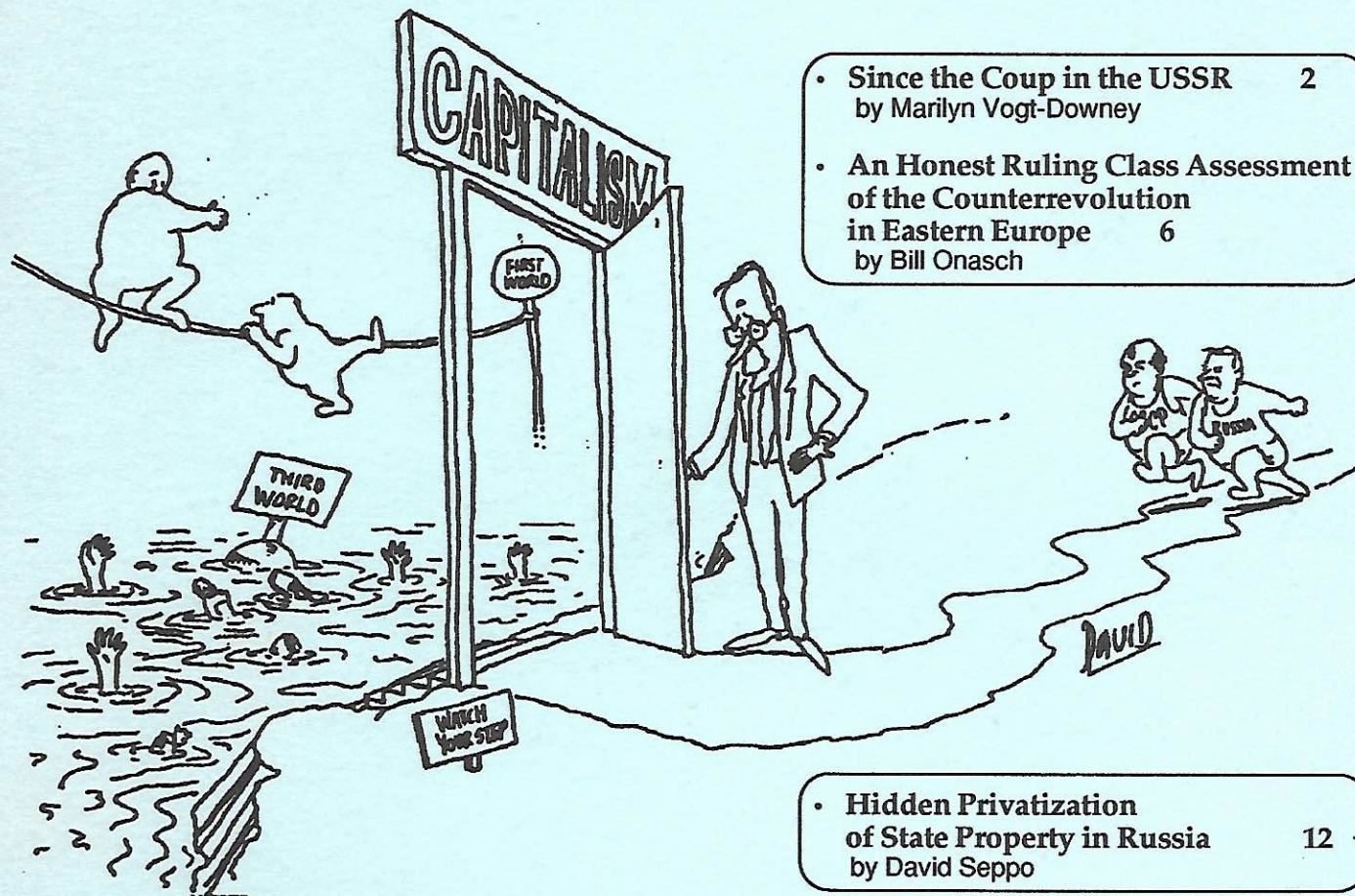


# In Defense of Marxism



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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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# Military Dictatorship Takes Power in Haiti U.S. Government Hypocrisy Is Exposed

by Tom Barrett

On September 30, 1991, the first democratically elected government in Haiti's history was overthrown by a group of army officers. President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a Roman Catholic priest and supporter of "Liberation Theology" (known in Haiti as "Ti-Legliz," the "Little Church"), was deposed by a junta headed by Brigadier General Raoul Cedras. Ironically, Aristide had appointed Cedras to head the Haitian army only two days previously.

At the time of the coup Aristide was riding on a crest of popularity. He had been on a speaking tour of the United States, addressing thousands of enthusiastic Haitians. The changes which he had been promising had given the workers and poor people of Haiti a new hope that finally their lot would be improved. Doubtless Aristide himself had every intention of trying to keep his promises—however, it remains to be seen whether he will ever regain the presidency and be given a chance to do so.

Aristide was able to escape to Venezuela. He has since traveled to New York and Washington to address the United Nations and the Organization of American States, demanding that he be returned to power. So far, the new Haitian government has been universally denied diplomatic recognition, and the U.S. government has been piously demanding the "restoration of democracy" in Haiti. Haitian government assets have been frozen and economic sanctions have been imposed.

The immediate cause of the coup seems to be discontent at Aristide's attempts to curb widespread military corruption. Some senior officers were reported to be living \$200,000/year life-styles on \$12,000/year salaries. They were understandably upset when Aristide's reforms shut off their illegal cash flow. Aristide was also taking steps to curb drug traffic and other smuggling operations, in which the army was complicit.

## The Long-Suffering Haitian People

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. The economic development of two centuries essentially bypassed this island populated predominantly by the descendants of African slaves. In typical third world fashion, a tiny elite of landowners and corrupt officials has enriched itself at the expense of the overwhelming majority of people, and in order to safeguard its privileges it imposed brutal dictatorship on Haiti. For over thirty years until his death in 1971 François "Papa Doc" Duvalier was Haiti's absolute ruler, whose tyranny was carried out by a secret police force known as the "Tontons Macoutes." His son Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc") succeeded him in the office of "President for Life," in the same fashion that a crown prince would accede to a throne.

Baby Doc maintained his father's brutality but had none of his adeptness at manipulating political and social forces in the interests of maintaining his rule. In 1986, in the midst of massive popular protests, reform-minded military officers overthrew him and sent him into exile in France. The new rulers promised to prepare the country for free elections, which were delayed until December 1990. When the people were allowed to express freely their political will they chose Jean-Bertrand Aristide, known affectionately as "Titide," as their president.

## Aristide's Performance in Office

Aristide was sworn in as president on February 7, 1991. During the seven months he held office a number of economic and political reforms were begun which directly benefited the Haitian people at the expense of the rich and corrupt.

The minimum wage was nearly doubled. In addition, tax reform was instituted. Under the leadership of Diogène Désir, taxes were collected from businessmen and military officers who had never had to pay them before. Corporate taxes were increased by 21.4 percent. These same businessmen and senior officers had also been exempt from paying utility bills. That subsidy also ended. The money collected was to begin the process of improving the Haitian people's living conditions.

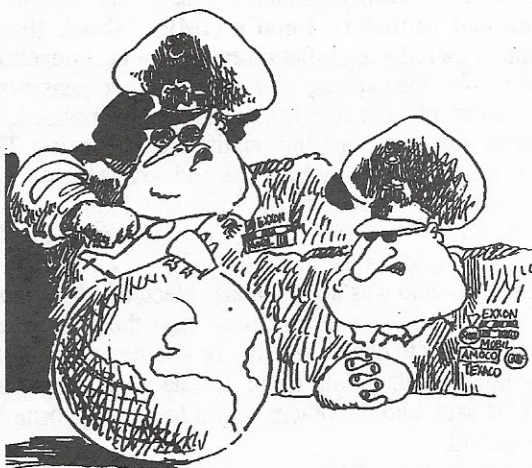
Aristide's government began hiring new people into civil service positions, replacing entrenched and often corrupt bureaucrats who had been in their jobs for years. The new government also attempted to stop private death squad violence, which had been going on in Haiti since the Duvalierist period. For these reforms, Aristide earned the enmity of powerful forces in the business community and the army, but he earned the support of the poor and oppressed masses.

## The Army vs. Democracy

There is no reason to doubt Fr. Aristide's sincerity in his pledge to improve the Haitian workers' and farmers' standard of living and political rights, and the Haitian people's support for him is

*(Continued on page 11)*

"Shall we defend democracy in Haiti?"



"Is there oil there?"

# Since the Coup in the USSR

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

While the attempted coup d'état in the former USSR in August has not apparently contributed directly to disruption of supplies of goods and services to the people, neither has the defeat of the coup brought any appreciable relief from widespread shortages and rising prices. The bad situation continues to worsen.

Nor has the defeat of the coup and the subsequent banning of the Communist Party led to a more democratic governing structure. The Congress of People's Deputies, the national elected parliament, dissolved itself in favor of a State Council composed of Mikhail Gorbachev and the heads of the republics or former republics. Twelve of the 15 republics have now declared independence.

This new governing body, much like the old Politburo, meets in secret. It was granted sweeping powers by the Congress. However, these powers were not aimed at alleviating the economic and social deterioration. Nor has the Gorbachev handpicked Economic Council expressed any interest in emergency measures to protect the declining living standard of the ordinary working person.

The apparatus, however, is looking after its own. The cabinet ministers in the pre-coup government—those who were not arrested for supporting the coup—were sent on paid vacations in September pending a decision on their fate, according to a recent article in the Soviet press. Their vacation ended, but no decision about their fate had been taken. Nevertheless, they continue to collect their pay.

Gorbachev conceded in late September that the central government is in a state of collapse: only the military and some research institutes are still functioning and they lack sufficient revenue.

## Old Bureaucrats Become New Ones

Although Boris Yeltsin and his circle of marketeers were able to resist the coup because of the widespread support for continued democratization, he has usurped more and more power for himself, sending his own appointees to take over governments on the local level.

Power appears to rest with Yeltsin and the "democratic bureaucracies" in the Russian republic (like that of Sobchak, the mayor of former Leningrad, and Popov, mayor of Moscow), the new "business elites" (apparatchiks and black-marketeers who are making money from the economic restructuring), and the former Communist Party apparatuses that continue to exist even if under another name.

Nor are the newly "independent" republics—whether under an old apparatus or a new one—necessarily a manifestation of more democratic forces having come to power. In most cases the old apparatus chiefs have tried to save their posts by switching their stance and becoming illegitimate champions of the legitimate mass sentiment in the republics for national

self-determination. In reality, a genuine movement, which would be strong enough to win an authentic democratic worker-controlled government, is the last thing such bureaucrats want.

One example is Uzbekistan, still under control of the old Stalinist apparatus headed by Islam Karimov. Even since the coup his government has arrested scores of democratic rights advocates. The Tadzhikistan parliament, still controlled by the old CP apparatus, has declared a state of emergency until the end of the year in an effort to repress democratic forces that are mobilizing for an end to power and privileges enjoyed by the CP. The demagogic rulers in newly independent Moldova, formerly the Moldavian republic, have banned from libraries books "which go against the interests and orientation of the Moldovan state." This was reported in *Moskovskiy Novosti* (June 9, 1991), which went on to say that these banned titles include the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and books about them.

The Azerbaijan ex-party chief, Ayaz Mutalibov, who came to power as a result of the invasion of Azerbaijan by Kremlin troops to crush the nationalist movement in January 1990, was elected president in early September because he ran unopposed and repressed the opposition. Although he supported the coup, Mutalibov resigned from the party when he saw that the coup would be defeated and is now an "ally" of the Yeltsin clique.

All four of these republican apparatuses are among those that have declared independence. However, such local rulers clearly rely on the support of the Kremlin. They and other local rulers were quick to grope for some kind of reconstitution of a relationship with the Russian republic. This is true even though such a move right away tends to put them in direct conflict with the mass sentiment from below for genuine independence.

## New Economic Agreement

On September 11, the post-coup regime in Moscow came up with a new plan for an economic union. It is much like the old union but with a stipulation that the signatory republics pledge their commitment to "unconditional private property." It calls for the retention of a common currency, banking, budget, customs, and taxation system in this "common economic zone."<sup>1</sup>

The plan was presented by the Kremlin's new chief economic planner, Grigory A. Yavlinsky, a young economist who is the disciple of Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, a proponent of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) "shock therapy" prescription for reducing inflation and balancing budgets in the third world—at the expense of the workers and peasants, and in the interest of debt repayment to the imperialist lending institutions and upholding imperialist profit margins. This is precisely the type of policy Yavlinsky advances for the USSR. He was one of the authors of the "500-Day Plan," a program for drastic reform measures for the USSR presented last fall to introduce the "rule" of the market.

Yavlinsky—who was not popularly elected to his high post but was appointed by the ruling caste—gave the other republics four to six weeks to decide whether or not they wanted to join the new union. If they didn't join, Russia would go ahead on its own, he said, and the others would lose an opportunity to get foreign aid.

Yeltsin at the same time announced that Russia planned to go ahead and take possession of the coal, oil, and other natural

resources within its territory. This was a rather surprising announcement considering Russia already had possession of at least the coal mines since May, which was one of the reasons many of the Siberian coal miners, fed up with the Kremlin's policies, agreed to stop their strikes and return to work.

By October 11, ten republics had apparently agreed to participate in the new union.

### **Problems with Market Reforms**

It is obvious that Yeltsin and the ruling caste are immobilized because they are actually powerless to implement the radical market reforms they seek. The drastic price increases, bankruptcies, and resulting massive unemployment, the severe cuts in social services are bound to be rejected by the masses, who will in turn reject Yeltsin and the rest of the ruling caste that is trying to impose these policies.

Yeltsin showed how sure he was that he could do nothing, and where his priorities lie, when he took two weeks off in September in the critical period of the coup—to write a book about the coup that can potentially increase the size of his personal foreign currency bank holdings.

Yavlinsky admitted the bureaucracy's dilemma. Now that the parliament had dissolved itself a new one is necessary. The State Council, despite all the power it has, he said, will need the approval of some sort of parliament or it will never have enough authority to sanction the "painful economic measures" it has in mind.

**B**oris Yeltsin showed how much he valued his alliance with Ayaz Muttalibov by "brokering" a so-called peace settlement to the advantage of the Muttalibov and the Baku apparatchik clique—or "the Baku mafia," as it is popularly called—at the expense of democratic aspirations of the Armenian majority in Nagorno-Karabagh.

Nagorno-Karabagh is an Armenian enclave inside the Azerbaijan republic that, since 1988, has mobilized for independence and also to become part of the neighboring Armenian republic. When the local Nagorno-Karabagh government voted recently to secede from Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan government disbanded it.

Despite the repeated vicious attacks by the Azerbaijan and Kremlin-controlled military forces murdering Armenians, and pillaging and depopulating Armenian settlements in Nagorno-Karabagh and Azerbaijan, Yeltsin's "peace plan" reaffirmed that Nagorno-Karabagh shall remain part of Azerbaijan.

The plan calls for "both sides" to disarm by January 1, with a return to the "pre-1988 conditions"—the conditions that led to the rebellion in the first place. In the meantime, Yeltsin imposed censorship over the media in Nagorno-Karabagh until "a democratic government" can be elected there, thus muzzling any forces who might try to tell the truth about the betrayal that had just transpired.

Incidentally, this plan was signed by the heads of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Kazakhstan, but by no one representing the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabagh.

However, it is unlikely any democratically elected parliament would approve of the serious, antihuman measures Yavlinsky and his circle have in mind—or it would not be around for long if it did. So that won't help the bureaucrats much either.

### **Real Aim Is Imperialist Aid**

The new plan for economic union is not aimed at satisfying the needs of the Russian or non-Russian masses. Like all the economic and foreign policies of the Gorbachev era, its goal is to attract imperialist financial and technical help.

On balance, the plan has not worked very well. Or if it is working, it is working for only a very few people, while causing massive hardships for the majority.

The Kremlin has made it clear that it is prepared to do almost anything imperialism wants—including selling out Cuba—for financial aid. Yeltsin even welcomed two prominent anti-Castro Cubans from Miami, Jorge Mas Canosi and Francisco Hernandez, when they visited Moscow.<sup>2</sup>

However, for all the Kremlin's retrograde political and economic concessions to imperialism, the funds imperialism has advanced or promised to advance to the Kremlin have been relatively small.

For example, last December, when fears of famine in the Soviet Union were first raised, 13 foreign governments provided \$4 billion in food and loans.

With winter again approaching and even worse food shortages on the horizon, imperialism and its client states have so far come up with pledges of only a little over twice that much—despite all the international concessions made by Moscow and the banning of the Communist Party. Approximately \$9.4 billion has been advanced or pledged, mostly as guaranteed loans for the emergency purchase of food, medical supplies, and other humanitarian needs. Of this, \$2.5 billion is from the Saudi Arabian monarchy. It is a puny token of gratitude for the Kremlin's conciliatory role toward the United States government's devastation of Iraq. In addition to the financial aid, the monarchy promises to send Saudi and Egyptian religious scholars to the impoverished and repressed Muslim regions of Central Asia to rebuild mosques and "calm people down." The Saudi dynasty also plans to set up Saudi-Egyptian banks.<sup>3</sup>

All this falls far short of the \$7 billion in free food Gorbachev had asked for. The Kremlin needs billions and billions in aid—Yavlinsky has suggested \$30 billion a year for five years—and in imperialist investments if it is to ride out of the current crisis and proceed with its reforms. However, the Group of Seven imperialist powers has made it clear that although the Kremlin rulers have "abandoned their pride and begun begging for economic aid," as *New York Times* correspondent Craig Whitney aptly described their behavior, their concessions are not enough. At the London meeting in July, the imperialist powers made it clear that "until leaders in Moscow showed that they were willing to undo the Bolshevik revolution and institute a market economy," significant aid would not be forthcoming.<sup>4</sup> They are not likely to shift their position to any great extent.

Ukrainian president and ex-party chief Ivan Kravchuk, in the United States for a six-day tour, unconsciously explained why imperialist demands are impossible to meet. He rejected the repeated urgings from his audience of U.S. economists that he abandon price controls in Ukraine and plunge into the "free market." The fear he expressed—the specter haunting the

bureaucratic tops—can be summed up in two words: “social explosion.”

“There would be a social explosion,” he said.

That is the problem.

Despite the verbiage and the massive economic dislocation that has occurred as a result of the Kremlin’s conscious plans, privatization of industry and housing has not really begun in the former Soviet Union, and only .67 percent of the land has been privatized. To be sure, local governments are trying to push through privatization measures. For example, in Moscow in October privatization of municipal housing is supposed to go “full speed ahead.” Agents and middlemen are expected to appear to help proud prospective owners formalize the deal (and make a tidy profit in the process).<sup>5</sup> However, such measures cannot really be expected to amount to much. Many people, for example, would not want to buy their dreary and rundown apartments; they want instead a better space with more room. Besides, the privatization of municipal housing is far from a massive privatization of basic industry and transport.

There are not only obvious objective factors that discourage foreign capitalist investors—the nonconvertible ruble, the sorry state of the infrastructure, the pervasive shortages—but also the repeated mobilizations of the masses of workers in strike movements and movements for national self-determination. These do not constitute a healthy investment environment for capital either.

Again the specter of “social explosions” haunts the Kremlin and stymies its plans.

### **Crisis In Agriculture**

The lack of food is one immediate probable cause for popular concern. Although Kremlin spokesmen claim that famine is not expected this year, it is clear that the population’s food supply will be severely limited. Grain production is expected to be about 25 percent less than last year. By mid-August, government purchases were 62 percent of what they had been at the same time last year. This is partially due to poor weather. It is also partly because fewer students and soldiers would participate in the harvesting, and so the crops rotted. It is also partly due to inadequate transport facilities causing crops to rot after being harvested, en route to their destination.

However, there is also another likely reason. There is speculation that farmers may not be telling the truth about their production so as to hoard their yields and divert them to more profitable private channels. There may be no real shortages at all!

Production has apparently fallen off not only in agriculture but in almost all other spheres as well. This has led Swedish economist Anders Aslund of the Stockholm Institute of Soviet and East European Economies to predict that by December overall production may be 50 percent of what it was last year. Yavlinsky states that production in the Russian republic is down 17 percent; if it falls to 20 percent, he foresees economic paralysis.<sup>6</sup>

In Moscow and other cities, some state stores have simply closed because there is nothing to sell. Stores with food have queues snaking into the streets. The fact is that most people can only afford to shop in the state stores. There are often plentiful supplies of food products in the “cooperative” or private stores, but, of course, at much higher prices.

### **Higher Prices**

In 1988, the minimum subsistence income was estimated to be between 78 and 105 rubles per month.<sup>7</sup> Roughly 90 million people, or 32 percent of the population, lived at that level or below. However, the economic reforms have caused higher prices. To compensate for the increases of April 1, pensions were raised by 50 rubles and wages by 60 rubles per month. Pensions are now 150 rubles per month in the Russian republic and the minimum wage was raised from 78 rubles in 1988 to 180 in October 1991. *Moskovskiye Novosti*, however, reported in July that a person needed to spend 209 rubles per month “in order not to go hungry.” The average pay in Moscow in July was calculated to be 410 rubles per month—which thus become the ceiling of unemployment benefits a worker can receive.

However, these are the official, government figures. The populace has another, more accurate conception of the situation. *Argumenti i Fakti*, on September 9, reported the results of a survey on cost of living that showed 34 percent of those polled felt that in order to live “a normal life” a person needed to earn 750-1,000 rubles per month. Sixteen percent felt a person needed 1,500-2,000 and only 10 percent felt that a person could live a normal life on less than 500 rubles per month.

A brief report in the Soviet press speaks louder than all the official figures. In the city of Uporovo in the oil- and gas-producing regions of Central Siberia, authorities reported that 1,126 donors had recently given 370 liters of blood in return for meal coupons, a bottle of vodka, and a pack of cigarettes.<sup>8</sup>

The cost of living is rapidly increasing. This is not only because workers are forced to purchase basic food items at expensive private markets because the state stores are empty. It is also because the farmers, who some speculate may be hoarding produce, are often forced to sell their produce secretly to the private or black markets in order to make a profit themselves and abide by the new government strictures to be profitable or go under. Thus, farmers are forced to deprive the consumers of affordable basic food items if they are to survive themselves—a predictable “dog-eat-dog” consequence of relying on “market mechanisms.”

