similar reorientation, or "the younger Black Muslims (who) want to see some action" will be heard of again, and either will leave to join Malcolm or produce an even bigger crisis inside the Muslim organization.

Malcolm's break will also have, is having, repercussions in the radical movement. Revolutionary socialists, who understand the progressive and revolutionary content of black nationalism, approve and support the course he is following and the contribution he is making to the mobilization of the Negro masses against an oppressive system. Other radicals or would-be radicals, who don't understand black nationalism, will be forced by the spread of Malcolm's views to reconsider their whole approach to the Negro struggle or they will find themselves on the wrong side of the civil rights barricades. □

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**"A meaningful and mutually beneficial labor-Negro alliance will not be forged until the Negro people are organized independently and strongly enough"**

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# Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

## 42. Conversations in the Main Alley

I spent many pleasant days with Yefim and Aleksandr—not days of abundance, celebration, or drunken gaiety, but days of interaction with honest people.

While we walked in the main alley we often reminisced about our wives, who by coincidence were all Russian women. Aleksandr's faithful wife was waiting for him. Yefim was not so lucky. His wife had suddenly asked for a divorce just one week after she had come to see him. She had been left with their child—working as an engineer in the same factory where Yefim had worked when they took him away. He had not the slightest doubt that she had been pressured to divorce him. The secretary of the party committee had summoned her for a heart-to-heart—that is, the kind of conversation where one person sits quietly on the edge of her chair while the other one, with quiet, sympathetic, unctuous words, torments her to despair. Possibly, the director of the factory was also there. When there are two of them, they constitute “public opinion” (just as Serov and I when we were together constituted a “mob”).

Until recent times, a divorce was very expensive—500 rubles of the old money. The high cost was aimed at reducing the divorce rate, without concern for the fact that divorces would occur anyway or for the burden this expense imposed on those earning low wages. However, to divorce a prisoner cost only 3 rubles—in current money 30 kopecks, or the cost of two portions of ice cream. It was the idea of the price that angered Yefim. He could not forgive his wife for leaving him at a cost of only 3 rubles.

“Her price was so low!” he exclaimed. “Would I ever go back to her? No way!”

Yefim had parted with his seven-year-old son. He carried in his pocket a photo of the boy and often stole a look at it. He recounted to us how the boy had once said to him: “Papa, the kids tease me by calling me a Jew. Is it true?”

Yefim answered: “You have two halves. Unbutton your trousers and show them that up to the belt you are not a Jew—you are just like them. However, above the belt, you just might be Jewish.”

The boy didn't understand this and Yefim's wife blew her top. “What are you teaching the boy, you shameless creature!”

Prison and camp took a heavy toll on Yefim. Before our experience in the camp near Moscow he had managed to work in Kolyma. From there he had been brought to Moscow by airplane as a specialist with the required qualifications—but in handcuffs. Only a little over forty, he was absolutely gray; and later in

Vorkuta, after one year, he became a semi-invalid. Why is it some people have only bad luck?

Other comrades weren't abandoned by their wives, but his left him. Other comrades had investigators who just went about their routine, but his was a real cretin. He gave Yefim an extended middle name. Being one of those dullards who cannot grasp new words, he listed Yefim's name as “Mendeleyevich.” Yefim, with difficulty, tried to explain to him that a son of Pantelei would be Panteleyevich, but the son of Mendel has no “ye”—and is simply Mendelevich.

Wrinkling his forehead the investigator, with great effort, understood, but was too lazy to rewrite the previous records of his interrogation (corrections were not allowed—that's a violation of the law!) and waved the matter aside: Mendeleyevich, Mendelevich—what's the difference! It would seem to be a trifle. But you can try for ten years and still not get this trifle corrected.

Later, after being freed, you receive a passport which is issued on the basis of camp information. It says: “alias.” The word “alias” immediately makes the official at the passport desk suspicious. “Isn't this a dangerous recidivist, who hides under another name, like “Petukhov, alias Kuritsyn”? You go on and try to explain to him that you have used the same name all your life. And besides, it would be stupid to keep the same last name and try to hide by changing your middle name. “Prove that you are not a camel,” as the old saying goes. The “alias” cannot be stricken. And because of this stupidity they will not issue you a passport but only a temporary certificate. Six months later you go again to the passport desk, you again stand in line as long as you have to, and again unsuccessfully try to prove that you are still not a camel. Again you receive only a certificate with “alias” on it. Who will be willing to take responsibility for deleting a clear absurdity from this most important human document?

