

In Defense of Marxism

WE USED TO BE AT
THE BACK OF THE BUS
...BUT WE'VE MADE
PROGRESS...

THEY MOVED US TO
THE FRONT OF THE
UNEMPLOYMENT
LINE!



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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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The Old Ways Return to Haiti After the Coup

by Steeve Coupeau

Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first president of Haiti to be elected democratically and under international supervision, was toppled by a military coup last September 29. A longtime proponent of liberation theology, Father Aristide relentlessly preached against exploitation and the capitalist system as a whole. "Capitalism is a mortal sin," he often told his followers. In a country characterized by extreme class differences, Aristide's message found a loud echo among the majority of Haiti's poor population. Father Aristide also raised hope in the hearts of many in the diaspora who have been discouraged by the elite's predominance in Haitian politics. On December 16, 1990, the National Front for Change and Democracy, the party that sponsored Aristide's candidacy, won the elections with 67 percent of the vote, followed by the National Alliance for Development and Progress, which received 13 percent.

Aristide sought to break with a long tradition of civilian and military leaders who were so eager to please the United States and the traditional elite that they excluded the masses from their political agenda. At his inauguration on February 7th of this year, President Aristide pledged to give voice to Haiti's impoverished masses. However, his government found the public treasury almost empty. With no money for the social programs that it sought to create, Aristide felt compelled to negotiate an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a prerequisite for additional funding by other international lending institutions. Disenchantment, created by fear that any treaty with the IMF would translate into widespread cuts in social services and additional layoffs in public administration, resulted in suspicion and demobilization of the popular movement. As soon as it was alerted of such decline, the government invited militants of popular organizations to a large debate on the issue—an initiative unknown in previous regimes.

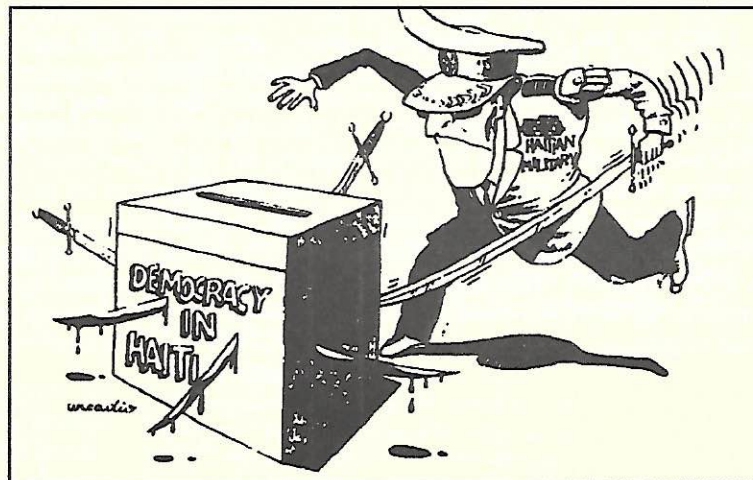
During its first seven months in power, the Aristide government tried to inject a new life into a public administration long ravaged by rampant corruption. For example, the government nominated M. Diogène Désir, an administrator well known for his honesty and administrative skills, to head the General Office for the Collection of Receipts. The government also tried to tax the rich by raising the income tax by 21.4 percent, the trade tax or TCA by 21.4 percent, the corporate tax by 45 percent, and the import tax

by 51.3 percent. The government also backed a proposal by Senator Clark Parent under which the daily minimum wage would be raised from U.S.\$2.14 to U.S.\$3.85. However, the major corporate organizations orchestrated an effective counter-lobby to demand that the minimum wage only be raised to U.S.\$2.51. In August, after six months of strife between employers and a divided labor movement, both chambers of the parliament voted a minimum "wage law under which salaried workers would be paid 26 gourdes (U.S.\$3.59) per day in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and 20 gourdes (U.S.\$2.76) in the rest of the country. This decision was welcomed neither by the labor federations nor by the employers. No sooner had the legislation been voted by the parliament than some labor federations organized protests aimed at repealing it. This law, which was to take effect at the beginning of the fiscal year, sparked large protests from both sides.

Such measures caused extreme resentment and hostility from members of the Haitian elite and the armed forces, who profited from the status quo. These tensions resulted in the coup of September 29 led by Brigadier General Raoul Cedras, then the interim army commander in chief.

The coup d'état in Haiti was known hours before it actually happened. The director of the National Radio, Michel Favard, announced the mutiny one hour before it occurred. Immediately after the announcement on September 29, armed soldiers stormed into his offices and took him away. At first, many thought that this coup would be easily defeated, as was the case with the coup attempt of Roger Lafontant last January, when people took to the streets and forced the military out. Unfortunately, this time the coup was fomented by the army itself and involved a large number of enlisted soldiers and career officers.

The present coup, in which more than 1,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed, has been condemned by the international community. In addition, the Haitian masses are now engaged in a clandestine resistance movement to defeat the takeover. For example, there have been general strikes in Jeremie and Les Cayes to protest the current regime. In return, since the coup, the military has been orchestrating a campaign of terror aimed at silencing any opposition. It has decreed a curfew from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. and has



banned all independent news coverage. Gatherings of more than three people are prohibited. Partially uniformed soldiers patrolling the streets regularly open fire on civilians without provocation. Hundreds of poor Haitians are being murdered by the army, especially in slums where Aristide is thought to be most popular. At nightfall, gunfire can be heard in Port-au-Prince while the army conducts searches in the homes of officials of the Aristide government. As a result of the ongoing repression, Evans Paul, the mayor of Port-au-Prince, was severely beaten at the airport. Manno Charlemagne, a popular folk singer, was arrested and tried for treason. When he was released a few days later, he was kidnaped by unidentified individuals.

The coup has led to a paralysis of the economy, which in turn has slowed the flow of hard-currency earnings to the central government. In its search for legitimacy, on October 7 the military forced 29 members of the parliament to sign a petition declaring the presidency vacant. Joseph Nerette, a supreme court judge, was named provisional president the following day. Many Haitians regard him as a "puppet" president. The parliament later approved the nomination of Jean Jacques Honorat, the director of a U.S. AID-funded human rights center, CHADEL, as prime minister. A well-known detractor of the Aristide government, Honorat was welcomed by the bourgeoisie.

The Haitian army remains the most influential power broker in Haiti. Many senior officers use their positions to sell "favors" while others make a fortune through all kinds of illicit practices, including drug trafficking. Under past regimes, many military officers and business owners were exempt from paying both taxes and utility bills. By combating such practices, President Aristide has made many political enemies among the traditional elite.

There are many indications that the army was paid by members of the Haitian bourgeoisie to orchestrate the coup. A sum of \$40 million dollars was allegedly collected from members of the elite days before the coup and distributed unequally throughout the army. Jean Claude Roy, a Haitian businessman and equally well-known opponent of the Aristide government, publicly welcomed the coup. In addition, it is now a known fact that many soldiers who had lived for decades in poor neighborhoods moved out just days before the coup. Knowing the housing shortage in Port-au-Prince and conditions under which these soldiers had lived for decades, it is hard to imagine how this could happen without financial help from their superiors. Therefore Cedras's claims that the coup came from rank-and-file soldiers does not stand up. The coup was designed and financed by members of the Haitian bourgeoisie.

The United States, Haiti's major aid donor and trade partner, strongly condemned the military coup and made the resumption of economic aid conditional on the return to constitutional rule. As a result, the United States has cut its economic assistance to Haiti. A month after the coup, President Bush called for a total embargo. Many other countries, such as France, Haiti's second largest donor, also condemned the military coup and cut off aid.

The United States government appears to favor Aristide's return only under certain conditions. The ousted president was thus pressured by the Bush administration and the Organization of American States (OAS) to issue a statement denouncing violence and pledging respect for Haiti's institutions. His remarks clearly repudiated the use of "Pere Lebrun," a form of punishment in which the flaming collar of rubber tires is used. (It is named after the owner of a popular tire company.)

In an attempt to reverse the coup, President Aristide swiftly asked the OAS and the United Nations to impose a total embargo on Haiti. The OAS unanimously voted against the coup, urged the return to constitutional order, and called for an immediate embargo on October 8. Following this lead, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted three days later on a resolution supporting the position adopted by the OAS and asked its member-states not to do business with the de facto government.

Despite allegations of human rights violations, President Aristide remains widely popular among Haitians in the United States. On October 11, an outraged crowd of demonstrators marched in the streets of New York City to show support for President Aristide, known affectionately as "Titid."

Nevertheless, fearing for their families' safety back in Haiti under the current regime, many in the Haitian community privately express support for a multinational intervention in Haiti under the cover of the OAS. On that matter, however, Aristide's position has been clear from the beginning. He has claimed that an intervention would lessen his margin of power and legitimacy. He believes that military action should be treated only as the option of last resort. Instead, he has called for an international blockade against the current regime.

An international blockade, however, may not be sufficient to force the military out of power and in any event it will be insufficient to really redress Haiti's profound social problems. An end to the political crisis and the social inequalities that the Aristide government has tried to redress will not come about without building a national resistance movement against the military, against corruption, and without a redistribution of wealth and power in Haitian society. The resistance movement already emerging in Haiti is therefore vital.

However, that movement is weak and its actions sporadic. During its seven-month tenure, the Aristide government failed to ensure the creation of a national political party. Such a party would have strengthened the hands of labor unions, peasant organizations, and the unemployed who put the government in power. Instead, Aristide led many to believe in an alleged "marriage" between the army and the people. This belief had the effect of demobilizing activists.

Since the departure of Duvalier in 1986, the limited political gains achieved by the masses would have been immediately eroded had it not been for the continuing mobilization of the Haitian masses. Once again, the masses will have to mobilize in order to defend the same rights that the Haitian military is denying them—including the right to have a government in power that they voted for overwhelmingly. □

Yeltsin Proposes Further Steps on the Road to Ruin

by Marilyn Vogt-Downey

On Monday, October 28, Boris Yeltsin, president of the Russian republic, in an hour-long speech before the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, outlined what he and his clique of self-appointed marketeers in power have in mind for the Russian working class.

Yeltsin first acknowledged the crisis state of the economy caused by the bureaucracy's economic perestroika—or market-oriented reforms—since 1985. The system of bureaucratic planning has been seriously dismantled, subsidies to many necessary industries have been withdrawn, price subsidies for many basic food and consumer products have been eliminated, and the state, which before perestroika had been the key consumer of many factory and farm outputs, has reduced or eliminated its orders. Many enterprises, forced to show a profit or close, have had to dismiss a large share of their workers or shut down entirely because they were not equipped to function under such circumstances. (See *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, No. 90, for a more detailed description of the crises.)

"The financial system is on the edge of collapse," Yeltsin said, and is "fast getting worse," which is undeniably true. What does he propose to do?

"Lift price controls" by the end of the year, "sharply accelerate the privatization of agriculture and light industry," stop financing some 70 ministries, and sharply reduce government funds to "unprofitable industries, the military and bureaucracies."

The *New York Times* summarized the impact these "reforms" can be expected to have: "For many Russians and enterprises, locked into the old system of fixed wages and prices, [these reforms] will probably mean disaster. Politicians and economists expect a wave of bankruptcies and widespread unemployment" to be immediate consequences. The cuts in financing the 70 or so ministries alone will mean some 50,000 people will lose their jobs, according to the *New York Times* of November 1.

Yeltsin, in his speech, provided an important figure: "55 percent of the families live below the poverty line."

In 1988, 90 million people, or 32 percent of the population lived at or below the poverty level, or earned between 78 and

105 rubles per month or less, according to *Moskovskiy Novosti*, No. 28, 1988.

Now, some three years' worth of market reforms later, 55 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. This is obviously due to the drastic price increases for all basic items from food, to rent, to transportation, to clothing, a terrible indictment of the reforms program.

If Yeltsin's concerns were for the welfare of the people, his reforms would be directed toward mobilizing the national resources to immediately improve their situation. But instead, he is going to accelerate the very policies that have worsened living standards.

A little more than two months after "emerging from the coup as a national hero for his bold resistance to the plotters," as the *New York Times* put it October 29 when he was heralded in the bourgeois press as the savior of democracy, Yeltsin on October 28 revealed just where he really stands on that issue. Because he is acutely aware that his proposed reforms will be wildly unpopular and that democratic measures would mean he and his gang would be rejected, Yeltsin has proposed that elections be postponed. "It is impossible to hold vast election campaigns and simultaneously carry out deep-going economic changes," Yeltsin explained.

He not only asked the Congress for "additional powers" over and above the vast powers he already has, to "shape the top echelons of the government." He also proposed to take over the recently vacated post of prime minister of the Russian republic, thus allocating to himself both top government posts.

To show that he is not totally indifferent to the massive impoverishment currently existing and the additional poverty his reforms will bring, Yeltsin outlined "social measures" to "protect the most vulnerable" [sic]: "free kitchens, hospices, and special stores."

For the minority—his cronies and backers, the bureaucrats and black market profiteers—who will rake in enormous sums from these changes Yeltsin promised a "lifting of all limitations on earnings." And he promised them and capitalist on-lookers abroad that "as many as half of all small and medium enterprises could be

privatized within three months and the process of denationalizing large enterprises would begin immediately." In agriculture, 24,000 tractors and 22,000 trucks are to be transferred to private farmers.

How many will that leave for everyone else in the countryside? How will they be able to function and provide for themselves?

Over the next few weeks, the details of this plan for massive privatization and market reforms will become more precise. Whether or not he and his entourage will be able to implement it, or any part of it, is another question.

The *New York Times* a few days later (Nov. 1) reported the current situation in Moscow even without Yeltsin's reforms and the worsened situation they and he would inevitably bring. For example, "For officially rationed items such as sugar, shoppers with the necessary ration coupons have been waiting days for a minimum purchase, forming elaborate waiting lines in which each individual has his place in the order written into the palm of her or his hand, to be verified the following dawn when the line reforms." "There were scenes of increased pushing and shoving in the city today as skimpy supplies of milk showed up in some neighborhoods. Shoppers said the lines were never longer and tempers never so short in a populace noted for forbearance."

In his speech before the Congress, Yeltsin called on "trade unions, political movements, and all citizens" to support him, and declared that his decision to initiate the changes was "the most important decision" of his life. "The coming months will be for me the most difficult," he went on. "If I have your support and faith, I'm ready to go this road to the end." If he had the people's "support and faith," he would not be postponing elections.

No situation in the contemporary world demonstrates more graphically the irrationality of the capitalist system than the current spectacle in the former USSR as the ruling caste of bureaucrats and their profiteering hangers-on try to push down the throats of the working class a system based on individual greed.