This is all a premeditated, calculated result of the Kremlin’s economic perestroika or restructuring: it is supposed to happen this way. That is why none of the constantly reorganized political bodies, since the time that Gorbachev began his reforms, has moved to do anything to stop it. It is precisely such anarchy in production and distribution—controlled only by the “invisible hand” of the market—that the new policies are trying to extend.

An additional problem is the inflation: that there is more money available than there are goods to buy.

The government is printing money day and night.

Last January there were approximately 136 billion rubles in circulation. At that time, then prime minister Pavlov (now in prison for his participation in the August coup attempt when he should be in prison for his economic policies as prime minister) overnight eliminated 50- and 100-ruble notes from circulation in order to get rid of a “ruble overhang”—extra rubles that consumers had and were not spending because there was nothing to buy. This “ruble overhang,” or extra money in people’s pockets or bank accounts, was considered “inflationary” by Kremlin planners, like Pavlov and Yavlinsky, who had no intention of making sure that more goods were available for

consumers to buy. However, as prices rose, the dreaded "social explosion" reared its ugly head in the form of strikes that won wage increases. To pay these higher wages, the bureaucracy simply printed more money.

As Kremlin economist Leonid Abalkin explained: "Everyone from miners to teachers wants raises and bonuses. If we don't do it [print rubles and give pay increases] there will be a social explosion. We are printing money on three shifts, on weekends, and still don't have time to finish the work. We are even short of the special paper needed for printing money."<sup>9</sup>

By the end of the year, the amount of money in circulation is expected to be 240 billion rubles and the "overhang" will be 186 billion! If this turns out to be true, it will mean that more than 70 percent of the rubles in circulation will be unspent because the prevailing shortages mean that there is nothing to spend them on. And all of this can be traced to the ruling bureaucracy's economic restructuring, which is responsible for both the high prices and the shortages.

### **Scarce Gold Reserves**

Can the Soviet Union buy necessary food and other items abroad to make up for the shortages? No, it can't.

The U.S. government forced the KGB to find out and report what the Kremlin would not tell the Soviet people: that the USSR's gold reserve is only 240 metric tons, worth approximately \$3 billion—a paltry sum considering the vast Soviet economy and its potential wealth, including gold mines.

In search of any source of financial relief, the Kremlin is begging to become a full member of the IMF but has been denied this dubious privilege which would allow it to sink further into debt. Instead, the IMF has allowed it to become an associate member, which means this international body will grace the USSR with an office and visiting IMF experts, conduct regular assessments of its economic policies, and accept Soviet bankers for training courses in Washington on such subjects as how to regulate the money supply.

Meanwhile, unemployment grows in the former USSR. From July 1 when unemployment benefits became available, around 57,000 workers were unemployed in Moscow alone.<sup>10</sup> Since the coup, some 150,000 or so functionaries who had worked in CP offices or government institutions have lost their posts, according to *International Viewpoint* correspondent Poul-Funder Larsen in Moscow after the coup.

Soviet government propaganda agencies, like those here, maintain that there are thousands of positions available for those "who really want to work," but this seems unlikely. Work Exchanges—a combination of an employment agency and a day-labor hiring hall—are being set up. But the government is making no effort to insure that all those who need work will get it by financing needed production projects. Quite the contrary: It has cut such subsidies.

If 90 million were living at or under the poverty level in 1988—before the Kremlin's conscious economic restructuring began to have an impact with rising prices and the massive economic dislocation, not to mention the creation of at least 500,000 refugees in the Caucasus and the 700,000 soldiers to be demobilized with the promised troop cuts—how many more people must be in dire trouble now?

### **Social Expectations**

Yet imperialism, in the main, will not help bail out the Kremlin's bureaucratic caste. It will not help save a workers' state—even a profoundly degenerated one—where the "sanctity of private property" is not yet reestablished and social egalitarianism, humanitarianism, and justice, rather than individual greed, are still highly regarded by most. This is a lasting legacy of the October 1917 revolution.

Fiat S.p.A. is considering investing in the Volga Automotive Plant Association. Fiat wants to put in \$1 billion, but the local Volga chiefs want \$4 billion. Kremlin economist and new stockholder Leonid Abalkin, who is making money off his own shares in the Kamaz truck factory in Chelyabinsk, explained the discrepancy.

Fiat does not understand, he said, that their investment must be enough to provide for the housing, hospitals, and schools for Volga's 120,000 workers. These "social functions" must be maintained, he insisted. "This is a permanent peculiarity of Soviet enterprises," he went on.

It is these types of "peculiarities" that imperialism wants no part of.

What options does the ruling caste have from here on out if the imperialists are not prepared to fundamentally assist them? If the IMF and the Group of Seven and the major capitalist powers are unwilling—or even unable—to provide vast amounts of funds in aid, loans, or credit under the present circumstances, the bureaucrats can always use the last resort of the desperate in a class society: "sell their bodies," or offer the Soviet workers' factories and resources to imperialism as collateral. In this case, the militancy and egalitarian assumptions of the workers will no longer be only the bureaucracy's problem.

In the meantime, an alternative road out of the crisis is available by turning not to the power of capital but to the power of the workers. The workers, in their strike committees and new political organizations, need to organize a movement—and "social explosion"—to force the ruling caste, instead of turning over economic statistics to the IMF, to turn over all the economic statistics to the working people who are bearing the brunt of the Kremlin's cynical and self-serving policies. Armed with the historic and current data on every phase of the economy, not only internally but also with regard to the former republics and the Kremlin's international deals, the workers and their allies can begin to unravel this horrific mess that bureaucratic rule has created.

There is no other way to avoid catastrophe. □

October 11, 1991

### **Notes**

1. *New York Times*, September 12.
2. *Moscow News* No. 38, September 22, 1991.
3. *New York Times*, October 9, 1991.
4. *New York Times*, September 12, 1991.
5. *Moscow News*, No. 38, September 22, 1991.
6. *New York Times*, September 30 and October 10, 1991.
7. *Moscow News*, No. 29.
8. *Moscow News*, April 21, 1991.
9. *New York Times*, September 30, 1991.
10. *Solidarnost*, Moscow, No. 9.

# An Honest Ruling Class Assessment of the Counterrevolution in Eastern Europe

by Bill Onasch

The mainstream mass media has been full of upbeat stories and feature vignettes about how the peoples of Eastern Europe, and now also of the Soviet Union, are happily burying their Communist past and eagerly building a capitalist future. But among the publications that help shape the opinions and decisions of the ruling class the outlook is less sanguine.

*The Economist*, a British weekly widely read and respected among world capitalism's movers and shakers, recently published a 15-page survey, "Business in Eastern Europe,"<sup>1</sup> which gives a useful, sober assessment of the progress of capitalist restoration in five countries—Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The results so far are bleak and the future can at best be described, from the restorationists' point of view, as uncertain.

First, we should note that while *The Economist* is more forthright than most bourgeois sources, even they cannot be completely candid in their essay. For reasons of diplomacy they must ignore the real attitudes of the imperialist powers toward the region. The Western capitalists are not really very concerned about seeing efficiency developed in the transition to capitalism in these countries. They are certainly not interested in seeing new successful competitors entering a world market already plagued by overcapacity and overproduction. The European Community has in fact established restrictions to protect themselves from East European imports, particularly in agriculture. Their interest in Eastern Europe is primarily as a market for Western-made consumer goods, and, possibly to a limited extent, as a reserve source of cheap labor.

Still, the imperialists are genuinely and deeply interested in seeing these countries brought back into the capitalist fold in an orderly fashion, as soon as practicable. They believe they should be in a position to call the shots in creating new capitalist societies. They are hopeful that Eastern Europe will be a dress rehearsal for an even bigger operation in the Soviet Union and, perhaps someday, China as well.

But the usual supreme self-confidence exuded by *The Economist* is missing from this survey. They are forced to admit that the dismantling of what they call "socialist states"—what revolutionary Marxists have described as *deformed workers' states*—is uncharted territory, without useful historical precedent.

In so doing they have in fact acknowledged, without explicitly admitting it, that the Eastern European countries are qualitatively different from say the "socialist" states of Allende's Chile, or the Labor Party's Britain, which were disassembled with relative ease by Pinochet and Thatcher.

Pinochet carried out the biggest privatization campaign in history to date—470 enterprises, producing nearly a quarter of Chile's value-added.<sup>2</sup> But, since the Allende government had not moved to break the capitalist class, and had failed to institute a planned economy, in most cases denationalized firms were simply returned to their former owners.

Thatcher's much-heralded privatization campaign involved only 20 firms. To be sure, these 20 included some important concerns in steel, auto, oil, telecommunications, and public utilities. Their former owners had been handsomely compensated

at the time of nationalization by the Labor Party "socialists" and no longer had any claims to these companies. But Britain has a big capitalist class, and some of the world's largest banks and stock markets. There was little difficulty in finding buyers with sufficient capital.

Though ruling class pundits, such as the staff of *The Economist*, continue to rail against the "socialism" of the social democrats, they know such state intervention is not incompatible with capitalism, is actually sometimes beneficial to the capitalist class as a whole, and is usually easily reversed. It is certainly *not* socialism.

But Eastern Europe is a different kettle of fish, not so digestible and full of bones to stick in the craw of the unwary. Let's consider just a few of the features:

- None of these countries has an indigenous capitalist class. This class was destroyed nearly a half-century ago.
- Nor are there any readily available masses of capital. There are only tiny embryos of commercial banks and stock exchanges, far from securing their viability. In Poland it is estimated that total personal savings—the primary domestic source for private capital—equals only 10-15 percent of the book value of nationalized property.
- Social democratic state interventions take place in the context of a capitalist marketplace, serving the market, aiming to make the capitalist economy as a whole operate better. The socialized property in Eastern Europe was utilized in a highly integrated planned economy, marked by rigid product lines, long-term production goals, stable customers, and dependable suppliers. Prices, rents, wages, and taxes, were more or less fixed. The state monopoly of foreign trade protected socialized industries from foreign competition. Value-added was almost totally reinvested into the planned economy—though not always, or even normally, into the sector that created it. Once the equilibrium of such a planned economy is disrupted, all of its component parts—including the most technically efficient—are put at risk.
- Though these countries exhibited a horrible caricature of the socialist model, the deformed workers' states did provide some genuine and important social benefits for the working class. Unemployment was virtually unknown until two to three years ago. While housing conditions were often deplorable, rents were nominal. So were prices for basic foods and public transit. Medical and dental care and education were free. Vacations were generous and the pace of work far less demanding than in Western Europe. This has created far greater social expectations on the part of East European workers than those of their counterparts in either Western Europe, or in the third world.

Establishing capitalism without capitalists; a market economy with no historic market; inevitable clashes with workers over diminishing social benefits, drastic price increases, and deteriorat-



ing working conditions—these are some of the challenges facing the East European governments and their Western economic advisers.

What have the new procapitalist regimes of Eastern Europe managed to do so far? Approaches have varied, of course, from country to country but there are some common results:

- All have made it a priority to break with COMECON—the Stalinist equivalent of the Common Market—and to reorient their trade westward. The short-term results of this policy have not been rewarding. The loss of COMECON customers and suppliers has not yet been made up by increased trade with the West. And where these countries formerly obtained cheap energy from the Soviet Union they must now pay Moscow world market prices for their oil and natural gas.
- The collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) <sup>3</sup> of the five countries plummeted 8 percent last year and is expected to drop another 8 percent this year. Industrial production was hit even harder—declines of 17 percent in 1990, 11 percent predicted for 1991. These are depression-type figures.
- Unemployment—nonexistent three years ago—has hit all the countries. The rate in Poland is over 7 percent. This does not include hundreds of thousands of workers put on short hours.
- Inflation—statistically insignificant, except for Romania, three years ago—is now a major problem in all the countries. Poland had an inflation rate of 251 percent in 1989, 684 percent in 1990, and is running 80 percent currently. Bulgaria is experiencing 200 percent inflation, Romania 130 percent.
- With social benefits being slashed, and prices soaring, wages in Eastern Europe remain ridiculously low. Hourly pay in Polish manufacturing is 6 percent of the U.S. average and only half the rate paid in Mexico! Wages are estimated to comprise only 20 percent of production costs in Polish industry.

Of course the defenders of capitalism argue that such disruptions are inevitable in the early days of transition, that these countries are still paying a price for decades of Stalinist “command economy.” The drive to restore capitalism is, after all, only in its third year in Poland and Hungary, while the others are even further behind. These things take time.

How much time? There appears to be no consensus.

Poland has been in the vanguard of the restorationist drive, beginning in the summer of 1989. The Polish government retained the services of one of the top bourgeois economists, Harvard professor Jeffrey Sachs, to come up with a game plan. Sachs devised what was called the “Big Bang” strategy for introducing capitalism. This is what he was saying at the beginning of last year:

The first, basic steps to the transformation of Eastern Europe’s centrally planned economies are two. One, the Eastern countries must reject any lingering ideas about a “third way,” such as a chimerical “market socialism” based on a public ownership or worker self-management, and go straight for a Western-style market economy. Two, Western Europe, for its part, must be ready and eager to work with them, providing debt relief and finance for restructuring, to bring their reformed economies in as part of a unified European market. . . .

Poland’s goal is to establish the economic, legal and institutional basis for a private-sector market economy in just one year. . . . “You don’t try to cross a chasm in two jumps.”

A necessary prerequisite to privatization, according to this learned professor’s plan, is to close “inefficient” state enterprises. “Unemployment rates even above the natural[!] rate (which might be 5% or so) should be expected and tolerated for a few years. . . .”<sup>4</sup>

But, nearly two years after the Big Bang, Poland has still failed to complete even all necessary legal and institutional, much less the economic, steps toward a private market. While Western Europe canceled about half of Poland’s 33-billion-dollar government-to-government debts they have done little else to assist Warsaw’s shaky finances. The European Community maintains tight trade restrictions keeping out Eastern European steel, textile, and food products.

A May 1991 study by the Institute for International Economics estimated that for Eastern Europe to reach Western living standards by the end of the century, an annual 420 billion dollars of *new investment* would be required—that is the equivalent of two-thirds of their current *total output*. Clearly this investment goal could not be reached without massive injections from the outside. But the most optimistic projections (more like wishful thinking) of foreign assistance expect only 7 billion dollars a year in direct investment by 1995 and perhaps 21 billion dollars in loans and aid from both commercial and agency sources.

Western investors perusing Poland so far, ignoring Professor Sachs’s pleas, have largely been bargain hunting, looking to pick up assets at fire-sale prices. Sometimes they offer only “debt-swaps” for payment—simply forgiving old debts rather than injecting any new cash into the economy.

The only part of Professor Sachs’s plan that has met expectations so far is the creation of substantial, long-term unemployment. The Big Bang approach has created greater disruptions, with few perceptible gains, than the more moderate approaches taken in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria.

In sharp contrast to the Big Bang strategy, the World Bank has laid out a plodding, comprehensive approach to establishing stable capitalist economies in Eastern Europe that they estimate will take a minimum of ten years to complete. They also calculate that it will take at least three years for the per capita GDP of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia just to get back to 1989 levels; Romania and Bulgaria are not expected to return to their 1989 level before the end of the ’90s. And, of course, even these modest projections are based on the assumption of a healthy international economic situation.

*The Economist* notes that the restorers of capitalism are faced with a series of “chicken-and-egg dilemmas” in trying to prioritize their program: Should subsidies be abolished and market prices established before or after privatization of state enterprises? Should trade barriers be lowered before or after restructuring of industry ownership? Should privatization be carried through rapidly even if this means literally giving the enterprises away? Should reform of the financial system precede, accompany, or follow privatization of industry?

Enormous problems confront the restorers no matter which set of priorities they adopt. There is no consensus among bourgeois economists, West or East, on how to proceed. All the East European governments, including Poland, appear to be pragmatically groping and stumbling from one obstacle to another.

Initially all the East European countries began with time-honored fiscal policies recommended by the International Monetary Fund—cutting subsidies, freeing prices, and then trying to restrict money supply (wage freezes, tight credit, etc.) to check the inevitable runaway inflation. These early steps were taken not so much out of conviction that they should be the top economic priority but rather because they were familiar policies, widely applied in so-called “developing countries.”

Most experts view privatization as the single biggest challenge and have come to favor this process not only beginning, but being

completed, sooner rather than later. Here there are no familiar helpful models.

Many in Eastern Europe were undoubtedly disoriented in the beginning by the illusion that sale of state enterprises—their only real assets—would be profitable. Their mouths watered when they read of the windfalls reaped by the British exchequer through Thatcher's sale of nationalized industry and local housing. They saw similar results in New Zealand with the privatization program of "Rogernomics."

The reality is that privatization, even in the advanced countries, meant a long-term social loss—the real windfall was picked up by the capitalist investors who got some bargains. The sales of most state companies in Britain and New Zealand brought the treasury less than predicted.

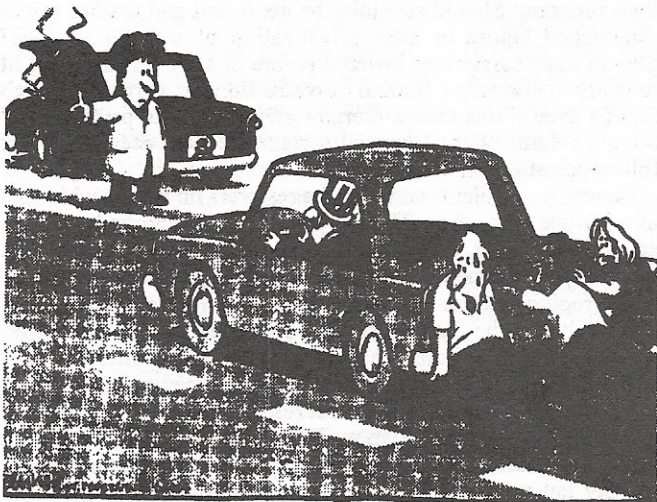
And attempts to emulate British-style privatization in "developing" capitalist countries have not worked as well as even the less than perfect model. In Brazil, the right-wing Collor government has failed to sell a single state firm eighteen months after the announcement of an ambitious privatization plan.

Most East European officials have now resigned themselves to the fact that they will not get even the book value, in most cases, for state enterprises. The problem now is not so much to get the best price but how to get these firms into private hands at any cost.

A brutal fact that they cannot acknowledge is that most state enterprises cannot survive, privatized or not, in a genuine capitalist, free-market economy. Antiquated equipment, lack of managerial expertise, and, above all, low labor productivity, will condemn most firms to an early death if they are forced to compete with capitalist enterprises in the West. The amount of capital investment required, along with the need to discipline the workforce, in the context of great economic and political instability, do not make these firms an attractive investment.

Peter Rona, CEO of the First Hungary Fund, which is seeking investment opportunities in Hungary, put it not so badly: "The whole idea of privatizing socialist companies is not a very good one. Socialist companies were formed to fill production targets and *not* to make efficient use of resources. It's in their genes, so to speak, and it's hard to get out."<sup>5</sup>

But state enterprises completely dominate, producing 82 percent of national value-added in Poland in 1989, 97 percent in Czechoslovakia. Clearly these industries cannot be allowed to simply collapse. A combination of protectionist trade policies, and subsidies, will likely be continued in all these countries in the short term while they search for some magic solution to the privatization challenge.



There are, of course, some plums among the state firms that have been eagerly grabbed up by foreign capital. Perhaps the best known example was Volkswagen's 6.8-billion-dollar purchase of part of the legendary Czech Skoda Works. U.S. General Electric bought the Hungarian electrical company Tungsram. GE brought in a U.S. citizen, who had fled from Hungary in 1956, to manage the operation, believing, no doubt, that a Hungarian manager would have an easier job in carrying out the reorganization GE had in mind. This reorganization has already eliminated 4,000 out of 18,000 jobs with plans to fire 4,000 more.

There are only perhaps a few dozen such plums in all of Eastern Europe that will attract major foreign investors such as Volkswagen or GE. Some smaller players, venture capitalists, may be lured into launching start-up companies.

*The Economist* reports on the recent launching of such an operation in the small Polish town of Mlawa—a factory, employing about 250, to assemble Japanese-made television sets and VCRs. The plant was built from scratch by a small-time U.S. company, Curtis International. The grand opening of the plant was a big deal, attended by an unlikely assortment of dignitaries ranging from the pro-Solidarity priest, Father Henryk Jankowski, to the old Stalinist deputy speaker of parliament, Tadeusz Fiszbach. *The Economist* expressed shock at the reception given to the head of the company, Zbigniew Niemczycki, a Polish immigrant, by reporters at a nationally televised, hour-long press conference. The press repeatedly questioned the American benefactor about how he would treat his workers and demanded to know whether a trade union would be allowed. "This was a strange topic to pursue in an area with 40 percent unemployment," sniffed *The Economist*. They went on to report one further irony in this curious economic anecdote: Mr. Niemczycki was urgently imploring the Polish government to raise duties on imported television sets to allow his operation to succeed. "Incredibly, this avatar of Poland's move to a free-market economy was already demanding government help against competitors," they lamented.

Neither a few mega-deals like the purchase of Skoda, nor cockroach ventures like Curtis International, will transform the East European economies. There is no way around the challenge of privatization of state firms.

Some of the old Stalinist bureaucrats have made their contribution—what has become known as "spontaneous privatizations." The "spontaneous privatization" is a scam whereby plant managers sell their operation to themselves through a dummy corporation. Sometimes they stay on to manage their new "private" holding, sometimes it is sold to some third party.

This practice, fairly widespread in Poland and Hungary especially, is clearly little more than theft of state property. But, in most cases, governments have looked the other way, relieved to know that there is one less state firm to worry about.

But even "spontaneous privatizations" won't make much of a dent. They will be limited to those enterprises where someone believes a short-term profit can be turned. Not many fit that category.

Marxists have often been wrongly accused of wanting to divide up society's wealth equally among the population. Ironically, a variant of such an impractical scheme is what is being developed by East European governments to rid themselves of state property. There are two major approaches.

Poland plans to distribute free shares in investment funds to every adult citizen. These funds will become the owners of hundreds of state firms. Shares in the funds eventually will be traded, just like stock, but not before the summer of 1993. While the funds will be formally headed by Polish officials, the government hopes to have Western experts actually managing the funds. The minister of privatization has described the scheme as "privatizing the privatization." There are many important details

to be worked out before this fantastic stratagem can be implemented.