I walked along the alley with still another interesting fellow. A son of Russian emigrants. You would not really call him an emigrant since he was taken from Russia as a boy. He grew up in Paris and received a higher education there—and worked as an engineer. He played an active role in the resistance, in its Russian section. He was imprisoned by the Gestapo and put in a concentration camp. He was tortured with electric shocks. After the war—influenced, like the Shanghai fellow Igor Alekseyev, by Stalin's appeal—he headed for his unfamiliar homeland along with a whole group of comrades. There was another member of this same group in our camp, a former White officer. My friend, with a

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.



melancholy smile, told how that fellow, upon reaching our shores, had knelt to kiss the Russian soil. After about three years, our Parisian friends had come to know their homeland pretty well. They had learned many things that were previously unconfirmed about the camps, though there had been a clamorous campaign about them in the French bourgeois press. My friend, as a Russian patriot, wanted to believe Vyshinsky when he swore to the United Nations General Assembly that talk of forced labor in the USSR was slander. Finally, the day came when our Parisian friend received the opportunity to study this problem first-hand. They gave him long enough to do the job properly: 25 years.

My friend loved Russia, but he also loved France. Previously I had known France only through its literature. But he showed me how fine a country it really was.

He had traveled to England. To go from France to England was as simple as going from Moscow to Serpukhov. You needed no international or internal passport; generally no papers were required at all. My friend had been around, but there were many things that he had yet to learn.

He was amazed to see how we worked without working. He was not used to *tufta* [work without working] and “obscuring.” Honest work was an ingrown part of his being.

However, he did not yet appreciate the scale of Stalin’s reliance on showpieces.

They brought us a piece of machinery, a very simple press for bending sheet iron, made in the Kurgan mechanical works. Undoubtedly the plant had fulfilled its plan successfully; there were very few enterprises that did not. They fulfilled “at any cost.” There was nothing more sacred than the plan.

The Kurgan machine was a fully finished product living up to our own peculiar standards: a horribly executed mounting plate; levers that it is impossible to describe—clumsy, somehow or other made to fit in place. It was all terribly heavy. The foundry workers also fulfilled their plan, which was calculated in tons. And the two plans, fulfilled alongside one another in the same territory, under the leadership of a single director, collided and resulted in such products. What was the machine supposed to produce? Shame and disgrace? And to top it off, so that everyone would know that it was manufactured in the final days of the month, and that they had stretched all hands to reach 101 percent of the plan—the much-coveted 101 percent—the factory seal had been affixed upside down. In Kurgan, they upheld the seal of their factory by standing it on its head.

“*Tufta*” and “*pokazuka*” [doing things for show] were camp words. But these phenomena were not born in the camps at all. They came in from the outside. Still, here behind the sealed walls the authorities did allow the inner workings of these phenomena to be revealed. Everything was called by its real name.

My notebooks would certainly be among the works that have been contemptuously christened “camp literature.” But you may have noticed, if you happen to have fished other such bottles from the ocean, that this literature—so hated by the authorities—is interesting not because of what was unique about camp life, but rather because of what camp life had in common with all aspects of our society. Things found a sharper and clearer expression in the camps. The coherent way in which social phenomena were reflected in camp life—that is what makes it interesting. By examining the activity of any of the camp apologists you will better understand the origins of the Kurgan machine tools. And sometimes it is possible to better discern many other things through the prism of the camps—which could break down the rays of Stalin’s brilliance into its simple component colors.

Doing things for show—*pokazuka*—is not limited to physical production. That dazzling smile of the girl photographed next to her machine is supposed to show the whole world that she is happy at her work. Possibly her father and brother are in the camps as enemies of the people, but she is happy all the same.

Being happy at your work is a real possibility; it is not an invention. But you experience it only when you are sure that your work is good and useful to someone. *Tufta* brings no happiness. If you see that your work is worthless, that nobody needs it, and that it belongs in the category of “it’ll do for now”—or worse, if you see its hidden dishonorable purpose—then of course there is no happiness involved.

But when you are deprived of freedom, when your every thought is subjected to scrutiny, when you know that tomorrow some zealous official could dream up a new way to expand the prohibitions inside your already tightly restricted zone, then a special form of happiness from work is born; it is the happiness of self-denial, a salutary ability to rid oneself of thoughts by devoting oneself to the process of concentrated work. I got to know that kind of happiness.

I pushed tormenting thoughts out of my mind by turning on the machine and focusing with the greatest possible precision as I strictly followed the markings in order to bore holes into the panel for our cunning machine.<sup>1</sup> I got to know that kind of happiness.

In our unit, representatives of other socialist countries as well as people from hostile and neutral states got to share with us the joy of creating a machine of no use to humanity. There was even a man from Brazil. There were many Poles, Germans, and Austrians. I remember one of the Austrians with special fondness.

He was a fine chap, good natured and intelligent—a real worker intellectual from the layer that produced Bebel and Telman. He knew and understood German literature and had read translations of many works by Tolstoy, Gorky, and Chekhov. But more than anything in the world, Max loved music, and naturally, Beethoven.