By rights, in a rational world, Boris Yeltsin should have been ridiculed off the podium when he unveiled the basic features of his economic plan before the Russian Congress of People's Deputies; and then he should have been immediately removed from office for gross incompetence and possibly arrested for conspiring to commit crimes against humanity.

It is likely that a fate of this kind awaits him as the situation continues to worsen

(Continued on page 7)

The First Skirmish: Observations from an Historical Vantage Point

by Nikolai Preobrazhensky

We have received from the Soviet Union several accounts of the events surrounding the August coup attempt, all of which we intend to publish. This contribution was written in Leningrad on August 25, only days after the coup's defeat. It was sent to Bulletin In Defense of Marxism by David Seppo, who translated the article. Nikolai Preobrazhensky, a participant in the Leningrad mobilizations, is an historian and an activist in the socialist and labor movements in that city. In a letter to Seppo, dated August 29, he writes:

"The euphoria, the unexpectedly swift measures aimed at smashing the CPSU, which left people with their mouths agape; the 'democrats' total monopoly of the mass media; the witch-hunt that met no resistance on the part of people who were in a stupor at the suddenness of the events; the mass, shameless brainwashing (for example, the Russian television's broadcast of the Moscow funeral [of the three people killed during the coup] last week)—all that is clearly coming to an end. Those who ran for cover are now beginning to peek out. . . . The witch-hunt spread so quickly and unexpectedly that now many leaders of the 'democrats' have taken fright at its scope. Strictly speaking, everything done by the putschists appeared constitutional (Yanaev replaced Gorbachev), and in their hearts many welcomed the 'introduction of order.' In any case, on August 19, those who did not want to doubt had no formal juridical grounds to do so. . . . And so now there are millions of frightened, trembling people, since if someone wants to he can finger any one of them 'for support of the anticonstitutional actions of the self-appointed State Council for the State of Emergency.' It is a wonderful basis for purges: anyone not found pleasing can be kicked out."

When will the next skirmish, the next attempt at a violent resolution of contradictions, occur? Who and what political forces will be behind it?

The Logic of Revolution

Two centuries ago, very many French people finally realized that their country was living through a revolution only a couple of years after the storming of the Bastille. But after the events of this August it has become clear to all of us that our country is in a revolution. The logic of revolution is its development from crisis to crisis, the alternation of periods of universal love-in with the fiercest confrontation, euphoria with disillusionment, the broadest freedom with the severe restriction of freedom. Like the USA in the time of Lincoln, Germany of 1918 or France in 1848, our country is living through its second revolution seventy years after the Great Revolution.

As a result of this crisis, events have begun to move at cavalry speed. The liberal (conditionally, "Gorbachevian") phase of our revolution is on the wane, and its democratic (conditionally, "Yeltsinian") phase begins. The new phase will clearly be shorter than the one that preceded it, and racing through all the twists and turns, it will inevitably lead to a split among the democrats¹ themselves. The popular movement is too heterogeneous; its constituent social groups often have completely opposing interests. It can be united and solid only against a common enemy, especially in times of mortal danger. But as the enemy grows weak, irreconcilable contradictions within the camp of the opponents of the old regime will show themselves. In a couple of years, in the background of the future

evolution of events, what today seems momentous will be viewed as merely a significant episode.

The resistance in August is characteristic of the *early stage* of popular revolution. Leaving aside the narrow strata of members of the old and new nomenklatura and of socio-political activists, the basic mass of the population adopted positions in relation to the declaration of a state of emergency based not so much on their concrete, material interests as upon purely ideological orientations. As far as those who were hostile to the putsch are concerned, one can say that the emergency situation made possible an historically rare and very short-lived unity among a very significant part of the population. The illusion of general unity reigned within this group. The stronger the unity, the more bitter will be the disillusionment.

On the political level, the total hegemony of undifferentiated democrats manifested itself. All the small political and ideological groups on the left (for example, the anarchists) and on the right (for example, Pamyat)² demonstrated their insignificance in relation to the basic, general democratic current. They appeared as exotic political wonders, and not much else. The events brought out the monstrous weakness of our newly born parties, their lack of roots in the people. These were not the centers around which people rallied, around which resistance was organized. That role was assumed by the new democratic organs of power. In the brief, feverish interval, the members of these parties themselves forgot them. This points to a major difference with the events of Peking [Beijing] in May and June 1989; there were no democratically elected organs of power there, and the resistance was unable to organize itself.

Acceleration

The failure of the counterrevolution has led to a great acceleration of all political processes. It is always thus in the history of revolutions: the Kornilovshchina³, the Kapp putsch in Germany in 1920, the attempted coup by General Spínola in Portugal in March 1975, all had analogous consequences. Incidentally, that is also how the Paris Commune began.

Very quickly, fundamental decisions have been taken—and will be taken. Of course, some part of them will not pass. Others will pass but will undergo revision afterwards. Nevertheless, a number of reforms will remain.

In the “heat of the victory” (opposition has temporarily been removed), we will very likely see a flurry of socio-economic transformations, and as a result—a sharp intensification of social contradictions and the accelerated development of a new crisis, a new attempt to resolve the contradictions by force. The power of the opposition to the introduction of the new social relations may turn out to be quite a bit greater than the combined force of the Tamen and Kantemirov regiments⁴ combined. The future promises, besides the split in what is now the democratic camp, an inevitable strengthening of extreme, radical forces: the (classical) right and the (classical) left.

The Problems Remain

At present, the democratic leaders, and Yeltsin at their head, “having fought like lions for democracy,” as well as to save their own power and maybe even lives, are at the height of their popularity. But political fortune is a fickle thing. The authors of the putsch did not, of course, declare the state of emergency out of personal ambition. The putsch was the logical consequence of the situation in the country, of the enormous quantity of unresolved contradictions. It was an attempt to resolve them by cutting the Gordian knot.

The putsch failed, but all the *problems* that gave rise to it remain: social, economic, ethnic, interrepublican. In fact, they have become more acute, and new ones have appeared. (For example, the flight of “non-indigenous” people from the republics has speeded up; the creation of parallel armed forces has taken on an explosive character, a la Yugoslavia.) The country was pregnant with a coup and emergency measures, and the pregnancy has not passed.

There is no doubt that in the leadership of the army, KGB, Ministry of Internal Affairs, both on the union and republican levels, the reasons for the failure, the errors in the organization and execution of the operation of August 19-21, will be carefully analyzed and conclusions for the future will be drawn. Very briefly, one can note that the two basic organizational flaws were the absence of a unified will and the attempt to combine opposites: to give the coup the appearance of legality, which is like “climbing a spruce tree without tearing one’s clothes.”

After removing the conservatives, the bloc of democrats and liberals that has come to power finds itself in a very unenviable position. On the one hand, it would appear that their hands are untied. But on the other hand, there will no longer be anyone to blame for the failures. Objectively, the popular struggle against the putsch has given rise to new contradictions. As Marx aptly remarked, “revolution is the holiday of the op-

pressed.” In purely psychological terms: a person participated in demonstrations, built barricades, risked life and limb for lofty ideals, but then returns to work where he or she has no rights, and to a life outside of work that is more exhausting than work itself. August 19 produced a *splash of movement among workers*. People in the enterprises were activated, organized themselves, created new structures (for example, strike committees) which will hardly disappear without a trace. The activity of the masses saved the democratic leaders; they very much needed it. It will also get in their way. For the success of their planned policy—privatization, mass unemployment, decline in living standards—they would much prefer to deal with quiescent, passive masses. Yeltsin, Popov, Sobchak, and others, as clever politicians, cannot but understand that in the future they will have to clash head on with the labor movement. Despite Yeltsin’s ukase forbidding the presence of political organizations at places of work, cells of new parties and socio-political organizations will be formed in the enterprises.

The Army

On August 19, the armed forces for the first time intervened on a major scale in internal politics. Before this, the army remained on the sidelines, showing itself only in the “hot” regions. Despite all the declarations, and maybe even the sincere desire of the state and military leadership to keep the armed forces out of politics, the course of events in the country will lead to the opposite. *On August 19, the army became a permanent factor of our political life*. The “Moscow syndrome” will pass just as, in its time, the “Tbilisi⁵ syndrome” did (nine months later, the troops of this same Transcaucasian military region stormed Baku).

One should not get carried away by the fact that many army structures were in no rush to carry out the orders of the coup’s leaders. It is not clear how they would have behaved if the same orders had been issued by a different authority (more legitimate or more popular) or if the operation as a whole had been better prepared, executed by more popular generals, and with more promise of success. August 19-21 revealed the first signs of a split in the armed forces. This split, it seems, will deepen. The command will get rid of undependable officers by various means. Putschist moods, called forth by the aggravation of the country’s problems, will continue to be nurtured by part of the officer corps. No purges can destroy them, just as one cannot wipe the dew off the ground “forever.”

After the August events, the army remains the *only* real basis of power of the “center,” that is, of Gorbachev. The president will try to do everything not to anger it. For a certain time, the loyalty of the higher echelon will be secured by the recent character of their appointment.

Unanimity?

After August 21, our mass media were beset by a *debauch of “moral-political unity,”* the likes of which has not been seen since the Brezhnev days! In essence, a tremendous brainwashing operation is underway. The mass media are as unanimous in their utter condemnation of the coup as they would have been in justifying it had it succeeded. I note this not because I want to accuse anyone of insincerity. My reproach is of a different

sort: as a consequence of this kind of "pluralism," it is as if a significant part of the population (judging by everything, tens of millions!) that greeted the putsch favorably does not exist. There is a conscious distortion of the genuine picture of public opinion. The majority of the people in this country adopted a passive attitude toward the events (some more so and some less). Those who opposed it were active, went out into the streets. Those who, on the contrary, supported it behaved like law-abiding citizens. The problem of any revolution is that while only a minority goes to the barricades, everyone votes. One can assume with a good deal of certainty that even today, in this time of euphoria and in this propagandistic avalanche, the results of elections would not be as unambiguous as the nice pictures of the demonstrations on the Palace Square or at the "White House" would lead one to believe. All the more so, if one considers that the provinces—and the non-European, non-Russian provinces even more than the others—are more conservatively minded than the large cities. It is no accident that the idea of choosing the president by means other than a general election is being promoted.

The Russian Supreme Soviet was from the start more radical than the Russian Congress of People's Deputies,⁶ and over the past weeks the former has grown more radical. The correlation of forces in the Supreme Soviet of Russia does not correspond to the real distribution of opinion among the population. It is probable that the radical socio-economic decisions of the Supreme Soviet will be a source of conflict, meeting opposition from a significant part of the population. Moreover, the very fact of being in power in conditions of deepening crisis reduces the number of supporters. One can expect, therefore, that new elections will come quickly, since the present moment is extremely favorable for today's democrats.

Revolutionary Antidemocratism

As in any revolution, the victorious side has begun to carry out antidemocratic measures. For decades historians, politicians, and publicists will debate whether these measures were prompted by "revolutionary necessity" or by the simple desire to score extra political points and to squeeze the enemy. The answer, of course, will be determined by the political position of the person who answers.

Under the totally ludicrous pretext of its "collaboration" with the putschists, the "undesirable" central press has been suspended. Even if you accept that reasoning, how to explain the failure to close *Trud*⁷ and especially *Krasnaya zvezda*,⁸ which "collaborated" to no lesser a degree? Among those papers that were closed is also the *only* mass paper that was really in opposition to Yeltsin and the democrats, *Sovietskaya Rossiya*. Tens of millions of people cannot now read the press they want. A slice of the spectrum of public opinion has been deprived of the means of self-expression. The central press is now of a single hue. The Russian leadership grabbed the All-Union television and radio as well as TASS.⁹ Undesirable information does not get through or else it is first made "presentable." Commentary and opinion express only the views of the victors.

Everyone remembers how a year ago, while traveling across Russia, Yeltsin promised sovereignty to virtually every telephone pole: "Take as many rights as you want." Instead, the

regions of Russia found themselves under the strict control of the Russian center. As in the French Revolution, presidential commissars are being sent out to the localities with broad powers. Elected to the Congress of People's Deputies on the old slogan of "All Power to the Soviets," the Russian president acquired tremendous constitutional power, which was then—well before the latest crisis events—supplemented by emergency powers. Yet even these powers are being surpassed.

A month before the coup, the decree prohibiting party organizations at places of work appeared. The desire to remove the political struggle from the enterprises does not jibe very well with the Russian president's professed democratism. On the other hand, considering the stifling of the work collective councils¹⁰ and the company character of the trade unions, this step gives more freedom to the arbitrary power of management. Despite the conservatism, weakness, and, at times, even fictitious nature of the primary organizations of the CPSU, some of them, as well as the primary cells of the new socio-political organizations, in conditions of growing crisis could become centers for the crystallization of protest in the work collectives. The attempts to prevent that along with the desire to undermine the basis of the CPSU were the basic motives of that ukase.

Some International Aspects

As in the domestic sphere, so also in external politics, the failure of the state of emergency will accelerate processes that were already underway. During the coup, the West helped not only with declarations but also with their special intelligence services (organization of special communications). The rapprochement with the West, the latter's influence, and the orientation of Soviet policy toward it, will all intensify. Support and aid to liberation movements will end or drastically decrease. The probable termination of aid to Cuba and Afghanistan will have the most serious consequences for the regimes there. The Soviet events will have an impact on public opinion in all the remaining "socialist countries," inspiring all types of opposition. They will facilitate the destabilization of the situation in Mongolia, benefiting the opposition. At a certain level of destabilization, the indirect intervention of China is possible.

Having lost a potential ally to the north, and in view of the indeterminate future situation in China, North Korea will probably accelerate its development of the atomic bomb. Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea will all find themselves in difficult situations. As in China, in Vietnam the position of the partisans of a hard line will be strengthened. China-Vietnamese rapprochement will be given a push. This could accelerate an agreement in Kampuchea. Yugoslav separatists of all nationalities and the Serbian opposition receive moral support from the Soviet events. Incidentally, one can suppose that it was the start of civil war in Yugoslavia (along with Yeltsin's decree on "departization" and the draft union treaty) that gave the final push to the decision to remove Gorbachev and to introduce a preventive state of emergency.

An examination of the events of 1989-90 in Eastern Europe reveals that during the democratic revolutions in the Soviet satellites the old regimes did not shoot at the people. Everything passed without bloodshed. Where there was some readiness to use force, as in the German Democratic Republic, it was prevented without Soviet intervention. On the other hand, in

the "socialist" countries independent of the Soviet Union, the leaders did not hesitate to shoot: China, Romania, Albania. The reason is clear: these regimes always counted on their own forces. It will be interesting to see how the inevitable transition to democracy takes place in countries like Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea, and, of course, behind the Great Wall of China.