Czechoslovakia is working on a slightly different variant. Vouchers, good for bidding in future auctions of shares in state firms, will be sold for the equivalent of about a week's pay. The government expects about two million people (out of a population of 15 million) to buy these vouchers. But there are no rules established yet for the trading of shares and there is still no stock market in Czechoslovakia.

These giveaway schemes may solve the formal problem of transferring ownership from the state to private hands. But neither variant injects any new capital into these enterprises, or makes any other changes at all, for that matter. The fundamental problems facing the economies of Eastern Europe will remain unaddressed even with millions of people clutching pieces of paper proclaiming them to be capitalists.

Is this what the workers of Eastern Europe fought for, overthrowing the Stalinist bureaucracy: to become stockholders in bankrupt firms?

The Stalinist bureaucracy described their dictatorial rule of incompetence and corruption as "socialism," and *The Economist* and other apologists for capitalism endorsed this false claim. There is no doubt that the East European workers want no part of such "socialism." They were told by the present rulers that a "free market" would bring them freedom and consumer goods. That they supported.

But the consumer goods have been slow in coming and are often priced out of reach when they arrive. Their freedom at times seems shaky as well. The old social benefits have been eroded. Job security is gone. Prices even for the essentials are out of control. Those still lucky enough to work are subjected to ruthless speedup campaigns regardless of whether they are employed in the state or private sectors.

Growing disillusionment with the promised second-coming of capitalism has led to more than embarrassing questions at press conferences. Strikes are rampant in Poland. Solidarity has gone through a series of splits. As this is written big struggles are raging in Romania, the government toppled by mass actions led by miners fed up with both austerity and worthless promises. The "honeymoon" period, with workers patiently making short-term sacrifices in the expectation of long-run benefits, will not last a decade. It is rapidly drawing to a close now.

*The Economist* recognizes that all is not well, or even assured, in the drive to restore capitalism.

Understandably daunted, East European governments have hesitated. While paying lip service to rapid privatization, many officials have quietly begun to advocate a more gradualist approach. . . . [They] naturally worry about how much more upheaval an already moody and dispirited populace can tolerate.

Thousands of [state] firms are now drifting in the limbo between a command economy without commands and a market economy still lacking the spur of private ownership. This makes rapid privatization more, not less, urgent. Without it the danger is not a return to communism, but economic stagnation and political instability as various interest groups compete for state-controlled resources.

*The Economist* is undoubtedly correct to dismiss a return to "communism"—that is Stalinism. The old bureaucracies and Stalinist parties not only lack credibility, they are hardly any longer a cohesive force.

No one will quarrel with the warning of economic stagnation. The stagnation is already manifest.

But when *The Economist* talks about the competition of "interest groups," this is an oblique reference to the class struggle, which lives on even in the new capitalists' paradise. And "political instability" hints at a horror too bone-chilling to utter in public—new workers' revolutions.

Unlike featherweight bourgeois politicians, who only mouth slogans others have written for them, bourgeois theoreticians, like those producing *The Economist*, know the real score in Eastern Europe. They know there was a crisis of Stalinism, not socialism. They know that the class struggle lives everywhere to haunt them. They know that socialism is far from dead and remains an option in Eastern Europe, as everywhere else. And they know better than anyone about the contradictions of capitalism that are being exposed once again in the East European pressure cooker.

The capitalist counterrevolution in Eastern Europe has begun and has made serious inroads. But it is far from being completed. We don't know if the workers will succeed in stopping it. But we know there will be big workers' struggles to try to stop it.

The job of revolutionary Marxists in this country is to try to understand the process that is unfolding, not only to draw the proper theoretical lessons, but to enable us to intelligently and effectively organize solidarity with the workers of Eastern Europe. □

September 29, 1991

## Notes

1. *The Economist*, September 21, 1991.
2. Value-added, as defined by capitalist economists, is the value of a firm's output minus the value of what it has purchased from other sources.
3. GDP is the value of all goods and services produced in a country. In the United States (and also Germany and Japan) Gross National Product is the more familiar measure. GNP includes not only the GDP but also receipts from operations in other countries.
4. *The Economist*, January 13, 1990.
5. *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1991.

# An Open Letter to the Communist Party USA

From the Fourth Internationalist Tendency.  
A Trotskyist Group in Support of the Fourth International

Communist parties throughout the world have been undergoing tremendous changes. Some have dissolved. Others have changed not only their names but their fundamental programs. The Communist Party USA also stands at a historic crossroads.

For more than six decades, the CPUSA and Trotskyists in this country have been deeply divided over the question of the Soviet Union. We Trotskyists have regarded the USSR as a bureaucratically degenerated workers' state ruled by a corrupt and despised clique. We trace this state of affairs back to the late 1920s, when Joseph Stalin consolidated his power and destroyed Soviet democracy. Thousands of Communist militants were killed, and the Bolshevik party, which had led the Russian workers in the first successful socialist revolution, was transformed into a party with a rigidly centralist structure, headed by a clique enjoying a privileged existence and concerned only with its own welfare and survival.

After Stalin's death, the CPSU instituted certain reforms. But none of these went to the root of the problem. The only real answer to the crisis that had developed was the complete removal of the bureaucracy from power and its replacement with genuine workers' democracy. This would have left nationalized forms of property intact, but with an economy democratically administered by the working people.

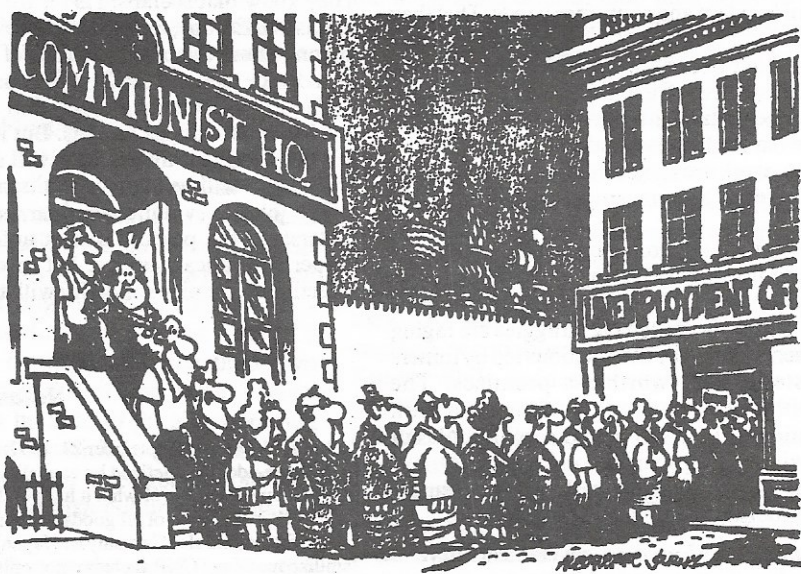
Instead, the Soviet bureaucracy continued to hold sway, albeit without the degree of terrible violence associated with Stalin's rule. The policy of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism, initiated by Stalin, remained. This policy has meant the sacrifice of national liberation and revo-

lutionary movements by the Soviet bureaucracy in the hope of making better deals with the imperialist powers. The lowest point yet was reached when Gorbachev gave Bush his total support in the genocidal war against Iraq, which resulted in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands. Now the Soviet leadership is moving to cut aid to revolutionary Cuba or eliminate it

It was disappointing to see the National Board of the CPUSA take a position initially "to neither condemn nor condone" the coup. While we Trotskyists hold no brief for Gorbachev—nor for that matter with any of the Soviet bureaucracy—we condemn palace revolutions, especially when carried out by people who call for a complete ban on strikes and demonstrations.

We look forward to the day when the Soviet masses themselves will overthrow the rule of the oppressive bureaucracy and replace it with a genuine workers' government.

We know that members of the CPUSA are today thoughtfully reflecting on the momentous events taking place in the Soviet Union and what led up to them. Your party for decades supported Stalin's rule, which you later concluded



THE NEW PARTY LINE

altogether. Yet Gorbachev continues to receive lavish praise in articles appearing in the *People's Weekly World*.

Meanwhile, the Soviet economy has become a basket case. It could never have been otherwise. The exclusion of virtually the entire Soviet people from any kind of meaningful decision-making role has left a tiny handful of corrupt bureaucrats in power to determine the economy's course. And they have driven it into the ground.

Recent concessions toward greater freedom of expression—glasnost—have begun to enable the Soviet masses to have a voice in deciding their own destiny. Those who tried to engineer the August coup obviously underestimated the change that has taken place in this regard.

was a serious mistake. But the party then continued to back the post-Stalin Soviet bureaucracy almost to the present time. The alienation of that bureaucracy from the Soviet people is now clearly evident, and the virtual overnight dissolution of the CPSU proves the party also had no real support among the Soviet masses.

Today the question is sharply posed as to whether the Soviet Union will survive as a workers' state against all attempts, internal and external, to effect a capitalist restoration. We believe that socialists in the United States have a critical role to play in responding to this question. *Now more than ever we need to demonstrate solidarity in support of the rights of Soviet workers, who will inevitably resist the drive to*

reintroduce capitalism in their country. They will fight to maintain their jobs and their social gains, all of which will be under sharp attack by the turn to the "free market," which will mean the freeing of prices, privatization, and austerity.

In the past, bitter differences between the CP and Trotskyists over the Soviet Union have been a significant barrier to forging united fronts, even around issues where we agreed. Part of the problem has been the widespread belief in your ranks that Trotskyists are, at best, ultraleft and sectarian, and, at worst, fascist agents. We hope that in light of events you will rethink such attitudes.

After all, Trotskyists have been proven correct in their analysis of the Soviet state and the Soviet bureaucracy. But this flows from the analysis developed over a half century ago by Leon Trotsky, particularly in his book, *The Revolution Betrayed*. As you know, Trotsky—co-leader with Lenin

of the Russian Revolution—was assassinated by Stalin's agent. But Trotsky today is in the process of being rehabilitated by democratic workers' organizations in the Soviet Union, and his writings are being widely distributed and read there.

It is also important to emphasize that Trotskyists, like members of the Communist Party, have been victims of repressive policies of the U.S. government. In fact, the first group jailed under the Smith Act were leaders of the Socialist Workers Party, which was founded by Trotskyists.

We believe that this is a time for dialogue between the CPUSA and Trotskyists. While we have had significant differences going beyond the question of the Soviet Union—we, for example, as a matter of principle, do not support Democratic Party candidates, whereas the CPUSA usually does—we also have a body of agreement which should permit us to work together.

That is particularly the case in regard to the defense of the rights of Soviet workers in the new period now opening up. But it also applies to solidarity with Cuba, advocacy of independent labor political action in the United States, participation in antiracist and anti-apartheid struggles, working in the women's liberation movement, and in other areas.

We hope you will consider this a comradely invitation to relate to one another more constructively than in the past and, we hope, to work together in united fronts where we agree. Our organization, the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, is consciously working to regroup revolutionary socialists in this country into a new formation with the ability to lead a revolution for democratic socialism in the U.S., while upholding the banner of internationalism and revolutionary solidarity in support of oppressed peoples around the world. Please let us hear from you. □

### Haiti (continued from page 1)

understandable. However, Aristide is only a man, even if he is the president. The social and economic forces which govern people's lives are far too strong for one man to control, regardless of his good intentions. The landowning elite which controls the wealth in Haiti also controls the armed forces—by allowing them to plunder the treasury at will, a practice which Aristide was attempting to stop. In return, the army has consistently defended the ruling class's property rights.

Simply curbing military and other government corruption will not begin to solve the problem, as Jean-Bertrand Aristide's experience is unfortunately demonstrating. Only by completely dismantling the old regime's military apparatus—as the Sandinistas did in Nicaragua in 1979—can the workers' and farmers' political representatives hope to prevent their overthrow in bloody counter-revolution. And that is only the first step.

It is unlikely that such a housecleaning could be accomplished entirely through peaceful means. To really transform the country Aristide or any other leader of Haiti will have to mobilize—and arm—the working people. However, Aristide's political program is based on religious moral principles rather than on sober class analysis.

The Haitian people, like workers and poor people throughout the world, have enough heroes and martyrs. They—and we—need victory.

### **U.S. Imperialism in the Caribbean**

Haiti was never formally recolonized after it won its independence from France in the eighteenth century. To the United States it never had more than a marginal economic importance, especially compared to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Aristide's liberal regime was not a serious threat to U.S. political or economic interests, so President Bush can make cheap political points with his pious denunciations of the military junta. Imposing economic sanctions on Haiti is convenient cover for support to other repressive regimes in the region, whose importance to Washington is far greater.

Bush also knows that Aristide's program of reform from above is quite different from a real mobilization of the Haitian masses.

He knows that without such a mobilization Aristide has no alternative but in the end to compromise and rely on imperialism. And he hopes that, with the reformist Aristide in power, Haiti can avoid a real revolutionary upsurge—which *would* pose a danger to "U.S. interests."

Bush's cheap posturing as the "defender of democracy" is a cover for something even more ominous: he saves his most threatening language for revolutionary Cuba, which is now standing alone against the North American colossus. Deprived of economic support from the Soviet Union and its former Eastern European allies, Cuba still suffers from the U.S.-imposed economic blockade after over three decades. Washington's hypocrisy was at one time patently obvious, as it complained about Cuban "tyranny" while installing and supporting such dictatorships as Balaguer's in the Dominican Republic and Pinochet's in Chile. However, in the spirit of a "kinder, gentler" imperialism, Bush is willing to support liberal regimes such as Aquino's in the Philippines and now Aristide's in Haiti. They in no way threaten U.S. interests, and Washington's dishonesty is masked. Bush can even pretend to be a non-interventionist, by refusing to involve the U.S. in Haiti's "internal affairs."

While it is absolutely necessary to demand that Aristide be restored out of respect for the Haitian people's democratic decisions, the temptation to call for U.S. or Organization of American States military intervention must be resisted. Washington has no positive intentions toward the workers and poor people of Haiti—or anywhere—and Bush would like nothing better than left cover for a military assault on Cuba. Some Haitians suspect CIA involvement in Cedras's coup, and that possibility must be taken seriously, regardless of the rhetoric coming out of the State Department and White House.

The Haitian people must be allowed to make their own political decisions, without interference from outside and without the threat of renewed military or Macoute violence. Whatever Jean-Bertrand Aristide's political shortcomings may be, he was clearly the population's democratic choice, and that must be respected unconditionally. In the future, however, the lessons from this experience must be assimilated, so that when democracy is restored it will not be so easily overthrown. □

October 6, 1991

# Hidden Privatization of State Property in Russia

by David Seppo

*Interview with Vera Lashch, co-chairperson of the Union of Work Collectives, Moscow, May 5, 1991.*

**D:** Could you talk about the activities of the Union of Work Collectives (UWC) since its founding at the Congress of Work Collective Councils (WCC) in December of 1990?

**V:** The USSR Law on the Enterprise that was adopted in June 1990 was a step backward in the development of self-management and producers' democracy. Strictly speaking, the UWC was born in reaction to that law. On the other hand, the Russian Republic's new Law on Entrepreneurship embodies the basic ideas of the resolution of our congress. And so we have been trying to explain to the work collectives how to go about applying this new law.

**D:** Can you explain the differences between the two laws?

**V:** The Russian law gives the work collective the right to full management of the enterprise's property. It gives the labor collectives the right to participate in writing the charter of the enterprise. The charter is the internal law upon which the basic activity of the enterprise is organized. This means that the work collectives themselves have the right to hire the administration of the enterprise. In that case the administration manages in the name of the collective.

According to the Russian law, the general assembly of employees or a conference of their delegates is the supreme managerial organ of their enterprise. Between conferences, the WCC, a democratically elected organ, acts in the name of the general assembly. This law allows the worker collectives themselves to write the internal charter of the enterprise. This was also the case under the union [central government] legislation introduced in January 1988. But, as I have said, it was replaced last June, largely on the initiative of the enterprise directors, by a new law giving these powers to a council of the enterprise, half of whose members are appointed by the director and half by the work collective. But the work collectives have already learned that it is not enough to elect ordinary, trusted workers to that council to make sure the administration doesn't pull any tricks. They need specialists, leaders who can really understand the issues and talk to the administration on the same level.

It is obvious that the half of the enterprise council elected by the work collective can always be crushed by the administration because, according to the law, the director does the hiring and sets the wages and conditions. He has many levers for dealing with troublesome council members. If under the old law the administration could not dismiss members of the WCC without the consent of the entire council, now he can—and he does. We are already experienced people and we know that these enterprise councils are not any kind of step on the path to democracy and self-management. They are purely symbolic and serve to legalize a fundamentally illegal situation.

This change in the union law is a very serious difference because last October, the USSR Council of Ministers [the cabinet] published resolution 1073 giving the ministries

property rights over the state enterprises under their jurisdiction. Armed with that resolution the ministries themselves began to conclude contracts with the directors. The directors, in their turn, put together a management team and concluded contracts with them, assigning them salaries and conditions. Now, we don't consider the ministries to be the owners of the enterprises. And the cabinet, the Council of Ministers, had no right to publish such a resolution. So you see, the union has made a serious attempt to suppress democracy and democratic transformations in the enterprises and, from this point of view, the Russian law is much better.

When a manager is not responsible to the collective, his work is not really evaluated on the basis of the enterprise's performance. If he is hired by the ministry and brings the enterprise to bankruptcy, nothing much will really happen to him. His employment contract will simply be abrogated and he is almost always given some other job, one that usually pays even better. The activists of the WCCs were constantly being told: before the law creating the WCCs, the director answered for the enterprise. But the WCCs are responsible to no one. But we always replied: even if the manager ruins the enterprise, he won't suffer personally; if he broke no laws he cannot be prosecuted. So basically, the work collective paid for the failures—for example, for delivery contracts not fulfilled, for failure to unload railway cars in the stipulated time—out of its own profits. It was the labor collective that paid these fines from the enterprise profits.

The UWC considers illegal the act of transferring to the ministries the right to dispose of enterprise property. This would require first a decision of the Supreme Soviet to transfer such powers to the Council of Ministers, which only then could delegate them to the ministries. The ministries have always been administrative organs, managing the property of the enterprise in the name of the state. Resolution 1073 is a usurpation of power by the Council of Ministers, and all the changes that followed from it are illegal.

We are trying to fight against this, and that is why we looked forward so impatiently to the Russian law that gave the collective the full right to manage the economy of the enterprise. This means the right of possession and disposition. We needed this to be able to block the ministries from taking measures without our agreement. For example, the directors in the name of the enterprise were signing agreements making their enterprise part of some larger concern or association. Very often the collective had no idea about this or why it was being done. The Russian law gives the collective the right to decide its own fate: the form of property, the type of economic regime in the enterprise, etc.

So practically all of our work since the congress has been directed at explaining this law to the collectives, helping them to realize in practice those rights it gives. Actually, there are many other more or less positive laws on the books, but we don't know how to make use of them.

**D:** What is the level of activism in the enterprises?

V: Representation of the work collectives at the congress was quite broad, even though it was not well publicized. Our goal was not simply trying to attract as many enterprises as possible but to create a union of people who shared the same basic views. And not all the enterprises who had sent representatives to the congress expressed the desire to join our union. There were, after all, many casual observers there, directors, representatives of different social organizations, such as trade unions, who look at these questions differently.

Our organizational work has involved setting up regional UWCs. Over the last month and a half regional organizations were created in the north around the city of Norilsk, in Lvov, Lutsk, Volgograd, and Rostov-on-the-Don. One will be created soon in Zagorsk. Regional councils also exist in Moscow and Leningrad. Our numbers are growing. The Lvov organization, for example, includes two very large enterprises. So I can't really say how large our union is—since our numbers are constantly changing.

Our council of representatives, the highest elected body after the congress, has held several meetings which examined how the congress's resolutions were being carried out. Unfortunately, the results are not comforting: we took note of the process of hidden, illegal privatization of state property. I have explained the background to this. Once the ministries were given ownership rights, the process of de facto privatization began in the enterprises. This appropriation of state property by the nomenklatura of the ministries and the party apparatus is frightening and dangerous for us. There has been much talk about nationalizing the party's property. But, in fact, that is just a very small part of what now could fall into the hands of the party apparatus.

There are still no union or republican laws on privatization,<sup>1</sup> and no one knows the legal way of transferring an enterprise into, say, private hands. But they are not waiting for these laws. The contracts that the enterprise directors concluded with the ministries make them directly dependent on the nomenklatura of the ministries. The ministry can tear up a contract under certain circumstances if the director refuses to carry out the will of the ministry. The consequences are clear: the ministry can form a state concern or association of enterprises or transform an enterprise into a joint stock company on conditions that are advantageous for the nomenklatura but unfavorable to the work collective. I won't even bother to mention the very common practice of creating all sorts of joint ventures, small [private] enterprises, and cooperatives linked to the ministries and state enterprises. Ministry officials use their powers and connections to create more favorable circumstances for these new enterprises, as a rule at the expense of work collectives.

This creeping privatization is causing very great social tension in the enterprises. Very many work collectives are approaching the point that the miners reached in March. The miners were deceived over the course of a year and a half when their economic demands, which had been agreed to, were not carried out. The work collectives are being tricked in the same way, as their property passes into the hands of the nomenklatura.

Our task is to get a law passed on this question and then, in light of this law, to force a review of all the previous decisions taken regarding state property.

D: You argue that the Russian parliament is more favorable to the interests of the work collectives.<sup>2</sup> It seems to me that it must have had a change of heart since the fall of 1990, when it practically unanimously adopted the "500-day Plan" that called for massive privatization and virtually ignored the self-management rights of the collectives.

V: Yes. We are far from idealizing the Russian government either. We don't worship anyone. We are simply trying to analyze carefully all the new legislative proposals. And not simply to analyze, but to have included in them something of our own. We have a special legislative group participating in the commissions of the Russian and other republican parliaments. We are trying to monitor all this to make sure the laws correspond to the interests of the work collectives. We know that the Russian parliament has already made a lot of errors. It has adopted laws that contain statutes that we do not like. Still, our experience of dealing with the Russian parliament leads us to conclude that it is more flexible, more open to our influence, and generally acts more in the interests of the work collectives than the union parliament.

D: Do rank-and-file workers support the idea of self-management?