So one evening—we were often left alone in the evening—Max and I were working in the shop. A freeman who was posted for the sake of appearance was sitting in the office with a book. Our shop had radio piped in. That evening they were broadcasting an opera by Zhukovsky: “*With All My Heart*.” Max learned from “the late news” over the radio that it had been awarded a Stalin prize. He was, therefore, very interested. Today it is no longer produced and, along with the novel on which its libretto was based, the opera has sunk into oblivion.

We were working, trying not to make noise, and listening. Max endured the overture patiently; then came the arias. Max hurled his skrewdriver to the floor and began to cry out:

“Mikhail, pour a bucket of cold water over me or I’ll go mad.”

The guard looked out of the office. Max sang at the top of his lungs and began to dance. He was a temperamental fellow.

We nevertheless held out for about an hour and a half. By now it was no longer the music that held Max’s attention, but the applause. The public was clapping lavishly. It may be that the applause was meant ironically: people, deprived of the possibility of showing their real opinion concerning a composer who could not be criticized, who had automatically become a laureate, used the only form accessible to them for expressing their feelings: they organized an ovation in order to obstruct the performance.

We soon read in the newspapers that the prize had been awarded to Zhukovsky “mistakenly.” Stalin alone awarded the prizes and he alone could take them away. Yes, there were some strange mistakes in those capricious times.

I respected Max as an extremely decent man. But his investigator, convinced that all people are scoundrels, hoped to make a provocateur out of him. For a very long time, maybe a year and a half or two years (Max told me but I forget exactly), he was held in solitary confinement. But this stubborn Austrian would not yield. They had to give him 25 years in the camps.

He did not sign a single record of interrogation. But there is no problem that cannot be solved. The investigator simply summoned from the corridor one of the warders on duty who attested in writing that the person under interrogation in his presence refused to sign the record. Then he affixed his official signature. The

record, along with the punishments handed down by the Mr. Fidget [jail guard], were thus presented according to the principle: "I do hereby attest," and were thereby transformed into "materials of the case."

Until Max told me his story I did not know that a case could be put together even without a confession. Someone signed it? That's all we need.

\* \* \*

In our camp there was a German, a member of the Central Committee of the German Communist Party. We knew very well that he was not the only member of the leadership of a foreign Communist party who was in the camps. They imprisoned and killed also Polish activists, and Hungarians like Bela Kun.<sup>2</sup>

"What kind of Comintern is possible," Yefim said bitterly, "when one Communist party imprisons members of the Central Committee of another Communist party?"

"You forgot to add," I answered, "that the Polish Central Committee cannot imprison our members, but we can imprison all of theirs."

It was a matter of propriety in the Peoples Commissariat of Foreign Affairs to speak with the Polish bourgeoisie in refined diplomatic language. But talks with the Communists of Poland took place in other offices, in that abusive language of great Russian bullies. The Stalinist autocracy began to apprehend and not release members of its fraternal parties—who ever more noticeably shifted into the position of subordinate little brothers, as the *experience* of the largest party in the world increased. This was the new style in international workers' solidarity. The dissolution of the Comintern,<sup>3</sup>—which was motivated on a different (but also rather significant) basis—only formalized what was already taking place.

And suddenly, after the war, when the other little-brother parties no longer dared to protest, there was one that decided not to be submissive. And then it started: meetings, exposés, the voices of the workers! And everything, of course, on the basis of the "people's consciousness" that yesterday knew only one thing about Yugoslavia but today found out that Tito, Kardel, Dzhilas, and Rankovich had always been a gang.

I remember one beautiful day in Akhtarsk. I was listening to Comintern Radio from Moscow. The name of this station was all that remained of the Comintern in the memory of the people. A stream of broadcasts in Balkan languages began, totally unexpectedly, one after another. And how angry-sounding they were. You wouldn't wish the likes of it on anyone. In neither the Bulgarian nor the Serbian could I make out anything coherent except labels of abuse. There were so many of them and they were so concentrated that I understood: Tito has been declared a bandit.

Our site occupied a small territory. The watchtowers stood nearby and we could hear the established lines which were recited during the changing of the guard: "I turn over this post guarding the enemies of the people." "I accept this post guarding the enemies of the people." The soldiers had it drummed into their consciousness that we were their inveterate enemies.

Once I was sent to help the stovesmith, a prisoner, repair the stove in a building for camp officials. They posted a guard with us, a nice lad of about 20. Only the two of us were there with him.

We worked along for an hour or two. The soldier was nervous. He rolled and chain-smoked cigarets, and offered us one. It was evident that he wanted to start a conversation but did not dare to do so. I whispered to the stovesmith:

"The lad is afraid to speak with the two of us at once. I'm going to move away."