We should not place too much confidence in foreign aid and counsel. In this area, there are negative as well as positive examples. Many now remember the Marshall Plan, but no one recalls the Dawes Plan.¹¹ Western experts are coming in for great praise but people forget the results the advice of American specialists produced in Iran.

* * *

It is curious how a plague in someone else's house teaches people nothing. The procuracy has made a formal accusation against the first assistant chairman of the KGB, Viktor Grushko, the same person who in the fall of 1989 played an important role in organizing the fall of Communist leader Milos Jakes in Czechoslovakia. He arrived in Prague on November 14 and already on the seventeenth his Czechoslovak colleagues had provoked a student demonstration and the harsh violence against it, and also staged the "murder" by the police of a student (in reality a lieutenant in the political police). In general, it was a great job, but a bit overdone: they provoked, unexpectedly for everyone, a revolution and, out of carelessness, the whole regime fell together with Jakes. And at the time, in Czechoslovakia, there was neither freedom of speech, nor parties, nor free trade unions, nor democratic organs of power, and the troops carried out orders accurately. With this experience, Lieutenant-general Grushko and General Kriuchkov could not help but understand the possible consequences of playing with coups in present-day Soviet Union. Yet they nevertheless let themselves get pulled into this doomed, bungled adventure.

The authors of the August coup considered that the country was on the verge of civil war or a series of local civil wars and saw their actions as a last attempt to avoid the revolution that flowed inevitably from the consequences of Gorbachev's policies. Those that are interested should read former KGB chief Kriuchkov's speech at last year's congress of the CPSU, in which he spoke openly of the possibility of such a revolution.¹² As in Czechoslovakia, the opposite of what was desired occurred: instead of avoiding revolution, the conspirators accelerated it. . . . As for civil war, we will have to wait and see. In any case, for the time being, the situation in the country is more reminiscent of Germany in the 1920s (or perhaps, even more of China in the 1930s) than the West in the 1990s, to which the democrats aspire. □

Notes

1. In contrast to the letter cited above, the author does not use quotation marks in this article when referring to the democrats. There was not enough time to clarify this with the author before going to print, but we would suggest that this reflects a basic ambiguity that exists in the political reality itself.

2. A Great-Russian chauvinist organization.

3. An abortive counterrevolutionary military coup in Russia in August 1917.

4. Famous Soviet guards regiments.

5. The author is referring to the use of troops in April 1989 against a peaceful demonstration in the capital of Georgia that resulted in deaths and injuries among the demonstrators.

6. The Supreme Soviet is elected by the Congress.

7. The central (official) trade-union paper.

8. The central daily of the armed forces.

9. The Soviet press agency.

10. Self-management bodies established under the Law on the State Enterprise of 1987. (See *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, November, No. 90, for an interview by David Seppo with Vera Lashch, co-chairperson of the Union of Work Collectives.)

11. A U.S.-inspired plan in 1924 to enable Germany to deal with its WW I reparations obligations. It was largely directed against Soviet Russia.

12. *Pravda*, July 5, 1990.

Yeltsin (Continued from page 3)

and the newly evidenced "short tempers" in Moscow spread across the republic.

The political gulf between the masses of the people and the Russian parliament was reflected in this assessment by the *New York Times*: "initial reactions from the Congress suggested that Mr. Yeltsin's proposals would be adopted. Even his political adversaries seemed to welcome his proposal to assume personal leadership of the government, apparently because nobody else in the republic has the stature

to weather the dislocation and discontent of the shock therapy that he proposed."

"There is no reason for panic," Yeltsin stated, perhaps trying to console himself. "The entire experience of world civilization shows that economic disease is curable."

That statement is only true if one has a revolutionary perspective. The cure for the "economic disease" caused by continued bureaucratic rule is not to inflict the "economic diseases" of poverty, un-

employment, and hunger characteristic of capitalism, as Yeltsin and his clique are trying to do. The only real cure is for the workers to organize themselves to take charge of the economy in their own collective interest and overthrow all of the parasites.

The next few months will reveal just how much these proposed reforms will hasten that process along. □

Trotsky and the Democratic Struggle in the USSR

by Paul Le Blanc

Leon Trotsky's classic *The Revolution Betrayed** was completed in 1936. Like *The Communist Manifesto*, it is a clear exposition that is nonetheless densely packed with ideas. As with the manifesto of Marx and Engels, successive readings of Trotsky's book yield new insights that often have a startling contemporary relevance. In Pittsburgh, a socialist study group in which I was a participant organized a four-part class series on this book which was completed as the orchestration and collapse of the August coup took place in the USSR. Some of us discovered passages in *The Revolution Betrayed* almost seeming to predict what was unfolding before our eyes. Clearly, this is one of the most crucial texts of the 20th century. It is a book we must grapple with now, if we wish to comprehend the revolution of our times and contribute to the realization of a better future.

The late anti-Communist academic Robert H. McNeal, in his influential, seemingly scholarly essay "Trotskyist Interpretations of Stalinism," asserted that, despite "a lot of writing about Stalinism over many years," Trotsky simply "could not come to terms with the cruel irony that confronted him in Stalin's Russia and Comintern," because it contradicted his deep belief "in human progress, most particularly in the progressive meaning of his life as a revolutionary." (Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1977], pp. 31, 30) After all, the vision of socialism (or communism) advanced by Marx and Engels posited a free association of producers in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. But while Lenin and Trotsky led the Bolsheviks to power in the Russian Revolution of 1917 precisely in the name of this liberating vision, the eventual product of the revolution was the system of Stalin. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Across the political spectrum —

*Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed, What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1937); a more recent edition can be obtained from Pathfinder Press, 410 West Street, New York, NY 10014.

even among those willing to admit that the Bolshevik revolution involved a profoundly democratic upsurge of working people — this line of argument has been employed to demonstrate that Stalin is Lenin's "true heir," that the Bolshevik tradition of revolutionary Marxism logically leads to totalitarianism.

This is an issue of crucial importance. If Bolshevik perspectives can lead to a socialism of freedom and community instead of to a bureaucratic dictatorship, then the phenomenon of Stalinism should be most adequately explained by a Bolshevik analysis, one that is true to the liberating conception of socialism contained in the *Communist Manifesto* and Lenin's *State and Revolution*. In fact, from a Bolshevik standpoint, it is absolutely essential to develop such an analysis in order to guide one's practical political work. This was a primary task which Trotsky set for himself in *The Revolution Betrayed*, to develop a critique of Stalinism and the nature of Soviet society that could at one and the same time be faithful to the facts and to the revolutionary socialist goal. Indeed, the commitment to the goal was a key to developing the most profound analysis—it is impossible to understand things as they are without having a sense of how they can and should be.

Trotsky's Summary of *The Revolution Betrayed*

One striking feature of Trotsky's study is that it begins, in the very first paragraph of the first chapter, by summarizing his theory of permanent revolution, and also the underlying law of uneven and combined development. This provides the broad and firm foundation of his analysis. The democratic revolution against the tyrannical tsarist system in Russia could only be accomplished by the working class, but that put political power in the hands of the working class; this, in turn, necessarily propelled the policies of the new regime in a socialist direction; the international factor immediately came into play, not simply in the form of military hostility against the infant Soviet Republic by the world's

capitalist governments, but in the form of innumerable and profound pressures of the world capitalist economy on the daily life of the Soviet peoples. Trotsky observes that the future of socialism, not to mention the very survival of the country and its population, made it essential "to catch up" with the level of economic development of the advanced industrial countries. Throughout the book he also stresses another aspect of the international factor: that the Bolsheviks saw as absolutely essential (including for the development of socialism in the USSR) the success of socialist revolutions in other countries, especially more advanced industrial countries.

"The extraordinary tardiness in the development of the international revolution, upon whose prompt aid the leaders of the Bolshevik party had counted, created immense difficulties for the Soviet Union, but also revealed its inner powers and resources," Trotsky noted. Reviewing the immense gains in industrial and cultural development, despite all the grave setbacks, that were accomplished by the planned economy and by the immense idealistic energy of a great many people, he added that, even if there were to be an eventual collapse of the USSR, "there would remain as an earnest of the future this indestructible fact, that thanks solely to a proletarian revolution a backward country has achieved in less than ten years successes unexampled in history." (pp. 6, 8)

Yet he also insisted that socialism—predicated upon the ability of a technologically developed economy to provide a decent life for all, and also upon a significant degree of harmonious economic cooperation among nations—did not and could not exist in the economically backward USSR of that time, despite all of the glowing propaganda to the contrary of the Stalin regime and its foreign admirers among the liberal-radical intelligentsia. "Law can never be higher than the economic structure and the cultural development of society conditioned by that structure," he quoted from Marx, following up with another Marx quote: "A develop-

ment of the productive forces is the absolutely necessary practical premise [of communism], because without it want is generalized, and with want the struggle for necessities begins again, and that means that all the old crap must revive.” (pp. 53, 56)

We can see that Trotsky—unlike many superficial analysts on the left—did not base his analysis of “what went wrong” on the evil designs of Joseph Stalin. In fact, he identifies the problem as developing before Stalin’s dictatorship was consolidated. He notes that in the midst of foreign intervention, civil war, and economic collapse, “democracy had been narrowed in proportion as difficulties increased. In the beginning, the [Bolshevik, or Communist] party had wished and hoped to preserve freedom of political struggle within the framework of the Soviets [democratic councils]. The civil war introduced stern amendments into this calculation. The opposition parties were forbidden one after the other. This measure, obviously in conflict with the spirit of Soviet democracy, the leaders of Bolshevism regarded not as a principle, but as an episodic act of self-defense.” (p. 96) Instead, he notes, democracy soon disappeared not only in the party itself, as well as in the soviets, but also in the trade unions, the cooperatives, cultural organizations, etc. “Above each and every one of them there reigns an unlimited hierarchy of party secretaries.” (p. 100) This was not generated by some “fatal flaw” in Bolshevism or Lenin’s ideas, he insists, but by something more fundamental that developed during the civil war period and the early years of the New Economic Policy (that is, from 1918 through the early 1920s). Trotsky indicates the dynamic in this remarkable passage:

The basis of bureaucratic rule is the poverty of society in objects of consumption, with the resulting struggle of each against all. When there is enough goods in a store, the purchasers can come whenever they want to. When there is little goods, the purchasers are compelled to stand in line. When the lines are very long, it is necessary to appoint a policeman to keep order. Such is the starting point of the power of the bureaucracy. It “knows” who is to get something and who has to wait. (p. 112)

It is impossible here to do justice to the full range and complexity of Trotsky’s analysis in *The Revolution Betrayed*. But it is worth examining, and reexamining, Trotsky’s own summary of his analysis, in which he provides a useful checklist of nine key points:

The Soviet Union is a contradictory society halfway between capitalism and

socialism, in which: (a) the productive forces are still far from adequate to give the state property a socialist character; (b) the tendency toward primitive accumulation created by want breaks out through innumerable pores of the planned economy; (c) norms of distribution preserving a bourgeois character lie at the basis of a new differentiation of society; (d) the economic growth, while slowly bettering the situation of the toilers, promotes a swift formation of privileged strata; (e) exploiting the social antagonisms, a bureaucracy has converted itself into an uncontrolled caste alien to socialism; (f) the social revolution, betrayed by the ruling party, still exists in property relations and in the consciousness of the toiling masses; (g) a further development of the accumulating contradictions can as well lead to socialism as back to capitalism; (h) on the road to capitalism the counterrevolution would have to break the resistance of the workers; (i) on the road to socialism the workers would have to overthrow the bureaucracy. In the last analysis, the question will be decided by a struggle of living social forces, both on the national and the world arena. (p. 255)

Bonapartism and the Transitional Regime

Trotsky asserted that Stalin was part of a tyrannical lineage that includes Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte, as well as Napoleon’s nephew Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte (who became Napoleon III). In each case, a somewhat similar governing system took the name of the individual in question. Caesarism, Bonapartism, Stalinism each involves the rise, in a strife-torn society and highly factionalized political atmosphere, of an authoritarian “super-arbiter” who utilizes democratic and popular rhetoric and claims to represent the interests of society as a whole. The power of the state is raised above the nation, apparently autonomous of all social classes, although actually preserving, in general, the privileges of the upper strata. “The Stalin regime, rising above a politically atomized society, resting upon a police and officers’ corps, and allowing of no control whatever, is obviously a variation of Bonapartism—a Bonapartism of a new type not before seen in history,” Trotsky wrote. “Caesarism arose upon the basis of a slave society shaken by inward strife. Bonapartism is one of the political weapons of the capitalist regime in its critical period. Stalinism is a variety of the same system, but upon the basis of a workers’ state torn by the antagonism between an organized and armed soviet aris-

tocracy and the unarmed toiling masses.” (pp. 277–278)

Trotsky drew attention to another form of 20th century Bonapartism—fascism. “Stalinism and fascism, in spite of a deep difference in social foundations, are symmetrical phenomena,” he observed, adding grimly: “In many of their features they show a deadly similarity.” A revolutionary internationalist insight was also highlighted in his analysis: “the crushing of Soviet democracy by an all-powerful bureaucracy and the extermination of bourgeois democracy by fascism were produced by one and the same cause: the dilatoriness of the world proletariat in solving the problems set for it by history.” Obviously thinking of the ongoing Spanish civil war and revolutionary possibilities in France, he added: “A victorious revolutionary movement in Europe would immediately shake not only fascism, but Soviet Bonapartism.” (pp. 278–279)

Significantly, Trotsky denied that the privileged Soviet bureaucracy actually constituted a class similar to the slave-owning patricians, the feudal nobility, or the capitalist bourgeoisie. It did not represent either a variation of capitalism (“state capitalism”) or a new form of class society (such as “bureaucratic-collectivism”). Rather, he saw the Soviet bureaucracy as being more akin to the enriched, conservative, undemocratic, and sometimes gangster-ridden bureaucratic layer that has so often arisen in the trade union movements of many countries. This parasitic elite, he felt, did not serve the same organic function as did the bourgeoisie in the capitalist mode of production. Therefore, the roots of the bureaucracy in Soviet society were not as deep, the bureaucratic stratum as a whole not as resilient, and the future of the bureaucracy as a ruling elite not as sustained as has been the case, for example, with the capitalist class.