V: Yes, of course, but they understand perfectly that it is not simply a question of managing or not managing. The issue of property is being decided now. If we don't start thinking about the process now taking place in the enterprises, we will simply find ourselves deprived of our property.

D: Are you saying that the basic question for your movement now is really property?

V: Of course. Just think of it: a worker has spent his or her entire working life at an enterprise—this is quite common—and now, on the eve of the market and market relations, he or she leaves with nothing but his or her minimal pension. After a life's work! And at the same time, it often happens that a director has just been appointed, and immediately—such scandalous facts have occurred—the ministry issues a decree that says: on the basis of the Law on the Enterprise of the USSR, the following are personally appointed owners [sobstvenniki] of the basic equipment and resources of the enterprise. And there follows a list of posts—general director, chief engineer, etc.—who are thus appointed owners. The labor collective also participates in the election of the council of the enterprise, but it is not owner. It is already at this stage that the illegality begins, sanctioned from above. We have appealed many times to the president [Gorbachev] on this question.

I was at the February congress of the powerful Scientific-Industrial Union (SIU), which is really an organization of enterprise directors.<sup>3</sup> The impression I took away was a depressing one. I never saw so many directors in one place. I had always fought with one, my own, when he violated rules in the enterprise, but it is another matter to see so many, more than a thousand, and a good part of them well up in their years, solid, tested Communists, act as they have been programmed. It was a dismal spectacle. The congress adopted a declaration—it did not receive final formulation at the congress—that was so general that it could be read to mean anything.

But I understood one very interesting thing. They find this period, when there is still no law on privatization, very much to their liking, very advantageous, and they are trying to drag it out as long as possible so that when the law finally appears,

when privatization begins to take legal forms, there will be nothing left to privatize. During this lengthy period everything will have been divided up. Part, even perhaps the largest part, will again fall into the hands of party functionaries, members of the CPSU. You can't miss this process. 99 percent of our directors at present are members of the CPSU.

So they very much like this obscure period. First of all, when an enterprise is formally privatized, management becomes responsible to someone. At present, management is in practice responsible only to itself. The ministry concludes a contract with the director under mutually very advantageous conditions: the enterprise pays a good percentage of its income to the ministry, the ministry assigns the director a very nice salary in return, and if he meets with failure in something, that can always be corrected by transferring him to another job.

The ministries are now very intensely involved in this sort of activity. The ministries were ordered to complete the process of creating a new charter by the end of the first quarter. But this has been extended, thanks in part to the resistance met in the work collectives. Some have been given to May 1, and others to the end of the year.

D: And the new charters define who is the owner?

V: Yes. And according to the union's Law on the Enterprise, the enterprise council does not actually participate in writing the charter. It is called upon only to "receive" it from the ministry. But since the enterprise councils have not yet been formed, in practice the charter is parachuted from above. Of course, it is signed, but many work collectives come to us after they have been handed down their charter already signed by the director behind their backs, that is, after the enterprise has formally begun a new legal existence and the accounts begin from zero.

D: There does not seem to be much coverage of your movement in the press. How do you explain that?

V: Unfortunately the newspapers, even the ones sympathetic to the Russian government, don't write very much about us. I think very many people are interested that the state's property end up in other hands than the work collectives'. This is a very dangerous game. We used to see films from the West in which your industrialists bought senators so that they would defend their interests in parliament. At the time, this did not mean much to us. But at the SIU congress I realized that these people were talking with the representatives of political power, with deputies, as if they were already owners and as if it was they who set the tone, not only in the economy but in politics too. I don't doubt that it is that way in the West. Only our directors don't own the enterprises. Still that doesn't bother them at all. On the contrary. It suits them just fine. It's said that our national property is in practice no one's, but our functionaries live very well on it.

D: Why doesn't the liberal or "democratic" press write about your movement?

V: The liberals' orientation is toward privatization, the transfer of the enterprise to private hands. When I was at a recent meeting of the head of our Russian government with the miners, he said: "Russia will be saved by entrepreneurs." Here we see they are playing with our directors, as if the latter are really entrepreneurs or capable of becoming them. But I wouldn't be so quick to draw that conclusion. I worked for more than 25 years in industry, first in a measuring-instrument

factory and then in one making rubber goods. Our economic personnel policy was such that a party secretary, say, with a degree from a historical archive institute, could be appointed assistant director. In a few years, he might be director. The consequences need not be serious if he is working with a more or less competent managerial team. But more than one enterprise has been ruined when both the director and his team were incompetent.

Of course, they try to reassure me by saying that it does not matter if the directors are really competent, since the market is such a cruel thing and we will weed them out within a few years. Maybe so, but why should the workers have to go through this? Why should they have to stand by while experiments are conducted on their backs and the recovery is put off for several more years? Why should they let this happen when other paths are available?

D: And maybe the workers don't want to be "cogs in the machine" anymore? After all, wasn't that one of the original goals of perestroika: finally to make workers masters in fact and not just in name?

V: Yes, and they don't want to be cogs anymore. There are some branches of industry, for example, defense, with which we have strong links, where the level of skills and education is so high that the workers sometimes have a much better grasp of things than the administration, the directors. They simply cannot remain obedient cogs, and you have to be deaf and dumb to underestimate this factor.

The tension in the enterprises is colossal. Today I am going to a conference of a work collective at a closed [military] enterprise, cybernetics, otherwise I would invite you. This is already the fourth session of this conference. The collective is trying to stop the administration from adopting a charter without its agreement, and more generally, is trying to keep the functionaries away from the enterprise's property. But the ministry is pushing hard. The director is already working hard on a contract with the ministry, and so he is practically invulnerable vis-a-vis the collective, which did not hire him and does not pay his salary. And this is the paradox: the director's salary is paid from the enterprise's funds, but it is the ministry that sets the salary.

It is clear why the conservative press ignores us. We have touched their most sensitive point. They don't want to attract attention to the process of hidden privatization. Recently at a meeting of political leaders and public figures of the Moscow region—it was organized without the press; such is the style lately, though I am never bothered by the press's presence—a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU told me that when they published the 1988 Law on the Enterprise that created the WCCs, they did not realize they were creating adversaries, and very serious ones at that. Two years later they understood that the WCCs were concerned with issues of the development of the enterprises, property, etc., that is, all those things they always tried to keep in the nomenklatura's hands. So they changed tactics, considering the path of self-management to be a dead end now.

I also spoke with a representative of the Moscow party committee. When I said that state property was being transferred into the hands of the party nomenklatura, he replied quite honestly that worker collectives are, of course, a good thing—could he say otherwise?—but only a social organization in the



enterprises. But how can democratically elected organs of self-management that decide issues of long-term development and property have the mere status of a social organization? Can such an organization lease an enterprise? It's a joke. So that is their present conception, and, of course, we can find no common language with them. They are very clear about what they are doing and why: they want to keep their power and take into their hands the property that belongs to all the people.

As for the liberals, we are seriously trying to talk with them. But we have received no help, even from *Rossiiskaya gazeta*.<sup>4</sup> This is disappointing, since we are, after all, advocating and facilitating application of the laws of the Russian Republic, which we consider the most progressive. Recently we had a very interesting meeting with Stepankov, recently appointed the chief procurator of Russia, precisely about this question. We wanted to know how the Russian laws would be applied on Russian territory, given the existence of union laws that often contradict them. At the end of the meeting, Stepankov told us that it had been an eye-opener for him. He had never looked at those questions from the point of view we presented.

Well, *Rossiiskaya gazeta* heard about this meeting and sent a reporter to us with a tape recorder. When I phoned a few days later to ask when the article would appear, the reporter said that she had shown the material to her bosses, who wanted to do an interview with us and Stepankov together. But, of course, that won't be the same, since Stepankov will hardly give the same honest answers to the press as he gave us. You see, we meet with a sort of blank, impenetrable wall on all sides. We are deliberately ignored.

You may have noticed that our press of late has been avoiding the issue of property. They write simply of "privatization," of "the market," "market relations." But where and to whom all this property will go—that is not discussed. I know, for example, that in the Russian parliament 14 versions of a law on privatization exist. It is titanic work trying to analyze the likely consequences of each one and to introduce our own amendments. Our Russian government itself has three different conceptions of how to privatize.

D: I recently spoke with some of the miners' leaders who want to set up their own newspaper. . . .

V: That is one of our goals too, but it is very complicated. We receive no material support from anyone. We already have a large number of member enterprises that pay dues, but they are so small that we still haven't the means to found a paper or to rent offices. Rents are very high, but we expect to have our own office soon. I am working full time for our union. I had to leave my enterprise when my conflicts with the administration became too serious.

D: Maybe you should get together with the miners. The miners' leaders I spoke with told me that they aren't counting on anyone but their own forces.

V: We also aren't counting on anyone. But the miners have their independent trade union; they have money. We don't have any money yet. If a collective wants to join our UWC and pay dues, it must first obtain the director's signature to be able to draw money from the bank. This gives you some idea of how complicated things are. But we don't let ourselves get discouraged.

D: When your congress called for the transfer of enterprises to the ownership of workers, does this mean without the right to sell it afterward?

V: We proposed several variants in the resolution: transfer without redemption on the part of the collectives, leasing, or some other way. In all cases the work collective receives the full right to manage the economic affairs of the enterprise. It also means the collective has the right itself to decide the form of property. It might want to create a joint stock company, if it sees that it is more suitable, and include among the stockholders its suppliers of raw materials or client enterprises. Or the collective might decide to lease the enterprise or break it up into a series of small enterprises, if it decides that would be more efficient. In the case of a joint stock company, for example, the collective might decide that the shares can be transferred to their children and relatives.

The collective should have the right to decide these things. After all, the workers have invested so much in their enterprise, which paid them such miserable wages. Is there anywhere else in the world where wages constitute only 2.16 percent of the total cost of production? On the other hand, if the collective decides it does not want to own the factory, the government Committee on Management of Property will decide its fate.

D: It is quite clear that you are opposed to the bureaucratic variant of privatization. But your attitude toward the liberals is

### Union of Work Collectives' Demands Regarding the Reform of Property

The Council of Representatives, on the basis of the basic principles set forth in the documents of the Constituent Congress of the Union of Work Collectives of the country, makes the following demands regarding the reform of property:

1. The forbidding of any decisions on the privatization of state enterprises without the agreement of the work collective; the unconditional right of the work collective to the full economic management of the enterprise (with the right of ownership of the results of its economic activity).
2. The right of a work collective of a privatized enterprise to choose the form of its privatization and the process of purchase (sale) of the property of the enterprise.
3. The right of the work collective of the enterprise subject to privatization to receive, without payment, that part of the enterprise's property created and paid for by it as a result of its economic activity from the moment of start-up of the enterprise.
4. The forbidding of the transfer of functions connected with de-statization and privatization belonging to the State Committees on Management of State Property of the USSR and the republic Supreme Soviets to any other executive organs.
5. The implementation of de-statization and privatization only after the adoption of corresponding laws and programs, after the division of functions among the union and republican State Committees on Management of State Property.
6. After the adoption of legislative acts on de-statization and privatization, the review of all previous decisions and actions on privatization of state enterprises and the adoption of a resolution in each case in accordance with the new laws.

somewhat less clear, though you seem opposed to their program of transferring the enterprise to private entrepreneurs.

V: Our attitude is the following. Even after specific laws on privatization are adopted each collective will have to analyze its own particular situation. You cannot push enterprises which have very different courses of development all into one framework. Only the work collective knows best its specific circumstances and its opinion must be considered. That's why I said that the basic thing is that the workers' collective obtain the full right to manage the enterprise and then it will decide on its own what to do.

Our constitution states that we are prepared to cooperate with any political and socio-political organization that defends the interests of the work collectives, of the toilers, and whose policies do not conflict with the basic forms and aims of our organization. Practically all the many political parties have made contact with us. But all have the same desire: to lead us. They come, they see we are a force, that there are many enterprises in our union, many worker collectives, and they want to direct that force. But they are not prepared to help in any way, to aid us in solving concrete problems.

Our starting point is the issue of property, the issue of privatization. We ask them what their stand is and their answer makes everything clear to us. We can see who is interested only in theories, who want to foist their own slogans on us. If someone really wants to help us, we can see this at once. And there are such people, but they are very shy. You can see the result: these problems are not discussed anywhere in the press.

D: The dominant view among economists seems to be that collective property and self-management cannot be efficient, that property must have a specific, individual owner who enjoys full property rights. This is used as an argument against self-management.

V: Well, when we are talking about self-management, we are referring to this transitional period. For now, we have a vacuum of authority. The parliaments cannot agree among themselves; governments put forth different conceptions. And at the same time, very concrete actions are being taken to appropriate the people's property. For over 70 years—and I was born under this idea—it was supposed to be the people's property, that is, it is all ours.

D: Are you saying that after this transition some other agreement can be decided?

V: Yes, possibly. But since our system already exists—and I will be direct: it is not a very rational system of management; we don't really know what we have invented here—the task is now to create, at least for the majority of the people, normal starting conditions for the transition to a market economy. This is needed not only for their well-being but also to reduce the social tension. When [the prime minister Valentin] Pavlov revealed his program, he stated very calmly: "So what if 30 million workers will be unemployed?" Maybe you in the West are more accustomed to unemployment, but for us this is something horrible.

We already have interruptions in the supply of materials to the enterprises. It is no longer just administrative posts that are being cut—these people as a rule manage to survive quite well; they try to be kind to the nomenklatura. They are cutting at the level of production. The textile industry is not getting enough cotton. These workers are people, mothers, heads of large

families. In the Soviet Union a family cannot live on just the husband's wage. Just imagine a person who has worked all his life from the age of 16, who knows how to do nothing else, and all of a sudden he finds himself on the street, unable to provide for his family. It is a terrible force that will descend onto the streets, and I doubt if our politicians and authorities really understand this. The miners have demonstrated a little of the potential of this force. But they are only one sector. Imagine if they all came out together?

D: What are your relations with the trade unions?

V: That depends on the trade union. We have good relations with the Independent Miners' Union, which has shown us in action what it stands for. As for the others [i.e., official unions now claiming to be independent], we first want to see what their real goals are. You may have seen the May Day celebration organized by our Moscow trade unions. What a pitiful spectacle! There were no demands relating to the issues of property. Calls to defend wage labor and nothing more. Defend, defend, and again defend! One has to wonder whom they are defending when they do not even ask the right questions. And even on the positions they do take, they are inconsistent. We want to keep a respectful distance from that kind of union.

Some say we are trying to substitute ourselves for the unions. But our functions are different. Our WCCs decide the fundamental questions concerning the development of their enterprise, the introduction of new forms of economic management, questions of property. The trade unions defend individuals against illegal acts, and the like.

D: From what you said, it seems the future will bring an increasing number of conflicts in the enterprises and more and more collectives will turn to you.

V: You can't imagine how many phone calls we're getting now. There isn't enough time, even though regional UWCs are already functioning in a number of places. They tell us, for example, that the director has handed them a new charter, that their enterprise is now part of a concern, or that the director has signed a ten-year lease to rent out a building to some organization with no rent charged for several years. Only after this period, when some sort of joint enterprise is functioning, will the state enterprise receive a share of the profits. Meanwhile, such space is going for \$300-400 a square meter in the center of Moscow.

They ask very concrete questions and want answers from us. But these problems cannot be resolved from Moscow. The collectives need legal help, economic expertise. We plan to create our own association on production and territorial self-management with the cooperation of the research institute of labor of the State Commission on Labor. This is our little secret. They have an entire department there that has long specialized in self-management and whose researchers are sick of seeing their work put away on shelves. They see that life dictates one thing, but our official ideology forces them to do another. Without such skilled help, we simply can't manage.

Maybe you think I am distorting things to try and convince you that our cause is right. But I assure you that our conflicts in the enterprises are very sharp and the tension that results is very frightening, simply frightening. We try to keep things under control, to channel conflicts into a legal path, but this is not always possible, to proceed calmly and cautiously when you face such massive illegality.

Take the conflict at the Kirov factory<sup>5</sup> in Leningrad concerning the formation of a joint stock company. Yeltsin was there, Pavlov too. It seemed like everything was resolved. But as soon as they left, the local authorities, the local party apparatus, started to get involved. And again the whole problem began to unwind. There is a union there and a WCC, but this unresolved problem drove the workers to create a workers' strike committee.<sup>6</sup> Things might quiet down for a while, but a work collective is a living, dynamic thing, and people need to feel that the situation is improving. It was stagnating there, and so they formed a strike committee. This is a huge collective, 40,000 people. If they want to, they can raise all of Leningrad! Someone is provoking this. After all, the issue was already resolved at the highest levels. There has to be some executive discipline at the local level. But no, it is precisely this stratum of corrupted local officials of the party nomenklatura that is behind this. I have no doubt of that.

A delegation from the Kirov strike committee came here recently, and I organized a meeting for them with the chairman of the Committee on Management of State Property, Malemin. Still, they had to return again, because once they got home the administration started to play around with them again, proposing totally unacceptable conditions. These workers have already reached the level where they ask themselves: what will we get and what will Russia get? And they see that Russia gets nothing. Part goes to the labor collective and the larger part to the union, that ephemeral entity, whose basis and contents are not even clear. And they ask: Since the enterprise is on Russian territory, why can't we give anything to our own government?

At Zagorsk, where there are also many defense plants, the problems are equally explosive. Conversion is not going as it should, and the enterprises are losing highly skilled cadres; that is, they are creating conditions to destroy totally this branch and its great potential.

At the VAZ auto plant in Togliatti a conflict is raging over the administration's plan to create a joint stock company. When the workers learned of this last summer, they declared the factory to be the property of the collective. The director then agreed to call a factory conference but he also invited all the auxiliary services, and they voted as management had instructed them, giving the director's plan a majority. This decision was disputed by the workers, and a commission on privatization was set up to propose different options. Once this commission finishes its work, a referendum will be held, but only among those employed in basic production. So here the workers have understood that these questions require careful preparation, that a lot of thought and analysis has to precede the choice. But it was only their mobilization against the administration's dealing behind their back that allowed them to reach this point.

**D:** Do your activists come from all strata of the enterprise, workers and the factory intelligentsia?

**V:** Yes. But the workers, by their nature, like action, action. They are much quicker to form workers' committees, strike committees. As soon as they see that the administration is not cooperating, they want to react strongly. But this is not always the shortest path. You can't always resolve things in one leap. Laws are being passed, and if we don't analyze them and try to

modify them before they are passed, it will be much more complicated to try to change things later.

The authorities and politicians don't want to see our problems, they don't want to resolve them, but to shove them aside. But the situation is coming to a head, and then the president can pass ten decrees to forbid the movement but they will do no good. Our leaders are sawing off the branch on which they are sitting. They are busy with other political questions. But they should come down to earth a while and see what is worrying the masses.

The behavior of the leaders is inexcusable. They are driving people to despair, people who don't deserve such treatment. I can't imagine another people so long-suffering as our Russians. How much we have suffered! How much we have built on sheer enthusiasm, for symbolic wages. We thought that that was how one should live. I was born after the war and I used to say to myself: How lucky to be born in the Soviet Union, in Moscow, in such a period without wars! Everything was so good that one could almost envy oneself. And now it turns out that those values, the ideals we served, the ideals they taught us, are completely wrong. And it turns out that we are not at all a well-off generation, that our generation may have to live through something more terrible than the Patriotic War [the war against Nazi Germany], that our economy might suffer more damage than during the war.

You understand, each generation has its own problems. But it is hard to get used to these ideas after that sense of well-being, although everything is relative. We didn't know that everything was so good where you live and so bad here. And then there are those regions where they are inciting national animosities, playing on them. I constantly have the feeling that someone is dividing us so the leaders can play with us or resolve their own problems. This is a very unpleasant feeling. I can't say what will happen to us, even in a half year. I feel that the calm among the miners now is also temporary. Even after the signing of the agreement on the transfer of the mines to the jurisdiction of Russia, I think they will have to return still many times to these issues, many times. □

### Notes

1. "Privatization" as it is currently used in the Soviet Union has a broader—and more ambiguous—meaning than in the West. In its broadest use, it means "de-stationization," which means removing the enterprise from the ministries' dictate, but not necessarily its transfer to private hands.
2. In March, in the heat of the miners' strike and during the Congress of People's Deputies of the RFSFR, the UWC took public positions strongly in support of Yeltsin and the transfer of enterprises from union jurisdiction to that of Russia.
3. The SIU is headed by Arkady Volsky, formerly a Central Committee functionary, assistant director of the department in charge of the machine-construction industry. In an interview, Volsky explained that the SIU is active in promoting entrepreneurship, de-stationization, and privatization, though not of the industrial giants. The SIU supported the "500-day Plan" in its day. Volsky believes that "classical capitalism" has been transformed by the socialist ideas of social security, social partnership, and the democratization ("popularization") of the economy. He would like to see a moratorium on wage increases and restrictions on "excessive" wage growth. (*Trud*, May 8, 1991.)
4. A daily very close to the Russian government.
5. Kirov factory—formerly the Putilov works, backbone of the revolutionary workers' movement in Petrograd in 1917.
6. Workers' committees and strike committees are generally elected only by blue-collar workers, while work collective councils have representatives of all strata of the enterprise.

# NOW Commission Calls for a New Political Party

by Evelyn Sell

Delegates to the June 1992 National Conference of the National Organization for Women (NOW) will discuss and vote on a resolution calling for the formation of a new political party. The following "New Party Recommendation" was adopted on September 15, 1991, by a vote of 26 to 4 (with one abstention):

"The Commission for Responsive Democracy finds that there is a need for a new force in United States politics to ignite in the United States the revolution for democracy that is sweeping the world in order to politically and economically empower all people of the United States.

"Fueled by the public disgust with the massive unprecedented corruption, greed and hypocrisy in the Republican and Democratic parties, the Commission for Responsive Democracy calls for a new party and recommends to the National Organization for Women that it provide leadership with other constituencies, grass roots activists, and those fundamentally alienated from the current system in the establishment of a new independent political party dedicated to equality, social and economic justice, demilitarization and a healthy environment.

"This new party will include as part of its basic tenets internal democracy, candidate adherence to the party's platform, and accountability to its membership."

