

# 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 SWP 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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# Abortion Rights Under Attack

On May 23 the Supreme Court struck again at abortion rights, specifically at poor women's and young women's right to consider the option of abortion. In a 5-4 decision it upheld federal regulations that prohibit family planning centers which receive federal funds from including abortion as a choice. All that a worker at the center may say to a woman seeking advice and help is "the project does not consider abortion an appropriate method of family planning."

Thus pro-abortion statements are forbidden; anti-abortion statements are mandated.

Title X of the Public Health Service Act, passed in 1970, allocates \$150 million annually to 4,500 family planning centers which provide services for four million low-income women and youth. These new regulations were attached to Title X in 1987 and were immediately

challenged by Planned Parenthood as a violation of the First Amendment guaranty of free speech and a violation of the Fifth Amendment right to self-determination in a woman's decision regarding reproduction. Representatives of the medical profession, including the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists, joined Planned Parenthood in opposing these regulations which dictate doctor/patient relations in violation of the medical ethics code.

The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, refers to Court decisions which denied the use of Medicaid funds for obtaining an abortion and to *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, the 1989 Supreme Court decision outlawing the use of public facilities for performing abortion. This latest decision takes the previous

prohibition of funds for the performance of an abortion and extends it to the mere *counseling* of an abortion.

Justice Harry A. Blackmun's dissenting opinion states that "Until today the Court never has upheld viewpoint-based suppression of speech simply because that suppression was a condition upon the acceptance of public funds." This ruling has implications for other federal funded projects, for example, public education. Will schools at some time have to pass a litmus test of a governmental agency? Will there be replays of the "standards" imposed by the National Endowment of the Arts on works of artists who receive federal grants?

The victims in this case are poor women. In an obscene display of class arrogance, cynicism, and sexism

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Ohio NOW Holds New Party Hearings

In Cincinnati, on May 11, the Ohio National Organization for Women held public hearings on the question: Shall NOW call for the formation of a new political party? Hearings on this question have been held across the country by national NOW's Commission for Responsive Democracy, which was established by decision of the membership at NOW's 1990 national conference.

At its national conference this year, in New York City July 5-7, the commission will give its report. We look forward to a full discussion of all the aspects and ramifications of forming a new political party and positive action toward that end.

Since Ohio was not one of the states slated for hearings, Ohio NOW took the initiative of conducting one in accord with the national program.

Opening remarks by Ohio NOW president, Phyllis L. Carlson-Riehm, were followed by brief comments from Jacqueline Hillyer, National NOW PAC; Janet Black, National NOW board of directors; and Kate Curry, president of Cincinnati NOW. They composed the panel conducting the hearings.

Activists from political and community organizations, from labor, homeless, gay and lesbian rights groups, etc., told of their work: some gains, mostly problems and frustrations.

Below are major excerpts from the statements of two speakers who took opposing positions on the question. The transcriptions have not been corrected by the speakers.

### Roxanne Qualls

*Roxanne Qualls is a Democratic candidate for Cincinnati city council. In the most recent election she finished tenth in the contest for nine seats. Since the election two vacancies have occurred but she was passed over for the appointment. Roxanne is a NOW member and leader in the local fight for pollution-free communities.*

I was asked to speak as someone who runs for office about the question, not just of a third party, but about parties and what they do or do not do for women, environmentalists, or constituencies—gays and lesbians, the poor, women in general in terms of reflecting their interests within their parties.

Bluntly put, the political parties are not about issues. That might not be big news to anybody but sometimes we need to remind ourselves of this. Basically what we are talking about with the political parties is how you divide up power and influence. Within that, you do have some minor and major differences of opinion between the two existing parties which

do give people who are general voters sufficient reason to try to distinguish between them, particularly since those are the only options they have.

As someone, however, who is a candidate running locally, I think you need to recognize that this does go to the heart of the question of the third party. When you are talking about people like ourselves who are very committed to issues, people who make decisions based upon analysis of issues as pollution and an air code, a human rights ordinance, a variety of things—what we try to do is to take principled positions on those questions and act accordingly. Right? And sometimes it gets difficult to take principled positions but we hold that goal for ourselves. But when you are dealing with the realities of one who emerges from that type of background running for office—local, statewide, or national—what you have to confront is that the general voting public ascribes significance to party affiliation, Republican, or Democratic or, in Cincinnati, Charter [a third party]. Because more often than not, particularly if you're not an incumbent, you simply do not have the ability to inform all potential voters about who you are or what your issues are to the point where they will go to the voting booth and vote based upon this information.

The majority of people look at certain things such as endorsements, with the party endorsements being a way of helping them to determine vaguely if this individual might have the possibility of representing one's interest slightly more than the other person. And it is a very practical, pragmatic function even if you don't want it to be. Even if you take the position that the parties in terms of issue content really are very weak, you have to understand that even if that is the case they still are very potent in terms of being able to sway numbers of voters. And if one is running for election and one believes very firmly in issues, then you do have choices to make. You can make a choice to break off and run with a third party or help support a third party. But the predictable consequences mean that you are looking very much into the future, which is what the function of an organization like NOW is: to look into the future. But in the here and now you have very practical decisions that you have to make.

I'd like very much to turn my attention a little bit to just this question of people such as ourselves running for office. We are people who have grown up in the last 10, 20, 30, 40 years believing that certain things are very important for our communities, as well as considering that good government must be responsive to the needs of people. And through our work I think we have discovered what the needs of people are; while not solved, we now know what the litany is. The litany includes things such as access to affordable housing as well as sufficient rental and home ownership opportunities. It includes such things as economic development programs which actually provide jobs for people who need them, including men and women. It includes such things as cleaning up toxics in our neighborhoods, because in Cincinnati, an industrial city, many of our neighborhoods confront problems of toxic and chemical pollution. It includes such things as looking at basic rights for women, minorities, for the physically challenged, for others who have been deprived of those rights.

In Cincinnati we are going to enter into a debate which is more challenging to us as a city than even the question of whether or not we should form a third party. We are going to

be entering into a debate over the next three months and then two months after that of whether or not this city should go to a system of district representation or proportional representation. How is this relevant to this forum? I would sincerely argue that for those of us in this room who do view ourselves as issue activists, regardless of what issue, that proportional representation is the method which allows women, which allows minorities, which allows physically challenged, which allows gays and lesbians to have representation through the political process.

### Dan La Botz

*Dan La Botz is the author of A Troublemaker's Handbook: How to Organize Where You Work and Win!, a manual of labor union tactics and strategy; Rank-and-File Rebellion: Teamsters for a Democratic Union, a history of the reform movement in the Teamsters Union; The Crisis of Mexican Labor, a history and analysis of the Mexican labor union movement. A review of Rank-and-File Rebellion was published in the April No. 84 issue of Bulletin In Defense of Marxism.*

Do we need a new political party to represent women, minorities, and working people? It seems to me one question to ask is who represents those groups today?

Who represents women today? I hardly need tell those in NOW about the situation of women. You are well aware that on the average women make less than two-thirds of the wages of men, and that is primarily because women are segregated into the lowest paying clerical and service jobs. A majority of women work for wages, many are heads of households, and yet we have no system of affordable daycare. Federal government policy denies many poor women the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, since Medicaid will not pay for abortion, and abortion rights for other women are threatened. Who politically represents women in dealing with these issues right now? Is the Democratic Party the champion of women? Has it fought to end job segregation and raise women's wages? Has the Democratic Party fought for childcare? Has the Democratic Party defended choice? Can the Democratic Party be relied upon to stand up and speak out for women? Can the Democratic Party be relied upon to vote for women in the Congress?

What about African Americans? Who represents Black Americans today? Black Americans have wages lower than white workers, and unemployment rates which are twice as high as those of whites. Black women are among the lowest paid workers in our society, Black babies have the highest rates of infant mortality, and African Americans have shorter life spans. Many of the same kinds of problems exist among Latinos, that is, lower wages, higher unemployment, less health insurance, and short life spans. Moreover in the last several years we have seen a legislative and legal attack on the rights of minorities which has undone some of the gains of the civil rights movement. This has been accompanied by increasing intimidation and violence against Blacks and other minorities. Who is representing the African American and Latin American today? Does the Democratic Party consistently fight for the interests of the minorities in our society?

What about working people? Since about 1970 the wages of American workers first stagnated and then declined. For 20 years the wages and standard of living of the American worker have been falling. At the same time millions of Americans have no health insurance, and millions more do not have adequate pensions for their retirement. Labor unions which fought to raise workers' wages, win important social benefits, and improve working conditions and worker health and safety have been tremendously weakened. In 1945 some 35 percent of the workforce belonged to labor unions; today that percentage is 15 percent. The loss of labor union power is one of the reasons for the deteriorating condition of the American working class. Who represents the American worker today? Does the Democratic Party consistently fight for the interests of working people? Does it vote for the needs of working people?

I believe that there is no party today representing the interests of women, minorities, and workers. Those three groups do not constitute a special interest, but taken together represent the vast majority of working people in this country. Ironically, the majority of our population has no political party which can be relied upon to consistently speak out and vote for its interests.

Would it be possible to reform the Democratic Party and make it a party of women, minorities, and workers? During the last two presidential primaries Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition attempted to reform the Democratic Party. Jackson and the Rainbow Coalition spoke out for Blacks, women, and workers. And because of Jackson's impressive showing in many of the primaries among both Black and some white voters, the party had to give Jackson a prominent role at the national convention. But that was it. The Democratic Party made no significant structural changes to make that party more representative of the population's majority of working people. Nor did it adopt a more progressive program to represent working people's interests.

In fact, the Democratic Party is not moving in the direction of working people, women, and minorities, it is moving in the other direction, toward the wealthy and the corporations. Paul Tsongas, the first declared candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, has a political program modeled on that of Reagan, Bush, and the Republican Party. Mario Cuomo, the New York governor who is often seen as representing the old New Deal

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### Editorial (Continued from page 1)

Rehnquist says just that. In his majority opinion he dismisses all concerns of free speech infringement. There's nothing wrong with the new regulations, he says, and if they mean that a woman will not have access to abortion because she is poor and depends on a federally financed clinic, she's "in no worse position than if Congress had never enacted Title X"—and she had no health or prenatal care!

Directors of Planned Parenthood and other centers say they will reject the new rules. Some dual centers will be set up, with and without abortion counseling. But the loss of funds may require the closing of centers and surely a diminution of services. Attempts are under way to pass legislation in Congress to void the Court decision, but predictions are that such legislation if passed in Congress will be short of the necessary votes to override the certain veto by President Bush. The "swing vote" in the 5-4 decision was provided by his newly appointed Justice David H. Souter.

The United States government has been imposing this same anti-abortion drive throughout the world. Ten days after the Supreme Court issued its decision, it refused to hear a challenge by Planned Parenthood to a federal policy cutting off family planning grants to any overseas organization that spends money, from whatever source, on ac-

tivities related to abortion. The money is allocated through the Agency for International Development, and last year of the \$220 million spent, 40 percent went to the third world. Federal law since 1973 has prohibited money from being used to provide abortions overseas. New regulations were announced by the Reagan administration at an international family conference in Mexico City in 1984: the "Mexico City policy," as it is called, is more punitive than the May 23 decision. Even if centers are separated so that some may abide by the restrictions, U.S. money is withheld.

The Supreme Court's 1989 *Webster* decision which upheld a Missouri abortion law was the first major attack on *Roe v. Wade*, which in 1973, after years of women's despair and defiance, finally legalized abortion.

The *Webster* decision opened the floodgates in other states to all kinds of anti-abortion measures—from mandatory consent provisions, to waiting periods, to actual denial of the right to abortion except under very limited conditions. The question of abortion was a major issue in the 1990 elections. There were some successes in stemming the anti-abortion tide, but also defeats and alarm signals. The Supreme Court is waiting in the wings for more "test cases" and to issue more decisions attacking *Roe v. Wade*.

In Utah on January 25 this year, the legislature passed the country's most restrictive abortion law to date. It declares that all abortions are illegal, with few exceptions. The National Organization for Women is carrying on a vigorous repeal campaign there and has called for a boycott of the state of Utah. This law was intentionally drafted to challenge *Roe v. Wade* and the anti-abortion forces hope the Supreme Court will use it to outlaw abortion.

The fight for reproductive rights is in a more perilous stage than ever. The fight will continue on a state level but must now be advanced on a national level. A return to national activities and demonstrations is needed to counter the all-out offensive being waged against women's right to choose.

The U.S. government which represents the rich and the powerful is waging a war against the majority of the people—women, youth, minorities, and all working people. And the two-party Democratic/Republican setup is the mechanism that carries it out.

NOW is holding its national conference in July this year. These two interconnected issues will be high on its agenda: the fight for legal and accessible abortion for all women and the call to launch a new political party, a party to challenge and break the two-party stranglehold on behalf of all who are victims of this oppressive society. □

# Capitalist Trade and International Solidarity

by Frank Lovell

Conflicting strategies against present plans of U.S. and Canadian capital to expand and control the flow of trade across the U.S./Mexican border are being debated and tested by the unions in the three countries. The debate takes the form of opposition to the "free trade" treaties negotiated by the Bush administration with the governments of Canada and Mexico, but it is essentially about wages and working conditions, and above all else *jobs*. In Canada nearly all unions oppose the U.S./Canada treaty which was ratified soon after the Conservative Party of Prime Minister Mulroney got a parliamentary majority in the 1988 general election. The treaty was ratified in 1989. The union movement now contends that it has disadvantaged Canadian workers and contributed to their declining standard of living.

The debate over the U.S./Mexico treaty is sharper because here the conflicting union strategies for creating and expanding job opportunities are more clearly expressed. The official AFL-CIO strategy is open opposition to any lowering of tariff barriers, appealing to the U.S. Congress to reject the treaty plans of the administration. Thus union lobbyists sought to line up members of Congress against renewal last May of "fast track" trade legislation which commits Congress to vote promptly for or against trade agreements without amendments. The AFL-CIO, major environmentalists, and some industrial protectionists argued for an extensive debate in Congress on the advisability of and necessary conditions for the free flow of trade between the U.S. and Mexico. This was defeated. The "fast track" legislation remains in place.

In reporting this outcome of their lobbying efforts the AFL-CIO political strategists seemed pleased, seeking to give the impression that at least they made a good try. They said, "a nearly 2-1 majority of Democratic House members bolted from their leadership to join labor, environmental and consumer groups in opposition." The meaning of this vote is dubious because the outcome was never in doubt. Both the Democratic and Republican parties are firmly committed to the "fast track" procedure. Congressional Democrats who need to curry favor with organized labor were free to oppose "fast track," knowing

in advance that their votes were meaningless. As it turned out 170 Democrats voted for a labor-supported proposal which failed by a vote of 231 to 192. Twenty-one Republicans also joined the opposition.

Environmentalists dropped their opposition when Bush promised that high U.S. health standards would not be compromised. He likewise promised job retraining and reemployment of workers displaced by relocation of U.S. manufacturing in Mexico. After the vote on May 23 the AFL-CIO announced that it would closely watch trade negotiations of both the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the U.S./Mexico treaty. It said, "We expect the House, as its leadership has consistently stated, to use its rules to make certain that the administration promises are fulfilled and that the interests of working people are protected."

## Protectionism

The arguments of the AFL-CIO and most of its affiliated unions are nakedly protectionist. They want laws requiring U.S. industry to remain in the U.S. in exchange for heavy trade subsidies. Their problem is that U.S. industry no longer seeks that kind of "protection." The auto industry is a classic example. Owen Bieber, president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) opposes the kind of free trade deal between the U.S. and Mexico that is sponsored by the Bush administration because, as he says, it will turn the Mexican economy into a giant *maquiladora*, a term for U.S.-owned border plants in Mexico that import materials and process them for export, usually directly back to the U.S.

This is not new. For 20 years the Mexican government has waived the usual tariffs and duties for U.S. companies that ship components across the border for assembly by underpaid labor. It began with textiles and clothing manufacturers and now it's mostly electronics and automobiles. From an estimated 120,000 workers in 1980 *maquiladora* grew to half a million in 1990, and is expected to reach a million by 1995. Wages are around \$6 a day. The UAW points to the shiny new plants surrounded by shacks without sanitation, urging that they be closed on this account.

Environmentalists contend that the lack of sanitation and the presence of toxic poisons on the Mexican side of the border are a hazard to life on the U.S. side. John O'Connor of the National Toxics Campaign (NTC) has reported finding high levels of toxic contamination which cause "respiratory problems, amnesia, brain hemorrhaging, internal bleeding, plus a variety of lung, liver, and kidney damage." He says, "They are turning the border into a 2,000-mile-long Love Canal, the largest toxic lagoon known to humankind."

UAW top officials are mainly worried about the loss of jobs in U.S. auto plants. Bieber claims 75,000 UAW jobs have been lost. He says, "With 36,000 workers, General Motors is now Mexico's largest private employer. Ford, Chrysler, Honda, Nissan and Volkswagen all have Mexican plants. Mexico has 328 auto parts companies, which supply 13 percent of the parts for U.S.-built vehicles."

The U.S. International Trade Commission says, "Unskilled workers in the United States would suffer a slight decline in real income [from the proposed trade treaty with Mexico], but skilled workers and owners of capital services would benefit more from lower prices and thus enjoy increased real income." In response, AFL-CIO economist Mark Anderson asks, "What's the moral calculus here?" Anderson thinks that even if free trade is a little bit beneficial, overall "you're advantaging the people who are already well off, at the expense of two-thirds of the workforce at the bottom." His "moral calculus" does not include those at the very bottom, the Mexican workers who earn less than \$6 a day.

## Labor United

An opposite strategy for the union movement in defense of working class living standards is being developed by UAW



North American Nations



MEXUSCAN

Labor  
Solidarity  
Network



Ford Local 879 in St. Paul, Minnesota, in cooperation with the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) and Mexican autoworkers fighting for higher wages and better working conditions at Ford plants in Mexico. Last year the Local 879 Executive Board constituted itself as the initiating nucleus of "a Ford Workers' Solidarity Network between North American Autoworkers." Calling itself "The Local 879 MEXUSCAN Solidarity Task Force," it invited support from all sectors of the working class. To launch the support campaign it proclaimed early this year a *Ford Workers' Justice Day* and issued the following appeal:

The First Ford Workers' Justice Day on January 8, 1991, will involve Ford workers in Mexico, the United States and Canada in a day to commemorate the death of Mexican Ford worker Cleto Nigno on this day one year ago at Ford's Cuautitlan Assembly plant.

The day is intended to show Ford that workers in the three countries have an interest in one another and that the interest is Solidarity—the union's answer to Ford's efforts to play us off against each other.

- It is also a day for Local 879 members to remember that despite all Ford's fancy talk on caring about us individually, that "caring" is directly proportional to our willingness to stop acting like a Union.

- It's a day to remember that our work injury rates are too high.

- It's a day to remember that the company continues to break our contract anytime it feels like it.

- It's a day to remember unjust disciplines, discharges and workloads, speed-ups and job eliminations.

- It's a day to remember that we all need a strong Union more than ever. The Local received 2,000 arm bands from the Canadian Auto Workers and we encourage everyone to wear one on Justice Day. Plans are to ask a \$1 donation for the bands then send all proceeds to the Cuautitlan Ford strikers. If anyone in the Local makes a donation it will help the cause of Ford Workers' Justice tremendously.

Get an arm band and be a part of your Union's history.

Two officers of Local 879 who work in Ford's St. Paul plant, Tom Laney and Jose Quintana, prepared a series of articles on their firsthand encounter with conditions in Ford's plants in Mexico, their analysis of "free trade," and their conclusions. They found the workers "at the Cuautitlan assembly plant are paid about \$9 a day—higher than a *maquila* plant but lower than

any other Ford workers in the world!" They agreed with the analyses of others that the Bush administration's proposed free trade agreement with Mexico "would allow U.S. companies to more easily take advantage of Mexico's cheap labor and raw materials and growing markets," and will prove harmful to all North American workers. Their conclusions: 1) "Any responsible talk on U.S./Mexico free trade should first revolve around negotiations on cancellation of the Mexican debt and human rights



guarantees—especially the right to join free and democratic trade unions." They said "there appears to be no workers' voice in these talks which means the most significant human component—labor—is left to its own devices in the pursuit of trade fairness." Mexico's \$93-billion foreign debt has saddled it with depression conditions. Real wages have dropped 50 percent since the 1985 devaluation of the peso. "Workers are victims of a corrupt government and labor bureaucracy," they said. 2) "Free trade should mean fair trade and there can be no fairness in any business deal with Mexico so long as we ignore the human rights abuses heaped upon Mexican workers by U.S. and other foreign corporations." 3) "Now is the time to publicize to the citizens of the U.S. what this Bush-Salinas-Mulroney Free Trade Agreement will mean to the future of the jobs in our country and Canada and the persistent denial of basic human rights in Mexico."

The Local 879 MEXUSCAN Solidarity Task Force continues to the best of its ability to publicize the evils inherent in these trade agreements.

The clearly defined difference between the strategies of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy and Local 879 is that the bureaucrats seek to curry favor with the capitalist politicians in Washington, hoping that the U.S. Congress will enact legislation to protect industrial jobs that are fast disappearing. The

opposite strategy of Local 879 is to mobilize the ranks of organized labor in defense of a higher standard of living for the working class in the three North American countries. Many questions remain: How can this be done? Can more and better jobs be created? Will the employing class and their governments, through an expanding system of commodity production, create a better life for everyone? Or will the working class be driven to strike out, in self-protection, for reorganization and greater control of production.

### Promises, Promises

Government representatives and other voices for capitalist expansion predict a brilliant future with the lowering of trade barriers. U.S. top trade negotiator Carla Hills says, "Reduced barriers will improve the efficiency and productivity of U.S. and Mexican industry and enhance their competitiveness in international markets." The *New York Times* is more expansive and revealing: "Mexican trade is a sideshow to what's really at stake, the five-year Uruguay Round of international trade talks scheduled to be completed this year. It will slash tariffs and other trade barriers, thereby adding trillions to the world's economies by the end of the decade. Few, if any, government policies in the U.S. or anywhere else will do more for economic growth."

With such enticing promises as this of future prosperity there is little chance of the business-connected members of the U.S. Congress taking any action to check the swift endorsement of the whole series of trade treaties now being negotiated. Implicit in all the arguments for new trade relations among nations is the promise that some of the benefits gained by the giant multinational corporations will somehow trickle down to the workers. Higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions, more jobs are unmentioned (and unmentionable) in the halls of government and the boardrooms of industry and finance.

International solidarity of workers in Canada, the U.S., and Mexico can best be developed and advanced, recognizing the present stage of political consciousness, by organizing an unrelenting struggle in all three countries for the creation of more jobs. It will not be easy. But it can begin with demands upon the employers for shorter hours of work with no reduction in take-home pay, and demands upon the governments for public works programs to build low-cost homes, more public schools, and free hospitals. The struggles for these modest demands, if jointly undertaken and pursued with determination, could lead on to a more rounded political program for economic and social transformation. □

# Another Historic March on Washington Planned

by Frank Lovell

The AFL-CIO top leadership announced early last May that unions this year “are looking past summer to Labor Day weekend” and another gigantic “Solidarity Day” in Washington, D.C. The date is Saturday, August 31, 1991, planned to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Solidarity Day 1981. What working men and women today have to celebrate after a dismal decade of concession bargaining and political subservience by the entrenched union officialdom is left unsaid. But there was plenty of ballyhoo from the start for another big turnout of union members, and the organizational machinery to insure a massive show of “labor strength” was in place before the big event was announced. The man in charge is John Perkins, AFL-CIO director of the Committee on Political Education (COPE). This tells us that a gigantic political rally will be staged, this time not exactly the same as ten years ago.

The fact sheet on planning shows Vincent O’Brien, assistant director of the AFL-CIO Department of Organization and Field Services, listed as “Solidarity Day ’91 Coordinator.” This title makes O’Brien responsible for publicity and logistics. He said right off the bat that “a strong belief in what the American labor movement stands for is drawing union members to Solidarity Day ’91,” and when O’Brien says “American labor movement” he means the union officialdom. His profound generalization was followed with specific ideas on chartering trains, airplanes, thousands of buses, and rental vans. He said it is a “coast-to-coast effort.” Central labor bodies in all 50 states and in towns and cities across the country have been notified to complete transportation schedules early to facilitate plans for “tents for shade, water supply, numbers of medical personnel and supplies, bathroom facilities and other on-site concerns.”

It was reported that New York, Chicago, Detroit, and other cities had canceled local Labor Day parades in favor of sending union members to Washington. There is great attention to detail, as if the organizers have feelings of insecurity about what *could* happen and are determined that everything must go according to plan. Every precaution is being taken to insure that nothing goes wrong. This is different from the political situation in 1981 and the spontaneous aspect of the first officially called demonstration.

### Solidarity Day 1981

In the spring of 1981 the newly installed Reagan administration began implementing its “supply side” economic policy with a broadside assault on welfare, social security, unemployment benefits, equal rights and additional demands of the rising women’s liberation movement for political recognition, enact-

ment of ERA, and extension of abortion rights. Union wages were a special target of Reagan’s economists who argued that they were “exorbitantly high” and demanded rollbacks.