If the bureaucratic system consolidated under Stalin is now collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions after only six decades, then Trotsky’s insistence that it does *not* represent a new form of class society seems vindicated. The same is true for his insistence that bureaucratic rule is not a final resting-place for the revolutionary process in the USSR but, instead, is *transitional*. Yet he warned against “the mistaken idea that from the present Soviet regime *only* a transition to socialism is possible. In reality a backslide to capitalism is wholly possible.” (p. 254)

Contradictions and Predictions

Trotsky’s analysis of the contradictions of Soviet society in the mid-1930s has a considerable amount of relevance to what

is happening today in the USSR. Even an incomplete account is revealing.

The growth and power of the bureaucracy comes into conflict with a rationalization of the economy and the development of productive forces in the USSR, "just as absolute monarchy became in its time irreconcilable with the development of the bourgeois market." Capricious bureaucratic management, an essential element in Stalin's hypercentralized "command economy," prevents the keeping of accurate accounts essential for rational planning. Red tape, bottlenecks, nepotism, and incompetence in a relatively autonomous bureaucracy—free from the threat of controls imposed either by laws of the market or by workers' democracy—vastly complicate the tasks of economic production and distribution. Even with the meeting and surpassing of phenomenal production quotas, bureaucratically imposed from the top down, the *quality* of goods produced inevitably suffers: "bureaucratism destroys the creative initiative and the feeling of responsibility without which there is not, and cannot be, qualitative progress." (pp. 274, 275)

The brunt of this is born by Soviet consumers. "The ulcers of bureaucratism are perhaps not so obvious in the big industries," Trotsky commented, "but they are devouring, together with the co-operatives, the light and food-producing industries, the collective farms, the small local industries—that is, all those branches of economy which stand nearest to the people." While "it is possible to build gigantic factories according to a ready-made Western pattern by bureaucratic command—although, to be sure, at triple the normal cost," this is not viable for long-term economic development: "the farther you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of a bureaucracy like a shadow." Noting that "Soviet products are as though branded with the gray label of indifference," Trotsky also placed his finger on the alternative to the dictatorship of both the bureaucracy and the capitalist market: "Under a nationalized economy, *quality* demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative—conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime of fear, lies and flattery. . . . Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life-and-death need of the country." (pp. 275, 276)

In the mid-1930s the Soviet bureaucracy, beset by intense internal and external pressures, stood at a crossroads. A portion of it indicated an inclination to move in the direction of "liberal" reform. But even the thought of this was soon obliterated by the assassination of "liberal"

bureaucrat Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad party boss and Stalin's potential rival (termed by Trotsky as "clever and unscrupulous"), whose murder was then used as a pretext for the mass arrests, imprisonment, and slaughter of real, potential, and imagined opponents of Stalin's regime—all accused of being part of a "counter-revolutionary Trotskyite conspiracy." Trotsky's analysis, completed just as this living nightmare began, considered what might happen if, on the contrary, a "liberal reform" wing of the bureaucracy made headway. This has special relevance for today.

Predicting that the economic crisis would generate "an open political crisis," he suggested that as a preventive measure the new Soviet constitution of 1936 might be utilized to channel deep popular discontent into the voting booth in order to admonish and correct sectors of the bureaucracy that were responsible for some of the society's difficulties. "However, it has happened more than once that a bureaucratic dictatorship, seeking salvation in 'liberal' reforms, has only weakened itself," Trotsky wrote, pointing out that this could create "a semilegal cover for the struggle against" the Stalinist regime. While Gorbachev and Yeltsin were still children, Trotsky predicted: "The rivalry of bureaucratic cliques at the elections may become the beginning of a broader political struggle. The whip against 'badly working organs of power' may be turned into a whip against Bonapartism." What failed to mature in the 1930s became the reality half a century later: "All indications agree that the further course of development must inevitably lead to a clash between the culturally developed forces of the people and the bureaucratic oligarchy. . . . With energetic pressure from the popular mass, and the disintegration inevitable in such circumstances of the government apparatus, the resistance of those in power may prove much weaker than now appears." (p. 287) Yet Trotsky did not assume that only good things could result. He favored a political revolution, renewing Soviet democracy, and leaving the socio-economic conquests of the 1917 revolution intact. But he was able to envision a grim alternate scenario:

A collapse of the Soviet regime would lead inevitably to the collapse of the planned economy, and thus to the abolition of state property. The bond of compulsion between the trusts and the factories within them would fall away. The more successful enterprises would succeed in coming out on the road of independence. They might convert themselves into stock companies, or they might find some other transitional

form of property—one, for example, in which the workers should participate in the profits. The collective farms would disintegrate at the same time, and far more easily. The fall of the present bureaucratic dictatorship, if it were not replaced by a new socialist power, would thus mean a return to capitalist relations with a catastrophic decline of industry and culture. (pp. 250–251)

Bad as daily life under Stalinist tyranny might be, things could get worse. The replacement of job security with the economic whip of unemployment; the erosion of even the often poor quality housing, medical care, education, and other social benefits guaranteed by the 1917 revolution—these and other possibilities strengthened the hand of the bureaucracy. "The vast majority of the Soviet workers are even now hostile to the bureaucracy," Trotsky argued, but "the workers have almost never come out on the road of open struggle," because of the fear that, "in throwing out the bureaucracy, they will open the way for a capitalist restoration." Trotsky saw this as a dialectical contradiction in the Soviet reality. The destruction of the planned economy would set the country back for decades, and the bureaucracy fulfilled a necessary function by preserving that economy. "But it fulfills it in such a way as to prepare an explosion of the whole system which may completely sweep out the results of the revolution." (pp. 285, 286) Whether the USSR would finally slide back into capitalism or move forward to socialism would be resolved through immense struggles involving the Soviet masses themselves.

The Importance of the Left Opposition

Trotsky knew that relatively spontaneous mass upsurges of the working class could *begin* a revolution, but he did not believe that this meant the working class could "spontaneously" *win* a revolution. Taking political power was possible only through conscious preparation, including the development of experienced militants, as well as the development of a sound political program and the ability to effectively communicate it to masses of people. He believed the existence of the Left Opposition in the USSR—which at that time was the largest section of the Fourth International—guaranteed the existence of such a force.

This was by no means a figment of his imagination. These courageous men and women—in many cases veterans of the revolutionary struggle against tsarism and capitalism, leading cadres in the 1917 revolution and the civil war period, early

defenders of Marxism and Bolshevik principles against the first signs of bureaucratic corruption—constituted a tremendous reservoir of political experience, organizing skill, and invaluable moral authority. “The prisons, the remote corners of Siberia and Central Asia, the fast multiplying concentration camps, contain the flower of the Bolshevik Party, the most sturdy and true,” Trotsky wrote. Noting the loss of hundreds of Left Oppositionists through executions, starvation during hunger strikes, suicides, etc., he stated that at least 20,000 remained. The Communist Party of Stalin had two million, but “on such a question a mere juxtaposition of figures means nothing,” Trotsky pointed out. “Ten revolutionists in a regiment is enough to bring it over, in a red-hot political atmosphere, to the side of the people.” (pp. 282, 283) He quoted the recently freed Victor Serge, one of the few Left Oppositionists to escape from the prison camps:

Thousands of these Communists of the first hour, comrades of Lenin and Trotsky, builders of the Soviet Republic when Soviets still existed, are opposing the principles of socialism to the inner degeneration of the regime, are defending as best they can (and all they can is to agree to all possible sacrifices) the rights of the working class. . . . I bring you news of those who are locked up there. They will hold out, whatever be necessary, to the end. Even if they do not live to see a new revolutionary dawn. (p. 284)

One of the most important changes to take place since Trotsky wrote *The Revolution Betrayed* is that almost all of these precious comrades—fine human beings, irreplaceable revolutionary cadres—are gone. Some were finally broken. Most were able to stand fast to their beliefs, and they were massacred in 1936–38. There are accounts of them being marched out in batches from the labor camps, at gunpoint, into the tundra. Some eyewitnesses recount that they walked with dignity, raising the Communist clenched-fist salute, and proudly, defiantly sang “The Internationale” before reaching the spot where they were shot down. Those few who have survived are now old—mostly in their eighties and nineties.

Today there are disparate, fragmented currents of younger dissident Marxists in the USSR, some working class activists

still inspired by the ideas of Marx and Lenin, and small groups of fresh militants who know little of the heritage of the Left Opposition but are eager to learn. One is entitled to have hopes for their future success—but the seasoned and relatively cohesive force that was the Soviet Left Opposition is no more. Trotsky asserted that “the bureaucracy can be removed only by a revolutionary force,” adding: “To prepare this and stand at the head of the masses in a favorable historic situation—that is the task of the Soviet section of the Fourth International.” (p. 288) The favorable historic situation has arrived, but the Soviet section of the Fourth International has yet to be rebuilt, its adherents and allies must be recruited afresh. It is not clear that this can be accomplished in time to affect events in the present conjuncture.

Yet the historic program of the Left Opposition remains vibrant even now.

This would involve, first and foremost, “the restoration of democracy in the trade unions and the Soviets. It would be able to, and would have to, restore freedom of Soviet parties. . . . A restoration of the right of criticism, and a genuine freedom of elections, are necessary conditions for the further development of the country.” Trotsky had no patience for the anxiety that some might stumble into political “heresy” and error. “The youth will receive the opportunity to breathe freely, criticize, make mistakes, and grow up. Science and art will be freed of their chains.” (pp. 252, 289, 290)

There would also be a settling of accounts, a necessary cleansing. “Together with the masses, and at their head, [a revolutionary party] would carry out a ruthless purgation of the state apparatus,” eliminating the tyranny of Stalinism root and branch. Of course, “it is not a question of substituting one ruling clique for another, but of changing the very methods of administering the economy and guiding the culture of the country. Bureaucratic autocracy must give place to Soviet democracy.” (pp. 252, 289)

Moving away from the bureaucratic strangulation of the means of production and distribution, “the proletariat would have to introduce in the economy a series of very important reforms, but not another social revolution.” Rather, “it would retain and further develop the experiment of planned economy.” But the planning must assume a qualitatively different character:

“The bringing of democracy into industry means a radical revision of plans in the interests of the toilers. Free discussion of economic problems will decrease the overhead expense of bureaucratic mistakes and zigzags. . . . ‘Bourgeois norms of distribution’ [such as inequality of incomes, market mechanisms, etc.] will be confined within the limits of strict necessity, and, in step with the growth of social wealth, will give way to socialist equality.” (pp. 253, 252, 289)

“And, finally,” Trotsky concluded, “foreign policy will return to the traditions of revolutionary internationalism.” Insisting on the utter utopianism of the Stalinist notion of building socialism in a single country, he predicted: “The longer the Soviet Union remains in a capitalist environment, the deeper runs the degeneration of the social fabric. A prolonged isolation would inevitably end not in national communism, but in a restoration of capitalism.” He added: “If a bourgeoisie cannot peacefully grow into a socialist democracy, it is likewise true that a socialist state cannot peacefully merge with a world capitalist system.” The Bolsheviks, upon taking power in 1917, had proclaimed their “fundamental task” to be “the establishment of a socialist organization of society and the victory of socialism in all countries.” This must guide a revitalized Soviet Union, Trotsky insisted. “More than ever the fate of the October revolution is bound up now with the fate of Europe and of the whole world.” (pp. 290, 300–301, 291)

For those of us outside the USSR, this revolutionary internationalist orientation is an appropriate point on which to conclude. Our efforts to build revolutionary democratic struggles and a working class movement for socialism are profoundly affected by what has been unfolding in the Soviet Union. We have much to learn from these great conflicts that are changing the face of world politics. It is no less the case, Trotsky insisted, that struggles against the oppression of capitalist societies such as ours will have impact among our brothers and sisters in the USSR.

For Left Oppositionists of all lands, Trotsky’s passionate and penetrating analysis is an important starting point as we seek to understand the world and change it. □

September 10, 1991

Six Points on the Clarence Thomas Hearings

by Claire M. Cohen, M.D.

Claire Cohen is a Black activist and physician in Pittsburgh, PA. This article has been reprinted from the New Pittsburgh Courier, October 26, 1991.

African Americans should seriously analyze what happened in the Clarence Thomas debacle.

1. There were good reasons for African American opposition to Thomas before the harassment charges surfaced. While heading the EEOC, Thomas let 13,000 discrimination cases drop without investigation.

He has opposed the very same civil rights gains won in the '60s that have allowed him and other Blacks to climb out of poverty into the middle class. He publicly dogged his sister when she was briefly on welfare. He has ridiculed Blacks speaking out against racism, denying its existence until he was charged with sexual harassment.

While claiming to be for "self-help," he has not (as Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, or even Booker T. Washington did) helped to build self-organized Black-controlled structures in the African American community.

2. We must be clear that the U.S. government (Republican and Democratic wings) serves the interests of a small, wealthy, powerful, mostly white male elite.

The other 80 percent of the population, including most Blacks, is losing economic ground.

Government policy has perpetuated double digit unemployment for Blacks throughout the '80s and '90s, condoned increased police harassment in the name of fighting the "drug war," and redistributed wealth from the poor to the rich.

The Supreme Court has ruled that Blacks and women discriminated against on the job have no right to sue for money damages, that coerced confessions can be used in court against defendants, and that people can be held in jail for 48 hours without charging them with a crime. Thomas supports the most reactionary sectors of this government.

3. It was not Anita Hill's charges against Thomas that hurt the Black community. We were hurt by our falling for the power elite's cynical manipulation of tragic circumstances to divert attention away from Thomas's record of anti-Black positions and by our ready acceptance of the false counterposition of racism to sexism.

There are two sides to the sexual stereotypes about African Americans. The myth of the "loose Black woman" who falsely charges victimization when spurned is just as damaging as the myth of the sexually depraved Black male. Historically, while Black men were lynched for false accusations of raping white women, Black women were frequently raped by white men, usually while working as domestics (which most did until World War II). But when Black women pressed charges, they were routinely dismissed as lacking credibility.

Black women were in the forefront of the Black community's fight against the genocidal lynching of African Americans, most of whom were male.

But, today, Black women are still two to three times more likely to be raped than white women and most interracial rapes are still by white men against Black women. Yet, like women of all races, we are most likely to be harassed, battered, raped, or murdered by the men closest to us.

This is as devastating to our community as "Black-on-Black homicide," and needs to be addressed.

4. The power elite only recognizes racism when it serves its interests to do so. They do not need "conspiracies" since life naturally provides many circumstances that can be cynically manipulated, as George Bush was already successfully doing with the "rags to riches" story about Thomas.