I moved my box with the grouting. I got a light from the soldier and he asked if I had been in prison long. I answered and his next

question was bolder: "Why are you in here? I heard that they put people in prison for nothing. Can that be true?"

"It is true," I answered. "That's how I ended up here."

I bent over my box and began in a low voice to tell him about my case. But how could I really get him to understand what my case was about? It was not such a simple thing to do.

"I got a second term because of the first case, which I had already served a term for even though I was innocent. And that comrade over there," I said pointing to the stovesmith, "is in prison because he got surrounded by the enemy. He was a soldier like you. Ask him about it."

The guard went over with his tobacco pouch to the stovesmith and had a quiet conversation with him, keeping a watchful eye on the door the whole time. I acted as lookout.

Seeing someone coming off in the distance, I signaled. The soldier straightened up and made a stern expression like one should have when on duty guarding enemies of the people. Did he believe us or didn't he? Could we in 10 or 20 minutes convince him when day in and day out they hammered into his head: Those people before you are enemies! And when will he get a chance to talk with us without the officials (or his comrades) knowing about it? But the mere fact that he wanted to know the truth, and for the sake of it took a great risk, was evidence that the hearts of the people were changing. The more camps there are, the more guards are posted, the more secrets there are requiring cover-up and deception, then all the more persistently do people begin to have doubts: "Why are they in prison?"

Contact with the camp prompted questions in the minds of anyone whose heart was not made of stone. For the first time in their lives young women trainees (for some reason they did not send the young men to work with us) came face to face with people the press and radio had always referred to with hatred and malice. It was evident, and they began to be persuaded, that they had been lied to. However, they were all afraid to be open about it; they didn't trust one another.

A young woman trainee worked in our laboratory. She was not particularly pretty but she was bright, charming, and kind. Next to her worked a prisoner, a Lithuanian lad who was quite inexperienced (but already political). He had the smile of a child and the height of a telegraph pole. In the course of their work they barely exchanged a dozen words all day long, and then they parted—she to leave the camp zone to go home to her mother, and he to go into the camp zone to his warden. The naive lad wrote a letter pouring out his heart and unobtrusively thrust it into her hand. The girl read the letter and grew frightened but did not report it (as was required by the rules!); she tore the letter up and threw it into the wastepaper basket. Her older friend, who had long ago lost her naivete, picked the wadded note from the basket and (out of the purest feelings of friendship) gave it to the Special Division. Within 30 minutes our Romeo was summoned with his things. He was placed in the punishment cell and later taken away somewhere.

All the official and Komsomol channels began to reprimand the girl, or "rub her with sand," as the expression went.

Didn't this all happen because the very sight of her aroused kindness and faith in humanity? She didn't know how to flirt. She didn't even know how to hide a boy's letters. She was not at all responsible for what the young prisoner did except to the extent that, looking at her kind, open, snubbed-nose little face, one could believe that there is still humanity in the world.

For several days she did not show up. They were working on her. But evidently it didn't do any good. Coming back into the laboratory, having grown thinner and with dark circles under her eyes, she said loudly:

"Hello, Comrades!"

Some prisoner happened to be in the room. To call them by their first and middle names was permitted, but never were they to be called comrades.

I met the ill-fated Romeo in Vorkuta, where we were all soon to end up. The prisoners long ago understood that a Sharashkin enterprise hangs by a thread. The black magic would inevitably fail; and it did. That was the ultimate fate of any tufta—from the smallest to the most grandiose.

The morning of December 3 they got us up as if for work but at roll call they unexpectedly announced: Assemble with your things. Few were left behind.

They gathered us at the staging area with lightning speed. Those who had borrowed tools were released for an hour to settle up. I went by the area next to the tool department. That is where the trainee worked. She looked at us, her eyes wide with fear. I briefly explained to her: I am going away, they are sending me away. Now she realized what it meant to be a person-object who could at any moment be cast into the unknown.

"Forgive me," I said. "I mean to do you no harm."

And she, in violation of all instructions, rose, came up to me, and offering me her ice-cold hand whispered:

"How terrible! My God!"

To shake the hand of a celebrity is flattering. Everyone gets embarrassed and stands at attention. But the trembling hand of this girl whose name I do not even remember was dearer to me.

Within half an hour we were on our way, tightly packed together in a blue bus with white curtains and fake windows. They took us to Butyrka.

While we waited for the blue raven, we hastily prepared for the unknown, mainly for the searches. We scrunched our rags into bundles and threw our notebooks into the stove. Many wrote while they were there because in the work zones you could usually keep such things. But at the transfer points they will search you thoroughly.