After the commission adjourned, supporters of a new party met and formed a working group to carry out platform development, voter registration and recruitment, outreach, fundraising, candidate search, and other tasks necessary to bring a new party into existence. Six co-conveners of The Working Group were chosen: labor activist Dolores Huerta, co-founder and first vice president of the United Farm Workers of America; Patricia Ireland, attorney and executive vice president of NOW; professor Mel King, former Massachusetts state representative and a founder of the Boston Rainbow Coalition; civil rights activist Sara Nelson, executive director of the Christic Institute; former three-term NOW president Ellie Smeal, currently president of the Fund for the Feminist Majority; and, Monica Faith Stewart, former member of the Illinois House of Representatives.

On September 21, the National NOW Board endorsed the commission's new

party resolution, and on September 23 NOW's political action committee voted to contribute \$25,000 to this independent political effort—the maximum amount which may be given to a party.

## Growth of 'New Party' Sentiments

This challenge to the monopoly held by the Democratic and Republican parties was set into motion at the 1989 National Conference when delegates enthusiastically voted for a "Declaration of Women's Political Independence" which called for the creation of an exploratory commission to investigate the formation of a new party. The delegates also adopted a "Bill of Rights for the 21st Century" which could serve as a basic initial program for a new party.

The members of the exploratory commission were announced at a workshop on the new party held during the 1990 NOW National Conference. A series of public hearings were held beginning in New York on November 30, 1990, and ending in Washington, D. C., on September 14, 1991. Other hearings took place in Atlanta, Houston, Tampa, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. Testimony was given by over 500 people including activists involved in a broad spectrum of struggles: civil rights, feminism, environment, lesbian and gay rights, health services, consumer advocacy, human rights, and peace. A press release from the commission explained:

"These individuals and organizations were unanimous in their belief that major, drastic changes had to be made in the electoral process immediately.



"During the hearings, many suggestions regarding electoral reform were offered, but it became clear that only limited and inadequate electoral reform laws would pass without a declaration of political independence. In addition, the majority of those attending the hearings were clearly in favor of the formation of a new political party."

Support for a new party was also expressed outside of the framework of these hearings. The NOW Young Feminist Conference, which was held in February 1991, adopted a resolution urging the Commission for Responsive Democracy "to recommend that NOW join forces with other interested groups to initiate a call for a new party." Further support for a new party was expressed at hearings held during May in Cincinnati by Ohio NOW.

The 1991 National NOW Conference, held in New York during July, continued the momentum towards political independence by passing a resolution instructing the Commission for Responsive Democracy to finish its work, and to make its recommendation to the National NOW Board for action at the next National NOW Conference.

## The Present Situation

The resolution passed by the commission and the formation of The Working Group for a new party represents a significant step forward on the path toward independent political action. The breadth of participants in the year-long series of public hearings clarified the initial confusion in 1989 over whether NOW was projecting a party devoted exclusively or primarily to feminist issues. It should be obvious, at this point, that the intention has been and is to address a range of social and economic issues, and to link up with powerful forces within the U.S., especially the labor movement and communities of oppressed racial and ethnic minorities. Two years ago, the media was quick to incorrectly trumpet NOW's political independence resolution as a call for "a woman's party." But the capitalist media has thrown a blanket of silence over the commission's press releases describing its adoption of a call for NOW to "provide leadership with other vital constituencies to launch a new political party in 1992."

Working women, men, and youth comprise a key "constituency"—including the many millions who are currently members of trade unions as well as the unorganized millions who work for wages or salaries and are part of the broader labor movement in the U.S. Support for a new party, independent from the two parties controlled by and serving the bosses, has been growing among working people. This has been shown by the high percentage who do not

vote in elections as well as by various polls which show that large numbers consider themselves "independents" or who state they would vote for "None of the Above."

The launching of Labor Party Advocates (LPA) is a clear sign of workers' disgust with the two major parties. The third issue of LPA's newsletter reports, in a message from founder Tony Mazzocchi (a longtime officer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers): "Even though our organizing drive has only just begun, hundreds of trade union activists around the country have sent in their dues to support our efforts. . . . Last month, I sent a personal appeal to more than 17,000 trade unionists and other activists around the country, inviting them to become Labor Party Advocates. The response to this mailing has been encouraging. Several thousand local unions received the appeal blind, and many of them took up my proposal in the course of their ordinary local business."

The newsletter reported on polls showing support for a labor party. For example, after the 1988 elections, the Labor Institute in New York City began polling trade unionists and found:

Fifty percent of rank-and-file union members agree that the best interests of working people are *not* met by either Democrats or Republicans; 63 percent agree that the two major parties "care more about Big Business than they do about working people"; over 50 percent agree that "it is time for the trade unions to build a new political party of working people independent of the two major parties."

When Local 1180 of the Communications Workers of America polled 500 members in New York City last year, 49 percent agreed that "it was time for the labor movement to build a new political party of working people that would be independent of the two major political parties." In addition, 50 percent rejected the idea that reform of the Democratic Party was the best way to achieve the political goals of working people. In a poll conducted for six international unions, Fingerhut Granados Opinion Research found:

Eighty-four percent of voters agree that "in recent years the rich have been getting richer, and it's getting harder for middle income and working families to get by"; and 71 percent agreed that "it doesn't matter which political party it is, politicians just don't listen to the needs of ordinary people anymore."

Although LPA is not attempting to build a party at this time, support for independent political action is clearly expressed by those sending in \$20 to become charter members as well as by the sentiments reported by researchers. Mazzocchi is gaining labor party supporters through radio talk shows, presentations at union

## Bill of Rights for the 21st Century

The Commission for Responsive Democracy was charged by the 1989 NOW National Conference to investigate the formation of a new party dedicated to equality for women and an expanded Bill of Rights for the 21st Century—which includes but is not limited to:

1. The right to freedom from sex discrimination.
2. The right to freedom from race discrimination.
3. The right of all women to freedom from government interference in abortion, birth control, and pregnancy, and the right of indigent women to public funds for abortion, birth control, and pregnancy services.
4. The right to freedom from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
5. The right to freedom from discrimination based on religion, age, ongoing health condition, or a differently abled situation.
6. The right to a decent standard of living, including adequate food, housing, health care, and education.
7. The right to clean air, clean water, safe toxic waste disposal, and environmental protection.
8. The right to be free from violence, including freedom from the threat of nuclear war.

and public meetings, and newspaper interviews. When asked by *Guardian* reporters, Mazzocchi welcomed the NOW commission's call for a new party, explaining that "efforts toward independent political expression are a step forward."

A break with the Democratic and Republican parties is also brewing among African Americans. In his Baltimore Afro-American newspaper column, Ron Daniels wrote about preparations for an emergency conference on Black independent politics to be held November 22-24, 1991, in Washington, D.C. Included in the conference goals are: "to assess the current state of Black politics against the backdrop of the crises in the African American community; to review the Black agenda and develop a progressive Black independent agenda for the '92 elections; to discuss the various third party initiatives under discussion in various quarters including the prospects for a Black led independent presidential campaign in '92." (September 14, 1991)

The initial list of conference organizers includes: Ron Walters, chairperson of the Political Science Department at Howard University; Bob Starks, chairman of the Black Political Task Force in Chicago; Janice Graham of the Florida organization Our Common Ground; William Nelson, president of the African Heritage Studies Association in Columbus, Ohio; and other political activists around the country.

A deputy campaign manager for Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign, Daniels now says he plans to announce the formation of an exploratory committee for a 1992 presidential campaign. He also plans to hold "an independent, grassroots convention of working class and oppressed people" after the national conventions of the two major parties. As reported in the October 1991 issue of *Bulletin In Defense*

of *Marxism*, Daniels's projection for the grassroots convention includes presenting a platform and measuring it against the Democratic and Republican platforms "so the people, themselves, can see how [bankrupt] the Democrats are."

At the same time as he supports and pursues independent Black initiatives, Daniels has been talking with Labor Party Advocates about "how we can work together, even combine our efforts." In addition, he was one of the featured speakers on "Independent Political Action: New Alliances for the '92 Elections" which was part of the September 13-14 hearings in Washington, D.C., organized by the NOW Commission for Responsive Democracy.

It is not clear exactly how these separate but interrelated developments in the labor movement, the African American community, and NOW will connect up with each other. What is crucial, however, is that they signal a bright green "GO!" regarding the openness to and opportunities for political action independent of the major parties — a welcome departure from the reliance on "good" Democratic or Republican politicians which has suffocated struggles for women's rights, workers' needs, and African American strivings.

### A Bumpy Road Ahead

Actually creating a new party will not be easy. Many activists cling to the idea that it is still possible to pressure Democratic Party candidates into pledging support for a "progressive agenda," and many activists question whether it is feasible to launch a new party. NOW president Molly Yard was one of the four on the Commission for Responsive Democracy who voted against the recommendation for a new party. According to NOW executive vice president

(Continued on inside back cover)

## Discussion

*Editorial note—The following article by Jean Tussey, like the one we ran last month by Claire Cohen, proposes that the radical workers' movement give critical support to Ron Daniels's presidential effort. This is an important question on which differing points of view may be, and undoubtedly are, held by sincere revolutionary activists. The *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* is published by the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, which has not taken a position on the matter. Our pages are open to other ideas and assessments. Please send comments, letters, or articles to: *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, P.O. Box 1317, New York, NY 10009.*

# Ron Daniels and the Third Party Movement

by Jean Tussey

An initial report and assessment of the Ron Daniels presidential campaign by Claire Cohen was published in the October issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*. She discussed the significance of this important African American initiative at a time when growing support for independent political action is also being expressed in the National Organization for Women (NOW), and by Labor Party Advocates in the labor movement. (See also September articles, "NOW Continues to Explore Idea of New Party" and "Labor Party Advocates: A Transitional Approach for Independent Political Action.")

"Despite problematic areas," Cohen wrote, "Daniels's overall perspective seems a positive contribution to building a mass national political alternative accountable to oppressed groups, the working class, and the poor. He is definitely correct that any such effort will not succeed if African Americans do not play a central role from the very beginning and if whites cannot accept that this is true." She welcomed his attempts to work with Labor Party Advocates and NOW, and she advocated "critically supporting Daniels's effort—especially if he continues to move decisively away from the Democratic Party."

An examination of the state of the third party movement at this point shows that each of its three major components continues to move away from the Democratic Party. As the 1992 election campaigns come closer pressures will undoubtedly be great to make compromises and there may be retreats. But there is also a growing fightback spirit among the oppressed and other victims of capitalism in decline, and they are the constituents of the third party movement. Ron Daniels speaks eloquently for them and to them.

All three constituencies appear to see the need to link their efforts, on the basis of their common demands for policies that prioritize human needs, not "profitability," and to combat divisive racism and sexism. All three should be "critically supported"—supported physically, materially, and with constructive criticism to strengthen this movement toward independent working class political action.

NOW, Labor Party Advocates, and Ron Daniels's "Project for a New Tomorrow" have recently made some organizational advances toward building an alternative, united force. In addition, the independent Black presidential campaign is gaining increasing support as a strategy for breaking with "lesser evil" capitalist politics on the national level. It provides voters with

a choice, a candidate with a transitional program around which to build a united movement against both the foreign and domestic policies of the two capitalist parties.

### NOW Led the Way

At their national convention in 1989, NOW delegates started the current public discussion of the need for an alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties. They voted to explore the possibility of developing a new party to promote a feminist agenda, and adopted a Bill of Rights for the 21st Century as a basis for a program for such a party. Last year NOW's National Commission for Responsive Democracy began holding hearings around the country. On September 15, 1991, the commission concluded its deliberations and voted 26-4 to recommend that NOW initiate a party "dedicated to equality, social and economic justice, demilitarization and a healthy environment." September 21 the NOW Board endorsed the resolution for submission to the national conference in June 1992, where the delegates may have to make important decisions on conflicting views of how to relate to the new party, its program, strategy, and tactics.

Meanwhile, on September 23 NOW's political action committee voted to contribute \$25,000 to the new party effort; and NOW organizers of the multi-issue action planned for Washington next spring see that event as a major opportunity to reach out to allies and potential members of the new party.

(For more information, local NOW chapters located in all 50 states and the District of Columbia may be contacted.)

### OCAW Labor Party Advocates Organize

In April 1991 Tony Mazzocchi, an officer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, and a longtime advocate of independent political action by labor, announced the formation of Labor Party Advocates to educate and recruit a mass membership organizational base for a labor party. In August, at the OCAW convention in Denver, 500 delegates unanimously adopted a resolution sponsored by the union leadership which condemned the antilabor record of both the Democrats and Republicans, "two decades of relentless union-busting by the federal government and its corporate allies," and

the rise of "racism as seen in the Helms election campaign in North Carolina."

The OCAW resolution cited organized labor's "historical responsibility to resurrect some of our finest moments as a social movement." The OCAW will "begin the broad discussion necessary with the rank-and-file of our movement." It will "open up a discussion with our rank-and-file members about a new social, economic and political agenda for America"; and it will "provide continued support to the Labor Party Advocates program as a means to that end."

(For information—Labor Party Advocates: P.O. Box 1510, Highland Park, New Jersey 08904)

### What Makes Ron Run

From his first public announcement, on August 27, 1990, that he was seriously considering running for president of the United States, Ron Daniels, former executive director of the Rainbow Coalition, pointed to the objective necessity for an independent new party to serve the survival needs of "African Americans, other oppressed nationalities, poor and working people."

"As a proponent and practitioner of independent and progressive politics for more than two decades," he wrote, "I have decided to spend the next 12 months vigorously exploring the desirability and feasibility of running as an independent candidate for president in 1992."

Exploring the desirability and feasibility meant discussing his concept of an independent Black presidential campaign to see whether enough people, especially in the African American community, agreed with it to make it feasible. His perspective of the presidential campaign was that "it must be seen as a part of the process of organizing and institutionalizing an independent progressive third force or new political party to perpetually and permanently advance the struggle for a new society. . . ."

In the year of intensive meetings, consultations and discussions, radio, television and newspaper interviews that followed, Daniels first focused on African American communities, organizations, and leaders—for example, at the international conference on Malcolm X in New York during November 1990. But he also testified at NOW third party hearings, spoke at national conferences of *Labor Notes*, U.S. Greens, and others. Constant themes of his talks were the need to wage a relentless struggle to fundamentally transform the racist, exploitive system in the United States; African Americans must be in the forefront of the struggle for social transformation; a new society based on human needs and the principles of genuine political and economic democracy for the masses of this nation.

After a year of exploring, Daniels reported that the vast majority of the people he had met are excited about the challenges and prospects of an independent campaign for president in 1992. On October 14 (Columbus Day), Daniels would announce the formation of the National Ron Daniels for President Committee. The initial partial list would include the following:

- **Dennis Ferrette**, labor activist (Communications Workers of America, Coalition of Black Trade Unionists); New Alliance

Party 1984 candidate for president (left NAP in protest against opportunism of 1988 presidential candidate Lenore Fulani)

- **Janice Graham**, chair, National Ron Daniels for President Committee; West Palm Beach, Florida; "Our Common Ground" television program; member, National Malcolm X Commemoration Commission
- **Mary Hollens**, Detroit; staff member, *Labor Notes*
- **Grace Jones**, Cleveland, Ohio TransAfrica Coordinator; African American community activist
- **Bob Law**, New York City "Night Talk" radio host; Respect Yourself Organization
- **Dr. William Nelson**, Columbus, Ohio; chairman emeritus, Ohio State University Black Studies Department; chair, African American Studies Association
- **Jean Sindab**, former director of Washington Office on Africa; World Council of Churches Committee to Combat Racism; policy adviser, Jackson '88 campaign
- **Rev. Lucius Walker**, Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization; Central America solidarity activist
- **Jitu Weusi**, chair, African Americans United for Political Power; chair, New York State Unity Party
- plus three representatives from Greens Party, one from the Chicago Harold Washington Party and four other African American women (Wisconsin; Philadelphia; Washington, D.C.)

### Ron Daniels for President

Daniels sees a number of critical tasks immediately ahead if he is to be able to announce his candidacy and formalize the campaign by March 1992. Essentially, these tasks are to "consolidate our base in the African American community while simultaneously intensifying the essential outreach to a range of constituencies outside of the Black community."

On the basis of his program and perspectives for building a political party and movement for social change in this country, rooted in the Black community and other oppressed sectors of the working class and its natural allies, the Ron Daniels electoral project deserves support NOW—material/financial, physical, political.

On Election Day Ron Daniels deserves the vote, whether on the ballot or by write-in, of everyone who wants an alternative to the two-party non-choice on the ballot. (I suspect that will include a lot of Labor Party Advocates and NOW members.)

As I see it, at this point in the third party movement, NOW is speaking out for political choice. Labor Party Advocates is building the heavy artillery and organizing the troops, and the independent Black candidate for president is leading the charge against Bush's New World Order at home and abroad.

Now more than ever it is important to remember the common slogan during the campaigns of Eugene V. Debs for president: "It's better to vote for what you want, and not get it, than to vote for what you don't want, and get it."

(For more information about the Ron Daniels for President Campaign, write to Project New Tomorrow, P.O. Box 5641, Youngstown, OH 44504.) □

October 7, 1991

## Leonard Peltier Could Get a New Trial

### Terrorist or Political Prisoner?

by Clay Evans

Reprinted from *Santa Fe Reporter*, July 24-30, 1991.

American Indian activist Leonard Peltier has already spent a decade and a half in prison since he was convicted in 1977 for murdering two FBI agents in South Dakota.

But Peltier and a core of supporters, including several Santa Fe residents, have always maintained his innocence and have been pushing for a new trial for the man they consider America's No. 1 "political prisoner."

But now Peltier will have to wait a little bit longer to see if he will be allowed to prove his innocence: last Friday the federal government abruptly postponed a long awaited hearing to determine whether or not the Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary prisoner deserves a new trial.

"I am a political prisoner," Peltier told the *Reporter* last week by telephone from Leavenworth. "There has been a sophisticated war against native people, going after their lands, and even exterminating them. As a political prisoner, I did not receive a fair trial. Much of the circumstantial evidence was manufactured or created.

"I am innocent," he said.

Peltier and four other members of the highly political American Indian Movement (AIM) were arrested in 1975 after a shootout at the Jumping Bull Compound on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, where several AIM members were staying. A gun battle ensued when an unmarked car carrying two FBI agents approached the compound, ostensibly looking for an Indian boy they said had stolen a pair of cowboy boots in Rapid City.

Both agents and an Indian, Joe Stuntz Killisnope, were slain in the melee.

AIM gained notoriety in the 1970s for standing up to the federal government and demanding it honor treaties signed with Indian people decades before. The activist AIM members considered themselves "traditionalists" fighting for all Indians. The group was involved in several violent confrontations, most notably when members barricaded themselves in nearby Wounded Knee, S.D. in 1973.

Not all Indians, even on the Pine Ridge Reservation, supported AIM, including

then tribal governor Dick Wilson, whose law enforcement officers battled frequently with AIM.

The other four Indian activists arrested in the shootings were acquitted by juries in Iowa, where the case was moved on a change of venue motion. Attorneys for the four successfully argued that they had acted in self-defense after FBI agents had systematically terrorized Indian activists for years, and that the two agents who were killed had provoked the gun battle.

But, when it came time for Peltier's trial, the government suddenly, and with little explanation, moved the proceedings to Federal District Court in North Dakota under now-retired federal judge Paul Benson. Peltier maintains that Benson did not allow his attorney to introduce self-defense evidence and that he denied permission to put a key witness, Peltier's one-time girlfriend, Myrtle Poor Bear, on the stand. Before Peltier's trial Poor Bear had recanted earlier testimony that Peltier killed the FBI agents. Peltier was convicted by a jury and given two consecutive life sentences for his crimes.

"From 1973 to 1975, there was literally a reign of terror over the reservation," said Eda Gordon, a Santa Fe private investigator and activist who lived on the Pine Ridge Reservation during the uproar following Peltier's arrest. Gordon has spent years working on his behalf, and is now regional coordinator for the Leonard Peltier Defense Committee, working with prominent American Indian locals such as Dennis Banks and actor Rodney Grant. "But in Leonard's trial, none of that evidence was allowed."

Peltier and his activist allies have spent over 15 years arguing that Judge Benson violated Peltier's constitutional rights by not giving him a fair trial.

But in a year that saw *Dances With Wolves*, a sympathetic portrayal of the plight of American Indians, win an Academy Award for best picture, Peltier's long simmering case has suddenly touched a nerve in mainstream America.

Peltier supporters now claim to have proof that some of the evidence presented against him was coerced and manufactured. Perhaps more significantly, renowned author Peter Matthiesson finally won approval this year to publish his book, *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*, an examination of the case in which an anonymous man confesses to the killing of the FBI agents. Publication of Matthiesson's book, which exhaustively details the mid-1970s unrest leading up to Peltier's arrest, was delayed by libel lawsuits filed by the former governor of South Dakota and FBI

agent David Price for eight years. Matthiesson won the suits.

Peltier's cause has generated worldwide media attention since the new evidence hearing was scheduled last December. He has been interviewed by CBS's "60 Minutes," and has spent the last several weeks making phone calls from the prison to reporters. In addition, celebrities such as Robert Redford, 55 members of Congress, South African Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu and filmmaker Oliver Stone have enlisted in his cause.

Even top legal minds have implied that Peltier received less than a fair shake as he attempted to make the government listen to Indian claims of treaty violations. This spring, Judge Gerald Heaney, a federal appeals court judge who heard one of Peltier's appeals, wrote to Sen. Daniel Inouye, who has been pressing for a new trial: "Instead of carefully considering the legitimate grievances of the Native Americans, the [government's] response was essentially a military one which culminated in a deadly firefight on June 26, 1975, between the Native Americans and the FBI agents."

Though Peltier's attorneys have tried just about every legal avenue they could to win him a new trial—the United States Supreme Court rejected his appeal in 1987—he has long believed the only way to prove his innocence is to win over public opinion. In Hollywood's "year of the Indian," the prisoner thinks he may finally have won a chance at real freedom.

"*Dance With Wolves* has really been a big part of changing a lot of opinions about Indian people. Hopefully that will help end my ordeal soon," Peltier said.

In the years since Peltier's conviction, even the federal government has acknowledged uncertainty about who actually pulled the trigger that day at the Jumping Bull Compound.

With the approach of the now-postponed July 29 "evidentiary hearing," Peltier's case has suddenly become a *cause celebre*. Although North Dakota district magistrate Karen Klein had not yet filed the reasons for postponing the hearing as of the *Reporter's* press time, some of Peltier's most ardent supporters think they know the reasons why.