5. We must deal with sexism in our community. Sexist values do not liberate Black men, they degrade Black women. Maintaining male dominance over women diverts attention and energy away from the crucial struggles in our communities.

Mutual support and solidarity of Black men and women for each other only strengthens our community. Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X in his later years, and other Black male leaders strongly supported women's liberation. This did not make them less masculine but more effective. Strong, intelligent, assertive Black women, rather than emasculating Black men, have been among their most effective champions and supportive companions.

6. We must also recognize class divisions in the African American community. Upper-class Blacks have often been co-opted by their newfound wealth and status.

Thomas is a good example.

On the other hand, poor and working class Blacks, especially our youth, have been increasingly alienated from society, as their hopes of achieving the "American Dream" are dashed and middle-class Black leaders fail to effectively address their issues. This alienation leads to drugs, crime, teen pregnancy, and the increasing deterioration of our communities.

In conclusion, the African American community cannot afford to be seduced into hitching its wagon to the "rising star" of a co-opted opportunist, no matter how inspiring his/her "rags to riches" story is.

Instead, we must educate ourselves about our rich heritage of group struggle, build grassroots community structures solely accountable to us, and take a leading role in building an independent political structure, outside the Democratic and Republican parties, which is only accountable to Blacks and the oppressed groups and poor and working class America of all races and ethnicities. □

NOW Calls Global Feminist Conference

As part of its 25th anniversary celebration, the National Organization for Women (NOW) is sponsoring a Global Feminist Conference. Designed to focus on issues being addressed by feminists around the world, the conference will take place January 9-12 at the Washington Hilton Hotel in Washington, D.C. For information, contact your local NOW chapter or call the NOW Action Center: (202) 331-0066. Future issues of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* will present material on this conference.

The Clarence Thomas Appointment and Its Challenge to the African American Struggle

by Tom Barrett

On October 15, 1991, the United States Senate voted, 52-48, to confirm Clarence Thomas as the 106th justice of the Supreme Court. It did so after an exhaustive debate in which absolutely none of the issues relevant to his appointment to the Court were discussed. The ruling class's campaign to fill the Supreme Court with justices who will use their judicial authority to roll back gains won in earlier years by African Americans, women, workers, and fighters for civil liberties is continuing. Thomas's confirmation makes more serious the threat to abortion rights, school desegregation, affirmative action, civil liberties, and the rights of defendants in criminal cases.

There should be no illusion that the Thomas nomination was a new attack against rights won in previous struggle or that defeating his confirmation would have put an end to the employing class's attempt to roll back those rights. Over 20 years ago, Richard Nixon attempted to appoint ultraconservative justices to the Court—sometimes successfully (Rehnquist), sometimes not (Haynesworth and Carswell)—to put an end to the “judicial activism” which manifested itself in the victories of *Brown v. Board of Education* (which outlawed school segregation in 1954) and *Roe v. Wade* (which struck down prohibitions against abortion in 1973). Ronald Reagan and George Bush pledged during their campaigns to appoint justices who opposed abortion rights, with the im-

plication that an attempt to overturn the *Roe* decision would ultimately be successful. Thomas's nomination was a part of that overall strategy. Had Thomas been rejected it is certain that Bush would have found an equally reactionary substitute.

It should be understood, moreover, that the Supreme Court is part of the capitalist government, and that its primary responsibility is to defend the power and property rights of the capitalist ruling class. The *Brown* and *Roe* decisions were indeed victories, but they took place in a context where the U.S. ruling class had the need to make concrete concessions in order to avoid a greater social explosion at home (and in the case of the *Brown* decision to present a liberal face to the then emerging liberation movements in Black Africa). In this sense they were consistent with the role of the Court as a ruling class institution. Both were, however, aberrations from the Supreme Court's usual reactionary practice. The *Brown* decision, for example, was itself a reversal of a previous decision, in *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896), in which the Court ruled that “separate but equal” schools for different races were indeed constitutional. Throughout American history, from the time that the Supreme Court was established by Article III of the U.S. Constitution, it has in general been a force to hold back social progress rather than advance it. The past 20 years have seen a concerted effort to make sure that the Supreme Court continues in its historic role.

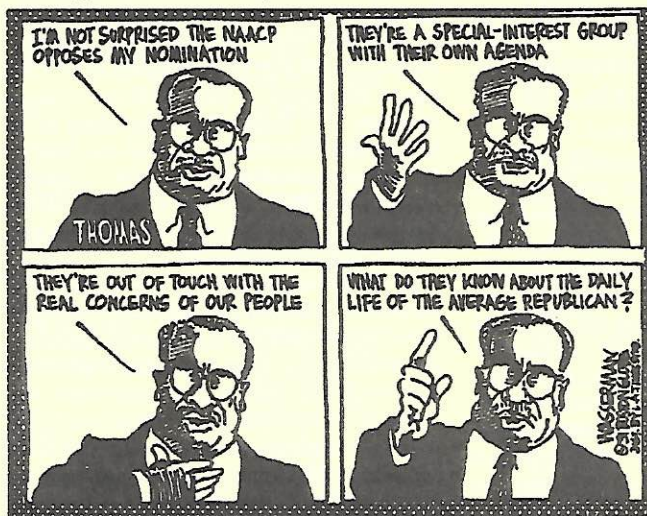
For the most part the Democratic-controlled Congress has acquiesced in the Executive Branch's appointment of more conservative justices. It agreed to the elevation of William Rehnquist, one of the most reactionary men ever to sit on the Court, to the post of Chief Justice, and agreed to the appointment of right-wingers O'Connor, Kennedy, Scalia, and Souter as well. The one appointment which the Senate could not accept was that of Robert Bork, one of the most outspoken reactionaries in the legal profession. It is likely

that his role as solicitor general during the Watergate scandal made him unacceptable to the Senate. During the “Saturday Night Massacre” of 1973 he agreed to fire Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox after his two immediate superiors, Attorney General Elliott Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William French Smith, refused. Bork's judicial experience and qualifications as a legal scholar, however, were unquestionable. That much cannot be said of Clarence Thomas.

Thomas was appointed to replace retiring Justice Thurgood Marshall, the first African American ever to serve on the Supreme Court. Marshall had distinguished himself as a lawyer for many years before President Lyndon Johnson appointed him. As an attorney for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund he argued for plaintiff in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Marshall's opinions on the Court tended to defend civil liberties, defendants' rights, and constitutional prohibitions against racist and sexist discrimination.

Though Marshall was the first African American to be a Supreme Court justice, his position had by the time of his retirement become known in Washington as the “Black Seat,” in much the same way that the seat held by justices Benjamin Cardozo, Louis Brandeis, and Felix Frankfurter was known as the “Jewish Seat.” It was politically important that President Bush appoint an African American to succeed Marshall. However, Bush was faced with a severe shortage of African Americans with sufficiently reactionary views. Clarence Thomas had the two assets Bush wanted—Black skin and right-wing ideology. The facts that he had less than 18 months' experience as a judge (in fact, he was probably appointed to the federal bench in order to prepare him for his Supreme Court appointment) and that his legal career had been less than distinguished did not seem to bother a president who has repeatedly attacked affirmative action programs for “lowering standards.”

Thomas's reactionary views and lack of legal qualifications did not seem to bother a majority in the Senate as well. In spite of his “stonewalling” on every single question put to him related to opinions on previous Supreme Court decisions (most notably *Roe*), as the time approached for the confirmation vote, a substantial majority of senators were prepared to vote “aye.”



It was in that context that the allegations of sexual harassment were introduced. Anita Hill, a former associate of Thomas at the Department of Education and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, made the allegations in explicit detail, and they need not be repeated here. Hill, who is today a law professor at the University of Oklahoma, is herself a conservative Republican. Her views on *Roe v. Wade* have not been made public; however, it is known that she favored the confirmation of Robert Bork as an associate justice of the Supreme Court. Her allegations cannot be proven; however, the circumstances surrounding the accusation lead one to suspect that they were true.

For one thing, Hill had absolutely no reason to lie, based on any hidden political or personal agenda. For another, she never intended to make a public accusation against Thomas. In a routine background check, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) interviewed her about Thomas, and she informed them about the incidents of sexual harassment. Every single member of the Senate Judiciary Committee had that information from *day one* of their deliberations, and they chose not to address themselves to it. Three days before the confirmation vote was to take place, Nina Totenberg, a reporter for National Public Radio, received a copy of Hill's allegations, and she made them public. Hill confirmed that she had accused Thomas and she agreed to testify before the Senate Judiciary Committee, and thus began the media circus whose Nielsen ratings went through the roof.

The public attention to sexual harassment, which is only a part of the larger problem of violence against women, is long overdue. If one by-product of the Thomas hearings is a heightened awareness of this aspect of women's oppression then the attention paid to Anita Hill and her accusation against Thomas will have some positive value. However, the problem is that it drew attention *away* from the clear and present danger that Mr. Justice Thomas and the rest of the reactionary Supreme Court majority pose to women and to African Americans.

However serious were Thomas's offenses against Anita Hill and two other women who raised similar charges, they were offenses against three women, and they remain unproved and, in fact, unprovable. Thomas's legal opinions, on the other hand—the opinions on which he will act as an associate justice of the Supreme Court—are an offense against millions of women, and as much as Thomas tried to hide them during the Senate hearings, they are a matter of public record.

The Threat to Women's Rights

The danger which Thomas poses to the gains women have won over the past two decades is clear and direct. Thomas may have been unwilling to express his disagreement with *Roe v. Wade* in his Senate testimony, but he fooled no one. The platform committees at the conventions which nominated both George Bush and Ronald Reagan promised that Republican presidents would appoint anti-abortion justices to the Supreme Court, with the express goal of reversing the *Roe* decision. This campaign promise is in print, in black and white; moreover, this is one promise which both Reagan and Bush have kept, with the exception of the Court's only woman, Sandra Day O'Connor, whose views on the question are less extreme. Clarence Thomas's opposition to abortion rights has never been a secret.

During his tenure as head of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Thomas showed himself to be an implacable foe of affirmative action, whether it benefited women, people of color, or even senior citizens. He was Ronald Reagan's hatchet man against programs which enabled women, African Americans, and other oppressed groups to enter trades and professions previously restricted to white males. Hiding behind rhetoric in opposition to "quotas," Thomas participated enthusiastically in the Reagan administration's drive to take away the EEOC's ability to enforce the laws which outlawed discrimination in the workplace.

The sexual harassment issue has a great deal of relevance to the fight against discrimination. Unlike people of color, women are equally distributed within all classes and are not denied access for any reason to the best educational facilities. Consequently, there is no shortage of qualified women to take positions in the professions and corporate management. However, the statistics show that these fields continue to be predominantly male, and one significant factor in driving women out of the executive suite is sexual harassment. The numbers of professional and managerial women who have encountered it are enormous.

Women who have attempted to enter previously male-dominated trades in the working class have been subjected to some of the crudest forms of harassment, sufficient to drive all but the strongest women out, and that is the real intention. It is, consequently, discrimination and therefore illegal. Could a Supreme Court justice who engages in such activity himself be trusted to enforce laws against sex discrimination in employment? Clearly not. Neither could a Supreme Court justice who opposed providing the means of enforcement to

those agencies charged with eradicating discrimination.

The Democratic majority's willingness to confirm Thomas before Anita Hill's sensational testimony speaks volumes about their lack of real concern about women's rights, especially when Senate Judiciary Committee members already had Hill's testimony in the FBI report. Had the FBI report not been leaked to Nina Totenberg, Thomas's confirmation would have been a matter of routine, and the margin would have been significantly greater than four votes, in spite of the fact that his opposition to women's equality is obvious to all. It is one more indication that the Democratic Party is willing to give nothing more than lip service to women's just demands for equality and freedom.

The Challenge to the African American Struggle

The problem which the Thomas appointment poses to the African American nationality is much more complex (though it should never be forgotten that 50 percent of African Americans are female). Bush's appointment of Thomas is part of a larger strategy by the ruling class to prevent a resurgence of the Black nationalist struggle by co-opting a section of its potential leadership into privileged positions within the capitalist structure. It is also part of a Republican strategy to convince significant numbers of Black voters to vote Republican by exploiting the Democratic Party's failure to advance African American interests. At the present time both strategies are working, and if opinion polls are to be believed, there was stronger support for the Thomas nomination among Blacks than among whites.

The Bush administration was so skillful in its response to the Hill allegations that one might suspect a Republican leaked the FBI report to Totenberg. To hear people like Orrin Hatch and Strom Thurmond posing as the enemies of racism defies the imagination, and the Democrats' failure to expose the hypocrisy of those who exploited the Willie Horton hysteria in 1988 shows the complete futility of any reliance on them. The Republicans and their allies among the Democrats played on African Americans' memories of past injustices and justifiable pride that a second Black lawyer has been appointed to the highest court in the United States.

In many respects all of the issues confronted by the African American struggle found a reflection in the Thomas debate—the relationship of class and nationality; the relationship between the nationalist and feminist struggles; the contradiction between the aspirations of African Americans and the capitalist system itself; and the character of African American leadership.

None of these debates are new: Black activists have been discussing them for most of this century. Booker T. Washington, William E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and later, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Amiri Baraka, and many other leaders have all expressed their differing opinions. Reading and studying the essays, speeches, and polemics of the past eighty years of African American history provides a rich education to anyone who undertakes it. If a new African American leadership is to actually bring about advances and improvements for Black people, these questions will have to be addressed.

The Thomas hearings were in themselves a dramatic illustration of what African Americans have won in four decades of struggle. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee was a Black woman law professor from the University of Oklahoma concerning the confirmation of a Supreme Court justice. In 1948 the Supreme Court forced the University of Oklahoma Law School to admit its first Black student — its last decision on school segregation within the guidelines of *Plessey v. Ferguson*. The Court ruled that Oklahoma did not provide a “separate but equal” law school for Blacks; therefore, the university could not deny admission to this student on account of race. He was admitted, but required to live in a basement room on campus and to sit behind a partition in the classroom. (My mother, who was an undergraduate at OU at the time, recalls that his classmates tore the wall down after the first day.) Today, no one questions the presence of a law professor who is not only Black but female. One wonders if even Anita Hill, who was not born until eight years after the desegregation of OU Law, understands how much those civil rights fighters (including Thurgood Marshall) really accomplished. In spite of his anecdotes about racism which he witnessed as a boy in Georgia, it is clear that Clarence Thomas does not.