How many checkpoints are there from Moscow to Magadan? It may be that many new Lermontovs<sup>4</sup> were lost—who never managed to hurl into the face of these miscreants an iron verse soaked with bitterness and malice.

I remember Misha Loskutov, a talented and promising writer. He perished when quite young. Everything that he wrote was a song poured out in the form of prose—bright tales from a pure heart. He never spoke about himself; everything he wrote read like lyric poetry. He totally revealed himself without ever using the pronoun "I."

I often visited the Loskutovs at their apartment in 1935 after I was fired from *Izvestia*. They offered me sincere sympathy, a very rare and precious commodity in that epoch of faint hearts.

Misha had an inimitable, refined, and wry sense of humor, and was unusually restrained and modest. But his main feature, it seemed to me, was his dignity and fearless integrity, like that of Grisha Baglyuk.

We barely managed to get to know Misha and hardly knew Lena at all. She showed herself to be a genuine woman when her hour of trial came. The authorities came to conduct a search, turned over the bed, and caused Lena to go into labor. But they never once let her see her husband. Misha died without ever knowing whether his child was born alive or dead. The child grew up and became a beautiful woman with sad and sarcastic eyes, just like Misha. And now she has a child of her own. If they are able to transmit to the boy Misha's integrity and Lena's courage, then he'll need nothing more.

There is no moral difference between our wives and the wives of the Decembrists<sup>5</sup> whom Nekrasov immortalized in his poetry. But there is a shameful difference in the kind of moral support the two groups received. Society made a fuss over the wives of the Decembrists; it didn't even want to know about our wives. Pushkin openly went to visit the wives of the Decembrists; the Writers Union avoided ours. The general wardens admired the wives of the Decembrists; the Mr. Fidgets posted next to us during our meetings ill-treated our wives. Nekrasov ordered us to remember the Decembrist wives; present-day poets try to forget ours:

Our friends, who while afar  
were prepared to wait for us a quarter of a century,  
At the cost of their torments  
saved in me what was left of a faith in humanity.

They got to know terror and filth,  
They went through slow tortures,  
And never made their peace with the terror,  
That tomorrow could send them before a mute executioner.

They brought to us strength of spirit  
as a gift that those watching us could not see.  
Even if we might have to lie in the dirt,  
We will never let that gift fall to the ground.

### End of Notebook Seven.

[Next Month: "A Second Time in Vorkuta"]

### Notes

1. "Cunning machine" is a term applied by Baitalsky in a previous chapter to the repressive judicial apparatus.

2. Bela Kun was head of the short-lived Hungarian soviet government in 1919.

3. During World War II Stalin formally dissolved the Communist International in order to further his alliance with the Western imperialist powers—U.S., Britain, and France—against Germany.

4. Lermontov, Mikhail Yurevich (1814-41), Russian poet and novelist whose reputation is second only to Pushkin's. His later writings were severely critical of the ruling strata.

5. The Decembrists were members of secret revolutionary societies whose activities led to the December 1825 uprising against Tsar Nicholas I. The insurrection was crushed and 5 of the leaders were executed, 31 were sent into penal servitude, and 121 were exiled to Siberia.

## The Reality of Cuba Today

*Ruptures à Cuba, Le Castroisme en Crise*, by Janette Habel. Editions La Breche, Paris, 1989. 280 pages. Preface de François Maspero.

Reviewed by Michael Löwy

Janette Habel is not a neutral observer of the Cuban scene. As a leading figure in the JCR, the LCR, and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, she has traveled several times to Cuba from 1962 to 1970, and has often written about Cuba in the last 20 years, always from a viewpoint of critical but active solidarity with the Cuban revolution.

Her book is, as François Maspero wrote in his preface, the first one in twenty years which goes into the gist of the problems,

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**Janette Habel's book, the French edition of which is reviewed here, is scheduled to be published soon in English. Watch the pages of the Bulletin in Defense of Marxism for further information.**

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with an exhaustive knowledge of the economic, social, and political data, and from the standpoint of the Cuban revolution's own avowed aims. It is the kind of book which has not been written, neither inside nor outside Cuba, because in both cases it is almost exclusively the figure of Fidel Castro, his ideas, his personality, his decisions, which have monopolized the attention of the authors (either positively or negatively).

The documentation of her work is indeed impressive: any statement is based on extensive and precise economic or political facts, collected both from Cuban and Western sources. Its main focus is *the present situation of Cuba*, its internal problems and its difficult position in an international environment dominated by the new developments in the USSR and Eastern Europe. It is not a loose description of the situation, but a tightly knitted and coherent argument, structured around a basic idea: the Cuban revolution is in danger, and there is no way out except socialist democracy. Refusing all kinds of apologetics, it shows that Fidel Castro is *not* a tropical equivalent of Ceausescu or Honecker, but also that his politics are *not*

the adequate socialist answer to the challenge of Gorbachev's perestroika.