"The government may be just blown away by all the attention he's getting, and may not have been prepared to handle it," Gordon said.

But while federal government officials for years have sought to portray Peltier as no better than a common terrorist, he has

(Continued on page 33)



# Imperialist Barbarism and Popular Response in the Northern Frontier—Part 1

by Manuel Aguilar Mora

Translated for *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* by Michael Livingston.

Having lost its ability to bring happiness or trample men in the dust, money will turn into mere bookkeeping receipts . . . for planning purposes. In the still more distant future, probably these receipts will not be needed. *But we can leave this question entirely to posterity, who will be more intelligent than we are.*—Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936) (emphasis added)

My systematic reflection on the northern frontier dates from 1985, the year in which my life took a turn that carried me again to live in the land of my infancy. Chihuahuanese by birth, as a child I was a member of one of the families that, “coming from the north,” settled in Mexico City in the 1940s before the opposite migratory flow—from south to north—became the dominant pattern. Due to my work as a member of the national leadership of the Revolutionary Workers’ Party (PRT, Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores) I returned in the 70s to the vast northern territories, visiting Sonora, Sinaloa, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León, until in 1983 a new chapter of my life opened which included a precious new child. An inevitable corollary of this was a new residence in the north. I thus returned as an adult to my origins. These events give me reason to believe that they go beyond the merely circumstantial.

I have been convinced for over two decades that the socio-economic processes of the north and especially of the frontier have crucial importance for revolutionary strategy. My own experience is an example of the difficulties that confront us when we desire to contribute to a better understanding of these unfolding processes. Capitalist development in the north advances much more rapidly than its theoretical reflection or revolutionary-political expression. It was in 1985 that I initiated a systematization of my views, presented in diverse essays and articles (for example, “Lejos de Dios: Reflexiones sobre una tragedia nacional” [Far from God: Reflections on a national tragedy] published in *La Batalla*, number 19, 1987). The present essay has been motivated by a reading of the rigorous work of Jorge Fuentes Morúa, especially from his conclusion.<sup>1</sup> It is enough to say that I concur with the way Fuentes Morúa has framed the problem. These lines are a contribution to a key debate, intended to elaborate and complement a shared train of thought with new observations and conclusions.

## Ideological Disarmament and Rearmament

The quote by Trotsky at the start of this essay is from a passage in Chapter 4 of *The Revolution Betrayed* in which the old Russian revolutionary discourses with total naturalness on the extinction of the state and money. We have underlined the last line of this paragraph to emphasize an aspect that today, in the midst of the crisis created by the crumbling of the Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe, the chaos in the Soviet Union, and the imperialist triumph in the Persian Gulf, would seem completely off key. This strong optimism that Trotsky displays sounds strange at the mo-

ment. On the contrary, five generations following the Bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky, the situation of the international socialist movement is much worse than in the 1930s, the years of Trotsky’s reflections. Far from being “more intelligent” than their grandparents and great-grandparents, today the young are disoriented by the disaster of “actually existing” socialism, which only a few have correctly identified as a counterrevolutionary bureaucracy with Stalinist politics and ideology. Confusion, disorientation, skepticism, and apathy are in reality the most common response among large numbers of youth and workers. The disaster of Eastern Europe and the chaos of the USSR, added to the powerful repetition of imperialist ideology, have caused the political consciousness of broad sectors of the population to regress to a primitive and insufficient level. Socialist thought has to swim against the current with firmness and conviction, but without illusions in the scope of the obstacles to be overcome.

In a country that, on July 6, 1988, witnessed a massive stampede of the majority of “socialist” left groups towards neo-Cardénasism, and whose population, fed up with the PRI-ist frauds, were pressed into participating unenthusiastically in federal elections for the Congress of the nation (the entire Chamber of Deputies and one-half of the Senate), the prevailing pragmatic political climate makes it difficult to pose political and ideological questions that are tied to the abstract theoretical tradition of the socialist international. Some themes appear, to many democratic and revolutionary Mexican militants in the 90s, as tantamount to *science fiction politics*. Such is the case with the political and ideological questions, posed by the North American Free Trade Agreement, the problems of the northern frontier, the maquiladoras, and the international struggle of the Mexican people; in short, questions that are a challenge for revolutionary strategy in the last decade of this century.

Nevertheless, to forge an alternative revolutionary strategy it is necessary first to understand, as well as we can, the theoretical concepts of Marxism that are part of our history—starting with its systematic criticism of capitalist economy, politics, and society. The present case of industrialization and consequent proletarianization of the northern frontier is evident proof of the above.

## Imperialism and the Northern Frontier

How is the problem framed? Along the 3,000 kilometers of the frontier an economic and social process, unique in the entire world, is taking place: the direct contact between an imperialist nation and another nation also capitalist, but dependent on and subordinate to the former. (The frontier that today divides the new and strengthened Germany, unified under imperialist hegemony, from a Poland in crisis may in the near future constitute a similar case to what we have on our frontier, but so far there has not been sufficient time for the restoration of a dependent and underdeveloped capitalism in Poland—and it is uncertain that this can

be done successfully.) Marxism defines this relationship as one between a metropolis and a semicolonial or, more precisely, politically independent but economically subjugated country.

Over a hundred years ago the population along the Mexican side of the frontier was less than 50,000 inhabitants. Today nearly five million people live in the region and its cities and towns have a demographic growth rate higher than the national average. It was during the 1940s when the first big surge in population growth was witnessed: the population tripled and Ciudad Juárez took its place on the list of the ten largest cities in the country. In 1960, with the addition of Mexicali, there were two cities on the list of the top ten. In 1970, Tijuana became the third frontier city on that list. And the explosive growth continues, with the three mentioned cities approaching one million inhabitants. Other border cities are following the top three in an equally spectacular fashion: Nogales, Sonora (which in 1980 had 53,000 inhabitants and today has more than 100,000), Matamoros, Reynosa, and Nuevo Laredo. These last three, all in Tamaulipas, are cities with over 300,000 inhabitants (Matamoros itself has more than 350,000). In 1960 none had more than 100,000.

The underlying reason for this explosive population growth can be found in the capitalist economic development of the two countries. Within their interrelationship the determining factor is the economic growth of the imperialist power. This has been the case historically, ever since the war between Mexico and the U.S. in the last century ended with a separation of the old north of New Spain from Mexico. The impact of the imperialist economy has continued to forge a relationship that clearly benefits the northern country. During the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, when U.S. expansionism took the form of a powerful imperialist drive to export capital, the north became more dynamic than any other sector of the country. Mining, ranching, irrigated agriculture were developed widely in Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Zacatecas, Aguascalientes, and Nuevo León—pushed forward by foreign investment, especially U.S. investment. Through the construction of an extensive network of railroads this influence was felt nationally.

The stage was set in the north of Mexico for the revolution of 1910-1919 by the development of a process of proletarianization. This process, caused by imperialism, affected the miners, ranch hands, agricultural laborers, and other workers who constituted the base of the armies of Madura, Orozco, Villa, and even the better part of Carranza's army.

### **The Estranged and Isolated North**

Given a region estranged and isolated from the center of the nation and sparsely inhabited until relatively recently, it was inevitable that it would fall under the omnipresent influence of the most powerful imperialist country in the world, a country found just on the other side of a river or artificial boundary. The subordination of this region to the needs of U.S. capitalist development was a logical outgrowth of such a situation.

The political dimension adds a peculiarity that makes the curse of this U.S.-linked region all the more evident. We are talking about the proverbial centralism and inefficiency of the government of the Zócalo, as much before as after the revolution. Exercised bureaucratically and anti-democratically, this centralized authority only made the historical neglect of the region's needs more palpable, and the demands for tribute more detestable. Until recently, the North was the cradle of strong regional and anti-capitalist resentments which can only be compared with resentments generated in the one other region estranged from the center, the Yucatán Peninsula.

The "revolutionary governments" from Carranza to Cárdenas were little concerned with an integral development of the extensive northern regions. Of course the degree of this neglect is directly

proportional to the lack of resources at the disposal of the Mexican capitalist system and its government. But politically this situation did not justify to the people of the north the lack of concern by the national center toward their needs.

Of course the Sonoran presidents, starting with Obregón, favored their native land. Cárdenas, for his part, was particularly interested in a policy of populating the frontier. The change, as was said above, took place in the 40s when, because of the economic needs of the U.S., a powerful migratory flow of braceros (day laborers) began, attracted by the wartime jobs.

The 40s represent an historical turning point for the northern frontier and not just because of the increase in demographic growth. Its population growth was an expression of something more profound: After the Mexican Revolution and the initial revolutionary governments, relations between the two countries stabilized and Washington again considered its southern neighbor a privileged site for investments, a priority labor market, and the "Good Neighbor" par excellence.

### **Government Action**

Mexican presidents should have, equally, concerned themselves more often with the vast region. The prosperous U.S. capitalist economy in the 40s, 50s, and 60s naturally attracted hundreds of thousands of braceros, as well as workers in general, to the fields and cities of Texas and California. This migratory flow began to act as an escape valve for the pressure generated by unemployment, as a sort of cushion for dangerous social tensions. When the bracero program was ended in 1964 the Mexican government promoted its first program of border development (Pronaf). This became the direct forerunner of the maquiladora program. Ciudad Juárez was the initial center of the process that was extended along the entire frontier in subsequent years. The influx of migrants continued and radically altered the composition of the frontier population. Not only was it made up of immigrants originating from the northern states, but the great majority of immigrants came from southern states: from Jalisco, Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz, Tlaxcala, and even as far away as Tabasco and Chiapas. Since the earthquake of 1985 the migratory flow includes an ever increasing number of people from Mexico City.

As a result of the generalized recession in the imperialist economy in 1974, the frontier plan experienced its first crisis: thousands of workers in Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez were laid off, investment fell, and the dangers of a close dependency on economic cycles in the U.S. became evident. In 1977 the government again aided the maquiladora program, but it was conceived as a secondary support, not the fundamental axis of regional development. The petroleum boom promoted this idea of the "transitory nature of the maquiladora process." The products of the maquiladoras were cloth and durable consumer goods. Maquiladoras producing electronic or automotive products were in the minority.

It was in 1983 that the government of Miguel de la Madrid, as a consequence of the economic crisis, decided to make the maquiladoras the centerpiece of an intensive policy of industrial production for export. This caused an abrupt change in the composition of the maquiladoras, placing electronic and automotive manufacturing in first place. Since then growth has continued until the present situation where around one-half million workers (the majority of whom are women) work in the maquiladoras.

### **Imperialist Exploitation**

This new situation in which we find ourselves of rapid and extended development of the maquiladoras has fundamental consequences. A realistic evaluation of these consequences presup-

poses viewing them as the expression of a broader and deeper process, that is, the attempt by the imperialists to resolve the problems presented by successive recessions during the long period of economic depression that is now entering its third decade. During the recession of 1981-82 Mexico became one of the principal protagonists in this attempt because of the enormous size of its debt and because of its strategic geopolitical situation as next door neighbor to the U.S.

Among the imperialist plans one in particular concerns us especially: beginning in the 1980s the imperialist countries began a stage of plundering and exploiting the third world in which financial and commercial methods replaced the more belligerent ones associated with direct capital investment and repatriation of profits. This concept of a "new world order" that began to be sketched during that period signifies the payment of a substantial tribute from the third world to imperialism.

We have seen eloquent examples that demonstrate how the imperialist economy develops at the expense of *certain* countries. Dependent and subordinate nations have witnessed a dramatic process of impoverishment in relation to the "industrially most powerful countries," a euphemism used to veil their imperialist nature. There has been a negative rate of growth in per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East since 1980. We see in these continents a process of absolute impoverishment. Historically, the collapse in the standard of living in Latin America can be understood by the following comparisons: The mean per capita GDP in Latin America and in the Caribbean in the period from 1980 to 1985 was -1.0 percent. A comparison of the countries of Latin America with the imperialist countries grouped together in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) gives the following results: In 1900 the mean per capita GDP in Latin America was 41.8 percent of the OECD, in 1913 it was 49.9 percent, in 1929 it was 44.7 percent, in 1950 it was 45.3 percent, in 1973 it was 35.1 percent, and in 1987 it was 29.7 percent. "In other words Latin America narrowed the gap in per capita GDP between itself and the OECD countries between 1900 and 1913, maintained or slightly improved its position between 1913 and 1950, and then began to fall further and further behind after 1950."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, investment in Latin America has fallen more dramatically than the per capita GDP. Historical studies of long-term economic development conclude that the situation has no chance of improving in the future. In the study previously cited it says: "The average OECD level of GDP per capita was nearly five times that in Asia and three times the Latin American level in 1900. The regional gaps have widened since then. In 1987 the gap between the richest country and the poorest country was 36 to 1; in 1900 the gap was much smaller at 8 to 1."<sup>3</sup>

The world capitalist economy is not the crucible of a generalized progressive growth, but the crucible of an extreme and polarized uneven and combined development. And it appears that this contradictory process is becoming more virulent today than ever before. Since the end of the last century and the beginning of this one when imperialism began, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, as well as many countries of Asia, have witnessed an increase in their indices of relative and absolute impoverishment.

### The Gap Also Grows in Mexico

This international process of "perverse" development in the world capitalist economy also manifests itself in Mexico. And the northern frontier is where these tendencies of neo-capitalist barbarism have revealed themselves with unheard-of force.

In 1970 the "stabilizing development" that characterized the so-called "Mexican Miracle" ended. Real wages reached a peak in

the last years of the 60s. Shortly thereafter inflation broke loose: in 1972 the rate of inflation reached double digits for the first time in fifty years, initiating an erosion of workers' buying power that, twenty years later, appears irreversible. The real mean wage in 1991 is equivalent to one-third of the real mean wage in 1980. The downturn in the economy also manifested itself during the '70s in a perceptible reduction in growth, a weak and transitory upturn during the oil boom (1978-81), after which growth fell flat on its face in the six years of zero growth (1982-1988). Now in the three years of the Salinas administration growth has started to take off again, but with great difficulty.

This decline in the standard of living and the processes that accompanied it was manifested in the north by an intensified proletarianization of the population, many of whom live in shantytowns lacking the most elementary urban services and who are subjugated to conditions barely adequate for survival.

An eloquent example of this degradation is the fall in real wages of the maquiladora workers during a period when some of the greatest growth in the industry is taking place. From 1980 to 1986 the number of workers doubled from 122,000 to 250,000. During this period the total expenditure on wages, calculated in dollars, was practically the same.

#### Daily Wages in the Maquiladoras (in U.S. Dollars):

YEAR	DAILY WAGE	YEAR	DAILY WAGE
1980	\$7.00	1985	\$5.12
1981	\$8.37	1986	\$3.36
1982	\$5.93	1987	\$3.38
1983	\$4.47	1988	\$4.72

Source: *Expansion*, October, 1989.

These figures clearly show the importance of the devaluation of the peso as a way to drastically cheapen labor costs for foreign capitalists. During this period the exchange rate went from 25 pesos per dollar to 2,500 pesos per dollar. If in 1988 the wages of \$7 per day had been maintained, the pay in pesos (with the exchange rate at 2,500 per dollar) would have been 17,500 pesos. In reality it was only 10,626.

But there is still more. In terms of expenditures in dollars the capitalists paid in 1980 an average of \$7 daily to the workers. The devaluations that occurred beginning in 1980 resulted in a mean daily salary of almost half, \$3.65 per day. That is, the imperialists paid in 1986 almost the same amount of dollars in wages as they did in 1980 to a workforce that had doubled. In 1987 wage rates began to rise slightly, about 10 percent, preserving in any event juicy rates of profits in comparison to other countries with higher rates of wage increases. □

**Part 2, which concludes this article, will appear next month.**

#### Notes

1. The conclusion states: "To synthesize the regional problematic, in terms of national sovereignty the transnationals play for their own benefit with Washington and Mexico, always leaving Mexican sovereignty relegated to a secondary status. Because of this the real contradiction today, as it was 100 years ago, is between capital and labor." Jorge Fuentes Morúa, "Historia y política en la frontera," *Cuadernos Del Norte: Sociedad, Política, Cultura*. Chihuahua, Chih., No. 13, January-February, 1991, p. 20.

2. Peter Drew, "The New World Economic Order," *International Viewpoint*, No. 200, February 18, 1991.

3. *Ibid.*

Despite the extensive media coverage of recent months, the Kurds remain a people seen but not known. Who are they?

Long before the kings of Persia, the caliphs of Baghdad, and the sultans of the Ottoman Empire came to sit in their palaces, the Kurds settled in the valleys of northeastern Mesopotamia and the surrounding mountains that lie astride the borders separating present-day Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and the USSR. For thousands of years they have worked the soil and grazed their animals here.

The Kurds are a people of Indo-European stock who have lived in a geographically cohesive area called Kurdistan, and who constitute a nation with a distinct language, culture, and heritage. By the seventh century, they were writing poems in their own language and introducing music into the palaces of Arab princes. Ensuing literary works were at certain historical periods of high quality. For example, Ahmed Khani's 17th century masterpiece, *Memozin*, continues to rank among the chief works of epic literature.

Through thousands of years the Kurdish people fought the Sumerians, Assyrians, Persians, Crusaders, Mongols, and Turks for their freedom. And they gave Islam one of its best defenders—Saladin (Salah el-Din Ayyubi), who battled Richard the Lion-Hearted and the Crusaders to regain Jerusalem in 1187.

Despite their long and proud history, this ancient people have the unfortunate distinction of being perhaps the only community of over 21 million which has not enjoyed some form of national state in the post-World War I period.

While the Kurds, like many other non-Turkish peoples, were officially part of the Ottoman Empire prior to World War I, they in fact enjoyed a high degree of autonomy. The Kurdo-Ottoman pact, concluded in the early sixteenth century, formally recognized sixteen independent Kurdish principalities, with many of the attributes of sovereignty: they could even strike coinage, they did not have to pay tribute to the sultan, and they were not accountable to him.

Although the defeat and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire during World War I gave birth to a number of independent nation-states of the non-Turkish minorities (for example, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine/Israel), the Kurds, who were also promised self-determination, were actually denied this right. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed by the Allies and the Turkish government on August 10, 1920, specifically stipulated the right of the Kurds to self-determination.

This promise, however, was soon rendered meaningless by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which effectively divided Kurdistan among Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. The Iranian Kurds had long ago been separated from the rest of Kurdistan in the 16th century when the Ottoman and Persian Safavid empires set their borders right in the middle of Kurdistan (1514), following a long and bitter war.

As far as the Kurds are concerned, the Treaty of Lausanne represented a deal between Britain and Turkey for the division of Kurdish territories: as Britain detached the oil-rich province of Mosul from Kurdistan and attached it to its mandate (Iraq), it in return gave Turkey a free hand to subject the rest of

## The Kurdish People: Victims of the Capitalist Nation-State

by Esmail Hossein-zadeh

Kurdistan to increased oppression. Soon after the treaty, Mustafa Kemal, the xenophobic nationalist leader of Turkey, banned all expressions of Kurdish national identity such as art, music, literature, and, in particular, the use of their mother tongue. To deprive the Kurds of all

rights, Kemal passed laws that completely denied the very existence of the Kurds in Turkey, by trying to rename them "mountain Turks"!

In return for the forceful attachment of the Kurdish oil-rich province of Mosul to Iraq, Britain promised the Iraqi Kurds national autonomy. A 1922 joint Iraqi-British declaration recognized the Kurds' right to "form a Kurdish government within the Iraqi frontiers." But when the Iraqi government reneged on this promise and the Kurds rebelled, the British Royal Air Force aided the Iraqi army to crush the rebellion—once in 1932, and again in 1945.

This brutal breakup of Kurdistan was countered by the constant struggle of the Kurdish people to reestablish their national identity. In Iraq alone, the recent uprising of the Kurds, triggered partly by President Bush's call on the Iraqi people to rise against the tyrant in Baghdad, was only the latest of some eleven such insurrections since World War I.

President Bush's green light to Saddam Hussein to quell the uprising was likewise only the latest in a series of such cynical turnabouts. For example, in the early 1970s, the United States collaborated with the shah of Iran to supply a similar Kurdish struggle with arms in Iraq. That struggle was prompted by Baghdad's default on an important autonomy agreement it had signed with the Kurds in March 1970. When the Kurds revolted in protest, the U.S. and the shah maneuvered to derive political dividends for themselves.

"Support" by the U.S. and shah to the Kurds was designed not to help them gain their national autonomy, but to teach the Iraqi regime a lesson for (a) having just signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union, and (b) making repeated territorial claims concerning the border waterway between Iran and Iraq. The 1976 congressional Pike report provides a powerful testimony of how the Kurds were used: "Neither the foreign head of state [the shah] nor the president [Richard Nixon] and Dr. Kissinger desired victory for our clients [the Kurds]. . . . They merely hoped to ensure that the insurgents would be capable of sustaining a level of hostility just high enough to sap the resources of the neighboring state" [of Iraq]. The report adds: "Our clients, who were encouraged to fight, were not told of this policy. It was a cynical enterprise, even in the context of a clandestine aid operation."

In March 1975, when the Kurds gained the upper hand in the fight and forced the Iraqi army to retreat, the U.S. and the shah abruptly dumped the Kurds in exchange for an Iraqi concession on the border waterway between Iran and Iraq. As a result, the rebellion turned to rout, and the Kurdish people were once again subjected to all kinds of brutalities by the Iraqi regime: expelling some 300,000 Kurds to Iran; demolishing about 4,000 Kurdish villages and deporting hundreds of thousands of the Kurds to other parts of Iraq; poison-gassing some 12,000 Kurds in the city of Halabja in August 1988; deforesting the hills,

burning hundred-year-old walnut trees, and choking springs with concrete so the Kurds could not live off their land. All these brutal measures were taken as part of the genocidal conspiracy called "Arabization of Kurdistan."

But all of this, and even the chemical bombardments, did not end a struggle for autonomy that has gone on now for more than a hundred years. The Kurdish drive for their national identity has frequently been used by the big imperialist powers for their own geopolitical purposes in the region. Each of these powers has at one point or another offered help and promised self-determination "when the job was done." Each time, although they fought bravely and honorably, the Kurds were abandoned in their struggle. Successive regimes of the countries where the Kurds live have systematically subjected them to forced assimilation and genocidal schemes, while the world powers have stood by in silent compliance.