A ‘High-Tech Lynching’

In 1955, a 15-year-old Black youth from Chicago named Emmett Till was visiting relatives in Mississippi. One afternoon he winked and made a remark to a white woman which today might have been construed as “sexual harassment.” Under Mississippi law, a Black man’s making eye contact with a white woman made him guilty of rape, and under Southern tradition, a Black man accused of raping a white woman was lynched the night of his arrest. Needless to say, her accusation was sufficient evidence to prove guilt. Till did not live out the night. His badly beaten body was fished out of a river several days later.

Naturally, no one was ever prosecuted for the crime.

Till’s mother, an NAACP activist, insisted on an open-casket funeral, “so that everyone could see what they did to my boy.” His funeral was transformed into a rally against white supremacy and night-rider brutality and, with the *Brown* decision and the Montgomery bus boycott, was one of the events which launched the mass-action civil rights movement of the 1955–65 period.

The memory of Southern lynch mobs is still very much a part of the African American collective consciousness. Though Emmett Till was one of the last victims of an out-and-out lynching, a clear double standard persists in cases in which Black males are accused of violence against women, especially white women, and, conversely, when white males are accused of violence against Black women. One need only compare the Central Park jogger case, in which the Black defendants were found guilty in spite of the lack of forensic evidence, with the St. John’s University lacrosse team case, in which the white defendants were found innocent in spite of their acknowledgment that they had done everything that their Black victim accused them of doing. The jury agreed with defense’s contention that she had consented!

Consequently, when Clarence Thomas denied Anita Hill’s accusation of sexual harassment with the claim that he was the victim of a “high-tech lynching,” it meant something quite different to Blacks than it did to whites. It touched a nerve. It evoked racist stereotypes about violent, oversexed Black men, desirous of white women (Thomas is married to a white woman). It created an association between Thomas and such victims of racism as the Scottsboro defendants in the 1930s, who were sentenced to death for the alleged rape of a white woman (none was ever executed).

Thomas’s supporters, led by the Bush administration, took advantage of African American sensitivity to unproven charges of sexual crime. The Republicans and their Democratic allies were able to pose as the enemies of racism and the defenders of due process. Led by former prosecutor Arlen Specter, the Republicans subjected Anita Hill to the all-too-common nightmare faced by rape and sexual harassment victims—not being believed or being turned from the victim to the criminal who “led him on.” By the end of the hearings, Specter and Hatch were speculating that Hill might be suffering from a psychiatric disorder.

Affirmative Action and the ‘Talented Tenth’

With little media attention, a section of the African American middle class has been developing increasingly reactionary political views as opportunities within the professions and corporate management have opened up for those Blacks who are willing to play by the white man’s rules. At the same time, the Republican Party has been actively courting not only African American conservatives but all Blacks who recognize that the Democrats have failed to deliver on their promises. Some of the most astute Republican strategists, such as Rep. Newt Gingrich of Georgia, Housing Secretary Jack Kemp, and former New Jersey Governor Thomas Kean (who won a majority of African American votes in his reelection campaign in 1985), have been arguing for many years that there are big opportunities for the Republican Party to regain the Black support it lost in the 1930s.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its principal spokesperson, W.E.B. Du Bois, argued that there existed a layer of educated and capable African Americans who should not be shut out of the professions, academia, and corporate management simply because of their skin color. Du Bois’s term for this group was the “Talented Tenth.” He openly acknowledged that most Blacks were incapable of rising above their position at the bottom of society, but that educational and career opportunities should not be denied to those Blacks who proved able to “better themselves.” (Later in his life Du Bois moved beyond his earlier elitist views.)

The Thomas hearings revealed conclusively that the original Du Bois objective has been achieved. Testifying both for and against Thomas was an array of African American lawyers, government bureaucrats, and corporate executives—including Anita Hill herself—all beneficiaries of decades of litigation, mass demonstrations, and outright bloodshed in the cause of racial justice. At the same time, the real meaning of the “Talented Tenth” agenda has been laid bare. During the 1960s universities and corporations took steps, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes not, not only to stop outright discrimination but to remedy a small part of the effects of past discrimination. They set up aggressive minority recruitment programs and made openings for applicants of color. The name most often given to such efforts at correcting past injustices was “affirmative action.” Yale Law School’s affirmative action program benefited both Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill.

One of the frequent criticisms of affirmative action is that it imposes "quotas" which "lower standards" for university and professional school admission and corporate employment. But in nominating Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, George Bush showed clearly that he wasn't going to let "lower standards" get in the way of advancing his political agenda. Anyone familiar with university admissions policies, especially at the most elite schools, is aware that "affirmative action" for the rich has existed for generations. Sons and daughters of graduates or of significant contributors have always received preferential treatment in admissions. Moreover, admissions faculties have for decades attempted to "diversify" their student bodies with "quotas" for different academic disciplines and extracurricular activities. No one at Anita Hill's University of Oklahoma can deny that promising football players are judged by less rigorous academic standards, not only in admissions but in their courses as well.

In corporate America, the "old boy network" remains very much a reality. Social connections, school acquaintances, and outright nepotism remain important factors in employment and promotion. In spite of forty years of civil rights and feminism, 92 percent of *Fortune* 1000 corporations' directors are white males, and one executive was quoted as saying that it was because too few Blacks and women play golf. The day-to-day mismanagement in business, to which any worker will freely attest, proves clearly that qualifications and ability are not the decisive factors in employment.

However, it is a fact that when corporations and universities make special efforts to recruit people of color, they often find a shortage of qualified applicants. When laws against discrimination are aggressively enforced—and that often does require numerical quotas—it possibly cuts across profits, and it most certainly cuts across the opportunities for golf partners, fraternity brothers, and second cousins. In some cases, including Bush's most recent appointment to the Supreme Court, lower standards are indeed applied.

The cause of this situation is the fundamentally racist character of American capitalist society. Due to the substandard schools, medical care, and grinding poverty which prevail in African American, Latino, and Native communities, only the most talented and able young people can break free of the cycle of deprivation and take advantage of the opportunities which the civil rights movement has opened. The "untalented nine-tenths" are not innately inferior by any means, but are the victims of unabated racial injustice. Simply remov-

ing color bars is not enough, and Du Bois got it right when he acknowledged that it would only benefit the "Talented Tenth."

Clarence Thomas represents that layer of the Black community which has turned its back on the millions who remain victims of oppression. Nationalists have been referring to him as "Uncle Thomas," but a better characterization is the often-used "Oreo cookie"—black on the outside, white on the inside. In the interests of advancing his own personal career he participated in gutting one federal agency (the EEOC) which had been an acquisition in the struggle for equal job rights. In order to "make it" in white-dominated capitalist society, he was willing to attack those programs of which he himself has been a beneficiary. He has placed a higher value on profit and career advancement than on simple justice, whether for working people, for women, or for his own African American people. And, in the absence of an alternative, people like Clarence Thomas are attempting to become the new Black leadership.

The Crisis of Black Leadership

The growing strength of reactionary political forces in the Black communities is as predictable as it is frustrating: it is a direct result of the failure of any alternative leadership to come forward and challenge the bankrupt Democratic Party forces who have been weighed in the balance and found wanting. At the end of the 1960s the first wave of Black elected officials took office in cities throughout the United States, pledging to end the cycle of hopelessness that had turned Los Angeles, Detroit, Newark, and other urban centers into battlefields. Some of the politicians sincerely thought that they could make a positive difference; others were merely intent on lining their pockets. All of them failed to improve the quality of life in the Black community.

Eventually, the old pattern of urban Democratic Party political machines reemerged over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, only with African American politicians in the place of the Irish, Italian, and Polish politicians of previous generations. They have made places for the sons and daughters of the Black middle class in the agencies created during the "War on Poverty" of the 1960s. They have even put potential militant leaders behind city hall desks where they can no longer pose a threat to the power structure. But for the people still inhabiting the urban ghettos, life continues to deteriorate. Now, however, instead of seeing a Hugh Addonizio (mayor of Newark until 1970) lining his pockets at City Hall, they see a Sharpe James (mayor of Newark since 1986). The same justified resentment which Blacks

harbored toward the old white politicians has been turned against their Black successors. It is only natural that people are willing to listen to a new message.

One could hardly expect the Republican Party not to recognize its opportunity to present its own reactionary message. Its answer to violence in school corridors is a principal with a bullhorn and baseball bat. Its answer to unsafe streets is capital punishment. Its answer to poverty is "economic growth" by cutting taxes for the rich and allowing businesses to invest tax-free in inner cities. In contrast to a Martin Luther King, it projects Colin Powell as a model for Black youth. Conservatism is growing in the more affluent African American community, and it will continue to grow in the absence of any other alternative to the failed politics of the Democrats. Bush's appointment of Clarence Thomas was a clear signal to the Black middle class that the right wing of the Republican Party has rolled out the welcome mat.

Experience has proven that the politics of Black inclusion in the political and economic system, the politics of the "Talented Tenth," have failed to advance the interests of African Americans as a whole. The only alternative which can be the *nationalist* alternative, but this will require a decisive and final political break with the parties which support the white-dominated capitalist power structure. A nationalist movement, basing itself on the oppressed masses, rather than the privileged elite, is what is needed at this stage. Such a nationalist movement will have to address the economic needs of the overwhelmingly working class African American community, the special needs of the female half of the African American community, as well as its nationalist aspirations. This is the course on which Malcolm X had embarked when he was assassinated in 1965.

The first steps towards reviving a revolutionary Black nationalist movement are being taken now. The Black Workers for Justice are committed to a long-term project of unionizing the poorest sector of the working class, the unorganized workers of the South. Ron Daniels, the former executive director of the Rainbow Coalition, has launched an ambitious presidential campaign outside of the two-party deathtrap. Ultimately, it is the capitalist system itself which is the obstacle to African American advancement; a militant and uncompromising Black nationalist movement will be an indispensable component of the revolution which will overthrow it. □

October 28, 1991

Discussion

In the period between Eugene V. Debs's first presidential candidacy in 1900 and the 1936 presidential election, all the wings and factions of the socialist movement in the United States stood foursquare for the principle of independent political action. Support for a capitalist political party or its candidates was excluded.

The year 1936 proved to be a watershed. With millions of workers massing in the streets demanding jobs and relief from the unbearable conditions of the depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt had inaugurated his New Deal program of reforms. The Communist Party USA and the right-wing socialists supported Roosevelt for president in 1936, as did unions like the UAW which at its second convention in 1936 had unanimously declared for a labor party.

For the next several decades, the Democrats were looked to by the organized labor movement, oppressed minorities, women's organizations, and some sections of the socialist movement, to champion their needs. Mild social reforms wrung out of Truman, with his "Fair Deal," Kennedy, with his "New Frontiers," and Johnson, with his "Great Society" were enough to sustain the illusion held by tens of millions that the Democrats were fundamentally better for working people and the oppressed than were the Republicans.

But in the '70s, with the stagnation of the U.S. economy, the heightened inter-imperialist competition for markets, and the maturing of conditions leading inevitably to a profound economic crisis on a global basis, the distinction between the two major capitalist parties became blurred to a significant sector of the Democratic Party's mass following. The Carter presidency of 1976-1980 demonstrated that the Democrats had pretty much reached the end of the road in advancing and adopting even minimal social legislation that would benefit the majority of people in the U.S. Instead, Carter gave us deregulation, which imperiled the jobs and living standards of hundreds of thousands of workers in transportation and communication; sought one of the worst anti-labor injunctions ever in an attempt to break the miners' strike; and refused to index the minimum wage (i.e., provide automatic increases as the cost of living went up). Neither labor law reform nor common situs picketing, two of the labor movement's principal legislative objectives, were enacted during the Carter administration, despite a Democratic president and a so-called veto-proof Congress.

To express their opposition to the Carter administration's reactionary record, tens of

Socialist Electoral Policy and the Ron Daniels Campaign

by Samuel Adams

millions of workers voted for Reagan. But the anti-labor, anti-Black, anti-women offensive was on with a vengeance. Reagan and Bush have carried it out with bipartisan support.

In post-World War II America until recently, the call for a new political party independent of the Democrats and Republicans, representing the interests of workers and the oppressed, was basically limited to a propaganda demand. It is clear now, however, with the advent of the '90s, that prospects are opening for more broadly based independent political action. The fact that initiatives are being taken simultaneously within the labor, women's, and Black liberation movements toward that end reflect the change of consciousness being experienced by millions of people who are fed up with the profits-before-people policies of the Democrats and Republicans and are more willing now to consider the feasibility of constructing a new party that will genuinely represent their interests.

The three most notable current developments are the initiation of Labor Party Advocates (LPA) by Tony Mazzocchi, who for many years has been a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union; the recommendation by the Commission for Responsive Democracy that the National Organization for Women (NOW) play a leadership role in the formation of a new party; and the independent presidential campaign of Ron Daniels, who over the past two decades has from time to time called for independent Black political action.

Each of these developments is highly positive, helps popularize the idea of a breakaway from the capitalist two-party system, and deepens awareness on the need for such a breakaway. But at the same time each contains contradictory features, coupling the call for independent politics with pronouncements or even actions which retain elements of the old politics.

Thus, Mazzocchi speaks glowingly of the New Deal period (helping perpetuate the myth that the capitalist politician Roosevelt served the workers' cause) and emphasizes that LPA members are free to campaign and vote for Democrats and Republicans. NOW contributes to and works for the election of gubernatorial candidates like Dianne Feinstein in California and Ann Richards in Texas, both Democrats. And Ron Daniels has continued to pursue his "inside/outside" strategy, reportedly testifying before the NOW hearings on the third party issue that while a new party is needed, "progressive Democrats" should be supported as well (*People's World*, September 1991).

All of this poses fundamental questions for revolutionary socialists, who must decide soon on an electoral policy for the 1992 elections. Inasmuch as LPA has ruled out all prospects for running an independent labor candidate in 1992, and since NOW will not vote on the new party proposition until June 1992—less than five months before the presidential elections—it is around the Ron Daniels candidacy that these questions most urgently require full and immediate discussion.

The Cohen and Tussey Articles

Articles appearing in the previous two issues of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* help provide some factual background for the Daniels campaign. In her "A Look at the Ron Daniels Presidential Campaign" (October), Claire Cohen summarizes Daniels's programmatic positions in support of the needs of African Americans, other oppressed nationalities, poor and working people. Cohen also reports Daniels's stated perspective for the future, which is to build a grassroots movement accountable to oppressed groups that will extend beyond the 1992 campaign. Cohen emphasizes the central role that African Americans must play from the very beginning in such an effort and says it will not succeed if whites do not accept this. She also sees Daniels as moving away from the "inside/outside" strategy.