General social unrest grew during the summer, aggravated by government-provoked strikes. In August the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) was forced to strike because the government refused to negotiate or arbitrate demands for less overtime work and an expanded workforce. The Reagan regime then asserted its authority and flaunted its reactionary antilabor bias. It decreed the PATCO strike “illegal,” fired the strikers, hired scabs, and moved to decertify the union. In response to some words of caution against unnecessarily provoking the unions, Reagan had early on pointed to opinion polls that showed working people fed up with “union bosses.” Union bureaucrats took this as an affront and looked for ways to show off their influence and convince Reagan that he had misjudged their power.

Under these circumstances the AFL-CIO officially called a Solidarity Day march on Washington for September 19, allowing only seven weeks to organize it. The response was immediate and decisive. Every major union mobilized its membership. Labor’s allies hailed the call and prepared to join the ranks of demonstrators. The NAACP convention in July endorsed Solidarity Day, as did the Urban League and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Ellie Smeal, then president of the National Organization for Women, called for a solid feminist turnout. She said, “those of us who fight for women’s equality and those of us in the labor movement have come to understand that we share many of the same goals and fight the same opposition.” An estimated half million protesters converged on Washington, September 19, 1981. It was a date to remember, one of the largest ever demonstrations in the national capital, equalled only by the huge antiwar demonstration of April 24, 1971.

### Slogans of the Day

One of the most popular slogans at the 1981 Solidarity Day march was raised by the United Auto Workers contingent, “Make Jobs, Not War.” The theme of the day was defend the right to strike (support PATCO) and defeat Reagan’s budget cuts (save the hot-lunch program for school children).

Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP, told the rally, “We shall not allow social programs established to provide a minimum standard of living for those who are in need to be destroyed. We will not sit by while the bare necessities of life are taken from the needy and given to the greedy.”

Lane Kirkland, head of the AFL-CIO, spoke to and for the thousands of men and women, Black and white, foreign born



and native Americans, who came to Washington on that day when he declared: "We have come too far, struggled too long, sacrificed too much, and have too much left to do, to allow all that we have achieved for the good of all to be swept away without a fight."

Many who heard these brave words hoped that they were witnessing the rebirth of militant unionism, and possibly the beginning of a labor party movement to unseat the puppet parties of big business. But others more familiar with the Washington political scene and the general philosophical outlook of these labor, Black, and other "leaders" were not taken in by the holiday oratory. A reporter for the *Washington Post* observed that "for Kirkland and the nation's trade union movement, however, the current rally appears to be a crucial part of a broader plan to return to power within the Democratic Party." This observation seemed to be confirmed by the fact that soon after the 1981 Solidarity Day rally the AFL-CIO raised a million dollars for the Democratic National Committee, but this did not buy the bureaucrats any seats in the leadership of the party, which is a closed corporation.

### Political Reality

From the earliest days of the Reagan administration the congressional leaders of the Democratic Party, while pretending to lead a strategic opposition, voted for Reagan's economic policy, calling for austerity in spending on social programs and a rapidly expanding war budget. As for union pleas on behalf of the poor and underprivileged, and for an increase in the minimum wage, many Democrats in Congress tried to outdo their Republican colleagues in public expressions of indifference and opposition. None of these politicians wanted to be seen talking to union lobbyists, but they were all careful never to turn down lunch with junior executives from the myriad military contracting firms that invaded Washington in the 1980s.

During this decade, partly as a result of the government's unabashed antiunion policy (wholly subscribed to by both Democrats and Republicans), the union movement declined precipitately both in membership and political influence. From an all-time high of more than 14 million members in 1975 the AFL-CIO declined to less than 13 million in 1990, an absolute loss of more than one million dues-payers. At present less than 10 percent of the labor force in the private sector is organized, the lowest percentage since the 1920s.

In 1982, the AFL-CIO Executive Council hired "experts" on the faculties of prestigious universities to advise them in ways to win influence among working people, the purpose being to attract new members and register more voters.

Between 1980 and 1984 unions helped register 12 million new voters. Only 4 million of them voted in the 1984 presidential election, and two-thirds of those voted for Reagan.

Having failed to defeat George Bush, Reagan's continuator, in the 1988 election, the AFL-CIO hierarchy invited Bush to address their 18th constitutional convention in 1989. He told them that the differences separating his administration from them on key social and economic policies are "signs of a democratic life," the implication being that they ought to count their lucky stars for the right to differ.

### Electoral Politics

In preparation for the 1992 presidential election the AFL-CIO bureaucrats are staging the Solidarity Day 1991 rally. This time they have defined three major goals: "legislation banning the permanent replacement of strikers, national health care reform, and full freedom of association abroad and at home—including full collective bargaining rights for public workers." This falls far short of the broad range of working class needs, but how even these "three major goals" will be achieved remains unanswered.

In strict accordance with past practice (an antiquated rule acquired through previous years of collective bargaining in the old days of union-management collaboration) the AFL-CIO's political arm, COPE, refrains from suggesting any means of reaching these goals. That will remain the task of the U.S. Congress. Unions will continue to lobby for favorable legislation, contribute to the campaign coffers of "friendly" politicians, and try to persuade more voters to play the two-party skin game.

### Labor in Retreat

Much happened during the decade of the 1980s that the top AFL-CIO bureaucracy is either unaware of or incapable of dealing with. Accompanying the disheartening decline of the union movement, a serious search for cures for the social ills that plague poor people, workers, minorities, and women has begun. A rising social consciousness and a new political awareness is becoming pervasive within the working class.

And this is finding expression in various forms, including inquiries into the political structure of this country where the corporate rich control all branches of government and dictate the enactment of self-serving laws and police-state methods of enforcing them.

Beginning late last year the National Organization for Women has been holding open hearings in several cities to determine the feasibility of a new political party to challenge the Democratic/Republican monopoly of electoral politics.

Within the established union movement the organization of what is presently called Labor Party Advocates is under way. And in several localities unions, long shunned and abused by corrupt political machines dominated by the Democratic Party, have entered the arena of electoral politics as an independent force. In the coal fields of Kentucky and West Virginia the United Mine Workers has run successful write-in campaigns to unseat Democratic Party incumbents in state government and elect union officials to public office. In April of this year the Communications Workers of America, representing state employees in New Jersey, announced that it will run its own independent candidates this fall in nine of the state's 40 legislative districts. These are small and halting beginnings, but they are harbingers of a big political shakeup.

For these reasons Solidarity Day 1991 will be different from the massive half-million mobilization a decade ago. This time the AFL-CIO bureaucrats risk revealing the weakness of the institutionalized union structure, instead of demonstrating the inherent power of organized labor in this country. □

At least one segment of New York City's working class decided this spring that they were not going to give back everything that belongs to them without a fight. April 1991 will be remembered as the month in which working class youth of the city rose up by the thousands to fight back against the attacks of the ruling class on the living standards and basic social services of the city's population (see box on this page). Unfortunately, it will also be remembered as the month in which this courageous fight was stabbed in the back by a cowardly and insensitive faculty union bureaucracy and college administration, and by the city labor union bureaucracy, which had an opportunity to step in and defend the students' bold initiative, broadening it in defense of the unions' interests. Instead they chose to hold off and wait until the students were defeated.

The CUNY student revolt points out the necessity of a militant, class struggle oriented leadership and a united front strategy, and the ruinous consequences of the "popular front," class-collaborationist strategies of reformist tendencies. It also calls attention to the need for workers, students, and all oppressed people to have their own labor party, united and independent from the capitalist parties, to fight for their interests. The CUNY student struggle is part of the class struggle, and unless it is linked up with the struggles of workers and the oppressed it has no possibility of being successful. The people united will *always be defeated* when they

## The CUNY Student Revolt of 1991

by Barry Lituchy

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are united with the ruling class politicians and divided from their class allies—and this applies to students as well as to workers and oppressed minorities.

### Behind the CUNY Crisis

In 1989 when Governor Cuomo tried to force a \$200 tuition increase down the throats of CUNY students they occupied campuses and marched down the length of Manhattan 10,000 strong. This show of unity and strength forced Cuomo to back down and forgo the increase. Last year as corporate profits nosedived, Cuomo began planning a new assault on the City University of New York as well as on the State University system (SUNY).

One piece of the puzzle was found when the city selected W. Ann Reynolds to become the new chancellor of CUNY. From

day one her job has been to help coordinate the wrecking of the CUNY system. Reynolds had previously served as chancellor of the California State University system where she had proven herself by slashing academic spending and excluding minorities by new admission policies. This was clearly a more important job qualification for the city and state than the fact that Reynolds had been thrown out of her California job after it was learned that she had tried surreptitiously to increase her own salary by some 46 percent to nearly \$200,000. As the new CUNY chancellor, Reynolds was given a \$160,000 salary plus a free brownstone on the upper east side of Manhattan.

But Reynolds's most important qualification may be the fact that she sits on the executive boards of three notoriously racist and labor-hating corporations where she nets another \$100,000: Abbott Laboratories, the American Electric Power Company, and Maytag. She also previously served on the board of GTE of California. Abbott does well over \$11 million dollars worth of business annually with its friends in South Africa where it also has a base of operations. According to an article in *The Nation* several months ago, the Admiral Company, a subsidiary of Maytag, illegally exposed its workers to a deadly chemical spill at its Galesburg, Illinois, plant in 1989. GTE, of course, is a major player in the military and nuclear industries. Ann Reynolds is perfectly qualified to help impose the "New World

## New York City: A Metropolis of Misery in the "New World Order"

Prior to World War II Trotsky correctly predicted that there was one alternative to socialist revolution—barbarism. Today barbarism goes by the highly respectable name of the "New World Order." In a period of worldwide capitalist decline the "New World Order" is the American ruling class's last best hope for maintaining the power and the wealth of its ruling rich. Essentially, this "New World Order" is really a vicious political movement of disorder, a massive onslaught on the living standards and basic social services of working people both here and around the world. Earlier this year the U.S. ruling class launched a genocidal attack on

the peoples of Iraq in this effort to revitalize world capitalism, not caring how much blood was spilled in the process. Currently, the international focus of this nicely named barbarism is on the free-trade agreements with Latin America and Canada, which are already placing more downward pressure on the living standards of Canadian and U.S. workers. But watch out! American capitalism is also constructing its "New World Order" in a neighborhood near you. Check your local street corner for symptoms of devastation and despair.

The "New World Order" has swept into New York City like a tornado, uprooting many of the basic social services and

institutions known to the working people of this city for several generations. Only this is no natural disaster: it's the logical result of a capitalist system that is falling apart—literally. This spring the city's department of transportation announced that three-quarters of the city's bridges are structurally unsound and that tolls will be needed by the end of the year to pay for repairs, making commuting between the five boroughs next to impossible.

Of course, the real intention of the banks, Wall Street traders, and capitalists who hold the deeds to the city and state in the form of bonds—and who own the politicians of the two capitalist parties as well—is not to fix what's

wrong with New York, but to cash in on the wreckage of whatever social gains belonging to working people they can steal. After all, what else can good capitalists do after they've already sucked the third world and bureaucratized workers' states dry with usurious loans, and supervised the pillaging of this country's industrial and commercial base with vast decapitalizations, junk-bond takeovers, and savings and loan rip-offs?

Well, for starters, the New York banks' number one politician and likely presidential candidate, Governor Mario Cuomo, ordered the state legislature to slash the state budget by some \$6 billion. Another billion is to be extorted out of working people through new taxes and fees for "luxuries" like driving a car or heating your home. Cuomo, whose

Order" on the largely minority students of CUNY.

Another interesting move made by Cuomo last year was his reimposition of the 1989 \$200 tuition increase at the end of the term in mid-December. Cuomo successfully sneaked that by, but not without reactivating student protesters and much ill will throughout the city. In early April of this year the state announced the really big cuts it had been forecasting, encompassing between \$92 and \$96 million. This included the elimination of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) which granted \$400 to each student, as well as the Liberty and Regents scholarships, the liquidation of numerous degree programs, the cancellation of thousands of class sections, curtailing maintenance and library hours, the firing of about 900 full-time faculty and staff and 1,000 adjuncts, and the raising of tuition by another \$500 a year. This dismantling of CUNY also does not exclude the possibility of two or more campuses being shut down altogether.

A major component of this plan to dismantle CUNY is the "displacement" of between 50,000 and 75,000 students from the system. After SUNY and the California state system, CUNY was the third largest public university system in the country with about 200,000 students. The tuition increase along with various new admission tricks Reynolds is using again from her "Cally" days amount to a de facto expulsion of one out of every four CUNY students, a planned shrinkage specifically

designed to bar the lowest income groups from a college education. Obviously, you don't need a college degree to see that this is not only class prejudiced, but outrageously racist and sexist as well. Women, Black, Latino, and Asian students are being singled out to take a double and triple hit of "New World Order Justice" doled out by the ruling class.

One of the ironies about tuition at CUNY, which stood at \$1,250 a year ago and could end up around \$2,150 in the fall, is that none of it goes back into CUNY itself. Every dime of tuition revenue goes directly to "debt service"—in other words toward paying interest on loans to the city and straight into the hands of the bankers and financiers who hold the coupons on the city's debt (the city currently owes \$23 billion and plans to borrow more in June). The two political parties of American capitalism—Democrat and Republican—are coercing workers and students into paying for a fiscal crisis that is nothing more than a product of their own irrational and racist capitalist system. That is why the Fourth Internationalist Tendency intervened during this crisis by calling for the cancellation of the city's debt and pointing out the inherent incompatibility between capitalism and public education. Moreover, *the wrecking of CUNY won't end here*. Currently, forty percent of the student body comes from households with incomes of less than \$16,000, ten percent receive public assistance, and a sizable number are single parents. When tuition

was first imposed on the CUNY system during the city's financial crisis of 1976, it came after 129 years of free tuition (and a much briefer six-year policy of open admissions, whereby any graduate from a New York City high school was guaranteed a place at a CUNY college). The exclusion of one out of every four students this year could easily become two out of four next year as the decline of capitalism and the assault on working people's living standards intensify.

### **The Student Takeovers**

The student takeovers began on the morning of Monday, April 8, when about 75 students occupied the North Academic Center complex at City College in upper Manhattan. By 5 p.m. Wednesday the entire campus was shut down and classes were suspended indefinitely. By the following week students had occupied buildings at 15 other CUNY campuses, though some of these such as those at Baruch, Brooklyn College, and Medgar Evers College lasted only a day. The takeovers at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), La Guardia Community College, John Jay College, New York Technical College, York College, and the CUNY Graduate Center all started within the week of April 9 and April 16, and ended between April 25 and April 28. The takeovers at Hunter and City College ended on May 1 and 2, respectively. Large rallies in support of the takeovers were also held at the two College of Staten Island cam-

greatest accomplishment in 12 years as governor has been to build the most prisons in state history, threw a fit when the *Republican-led* state legislature passed a budget that would spend \$937 million dollars more than he wants on things like education and Medicaid, while cutting Cuomo's beloved state police. "Police State" Cuomo promises to veto it. Meanwhile, in New York City, Mayor David Dinkins is calling for a budget reduction of some \$3 billion with another \$500 million in new tax rip-offs which will fall most heavily on the poor and working people.

These budgets mean the firing of 30,000 city workers on top of another 16,000 state workers. When combined with the elimination of job-training programs and the

aftereffects on local economies, these budgets will undoubtedly set off an additional round of layoffs. The "New World Order" in New York City also means cutting health and human services by millions of dollars. State funding for childcare, for example, will be cut by at least ten percent. Cuomo and Dinkins argue that outpatient clinics, city-run pharmacies, school nurses, and dental clinics have got to go, and that fire departments, senior centers, hospitals, and Medicaid benefits for dental, optical, and psychiatric care are expendable. Meanwhile, New York has become the tuberculosis capital of America, with measles and other preventable diseases on the rise. Homelessness too is breaking all-time records this year with over 100,000 people on the streets. Libraries,

museums, parks, zoos, public swimming pools, and beaches will also be closed in this summer of the "New World Order." Even one out of every four street lamps will be turned off at night.

But amidst all the disorder public spending *will* go up for 50,000 new cops to help enforce this class war against workers and minorities. The cops are also needed to defend the rich from a rising tide of hopelessness and desperation which is pushing random violence to ever higher levels and increasing the numbers of racist attacks, attacks on women, and senseless killings of children and infants. As for the truly destitute, they were given a taste of this growing police-state army in early June when cops closed Tompkins Square Park in Manhattan—long a haven for the home-

less—and erected a six-foot fence around it. Dinkins and Cuomo only wish that every day could be a June 10, when millions cheered their obscene "Imperialism Day" parade, so that labor, students, and anti-war protesters could always find themselves outnumbered and harassed by super-patriotic drunken thugs.

The "New World Order" is turning New York City into a metropolis of misery. And it is the Democratic Party and its most liberal politicians, Mario Cuomo and David Dinkins—for years passed off as "the friends of labor" by social democratic reformers and trade union bureaucrats—who are leading this attack on working people. □

Barry M. Lituchy

pushes where a library was held by students for several weeks. The administration buildings at two SUNY campuses, SUNY Purchase in Westchester County and SUNY Stony Brook on Long Island, were also seized by students in solidarity with the CUNY protests.

Naturally, one of the first things a large number of faculty and outside observers said at the time of the takeovers was "I support the goals of the students, but not their tactics." In fact, the headline of one article in the faculty union newspaper *The Clarion* read: "Tuition Protests: Union backs goals, rejects tactics" (May 1991). This refrain, uttered by many who simply did not want to come out in earnest and say that they were completely against the students, was eventually taken up by a large number of reformist "progressive" types who are accustomed to tailing after the liberal majority viewpoint, no matter how wrongheaded it might be.

The reactionary character of this posture was not adequately agitated against during the course of the protests. The idea that the fight against the budget cuts could be won with anything less than direct militant action against the city and state by students and workers is an extremely serious misconception. Those who did nothing to solidarize with the students proved themselves to be on the side of the state. The reformist argument that the takeovers proved nothing or that the students should have just given up and waited for future mass demonstrations were promoted by people who have no desire to see working class protest go beyond anything more than reformist actions where people let off steam, and then go home to be exploited the next day. This is not to say that everything the students did was "correct." But it does mean that in this given situation these were the tactics that working people used as an expression of their self-assertion and self-empowerment, and that once the barricades were up and the class struggle was engaged, it was not for a bunch of fence-sitters to judge which tactics they would and would not support. The college takeovers, actively supported by thousands of New York City working class students, were more than just a symbolic act advocating that education is a right of all people and that these campuses belong to the people, to be occupied, kept open or shut down as they saw fit; it represented a real attempt by working class students to wrest control of the CUNY system from the ruling class and to exercise the kind of real, democratic self-government that socialism would be based on. A socialist budget cut would abolish the overpaid administration that expels students (and receives six-figure salaries for doing so) and establish stu-

dent, faculty, and worker control of the university.

### **Potential for a Broader Struggle**

Once the struggle against the budget cuts was launched it should have been possible for other groups in the city to broaden it. It was a problem with the takeovers that, in most cases, the students involved were not sufficiently conscious of the need to move in that direction—to bring in sympathetic faculty, staff, workers and trade unions, community activists and parents. In some cases this was attempted, but in others there was a mistaken perception that this was a "student thing" and "outside agitators" should be kept out. Needless to say, by the time the takeovers were about to be broken by cop assaults the student occupiers were desperate for "outside agitators." But by then it was too late.

A united front with labor would have involved much more than simply the rallies which finally did take place on April 24 and 30; it could have created a dynamic that would have significantly advanced the overall situation of the class struggle in New York City—beginning with an active defense of the students involved in the takeovers by a broad coalition of students, faculty, workers, and community activists, and could have extended to the calling of a citywide workers' and students' council organized for the purpose of negotiating with the city and state for student and worker demands, and even to a citywide general strike—or as broad a strike as possible—in the event the demands were not met.

Of course, no one should fault the radical youth who led the takeovers for not possessing expert revolutionary leadership, or for breaking this or that rule of Robert's rules of order. Moreover, they also understood that they had to take the initiative themselves because the faculty and staff had already shown themselves time after time to be incapable of taking the lead in fighting the budget cuts. Not surprisingly, the conservative leadership of the faculty union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), did absolutely nothing to defend the students from arrests, expulsions, or cop violence. But the problem went even further than this. For a number of reasons the faculty, including those most sympathetic to the takeovers, found themselves unprepared to act when the takeovers began, even though many had been involved in a variety of protests against the budget cuts prior to that time. There was a reluctance to state openly that students should have the right to engage in acts of civil disobedience to protest their legitimate grievances—acts which are regularly endorsed even by conservatives in academia when discussing the civil rights movement of the

1960s. Although the budget cuts came at the same time as the faculty was negotiating a new union contract and contesting a union election, there was not even a clear appreciation of the fact that the best way to defend thousands of full-time faculty facing layoffs was to link their demands with those of the students. Among no group was a failure of leadership more evident than among the part-time faculty, the adjuncts.

### **Adjuncts Get Screwed**

The adjunct position in CUNY was created in the 1970s as a way of reducing expenditures, primarily by grossly exploiting the labor of graduate students working toward a PhD, as well as the labor of PhDs unable to find a full-time position in their field. Today the approximately 3,000 adjuncts in the CUNY system comprise about half of the entire system's faculty and teach about 63 percent of all undergraduate courses in CUNY. Despite the high quality and commitment of adjunct faculty instruction—which is usually superior to that of the full-time staff and is concentrated in large, required, and introductory courses—and despite the fact that many have been teaching for over a decade in the CUNY system, adjuncts are paid only a fraction of the salary earned by full-time faculty and staff for an equivalent amount of work and in most cases receive absolutely no benefits. Although the system has become completely dependent on cheap adjunct labor for its survival, adjuncts have virtually no job protection and are regularly victimized by arbitrary policies that vary from department to department, from school to school, and from year to year.

Although PSC union boss Irwin Polishook has admitted that the exploitation of adjuncts "raise[s] serious questions about the university's employment practices and academic integrity," the union has done nothing to help adjuncts. Indeed, as numerous sympathetic full-time professors have often said, the PSC views itself as a white, male-dominated, tenured professors' union.

Last fall several hundred adjuncts and graduate assistants organized their own adjunct caucus within the union, calling itself Part Timers United (PTU). The PTU was constituted specifically to address concerns such as the budget crisis, the demand for equal pay for equal work, health benefits, and better job security. From the very beginning there was a consensus within the PTU that drastic action would be needed to be taken in order to advance these demands. It was decided last fall that adjuncts would mobilize themselves first by getting as many adjuncts as possible to join the union and then by preparing to run a slate of candidates in the union election

jointly with another progressive caucus. There was also an early consensus that some sort of strike action needed to be taken in the spring. The urgency of a strike action intensified when the union bureaucracy did everything in its power to block adjunct participation in contract negotiations and in the elections, including the disqualification of hundreds of new members from the union election and a smear campaign by mail against the PTU slate of candidates.

Although individual PTU activists offered an enormous amount of financial, logistical, and political support for the student protesters, the PTU failed to link its struggle against the budget cuts and union bureaucracy with that of the students in the most effective way possible. This was due to a number of factors: the failure for students and adjuncts to coordinate their actions in advance, the attention being paid by the PTU to the union election in April, the newness of the adjunct organization, and the failure of adjuncts to recognize fully that the student struggle was their struggle as well, campus takeovers and all.

The failure of the adjuncts to mobilize themselves as a bloc in solidarity with the occupations was a serious miscalculation on their part. In order to cut the city's losses during the student strike, the city's Board of Higher Education decided that adjuncts would not get paid for any time lost as a result of building occupations. It also decided that in order to extort extra free labor out of adjuncts, paychecks would be withheld until after the extended semester was completed and "work certificates" were signed by deans and department chairs. With the adjuncts' challenge to their authority in the elections still fresh in their minds, the PSC union leadership voted to strongly support this decision. Meanwhile, the entire union continues to work without a new contract since September 1990 and one out of every three adjuncts now faces the prospect of not returning to work at all in the fall. The opportunity to fight back was lost and many adjuncts are still asking themselves why.

### **Reynolds' Rap**

As soon as the takeovers began CUNY administration strategy aimed at intimidating the protesters in every possible way. The first element of this strategy was a slander campaign against the students, including lies about stolen property and allegations of violence and vandalism. The capitalist media immediately picked up on this and made every effort to delegitimize the student takeovers. The goal of this tactic was to turn both general public opinion and sympathetic faculty against the protesters, and this disinformation campaign undoubtedly had a considerable im-

pact. Another administration tactic was aimed at the student body itself in an effort to divide the majority of students outside the occupied buildings from those on the inside. Reynolds threatened the student body with cancellation of the entire semester.

On April 16 the Emergency Committee to Save CUNY met with Reynolds and her staff to demand that no police or other disciplinary action be taken against the students. This committee had been organized by progressive full-time faculty and PTU activists the preceding fall and had also planned to organize a campaign against the budget cuts before the student protest began. Reynolds used this occasion to further intimidate the students, claiming she had full authority to use police action as she saw fit and to expel any and all students associated with the takeovers. She also emphasized her close personal friendship with cop commissioner Lee Brown. As students were soon to learn, one of the reasons Dinkins and the city's rich want to hire 50,000 more cops is to try to prevent student takeovers like this from ever happening again, even if it means bashing in the heads of unruly students. Thus, during the first ten days or so of the takeovers, the CUNY chancellor's office focused its energies on generating as much negative publicity and threats as possible in order to divide and conquer the protests.