There is no doubt that the Cuban economy is in a difficult position. The reason for this is first of all the U.S. embargo, but also its excessive dependence on sugar and on Soviet aid. Trying to find a way out of its structural problems, the Cuban leadership applied during the '70s and early '80s a "new economic policy" based on the development of free markets, private initiative, money stimulants, etc. The results were rather disastrous: growing social inequalities, corruption, speculation, and—above all—popular discontent. This is the reason why after 1986 a process of "rectification of the mistakes" was undertaken, rehabilitating Che Guevara's economic ideas and putting severe limits to market relations—precisely at the moment when the USSR, under Gorbachev's leadership, took the opposite direction, and decided to reinforce the market mechanisms.

The problem is that this campaign of rectification was an initiative which came exclusively "from above" (Fidel Castro and his group); moreover, it was not followed by any measure of real democratization. Power in Cuba continues to be in the hands of the single party and its single leader, in a typically military style of command whose origins can be found in the guerrilla years of the '50s at the Sierra Maestra. The so-called organs of popular power have a significant role in local administration, but no real political power. All key decisions are taken by Fidel and a small group of his most reliable companions, without any public debate or popular participation in the process of decision making.

Janette Habel rightly insists that Fidel and his group are *not* the expression of a bureaucratic apparatus—even if, by its authoritarian way of ruling, it has favored bureaucratization. But she shows also that Fidel's attempts to fight bureaucratic corruption and privileges are doomed to failure, because they are based on an elitist voluntarism and not on mass popular participation and real democracy. She points, in a very insightful analysis, to the Jacobin ("Robespierriest") component in the Castroist ideology, with its faith in "purges" as the way to guarantee austerity and revolutionary virtue. A rather sad example of this attitude is the recent execution of several leaders accused of corruption (General Ochoa and his friends)—the worst crisis which has ever occurred among the revolutionary leadership.

While revolutionary Nicaragua acknowledges the importance of pluralism,

democratic freedom, and democratic mass participation, Castroist Cuba keeps a power structure based on the paternalist, charismatic, and "pedagogical" leadership of one man. Fidel's criticism of the Soviet perestroika (the return to market regulation) and of the Soviet foreign policy in Latin America (no support for the revolution in Central America) is entirely legitimate, but by refusing glasnost—i.e., freedom of expression, political pluralism, free debate of different views—he is unable to give an appropriate answer to the challenge raised by Gorbachev. Moreover, by supporting Deng-Hsiao-Ping and Honecker, he appears as aligned with the most regressive bureaucratic forces.

No one can deny that the social achievements of the Cuban revolution are impressive, in terms of education, health, social security, an end to misery and unemployment. The revolution has been able to survive thanks to the satisfaction of basic social needs and because of its appeal to the national dignity and the anti-imperialist feelings of the population. But confronted with growing economic difficulties, a new international environment, a young generation which is becoming increasingly critical, and an entrenched bureaucratic apparatus, the revolution can be saved only by a radical process of democratization.

One of the great merits of Janette Habel's book is to show that beyond the false alternative—either market reforms and economic liberalization or centralized/bureaucratic planning—there exists a third way: the free choice of the main economic options by the laboring class itself. Socialist planning is not a simple economic mechanism, it is a *social relation*, based on the effective and democratic political control of the popular masses on the key economic decisions. □

## Che Guevara's Economic Theories

*Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*, by Carlos Tablada. New York, Pathfinder Press, 1989. 286 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by John Kovach

Fidel Castro, worried about the after-shocks in Cuba from what he calls Eastern Europe's political "catastrophe," delivered a series of speeches the first week in April. He warned his country to be prepared for wartime austerity measures which would include a moratorium on construction of new houses, apartments, schools, and

childcare centers as well as medical clinics. Castro also said that electricity would be cut in half and new clothing for adults would not be available. To paraphrase Castro, "If we have to completely stop social development for the next five years and build no new homes or day-care centers, then that is the price which we must pay in order to save the revolution."

Do Castro's statements sound all too much like the projections of hard times and shortages which contributed to the Sandinistas' defeat in recent elections? Are the Cubans seeking solutions to their economic crises which follow socialist principles? Will Cuba become the shining example of the decade for countries in the transition to socialism? A good starting point for consideration of these questions, along with more complex questions related to market economy reforms in Eastern Europe, is Carlos Tablada's most recent book, *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism*.