### **The Roots of the Problem**

The Kurds have never made territorial claims upon other peoples' lands. They have demanded only the right to be identified with their historic heritage and culture, and the economic resources in the lands where they have lived for centuries. Why then have they been subjected to all these atrocities?

A number of answers limited to anti-Kurd policies of this or that regime, geopolitical interests of international power brokers, mistakes of this or that Kurdish leader, and so on fall far short of satisfactory explanations. For one thing, they do not explain why the regimes that rule the countries where Kurdish people now live oppose the Kurds' use of their mother tongue as their language of instruction, while the regimes that ruled these countries prior to the emergence of modern, 20th-century national states in the region did not oppose such cultural expressions. Nor do they explain why major world powers go along with brutal policies of cultural and ethnic annihilation of the Kurds.

A closer examination of the forces denying the national rights of the Kurdish people, as well as those of other ethnic minorities, reveals that these forces have their roots in concrete economic requirements of the modern capitalist nation-state. An essential requirement of a relatively smooth functioning market economy is unity of language. Expansion of markets, contact between economic factors and agents, instituting and implementing of economic rules and regulations, marketing and sale of commodities, and the like are made more cost-effective in a society whose peoples speak a single language rather than being multilingual.

This is the fundamental reason for opposing the use of ethnic minority languages. It also explains why the loosely centralized precapitalist regimes of kings, sultans, emirs, and emperors were more tolerant of cultural and ethnic diversity than are the modern nation-states of capitalism.

Diversity of languages is not the only "burden" on the free functioning of a market economy. The market mechanism also requires uniformity in currency and tax systems, in trade and investment rules, in labor and business laws, and so on. In addition, it requires politically united territories within the nation-state. These needs of a market economy for standardization and uniformity are diametrically opposed to the needs of ethnic minorities for diversity and self-determination.

The plight of the Kurdish people can best be understood in this historico-economic framework. It shows why successive regimes ruling the Kurdish territories have systematically suppressed their struggle for self-determination. It also shows why major world powers go along with the oppressive policies of these regimes against the Kurdish people.

This is why, for example, despite the Western powers' calculated assault on Saddam Hussein, they nevertheless salvaged the dictator as the "guardian" of Iraq's nation-state and as the "lesser evil" in the face of the recent popular uprisings against his dictatorial rule and the prospects of self-determination in Kurdistan.

Nation-state requirements are not the only factors thwarting the struggle of the Kurds for self-determination. Their struggle has been further hamstrung by their geography, their economic backwardness, and the rigidities of their past methods of national struggle. Their once strategically valuable mountains turned out to be their scourge in the 20th century. As long as pastoralism, feudalism, and other precapitalist formations were the dominant socio-economic structure in the region, their high and relatively secluded lands served them well: on the one hand, they provided favorable grounds for both pasture and agriculture; on the other, they served as defense/security fortresses against territorial ambitions or military incursions from the outside world. Indeed, these geographic properties contributed greatly to the Kurds' national survival through so many centuries, as well as to the fact that their national identity and cultural characteristics have remained intact.

These factors contributing to their national survival in the past became, however, a threat to that survival in the 20th century. A rugged, mountainous, and relatively secluded land, with no access to the sea, meant that most 20th century development in the region—of markets, industries, modern nation-states, and the like—have passed the Kurds by without seriously touching them.

This does not mean that all their economic underdevelopment is due to their natural conditions. Surrounded and divided by hostile regimes, Kurdish provinces have been left out of most of the development projects of the central governments ruling their lands. It has been only in the past fifteen or twenty years that minimal industrialization projects have been implemented in Kurdish provinces.

Lack of economic development has in turn impeded social development. Thus the process of social differentiation and the emergence of modern social classes, characteristics of a social transition from feudalism to capitalism, did not arrive in Kurdistan in time to help the Kurds establish their own nation-state. A modernizing bourgeois elite versed in statist traditions did not develop in Kurdistan until very recently. Nor did an industrial working class or a radical intelligentsia equipped with a revolutionary ideology. To the extent that these modern social strata are belatedly developing among the Kurds, they largely represent a process of integration (i.e., integration of the Kurds into the ethnic majorities of the countries to which they are attached—mainly Turks, Persians, and Arabs). Considering that the language of instruction and education, hence of progress and "upward mobility," in all these countries is non-Kurdish, the mechanism of forced integration and assimilation of the Kurds becomes clear.

Because of small, insignificant modern elites, traditional tribal-feudal leadership dominated the Kurdish struggle for national liberation until very recently. Even now strong influences of traditional methods of struggle manifest themselves within various ranks of the leadership. Without discounting all the sacrifices and contributions of the traditional leadership, it must be pointed out that its tactics and strategies are not suitable for the 20th century requirements of national liberation. Gerard Chaliand, an authority on the political history of the Kurds, captures the weaknesses of the traditional leadership in the following sentence: "Tactical cunning instead of political analysis, clientist maneuverings instead of political mobilization, and a few revolutionary slogans instead of a radical practice."<sup>1</sup>

Such methods of struggle have at times cost the Kurdish national cause very dearly.<sup>2</sup> Although traditional methods have in recent years come under serious analysis and severe criticism, present leaders of the Kurdish movement have been less than successful in entirely extricating themselves from their past methods. This is perhaps due to the fact that traditions and modes of thinking cannot be changed at will: as long as the economic structure and living conditions of the Kurdish people remain in the grip of geopolitical constraints and economic underdevelopment, the burden of past rigidities is bound to weigh heavily on their national movement.

### ***The Future of the Kurdish People***

Requirements of capitalist nation-states are seriously threatening the survival of the Kurdish people. Kurdish national identity and continuity are threatened not just by forceful relocation of the Kurds or by periodic wars and bombardments launched against them by the armies of the regimes ruling their territories. Their survival is being undermined through a gradual process of integration and assimilation—a kind of a slow death. As the Kurds are deprived of using their own language, they are forced to abandon it and learn Arabic, Turkish, or Persian in order to be able to go to school and educate themselves. And as the Kurdish language thus becomes an increasingly oral language of older generations and, therefore, obsolete, so does the Kurdish culture and national identity.

Thus, if the status quo and the ban on the use of the Kurdish language continues for a long time, survival of the Kurds as a nation will gradually come to an end, perhaps within the next few generations. One might argue that this is extreme pessimism, since the Kurds (and many other nations) have lived for centuries without a written language. True. But those were different times. In our time, survival of a nation without a written language is simply impossible—it is only a matter of time before that nation becomes extinct.

Does this mean that the Kurdish people as a nation are therefore doomed? Not at all. The pessimistic scenario projected above is a conditional scenario: "If the status quo . . . continues for a long time. . . ." This is a big "if." None of the regimes suppressing the Kurdish national movement enjoys long-term prospects of stability. Nor is the dominant capitalist world order guaranteed a permanent life. Social changes always take place despite the opposition of the ruling powers. For example, very few people predicted the overthrow of the shah of Iran, in which the Kurds played an important role.

True, they did not achieve the national rights for which they fought. But that was not due to any fault of their own. It was, rather, because their coalition partners in the united front against the dictatorship betrayed them. The Tudeh party (the Iranian pro-Moscow Communist party) and a number of other leftist organizations and parties that followed the political line of Tudeh played a most shameful part in that betrayal.

The present turbulence in Iraq serves as another example. Not long ago, Saddam Hussein's regime seemed invincible and the prospects of the Kurds challenging it inconceivable. But a series of events, largely orchestrated from outside Iraq, quickly put his regime on the verge of collapse. Once again, the Kurds played a major role in the national uprising. Had Washington not given Saddam Hussein a green light to use his air power against the uprising, Saddam would have been overthrown and the Kurds could have been liberated.

The process of forced integration of the Kurds into the non-Kurdish societies noted earlier is not unidimensional. While it tends to undermine the national identity of the Kurds, it also helps their national cause in other ways. It does so by creating counterbalancing developments that somewhat offset the integration effects. One such positive development is the breakup of traditional societies in Kurdistan and the emergence of new social classes and new elite groups among Kurdish people. This is increasingly changing the composition and the character of the leadership of the national liberation movement.

There are indications that the new leadership, or at least sections of the new leadership, is increasingly becoming conscious of the fact that liberation of the Kurdish people is inseparable from that of other oppressed peoples in the region, and that a solution to their national cause cannot come about in isolation from broader social changes in the countries in which they live. This new perspective is partially reflected in the ongoing negotiations between Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi Kurds. While Saddam is eager to strike a bilateral deal that would involve only his regime and the Kurds, the Kurds are insisting on broader social reforms and multilateral dialogues that would involve other democratic forces in Iraq. Their slogan is "Democracy for Iraq, Autonomy for Kurdistan."

Penetration of new ideas into the ranks of the Kurdish national movement is adding another significant dimension to their struggle: the international dimension. The Kurds are increasingly learning that they have long been unmindful of the importance of making their cause public on an international level. And they are gradually opening up political offices and establishing liaison networks in imperialist countries in order to reach out to the media and sympathetic democratic forces there.

Economic exigencies of the modern nation-state constitute the major obstacles to the national liberation of the Kurds, as well as to that of other national minorities. To overcome these obstacles, it will be necessary to change the economic foundation of the nation-state in a way that it would not be in conflict with the language or cultural diversity of ethnic minorities and their dire material and social needs. This is a task way beyond the power of the Kurds alone. But the Kurds are not alone in their suffering from the evils of the capitalist nation-state. There are other minorities, both ethnic and non-ethnic, and

*(Continued on next page)*

# Couple Denied Asylum by Hong Kong Executed After Returning to China

This report is reprinted from *The Voice of Democracy in China*, May/June 1991, the newsletter of the Chinese Alliance for Democracy and the Federation for a Democratic China.

Two pro-democracy activists who had escaped to Hong Kong were executed after the colonial government refused their asylum application and deported them back to China.

Government officials in Hong Kong turned a deaf ear to the couple's claims that they would be executed if they were forced to return to China, said the English language *South China Morning Post*.

Killed were 22-year-old Lin Bin, one of the leaders in the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement. Lin Bin and her 32-year-old husband Lin Quingming escaped to Hong Kong in September 1989.

A friend of the couple remembered: "I found out that the lady was pregnant. She looked tired physically and spiritually while in custody in Hong Kong. She is thin and weak. But her personality is nice, she is outspoken, unyielding, and smart."

Lin Bin gave birth to a child while in custody in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong governor denied their appeal contesting the deportation order last year. Ultimately, Lin Bin was desperate with worry over the health of her baby in the jail cell and agreed to go back to China.

Several weeks later, her husband went back to China as well. They were immediately arrested and accused of participating

in an alleged speculation scam known to be fabricated by the PRC regime and, after a summary trial, were immediately executed in the traditional method—a single bullet was fired into their skulls.

According to sources, Lin Bin is one of the 30 most-wanted Tiananmen leaders in the aftermath of the CCP's pursuit and suppression of dissidents. Whereas her husband, Lin Quingming, is the major leader of the pro-democracy movement in Sichuan province.

The couple had escaped to Hong Kong when they knew they were on the most-wanted list and applied for political asylum but were considered illegal immigrants by the Hong Kong authorities. Later the Hong Kong authorities contacted the Public Security Ministry of the PRC (PSM) to obtain information on them.

The PSM claimed that the couple were involved in a fraudulent deal involving a gas factory in Sichuan province and were on the most-wanted list. On December 20, the Hong Kong officials determined that they "lacked materials and were suspected of fabricating information" and ordered their deportation to the mainland. □

## Kurds (Continued from page 28)

especially the growing working class and the poor who are likewise kept down. Only a concerted struggle of the broad layers of the oppressed can bring about a meaningful socio-economic change in the status quo, thereby ushering in a dawn of liberty for them all, including the Kurdish people. □

September 16, 1991

## Notes

1. Gerard Chaliand, *People Without a Country: The Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Zed Press, 1980): page 16.

2. For a somewhat comprehensive account of the mistakes and weaknesses of the leadership of the Kurdish national struggle see Kendal, "Kurdistan in Turkey," in *Ibid*.

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## Northern Moravia Was the Site of the Seventh International Youth Camp

# See You Next Year!

by Kalle Lindberg

*From The International, weekly newspaper of the Socialist Party, Swedish section of the Fourth International; translation by Riitta Ronkko.*

During the last week in July the Fourth International youth organization arranged an international youth conference in Czechoslovakia. Seven hundred and fifty young people from all over Europe and other parts of the world got together to discuss politics and have fun.

We were part of a busload of tired but happy Swedes who came and experienced an intensive week filled with political discussions and a great deal of enthusiasm which has left us much more inspired to carry on our political work back home. During many of the sessions at the conference the meeting rooms were filled with over 400 participants. About half of us from Sweden were of our Young Socialist group. Others were part of various groups [six are mentioned] as well as those belonging to no group.

Everyone wanted to learn what it meant to be a "young socialist" and an internationalist in the world today. This was one of the liveliest group discussions. But, of course, there was a lot of sharp disagreement during this discussion among the various groups present.

One of the most important aspects of the whole conference was the chance to learn firsthand from people about the living political movements in their own lands. For example, Luis from the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil talked about building a mass workers' party, while young people from East Berlin spoke at length about the fight they are organizing against the rapidly growing fascist movement there. Young Poles spoke about the worsening conditions for women in their country and their struggle for a new abortion law in Poland. Having this shared knowledge of these living

movements has helped us all both politically and spiritually.

The clock is passing midnight and we are all exhausted by now. This was my fourth youth conference and I have enjoyed seeing the greatly improved relations between various left groups. The atmosphere among the left has improved greatly. When the first youth conference was held in Denmark seven years ago the Fourth International's youth organization was relatively small and unknown. Since then we have managed to build up a rather stronger identity. Presently, our youth organizations in Europe are still not very big or powerful, but they are very stable. There is much more cooperation with other left groups and youth movements. The idea now is to continue this cooperation and joint discussions so that we can continue to work together.

Ingemar from Sodertalje said that last year it seemed to be easier to get in contact with people from other countries and reach political agreement. Ebba from Skovde remarked that there was a strong conviction that many people attending this conference very much wanted to come back next year. Many who attended noted the strong condition and organizing ability of the Swedish youth section which proved to be one of the largest and best organized. Some from Goteberg talked about starting a new youth group in that town and pointed out some ways in which the Swedish youth section could build bridges with other left groups.

At a later discussion at the cafeteria many gathered to discuss building solidarity with the oppressed peoples of Latin America. This was followed by a discussion on why the left's political

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vision today is so weak and how it needs to be strengthened. □



**This article was submitted to the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* following Solidarity's recent National Committee meeting.**

**W**e appreciate the opportunity to present to the readers of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* some of Solidarity's perspectives on the ways of working toward a fruitful process of regroupment of the revolutionary socialist U.S. left. The National Committee of Solidarity, at its meeting in September, mandated us to prepare this contribution.

This NC meeting also passed several other motions regarding Solidarity's relations with the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, including the continuation of our practice of co-sponsoring public forums with FIT on appropriate topics and asking our branches to review areas of work where it might be appropriate to invite FIT comrades to participate.

Two representatives of FIT, Steve Bloom and Paul Le Blanc, attended several sessions of this NC meeting, where they participated in our discussions on the Soviet upheaval and its implications, as well as our discussion on the controversy over the "Politically Correct" on campuses.

Regarding the issue of revolutionary socialist regroupment, we won't repeat here all the general arguments, which are certainly already known to (and agreed to by) most readers of this journal, in favor of seeking unity wherever possible. The urgency of this task is only enhanced by the complex upheaval in the (former) Soviet Union. These events present our own left with both an opportunity and critical challenge: the opening created as the death grip of Stalinism is removed from the left must be seized, at a moment when bourgeois ideology is trumpeting the final discrediting and "failure" of socialism itself.

The question is not *whether* to seek unity among the small forces of the revolutionary socialist movement in the United States, but the *methods* by which to pursue it. We have been following a road that is different from that proposed by the comrades of FIT.

Solidarity's approach is to seek *unity around a broad revolutionary program*, one that stresses several key points: the inseparability of socialism from democracy and working class power; the struggle for independent mass working class organization and politics; support for all democratic struggles, especially national liberation, and for feminism and the self-emancipation of all the oppressed. A key to our strategic perspective in the U.S. is organizing for a rank-and-file movement for militant democratic unionism, and for a break from the Democratic Party. (These points are spelled out in a twelve-point statement in the Founding Statement adopted by our organization in 1986.)

In a letter we wrote to FIT on March 21, 1991, we stated the role we believe those from the Trotskyist tradition (with which

many Solidarity members critically identify) should play in such a process:

"Undoubtedly, because of the experience, the attention to education and theory, the intransigent insistence on workers' democracy and the crucially important critique of the Democratic Party that militants from the Trotskyist tradition contribute, they are a crucial component of a viable socialist

workers' movement in the United States. We are happy to note that even former 'Marxist-Leninist' sectarians now admit as much. But we don't believe that the healthy, broad revolutionary socialist organization we are struggling toward will be premised on the 'assimilation' of new cadres and generations to a Trotskyist continuity (in the sense of an historical factional loyalty) or to this or that current within it. *We don't attempt to do this in our organization*, which

is one thing that distinguishes us from a Trotskyist tendency or a federation of several."

To be crystal clear about this point: We are not under any illusions that the policy of regroupment on a broad revolutionary program is going to produce rapid gains. This would be an absurd expectation in a period when much of the left has fled from revolutionary politics, when few if any prospects of mass-based independent politics are visible, when the credibility of socialism—a new society to be created through democratic working class power—is under attack not only from outside but from *within* the left itself. The tasks of the period are patient propaganda, activism, and the recovery and critical re-theorization of the revolutionary socialist traditions of Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg and Debs applied to our present reality.

Our argument, which we are attempting to test in practice, is that a broad revolutionary program is the *correct* approach to making socialist politics relevant to those labor and social movement activists—the small numbers today and hopefully larger tomorrow—who are open to this project. This means that a range of questions that within a tightly defined sect are considered "programmatically settled"—including the interpretation of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, the nature of the "Leninist party," and yes, even the desirability of one—are *open*, and that no timetable is contemplated for resolving them. We are far more concerned with developing agreement, among ourselves and with others on the left, toward common practice in building the movements, without the slightest pretensions that we ourselves are the "vanguard" or its nucleus.

It will be immediately obvious how our approach differs diametrically from that of the Socialist Workers Party or

## On Socialist Regroupment: Solidarity's Perspective

by the Political Committee of Solidarity

Socialist Action, which declare themselves to be the "party." As we tried to explain in our March 21 letter to FIT:

"The way in which SA conceives itself as the unique embodiment of some kind of Trotskyist continuity, and *therefore* the way it organizes itself, creates a situation in which its leadership *necessarily acts as a permanent faction*, not just in SA's external milieu but also internally (a danger Cannon recognized in the SWP four decades ago). The SWP obviously operates similarly, but if anything SA's method is a bad caricature of the SWP itself. In terms of politics and organizational practice, taken as a whole and not with respect to this or that particular position, we are no closer to Socialist Action than to the SWP." We wish to stress here that what we consider to be the extremely unhealthy methods of SA are not the result of subjective shortcomings of its particular leaders (which they undoubtedly have, but so do we all), but are a near-inevitable result of its vanguardist pretensions with no working class base.

In no way does this imply that we hold up Solidarity's current organizational practice as a model. Our structures are weak, our "response time" to political events often slow, our level of political development below what we would like. In short, we share the problems of a left that is small and poorly implanted in the the struggles, the communities, and the social institutions of the working class and oppressed. While struggling with uneven success to overcome these weaknesses, we refuse to *disguise* them with fake Bolshevik posturing and commandism dressed up as democratic centralism.

What may be less obvious are our differences with FIT, an organization which does not regard itself as the "party" and with which we share cordial working relations in several cities. We believe that FIT adopted a mistaken orientation, reflected in its very first public statements on unity, which has created a barrier to closer relations between us. FIT chose to give *political priority* to seeking "unification among all Fourth Internationalists in the United States." Our objection is simple: On the one hand such unification is too ideologically narrow in principle; on the other hand it is a perfect fantasy in practice.

FIT comrades have assured us that they, too, view a unification among Fourth Internationalists as only one component in a broader project that includes a mass-based working class party, and that FI supporters could loyally be part of building a wider revolutionary organization. Fair enough. Regrettably, however, Solidarity has been unable to convince FIT of what seems absolutely obvious to us: that the political priority of seeking to bring about a unity among Solidarity, FIT, and Socialist Action is not just ludicrous in itself but actually hinders any sane discussion of real possibilities. Indeed, FIT has put itself in a locked box by stating publicly that its "fusion" with either Socialist Action or Solidarity would only be a "first step" toward unity with the other. Under such circumstances it would be *impossible* for FIT to place its political confidence (and therefore, loyalty) in the kind of organization Solidarity is trying to become.

Obviously it makes perfect sense for supporters of the FI, or any other international political current, to wish and work for unity of their forces in the U.S. or any given country. This task, however, cannot take *priority* over real working political and

organizational agreement. This problem is not of our making; it is inherent in the real political situation. For its part, Socialist Action has quite clearly—and quite logically and correctly, given *its* politics—rejected any discussion of unity with Solidarity. SA has informed both ourselves and FIT that its only interest in Solidarity would be to split us, i.e., to invite the Fourth International Caucus of Solidarity to join SA. And we are told by FIT's representatives that SA has rejected "fusion" with them, but is interested only in absorbing it, "with full democratic rights" to be sure, something with which many former SA members now in both Solidarity and FIT have previous experience.

It was the hopelessness of what we called the "triangular" process that FIT had embarked upon that prompted us to initially decide not to hold a face-to-face meeting between our leaderships. It seemed clear to us that, in making a priority of an FI regroupment in the U.S. *without regard to the obvious political choices about general direction and project of construction* that have to be made, the FIT was beginning with a formality instead of a political *line* on these crucial matters. The diplomacy of a face-to-face leadership meeting would not have conveyed our real assessment of FIT's regroupment proposal, but would have instead lent a false impression that we were somehow willing to involve ourselves in a project we believed was wrongly axised at the present time.