### **The Smashing of the CUNY Revolt**

The CUNY administration was determined, by the end of the third week of the protests, to end the student takeovers. During that week of Monday, April 22, the CUNY administration helped to organize counterdemonstrations of 20 to 30 students at New York Technical College and BMCC. Reynolds and the college presidents at both schools managed to manipulate nursing and dental hygiene students into believing that they would fail their licensing exams unless the protests were stopped. After giving only trivialized coverage of the protests and takeovers, television and radio news teams showed up in force to report the pathetically small New York Tech counter-demo for the evening news, bemoaning the denial of a college education to these stooges by the "selfish" protesters.

The decisive day in the breaking of the takeovers occurred on Thursday, April 25. Reynolds arrived that day in Staten Island for a 5:00 p.m. meeting with the Board of Trustees, perhaps to receive final blessings from the supposed caretakers of the CUNY system for the planned cop assault on the students. Reynolds was met by an angry crowd of students, faculty, and community activists who were being barred from the phony "hearing." Learning of the imminent

counterdemonstration and attack on the takeover at BMCC by nursing students, and perhaps annoyed that protesters were about to break into her "hearing," Ann Reynolds broke off her meeting after less than an hour and headed for Manhattan. Aping a scene from the movie "Roger and Me," Reynolds made a dash for her limousine as protesters chased her, yelling obscenities and attempting to block her exit.

In what appears to have been a closely manipulated event, Reynolds arrived an hour later just after a violent mob of nursing students smashed through the glass doors of the BMCC takeover. It was no coincidence that security was there in advance to help cut the chains on the entrances and provoke the attack or that television film crews were also there in advance to film the action live for the seven o'clock news with an interview from the ecstatic chancellor spouting something about her pride in being a woman.

But even bigger plans were in the works for that evening. Approximately 500 specially trained riot cops were assembled late that night at Yankee Stadium in the Bronx for a series of violent mass assaults which would eventually put an end to all of the takeovers. As in Iraq, the modus operandi of the "New World Order" in New York City is massive armed force in the dead of night. In the early hours of Friday morning two to three hundred heavily armed riot police marched into Bronx Community College and ended the takeover with court orders in hand. The scene was repeated in the next 48 hours at Lehman, Hostos, La Guardia, New York Technical, and York. Only the takeovers at Hunter and City held out beyond the April 30 demonstration, ending May 1 and 2, respectively.

### **Mass Actions—Too Little, Too Late**

The culmination of the CUNY crisis coincided with two mass student and labor demonstrations against the city and state budget cuts in downtown Manhattan on April 24 and 30. About 4,000 people, mostly students and faculty, turned out in a driving rainstorm for the CUNY demonstration on the 24th. The demo on the 30th, called by the leading unions in the city and drawing out tens of thousands of their workers, focused on labor's response to the budget cuts. But it was even better attended by students than the rally of the 24th.

However, instead of using the rally to forge links with the CUNY students and solidarize with their takeovers, using the impetus of this protest to help the city workers in their struggle, the April 30 organizers chose to hand the students a clear insult by roping them off in a corner at the back of the march. Small contingents of

students had tried to meet with the leaderships of the hospital workers Local 1199, AFSCME District Council 37, and the Transport Workers Union, but fearing that the students would infect their workers with a militant strategy for fighting the budget cuts the union officials told the students to get lost.

The rally on the 30th, rather than marking an opening shot in a militant battle by the city unions against the cutbacks—a battle that would reinforce the students—turned out to be another case of the bureaucrats going hat in hand to the politicians in City Hall, Albany, and Washington, to beg for a few crumbs to ease the impact of the crisis on their members. Their only appeal was for a return to the “Roosevelt tradition” of the Democratic Party, and it was clear to anyone who would listen that the threats being made of a fightback were all bluff and bluster—if the politicians failed to respond to their pleas, the union officials were not planning any effective response. Under these circumstances, rather than contributing to a rebirth of the student protest movement after the police attacks against it, the April 30 rally actually marked the end of any effective protest by students against the cuts, at least for the time being.

### **Defense of the Protesters**

The zeal and determination of the city and state to prosecute the students, to intimidate anyone who might consider taking part in future protests, has driven the CUNY administration to launch a vicious and widespread campaign of frame-ups against many of those who took part in the occupations. Thus, the last act in the Reynolds strategy to wreck CUNY involves the prosecution of student protesters on false charges.

A typical case study in “frame-up 101” comes from La Guardia Community College. Threatened by a mass assault of riot cops on the main building, occupying students surrendered the building at noon on Friday, April 26. Ten minutes before police and security stormed the building three members from faculty and staff entered the building to inspect it for damages. They found nothing amiss. Throughout the occupation at La Guardia, the students took extraordinary care of the building, mopping the floors and cleaning rooms that were not even in use. They issued printed statements—“memoranda”—distributed to students outside the building and at rallies and teach-ins on campus countering the false accusations made by the college’s ultrareactionary and vindictive president Raymond Bowin, who has called for police actions on every possible occasion and who turned off the heat and hot water during the

two weeks of the takeover. The students proved to everyone who listened that they were the true protectors of the college.

But soon after entering the building, security and police claimed that they had “discovered” extensive and senseless vandalism. The media center and the student government offices in particular were filthy with food, beer, liquor, vegetables, and other foul substances spilled all over the floors and walls. Media equipment and lab equipment were broken. Given the failure of the faculty investigative committee to find this destruction, the only conclusion must be that it was done by campus “security” itself, after the occupation had been broken. This is one of the flimsiest and most amateur frame-ups ever attempted—and by people who run a college no less! On reentering the building on Monday, faculty, staff, and students were amazed by the blatant duplicity and insanity behind this scheme. More remarkable still is the fact that the college president and the dean of students, who have done everything they can to rig the disciplinary hearing, may yet get their phony charges to stick.

In a separate case at Hunter, two students were arrested in their homes after completely bogus charges of assault and theft were leveled against them by security and the dean of students. The students involved in the takeover at BMCC have even been charged for breaking the glass doors smashed in by the nursing students. Dozens of students are still facing months of disciplinary hearings and court appearances in front of them. The hearings at York College for example began only on June 10.

Although as a whole the faculty did not acquit themselves well during the takeovers, there were hundreds of faculty across the city who offered considerable support to the students and made admirable sacrifices. Faculty and staff played a very positive role in helping to defend students from more severe disciplinary action at Lehman, Hostos, City College, and La Guardia.

A positive effort in helping to defend students facing reprisals for their participation in the protests has been the work of the Legal Defense Committee headed by Ron McGuire of the National Lawyers’ Guild, and a similar effort in the defense of students at BMCC by the Center for Constitutional Rights. McGuire, who has volunteered his services to defend the students, has been tireless in his efforts in negotiating with college presidents and organizing legal defense for students facing both academic and judicial hearings. According to McGuire, nearly 200 students have been picked out since the occupations for some sort of disciplinary action ranging from academic probation, suspension, censure, or expulsion to serious jail time for

framed-up charges of theft, vandalism, and assault. At least one student faces felony charges. Clearly, the building of a citywide student defense committee represents the most effective and logical direction in which to carry the CUNY protests further and build a solid coalition of faculty, labor, and community support for the students under attack.

Unfortunately, this essential task of political support for the students has hardly been given the necessary attention that it needs. It would be a very grave error to believe—as some faculty who have testified on behalf of the students have suggested—that successful manipulation of bourgeois legality is the only way or even the best way to defend these students from political persecution. Legal defense is absolutely necessary, but it would be a reformist pipedream to think that it is a sufficient condition for winning any serious victory on behalf of the students. Moreover, a student defense committee that mobilizes support effectively citywide will not only defend the students better in court by bringing community pressure to bear on the proceedings, but it could also lay the groundwork for developing a more effective vehicle to reopen the struggle against the budget cuts in the fall. Once again the opportunity to build labor and community support around a long-term strategy presents itself.

Of the original group of persecuted students, about 125 have been given amnesty. But amnesty in this case means an admission of guilt and a permanent mark on the records of these courageous people. To have to accept “amnesty” from such corrupt and despicable bureaucrats is an outrage and an insult to these students who should be regarded as heroes. These students who issued leaflets, who occupied buildings, and who led a brave protest in defiance of capitalist legality are without question “the best and the brightest” of their generation. And yet today, these very same students are not receiving degrees, nor engaged in rewarding labors, but instead find themselves on trial for their “crimes.” It is difficult for me to understand why anyone who has seen what this system is doing to its youth would ever want to reform it. The necessity of a revolutionary leadership will become increasingly clear to growing numbers of students and workers as they also confront this reality. Once again we come to the choice posed by Trotsky over fifty years ago: socialism or barbarism? The students who are on trial, and those of us who have witnessed the trials, need to realize the immediacy of this decision. The “New World Order” and all of the other crap associated with this capitalist system must be put *out of order*, forever. □

**A**lthough congressional intervention in the national strike by rail unions on April 17 forced an end to the action in less than 24 hours, reverberations from government strikebreaking are still echoing among rail workers.

Congress did not directly impose the recommendations of Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) 219 established by President Bush in 1990. Instead it set up a process that almost certainly guarantees that the same pro-railroad provisions will be imposed by late July, after a bogus reconsideration by yet another arbitration board.

The new board, again consisting of three professional arbitrators, is instructed to give a "presumption of validity" to the recommendations of PEB 219, and to place "the burden of persuasion" on any party that would propose changes. This is similar to the eleventh-hour appeal granted to a condemned prisoner, and about as likely to receive a sympathetic response.

The recommendations will impose a 25-30 percent cut in real wages over the life of the contract (four years), and will result in the elimination of tens of thousands of rail jobs—this after a reduction by over one-half of existing rail jobs during the decade of the 1980s.

The face of labor relations under the New World Order has been an eyeopener to many railroad workers. Although government intervention in rail labor relations has been established for most of this century, most rail workers believed that some rough form of fairness prevailed. This sentiment has been deeply disturbed by the recent experience of joint intervention by Congress, the White House, and the PEB—more openly on the side of the railroads than at any time in the memory of most rail workers.

The full impact of this is still developing, and the new board, established by the congressional strikebreaking legislation of April 17, will not impose its recommendations until July 28. At that time, the devastating nature of these provisions will be driven home with renewed force. Nevertheless, the experience up to now, especially the openly bipartisan nature of the vote on April 17 (400 to 5 in the House of Representatives and unanimous on a voice vote in the Senate), has given many workers a picture of the two-party system jointly defending corporate interests.

An interesting and symptomatic expression of this new consciousness has manifested itself within a large local of primarily female clerical workers on the Burlington Northern Railroad in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Minnesota rail workers went on an unprecedented mobilization of rallies, picket lines, and letter writing before the strike, much of it directed to their congressional representatives, who, it was understood, would probably be called upon to intervene.

Consequently, there could be no question that the local congressional delegation was fully informed on the issue, well

apprised of the position of rail workers and their local unions. Many of them responded with sympathetic letters and other messages, assuring rail workers that they could be certain of support from their elected representatives. The rail workers looked hopefully to members of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, the Minnesota section of the national Democratic Party. As a result of the liquidation of the independent Minnesota Farmer Labor Party into the state Democratic Party in 1944, the state party has born that misleading label ever since. Even more than in other states, organized workers have felt that the DFL was their party. One DFL officeholder, U.S. Senator Paul Wellstone, was seen as an especially militant and outspoken defender of labor and other good causes after his election in 1990, and he, like the others, talked a good fight in meetings with rail workers before the April 17 showdown.

The outrage of rail workers at the complete abandonment of such pretenses on April 17 was heightened by all of this. In particular, many of the activists in the St. Paul clerks local, Local 593 of the Transportation Communications Union, had worked hard for the election of the DFL candidates, and Wellstone especially.

Local 593 responded energetically and angrily when the vote came down, and over 250 attended the first local meeting following the strike, ready for action. A Local 593 Fightback Committee was established,

which laid out a number of projects, including the organization of a public hearing on the emergency board proposals at the Minnesota state capitol in conjunction with the Intercraft Association of Minnesota (ICAM), a militant coalition of rail unionists which publishes the widely distributed rank-and-file rail workers' newspaper *Straight Track*.

The Fightback Committee's first action was to set up an informational picket line at the St. Paul Labor Center on April 29, when Senator Wellstone was scheduled to speak at a Workers' Memorial Day breakfast honoring workers killed on the job. About 50 rail workers picketed and distributed a leaflet explaining their support of the goals of Workers' Memorial Day, but repeating their criticisms of the politicians who had sold them out.

When Senator Wellstone showed up he elected to engage in an impromptu dialogue with the rail workers, explaining to them that he supported them, and that he had opposed the congressional action. Unfortunate for the credibility of this fairy tale, a rail worker placed in his hands a copy of Wellstone's remarks on the Senate floor on April 18, praising the strikebreaking legislation and the role of senators Kennedy and Hatch in ramming it through.

## Potential Grows for Fightback

# Outrage on the Railroad

by L. D. Bradley

The caption of the St. Paul, Minnesota, *Pioneer Press*, where this photo originally appeared (May 30), says it expresses the sentiments of betrayed railroad clerks who leased the billboard. "DFL" in Minnesota stands for Democratic Farmer Labor Party, the state organization of the national Democratic Party. Union members across the country are becoming disillusioned with "friends of labor" pretensions of the Democrats. The old illusory distinctions between Democrats and Republicans are fading, hardly discernible today by growing numbers of union members.



This experience, of course, only deepened the feeling of betrayal prevalent among the rail workers.

Local 593's next step was to purchase billboards near the state capitol denouncing the sellout by the so-called "friends of labor" (see photo on this page). Further plans involve newspaper ads and billboards along the same lines.

Naturally, these experiences have made Tony Mazzocchi's call for a labor party based on the unions seem even more immediate and persuasive. Mazzocchi's meeting in Minneapolis a few weeks after the strike was well attended and introductory remarks were given by a local railroad worker referring to the recent experience with bipartisan congressional strikebreaking.

There is no end in sight for the deepening crisis of rail labor, and no prospect of a slackening of government and carrier assaults on wages, jobs, and working conditions. All this seems especially hypocritical to workers who note the White House's embrace of Lech Walesa and the cause of free trade unionism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Many of the 11 major rail unions will hold national conventions this year. In spite of the highly bureaucratized nature of these organizations, there will be an unprecedented expression of the anger and alarm of rail workers at these meetings. Some heads will roll, and some international officials will be replaced. Unfortunately, few of the likely replacements have any clear idea of what to do about the deteriorating situation, and those who do have ideas place them largely in the traditional framework of reliance on capitalist politicians, labor

boards, and other class-collaborationist practices. Nonetheless, the accelerating crisis and the absolute barrenness of the bureaucratic perspective for dealing with it will continue to generate a new consciousness.

### The Situation in Minnesota

The ability of the rank and file to try out initiatives is enhanced by the continuing decomposition of the union bureaucracy and its consequent inability to police the ranks as it used to do.

The situation in Minnesota is somewhat exceptional due to the long experience of organized rank-and-file initiatives, especially through ICAM and *Straight Track*, and the ability of class conscious rail workers to link up with spontaneous expressions of protest and resistance.

Nevertheless, the experience is a good indication of the direction that needs to be followed in fighting back effectively, and the indispensable need for a combination of revolutionary class consciousness and rising rank-and-file moods of struggle.

Future developments will undoubtedly confirm this in spades. The task now is to prepare, regardless of the dimensions of the forces currently in motion. Every great struggle in the past arose out of a combination of a growing response of the masses of workers to intolerable conditions and the patient and painstaking preparation of a class struggle minority. Each genuine opening to influence among the masses of organized workers must be seen as the threshold to the future. □



# Deepening Economic Crisis in the USSR

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

"We are in a classic slide which nothing can stop" was the way Vladimir Mashchits, one of the architects of the Kremlin economists' stillborn "500 days" economic reform package, described the current crisis in the USSR.

The slide is not really "classic." In fact, it is historically unprecedented. No crisis in the capitalist world is quite like it. Nor does the ruling bureaucratic caste in the USSR confront quite the same situation as has evolved in Eastern Europe.

But there is, indeed, a crisis. Six years of policy edicts aimed at introducing market measures, privatization of state-owned property, and attracting infusions of foreign capital and technology to reverse the economic stagnation caused by decades of Stalinist totalitarian rule have worsened the Soviet Union's economic crises.

Not only has the economic situation deteriorated, along with the living standard of the working masses; not only has imperialism failed to come to the Stalinists' rescue; but the democratic openings the rulers have permitted in tandem with their economic and political restructuring are large enough that protests have begun to directly challenge the bureaucrats' continued rule.

### **Bureaucrats Close Ranks**

It is their awareness of these direct challenges to their control that has caused the various wings of the bureaucratic caste to again close ranks behind Gorbachev. The "conservative" Soyuz faction of the Communist Party at the special Central Committee meeting April 24 pulled back from its clamoring for Gorbachev's resignation. The heads of eight republics along with maverick "radical" Yeltsin, who had also been demanding Gorbachev's resignation, joined Gorbachev in the April 23 secret "dacha" meeting to support Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov's "anti-crisis" plan.

Their agreement was announced in a five-point declaration, signed by both Mikhail Gorbachev for the Kremlin and Boris Yeltsin for the Russian Republic, as well as the top bureaucratic apparatchiks and gangsters from the Turkmenian, Tadzhik, Azerbaijan, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Belorussian, and Ukrainian republics. Entitled the "Joint Declaration About Urgent Measures to Stabilize the Situation in the Country and Overcome the Crisis," it was published on the front page of the Communist Party daily *Pravda* April 24.

Most notable was that three of its five points were calls to workers to end their strikes and threats against workers' anti-bureaucratic organization. This shows who the bureaucrats think the enemy is.

While the first three points promised a new constitution, new elections, review of the new price increases and of the 5 percent sales tax, point three also stated: "Toward the aim of stabilizing the state of the people's economy in the country, the par-

ticipants of the meeting called for the introduction of a special regime of work in basic branches of industry, in enterprises producing consumer goods, and in railroad transport.

"When necessary, organs of power in the republics will adopt additional measures to guarantee the normal workings of the people's economy."

Point four added to this "the leaders of the Union and of the republics appeal to the miners and all workers to end their economic and political strikes and direct their efforts toward making up for the lost work time in the shortest term possible."

Point five commenced with "Considering the exceptionally sharp crisis situation in the country, the leadership of the Union and of the republics considers intolerable attempts to achieve political aims by means of inciting civil disobedience, strikes or calls for overturning the existing, legally elected organs of state power."

### **Strikes and Protests**

While these pleas and threats aimed at the striking workers can unite the bureaucrats, they are unlikely to have much impact on the workers. Strikes in vital industrial sectors, including the energy industries, were made illegal by the Supreme Soviet following the coal miners' strikes of the summer of 1989. This has made no difference to the workers, as has been shown by the strike wave that hit the country in early March when hundreds of thousands of coal miners in Ukraine, Siberia, and Vorkuta stopped working. Their main demands were political: the resignation of Gorbachev and the dismissal of the Supreme Soviet.

The Donbass miners in Ukraine, according to the *Financial Times* of March 25, were demanding the resignation of the Ukrainian Republic's leadership and an independent Ukraine. Only after those demands were met, the miners said, did they want the demands for pay increases and improved living conditions to be taken up. Unless the political demands were realized, they explained, economic concessions from the government would be meaningless. The miners were also demanding the expulsion of Communist Party organizations from the enterprises, from the security police, and from the Ministry of Interior. Among their other demands were a 100 percent pay increase, the lifting of censorship of the mass media—that has been progressively more pronounced since the Kremlin's invasion of Lithuania in January—a law indexing wages to prices, decent housing, more and better food, etc.

As in most parts of the USSR, food is rationed in the mining regions. Miners in the Kuznetsk Basin in Siberia and in Vorkuta can receive only 10 eggs, about 5 pounds of meat, and two and one-half pounds of flour and sugar each month, according to the *Financial Times* of March 1. Sometimes even that much is unavailable.

Before March ended, and on the eve of the new round of price increases April 2, the strike had been joined by coal miners in southern Rostov, gold miners in Chita in the far north, and 10

mines in Chelyabinsk. Metal workers, rail workers, and aviation workers had pledged support.

Neither the much-publicized March 17 referendum on the maintenance of the Soviet Union nor an offer of a large pay increase made by the government in the first days of April stopped the strikes.

In April, new events fueled popular unrest and the strike waves spread. The lifting of price controls over products sold in state stores incited widespread anger. Among the first workers to resist were those in Minsk, capital of the Belorussian Republic. The Belorussian workers have been unjustly termed quiescent or conservative by reporters. This is not a fair description.

The environmental destruction of one-fifth of Belorussia caused by the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in April 1986 has been the focus of numerous and growing movements in Belorussia to resettle those living in contaminated areas, uncover the truth as to who and what was responsible for the accident, and close down the nuclear plants. Although Gorbachev did choose the Minsk tractor factory as the site for a recent public relations visit, the exact time and place of his proposed visit were not publicized beforehand; he met with selected party tops and a handpicked grouping of workers; the press was not allowed to directly cover his visit; and he kept a safe distance from the shop floor.

Commenting on his visit, *Moskovskiy Novosti*, No. 15, April 14, reported from the Minsk Tractor Factory: "A month ago, Mikhail Gorbachev visited it. At one of their meetings, the thermal-forging workers shouted out using unparliamentary language to express their regret that the president of the USSR did not choose to visit their shop floor. Perhaps the head of the proletarian state would have found it worthwhile to see this hell—the constant roar, the soot and the heat, in which his subjects work for almost nothing."

The reporter went on quoting one worker: "The guys were feeling aggressive . . . prices have gone up 6-7 times but our pay has not even doubled . . . the economic demands are of course the most important . . . but don't forget the political demands. Who's in our government? Generals and secretaries. They have dachas standing empty in places where we aren't even allowed to pick mushrooms."

It does appear, however, that Minsk became the center for workers' opposition to the price increases at least partly because the widespread shortages of basic goods had not been quite so acute there as elsewhere. Thus, when the price increases went into effect, they were not "an abstract issue" as they were in many other regions where there was nothing much to buy anyway.

The price increases caused strikes and demonstrations that shut down Minsk throughout much of April. Workers from the giant tractor factory and the electrical-mechanical works led the protests that were joined by numerous other industrial and transport sectors. They were demanding that the central government and the Belorussian government resign, an emergency session of the Belorussian Supreme Soviet to enact more democratic laws, new elections based on broader democratic rights, and nationalization of the property of the Belorussian and central Soviet Communist Party—with proceeds to go to help the victims of Chernobyl and to improve health and

education. They were also demanding Belorussian sovereignty, according to *Moskovskiy Novosti*.

Meanwhile, on April 9 in the Georgian Republic, where the nationalist movement has been in control of the parliament since the November elections, the parliament voted unanimously for a declaration of independence. April 9 is the anniversary of the attack by Ministry of Interior troops on a peaceful, unarmed demonstration in 1989 which left at least 19 dead. The president of the parliament—a prominent human rights activist during the Brezhnev era, Zviad Gamsakhurdia—marked the anniversary by announcing that the Georgian government supported the demands of the workers on strike in the USSR and endorsed such actions across Georgia, adding its own demands: for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from South Ossetia and the Kremlin's recognition of Georgian independence.

The parliament of the South Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Region declared itself an autonomous republic in December 1990, thus removing itself from Georgian jurisdiction and placing itself under direct Kremlin rule. The Georgian parliament revoked the South Ossetian decision. The Supreme Soviet then revoked the Georgian parliament's revocation.

Such wars of decrees have characterized the recent period where local republican parliaments, under partial control of and pressure from local nationalist-minded and anti-Stalinist forces, have decreed that their own laws override those of the central government. In fact, 14 of the 15 republican parliaments—all except that of Kirghiz—have asserted that their laws take precedence over those of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Since December, South Ossetia has been invaded and occupied by both Georgian militia and Kremlin Interior Ministry troops in a jurisdictional dispute that has left dozens dead. The region was the center of a devastating earthquake at the end of April that destroyed 17,000 homes, 80 percent of the region's hospitals and schools, and left at least 120 dead. However, even before the earthquake, all of the region's social and economic institutions had been at a standstill for months due to an economic blockade of the region by the Georgian government and due to the armed conflicts. The region's capital Tskinali is under a virtual state of siege. Almost all the villages in the Tskinali region had been burned and plundered. More than 4,500 people had been forced to flee.

Georgia did not participate in the March 17 referendum to preserve the Union sponsored by the Kremlin to try to bolster its thin pretensions to authority. However, 90 percent of the registered voters turned out March 31 for Georgia's own plebiscite with nearly 99 percent answering "yes" to the question "Do you agree that the state of independence of Georgia should be restored on the basis of the independence act of May 26, 1918?"

### ***Gorbachev Tries to Ban Strikes***

On April 10, Gorbachev called for a ban on strikes and demonstrations during working hours for one year. While he withdrew that call the next day, the Supreme Soviet in a closed session outlawed strikes again April 16. On April 17, independent trade unions from the Russian Federation announced they were going to meet in Moscow to call for a Russian-wide one-hour strike in solidarity with the coal miners' demands. On April 23, Prime Minister Pavlov, unveiling his new "anti-

crisis" plan, announced it included a ban on strikes and rallies during work hours.