Here is Cohen's conclusion: "Revolutionary socialists ought to take an initial approach of critically supporting Daniels's effort—especially if he continues to move decisively away from the Democratic Party. His perspectives in this area seem to be evolving in a positive, less reformist, even more revolutionary direction."

Writing in the November issue on "Ron Daniels and the Third Party Movement," Jean Tussey discusses Daniels's program, lists some of his major supporters, and details his campaign plans. Tussey believes

revolutionary socialists should immediately commit themselves to supporting Daniels's candidacy, declaring:

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.

While agreeing with the positive factors cited by Tussey as well as by Cohen, it seems to me that Tussey's call for endorsement *now* of the Daniels campaign is, at the very least, premature.

What Constitutes a Correct Electoral Policy?

In the period prior to the developments around LPA, NOW, and the Ron Daniels campaign, revolutionary socialists found little support for the idea of independent political action. They often found themselves in the position of going *against* the endorsement of their own unions when the call came to ring doorbells and cast votes for the Democrats and occasional Republicans who were endorsed.

At stake for Marxists was the basic principle of class independence. Revolutionists told co-workers, "We and the bosses have opposite interests on the shop level. The same is true on the political level. The bosses own and dominate the Democratic and Republican parties. We need our own political party to represent us. Under no circumstances should we support the bosses' parties."

James P. Cannon, principal founder of the Socialist Workers Party, put it this way:

Capitalism rules and exploits the working people through its control of the government. That's fact number one. And capitalism controls the government through the medium of its class political parties. That's fact number two. *The unconditional break away from capitalist politics and capitalist parties is the first act of socialist consciousness, and the first test of socialist seriousness and sincerity.* That's fact number three. [Emphasis added.]—*Speeches for Socialism*, March 1, 1958 pp. 339-340.

When the Cochran group left the SWP in the 1950s, they adopted an eclectic electoral policy, supporting both the pseudo-independent American Labor Party in New

York and the Black Democrat Diggs in Michigan. Concerning the latter, Cannon said, "The fact that Diggs is a Democrat and therefore a political representative of capitalism is a mere trifle to [the Cochranites]. . . . [They] are determined at all costs not to be 'sectarian,' and not to be 'dogmatic' about such things as socialist principle. How often have we heard and seen that before?"—*Speeches to the Party*, p. 218, November 28, 1954.

To be sure, no one here is proposing that revolutionary socialists support Democrats. The question rather involves endorsing a political candidate who while running independently leaves open the possibility he will be supporting—and perhaps even campaigning for—representatives of a capitalist party. What has to be determined is whether this course is consistent with socialist principles.

If we go by precedent, arguably it is. In the 1960s the Socialist Workers Party endorsed and worked for the election of Black independent candidate Carl Stokes for mayor of Cleveland. Because of internal Democratic Party politics, which precluded his getting the party's nomination, Stokes ran his initial mayoralty campaign as an independent. But he had not broken with the Democratic Party and he supported the election of Democrats in other races. In the aftermath of the election, which he lost, Stokes returned to the Democratic fold and was later elected mayor of Cleveland under the Democratic Party's banner.

If "the unconditional break away from capitalist politics and capitalist parties is the first act of socialist consciousness," I cannot see how the decision to support Stokes was correct, any more than I can see how a decision to endorse Daniels *at this point* can be justified. After all, as Cohen reports, it is Daniels's position that he would go back into the Democratic Party if Jesse Jackson were to get the nomination, as if that by itself would transform the party into one representing the interests of workers and oppressed peoples.

We who count ourselves revolutionary socialists are concerned above all with deepening class consciousness among the have-nots and exploited in our society so that they shed *all* illusions about the Democrats as representing their interests in any way. The "inside/ outside" strategy sends mixed and confusing signals. It leaves open the possibility that maybe, just maybe, the Democratic Party can be reformed. But if that is the case, then it puts a question mark around the need—which we argue is indispensable—for a *complete and definitive break* with the capitalist parties and the establishment of a workers' party based upon the unions.

On Decision Making and Structure

At the moment, an analysis of Daniels's positions on programmatic questions seems to hinge on what he says in a given speech and what is contained in some initial campaign documents. But an authoritative *platform* for the Daniels candidacy does not yet exist. Indeed, it will not even be adopted, presumably, until August 1992, just a couple of months before the elections. Cohen quotes Daniels as saying he plans to hold "an independent, grassroots convention of working class and oppressed people in late August of next year, after the Democratic and Republican conventions, where we will present our platform and measure the platform of the two parties against it—so the people, themselves, can see how [bankrupt] the Democrats are." Daniels says he is working with African Americans, Native Americans, and other activists to develop the platform.

Many activists recall the top/down, one-man decision-making process in the Rainbow Coalition, of which Daniels was executive director. The question is whether that same system will prevail in this new development, or whether it will have a genuinely democratic character, allowing for full discussion and debate, and participatory decision making.

Daniels has frequently expressed a desire for input from those supporting his campaign. The question is to what extent he is prepared to *alter* his positions based upon that input. For example, Daniels proposes a 50 percent cut in the "defense" budget, which means he favors giving the Pentagon \$150 billion a year. When asked why, his answer is that to call for a zero expenditure for "defense" would be seen as so unreasonable that people he seeks to reach would not even give him a hearing. When challenged on this issue by groups and individuals who demand not a penny for the Pentagon, Daniels has complained of "left sects" which "split hairs."

It is clear from all this that Daniels wants to maintain some kind of appeal to more "mainstream" thinking, which he sees as necessary in order to achieve his goal of securing at least two million votes. His positions are being tailored accordingly.

What Position for Revolutionary Socialists at This Juncture?

In the course of his presidential campaign, Ron Daniels is articulating an alternative political program not only for the masses of African Americans but for workers and the oppressed as a whole. The concerns expressed above about certain of his current positions—and these positions may of course be subject to change based

(Continued on page 40)

The Current Political Situation in the U.S. — Autumn 1991

by Paul Le Blanc

The presidencies of Ronald Reagan and his successor George Bush have been described as a period of “conservative-capitalist overdrive” by an influential maverick-conservative political analyst, Kevin Phillips (in his book *The Politics of Rich and Poor*). He means it is a period in which the government tilts in a less democratic and less social reform-oriented direction, adopting policies more overtly favorable to the big business elite. In such a period, higher profits are made by capitalist enterprises, some of which become consolidated and more powerful than ever, and opportunities for becoming rich open up for a narrow layer of capable entrepreneurs and managerial elements. At the same time, he notes, economic imbalances and inequalities grow rapidly, and the great majority of people—what we would call petty-bourgeois and proletarian layers—bear the brunt of the painful excesses of capitalist enrichment.

Phillips has documented impressive similarities between this period and previous “capitalist heydays” in the Gilded Age (of late 1870s to mid-1890s) and in the decade of the 1920s. Noting that “the wealth share of the top 1 percent of Americans had increased from 27 percent to 36 percent at the end of the 1980s,” Phillips points out that “‘downward mobility’ emerged as a real fear within the U.S. workforce, white-collar and blue-collar alike,” and that “many families found themselves emptying savings accounts and going into debt, often to meet the soaring price of home ownership or to put a child through college. . . . For much of Middle America . . . the Reagan years were troubling and ambiguous as the contrast intensified between proliferating billionaires and the tens of millions of others who were gradually sinking.”

Phillips goes on to warn that the immediate future of U.S. politics could well repeat the pattern of the earlier “capitalist heydays”—the rise of radical-populist and militant working class social protest movements. The first of these, from the mid-1890s through the early 1900s, included the Populist revolt of poor farmers, the emergence of the Socialist Party of Eugene V. Debs and of the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), forcing bourgeois politicians of both the Democratic and Republican parties to become champions of so-called “Progressive” reform. The second period of popular insurgency, the so-called “red decade” of the 1930s, saw the massive unionization drive among industrial workers that challenged the power of the wealthy corporate-capitalist elite, sending the Democratic Party of Franklin D. Roosevelt scurrying to implement radical reforms in order to preserve the capitalist system. Phillips anticipates the possibility of a similar leftward political tilt in the foreseeable future.

The ‘New World Order’ Gambit

The ruling elite of the U.S. is itself divided over how to deal with the problems of the 1990s.

Global economic restructuring has generated a devastating reality for many industrial working class communities. What used to be referred to as the cradle of the American labor movement and

the steelmaking capital of the world, my own Pittsburgh area, is now a classic example of “de-industrialization,” where communities of once-prospering steelworkers are turning into demoralized slums, with the mills rusting or torn down altogether; the biggest employer in the area is now the University of Pittsburgh. The Detroit area, once the vibrant center of the world’s automobile industry and a bastion of militant industrial unionism, has also become a case-study of massive unemployment and urban blight.

Such developments have posed questions about the industrial strength of the country as a whole, and about the economic power of the United States in the world economy—especially with the growing competition from the bourgeoisies of Western Europe (Germany most of all) and Japan. What’s more, the end of the Cold War and collapse of the USSR appears to make the immense (and expensive) concentration of U.S. military power somewhat superfluous, further undermining the validity of “the American Century” as an apt description for the present. In contrast to the previous “capitalist heydays” of the Gilded Age and 1920s, the late 1980s saw a significant downward movement in the United States’ share of the world’s industrial economies. The U.S. portion of the world’s Gross National Product fell from about 40 percent in the 1950s to under 30 percent in the 1970s, and is projected as being only 25 percent during the 1990s.

Sectors of the U.S. ruling class gathered around George Bush have committed themselves to preserving their position through continuing the policies of imperialist resurgence advanced by Reagan. Seeking to overcome the “Vietnam syndrome,” U.S. policy-makers have been inclined to play “hardball” with upstart leaders in the third world, such as Qaddafi in Libya, Noriega in Panama, and most recently Saddam Hussein in Iraq. This is part of a larger strategy to secure U.S. domination over these areas, a strategy seeking to clear away *any* nationalist or revolutionary obstacles to U.S. corporations having access to the third world’s rich resources, cheap labor, and investment opportunities.

The U.S. war in the Persian Gulf was designed in part to use U.S. military power as a lever to shore up a declining economic clout, outflanking European and Asian competitors of the American bourgeoisie. There is the problem suggested, however, by André Gunder Frank: “Without an adequate economic base, military power is insufficient to keep a great super-power afloat. On the contrary, the foolish use of its military power may instead sink that [super-]power.”

Such an insight is not the monopoly of leftists—it has also been voiced by worried spokesmen of the loyal bourgeois opposition. To date this loyal opposition has been relatively ineffectual. Much of it is concentrated in the Democratic Party, accurately termed by Kevin Phillips as “history’s second most enthusiastic capitalist party.” Democratic Party liberals and “doves” can be expected to offer lukewarm resistance, at best, to political, economic, and military efforts designed to protect the death-squad dictatorship in El Salvador, to crush the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and to bring down the government of Cuba. And, despite populist demagoguery,

the Democrats have no solutions to offer U.S. working people in the face of deteriorating living standards.

The Bush administration was undeniably successful in making important short-term gains with its war policy in the Persian Gulf. But this has by no means overcome stubborn facts:

1) a significant minority of the U.S. population consciously and actively opposed the Persian Gulf war from beginning to end, vigorously organizing impressive demonstrations and educational activities, and indicating a capacity (had the war lasted longer) of creating and mobilizing an antiwar majority, as occurred during the Vietnam war—and this antiwar force remains as a potentially active element in U.S. society;

2) the inequalities, corruption, oppression, class tensions, exploitation, and growing social problems that were creating mass discontent in the United States before the Persian Gulf war remain as great as ever, and insurgent forces are therefore continuing to grow among workers and the oppressed;

3) the nature of imperialism promises to continue to impact on the peoples of the third world (and soon on the peoples of Eastern Europe) in a manner that generates anti-imperialist struggle and political radicalism that will provide an ongoing challenge to the “new world order,” and therefore generating ongoing strains on the present U.S. power structure;

4) it is unlikely that the ruling classes of such countries as Japan and Germany will simply accept U.S. hegemony, or that the flexing of U.S. military power will be able to effectively counteract the decline of U.S. economic power;

5) a protracted world capitalist crisis, manifest in innumerable ways over the past decade (massive unemployment and underemployment, growing debt, declining living standards, the collapse of social programs, even famine), persists and threatens to overwhelm the plans of bourgeois policy-makers.

One of the most salient “victories” for world capitalism appears to be the so-called “collapse of Communism,” the disintegration of the Stalinist bureaucratic systems in Eastern Europe and the USSR. But this also promises to have mixed effects. The failure of what many mistakenly called “the socialist experiment” creates a mass audience (and also mass participants) for a “capitalist experiment” in which privatization and the market will demonstrate—amid rising expectations—what they are capable and *not* capable of. The devastating effects of this will undoubtedly stimulate (and have already begun to stimulate) a renewal of the kinds of mass protests that brought down bureaucratic tyranny. The destabilizing impact of such developments on the “new world order” may be matched by the impact they have on the consciousness of growing numbers of U.S. working people. Events in Eastern Europe and the USSR provide stirring models of people “taking democracy into their own hands,” so to speak, carrying out mass actions against parasitic elites in a manner that some working people in the U.S. may at some point feel inspired to emulate.

The Nature and Struggles of the U.S. Working Class

The composition of the U.S. working class is changing in important ways. During the 1970s, a total of 38 million industrial jobs were lost to runaway shops, plant shutdowns, and cutbacks—though the creation of new jobs meant that the net job loss was only a little more than a million. On the other hand, the newer jobs tend to involve lower-paying employment. It is important to note that in 1989 the number of blue-collar workers was higher than ever—31.8 million. But the blue-collar sector of the proletariat now represents 27.1 percent of the labor force; this is a decline

from 34.5 percent in 1950, and the rate of decline is increasing more rapidly than before. The white-collar sector represents just over 50 percent, about half of which suffers from very low incomes of clerical, sales, and service workers. In fact, about 85 percent of the new jobs created in the 1980s were concentrated in this low-wage white-collar sector. There has been a significant expansion, also, of temporary and part-time jobs, with even lower wages and no benefits. Almost 20 percent of U.S. employees have no health insurance, and 40 percent are not covered by any pension plan.

The general decline in working class living standards has had a profound impact on the consciousness of the class. Younger workers in particular face greater possibilities of unemployment, or at least greatly reduced opportunities than enjoyed by their parents and grandparents. Already, 22 percent of U.S. children live in poverty, and given today’s job market this is certain to increase, since about 40 percent of all 18-year-olds are entering the labor



market with only minimal skills.