The invitation to our recent leadership meeting came primarily because the FIT insistently made a (false) identity between "a leadership meeting" and "willingness to discuss." Since we could not make it clear that the two were not identical, and since the leadership of the FIT was systematically misinterpreting our responses as "hostility" or "brutality," we agreed to meet in person to try to explain what we had already made fully explicit in writing and in conversations over time in order to clear away this false portrayal.

These somewhat arcane discussions run the risk of obscuring bigger problems. Stalinism has collapsed, at a historic moment when the labor movements in the industrial heartlands of capitalism are in profound retreat. A vacuum exists where working class socialist politics should be. Our tiny organizations face huge responsibilities. To confront these, we need to be seeking open dialogue with *everyone* on the left who wants to keep the socialist struggle alive, without abandoning the principles crucial to us. Regrettably, those like Socialist Action—one of whose co-chairs told the World Congress of the FI, "In my opinion we have almost nothing to learn from other currents; they have always been wrong on almost everything"—have less to contribute to that dialogue than others who are ideologically further from us.

There is a *clear choice* to be made, not between organizations but between perspectives, between seeking regroupment on a broad revolutionary program and seeking yet again to create a single-tendenced Trotskyist sect. We hope that our two organizations can continue and deepen mutual work where it is appropriate. And we hope that the FIT can clarify for itself what lessons it draws and what direction it seeks to go in the future reconstruction of revolutionary socialism in the U.S. □

# Ann Charloff Snipper, 1914-1991

by Walter Lippmann

Ann Charloff Snipper, a revolutionary socialist activist for over half a century, died of cancer in Los Angeles, October 3, 1991. She was 77 years old.

A plainspoken, often blunt individual, Ann's entire adult life was spent in the socialist and working class movements.

She joined the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) at the age of 16 in 1929. In the YPSL she met Milton "Mit" Snipper whom she would marry in 1936 and with whom she had two children, Julius and Elizabeth.

In the early 1930s, Ann was active in solidarity with striking agricultural workers in California. She and others went out to the unions in the San Pedro area, appealing to them for support to striking farmworkers. Five dollars would feed a family for two weeks during that period, she would later remark in an oral history interview with historian Arnold Springer.

As a member of the Socialist Party in the mid-1930s, Ann made her acquaintance with revolutionary ideas through the Trotskyist cadres then active in that organization. With them, she was expelled for her political ideas and became a founding member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1938.

Following the 1940 split in the SWP, Ann joined the Workers Party, led by Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. After a short period, she decided this had been an error. She promptly rejoined the SWP, in which she spent the bulk of her political life.

In the 1940s, Ann played a leading role in the work of the American Committee for European Workers Relief, a material aid organization providing practical assistance to European Fourth Internationalists in the aftermath of World War II.

Within the SWP, Ann was an active organization person. She served on numerous local party bodies, including the executive committee during the 1950s. As the Cold War and economic prosperity combined with government harassment, the SWP, like all working class organizations, was negatively affected. Ann played a vital role in keeping the SWP both organizationally alive and financially stable at the time.

Ann was particularly noted for her effective work over many years in party fundraising through institutions such as twice-annual rummage sales, party banquets, and other events. An excellent cook herself, Ann was always a stickler for seriousness and professionalism in food preparation, presentation, and service.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, the West Coast Vacation School became a nationally significant party institution. A week-long educational, social, and recreational encampment, the school was a place at which party leaders first presented many ideas which were later published as articles, pamphlets, and books. Ann was one of the key organizers of these events, which served to keep the party active, alert, and open to new people during a long and difficult political conjuncture.

Together with her husband Mit, his brother Henry Snipper, and Henry's wife Alice Snipper, Ann worked weekends over a three-year period to construct a remarkable duplex home on Descanso Drive in the Silverlake district of Los Angeles. The home became a center of party social life and fundraising through the mid-1960s. An annual shish kebab barbecue, New Year's Eve parties, and other events were held there with regularity.

In 1967 the Snipper home was firebombed by counterrevolutionaries protesting an event held there in support of

the Cuban revolution. The damage was corrected and political events continued to be held there.

Ann was heartened by the rise of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. She was active in the pro-choice struggle at various levels, most recently through the January 22 Coalition for Reproductive Rights, a local group, some of whose work was conducted out of Ann's home. As recently as two years ago, at the age of 75, Ann could be found outside the front door of the local neighborhood abortion clinic, participating in the physical defense of a woman's right to choose abortion.

In 1984, following her political convictions, Ann and other longtime SWP members were expelled from the party for their defense of the Trotskyist program on which they had joined. She became a founding member of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, of which she remained a member for the rest of her life. She was well-informed, reading the daily paper thoroughly and following the news on television closely.

Ann was an individual of remarkable strength and determination. She learned to drive an automobile at the age of 60, and had a safe driving record for the rest of her life. An avid traveler, she visited England, Finland, Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, and Australia in recent years. She had an acute visual sense, and brought back genuinely accomplished photographs of characteristic local sights from her travels.

As a Marxist and an atheist, Ann faced cancer with a clear-sighted vision. She rarely mentioned pain, nor did she suffer from depression. She never sought help from a higher power to alter or postpone the reality of her condition. In a world and at a time when most people concern themselves with personal and private matters, Ann Snipper's life of participation in the struggle for the betterment of human society was at once admirable and exemplary. She will be missed!

Ann is survived by her daughter, Elizabeth "Bitsy" Myers, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. □

## **Peltier (Continued from page 22)**

become something of a symbol of Native American rights to his supporters, Indian and non-Indian alike. Many of his supporters, in fact, argue that in the years leading up to the conflict at Wounded Knee and after the Jumping Bull incident, the FBI, federal marshals, and Indian law officers

killed more than 300 "traditionalist" Indians on and around the reservation. Few of the deaths were even mentioned in the media, his supporters claim.

"Our history has seen us lose time and again through the courts and the media. My imprisonment has helped to keep Indian issues alive. It has put people on notice," Peltier said.

Gordon is even more emphatic than the prisoner himself when talking about the importance of his cause.

"The whole thing is about sovereignty," she said. "It is about people protecting their land and their life. Leonard represents not only a protest, but also a stand against what is essentially the colonialism of the U.S. government." □

# Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

## 49. Empty Blither, Present and Accounted For

*"A lie can become a mighty force indeed. But it can never become the truth."*

Rabindranath Tagore, "The Bird of Passage."

I notice that the more I talk about the camps, the more subjective I get. But what is to be done about this? Should I be expected to describe the camps but keep my opinions out of it? That was my original intention, but I did not succeed. I am retaining only one feature of my plan: not to mouth the self-serving "truths" that were officially disseminated. The result is that I am more likely to focus on what was bad than to keep talking about what was good. There are various degrees of self-awareness in society. A member of a primitive community considered his tribe the best there was and could not see its flaws. Those who expose what is bad in society made their appearance only at a later stage of human development. However, to expose the flaws of those close to you means to mourn their existence.

It is not books exposing social ills that are harmful to a society, even books that exaggerate (did not Diogenes, Jeremiah, and Swift really exaggerate?). It is novels and poems concealing these ills that are harmful. Hiding the flaws lulls the public to sleep. It is worse than the heroin trade—and more massive in its effect. Therefore, books inspiring indignation and distress are a thousand times more noble than soothing ones.

This is not just true of artistic literature but also of statistics. For example, the 1969 annual report "The People's Economy in the USSR," published in 1970, cited comparative data about labor productivity in our country and in the USA. It stated that labor productivity in industry in 1913 was "approximately 11%" of what it was in America; but by 1969, it was "approximately 50%." In agriculture, it averaged in 1966-69 "approximately 20-25%" of America's; but in construction in 1969, it was "approximately 65%."

This very important comparative data took up six lines, a fifth of a page, one-four-thousandth of a part of the book even though the problem of the comparative productivity of labor under capitalism and socialism by no means constitutes one-four-thousandth of the general question of the superiority of

socialism. The productivity of social labor is the decisive, conclusive factor determining the superiority of each new form of society over the one that it displaces. Every new stage of the economic organization of human society is distinguished by its higher level of labor productivity over the system it is replacing. Slaveholding societies had a higher level of labor productivity than tribal societies; feudal societies had a higher level than those based on slave labor. The level of labor productivity under capitalism is on a higher level (immeasurably higher) than it was under feudalism. There can be no transition to communism until the stage preceding it (i.e., socialism) has surpassed its own predecessor, i.e., the capitalist stage, and thereby proven its economic superiority. This is elementary to Marxists. Lenin often spoke not simply about higher labor productivity but precisely about "a higher level of labor productivity compared with capitalism." One need only read his articles, "The Routine Tasks of Soviet Power" or "A Great Beginning."

Here I would like to note that I am speaking about social labor and social structures and not about the state structure. They are not the same thing. Concern over the needs of the state are not always equivalent to concern over the needs of society, as I tried to explain in a preceding notebook, using the example of the telephone. Everything that was useful to the state under Stalin began to be developed at an accelerated rate, while those things that were more useful only for society began to lag behind. There are many examples of this: vodka production, domestic labor of women, and the imposition of the sales tax. Of course, statistics can be adduced to prove that this benefited society. But if it were so beneficial, why does this benefit have to be proven?

There is nothing in and of itself odd or surprising in a negligent or at best ambiguous attitude on the part of the state toward such social problems as alcoholism. The state can only be concerned about itself. Otherwise, it is not a state. It has to grow and its every cell stubbornly resists any attempt at removal. Each one wants to live!

The process of the gradual withering away of the state outlined by Lenin in his *State and Revolution* had not even begun. On the contrary, the state was becoming ever more

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.

centralized and ossified. This centralization—no matter how paradoxical it may seem—dynamically facilitated technological progress, particularly in the sphere of the material basis for culture. This material basis for culture, however, should not be confused with culture itself, as is done in the statistics, for example in the reference work cited above on the "People's Economy."

The mass culture generated by the current level of technology corresponds precisely to the needs of the state. This mass culture has become extremely necessary to the state and the state takes care of it. The state clips all thoughts down to be like new recruits in basic training, stands them to attention, and leads them out for a drill, all the time shouting out: "Emp-ty Bli-ther!"

However, society needs another kind of culture: the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. The stronger the influences of identical newspaper, radio, and television accounts, fanatic agitation on one or another theme, and other such motors of the masses on the development of each, the further removed we get from the very idea of the free development of each member of society. Where is the freedom?

\* \* \*

A year after the judicial counsel had replied: "Rightly convicted!" all my previous convictions were struck down, first the 1936 case in the Supreme Court, then the two different decisions in 1950. Only then was I freed. Thus, one could say that I have been rehabilitated three times. See how much I have accomplished in my life!

Going to work in a factory, I got a room in a building that was a re-done camp barracks. One of its walls faced the street, the three others faced apartments of three workers who were former prisoners in the camp. The oldest one had a 17-year-old daughter, a half-educated pupil, pretty, and poorly developed. Having joined her father a year ago, she had in this short span of time learned to swear no worse than her father. The second neighbor had an infant who learned foul language at an even younger age. The third neighbor had a boy who was about seven years old. The little boy had been in the first grade for no more than a month. The teacher sent him home (after having spoken with the parents several times) because she could no longer bear to hear the words that were endlessly pouring from his mouth.

This is what the camp did for the children of those it reeducated. However, the quality of the reeducation of parents themselves also seems questionable to me. One could, I daresay, be sure that my neighbors will never again commit robbery or grand theft. The camp taught them something. But every day, they would drag home this and that from the factory. To them, this was a minor transgression. If you punish every case of petty theft to keep others from doing the same, there would not be enough prisons. One could try to punish them for having stolen items that they themselves produced. This has been done for more than thirty years. But the success rate is not good. The criminal code, which has taken the place of a moral standard, is no substitute for such a standard and never can be. My three neighbors are totally upright individuals. The only thing that deters them is fear of punishment. All those things for which

no punishment will be imposed or for which the punishment is light, they consider permissible. Their sense of shame has completely atrophied. And shame, once it dies, will not return. It is impossible to instill it in adults. The young girl of 16 arrived at Vorkuta and had lost it after a year.

Social ills can be driven inward by means of fines, arrest, and other severe measures; but they cannot be cured in the same way. Beyond the barbed wire of Mine No. 4, I watched as two well-dressed men had it out with some woman. One of them lashed her across the face with the palm of his hand—not with a fist which would have left a bruise. He hit her first from the right, then from the left. The other man stood there and said something while keeping his hands in his pockets. She did not try to cover her face. Her head simply moved to the right and then to the left under each blow.

To me all this was a link in the chain. The window of the investigation bloc in Butyrk, where women were interrogated at night and doused with buckets of filthy verbal abuse, was another link. The camps in Karaganda where Nina Lasova was confined was still another. The criminals who played with women were one more. And the daughter of our neighbor, mastering the entire lexicon of the campmates and investigators in one year, was another. Alcoholism is a link; and what a weighty one it is. They make up a long chain. Where is its end? And what is perhaps even more important to establish, where does it begin?

Continuity is particularly important to a culture. If a society is too encumbered by feudal ruins—humility, servility, fear of those above, weakly developed self-awareness—clearing away these ruins is not a simple task. Culture is distinguished by the fact that it cannot be transformed. It is always there—continuing. While repudiating the past, culture always maintains it.

\* \* \*

In our shop, the second machine division, everyone who lived too far away to go home for meals—our shop had no dining room—gathered in the red corner and ate the cutlets and sandwiches brought from home.

A demobilized soldier worked with us. He was not a stupid lad and told a story well. He was still a boy during the war and his family lived in occupied territory. The lad remembered those years well. He told how the Jews were killed. All the inhabitants of the little town were gathered together to watch it. The Jews were herded to ditches that had been dug beforehand, and then all of them—the men and women with babies in their arms—were forced into the ditch by being shot in the legs.

Then, these living people were covered with dirt. The crowd of inhabitants had to stand and watch. He, a little boy, was among them. The earth continued to move over these people buried alive. It continued to move for a long time.

He told the story, staring at one spot as if the sight of it were still before him. Our young fitters and lathe operators listened, sitting at the long table. They continued to wolf down their lunch. None of them lost his appetite.

Do I ask too much from our young people? Perhaps it is only women who are allowed to shudder in horror while our future men are allowed only to concentrate intently on devouring their

sliced pieces of lard, neatly shake the crumbs from the newspaper, fold it up and put it into their bag, pat their pockets, and if they are out of cigarettes say to the guy next to them: "How 'bout a smoke!" Then, as all inveterate smokers do, he may knock the end of the cigarette on his fingernail, take a big drag, spit out the bit of tobacco on his tongue, and while intently watching the cigarette's burning end, adroitly release a smoke ring into the air. The earth kept moving over the bodies of those buried alive.

Obviously, I am demanding too much. Sentimentality is out of date. We have seen too many horrors and are immune to shuddering. Millions of corpses, who were alive only a minute ago, we cannot imagine. The boys play with their smoke rings, listening but not listening, as the earth continues to move over the buried bodies of living Jews. "The Jews again! I'm sick of hearing about the Jews!"

The boys are only products of their environment. All of them—the lathe operators and fitters—were not highly ranked for their skills and didn't earn much. Not one of them, as far as I knew, lived on his own. They all depended on their parents. They spent their pay only on themselves, not on necessities but on their amusement: the picture shows, cigarettes, smart clothes—not on a coat, which their parents provided, but on a nylon shirt. But all of them, wanting to earn as much as possible, pushed and pushed for more, tirelessly arguing until they were hoarse and in a frenzy with the controller of the division that what they had produced was for the good of all, quality work, i.e., not junk, but good products. Their pursuit of more pay, like their indifference to people buried alive, was not something they thought up themselves.

Valentine, a good boy with bangs reaching to his eyebrows, was particularly energetic in his production of junk. He considered the shift foreman and division workers his personal enemies. I asked him:

"Valya, what if this bolt you've fashioned falls out of the socket? There would be an accident—imagine it—an accident in the mine! Somebody would die. Have you ever seen a man who has been crushed?"

"That has nothing to do with me, it would be the fitter's fault. He should have screwed it in tighter."

"But your bolt will not screw in tight. It goes right through. The fitter is just a guy like you. Why should he worry about mine accidents while it's not your problem? Think about it!"

Valentine shrugged his shoulders and turned away. He was sick of hearing me. Where did these old geezers come from and why are they sermonizing him?

Obviously, I am too demanding. Valentine knows how to get on in the world. Life itself has been his teacher. It taught him without him ever noticing it and not through tiresome sermons. If a girl, after only one year, can fall under the influence of this city, a city unadorned, a city in which the brutality of the criminals and wardens permeates through every hole of the fence around the Special Camp Point [the official designation for specific geographic subdivisions of a camp zone]. Then what can one expect of those who lived there all their lives? The city, after all, is not surrounded by a great wall.

A child growing up in Vorkuta does not reflect only Vorkuta. The city is linked with the whole country—by the main rail line built on the bones of prisoners and by all other types of social

ties. All the cities are in communication with one another. All of society's institutions are linked together.

Grisha Baglyuk and my other friends were just as much the children of their times as were the builders of Dneprogas or the soldiers of the Great Fatherland War, or as Kornev, Samodurov, and the lads in the machine shop are.<sup>1</sup>

Grisha was a miner. Kornev was from the mines of Donetsk. The great revolution opened up unprecedented opportunities for every worker: to govern the people, to lead the masses. But it also opened up the possibility for dangers that already, only three years after Lenin's death, produced the phenomenon of Artemovshchina.<sup>2</sup>

Two apples hang on one branch. The wind grows stronger, shaking the branches. One apple falls off, the other does not. Is there any reason for this? Pick up the fallen apple and cut it open. Inside is a worm. It had bored its way to the core, devoured the seed, and weakened the fruit. The stem began to dry up. The worm could have crawled into any apple—it was a matter of chance. However, the flight of the butterfly that laid the eggs from which the worm hatched was not accidental. The butterfly unalterably and immutably will be found where there is fruit that is ripening.

The power which the heroes of Artemovshchina received—all these godfathers and brothers-in-law—went to their heads and crippled them. So, they fell from the tree that had produced them. Obviously, some sort of worm had gnawed its way to their core and eaten their seeds.

The sins of youth acquire a different form when the youth become adults. Thus the worm flies from its cocoon transformed into a brightly colored butterfly which is now able to lay new eggs. The sins of the adult—time-serving, conformism, hypocrisy, deference to rank—are hidden under a pretty cover, ringed with a shiny edging of correct words transformed into stereotypes of thought. But the butterfly is still only a worm in another form. Steadily moving its jaws, the worm has its lunch, then adroitly releases smoke rings and spits out bits of tobacco. The butterfly, meanwhile, with a fluttering rhythm, proclaims that it will be necessary to spit on precisely this grave.

One cannot help but recall the frenzied outpouring of criticism that erupted immediately after the publication of Yevtushenko's "Baby Yar."<sup>3</sup>

[Next month: "Vorkuta: My Alma Mater"]

## Notes

1. Grisha Baglyuk and Baitalsky's other friends were supporters of the revolution and of the Opposition who perished in Stalin's camps, some shot during the mass executions of Trotskyists and others at the brick factory in Vorkuta in the spring of 1938. Kornev oversaw the implementation of orders from Stalin to execute them and Samodurov was a viciously anti-Semitic prisoner of a type that Baitalsky encountered in the camps.

2. Artemovsk, a Ukrainian city, became notorious in the mid-1920s for the apparatus' protection of its corrupt and retrograde officials and the punishment of workers' correspondents and others who sought to expose the corruption. The name of the city was used to form a new noun expressing this soon widespread phenomenon. Baitalsky describes this in more detail in an earlier notebook.

3. Baby Yar is the mass grave in Ukraine of 100,000 people, mostly Jews, killed and buried by the Nazis 1941-43. During 36 hours, beginning September 29, 1941, 33,000 Jews were murdered there. Baby Yar became known as a mass grave because of Yevtushenko's poem by that name printed in 1961. In 1974, the government finally placed a memorial nearly a mile from Baby Yar only to "victims of fascism." In early October 1991, the government finally put a memorial at the actual site.

Patricia Ireland, Yard was concerned about NOW's ability to initiate such a party given the organization's involvement in abortion rights battles, in particular, the efforts to block nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, and to overturn the "gag rule" which prevents federally funded health care providers from discussing abortion.

Ireland told *Guardian* reporters, "The sentiment and votes for a new party already exist in NOW." She stated, "I think there's a realistic possibility—not a high likelihood—that we may be able to pull off forming another major party." Ireland pointed out that NOW had been burned too often by Democratic politicians—even though NOW had mobilized massively to help the Democrats regain the U.S. Senate following the 1980 Republican landslide. "Now the Democrats are letting Bush pack the Supreme Court. We're bitter about that."

When questioned by *Guardian* reporters about NOW's capacity to overcome the perception that it is a white, middle-class organization and cannot rally workers and people of color, Ireland responded, "I think we'll be able to broaden beyond NOW's

traditional constituency," and pointed to the multiracial, multi-ethnic composition of The Working Group which is beginning to work on practical steps to help establish a new party (October 2, 1991, *Guardian*). NOW will not be alone in educating people about independent political action, and in organizing the ranks for a new party. As already indicated in this article, developments are also taking place within the labor movement and among African Americans. But NOW can play a critical role in a process culminating in the formation of a new political party. With almost 600 chapters in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., and with 250,000 members, NOW can draw on powerful resources. NOW has proven, again and again, that it has the ability and the skills to mobilize large numbers of people in the struggle for women's rights. This experience is invaluable for forces working to create a political party with enough clout to challenge the twin parties of the ruling class.

#### **Political Action in the Streets**

NOW has called for "the largest march on Washington in our nation's history in the spring of 1992." This mobilization will

be one of the most powerful forms of independent political action—presenting urgent demands, and bringing together hundreds of thousands of people of various races and nationalities, blue- and white-collar working people (as well as women from the "pink-collar ghetto" most female jobholders are forced to work in), and youth along with veteran activists. The spring march and rally can be designed to boost new party efforts by providing a platform for those calling for independent political efforts—instead of the usual parade of Democratic politicians. Signs, banners, buttons, flyers and other written materials can promote the new party concept. Tables can be used to sign up new party volunteers, to change voter registrations to "Independent," to register people who have been alienated by the two-party shell game, and to gather signatures on petitions for independent or new party candidates.

All individuals and all groups battling for a better world must help build the spring march on Washington. All out for the mobilization! Support the call for a new party—and help build it! □

October 3, 1991

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