Nevertheless, the Russian Independent Trade Union Federation went ahead with its call for a one-hour strike with the date set for April 26. An estimated 50 million workers throughout Russia took part. Walkouts spread throughout the Russian and non-Russian regions.

It was in this context that Gorbachev and Yeltsin decided to make their peace. Their economic plans had never been very different. Yeltsin claimed to be for accelerated steps toward more thoroughgoing market measures. However he, like Gorbachev, has been unable to implement such measures because they are vastly unpopular.

Nor was there much substantially new in their economic accord. The Russian Federation was granted jurisdiction over the coal mines in its territory. However, the Russian parliament on October 31, 1990, had passed a law on economic sovereignty that declared its control not only over the coal, but over all the natural resources in Russian regions. When Gorbachev had annulled this law neither the Russian parliament nor Yeltsin offered much resistance. So nothing much had come of the disputes.

What was important about the agreement between the two leaders was that the Kremlin agreed to publicly collaborate with Yeltsin in the hopes that he could use his wider popularity to end the strikes. Yeltsin had shown himself capable of attracting support among the discontented masses because he alone, of the prominent political figures, seemed to stand up to the bureaucracy's hated privileges. He seemed opposed to the encrusted bureaucratic apparatus; he defended and made overtures to some of the national independence movements and had opposed the dispatch of Kremlin troops to Vilnius, Lithuania, in January; and, of course, he had called for Gorbachev's resignation, which added to his broad appeal.

However, even as the head of the Russian parliament, and even with the special powers he was given by the Russian parliament in early April after he won the public jousting match with Gorbachev, he has done little to improve the lives of the Russian people as a whole.

Over the past few years it is not only the apparatchiks who have had no alternative leadership to offer, despite the obvious unpopularity of Gorbachev and his policies among the masses. The workers' opposition, still in its formative stages, also has not been able to create an alternative to bureaucratic leadership and is still in its formative stages. In this vacuum, Yeltsin had gained wide popularity for his maverick behavior.

His support coalesced in January around the "Democratic Russia" movement claiming over 1.3 million adherents. It pulled together a cross-section of political currents from the Milton Freidman-minded "reformers" like Gavriil Popov, mayor of Moscow, to pro-Marxist activists in the Socialist Party of Russia, to mass independent workers' movements involved in the strikes. Yeltsin has played a role in the USSR much like the role Jesse Jackson has played in the U.S. Both of these populist figures seek to build a base for themselves among those in struggle against the system in order to create a movement that will lead these activists right back into that system. Yeltsin has been much more successful than Jackson because the ruling bureaucracy in the USSR is in the midst of a far

deeper economic and political crisis than is the U.S. ruling class at the present time.

Yeltsin's role was never so evident as during the events surrounding the March 17 referendum. Yeltsin never urged voters to boycott the referendum, which in this case would have been a positive alternative. On the contrary, the fact that Yeltsin added a question to the referendum for the Russian Republic, asking voters if they favored a president elected by direct, popular vote, surely increased voter turnout. It is quite possible that without that added attraction, the voter turnout would have been so low that the referendum would have been rendered void, further discrediting the Kremlin authorities and defeating their maneuver.

However, Yeltsin has now joined hands with Gorbachev. Following the "dacha" meeting, Yeltsin traveled to Siberia to meet with the striking coal miners to promise them that the mines would be transferred from Kremlin to Russian jurisdiction and to tell them they would get a share of the foreign currency from the sale of the coal for their own use. While some miners apparently applauded Yeltsin's deal, others—in Siberia, Vorkuta, and in the Ukraine—were very skeptical.

By May 7, one-third of the Kuzbass pits were still idle. By May 10, however, it appeared that the coal miners' strikes had ended. The Russian Republic now has jurisdiction over the coal mines in Russia, the Kazakhstan government now has jurisdiction over the coal mines in Karaganda, and the government in Ukraine has had jurisdiction over the coal mines in the Donbass region since January. Such divided jurisdiction over the coal mines under present conditions only serves to diffuse the unified miners' movement. Such a state of affairs will not serve to improve the living or working conditions of the coal miners. However, it does take the heat off the Kremlin for the time being.

The strikes in Belorussia had been called off at the end of April in anticipation of a meeting of the republic's Supreme Soviet called for May 21.

What is notable about the coal miners' strikes and those in Belorussia is that the Russian and Ukrainian miners as well as the Belorussian workers had refused to call off their strikes even when they were offered substantial pay increases. More money is of no use to them if there is nothing to buy with it. Meeting their demands calls for much more fundamental changes, some of which are included in the workers' demands. These have not been implemented.

### ***Failure of 'Marketization'***

In the meantime, the ruling apparatchiks, are in a bind. Their goal was the introduction of market mechanisms and controlled privatization—which would be more attractive to foreign capital while at the same time remove them from direct responsibility for the economic crises. However, even limited steps toward these goals have only worsened the day-to-day lives of the masses with whom they are widely unpopular. Gorbachev advocates fundamentally what Yeltsin does. Neither has been able to implement the market scheme, however, despite the extensive personal power their legislatures have bestowed upon them.

In the meantime, policies zig and zag, creating havoc as the government tries first one empirical maneuver and then another.

For example, on January 1, 1991, by government decree, the price of fuel and energy doubled, as did the price of lumber and lumber products. The price of metal went up 50 percent and machine tools 40 percent. This had disastrous effects throughout an economy where enterprises have been put on a system of self-accounting and subsidies and state orders have been cut. Enterprises must survive on their own. But if the prices they must pay for supplies and fuel double while their income remains the same, the enterprises are obviously in trouble. They must raise the prices they charge for the goods they produce. This has an obvious inflationary effect.

The first deputy chairman of the State Committee on Prices, Anatoly Komik, acknowledged this when answering the *Moskovskiy Novosti* reporter's question: "What goods will become more expensive?" as a result of these government price increases. Komik answered: "Food and nonfood products."

To meet increased demands for funds, the government prints more money. For example, to meet the demands of the striking coal miners (their demands were never really met), the government increased the money supply by 55 percent. This practice, plus decreed price increases, plus the shortage of consumer goods have led to what Soviet economists called a "ruble overhang," or more money than there were goods to purchase.

A visitor notices, for example, that people in the Soviet Union must have considerable cash in their pockets on any given occasion to be prepared at any moment to buy some item in short supply that may suddenly turn up. Brown vinyl women's winter boots from Yugoslavia can unexpectedly turn up in Leningrad during the hottest day in July. Dozens of people suddenly line up to buy the boots which are selling for a hefty 120 rubles a pair—almost half the average monthly pay.

One bureaucratic solution for eliminating this "ruble overhang" was announced to the population on the evening news January 22. As of midnight that day, 50- and 100-ruble notes would no longer be legal currency! People had three days to redeem money held in such denominations, but they were only allowed to redeem the equivalent of one month's pay. Imagine what this meant to pensioners who had saved money in large bills or working people who kept large bills around in case they happen to come across winter boots in mid-July!

It was as if their money had been stolen right out of their pockets; in fact it had been. This measure was intended to remove roughly 46 billion of the 130 billion rubles in circulation at that time.

There was understandable cause for popular anger and panic as people lined up to cash in their limit for smaller bills. Banks were open 24 hours a day in some areas. Because of the obvious problems involved in converting so much cash in such a short time, deadlines were extended a few days in some regions.

While in February the government announced that it had removed from circulation 40 billion of the 46 billion rubles it was trying to remove, in April Prime Minister Pavlov reported that the figure was only five billion. Many people are obviously stuck with lots of worthless 50- and 100-ruble notes. Many people who had turned in their allotted amounts are stuck with equally worthless coupons because the banks simply did not have enough bills in legal denominations to redeem everybody's cash limit.

Then, after all this, on April 1, the head of the State Bank Victor Geraschenko announced the government plan to print

an additional 40 billion rubles "to meet the needs of high prices and high wages" in 20 and 500 ruble notes and add 70 billion rubles to the credit line!

Due to earlier price increases such as those effective January 1 described above, the State Committee on Prices announced that prices overall had risen 123 percent in 1991, even before the hated April 2 price hikes went into effect. Price ceilings on many goods were either eliminated or significantly raised. This meant that prices charged in state stores for many basic "food and nonfood" items tripled overnight. These price increases came on top of a new five percent sales tax on basic consumer items that went into effect in mid-March.

To make up for the hardships the April 2 price increases would cause, the government promised to increase wages 60 rubles per month and increase pensions. However, this was no help to the unemployed who got no such compensation. TASS called the price increases of April 2 "the most unpopular of all the decisions taken by the Soviet leadership since 1985," a statement not to be taken lightly.

By May 1, the Council of State Prices issued a report showing that these price increases had moved more than half the population below the poverty line. The extra 60 rubles per month compensated for only about one-third of the price increases. The minimum monthly income a person needed to survive had doubled—from 97 to roughly 200 rubles per month.

### ***Fear of Military Repression***

It is in the context of such unpopular measures that the strike waves and the detente between Gorbachev and Yeltsin emerged.

There was widespread speculation that the central government was moving closer and closer to using military measures to enforce its decrees; and the military intervention against Lithuania seemed to buttress this theory. In January, the KGB was, in fact, given greater powers to search and investigate banks and public organizations and enterprises. In February, the Soviet armed forces were assigned to join the local police in street patrols in the major cities. Twelve thousand Ministry of Interior troops were involved. While the publicly announced reason for these added police measures was to stop the speculators, black-marketeers, and other criminals, many of these types now operate legally in new, high-priced markets and shops. Therefore, following the military intervention in Lithuania and then the addition of 50,000 Ministry of Interior troops to Moscow against a pro-Yeltsin demonstration in late March, there was growing talk of a new era of repression on the horizon.

It should be noted, however, that this willingness to resort to police measures is not new in the Gorbachev era.

It should not be forgotten that only one year earlier the Kremlin had sent tens of thousands of troops against Azerbaijan, killing over 100 people. As of mid-March 1991, at least 12 areas in the USSR were under martial law; since then, more have been added. Baku, capital of the Azerbaijan Republic, has been under martial law since the January 1990 invasion of Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabagh, an Armenian region inside Azerbaijan, has been under martial law since January 1989.

Despite the official stories concocted to justify these repressive measures, when one scratches the surface it becomes evident that they were implemented to reinforce the control by

the ruling apparatus over rebellious populations. The difference between these areas—mostly in the Caucasus and Central Asia—and the repression aimed against Lithuania in January 1991 is that in the case of Lithuania numerous eyewitness and even video accounts were available to expose the lies propagated by the official media to justify the repression. When such repression occurs in outlying regions, however, it creates less of an international stir.

“Restoring order,” through police measures if necessary, is vital to the ruling apparatus not only in order to defend its privileges. Imperialism also demands stability if it is to extend credit or invest, which is what the bureaucratic caste is desperately seeking.

A report issued by four imperialist financial institutions—the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization of European Cooperation and Development, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development—in December said Soviet economic output had fallen four percent in 1990, something unprecedented in a major industrialized nation in the postwar period and more descriptive of the economic downturns in the capitalist world of the Great Depression era. The USSR’s GNP dropped 3.5 percent 1986-90. By mid-December, shortages of basic food products had prompted pleas from Soviet government officials for international relief. Around \$4 billion was contributed in food and other forms of aid from 13 countries: even India, where more than half the population goes to bed hungry each night, sent food!

In mid-April, in the midst of the strike wave, TASS published statistics showing a further economic decline in the first quarter of 1991: the GNP was down eight percent, exports and imports were down 30 percent, and labor productivity was down nine percent. The IMF in its much-awaited April report announced that it was refusing any credit to the USSR until it saw reforms designed to change its “rotten structure.” In the meantime, Gorbachev had been off in Japan seeking funds and Yeltsin had visited European states and the European Parliament trying to scare up some capital. Both had little success.

The “9 plus 1” accords that Gorbachev and Yeltsin put forth after the secret dacha meeting April 23 is a desperate attempt to show imperialism that the bureaucracy is in fact in control and united. Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov in early May claimed the accords had by then captured the allegiance of the heads of 14 of the 15 republics. By late May, the bureaucrats were even going so far to prove their reliability to the imperialists that they were proposing to change the name of the country to “Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics,” no longer even calling themselves “Socialist.”

The bureaucrats are prepared to make more meaningful concessions to imperialism as well. In addition to taking a strong stand against strikes and worker protests, the “anti-crisis” plan includes the following proposals:

- It promises, by June 1, a bill guaranteeing foreign capital that its profits can be repatriated. Without a convertible ruble this will be tricky. No specific plan was proposed, however.
- It also promises to go further toward guaranteeing the protection of private investments.
- It projects backing up the value of the ruble by guaranteeing it with state buildings, land, and other properties.

- In addition, it projects swapping Soviet energy resources for farm technology “within a pan-European plan.”

Gorbachev’s October 1990 plan had put forth similar proposals. The “500 days” plan adopted by the Russian parliament and promoted by Yeltsin had similar inducements to foreign capital. What is different this time is that the formerly divergent forces of the bureaucracy have come together.

In mid-May, some key Kremlin marketeers like Gregory A. Yavlinsky, one of the drafters of the “500 days” plan and an economic adviser to both Gorbachev and Yeltsin whom the bourgeois reporters keep describing as “widely respected” (by imperialist think tanks), made a pilgrimage to Boston bringing a new Kremlin initiative to the United States.

To prove how sincere they are about wanting to please imperialism, the learned emissaries brought an “Appeal to the Group of Seven” which beseeches the U.S., Britain, Japan, France, Germany, Canada, and Italy to draft a plan for Soviet reform and offer vast amounts of aid to implement it.

According to the *New York Times* summary of the “Appeal,” the letter presented five basic problems on which advice is sought—from the relationship between the center and the republics, to broad privatization projects, to faster transition to market-pricing systems.

Part of the assistance the Kremlin is seeking is the abolition of trade barriers, new terms for repayment of its foreign debts, Soviet membership in the IMF and World Bank, and vast amounts of long-term credit. The projected figure for annual aid sought was given as \$30 billion per year over five years.

The bureaucratic caste wants the USSR (The Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics) to become a partner in the world capitalist economy.

### ***Some People Profit***

Not everyone in the USSR is suffering under the new economic conditions. Not only are the black-marketeters now able to set up legal operations, those in the right position can set up illegal “redistribution” networks that channel goods intended for state stores into private distribution networks where prices are much higher. It is also important to note that although there have been shortages of goods in the state stores where prices were subsidized, there were often plentiful supplies of food in the private markets at prices most people could not afford.

There are, of course, some individuals who can afford these high prices and others still who have their own private distribution centers with much more copious supplies.

Among those benefiting from the economic chaos are apparatchiks. The Communist Party still has an entrenched presence throughout the USSR, despite the shifts in policies. The situation in Sverdlovsk—site of the giant Ural Machine Tool Factory (Uralmach) and stepping-stone to power of both Yeltsin and former prime minister Ryzhkov—is a case in point. There the party is “shoring up its position by pumping its wealth into commercial joint ventures, small businesses and trading organizations,” the *New York Times* said December 13, 1990.

“The party owns the best hotel in town, which it puts at the disposal of factories and visiting trade delegations. It has the

*(Continued on page 24)*

# "We must decide what is rational"

Interview with Soviet miners' leader

THE recent Soviet miners' strike has been presented in much of the western media as simply an aspect of Boris Yeltsin's struggle with Mikhail Gorbachev.

Aleksandr Sergeev is a member of the Interregional Co-ordinating Council of Strike Committees and vice-chair of the Executive Bureau (EB) of the Independent Trade Union of Miners (ITM). He is also a member of the strike committee of the city of Mezhdurechensk in the Kuzbass. He spoke to David Seppo in Moscow on May 4, 1991, about the real background to the strike and how miners are organizing in the Soviet Union.

**F** I recall correctly, Mezhdurechensk is where the strike began in July 1989. What is its social composition?

It is a mining town of about 100,000 people. There are five mines as well as a factory that makes pre-fabricated units for construction. About 50,000 people are employed in the mines and the factory. Besides children, pensioners and housewives, some 5,000 work in trade. The trade sector here is run by the mafia, just as in Moscow.

We are trying to improve the situation, but in conditions of generalized shortage, it is impossible to completely end the abuses.

**■** What is the composition of your city soviet? Are the candidates of the strike committees in the majority?

No. About 30% are workers' representatives. Of this 30% some are workers and some intellectuals. It is not easy for workers to deal with budgetary and economic questions. The Communists predominate. People do not believe that the city soviet can resolve their problems.

**■** How would you rate the general level of consciousness and abilities of the workers?

Compared to the general level of all employees (toilers) in the USSR, it is rather high. Sociological studies of the workers have shown that they are rather independent people, who can do things with their own hands. Of course, the economic crisis has a depressing influence, but the desire for action is there in most.

**■** Tell me what has been happening since the Second Congress of Min-

ers in Donetsk that founded the ITM in October 1990.

The delegates were supposed to report the decisions of the congress to their collectives. But in this a lot depended on the capacities of the delegates and their motivation. I went to my mine, Tomskaya, and told the miners that I had been elected to the Union's Executive Bureau. I asked if they needed my help in forming the trade union at the mine. They said that they would manage by themselves and that I should return in a month. When I returned they had registered the union and received an official stamp, but the union had only a few members. They simply did not know how to go about it. I explained this to them. And today, in a collective of 1,500 we have about 300 members.

The small number is not so important. That fact is that, for many years, Soviet trade unions' main activity was dispensing various benefits and distributing goods that are in short supply. And so people are wary of leaving those trade unions. Only those who understand the tasks of trade unions are ready to leave.

**■** Can one be a member of both unions?

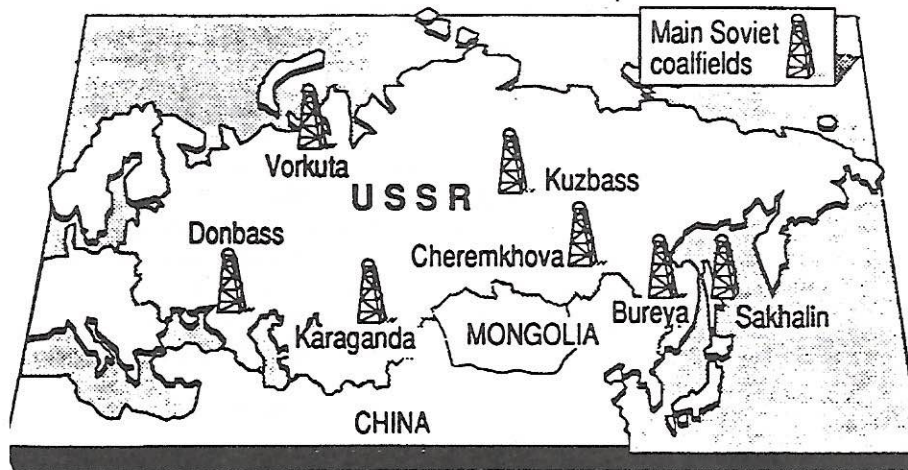
In principle, yes. Our constitution allows it. But the other trade union forces people to choose. People say they are afraid of losing their sick pay. We explain that sick pay, trips to sanatoria and so on are not paid by the union but by state insurance and the law says that any worker has a right to these benefits, regardless of whether the enterprise made its payments to the fund or whether an individual is a member of the trade union.

And when the workers leave the state union they really do continue to get these benefits. The same with the sale of consumer goods within the enterprise. After all, it is the entire collective that earned them, and they should be distributed equally.

**■** How did the present strike begin?

The Second Congress of Miners in October 1990 decided to launch a campaign for a general collective agreement in the coal sector. It elected an EB and assigned it three tasks: organize union locals, conclude a general collective agreement and organize miners' congresses. We began to organize locals. We now have more than 50,000 members in the entire Soviet Union. This is a small number, but these are committed people.

We worked out our demands and wrote up a draft collective agreement for the sector. We presented it on November 20 and received a negative reply a month later. In the case of a negative reply, the law proposes a conciliation commission. Again papers. The EB proposed conciliation, but the authorities ignored this. We sent Ryzhkov, Gorbachev and Lukyanov [Chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet] a warning that we were considering a general strike.



Then the government changed. Pavlov replaced Ryzhkov. Again we sent documents to Gorbachev, Pavlov and Lukyanov. Again no answer. On February 11-13 we convened the representatives of our trade union and the members of the regional strike committees. We went through all the stages required by law, but the other side refused to negotiate.

They gave no reason. They completely ignored us, despite the fact that we had conducted a forceful strike in 1989. This is the style of our leadership.

In the face of this, our meeting decided to prepare for a strike in the spring, at the end of March or in the middle of April and to hold meetings in the collectives on this question. The EB was mandated to contact the president and explain the situation, and to warn him that if he does not respect the convention of the International Labour Organization, of which the USSR is a signatory, and which sets down the right to collective agreements, and if he violated his own law on the Resolution of Labour Conflicts, the mines would strike.

But at this point politics intervened. The Ukrainian Supreme Soviet passed a resolution transferring the mines to the Ukraine, as a sovereign republic. The miners of the Ukraine said to the Ukrainian authorities: O.K., if you have declared the Ukraine sovereign, the mines should pass under your jurisdiction — but you should know that our basic wage is 300 rubles, and that in July 1989 we were promised that our wages would be adjusted according to the movement of prices. This has not been implemented. The other unfulfilled promise was the extension of special pension provisions to all underground workers. We are ready to forget other smaller points, but on these two we want satisfaction. The Ukrainian authorities said: come over to us, and we will decide together. To which the miners agreed.

But when they began discussing, the authorities agreed on the pension demand but refused the wage demand. As a result the Ukrainian strike committees decided to begin the strike earlier.

In order to arouse the rest of the population against us, the government papers have tried to present it as if we were demanding a 200 or 300% wage rise. In fact we are asking for indexation, and not even necessarily full indexation. Prices have at least doubled.

At first there was supposed to be a warning one-day strike. Opinions were divided on this, however. Half of the work collectives wanted to start an all-out strike at once, the other half wanted to give the government ten days after the warning strike. But the union does not have the right to give orders to the collectives — local unions can decide for themselves.

■ **Why did the strike become political?**

A struggle for power and influence is

taking place and the authorities at different levels cannot decide how to divide up the property. We told them: either you divide it up by republic, or else take a common decision for the whole industry.

From the start Kuzbass raised the demand for the transfer of mines to the republics. But there are differences in the political level of the miners. Some wanted to put forward economic demands at first, but others reasoned that, since the republics had declared sovereignty, then the issue of jurisdiction of the mines had to be resolved.

■ **Have you discussed the problems that this might create for solidarity between miners in different republics? At the Congress last year one could already sense that there were some divisions between the Kuzbass and Donbass miners.**

This is no secret. Economic conditions are different. Kuzbass coal is closer to the surface; there are many open-cast mines. It is a matter of first deciding the issue in one republic; this will put pressure on the others. People wanted sovereignty; they elected supreme soviets that proclaimed this; so they have to define their position themselves. In the referendum last March people said "yes" both to the Union and their republics. This means there has to be a division of powers.

■ **Has your union divided along republican lines?**

So far, no. But I think it will eventually structure itself along republican lines. The official trade unions have already broken up along republican lines. They accused us of dividing the workers, and it turned out that they were the first to divide up. It makes no difference if you breathe dust in the Donbass or the Kuzbass.

■ **Does your draft collective agreement have anything to say about mine closures?**

Yes, we propose that the government take certain measures. First it must conduct preliminary expert economic surveys of the situation in the mines and determine how long each mine can hope to function. In this way, miners should have a sufficiently long warning of what the future holds for their mine and know that they will have to change their work. This is the first stage.

The second stage is that of social guarantees; unemployment payments and if necessary three years support for retraining. The question of employment is given top priority in the agreement. The central government's draft law on employment is very bad.

In fact, some Donbass mines did not strike simply out of fear they would be closed. We argued that it would make more sense for them to fight for guarantees now, but they had been told that the

mine would close if they struck and were in a state of shock.

■ **Why doesn't your union work out a programme for restructuring the economy of the mining regions?**

What makes you think we aren't? We have a programme for the creation of a social development and defence fund in which we want to make provision for such matters. This is in addition to our intention of demanding guarantees on employment from the government.

We are making provision for a social protection fund that would be able to give people work and create new jobs in for example, construction and manufacturing. Again, this is in addition to what the state will do. Because any state, whatever goals it might proclaim, will always oppress an individual, restrict a person's rights. So we have to create non-governmental structures. We are already trying this out in the Tula basin near Moscow.

■ **Will these be miners' structures?**

No, these will be big enterprises created by the funds of several independent trade unions. They will be engaged in construction and at the same time provide jobs for miners. But this is still only a project. Here in the Soviet Union nobody else has yet bothered to think about these problems. Everybody is counting on the state.

■ **Yeltsin is now in the Kuzbass explaining to the miners the agreement that was concluded several days ago between Gorbachev and the leaders of the nine republics. The papers wrote that Yeltsin first met the miners' representatives in Moscow, but that you were dissatisfied with his explanations. Alarmed by your reaction he decided to go to the Kuzbass, and you sent a delegation in his wake. What actually happened?**

The Interregional Council, which is, in effect, the Union-wide strike committee, demanded a meeting with Yeltsin. But he met only with two representatives from the Kuzbass. Why he met only them I can't say.