What is most important about this book is that it genuinely conveys Che's earnest attempt to transform Cuban society according to socialist principles. His attention is keenly focused on the ways in which aspects of consciousness are affected by social/economic and political reforms. Che was most concerned with the types of human relations which would result from newly designed economic reforms. This approach is in contrast to the preponderance of literature which emphasizes only economic and administrative measures for transforming society, while ignoring aspects of consciousness.

The two technical means which Che advocated for transforming Cuban society to socialism were the budgetary finance system, which was applied to state enterprises responsible to the Ministry of Industry (70 percent of all Cuban factories), and the financial self-management system, also called the economic accounting system, which was used in enterprises organized by the National Institute of Agrarian Reform and those accountable to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. Both of these systems coexisted in Cuba for several years. The budgetary finance system was the mechanism which was used to socialize production in Cuba. These systems relied on moral incentives but did not ignore the use of material incentives.

Che saw centralized decision making as the most expedient way to organize all elements of society; unfortunately, he does not discuss or clarify exactly who will make these decisions nor does he outline the mechanisms that should be in place to ensure democratic decision making. Because of this lack of attention to democratizing decision making, many of Che's statements, and Tablada's discus-

sion of them, seem romantic and idealistic. Che writes, for example, about the "fact that politics establishes the goals of the economic model, while science determines the possibilities and roads to be taken." But who will be involved in this decision making? How will decision making be democratized at all levels in these political and scientific processes? These questions are totally ignored by Che. What is revealed is the way his own consciousness had been conditioned by the top-down bureaucratic system through which he hoped to institute change.

Tablada points out that Che's emphasis is not on the technical economic and administrative means for establishing a centralized, planned economy. Che felt that the rationality of an economic model must be measured by its social rationality. What is at issue is *how* goods are produced—the social relations that develop through production. These are the same types of concerns expressed by Trotsky and later by Lenin relating to the NEP reforms in the Soviet Union.

The ultimate objective which Che hoped to achieve through economic reforms was the creation of a social structure that would provide optimum conditions for development of a new type of "human nature." The transformation of human consciousness was seen as the first step in the transformation from capitalism to communism. Che did not believe that consciousness could be relegated to a secondary position when considering revolutionary reforms. He understood that it is the social relations of production, and not purely economic relations, that conditions our consciousness. He appreciated the need to pay attention to these base/superstructure relationships during the transition to socialist society.

Che clearly understood that state ownership of the means of production and an established dictatorship of the proletariat do not guarantee the increasing emergence of a communist consciousness. Such a situation certainly implies a communist consciousness because of programmatic implications; but the length of time which is required for such a consciousness to develop depends on the actions of the revolutionary dictatorship and the political vision of leaders, as well as the real internal and external possibilities to carry out such a program. Initial revolutionary triumphs open up the possibility for change, but it was clear to Che that the actions of the vanguard are important in determining the outcome. Such processes cannot be "left up to spontaneity," he says.

Whether Che equates "spontaneity" with democratic decision making, here, is not clear. What is certain is that Che did not concern himself with the details of the antidemocratic character of the vanguard in

Cuba. The fears which Trotsky expressed in 1904 and Rosa Luxemburg in 1918 related to the antidemocratic potential within Bolshevism seem not to be of concern to Che.

Importantly, Che opposed using categories from capitalist political economy like market, interest, direct material incentives, and profit. He was vehement in his feeling that socialism cannot be built using elements of capitalism. He certainly would be strongly opposed to Gorbachev's recent call for the establishment of a stock market in the Soviet Union. Che understood that social relations cannot be restructured if the free play of the capitalist law of value is perpetuated.

According to Che, the law of value, "is the umbilical cord that ties alienated man to society." He saw communism as a phenomenon of consciousness and not solely a phenomenon of production. It is impossible to achieve a Marxist communism without a new social consciousness toward society; this is the basic principle which guided Che as he developed his budgetary finance system.

Without going into detail, the budgetary finance system involved the financial centralization of all factories and workshops in order to ensure production according to social needs and goals. The emphasis was on the development of sophisticated techniques for programming and production controls. It was a system based on rigorous supervision of the enterprises. Che mistakenly believed that rationalization of the entire administrative apparatus would minimize the growth of bureaucratic structures. He envisioned a very small core of administrative activities with a limited nucleus of directors. He did not see that as his budgetary finance system developed, it would create a sprawling bureaucratic system which would be slow to respond to innovation and new technology. Even the most sophisticated marketing researchers in capitalist countries often are totally amiss in predicting effective demand for various products and new technologies. Clearly, Che placed too much faith in technology and the predictive methods of social science.

Many of the economic reforms developed by Che operated successfully in Cuba for several years. He developed a national job classification and wage system which was designed to discourage the development of material incentives. The rationality of his wage system was different in that production and output were not measured in terms of surplus value, but surplus product—created by workers with a sense of a social benefit. On the level of consciousness, then, production was being carried out for a much different purpose as compared to capitalist society. All jobs

were classified in one of eight groupings, each with a corresponding wage level. This system provided the incentive for workers to raise their skill levels and capacities. Che opposed piecework for he felt it discourages workers from trying to raise their skill levels.