Thus, Yeltsin went to Kuzbass not because of what the Council told him, but because telegrams started pouring in from the localities, above all the Kuzbass, demanding an explanation of the "special labour regime" called for in the joint agreement with Gorbachev, to be applied to the basic economic branches. When we learnt that Yeltsin had left for the Kuzbass without meeting us, we decided to send representatives there, not from the Interregional Council, but from those regional strike committees that wished to go. Members of the strike committees from Rostov and the Kuzbass went.

In Kuzbass they heard Yeltsin's explanation of the agreement; it seems that they did not find his explanation satisfactory.



But then, after all, Yeltsin is a politician.

■ **Do you think that Yeltsin's promises are realistic?**

Today, the papers published Yeltsin's decree transferring the mines to the jurisdiction of the Russian Republic. Those mines that want to will receive their independence and pay only taxes. The others will be subordinated to the Russian Committee for Fuel and Energy.

I consider that this measure proposed by Yeltsin is populist. It might well turn out that he will take into Russian jurisdiction only the profitable mines and leave the others. We have to see. But the threat of closures is real in Russia too, including in the Kuzbass.

In general, I am categorically opposed to such blanket recipes. In the 1930s there was mass collectivization; now they want to conduct mass privatization, at full speed and without any economic analyses or studies of the situation in the coal industry as a whole. We need time to study these questions. They are holding out to miners the prospect of becoming owners and masters. But what will happen after that, nobody knows.

I told the representatives of the Raspadskaya mine [one of the largest in Russia]: two and a half years ago they offered you a leasing arrangement to persuade you to abandon the strike. Two years later, in 1991, you struck again, and they let you become a joint stock company in order to end the strike. What will you strike for the next time? You haven't yet even understood the first stage and you are already jumping into another. They are throwing you bones. These are pure slogans without any economic basis, like in 1917.

Not everyone agrees with me, of course.

■ **And what is the view among the rank-and-file?**

There too, opinions are divided. A person who has spent six hours at physical

labour and then has to think about how to get food, is naturally not worried about such things. They tell him: here's your chance to become owner; until now you have been working without being owner. And he thinks to himself: hey, maybe that's the truth. Who the hell knows?

We are going through a process of self-education. We don't trust any economists. They offer different and contradictory analyses depending on who is paying them. We take one point of view, another, try to compare them, and then draw our own conclusions. But in making the comparison, we start from the principles of the trade union: it was created to defend the workers interests in the areas of employment, wages, and health and safety.

None of the programmes, neither that of Pavlov nor of Silaev [prime minister of the Russian Republic] take these problems into consideration. They don't even mention them. In principle, that is correct, since that's what a government exists for: in order to get out of the crisis, you have to cut off the ends, and do anything that will keep the ship afloat. But we can't adopt that point of view.

Our small union has forced the state to recognize that collective agreements should exist for all sectors, although it is the state unions who will conclude the agreements, and their whole tradition leads them to be conciliatory. Until the 1930s Soviet trade unions used to conclude such agreements, but then that right was taken away. Until about 1930, the function of determining the value of labour belonged to the Central Council of Trade Unions, but it was taken over by the State Commission on Labour.

■ **Is there anything in your collective agreement about enterprise management? Who will hire the director?**

If you analyze the agreement, you will see that it will radically change relations

in the entire country. Before, in our country, it was production for production's sake. Now, the basic principle would be that everything produced by people will be produced for themselves. And price number one should be the value of a person's skills, knowledge, the value of his labour power. For that to be true, the labour legislation has to be changed, as well as the system of social insurance and the laws regarding self-management. There is nothing concrete in the draft agreement about who will manage. It says to the state: you own 90% of the property (the rest being private plots, cooperatives and non-state enterprises), you buy our labour power and you have many obligations towards us. Let's define our respective powers.

First of all you are obliged to provide us with work and to pay us so that we won't starve. At present, we are not paid for stoppages that are not our fault. We are on piece work. We are demanding to be paid by the hour. Our concept is that 70% of the wage should be hourly and 30% piece-rate.

So, the state is the owner, we are the labour force. The state should provide us with work-guaranteed employment, and decent socio-economic conditions. But at the same time, we do not deny the collective its right to take over the enterprise as its property. But even if it does this, wages and other conditions cannot be below those fixed in the collective agreement. That is, the agreement must hold for the salaried workers regardless of the form of property, whether it be joint-stock, private, state or collective. It must be recognized that a person works in order to feed his family and to live decently. He does not go to work to feed the neighbour's family or to realize some lofty ideas. The worker, the basic producer of all the value that exists on earth, and his needs, must be the cornerstone.

■ **Can you expand on the proposed form of wages?**

This conception was developed over a long period. I worked on this when I was still chairman of my mine's trade-union committee. After the July 1989 strike I was elected chairman of the state trade union committee. In the mine, we tried to understand this question. It turns out that there is a basic pay rate that is set by the State Commission on Labour for the minister. These basic rates are included in the cost and price of coal, which are also set by the state. We began to think about how to organize things so that a minimum wage could be guaranteed. The first step was our demand in the 1989 strike that the state pay a hard price for each tonne of coal.

Before that, you were paid a basic wage; after that came the bonus; that depended on you fulfilling your norm. Say that you



missed your thousand tonne norm by two tonnes. Then you would get, say, 300 rubles. However, if you surpassed the norm, you would get 600 rubles. But your output does not depend mainly on your work. The geological conditions could be bad, the electricity off, materials not delivered, or the combine broken down. It turns out you worked practically for free. So we demanded to be paid by the tonne, independently of the plan. We won this, but they still managed to get around it: yes, up to a certain level, we'll pay a fixed rate by the tonne, but then, depending on how vigilant the miners were, the authorities sneaked in sliding scales and bonuses and the like.

So we began to ask ourselves: how are these basic wage rates set at the centre? Why is it two rubles an hour and not six? By that time the first Congress of Miners was approaching and we decided to work out a concept. The second congress worked out the principles, and the EB continued to work on it. According to these principles, a miner's wage should have four constituent parts. First of all, a basic wage. This should be the value of the consumer basket of an average person, regardless of stoppages that are not the worker's fault. This is thus a guaranteed minimum. Secondly a guaranteed payment for harmful working conditions: above-normal concentrations of dust, methane, nightwork, heat over 26 degrees and so on. A third part is payment for time going to and from work, washing and so on. At least a part of this should be compensated. The time spent at production is six hours, but in fact a person might spend ten hours or more in all. This is his personal time. Only the fourth element should be about quality of output. We haven't worked this out fully.

As we understand it, this is the practise among miners in the West, that is, a guaranteed minimum for a decent life and to compensate for harmful working conditions. At present, the fact that our miners' wages depend on how much they produce forces them to violate safety norms, to work in conditions that exceed the norms for dust by 2000 times. The consequences are silicosis, trauma; a worker does not value his life. The state trade unions have the right to shut down the enterprise if conditions exceed safety norms. But it will not do this because it knows that workers have to earn a living.

Of course, the government will oppose our demands because they raise the issue of the organization of production. They will say: how can we pay what the miner has not produced? We answer that that is your responsibility, director, chief engineer, department head and minister and prime minister.

I am above all a person. I pay taxes to the state, I elected a deputy and appointed you to your post. You are supposed to be a qualified specialist at your post and I at mine.

■ **Compensation for harmful conditions has been criticized as encouraging workers to tolerate and even seek to work in such conditions, at the same time as freeing management from pressure to remove these conditions.**

Our position is to make management pay for harmful conditions. For example, according to norms, no person should lift more than 50 kilos. But as an electrician in the mines I carried beams and metal that weighed 60 or 70 kilos. So our idea is that wage supplements for harmful conditions will make it unprofitable for management to ignore these conditions.

We are in practise going over the same route that your trade unions traversed years ago. So that when we ask what kind of help we need from the West, we answer that we don't primarily want financial and material help, although, of course, that is important — we need your experience, your methods, your knowledge of how to conduct negotiations, so that we won't have to invent all this anew. That is why we want to establish contact with Western miners, to get their experience and learn their history. Of course, we are proud of what we have done ourselves. I was talking to my acquaintance in the state trade union and I told him: you have to admit that there isn't a single state union that ever proposed the principles we have worked out. And that is because they were worked out by people who had the desire to change things. They answer: well, come over and be a leader in our union. My answer to this is: why should I join you when you haven't come to these ideas yourselves. Why should we impose them from above? It would be the same system as before: a kind lord appears, he looks things over and gives the nod. Let's rather proceed from below, by ourselves, to propagate our idea.

■ **How does the miners' movement relate to the different political currents?**

I'll try to do this briefly, though it might not be so clear because it really would require a lot of time to explain. Our trade union adheres to a purely trade unionist principle, that is: that for now at least, the trade union should not support any political party. But at present we have to look at the situation.

In addition, there are those strike committees that have not yet transformed themselves into trade unions and which adhere more or less to the orientation of the democrats, in the Soviet sense of the word [i.e. liberals] though maybe this might not mean the same thing as in the West.

In Russia, this is the Democratic Russia movement. This is especially true in the Kuzbass. Golikov for example, the chairman of the Council of Strike Committees of the Kuzbass, is on Yeltsin's brains trust.

■ **Are the political positions of these strike committees supported by the rank-and-file?**

I would say so, for the most part. After all, the idea of sovereignty is attractive. The centre has ripped us off for a long time, and the idea is correct. I also, incidentally, am a patriot of Russia; I want there to be a Russian republic that is sovereign, but within the Union. And let them divide up their powers.

To put it briefly — perhaps abstractly and a bit crudely — a struggle is occurring today between the Communist *boyars* [aristocrats] and the new bourgeoisie that used to serve the *boyars* but has grown tired of that. They now have the desire to rise to the top themselves. The bourgeoisie are enterprising people, whose capital at present is their knowledge. They worked for the *boyars* for a long time, servicing their ideology.

■ **You are talking about the intelligentsia?**

Yes, the intelligentsia, economists and the like. So to put it rather figuratively, there is this struggle taking place between the *boyars* and the new bourgeoisie, whose capital, for now, is knowledge. For us, workers and the workers' movement, it makes more sense now to support this bourgeoisie, because for 70 years the Communists' idea that everything belongs to everyone and to me, "everything is the Kolkhoz's", has shown its unsoundness — in general, although in principle some degree of centralization and planning are necessary. It is a question of deciding what is rational.

The new bourgeoisie are proposing a system that gives the worker a chance to sell his labour power according to the amount agreed. That is, you too are a person, and we give everyone a chance — though this is really open to debate, here as well as in the West. In any case, they are proposing a concept of a normal society in which everyone will have a chance — though I repeat, the validity of this claim is far from obvious. So while this struggle is going on, we naturally support the new bourgeoisie. Because the foggy orthodox Communist idea, that of the radiant future, is not based on concrete reality and concrete forces.

But we must never forget that when the new bourgeoisie comes to power — that is an inevitable process, for either they will share power with the *boyars* and live with them in peaceful coexistence or they will come to power on their own — those whose capital is knowledge will want to transform this into material capital.

In any case, when the new bourgeoisie tries to turn its knowledge into capital they will want to exploit us, that is part of their system. So while supporting at present the movement of democrats — though we know that they are really a bourgeoisie with a social-democratic orientation if judged from the point of

view of world experience — we must never forget that sooner or later we will clash with them, and are already clashing over a number of issues. Therefore, we are creating a trade union that at first deals with purely union problems and stays out of politics.

■ **Do you foresee the need for a workers' party?**

I can't predict what the future holds. But I can give you my personal opinion. In order for a person to be able to define his political position, he has to have reached a certain level of knowledge as well as have acquired the desire to do so. For now, we still have to raise the workers up to that level. The majority of people today are preoccupied with the question of what to eat and drink. So we have to interest them in these other things. We have to allow the worker to feel that he is a person. And when he feels this, when he receives all that he has earned, has extra money, time to read books, his horizon will broaden. then he will be able to define himself.

To force the creation of a workers' party now, in my view, is utopian, since it would fall under the influence of either the right or left; for example look at the United Front of Toilers, which is really a radical-left orthodox Marxist party. But sooner or later there will be a need for a normal party, either an English-type labour party or a Socialist party. This will exist in the future, but to try to create it now would be just a waste of time. People first have to define themselves politically.

■ **It seems obvious that a barely hidden struggle for property is now taking place.**

Yes, at the level of the state, the sector and the enterprise there is a hidden struggle for economic power. In the year after the 1989 strike laws on leasing and on joint-stock companies were passed, many directors proposed to their workers: let's take this enterprise over as collective property. And this year we began to ask ourselves: why is it that a significant part of the directors are supporting this idea? And we came to the conclusion that given the low level of workers' legal and economic knowledge, if the enterprise is taken over as some form of collective property, the workers will become even more dependent on the enterprise. It will be "their's" but they won't know how to manage it.

So the directors see a chance, not directly, but indirectly, to exploit the workers' lack of preparation in order for themselves to become the real masters of the enterprise. If they used to be subordinate to the ministers, now they would be free. After all, why should they want to become legal owners themselves? They might go bankrupt. But if the collective takes over the enterprise, the workers will come one day to the director and ask: where is the money, where are our wages? And the

director will reply: why ask me? It is your enterprise. You are responsible for it.

Look at the process of establishing republican sovereignty at enterprise level. In principle it is a good process. But it has its negative sides. The republics say to their workers: we are all brothers; the centre is robbing us.

Let's take over all the enterprises and we will be rich. And each one says it is the other who is to blame. They want to be free from the structures above them but to preserve their own structures to

dominate those below. And so it goes all the way down the line.

They want to exploit our ignorance.

Capital is being accumulated, and it will flow to those who have economic knowledge.

■ **Do you think the workers, when they fully realize what is happening, will revolt against this?**

I don't at all deny this. It's at that point that the possibility of a party will become real. ★

## **USSR Crisis (Continued from page 19)**

best computers and printing services and its 22-story office tower dominates the skyline.

"Stanislav V. Yachevsky, a city councilman, sees the Communists exploiting this period of confusion to build comfortable new niches for themselves."

That is the way millions of others in the USSR see the situation, too.

The demand of the Belorussian strikers that the party's property be taken away and socialized is a popular solution to this problem. The Armenian Supreme Soviet voted in late April to nationalize all the Communist Party's property. The Ukrainian parliament passed the same measure late last year after republic-wide protests. Even though Gorbachev nullified these bills, the Armenians proceeded to enforce theirs. On May 1, the CP officials were ejected from their building in Yerevan.

This measure and the Armenians' obvious intentions to enforce it may be one reason for the military offensive against Armenians launched by Kremlin and Azerbaijan government troops in late April. (See article on page 25.)

Inaugurated under the guise of a "security check" through Armenian villages in Azerbaijan on April 30, it became a deadly assault that left nearly 50 dead, whole villages burned to the ground, and more than 4,000 refugees. When tens of thousands in Yerevan, capital of the Armenian Republic, turned a funeral for some of the dead into a mass protest, Soviet paratroopers were airlifted there in May 6 "to protect military installations."

There can be little doubt that it is more than just military installations that the Kremlin's paratroopers are there to protect.

The imperialists' financial institutions and the Group 7 industrialized capitalist powers meeting in July, which Gorbachev is trying so hard to impress, are not likely to be enthusiastic about extending massive credit or investing massive capital in the USSR. They are not interested in the pious principles of peace and human welfare the Kremlin's economists draw

on to try to motivate the imperialists in their "Appeal." The imperialists are interested in guaranteed profits. Militant workers, organized and in struggle, turn capital off. Moreover, it is unlikely that Gorbachev and his advisers will be very successful in convincing the imperialists that their property will not be confiscated when the Communist Party cannot even defend its own property from the angry masses.

On May 18, as the Kremlin's respected economists were having their first meetings with the trained economists of capital at Harvard, Igor Klochkov, chairman of the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions, announced his organization rejected Gorbachev's antistrike decree of May 16. The strike movement "will become even more disruptive if it is made illegal" he said.

Belorussian workers, having called off strikes in early May in expectation of satisfactory decisions from the Republic's Supreme Soviet scheduled to meet on May 21, have apparently received disappointing results. They resumed strike activity.

Among those who qualified as a candidate to run against Boris Yeltsin in the June 12 elections for president of the Russian Republic was Aman Tuleev, chairman of the Kemerovo regional soviet in the heart of the Siberian coal mining region. His platform asserted that Yeltsin betrayed the workers' cause by signing the agreement with Gorbachev in support of the "anti-crisis" plan.

An approach like this surely represents the sentiments of many worker activists in Russia. Whether or not it finds expression in the voting, it is certain to promote the growth of the new layer of leadership—representing the workers' point of view—that is vital if there is to be economic and political renewal in the USSR.

It is here, not with the capitalist economics experts from Harvard, that a progressive solution to the current crisis of the Soviet Union will be found. □

## Reprisal for Independence Moves

On April 30, while attention in the USSR was focused on the political dealings between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, central government troops and Azerbaijan Republican police

launched a security sweep through Armenian villages in the Azerbaijan Republic. By May 13, at least 48 Armenians were dead, hundreds were wounded, and at least 4,000 had been forced to flee their homes.

A Kremlin official explained that the purpose of the attacks was to crush Armenian guerrillas who were using the Armenian villages as their base. The government of Azerbaijan accused Armenian nationalists of waging an undeclared war against Azerbaijan. TASS claimed that between April 28 and May 3, Armenian guerrillas had shelled or opened fire on more than 30 Azerbaijan villages and towns with automatic weapons and mortars.

The region is closed to reporters. However, numerous Armenian refugees who fled the area provided accounts of the events.

On April 30, according to refugee accounts reported in the *New York Times* May 5, Kremlin and Azeri forces armed with tanks and other heavy weaponry stormed two Armenian villages north of Nagorno-Karabagh. Nagorno-Karabagh is an autonomous region inside the Azerbaijan Republic, the majority of the population of which is Armenian. Since February 1988, the population of this region has been demanding the right to be part of the Armenian Republic. However, both the Kremlin and the Azerbaijan Republican government have refused to allow this. The local apparatchiks in Azerbaijan, with Kremlin collusion, have instigated pogroms against the Armenians, creating fear and hostility between Armenians and Azeris. This has led to murderous conflicts, created hundreds of thousands of refugees, and allowed the Kremlin to move in and establish a police regime over the populations. Failing to receive adequate protection from the authorities against the marauding attacks, many Armenian villages both inside Armenia and in Azerbaijan have tried to organize their own self-defense units.

The two villages initially reported to have been involved in the April 30 attack were Getashen and Martunashen.

The problem began, refugees said, when Azeri forces demanded that the central government troops remove themselves

# Kremlin Attacks Armenian Republic

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

from the scene after which Azeris attacked the residents of the towns.

Government troops claimed to have confiscated three mortar launchers, 48 mines, 15 homemade antitank mines, 84 other weapons, thousands of rounds of ammunition, and a variety of vehicles. The nature of the "other weapons" and "variety of vehicles" was not specified. Forty-five "guerrillas" were detained. Martunashen was reportedly burned to the ground. Troops robbed, burned, beat, and killed their way through Getashen, the refugees said. The villagers said they were terrorized into leaving.

Over the next two weeks, Soviet troops occupied the Armenian villages of Manashit and Uzlu and six others along the border with Nagorno-Karabagh. A seventh village apparently surrendered before it was attacked.

The Kremlin's and the Azeri government's justifications are undoubtedly false. There were no reports of casualties among Azeri civilians or government troops until May 10 when a column of government troops was ambushed, the first report of Armenian resistance in the nearly two weeks of anti-Armenian attacks. One Soviet soldier was reportedly killed and several were apparently wounded in that ambush. In retaliation, Soviet troops using 11 armored vehicles and six helicopters crossed into the Armenian Republic, surrounded the Armenian village of Paravakar and fired machine guns into it, claiming that it was to Paravakar that the Armenian ambushers had fled. These military forces have, apparently, since withdrawn.

The president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, accused Gorbachev and the central government of launching the military offensive as part of a campaign of terror aimed at toppling the Armenian government. Armenian officials claimed that the operation was a forced resettlement plan. Ter-Petrosyan demanded Gorbachev provide security for the Armenian villagers, assurances that they would not be deported, and emergency helicopter aid missions to make sure they had necessary supplies. None of these demands were met.

The Armenian government also asked the Supreme Soviet to convene an emergency session to discuss the attacks. The

Soviet, however, rejected the request and went on record supporting Gorbachev's repeated calls for "separatist fighters on both sides" to disarm.

On May 4 in Yerevan, capital of the Armenian Republic, where the population supports unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh, tens of thousands mourned the 36 residents of Getashen and Martunashen who had been killed during the attacks. On May 5, using the pretext of what government newspaper *Izvestia* called the "civil war" between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, Soviet paratroopers were airlifted into Yerevan, "to protect military installations."

There was not a civil war, however. What was happening was an armed attack by Soviet and Azerbaijan troops against essentially unarmed Armenian civilians to neutralize their resistance.

Undoubtedly these military offensives are aimed against the Armenian nationalist and democratic rights movements. Despite terrific hardships the government has imposed on them, or perhaps because of those hardships, the Armenians in both the Armenian and Azerbaijan republics have been continuing to organize themselves.

On July 25, 1990, the council of the Shaumyanovsky Region voted to request the Azerbaijan government allow it to become part of Nagorno-Karabagh. Shaumyanovsky Region, just north of Nagorno-Karabagh, has a population of 20,000, 82 percent of whom are Armenian, according to *Moskovskiy Novosti*, Feb. 3, 1991. On August 1, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet denied this request.

Since the January 1990 invasion of Azerbaijan by Soviet Ministry of Interior troops, the Azerbaijan Republic has been placed firmly under the control of apparatchiks and their gangster friends loyal to the Kremlin. Baku has been under a state of emergency since then as have the Shaumyanovsky Region and Nagorno-Karabagh. On August 29, 1990, the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party ordered the Shaumyanovsky Regional Committee of the party to dissolve. It expelled from the CP the region's first secretary on grounds of nationalism and separatism.

On September 28, the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet cancelled elections to regional and local councils that were scheduled to take place in the Shaumyanovsky Region, halted the ac-

tivities of the existing councils and assigned full power over the region to a temporary organizational bureau subordinated to Azerbaijan Republican authorities.

The Azerbaijan rulers were taking a page from Stalin's handbook for dealing with "nationalist deviations." Stalin used a very similar strategy against Georgia in 1922, which Lenin objected to and which ultimately led to the break between Lenin and Stalin.

On January 14, 1991, the president of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet resolved to merge Shaumyanovsky Region and the Kazum-Ismailovsky Region into one. Since the 50,000 population of the Kazum-Ismailovsky Region is overwhelmingly Azeri, the Armenians in the Shaumyanovsky Region would suddenly become a minority.

The Shaumyanovsky Region then broke relations with the Azerbaijan Republic. Since that time, the region has been under a de facto economic blockade. Armenian volunteers have patrolled 24 hours a day. Once a day a helicopter came from Yerevan with kerosene (electricity is scarce) and cooking oil. There is little food or supplies. Industry is shut down so few people were getting paid.

The Armenians of the Shaumyanovsky Region declared they would refuse to be merged into the new region. They also expressed fear that the regime's special forces would be sent against them.

It may well be that this is what happened April 30. Troops of the Soviet army, the Ministry of Interior, and the Azeri police were involved. Some Armenian refugees believe that the regime evacuated them from their villages so that Azeri and Meskhti refugees could be settled there. It does seem quite possible that the expulsion of Armenians may have been part of the motivation for the attacks. This has been behind apparatus-inspired provocations against Azeris and Armenians since the strife in the Caucasus began in February 1988. It also characterized the attacks against Meskhtis in Fergan in the summer of 1990, among others.

Expulsion and deportation were also used by Stalin to solve the "nationalities problem" in the Caucasus; this solution was applied during World War II. Then, however, it was done overtly carried out.

These new 4,000 Armenian refugees join the roughly 300,000 other Armenians who have fled in terror from Azerbaijan, mostly in late November 1989. Many of them have lived in squalid conditions since then.

The Armenian refugee problem was worsened by the earthquake in December 1989 that left more than 25,000 dead and 250,000 homeless in the region. Roughly 80 percent of the survivors, most without jobs, still live in tents and makeshift huts.

The republic lost 20 percent of its housing and 130 enterprises as a result of this earthquake alone.

Only two billion of the expected ten billion rubles allocated by the central government after the earthquake for rebuilding projects has been spent; and much of this has been misappropriated (stolen) by apparatchiks and their cronies. The new buildings that have gone up are poorly constructed, like those that collapsed so easily during the earthquake. Other new structures have been located where no utility or transportation lines reach.

All these problems have only worsened the economic crisis confronting the Armenian Supreme Soviet, now under control of predominantly anti-Stalinist and pro-independence forces.

In addition to this, Armenia has also been plagued by a virtual economic boycott for months at a time over the past two years that has caused dire shortages of many vital items on top of the shortages most people in the USSR experience.

Energy sources have been a particular problem, despite the republic's proximity to the oil-rich Baku region. These shortages threaten to cause Armenians to retreat from gains won by their democratic and environmental movements. For example, one of the gains of the Armenian popular movement had been closing down the deadly Nairit chemical complex in Yerevan whose emissions caused a high rate of birth defects, lung and skin ailments, as well as a soaring infant mortality rate. After the earthquake destroyed Leninakan and Spitak, the authorities also agreed to close down the atomic energy plant not far from Yerevan that was not earthquake-proof and posed a mortal danger to population centers.

Under pressure of the economic and energy crises, the Nairit plant is apparently beginning to function again, and there is talk of reopening the atomic plant, according to *Moskovskiy Novosti*, No. 12, March 24, 1991.

Armenia did not participate in the March 17 referendum and has not yet joined the new unity drive by the bureaucrats aimed at convincing imperialist investors that the Kremlin is a worthy client.

The Armenian Supreme Soviet voted in late April to confiscate the property of the Communist Party and on May 1 began to expel CP officials from their buildings. This caused alarm in the Kremlin and was denounced by party organs. Gorbachev himself declared the resolution unconstitutional—that is, that it violated the laws and constitution of the USSR—and banned its enforcement in a decree published on the front page of *Pravda* April 24.

The Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party and the Yerevan City

Committee of the Armenian CP also condemned the Armenia Supreme Soviet's decision as politically motivated. They declared that the property of the Armenian Communist Party had been acquired legally because it had been received from the CPSU—as if that settled its case. The Armenian CP statement also appeared in the April 24 *Pravda*, showing the consternation the decision had unleashed.

Ter-Petrosyan expressed the view that the attacks on the Armenian villages were aimed at punishing Armenians for trying to secede from the USSR. There is an independence referendum scheduled for September 21 which will most certainly receive a majority vote.

The Kremlin does not take a comradely attitude toward republics claiming independence. Having already caused incalculable hardships and suffering for the Armenians, the Kremlin is now apparently withholding food shipments. Armenian officials say that Armenia is receiving only a fraction of the food deliveries promised by the central government.

The Kremlin tries to equate declarations of independence with demands for self-sufficiency or autarchy. But being independent does not mean that a region must get by only on the basis of its own resources. No nation in the world can do that today—not even the richest and most productive. Real independence would mean that decisions as to what is done with those resources can be decided by the working people who live there and not by capitalists—foreign or domestic—or Stalinist bureaucrats.

The Kremlin, even under its Union treaty, is not going to recognize a republic's declaration of independence until after five years have passed and after such independence is approved by the USSR Supreme Soviet. The "9 plus 1" accords of the April 23 "dacha" meetings between Gorbachev and the heads of nine of the republics, including Boris Yeltsin for the Russian Republic, are no better. They threaten to cut off any trade except at market prices and on the basis of hard currency with those republics that declare for independence and refuse to join the Kremlin's new initiative. Since the republics declaring for independence are experiencing the same economic crises as any other region in the USSR, trade on such a basis is hardly an option.

However, the Kremlin will not actually allow independence to the republics, whether they are part of the new initiative or not. These republics are the source of its power.

The accords are in effect a type of protection racket. Despite their aspirations for independence, the non-Russian regions are

(Continued on page 29)

# A Somber Anniversary: The French Communist Party at Seventy

by Keith Mann

The collapse of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the all but open renunciation by the Stalinists themselves of any perspective of building socialism has inevitably had an effect on the pro-Moscow Western Communist parties. We are today confronted by a crisis-ridden movement that has nevertheless not yet relinquished its influence over important sectors of organized labor in a number of countries. The French Communist Party (PCF), one of the West's strongest and most pro-Moscow Stalinist parties, has recently marked its seventieth anniversary in an atmosphere of decline and muted internal dissension as it prepared its twenty-seventh congress. Never has the party that considered itself the heir to France's rich revolutionary tradition been as marginalized as the PCF is today.

## **Electoral Decline**

The decline of the PCF began sometime ago. The crisis of the Soviet and East European bureaucracies has only accelerated that decline. One of the clearest manifestations of the loss of PCF influence has been their steadily dwindling electoral fortunes. The 15.34 percent of the vote that the party received in the 1981 presidential elections represented a loss of 25 percent from legislative elections that had been held in 1978. By 1986, the party's share of the vote had dwindled to 9.78 percent—its worst showing since 1932. Worse yet, the far-right, racist National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen received roughly the same percentage. The 1988 presidential elections saw the party's score decline even further to 6.8 percent, though they fared better in the legislative elections with 11.3 percent. Furthermore, studies have shown that the party's electorate is an aging one.

The PCF's decline is not only an electoral phenomenon. There has been a marked decline in rank-and-file activism in general. More seriously, the two pillars of the party's traditional strength—its deep municipal implantation and the influence of the PCF-dominated General Confedera-

tion of Labor (CGT), one of the two largest trade union confederations in France—have been seriously weakened. The PCF used to be the object of numerous university-based studies both friendly and hostile. The dramatic decline in the number of these studies is further testament to the party's marginalization and failure to be considered a serious vehicle for confronting the problems of French society. The failure of the PCF leadership to chart a strategy to halt its decline and adapt to current realities—even within the framework of the class-collaborationist policies it has practiced since the 1930s—stands in sharp contrast to the Italian Communist Party (PCI). The PCI has been just as much an obstacle to revolutionary change in Italy as the PCF has been in France. Yet the Italian party has shown a capacity to distance itself from the most notorious crimes of Stalinism and assume a benign quasi social democratic guise. In the 1970s this meant embracing the reformist policies of Eurocommunism. Today, they have increased their distance from their radical past and dropped the word Communist from their name.

The PCF leadership on the other hand, especially the current leadership around

the French political spectrum is due in no small part to the work of the PCF.

The PCF leadership has always sought to give theoretical justification to its many twists and turns. The predictable result of this cynical and eminently Stalinist subordination of theory to the narrow political considerations of the moment has been a terribly low level of theoretical discourse. The avalanche of books, articles, and resolutions to justify past changes in direction—like their abandonment of the Union of the Left (PCF-PS bloc) in the late 1970s—are clearly not designed to contribute to Marxist theory or educate future generations of militants. This approach to theory combines with an anti-intellectual sentiment. The party has never counted a single authentic intellectual in its leadership though it has always sought to influence left-wing intellectuals and artists with its impressive array of journals and colloquiums.

## **Cracks in the Monolith**

One result of the PCF crisis over the last several years has been the development of a series of oppositionist groupings inside the party. Yet any chance of such trends moving in a positive, left-leaning, anti-

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*'The two pillars of the party's traditional strength  
have been seriously weakened'*

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George Marchais, has been remarkably unimaginative and unwilling to propose anything more than the most short-term and shortsighted changes. From the ultraleft and sectarian "third period" of the late 1920s and early 1930s, to the Popular Front of the mid-thirties, to unabashed support for the 1953 crackdown in East Germany, the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, the leaders of the PCF have always shown the greatest enthusiasm in carrying out the Kremlin line. A brief flirtation with Eurocommunism in the late 1970s, welcomed by many in the party's ranks as a way to disassociate themselves from the widespread revulsion at the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, ended when the leadership abruptly retreated from its alliance with the Socialist Party (PS) and resumed an uncritical allegiance to the Soviet CP. These and other zigzags between united front tactics with the PS and the basest sectarianism, coupled with their irresponsible and sectarian abuse of their influence over the CGT, has disoriented the PCF's largely working class base as much as their apologies for the crimes of their sister parties in power. The strong position that the PS enjoys today on the left wing of

bureaucratic direction has been choked off by the bureaucratic stranglehold of the central leadership. A common feature of these opposition groupings is that they originate in the apparatus itself. Successive waves of "renovators," "reconstructors," and now "refounders," have all raised partial critiques of the party without offering anything in the way of a coherent Marxist appreciation of the party's basic Stalinist character. They have all sought to maintain a "communist" identity and have, to various degrees, found an echo amongst the rank and file. For a time it appeared that the renovators and their leader, Pierre Juquin (a former member of the party's Political Bureau), might move in a left and even revolutionary direction. The hopes raised by this possibility led the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, to enter into an electoral alliance with the renovators and explore the possibilities for building a new, larger, far left political force. In the end, however, Juquin and his followers turned toward the French greens—a far less radical current than is found amongst some of their German counterparts. The reconstructors counted in their ranks many members of the old

guard, former resistance fighters, mayors, and deputies, as well as Claude Poperen, former Political Bureau member in charge of the party's factory work. The latest group, the "refounders," include top leaders of the party, several of whom were also ministers in the Mauroy PS government in the early 1980s, as well as a layer of the party's elected officials. Their most visible spokesman, Charles Fiterman, a former minister of transportation, has long been considered the number two leader of the party after Marchais.

### **The Twenty-Seventh Congress**

The occasion of the recent twenty-seventh congress of the party allowed some of the differences between the refounders and the leadership to be aired—albeit in a truncated and restricted form. True to their lack of imagination and their inability to even attempt to deal with current realities, the majority around Marchais responds to the crisis in the East by merely affirming a "communist" and "anti-capitalist" identity, rejecting Gorbachevism and social democracy in favor of the old status quo. The refounders have shown a greater interest in grappling with the crisis of their world movement, yet scarcely a wider vision. Their key document states that the "future of 'communism' depends on the success or failure of perestroika and glasnost." As partisans of Gorbachev, they accept the narrow framework of possibilities agreed upon by both the bureaucracy and imperialist ideologues, namely, that there are two alternatives for the Soviet Union and the CP: a move towards a market economy or the continuation of bureaucratic stagnation. Neither side was able to offer a coherent domestic strategy to confront an ailing economy that has left over 10 percent of France's workforce unemployed. Nor is the party prepared to lead the struggle against the proto-fascist National Front.

The atmosphere in the party was far from conducive to involving the ranks in this discussion. More than half of the party's members were not even involved in the debates which were largely conducted amongst leaders of the various organizational apparatuses. The Marchais leadership refused to allow the opposition platform to be submitted to the ranks for a vote. In its refusal to allow breathing space for minority points of view the leadership appealed to tradition and what it claims to be communist orthodoxy.

The banning of factions and tendencies in the PCF has a long history. The Fifth World Congress of the Communist International held in 1924, shortly after the death of Lenin, made strict demands on its sections. Gregory Zinoviev as president of

the International announced that the task of the coming period was to "Bolshevize" the Communist parties. One of the five principles of this "Bolshevization" was that Communist parties must be "centralized." This meant "permitting neither factions, nor tendencies, nor groupings—a monolithic party cast in a single block." In spite of its name this false policy of "democratic centralism" used so effectively by generations of Stalinist misleaderships to stifle dissent represented a break with the democratic essence of Leninism. It is part and parcel of the profound miseducation of millions of worker militants, not only in France but around the world, that is the legacy of Stalinism.

The identification of this travesty of Leninism with democratic centralism is so strong that today's PCF minority could think of no way to propose a more democratic mode of debate other than to demand the abandonment of democratic centralism itself. Concessions to the minority were made, however. Though the congress voted 99 percent in favor of the majority's propositions, the leadership recognized that the refounders represented 10 percent of the party. Oppositionists were included in the new Central Commit-

tee, though the six seats offered to them out of 139 were far short of matching their proportional strength in the party as a whole.

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### ***'The decline of the CPs has proceeded faster than their replacement by authentic mass revolutionary parties'***

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tee, though the six seats offered to them out of 139 were far short of matching their proportional strength in the party as a whole.

Since the congress the PCF has been confronted by PS President Francois Mitterrand's replacement of Prime Minister Michel Rocard by longtime Mitterrand loyalist Edith Cresson. The PCF leadership has indicated that it is ready to actively support the new government and Cresson is reputedly considering adding two PCF ministers to her cabinet. Though the PCF membership has come to expect abrupt reversals in party policy, it remains to be seen how the ranks will respond to this new reversal after years of sharp attacks against the PS and the leadership's claims that the Union of the Left had been an error. In the meantime the PCF has been encouraging the new government's economic policies—particularly its anti-Japanese crusade which has won wide popularity with French industrial capital, long suffering from a sharp trade deficit with Japan. The alliance with French capital against foreign competition that the PCF is now proposing in the name of protecting jobs is

only the latest in its long history of class collaboration.

Despite its advanced state of sclerosis, the PCF is still able to fill the void to the immediate left of the PS. In spite of the decline of the CGT, PCF influence in this still formidable union confederation remains considerable. The party is even able to exert some influence among young people through its youth organization as was shown in last fall's mass upsurge in the high schools (see *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, December No. 80). Yet its failure to consistently provide a principled class struggle perspective continues to disorient those who look to it for leadership. Their activity in the movement against the gulf war is a case in point. At the beginning the party seemed as if it was returning to its old, militant, anti-imperialist traditions. It hadn't shown such energy in building local committees and strong contingents in demonstrations for years. It took positions far more radical than expected—like its agreement to support a formation that called for the withdrawal of French troops.

Yet once the war started the party moved clearly to the right, limiting its slogans to "Stop the war," "For a political solution and the retreat of Iraq from Kuwait," and

"For an international peace conference." This indicates that in spite of the healthy effect that the party's connection with the living mass movement can occasionally exert on it, its rotten, class collaborationist character inevitably resurfaces.

When the PCF was founded in 1920 it was part of an international revolutionary Marxist movement which believed that the revolutionary epoch opened up by the Russian Revolution was not yet exhausted and more revolutionary victories were on the horizon. At that time the PCF was a revolutionary tool towards that end. Today at seventy it still claims to be anti-capitalist. Yet not only is it incapable of providing a strategy for social change, it has long been an obstacle to revolution.

The Fourth International was founded to help solve the crisis of proletarian leadership of which the Stalinized Communist parties were (and remain) a fundamental part. History has shown that the decline of the CPs has proceeded faster than their replacement by authentic mass revolutionary Leninist parties. The historical task of the Trotskyists has proven to be a difficult one indeed. But it is one on which the future of humanity depends. □

## FIT National Organizing Committee Meets

by Steve Bloom

A meeting of the National Organizing Committee of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency took place over the Memorial Day weekend (May 25-26) in Pittsburgh. The agenda of the meeting included a discussion about perspectives for the FIT's campaign to reconstitute a unified sympathizing section of the Fourth International in the United States; an assessment of the fund drive, recruitment drive, and subscription campaign for the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*—launched after the FIT's last national conference in September 1990; and plans for the FIT's national educational conference scheduled for this July along with other projects for building the organization.

After the September 1990 FIT conference a call was issued addressed "to our comrades in Socialist Action and Solidarity." It was titled: "For the Reconstitution of a United Movement of the Fourth International in the U.S." (See *Bulletin IDOM* No. 78.) In the months that followed, the national coordinators of the FIT made consistent efforts to open a dialogue with both of the organizations addressed by that call, to explore ways in which collaboration between us could be improved and positive steps taken in the

direction of unity for all revolutionary Marxist forces in the U.S.

At the plenum, NOC members expressed different points of view—both in assessing the results of our efforts so far and in terms of how the effort to reconstruct a unified Fourth Internationalist organization in the United States should be continued. A majority voted in favor of a report made by Paul Le Blanc reaffirming the unity perspective approved at the FIT's 1990 conference, and in our next issue we will carry an article by Le Blanc to let readers of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* know what has happened so far in response to the FIT's call, as well as outlining those steps which the NOC voted to pursue in this area during the coming months.

The plenum also noted major advances in the organization-building work of the FIT. A fund drive launched by the September conference to pay for the publication of a three-volume set of books—*In Defense of American Trotskyism*—documenting the struggle waged against the degeneration of the Socialist Workers Party and its leadership under Jack Barnes. Although the formal goal of that drive (\$7,000) was not reached, \$4,600 was raised, and due to a smaller expense than originally anticipated this should be enough to guarantee completion of the publication project. Also since the conference the membership of the FIT has grown by over 20 percent—including a significant number of predominantly young people who joined at least in part due to the work of the FIT in the movement against the Persian Gulf war. The subscription base of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* has been raised by 30 percent, well over the projections made

for our formal, six-month subscription drive, and new subscriptions continue to come in at an impressive pace. NOC members expressed strong optimism for our future ability to continue to grow, and to expand the activity and influence of the FIT.

The NOC meeting approved a specific motion setting the building of our national educational conference, scheduled for July 11-14 in Pittsburgh, as a major priority for the organization over the next few weeks. Information about this conference has appeared in the last two issues of this magazine. It can also be obtained by calling the FIT National Office: 212-633-2007.

The draft political resolution, "Revolutionary Internationalism and the Struggle for Socialism in the United States," which was first published in *Bulletin IDOM* No. 79, was approved by the NOC meeting. After some editing and updating (the document was first drafted before the beginning of hostilities in the Persian Gulf, for example) it will be published as part of a pamphlet. Another pamphlet being projected out of the plenum is an updated edition of the popular, *Organizing for Socialism: The Fourth Internationalist Tendency—Who we are, What we stand for*, by Bill Onasch.

In other actions, the NOC voted to recommend that all FIT trade union members join the Labor Party Advocates groupings being organized around the country by Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union, and that we urge others in our unions to do so as well; and it also approved an updated version of the FIT's organizational principles resolution. □

### Armenia (Continued from page 26)

desperately in need of many kinds of aid and assistance. This is not available from abroad. The imperialist will only intervene if substantial profits are guaranteed—that is, only to further rob these regions of their resources. In the present circumstances the republics seeking independence may be forced to make concessions to the Kremlin if only to keep from being strangled.

This is certainly possible with respect to Armenia. However, whether or not those presently in power in Armenia are forced to go along with the Kremlin's economic plans for the time being, it will not change the fact that the Armenian population wants self-determination and knows that as long as it is under the rule of the Stalinist bureaucrats in the Kremlin, this will be impossible.

The *Moskovskiy Novosti* of May 26 reported that not only Armenians in Azerbaijan were under attack; so were Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh. *MN* reported: "Under the pretext of a passport check, the special forces of the Azerbaijan

Republic continued mass pogroms, arrests, and plundering of Armenian population centers in Nagorno-Karabagh. In the Martunin region, 35 people were arrested. In the Gadрут region the village Spitakashen was burned to the ground. In the Shushin region in the village of Metsshin during a search, three people were killed. In Berdadzor region, all the adult population of three Armenian villages were arrested and shipped to the Azerbaijan city of Lachin."

Arrests continued among males in the Armenian regions of Nagorno-Karabagh on May 17. On May 18 in the Gadрут region, 18 Armenian villages were destroyed. This destruction took place despite the presence of soldiers posted there allegedly to defend the population from such attacks.

The *MN* reporter on the issue, Tatyana Yakhlikova, commented on the notable silence of the liberals in the Russian parliament on these attacks. She voiced the suspicion of some that the "9 plus 1" accords included an agreement to remain silent on regime attacks against Armenians.

This points to the need for an organized outcry against these savage crimes being committed against the Armenian people. Now, unlike in Stalin's time, news of the crimes can be found in the legal press. Now, socialists and workers have the possibility to organize against the government's repression and defend the victims' rights. These alone are the forces that, if mobilized, have the power to stay the Kremlin's murderous hand while building movements that are stronger and truly international.

Hopefully, such protests are taking place but news about them is simply not being reported. Such protests will need to find an echo from the socialist and workers' movements abroad demanding of the Kremlin:

- Hands Off Armenians!
- Stop the Attacks on Armenian Villages!
- Self-determination for the Armenian People!

# Revolutionary Feminism and the Fourth International

by Carol McAllister

The Thirteenth World Congress of the Fourth International, held earlier this year, made important strides in addressing feminist issues and strengthening women's role in the Fourth International and its leadership bodies. Women's equality has been a long-standing principle of the Trotskyist movement and for more than 20 years our comrades have played leading roles in struggles for women's liberation around the world. This experience informed the discussion at the congress on women's situation in different sectors of the world and the prospects for renewed struggles for women's rights.

For me, a first time participant in a world congress, one of the most exciting aspects of this international meeting was the chance to meet and talk with women comrades from different countries. I arrived at the congress after a long and exhausting trip as people were just finishing supper. My intentions were simply to eat and then go to bed. However, I soon found myself drawn into an exhilarating discussion with a comrade from Sweden, comparing notes about the effect of recent economic and social developments on women's work experiences in the U.S. and Europe. We discovered we were both interested in developing an analysis of changes in the international capitalist economy and their particular effects on women, something we had each been working on in our own national settings but are now intending to do in a more collaborative way.

This spirit of collaboration characterized the interactions among women comrades throughout the congress. We often talked together as we were eating, took walks on the beach during breaks, and stayed up late into the night exchanging information and insights on women's lives and struggles in our respective countries. We also encouraged and supported each other in speaking before the congress, something many of us were not experienced in doing. Although women still composed a minority of the congress delegates, our active participation in congress deliberations as well as our informal interactions with each other revealed the presence of a number of fine women revolutionaries and feminists in our world movement.

Near the beginning of the congress, there was a meeting for all women organized by members of the International Executive Committee's (IEC) Women's Commission. The commission was set up after the last world congress to try to involve more women in leadership functioning and to organize the FI's women's liberation work in a more consistent fashion. Women from a number of countries are involved in the commission, with comrades from Latin America and Europe—the strongholds of the FI's national organizations—playing key roles. I was impressed with the truly international character of this group, including the leadership provided by “third world” comrades. Many of these comrades had worked together over the past several years, developing written reports and resolutions for the congress and organizing the sessions that focused on women's concerns and issues.

There were three complete sessions during the course of the world congress devoted to discussions of women's situations, struggles for women's liberation, and the role of women in the Fourth International. This, in itself, was a new and significant

development. The quality of the reports and discussion was even more impressive.

## ***The Women's Movement and Feminism In Latin America***

The first report and discussion focused on “The Women's Movement and Feminism in Latin America.” The written resolution that had been adopted by the United Secretariat in February 1990 provided an excellent analysis of the situation of women in Latin America, as did the opening report by a comrade from the PRT (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores — Revolutionary Workers Party) of Mexico. This resolution had been developed specifically out of the critique by Latin American comrades that the earlier and more general FI documents on women's liberation did not accurately represent the situation in their countries, but rather displayed a Eurocentric bias. The new resolution presented a balance between a general overview of the Latin American situation and the recognition of variation from country to country. Both the resolution and the report discussed the current economic crisis and its impact on Latin American women, as well as commenting on women's changing relationship to the family, the state, and the church. This analysis was then used to interpret recent developments in the Latin American women's movement and to propose guidelines for the involvement of FI comrades in this area of political work. During the ensuing discussion, comrades from various countries made contributions from their own experiences and suggested particular issues and problems on which we needed to focus our attention.

Three issues stand out in my mind from this discussion. One is the point made by a number of comrades of the need to further develop women's consciousness around questions of gender inequality. Women throughout Latin America are increasingly active in political struggles that are organized on a class basis fighting for economic justice, human rights, and democracy. In fact, in the past 15 years, new movements have emerged whose base of support and activists are almost exclusively women—for example, the urban struggle around basic survival issues and the fight for freedom for political prisoners and the disappeared. This often goes far beyond women's political activism in the imperialist countries. But as many comrades reported, the involvement of women in political struggles—even when such struggles are organized for and by women—does not automatically lead to consciousness and activism around their oppression as women, i.e., around issues of gender as well as class inequality. There was a clear consensus, however, that the conditions are being created at a mass level which open up the possibilities for such a development of consciousness. These conditions include the contradiction between women's active role in a range of mass struggles and the continuing obstacles created by sexism which prevent women from realizing their political objectives. There was also a strong feeling that our comrades need to intervene actively in strengthening the feminist pole in these women's organizations and movements and in extending women's awareness of gender as well as class oppression.

Another concern to which Latin American comrades drew our attention is the problem of co-optation of women's demands by the state and thus the tendency for women's movements to become deradicalized and to take on an increasingly bourgeois character.



When this happens, the class line becomes blurred, the revolutionary potential of the movement is derailed, and women's rights are ultimately undermined. This problem occurs in both legislative campaigns and in demands for social welfare measures such as programs of maternal healthcare or child nutrition; it is linked to the recent and partially successful struggles to extend democratic measures in several Latin American countries. A related problem is the tendency of women's "self-help" organizations to simply take over functions not being performed by the state and to thus concentrate on the provision of basic services rather than on organizing for more fundamental political change. The written resolution makes the point that it is important to distinguish between two things: "services that the state is obliged to provide with the greatest control on the part of the users and a position of accepting or promoting the state organizing women." In distinction to the latter, emphasis was placed on self-determination and self-organization for women, on maintaining a politically independent women's movement, and on strengthening people's understanding of the need for a revolutionary transformation of society to achieve women's true emancipation.

An additional issue about which many Latin American women spoke is the barriers to their participation in the organizations of the FI itself and in the labor and mass organizations in which the FI is active. Part of the problem lies in the general social expectation that domestic chores and childrearing are primarily women's responsibilities. Added to this were reports of ongoing problems with sexism in our own ranks and difficulties in overcoming male dominance in the various movements in which comrades participate. This led to a more general point that the responsibility for addressing problems of sexism and male chauvinism—and also for redefining social roles—belongs as much to male as to female comrades. This process must take on a conscious and consistent character and be seen as important work for all comrades. Such an effort is necessary not only for the emancipation of women—a matter of political principle—but also for the strengthening of our political organizations and the labor and social movements as a whole.