Unfortunately, Che's wage system was destroyed due to modifications after 1965. It is important to study, though, because it shows that although Che did have an unshakable confidence in the ability of humans to transform themselves, he also understood that simple appeals to consciousness will not bring about such change. It is also clear that Che didn't see such planning as just an economic instrument. Che's view was that anticapitalist revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, and a planned economy are inseparably linked in Marxist theory. They signify the synthesis of a new way of making history. Economic planning is seen as society's first chance to reign over economic forces. For Che, planning characterizes and defines the transition period.

Che's writings are also important for study today because he wrestled with problems related to underdevelopment and

capital flight which make the transition process so painful. He acknowledged that there is a great temptation to use capitalist instruments to facilitate economic development during the transition period but he understood that a socialist consciousness cannot be built on such a foundation. He also discussed the problem of purchasing raw materials in the world market and how this market affects pricing in countries where capitalism has been overthrown. Tablada presents much of Che's detailed analysis on the creation of indexes for determining investment and pricing levels which are not totally detached from corresponding world market levels.

Reading Che today is especially enlightening if one wishes to understand how deviation from Che's economic programs has resulted in many of the problems which have led to a new level of crisis in Cuban society. It is also interesting to see the contemporary result of Che's ignoring of democratic decision making in establishing economic reforms. For all his detailed analysis of the relationship between economic production and corresponding social organization and

consciousness, Che spends little time discussing details for democratizing decision making. Tablada only presents one passage from Che's writings where he does say that the vanguard party should provide controls and leadership but that these controls should not be the sole domain of administrative bodies; unfortunately, Che seems to have no plan or program for incorporating unions or workers into this process.

Che's writings on transforming society according to socialist principles, especially given his attention to aspects of consciousness and the building of a new type of human relations, deserve serious study and analysis. These are exactly the types of concerns which socialists in Eastern Europe should be discussing today. Reading Tablada's book along with Catherine Samary's "Plan, Market and Democracy" (*Notebooks for Study and Research*, No. 7/8, 1988, see review in *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* No. 77) would be my recommendation for a solid grounding and understanding of the issues and problems related to planned economies, market reforms, and the transition to socialism. □

## Letters

### **Praise for July-August Issue**

A friend recently gave me an issue of the July-August *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*. At first I was skeptical, thinking that it was just another mindless left-wing journal. I read the first article and I was surprised at the clarity and insight the writer possessed of the Soviet Union. Your journal is far beyond any other left-wing journal I have ever read. I am interested in learning more of Marxism and so I have enclosed a check for \$15 for 6 issues.

I will certainly photocopy articles of interest to my friends at Purdue University and circulate them. Your journal needs to be read by all those on the left. Keep up the good work.

Douglas C. Brown  
Indianapolis, Indiana

### **Note from the USSR**

I have received and read your very good and interesting magazine for almost a year. *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism* gives us much precious information, especially on the U.S. workers' and left movements, but on other subjects also. It's very important because the majority of the people here, in the USSR, can't even imagine that left organizations exist in the USA. (When someone hears about American Trotskyism, always he or she is very, very surprised.) Your constant factual and analytical articles on the USSR are also very interesting for us!

As a member of the editorial board of *Rubicon* I want to make a little remark concerning our document published in your magazine. In No. 76 (July/August 1990, pp. 4-5) was printed the draft political resolution for the workers' congress, which had been proposed by *Rubicon*. It's at the same time the political platform of our review. We are very grateful! The translation also is very correct. (We can suppose that it was made by our good friend Marilyn Vogt-Downey.)

But for some time (from summer 1989), *Rubicon* hasn't been the organ of the "Justice" group (although the editor of *Rubicon* Igor Dashkevich remains an active member of Justice), but an independent trade unions' and workers' review. Now in Leningrad there are some independent trade union organizations and workers' committees. Their relations are sometimes complex. That's why the best position for *Rubicon* was to become an independent publication, reflecting all Leningrad workers' movement tendencies. The political platform, elaborated and published by *Rubicon*, is the total responsibility of *Rubicon* and has nothing in common with the Justice group.

That's why the headline on page 4 of your magazine "Justice Trade Union Resolution" doesn't reflect the real situation.

I send to you best greetings and our thanks for the possibility of receiving *Bulletin in Defense of Marxism*.

Igor Dashkevich, editor of *Rubicon*, sends also to you, comrades, his best greetings.

Nikolay Preobrazhenski  
Leningrad, USSR

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