Although this report and discussion focused on women in Latin America, several comrades commented that the general analysis could be applied to other regions of the third world as well. Women from Africa and Asia also spoke under this agenda point, providing information on developments in their own countries. Of most importance was the report about the impact on women in Algeria of the rise of a reactionary Islamic current known as the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). As a result of the failure of the ruling regime to address the country's pressing economic and social problems combined with an increased preoccupation of opening Algeria to the world market, this particularly repressive form of Islamic fundamentalism is experiencing growing popular support. While the majority of Algerian women embrace the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, they are now subject to both psychological and physical attack if they do not adhere to the dress codes and other restrictions on social behavior and mobility demanded by the FIS. Algerian women view the situation as extremely dangerous and the world congress called for an international campaign of solidarity with Algerian women (see *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, April No. 84).

### ***The Struggle for Women's Liberation in the Western Imperialist Countries***

The second major report and discussion concerning women's liberation was entitled "The Development of the Struggle for Women's Liberation in the Western Imperialist Countries Since 1979." The focus, however, was on Western Europe, with some reference to the situation in the U.S. and Canada. Although many of the issues are similar—for example, women's changing roles in the workforce and in the family, cutbacks in public spending and

thus curtailments in social services used especially by women, and the growing attempts to restrict reproductive rights especially around access to abortion and contraception—analyses of the U.S. and Canadian situations need to be more fully developed in future reports and discussions. One major difference between the U.S., on the one hand, and Canada and Europe, on the other, is the higher level of unionization among European and Canadian workers, including women workers, thus opening up greater possibilities for effective campaigns around feminist issues within the labor movement. There is also the far greater presence in European countries of both social-democratic and communist parties that play an important, though often contradictory, role in women's liberation work.

One debate that emerged but was not resolved during this discussion centered around the recent experiences of women in the wage-workforce and the implications of these experiences for struggles for women's liberation. In their remarks, some comrades focused on the increasing involvement of women in wage-work and the importance of this for mobilizing women workers, including around issues of gender equality. Others, however, pointed out the recent undermining of women's status as wage-workers, through the increase in part-time and temporary employment and the reemergence of the putting-out system or home work. In my remarks, I suggested that both processes are occurring and we thus experience a contradictory situation that may be quite variable for different groups of women. In the U.S., the fastest growing component of the labor market is represented by women, especially women with young children. Most women workers, however, remain relegated to predominantly female, low-paid jobs in the clerical, sales, and service sectors; a growing number of immigrant women find work in the hazardous as well as low-paid jobs in the electronics and garment industries. Large numbers of women also work part-time, as "temps," or in the informal sector on the peripheries of capitalist production; if anything, this trend is increasing rather than declining. Of interest though are the recent successes in union organizing among women workers, especially in the clerical and public service sectors. These union drives are also significant in that they are raising issues far broader than just wages and hours, including some—such as for pay equity, childcare programs, parental leave policies, or reproductive rights—that converge with the demands of many feminist organizations.

Another thing discussed under this agenda point concerns the level of activity and focus of recent campaigns of the autonomous women's movement. While there were some important variations from country to country, major campaigns that occur in many countries include: maintaining or extending reproductive rights, especially around the question of abortion; stopping various forms of violence against women; seeking greater economic justice in the form of pay equity and access to jobs and social benefits; maintaining and extending social services such as crèches, social security measures, and national healthcare programs; and defending women's right to freely define and exercise their own sexuality, including the elimination of discrimination against lesbians. There were also repeated references to the increasing involvement of young women in these campaigns and the significance of this development. The campaigns are quite similar in the U.S. and Europe except that the recent attacks—for example, on reproductive rights—tend to be more virulent in the U.S. Also, in terms of some demands—for example, those for national health insurance or services such as publicly funded daycare—European women are currently struggling against retrenchments on rights already won while in the U.S. such measures have not yet been achieved. During this discussion there was much commentary on the different currents of the feminist movement active in each country. There was also discussion of how, while continuing to work with other currents, we might help strengthen the revolution-

ary pole and potential of the women's movement. There were suggestions of the need for further analyses that show the relationship between women's liberation and the general socialist transformation of society; for activities that link feminist struggles to other campaigns such as antiracist, antiwar, and labor struggles; and for deepening our own feminist perspectives through greater attention to ideology, psychology, and culture as well as material relations in understanding the causes of women's continuing subordination.

A further point that emerged in the discussion of women's liberation in the Western imperialist countries concerns the relationship of class and gender issues. It was interesting to me how this question was almost the mirror image of the related question that was discussed under the previous agenda point on women in Latin America. As noted above, the problem with which Latin American comrades are struggling is how to encourage women activists to extend their consciousness of class oppression to include an awareness of gender oppression as well. In the case of Europe and North America, the problem is almost the opposite in that activists in the women's movement tend to focus on gender inequality with inadequate awareness of class differences and class oppression. The same could also be said in relation to racial/ethnic differences and the problem of racism. Thus the feminist movement in advanced capitalist societies often fails to support labor struggles, antiracist struggles, and other struggles of the working class. It also neglects to adequately give voice to the perspectives of working class women, poor women, and women of color. This is a serious problem that alienates large sectors of women from the organized feminist groups and also severely weakens the movement in terms of both political analysis and its potential for political mobilization and change. It was clear that our own comrades need to give increased attention to this problem.

### ***Feminizing the Leadership of the Fourth International***

The third major report and discussion concerned the role of women in the Fourth International itself. There was a recognition of the important roles women play in local and national organizations and also in international discussions and deliberations. At the same time there was clear acknowledgement of their inadequate representation on leadership bodies at all three levels. A resolution on feminizing the leadership was adopted as was a proposal that all delegations to the next world congress that include two or more comrades include at least one woman. It was also decided to maintain the IEC Women's Commission and to broaden its representation to other countries as well.

Contributions in this discussion focused on several points. Building on the earlier comments by Latin American women, there was more elaboration of the ideological and practical barriers to women's activism within the FI itself. It became apparent that this is a problem throughout our world movement. Again, there was an affirmation that eliminating such barriers is the responsibility of male as well as female comrades. There was also discussion of how women's leadership skills can be encouraged and developed so that women will be selected as leaders on the basis of their experience without the institution of quotas or other gender-based systems. This is the best way to strengthen both women comrades and our organizations as a whole. Numerous speakers shared examples from their respective countries of what approaches facilitated women's development of new political skills and increased levels of political confidence to take on major leadership roles.

Several comrades also pointed out that what we want to build are organizations that allow the "average" woman to be politically active. We can no longer just single out women who have few care-giving responsibilities for children or other family members, or who can work fulltime for the movement rather than in a wage-earning job, to become leading cadres. This cuts out the

overwhelming majority of women in all countries and also avoids the issue of transforming gender roles to create more equitable opportunities for women's political participation.

There was a general recognition that women comrades should be involved in all areas of political work. But there was less understanding that women's experiences should enter into the analysis of most economic and social issues and be taken into account in the deliberations around all political questions. For example, in an earlier session not specifically concerning "women's issues," a Swedish comrade made a contribution on women's contradictory experiences in the changing international labor market. She used this example to address the general question of whether or not the labor movement in most countries has suffered significant defeats over the past decade and is now in a defensive posture. Both of us also raised this point in our contributions to the discussion on feminizing the FI leadership. We feel, however, that more work needs to be done to strengthen our collective consciousness about this need to integrate women's experiences and concerns into general discussions. A step toward this goal was the placement of the three reports and discussions on "women's issues" next to related agenda points rather than all together at the end of the congress. This was the result of the IEC Women's Commission criticism of the initially proposed agenda. Continued work on this problem is essential not only for demarginalizing women and issues of particular concern to us but also for developing more accurate analyses of economic, social, and political developments as a whole.

This commitment to continued work on feminist issues was the overall impression during the world congress. There were formal votes committing national organizations to ongoing attempts to integrate women more fully into their organizations, their areas of work, and their leadership bodies. There were also resolutions to take up certain campaigns concerning women's rights, such as the appeal regarding Algerian women discussed above. I also feel less formal commitments were made to develop areas of feminist analysis that were weak in this congress—for example, the impact of recent changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe on women as well as women's potential role in the prospects for political revolution in this sector of the world. In a similar vein, there were mentions of the need to more fully assess women's experiences in the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions and to evaluate the impact of economic restructuring in the advanced capitalist countries on women's lives. It was recognized that the concerns of certain groups of women need to be given more attention—for example, women of color and immigrant women in the Western imperialist countries and lesbian women throughout the world. In terms of the latter, a new commission on gay and lesbian rights was set up whose first task will be to communicate with Fourth Internationalists engaged in this area of work in the different countries.

Some of this ongoing work, especially that of an analytic and educational character, will be carried out at the month-long Women's Seminar to be held in September at the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam. Other types of political discussions and initiatives—including strengthening the role of women within the FI—will have to be overseen by the new IEC Women's Commission. The largest part of the responsibility for developing various areas of feminist work will, of course, reside with the national organizations. As we continue our activities in a diversity of women's movements, we must also continue to critically revise our own analyses and clarify our perspectives on revolutionary feminism. If we do this from an internationalist perspective, sharing our insights across national boundaries, the reports and discussions at the next world congress on women's liberation should be even richer and more thorough than what we experienced at this latest gathering of our world movement. □

In this presentation, I want to give special attention to Vladimir Ilyich Lenin's conception of the revolutionary vanguard party, which he saw as essential for bringing about the overturn of capitalism and the transition to socialism. In leading the Bolshevik (or majority) faction of the Russian socialist movement to victory, Lenin and his comrades provided an example from which millions of revolutionary workers, peasants, and intellectuals have sought to learn for more than seven decades. Many of the efforts to emulate the Bolshevik-Leninist example have not been successful. What's more, many parties claiming to be "Leninist" which *did* come to power ultimately established bureaucratic tyrannies that have discredited not only Lenin, but also Karl Marx and socialism itself in the eyes of many. A general theme of this conference is that these tyrannies grotesquely distorted and betrayed the principles of Marxism and the ideals of socialism. The defeat of these tyrannies facilitates a revolutionary renewal. The same is true of Lenin's perspectives, which—along with the broader Marxist theoretical tradition and the socialist goal—continue to have relevance for those who are prepared to struggle against all forms of human oppression and degradation.

Lenin's organizational perspectives flow from an underlying commitment to a political orientation which holds that the evils of capitalism cannot simply be reformed out of existence, that working people will need to organize consciously to overturn the power of the capitalists, establish the political sway of the working class, and then reconstruct society along socialist lines. It is important to observe that many on the left who seem to agree with this revolutionary perspective, especially in the United States and Britain, have questioned the wisdom of attempting to build a Leninist party in our present-day reality. Yet Sheila Rowbotham, in a very thoughtful and provocative critique which rejected Leninism as a model at least for socialists in advanced capitalist societies, nonetheless admitted that Leninism provides "a passionate and complex cultural tradition of revolutionary theory and practice on which we must certainly draw." I would go further than that and argue that it still makes sense as an orientation for revolutionary socialists throughout the world—even here.

Before discussing the Leninist party as such, I want to explore a bit further the notion that Lenin's organizational perspectives were inseparable from his programmatic orientation. This should not be

# The Leninist Party

by Paul Le Blanc

The following is the text of a talk given in April 1990, at New York's annual Socialist Scholars Conference.

misunderstood. We *can* separate the basic principles of the Leninist party from certain historically specific realities: for example, the need for revolutionary socialists to operate as an underground organization in the repressive conditions of tsarist Russia before 1917; also, the rise of a strong authoritarian element in the Bolshevik party beginning in 1918, in the face of a brutalizing civil war, foreign invasion, and economic collapse. We need to see both of these periods as introducing practices in the Bolshevik party which, to put it mildly, are definitely *not* applicable to all situations.

The conditions of tsarist Russia introduced problems which have sometimes obscured the essence of Leninism. More than this, the conditions generated during the civil war period introduced fundamental *distortions* into the norms of the Bolshevik party, distortions which were often given faulty theoretical justification. All too often, what have been termed "Leninist principles" have been drawn from the civil war experience. But the party which led the Bolsheviks to victory in 1917 functioned differently from the so-called "Bolshevized" parties established by the Communist International in the 1920s. These Communist parties, and the kind of so-called "Leninism" which they stood for, were negatively influenced by these subsequent civil war precedents. It is questionable whether the Bolshevik revolution could have been achieved if Lenin's party had been hampered by the supercentralist norms of the Comintern under Gregory Zinoviev and the later bureaucratic-centralist norms under Joseph Stalin.

## Revolutionary Program

While these historically specific realities must be seen as distinct from the basic organizational principles of Lenin's party, however, the revolutionary Marxist program developed by Lenin and his comrades cannot be separated from their organizational approach. There is a belief that socialism must become rooted in the struggles and consciousness of the working class if it is to be relevant, that the working class must win its own freedom through its

own efforts, and that the working class must become socialist if it is to bring about its liberation and the forward movement of all society. From this flows much else.

For example, there is an insistence that the struggles of workers cannot be confined simply to narrow economic issues, that the working class must form its own perspectives on all major issues and problems in society, that the more privileged workers must concern themselves with the interests

and needs of the more oppressed workers, and that the working class must concern itself with the plight of all oppressed groups in society, forging alliances with them all and linking their struggles to the general struggle for the triumph of the working class.

There is the belief that because capitalism is a global system—especially with its imperialist development—the international solidarity of the working class is crucial not as an idealistic slogan but as a practical policy, and that the struggle for socialism can only advance and be won as a worldwide process. (This was not, by the way, a romantic abstraction—Lenin quite seriously tried to help build an international organization of revolutionary socialists, first through the Second International, then through the Third International. After the triumph of Stalinism, Leon Trotsky similarly felt it necessary to advance the Leninist perspective by trying to build a Fourth International.)

There is for Leninists also a commitment to practical (sometimes quite modest) struggles for democratic and economic reforms, to defend the interests of working people and the oppressed. But at the same time there is an insistence that such struggles be integrated into a strategic orientation which advances the political independence and hegemony of the working class. There is an understanding that such political independence and hegemony of the working class *as a class*, if it is achieved on a significant scale, naturally and necessarily leads to socialist revolution.

The programmatic orientation of Leninism, as the political current which led the Russian working class and its allies to victory in the 1917 revolution, comes through most clearly in the line of thought which Lenin developed under the impact of the First World War in the years 1915-1916, particularly in his discussion of democracy. Especially in the present period, as democracy is raised as a banner of hope in all major sectors of the world, it is necessary to give attention to this elemental component in the Leninist political program.

Lenin wrote: "The proletariat can win only through democracy, i.e., through putting into effect full democracy and linking up every step of its progress with democratic demands in their most emphatic wording." He stressed: "We must *combine* the revolutionary struggle against capitalism with a revolutionary program and tactics in respect of *all* democratic demands, including a republic, a militia, election of government officials by the people, equal rights for women, self-determination of nations, etc." He explained: "So long as capitalism exists all these demands are capable of realization only as an exception, and in incomplete, distorted form. Basing ourselves on democracy as already achieved, and showing up its deficiency under capitalism, we demand the overthrow of capitalism and expropriation of the bourgeoisie as an essential basis both for abolishing the poverty of the masses and for *fully* and *thoroughly* implementing *all* democratic transformations."

Lenin saw this approach as relevant to the revolutionary socialist struggle in every country. "Some of those transformations will be started before the overthrow of the bourgeoisie," he asserted, "others *in the course* of this overthrow, and still others after it. The social revolution is not a single battle but an epoch of a series of battles on all and every problem of economic and democratic transformations, whose completion will be effected only with the expropriation of the bourgeoisie." In developing this line of thought, we can see that Lenin's outlook began to converge with Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. "It is quite conceivable that the workers of a given country may overthrow the bourgeoisie *before* any single cardinal democratic transformation has been fully implemented. But," he concluded, "it is quite inconceivable that the proletariat, as an historical class, will be able to defeat the bourgeoisie unless it has been prepared for it by being educated in a spirit of the most consistent and determined revolutionary democratism."

### Revolutionary Vanguard and Democratic Centralism

This bold vision cannot be held and acted upon, unfortunately, by all people or most people, or even the majority of the working class, *at all times*. Otherwise, we would perpetually be in a revolutionary situation—but such situations are rare. The relative minority which *does* hold and act upon the revolutionary orientation is capable of playing a vanguard role, if it organizes itself well in order to interact intelligently and persuasively with various sectors of the working class as a whole. It can gain

authority with growing numbers of working people, and when economic and political crises shake capitalism (as inevitably happens), significant numbers of working people may find the vanguard's political outlook to be compelling and its leadership worth following. At such moments, revolutions become possible.

But well before such revolutionary moments arrive, it is crucial that those who hope to contribute their energies to the revolutionary victory patiently build several things. It is necessary to build a variety of struggles in defense of the dignity and needs of the workers and the oppressed; a sense of connection between the various types of struggles, between the struggles unfolding in different places, and between struggles taking place over a period of time. It is necessary, out of all this, to accumulate a growing number of experienced and educated activists; it is necessary to secure an accumulation of experience and analyses that flow from such struggles and that can strengthen future struggles. And thus it is necessary to create an organization capable of facilitating all of this.

What has been described here is the type of organization that Lenin sought to build. It functioned according to the principles of *democratic centralism*. The term was first introduced into the Russian socialist movement by Lenin's factional adversaries, the Mensheviks, but Lenin embraced it and summarized it as "freedom of discussion, unity of action." In Lenin's opinion, the revolutionary party "must be united, but in these united organizations there must be wide and free discussion of Party questions, free comradely criticism and assessment of events in Party life." This would include, he stressed, "guarantees for the rights of all minorities and for all loyal opposition, . . . the autonomy [that is, the right to democratic decision making on the local level] of every Party organization, . . . recognizing that all Party functionaries must be elected, accountable to the Party and subject to recall." He concluded: "The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organizations implies universal and full *freedom to criticize* so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action; it rules out *all* criticism which disrupts or makes difficult the unity of an action decided on by the Party." Once a majority came to a decision, a minority which disagreed was to do nothing to undermine the decision. The decision would be tested in practice. The critical perspectives of the loyal minority, far from undermining party unity, would help the organization as a whole to clarify its orientation, learn from its experiences, stay in touch with complex realities, and correct its mistakes.

Especially after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, as Communist parties were organized around the world to extend the revolutionary socialist victory to other countries, some confusion developed over how to understand this notion of "democratic centralism." At the Third Congress of the Communist International in 1921, an effort was made to develop a resolution that would explain the concept: "The democratic centralism of the Communist Party organization should be a real synthesis, a fusion of centralism and proletarian democracy. This fusion can be achieved only when the Party organization *works* and *struggles* at all times together, as a united whole." This was contrasted by the resolution to the negative practice of "formal, mechanical centralization." This negative practice which the resolution rejected sounds very much like the later Stalinist organizational norms that masses of people in Communist Party-run states have been definitively rejecting especially over the past couple of years. The resolution warned: "formal or mechanical centralization would mean the centralization of 'power' in the hands of the Party bureaucracy, allowing it to *dominate* the other members of the Party or the proletarian masses which are outside the Party." Democratic centralism, on the other hand, was supposed to facilitate "*centralization of Communist activity*, i.e., the creation of a leadership that is strong and effective and at the same time flexible," and in addition it was supposed to facilitate "the active participation of working people."

In the following year, at the Communist International's Fourth World Congress, Lenin expressed misgivings about the 1921 resolution. "I am prepared to subscribe to every one of its fifty or more points," he commented. "But we have not learned how to present our Russian experience to foreigners." Seeing that his criticism of the resolution as being "too Russian" startled some of the delegates, he added with a laugh: "For one thing it is so long that nobody but a Russian would read it." An eyewitness from the United States, Max Eastman, tells us that Lenin "continued to laugh a little at the memory of that remark after he had begun to say something else." In fact, his additional remarks were also offered with some humor. Even if foreign comrades read the document, he speculated, they would find it extremely difficult to understand. "And," he added, "if by way of exception some foreigner does understand it, he cannot carry it out." With a verbal finger-wagging, he suggested that "the foreign comrades have signed without reading and understanding" the resolution, yet he expressed the thought that "they cannot be content with hanging it in a

corner like an icon and praying to it. Nothing can be achieved that way.”

The point is that organizational structures take on meaning only in their intimate, organic connection with the actual struggles of working people in specific social and political contexts. “It is now essential,” Lenin insisted, “that communists in every country should quite consciously take into account . . . the *concrete features* which the struggle assumes and must invariably assume in each country, in conformity with the special character of its economics, politics, culture and national composition.” If one was to follow the Bolshevik model, one would have to do more than vote for and worship lengthy theses of the Communist International, loyally but blindly endorsing the ideas of the Russian Communists. Rather, it would be necessary to develop a native variant of Bolshevism—through one’s own experience and struggles—that could duplicate the Russian model by being as rooted in one’s own traditions and one’s own working class as had been the case with Lenin’s party.

### Organic Connection to the Class Struggle

One of the most important developments in the historiography of the 1970s and ’80s has been the proliferation of a rich array of original studies—particularly among U.S. scholars—which contribute immensely to our understanding of the social history of the Russian working class. These studies (by Leopold Haimson, Alexander Rabinowitch, Ronald Suny, Victoria Bonnell, Laura Engelstein, David Mandel, Diane Koenker, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, and many others) have documented the process through which a revolutionary workers’ movement came into being in Russia and triumphed in 1917. And these studies, along with memoirs and eyewitness accounts, show us the key to Bolshevik success: an intimate connection with key sectors of the Russian working class, and a capacity to present clearly and persuasively to these sectors and others, at decisive moments, a revolutionary program.

It was to this experience that Lenin pointed in his classic of 1920, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, when he warned would-be revolutionaries that unless certain conditions are met, “all attempts to establish [party] discipline inevitably fall flat and end up in phrasemongering and clowning.” The three prerequisites for a seriously disciplined revolutionary party were: 1) the class consciousness and devotion to revolution of significant elements of the working class (whom Lenin terms the revolutionary vanguard); 2) the ability of

this proletarian vanguard to link up “and—if you wish—merge, in a certain measure, with the broadest masses of working people”; and 3) the correctness of the political leadership of the revolutionary vanguard, and the understanding of this by the broad masses on the basis of their own experience.

“Without these conditions,” Lenin wrote, “discipline in a revolutionary party really capable of being the party of the advanced class, whose mission is to overthrow the bourgeoisie and transform the whole of society, cannot be achieved.” He warned his would-be followers in other countries not to try to short-circuit the necessary process through superrevolutionary tactics or rigid organizational formulas in order to somehow create the desired revolutionary conditions. “These conditions cannot emerge at once,” Lenin insisted. “They are created only by prolonged effort and hard-won experience. Their creation is facilitated by a correct revolutionary theory, which, in turn, is not a dogma, but assumes final shape only in close connection with the practical activity of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement.”

### The Future of Leninism in the United States

What does this mean for us in the United States today?

I think, first of all, that we must embrace the two core notions of Lenin. One core notion holds that a coming-together of socialist ideas and of the working class is possible and necessary, and this coming-together would transform both the socialist movement and the working class, creating a force capable of bringing revolutionary change. The other core notion holds that a serious, democratic, and cohesive organization guided by a critical-minded and revolutionary Marxism is necessary to accomplish the crystallization of such a revolutionary force.

I would also argue, secondly, that it is necessary for such an organization to be grounded in a more serious understanding of certain realities than has been the case with our many would-be “Leninist” predecessors. Specifically, we must develop a deeper understanding of the actual Bolshevik-Leninist tradition up to the 1920s, an understanding of the experience of revolutionary movements and struggles since then, a serious-minded analysis of recent developments in the world capitalist system. And there must be a critical-minded (and self-critical) shaping of organizational norms and functioning in light of such understanding and analysis.

Third, for Americans such an organization must, above all, be “American”:

grounded in our own specific radical traditions; integrated with the actual experience, struggles, needs, and idiom of the working people of our own country; related to and learning from, and helping to advance the *world* revolutionary process, but in a manner that facilitates the forward movement of the real, actually existing working class in the United States.

Nothing like this exists or has existed in our country on a significant scale. Nor can a genuinely revolutionary party exist simply because a small band of relatively intelligent and dedicated people decide that it must exist. That is a necessary condition for the existence of such a party, but by itself it is not sufficient. An inadequate understanding of this fact, an impatience in the face of difficult realities, has turned more than one group of good people into a political sect. We need to do better than that.

Today there are different organizational elements, fragments, currents of Marxists and socialist activists which, taken together, could become the nucleus of such a party. We each need to engage, to the best of our abilities, in serious theoretical, analytical, and practical political work. We need to work together on joint projects which make sense, projects which can help advance the common struggle: the defense of the interests of working people and the oppressed, and the growth of socialist consciousness. We must recognize that our existence as political people and political currents is precisely to advance this *common struggle*. To the extent that more and more of us can work together in such practical activity (continuing to build our own organizations and currents, but not at the expense of the common struggle), the more we will be laying the groundwork for the kind of revolutionary party that it will take to bring socialism to the United States.

We should be able to work together in this way without agreeing on everything. We need to talk to and listen to each other, and we should be prepared to make, listen to, and seriously respond to frank criticisms and disagreements. If we approach such discussions from the standpoint of how we can work together to help build a revolutionary socialist movement, then such discussions will in no way divide us (the divisions are already there!), but instead they will help us draw closer together. They can become means not for mutual ostracism but instead mutual influence, for comradeship among critical-minded revolutionaries. We should work to draw together a unified organization which will work to build a mass revolutionary socialist party, a party that can provide leadership in the even larger movements and struggles of the working class and all oppressed groups.

There is always a powerful temptation, when drawing from an historical tradition such as Bolshevism, to look for parallels. Often key notions are associated with specific years. In 1903 the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party split into so-called radical and moderate factions, Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. In 1905 there was a revolutionary upsurge which made the Bolsheviks a mass working class current. The period of 1912 to 1917 saw the consolidation of the Bolsheviks as a distinct party and—with some important fluctuations—their rise as the most influential force in the workers' movement, culminating in a socialist revolution. But nothing that we face is just as it was for Lenin and his comrades. Our 1903 and 1905 and 1912 and 1917 may not look at all like theirs, and the sequence of events may differ dramatically. We cannot allow our knowledge of their history to become an obstacle to understanding and making our own.

This understood, it may be worth suggesting that we avoid thinking in terms appropriate to 1912 or 1917, when we—in a certain sense—have not even had our 1898 (when the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was formed). I say "in a certain sense" because historically this is not quite true. As far back as 1876 there was the Workingmen's Party of the United States, from which the Socialist Labor Party, the American Federation of Labor, and the semianarchist International Working People's Association emerged in the 1880s. There was the Socialist Party of America which, under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs in the first two decades of the 20th century, assumed mass influence in the labor movement, as well as among

militant social reformers, thoughtful feminists, influential Black liberation activists, and radical intellectuals. There was also a substantial Communist Party which up to the late 1920s showed great promise, and which even after the onset of its Stalinist phase played an influential role in the political, intellectual, and cultural life of our country. There were other currents as well, such as the revolutionary socialists who followed such independent radicals as A.J. Muste, and a significant intellectual and labor tradition in the United States influenced by the perspectives of Leon Trotsky. The fact remains that this entire history—with all of its richness, all of its vital lessons that emerge from inspiring victories and tragic defeats—has not survived as a mass socialist movement rooted in the American working class. It is not a living force in U.S. politics today. Such a movement must be re-created by us, and people like us, drawing from the crucially important experiences of those who went before, but also in a very real sense starting anew. What I am insisting on here is that we cannot fruitfully move toward creating a revolutionary socialist party by rejecting Leninism. Instead we must embrace the example and the fundamental orientation represented by Lenin and his comrades. We must transcend a romantic and uncritical adulation of Lenin and his ideas, which will prevent us both from understanding the past and from being alive to the realities of our own time. On the other hand, we must also transcend a shortsighted pessimism and narrow pragmatism that will keep us from what Sheila Rowbotham calls "a passionate and complex cultural tradition of revolutionary theory and practice on

which we must certainly draw." In fact, we will need to make that tradition our own if we hope to make socialism a living reality. □

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## NOW (Continued from page 3)

Democratic Party, has been cutting the state budget, laying off workers, cutting back social programs, and facing tens of thousands of demonstrators in Albany.

Those of us here today are well aware of the urgent needs of our society. First, a national, public, health care system for all working people. Second, a national system of support for affordable daycare for working parents. Third, programs to provide employment for the unemployed. Fourth, a program of housing for the homeless. Many of our citizens are well aware that we need a new tax system to tax corporations and the wealthy in order to pay for those programs. In order to put such a program on the political agenda, we will need a new political party.

Is it possible to form a new party to represent the interests of working people, minorities, and women and to fight for such a program?

Tony Mazzocchi, one of the top officials of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers union, recently proposed the or-

ganization of a group called Labor Party Advocates. Labor Party Advocates is not a political party, but an organization advocating the formation of a working class political party based on the labor unions. I think this is an important step.

But what is needed to launch a new political party with a progressive program is an organizational base and a working class constituency. The AFL-CIO would be the logical organization to launch a new political party, but it is too tied to the Democratic Party. Likewise with the most important civil rights organizations such as the NAACP. The National Organization for Women (NOW) is in a unique position to offer leadership to working people at this moment. You have a national organization with a largely working class membership which could launch the movement for a new party.

I urge you to do so. Start a new political party, a women's and workers' party. It would mean a new political life for our country. □

# Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

## 47. The Period of Camp Liberalization (cont.)

Soon after Stalin's death, a broad amnesty was announced called the "Voroshilov amnesty" because Voroshilov, who was then the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, had signed it. It affected people condemned to a term of up to five years. However, since you got a stiffer sentence for an anecdote about Stalin than you did for ordinary criminal activity, the amnesty affected almost exclusively the common criminals. In the neighboring camp, which contained more than 4,000 persons, one political prisoner was freed under the amnesty; but in our camp there was not even one political prisoner with only a five-year term. However, an enormous wave of inmates from among the "common criminals" swept forth to freedom from Vorkuta camp. They swept forth in order to immediately start rolling back, having been up to no good in every city along the way home.

The politicals remained in the camps awaiting review of their cases.

They transported a shipment of several thousand political prisoners from the Karaganda camps. They were divided up among the mines. Before shipping them out, the authorities had promised the prisoners: By the time you reach Vorkuta, your cases will be under review. But they did not intend to fulfill that promise—or they did not intend to do so very soon. Rumors that reviews were under way were constantly circulated through the camps, but vague rumors are no replacement for a definite promise. People ceased to believe them.

Quite a few of the Karaganda political prisoners ended up in mine administration No. 2 (MA-2, as it was usually called). Several hundred meters from MA-2 was the zone of mine seven, which also happened to have quite a few of them. Thanks to the railroad tracks that united MA-2 and mine seven, a means of communication was set up: trains were constantly being moved along the tracks, and the prisoners wrote messages on them in chalk, right under the nose of the omniscient godfathers. Their omniscience had always relied on informers and not on their personal perspicacity. That is how the prisoners of both camps made their arrangements for the strike.

The prisoners decided to strike under the slogan: "You gave your word, now keep it," the same slogan that for decades had been employed against us, although we had never given them our word about anything. And how well they kept their word! On the appointed day, the Karaganda guys did not go to work but hung a red flag over their mine. A red flag was also raised over mine seven, and non-Karaganda prisoners joined the strike. Both mines stopped working.

Then the godfather of the Special Camp Point (SCP) of MA-2 picked out several fellows and sent them to the BUR (special punishment cell). Following the method they had long ago worked out, he declared them the instigators and intended to take reprisals against them so as to frighten the others.

They were confined in the BUR, but when the tanks with gruel were brought to their cell, they shoved aside the warders who were standing by the open door and made a break for it. However, they did not run toward the camp's exit but toward the barracks to their comrades. The official in charge of camp regimentation happened to be walking past not far away. He grabbed his pistol and emptied it at the running prisoners. Hearing the shots, the soldiers in the watchtowers also began to shoot. They fired in a panic without knowing at whom and having received neither an order to shoot nor an order to stop shooting. Two people were killed. The camp regimentation official killed one and a stray bullet from the watchtower hit another, a fellow who was sitting on a mound of earth by the barracks door.

The strike in both mines continued for ten days. The zone was surrounded by a cordon of troops, and machine-gunners stood at each corner. The officials haggled with the prisoners over every concession. All the concessions concerned the camp regime, having nothing to do with the main demand of the strikers—review of their cases. They were not demanding to be freed, after all; they only wanted justice—a review of their cases by higher bodies. This they were not granted. They were not even promised that those guilty of the shooting would be

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

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

punished. However, they were allowed to bury the victims themselves.

The death of innocent people caused the prisoners of all types to form an instant bond—the Bandera supporters and the former prisoners of war, the Germans and the Russians, the Jews and the Nazi police agents. They all put on black armbands. The victims were carried away to the sound of a funeral dirge—the SCP had an amateur orchestra. The two red coffins were placed on a raised mound of earth, with the dead facing the mute, gray Vorkuta sky. The leadership of the camp point assembled but kept its distance. The camp regimentation official, the murdering coward, did not dare show his face.

The prisoners, removing their flannel caps with earflaps, filed past the two red coffins in solemn silence. Each one stopped for a moment as if wishing to memorize forever a question that could not escape from lips sealed by a bullet. Some simply stopped; others bent over and kissed the foreheads of the dead; others got down on their knees and whispered a prayer. Slowly, slowly moved the endless line. The camp officials stood a little way off and also remained silent.

The farewell lasted almost all day. Afterward, a small group, selected by the prisoners themselves, set out—accompanied by an armed convoy—to bury the dead. They were the first ZKs [political prisoners] in Vorkuta to be buried in the daylight. Usually the dead were hauled from the zone in the dead of night, at three or so in the morning after the night shift had arrived from the mines and settled in. The cart with the bodies—if there were several, piled one on top of the other (burying them in coffins would have been unthinkable)—was covered with a tarpaulin. The warden on duty left his post and by blows to the skulls with a wooden mallet checked to make sure that the bodies they were hauling away were really dead people.

\* \* \*

There were also shootings at other mines. The most serious events transpired at mine 29. Although the strike had ended at the other SCP, at mine 29 the strike continued.

Why this happened is difficult now to explain. General Maslennikov was flown in from Moscow with instructions to “settle the matter.” The general’s call, broadcast over the camp radio in all the barracks, brought no success; and he proposed a delegation be sent to him (under guard, of course) for talks. The prisoners, fearing for the lives of their delegates, refused this and proposed the general simply come to their meeting which was scheduled to convene in the zone, in the square by the SCP office at 12 noon. Before entering the zone, the general set up reliable security for himself in the event that the prisoners decided to go after him. He surrounded the zone—that was already surrounded—with a fresh, reinforced detail of troops and assigned to the watchtowers additional guards. There were six or seven soldiers not only in the towers themselves but on the upper steps of their stairways. He also pulled to the towers machine-gunners to supplement those already previously assigned throughout the zone.

At 12 noon, Maslennikov entered the zone with his retinue. The ZKs stood in a semicircle in front of a table and silently listened to his speech. At first he explained why he could not

even review the demands of the strikers: They were being presented collectively, and any “collectivity” was forbidden. By the end, the general was incensed, his tone changed, and—denouncing the strike as anti-Soviet sabotage—he gave the strikers two hours to reconsider. At three o’clock sharp, he said, they will be given a signal to disperse. Those who do not disperse will have only themselves to blame for the consequences—“Soviet power has enough bullets to suppress obvious enemies who wreck its plans.”

He left, the radio began repeating his call and his threats, and at three o’clock the signal sounded. Many moved toward the guard posts but they were met by those who did not want to give up. At first they began to argue back and forth; then some fights began. The holdouts were a minority. They formed themselves into a chain, but the crowd—shouting—pressed against them, advancing step by step toward the guard posts.

Those in the watchtower were observing the scuffle, and poorly understanding what the noise was about, got nervous. One thing bothered the guards: Any moment they might break through the gate! Where they would go once out the gate in this city of guard posts and watchtowers was not important. They will break out of our trusted guard posts and head toward the officials.

The scuffle by the guard post they apparently imagined to be simply a maneuver to break through the gate. Someone who couldn’t restrain himself shouted: “They’re breaking through! Shoot!” And wild panicked gunfire began: at the crowd, into the windows of the barracks, into the windows of the infirmary. Snipers picked off fleeing individuals.

The carnage lasted only a short time and there was a command to cease fire. However, I was told later that the victims numbered more than 500. The burial crew, they say, counted 129 dead. The number of wounded was 300–400. There were indeed enough bullets!

The strike was thus suppressed. Those who remained alive obediently returned to work. New ZKs were sent to replace those killed and wounded. There were also enough of them!

As a result, the mine began to fulfill its nearly wrecked plan so that the red star—that respected symbol of a vanguard enterprise—could again shine over the headframe of the mine.

Throughout the strike, the ZKs made sure the mine was protected from flooding and gas leaks. However, this is not what the godfathers cared about. They cared about names, including the names of those who went on strike in the mine. The strikers had an elected commission which went to work despite the strike overseeing the proper functioning of the ventilation systems and water drainage. It was not the godfather that protected the mine but the ZKs. Nevertheless, the members of this commission along with those who were considered instigators were hauled off to a penal mine with especially rotten barracks and a particularly harsh regime. The slightest public activism, if it is not led by the godfather or the Educational-Cultural Department, is considered a crime. Many were sent to closed regime prisons.

In the secret newspaper of the miners’ society, *The Miner*, they printed the names of a few of them to frighten us: ZK Protopopov, sent to a penal mine for malicious sabotage—that same Protopopov whom I wrote about in a previous notebook. Along with him, all his judges and all his accusers were named. But no one had ever heard of them.



A general review of the cases did not begin soon. But by autumn of 1954, they began to issue passes and allow some prisoners to settle outside the camp zone, with the stipulation, however, that they register every day at the guard post.

However, the prisoners never stopped expecting what was most important: justice. In the summer of 1955, an unexpected and absolutely spontaneous strike erupted in our mine. A guard in our convoy provoked it by shooting an old man without any cause, only because he was sitting on the ground. It happened by the gate to the mine. Coming out as usual, we stood in clusters. Some were squatting down. This had never been forbidden. When the command "Let's go" was given, you had a little wait. This old guy was squatted down. He was very Jewish-looking and the guard—well versed about kikes from his reeducation in camp—wanted, it seems, to scare the cowardly kike. The bullet hit him in the leg.

However, the guard had picked the wrong year to shoot someone. The prisoners began shouting. The convoy grew frightened and cocked their guns. Then someone yelled: "We will not go with such a convoy!" Everyone headed back toward the gate and the convoy remained behind. The boss of the mine came out to the prisoners who were sprawled on the ground next to his office. Their response to him was: "We want to speak with Zakharov." Major Zakharov was the SCP official. A phone call went through and he responded: "I'll be right there."

He was one of about a half dozen deputies and assistants, gallant old hands of the camp, full of contempt for us nobodies. He would be able to inspire courage in his staff. However, he came up to the gate of the mine and then turned around and went back.

All night the prisoners sat in the yard of the mine and waited. The evening shift came out of the pits and joined them. They did not bring in the night shift; it refused to move. The next day, the hungry and exhausted people agreed to leave the mine—they were promised that talks would take place in the zone, "at home." Surrounded by guards, they trudged "home." Zakharov and his deputies walked along on the side. They weren't so timid with the guards around.

This time, too, the strikers themselves ordered those who worked in ventilation and drainage to maintain the mine, protecting it from flooding and gas leaks. The prisoners were not out for revenge against either Korniev or the godfathers. They had one demand: We are waiting for a representative from the Supreme Prosecutor's office. We no longer trust you locals.

The representative flew in, held talks, and accepted numerous statements. He allowed a meeting of prisoners to be held and many came out and spoke. The most convincing and boldest speaker was the former pilot in the Soviet army Dobroshtan, who was serving 25 years at corrective labor. They took him to Moscow and a while later he returned to us a rehabilitated man. He was the first swallow of spring in our SCP. He enlisted in mine 40; a woman he loved was there and he could not leave her. However, he did not work for long.

During all the years of his confinement, Dobroshtan had been marked on the godfather's list not with a pencil but with a bold "x." He had not gone into the mines but had worked inside the zone. The special investigations divisions in other mines also knew about him. They were hardly enthusiastic about the decision of the Supreme Court to rehabilitate such a dangerous man. I relate to you what soon took place without trying to explain it.

One day, when he left work, a vehicle drove up to him. The door opened and he was invited in. He was never seen in Vorkuta again.

I will finish telling about the strikes. The United Nations learned about them. At some time, it is possible people abroad also found out about the Vorkuta and Kolyma executions as well. However, Stalin worried little about this, confident that he would be able to deceive the communists of all the world. In 1955, the circumstances changed. The Twentieth Congress had still not had its word, but the winds of change were getting stronger. General Maslennikov, commander of the new executions, committed suicide, when so doing taking full responsibility for them. With him gone, there was no one to investigate.

However, was the liberalization of the special camps possible? They existed precisely for political prisoners. The twice-a-day feedings along with the Rechlag regimen—by no means the strictest—could not but have a particular aim. We will recall that in the camps of those years were people less inclined to resistance than the prisoners in 1936. Even such a form of protest as a strike arose, I think, because an overwhelming number of workers from Western Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltics showed up in the camps—people from countries where a strike was always conceivable as a totally natural response by workers to injustice.

These prisoners posed a dilemma for the officials: either permanently dispense with this regime for working, but politically dangerous, people; or suppress strikes in such a way as to teach people never to do that again. And suppress them they did.

But life goes on. And more and more young people ended up there who wanted these camp conditions about as much as Dobroshtan wanted to get into the vehicle that drove up to him. These are the same young people who incorruptible commentators like Yu. Feofanov call mercenary rogues, wanting nothing more than to show off. For them—the venal, bad, depraved, dishonest, etc., etc.—for them, there exists an extra-strong, strict, super-strict regime. But can it use the example of the regime of the 1950s if the young people are more obstinate than their fathers? On the other hand, it becomes more and more difficult to conceal the evidence.

How can you reeducate slanderers with punishment diets without at the same time creating new slanderers that punishment diets have not yet managed to reeducate?

[Next Month: "The Puddle and the Tower on Its Shore." ]

## Letters

### **Letter to Marilyn Vogt-Downey—1**

This letter is coming to you from the granddaughter of Mikhail Davidovich Baitalsky—Lyubov Nikolaevna Petrova—from far-off Vorkuta where grandfather twice served a sentence, later described in his book of memoirs *Notebooks for the Grandchildren*.

I received your address from Nikolai Ivanovich Starkov. We meet as much as we can in Moscow. He has given me part of the archival documents concerning my grandfather's literary heritage and informed me that since 1986 you have been publishing *Notebooks for the Grandchildren* in the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*. I was surprised and gladdened by this news: finally this manuscript has come to life and will be read. Can you tell me how you obtained it?

The chapters of the *Notebooks* were written immediately after his rehabilitation, over almost twelve years. From the time I was six years old, and until I became of age, we often spent a lot of time together. My child's heart was instinctively absorbed by the courage and moral guidelines of this tormented and loving heart. I read the manuscript in its final form only after I had grown up. I read it differently from anyone else: while reading, I see and hear a deeper meaning, because I know more. I know and it pains my heart.

I am taking the liberty of requesting that you send me the issues of the *Bulletin* containing excerpts from the M.D. Baitalsky book. Not just one copy but several would be better. Then I could donate them in your name to the Memorial Society at Vorkuta, to the city museum, to libraries.

This book was dedicated to the grandchildren and they must be given the opportunity to read it. We are not to blame if it was first published not in our own country but in another. I want to express my sincere thanks to you for having done it. Help me now to see to it that the book is read in Vorkuta.

My attempt to publish chapter five (about the events at the brick factory) have been relatively successful: the material has been accepted and it is going to be printed in one of the Moscow journals, *The Northern Expanse*. It specializes in issues concerning the people of the north and is well produced. I said I have been relatively successful because a publication date has not been set, and I am afraid it will not be soon. If I were able to show them your *Bulletin*, perhaps this would hasten the process: it is a crime to ignore the work of an author whose works have been long acknowledged and published in America, Israel, and Holland.

I am interested in exerting every possible effort to see to it that the books and articles of M.D. Baitalsky get published in our country as well. This is my duty, my atonement—and

my way of repenting for my frivolous and intransigent youth.

Lyuba Petrova  
USSR

### **Letter to Marilyn Vogt-Downey—2**

In your article titled "An Assessment of Trotsky's Assassination in Ogonyok" in the February 1991 issue of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* you state "In 1939, however, Trotsky and Rivera broke politically over what position to take following Stalin's invasion of Finland and over other political and personal differences."

This is simply contrary to fact. The break between Rivera and Trotsky was primarily over the stance to be taken toward capitalist parties, old or in the process of being born with Rivera's dedicated care and financial nurture in the birth process, over class criteria in politics.

The schism between Rivera and Trotsky is narrated in detail in the Pathfinder Press' *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-1939* and *The Writings of Leon Trotsky Supplement 1934-40*, the first edited by Naomi Allen and George Breitman and the latter by Breitman himself, and in both instances edited beautifully.

Only a handful remain of those who could personally testify on the events. Among them are Manuel Alvarado, Octavio Fernandez, Luciano Galicia, Felix Ibarra and myself. Could we add to this list Adolfo Zamora; is Jose Ferrel alive?

These rather discursive remarks are in the interest of historical accuracy, a quality which I know you regard highly.

Charles Curtiss  
Los Angeles

### **Matt Lee—A Letter from Prison**

*The following letter from Matt Lee was sent to us by the Birmingham Poll Tax Prisoners Support Group. (See "Matt Lee—Poll Tax Prisoner" in the June No. 86 issue of Bulletin In Defense of Marxism.)*

Over a month in prison and any initial "novelty" has long gone. Luckily so, too. I am left with the reality, a very long, monotonous, degrading, and humiliating waste of time. I was imprisoned on March 25, 1991, for two and a half years. My "crime" was rioting. My sentencing was "exemplary" and my trial a farce.

My real "crime" was to fight back, to defend myself and my comrades. My real "crime" in the eyes of the government and the state is that I didn't sit back and "take it," take the police brutality, their free hand to drive legitimate demonstrators off the streets of London by force.

My sentence was indeed "exemplary." It is not intended to reflect the severity of my crime in any "just" way. It is intended to warn me, and you, indeed to warn all opponents of the government and the state that to fight back is not allowed. I didn't hospitalize any coppers, or burn down any buildings. The main concern of the judge seemed to be that I was at the front of a "charge" towards police lines, and that I urged people to "come on." To the judge I was doubly guilty because not only did I fight back, but also encouraged others to do so.

The trial—you had to be there to believe it—three days of high comedy that cost me two and a half years of my life. I believe that it was Paddy Hill who said with astounding clarity, "Justice, they don't even know how to spell the word." Yet again the so-called forces of law and order have proved this truth.

Myself and the other poll tax prisoners are nothing more and nothing less than political prisoners. Huge chunks of our lives are being sacrificed in the pathetic attempts of the ruling class of this country to save their necks. If you believe in justice in Britain, you are a fool. The only way to understand why I and many others are in prison is if you realize we are involved in a massive and bloody power struggle—between us, the working class of this country, and them, the blood-sucking parasites of the ruling class.

In case you think this is old-fashioned and boring dogma, long since overtaken by John Major's "vision" of a "classless" Britain, just think for a minute.

There are about 30 people in prison *now* for fighting the poll tax—the dead and gone poll tax! Why are we here?

Is it because we are a threat to decent, law-abiding, democratic people? If that were the case why was I, a not untypical "poll tax rioter," allowed to roam the streets for a year, from March 31, 1990, to March 25, 1991, before being sent to prison? Surely as a violent threat to society I should have been put away sooner.

Is it because what I did on that day was "wrong" and so, even though not a threat to society, I had to be punished by being put in prison? If you believe that, why wasn't I given community service (perhaps cleaning Trafalgar Square for a year), or some other more "appropriate" sentence? I've no previous convictions, I'm married with a child on the way—prison would seem, if justice were the desire, the wrong option. More importantly, if you believe I should be punished for some "crime," then why are no police behind bars? Maggie Thatcher's boot boys, free to go on the next demo beating and maiming innocent people! Why are the psychopaths that drove armored transit vans

(Continued on inside back cover)

into densely packed crowds at 30 miles per hour not tried for attempted murder? *Why?*

The reason is simple, comrades. *We are* in a struggle. It is the reality of life in Britain; not the supposedly old-fashioned view of supposedly old-fashioned socialists. *It is the truth.* It is why 30 people are in prison *now* for fighting the poll tax. It is why before us the printers and the miners were beaten, maimed, imprisoned, and murdered. It is why thousands of workers in Britain have demonstrated, struck, and fought back. It is not something for history books, but the reality of today.

The struggle has not finished, or gone away. It exists and imprisons me. It is why in a so-called civilized society thousands are homeless and starving on the streets, while the politicians debate how much to charge a single rich man for living in a 25-room mansion! It is why the Birmingham Six did 17 years for nothing, why the Tottenham Three

are in prison for a murder they didn't commit, why Martin Foran is dying in prison—murdered by prison, not for being guilty of any crime, but because, in the eyes of the judges, he was working class, Irish, and therefore expendable.

If you think you can sit on the fence and be objective (whatever that means) and look to "justice" and the oh so fair British legal system, you are mightily mistaken. Where is the fence for you to sit on when police vans drive at 30 miles per hour into you? Where is the fence you sit on when young mothers and their babies are attacked by mounted police with three-foot-long batons? I fought back and am now in prison because there is no fence! There never has been, there never will be. You, me, everyone, must choose our side in the struggle. Their side, or ours. *There is no middle ground.* You are either part of the solution, or you are part of the problem.

I chose. I fought back. I'm in prison. It's now your turn to choose—to learn the lessons of the fightback, to make sure we don't get beaten off the streets again. It's time for you to choose which side you are on—before you have no choice. I'm in here for you—you're out there for me. The struggle continues.

*Free All Poll Tax Prisoners!*

Matt Lee  
May 8, 1991

Send messages of support and donations to:

- The Birmingham Poll Tax Prisoners Support Group, c/o 5 Exton Gardens, Blackpatch, Smethwick, W. Midlands B66 2LT England

To contact Matt Lee, write:

- c/o Chris Lee, 20 Corner House, Wellington St., Birmingham B66, England

[Note: Letters to the editor are subject to abridgment without the approval of the author.]

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