The conservative Kevin Phillips writes of the Reagan and Bush years: “The high-paying jobs lost in [the Iron Range near] Hibbing or [the auto assembly-lines of] River Rouge had been more than just employment; they had been cultural and economic ladders to middle-class status for millions of families all across industrial America.” In the face of this development, he observes: “Caste and class restraints that had eased after World War II began to reemerge.”

White males serving as their family’s only breadwinner were, as a category, traditionally seen as a privileged layer of the working class, yet their median income fell by 22 percent between 1976 and 1984. It would be quite difficult, obviously, for a family to survive on such a reduced income. There is often a need in working class families wishing to avoid poverty to secure a second income. This is related to another development in this same period—the growing importance of the female sector of the working class, accounting today for about 45 percent of the labor force. In 1900 only 6 percent of married women worked for pay; by 1987, 56 percent of married women were wage or salary workers. According to a September 1991 *New York Times* report, there has also been a growth of child labor, much of it illegal.

At the same time, a majority of the working class is nonwhite in many parts of the country, as Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (many of them recent immigrants) become an increasing proportion of the workers in both industrial and nonindustrial enterprises. This sector of the working class remains the most oppressed of all. For example, almost one-third of all Blacks live in poverty (as opposed

to only 11 percent of whites). When the September *New York Times* report on U.S. labor says that increasing numbers “of full-time workers, notably single mothers, . . . earn so little that they qualify for food stamps” available for those living below the poverty line, it should be added that a majority of these are African American. There is also the fact that unemployment rates among Blacks are double those of whites.

The working class does not exclusively, or even primarily, express itself through the trade unions. Less than 15 percent of all workers are in unions, and less than 10 percent of private sector workers are organized. If we carefully examine the composition of some of the organizations associated with the so-called “social movements,” we find that a majority of members of the National Organization for Women, a majority of members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and a majority of those active in antiwar organizations, and so on, are also wage or salary employees or come from working class families. The often bureaucratized leaderships of the unions and of the social movement organizations rarely demonstrate a clear sense of working class consciousness—but elements of them, in order to keep pace with the moods and perspectives of their memberships, have recently shown some inclination to move in more militant and socially conscious (in some cases even class-conscious) directions than previously.

As has been the case from the beginning of our history, one can find within the U.S. working class a contradictory mix of reactionary and progressive elements. It is not difficult to find racism, superpatriotic chauvinism, sexist bigotry and homophobia, illusions about capitalism and about bourgeois politicians, and so on. Much of the working class is divided against itself, and sectors of it are susceptible — especially as the social contradictions intensify—to right-wing ideology. But now, more than has been the case for decades, there is potential for a massive leftward shift in the American working class. That is what is being focused on in this report.

Prospects for Independent Political Action

The weakened state of the U.S. trade union movement is reflected not only in the decline in membership but also in the fact that real wages declined by 8 percent during the decade of the 1980s, and in some cases by more than 20 percent. At the same time, there are important stirrings. The independent fight by Austin, Minnesota, packinghouse workers several years ago was one of the first vigorous fightbacks, although it was defeated. The militancy of the United Mine Workers of America in the Pittston strike of 1989 generated enthusiasm and a spirit of solidarity throughout the working class, and the resulting victory has strengthened class struggle currents in the labor movement over the past two years. Challenging the conventional wisdom that strikes are an outmoded tool, union members in a variety of local struggles are showing an inclination to use strikes, picket lines, and also civil disobedience against court injunctions in order to defend their rights.

In my own Pittsburgh area, for example, there have been two long and tough strikes this past summer—among the workers of the Giant-Eagle supermarket chain, and among the hospital workers in nearby Canonsburg, Pennsylvania—which successfully mobilized support from other unions as well as broad community support, compelling even some elected officials to take the side of the strikers. Both generated a militant spirit reminiscent of the 1930s; in Canonsburg there were mass confrontations and arrests. Both strikes were victorious. Neither is unique. Similar struggles are emerging in a number of local areas.

In the face of the obvious bankruptcy of the bureaucratic conservative “respectability” and class collaborationism of the AFL-CIO leadership, union members and even some union leaders are

turning to a more socially conscious and radical variant of trade unionism. In some unions dissident caucuses reflecting the new moods are making headway—for example, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, the New Directions Caucus in the United Auto Workers, dissident networks in the railworkers unions around the independent newspaper *Straight Track*, and other militant caucuses such as the one called “Hell on Wheels” among New York City transit union members, etc. Also significant is the positive response of many established unions to the project of Black Workers for Justice, a modest yet militant union organizing project with significant roots in parts of the largely nonunionized South.

There is growing union interest in international labor solidarity, although the positive examples are still extremely modest. The national leaders of some unions have cautiously challenged U.S. foreign policy, and the old CIA-labor ties, in Central America. Labor has assumed a progressive stance toward the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. And most recently, union members have taken action against the so-called “free trade agreement” being advanced by the capitalist governments of Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. These modest developments have significant implications: if working class internationalism in the U.S. expands from the fringes into the mainstream in the coming period, this could mean an independent foreign policy of the labor movement that could contribute to a growing trend of class independence.

The absence of a coherent and nationwide independent working class politics is today seen by growing sectors of the trade union movement as a serious deficiency. While the old-line bureaucrats and many of the social democratic “professionals” on union staffs remain committed to the Democratic Party, significant numbers are indicating support for the kinds of positions being articulated by a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, Tony Mazzocchi, who said: “The bosses have two parties. We want one.” Although Mazzocchi has been making such statements for years, he has recently initiated and urged union members to join the new group called Labor Party Advocates, asserting: “Hopefully, ultimately, we will have a labor party. When we have about 5,000 local union leaders signed up, we will call a convention [and] draw up the constitution of a party.” A number of opinion polls are indicating majority or near-majority support among union members in many areas for independent political action by labor. According to the September *New York Times* report cited earlier, “With their fortunes still in descent, unions for the first time are thrashing about for new ways to recapture their old influence, including turning against the Democrats. The United Mine Workers has started running their own members . . . against incumbent Democrats who vote against their agenda.”

There are other stirrings for independent political action as well. In the African American community there is a deepening resentment against the phoney reforms and empty promises of mainstream politicians and the outright racism pervading the larger white society. For many U.S. Blacks daily life involves poverty, joblessness, deteriorating community services, substandard housing, and the threat of violence—including from racist mobs and from the police. Keenly aware of the discrepancy between capitalist politicians’ rhetoric and some of the uglier realities of our society, a high percentage of Blacks have drawn quite radical political conclusions. This was reflected in the political campaigns of Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition which, despite the fatal contradiction of being bound up in the Democratic Party, created a pole of attraction which was far to the left of all other mainstream politicians of the two capitalist parties. Most recently, a former top strategist of the Rainbow Coalition, a radical intellectual named Ron Daniels, has broken with Jackson over the question of being tied to the Democratic Party. While suffering from some inconsistencies, the thrust of Daniels’s appeal is to lay the groundwork for an independent political party with a political

program slightly to the left of that advanced by the Rainbow Coalition.

The National Organization for Women has, over the recent period, helped to lead mass struggles against reactionary efforts to eliminate abortion rights. This organization also has solidarized with other struggles—including those of the labor movement and of the African American community—and it took a consistently antiwar stand before and during the Persian Gulf conflict. A majority of the NOW membership, and a central component of its leadership, have taken a position in favor of a new political party that would be based on a far-reaching political platform of social and economic reform. The organization has been holding hearings on this throughout the country, and has received positive testimony from a variety of speakers favoring a new party—including such people as Tony Mazzocchi and Ron Daniels.

Another important factor in U.S. politics today is a broad-based milieu of left-liberal and radical activists, many of them relatively young and a growing number of them part of a resurgent wave of politicizing students. This has constituted vital components of the Central America solidarity efforts, the mass movement against the Persian Gulf war, and the movement against U.S. support to apartheid.

Such activists have also been in the forefront of struggles to defend abortion rights, which is a central struggle in the United States at the present time. The federal government and Supreme Court's conservative majority have been eating away at the legal right of women to safe and affordable abortions, while right-wing fundamentalists have been mobilizing violent and so-called "non-violent" actions to close down women's clinics and counseling centers. Some of the most massive and militant demonstrations in recent years have been organized to counteract these attacks—and this promises to be a focal point for future mass actions.

Many from this layer of activists have also been active in antiracist campaigns, for example, around the case of vicious police brutality in Los Angeles, as well as against mob violence and killings in New York's Howard Beach and Bensonhurst. New York has also seen recent mass campus protests against cutbacks and tuition hikes, and there are signs of similar ferment on campuses elsewhere.

Some of these activists have been involved in strike support activities or, in the case of young workers, union organizing efforts and dissident union caucuses.

As this general analysis indicates, we believe that in the 1990s there is a real possibility for the creation of an independent working people's party, based on sections of the union movement, sections of the Black movement, sections of the women's movement, and attracting important layers of radical activists, college youth and politicized young workers. There are no guarantees that this will happen, but there are clear stirrings leading in this direction that we can see in the various movements and struggles.

In addition to this, there is a general proletarianization of the population, accompanied by radicalization, deepening working class consciousness, and political militancy. Regardless of precisely how the different "new party" developments unfold, there are opportunities for building socialist consciousness and a socialist movement of significant proportions over the coming decade. All three U.S. groups in which Fourth Internationalists are active have been able to recruit in this period—and a unified Fourth Internationalist group should be able to grow even more impressively in the coming period.

The most substantial alternatives to revolutionary Marxism on the U.S. left are Democratic Socialists of America and the Communist Party, USA.

The Communist Party has around 5,000 members, including some trade union cadres, Black and Hispanic activists, as well as women and youth. A shadow of its former self, it continues to have a significant impact in some labor circles and social struggles. Yet the organization is presently undergoing an agonizing crisis that may well lead to a split, given the world collapse of Stalinism; some seem intent on clinging to the last shreds of the old Stalinist tradition, but many of those who break from this may well drift into the left wing of the Social Democracy.

This is Democratic Socialists of America, affiliated with the Second International. It is extremely incohesive, and its membership of 5,000 or so consists largely of people who pay dues and attend one or two meetings and a couple of special events sponsored by the organization each year. It has some influence especially among leaders in the unions and social movements, and is very much integrated into the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, but so far has demonstrated an inability or lack of interest in building an activist organization that could act as a pole of attraction to radicalizing workers and youth.

It should be added that in and around both of these organizations there are thoughtful activists who could be attracted to a serious revolutionary Marxist alternative.

It is essential that a substantial revolutionary socialist organization be developed that is capable of participating sensitively, coherently, effectively in the various struggles of the unions and social movements. This involves bringing to these struggles and movements serious analytical and organizational skills, political energy, and a programmatic orientation that makes sense and is persuasively expressed. The involvement of such an organization in these struggles could contribute to their success and to the growing authority of the revolutionary socialist organization and its ideas. Whether it is able to help bring into being a mass labor party, it will have plenty to do in helping advance nonelectoral class struggle efforts, carry out general socialist education, and develop a body of Marxist analysis that can help move the popular struggles forward.

Such an organization does not exist in the United States. Its potential components exist but are scattered. To the extent that the U.S. forces of the Fourth International are able to overcome their own fragmentation and present a common revolutionary Marxist orientation, they will be an extremely compelling pole of attraction for serious-minded socialist activists. This could create a dynamic that would culminate in significant political breakthroughs as the capitalist crisis continues to deepen. □

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Changes Brewing in the Labor Movement

by Jerry Gordon

Jerry Gordon, international representative, United Food and Commercial Workers Union, gave this talk on a panel of labor activists at the July FIT educational conference in Pittsburgh.

The first thing I want to say is that the views that I'm about to express are my own, and I'm not speaking officially on behalf of my union.

Starting with the mid-70s through the '80s we have seen an avalanche of concessions, setbacks, and retreats for the labor movement resulting in its serious decline. No one is going to dispute that. But buoyed by certain organizing breakthroughs and by a number of contracts that were negotiated without concessions, and with the favorable outcomes of some strikes, there are expressions in some labor journals now to the effect that the corner has been turned, that the pendulum has swung back our way, and that the labor movement is reversing its decline and moving forward. It would be nice to be able to say definitively that the past period is over, and that we are on to the offensive, but I don't think it corresponds to the reality. While it is true that there are a number of favorable developments in the recent period, and I'm going to focus on those in my remarks, they are not of the magnitude, at least up to this point, to reverse the decline. All the factors which led the capitalist class to unleash its savage antilabor offensive are still operative, primarily the intensified competition and the stagnant industrial production. But, in addition, there has been and continues to be—more so now—a ready pool of “replacement workers” (to use the current euphemism) and, through computerized automation and high-tech, the means to more easily replace workers who strike.

So the bosses continue to try to bolster their profits by squeezing more and more out of workers, by driving down wages by speeding up work, and by cutting corners on health and safety. The deepening worldwide economic crisis only drives this whole process forward. If anybody has any doubt that this offensive is still on, take a look at the strike against Ravenswood Aluminum Company in West Virginia—I should say lockout, that's really what it was—of 1,700 workers. It's been on for 8½ months and the workers have been replaced. At least 1,100 scabs are in there

now. Keep in mind this is an attack on the powerful Steelworkers union. Or, in Saginaw, at a place called Graphite, for the first time we have a UAW strike, and the workforce has been totally replaced. The UAW has allowed this to happen. Or, a strike by our union at Montford Pork in St. Joseph, Missouri, the same pattern. The miners' strike in Colorado, again an attempt to bust the union. And, of course, the government is still in the strikebreaking business, as we saw in the railroad workers' strike. And there are many more examples that could be given.

Now, having said all this and placing what remains within that context, it is certainly true that there has been a change, a great stiffening of resistance by the working class in this country. Workers have been pressed to the wall; there is not much more to give. There is a growing spirit of fightback, graphically demonstrated by three strikes. What the coal bosses were able to do at A.T. Massey, they were unable to do at Pittston. What the airline bosses were able to do at Continental, they were unable to do at Eastern. What the newspaper bosses were able to do at the *Chicago Tribune*, they were unable to do at the *New York Daily News*. In each of these strike battles workers paid a price. The Eastern workers lost their jobs; so did many of the *New York Daily News* strikers. And if you look very carefully at the Pittston contract, you find there are significant weaknesses there. But the basic point is that in each of these cases the employers' attempt to bust the union and continue a nonunion operation failed. And this signals the upturn; it signals the much greater combativity of the working class in this country.

And these struggles are indicative of growing changes which could lead to a new period and to the rejuvenation of the labor movement and the working class struggle. I want to talk about five facets to this, which I think are particularly important today. First, changes in how strikes are being waged; second, the turn to the streets, the mass mobilization coming up August

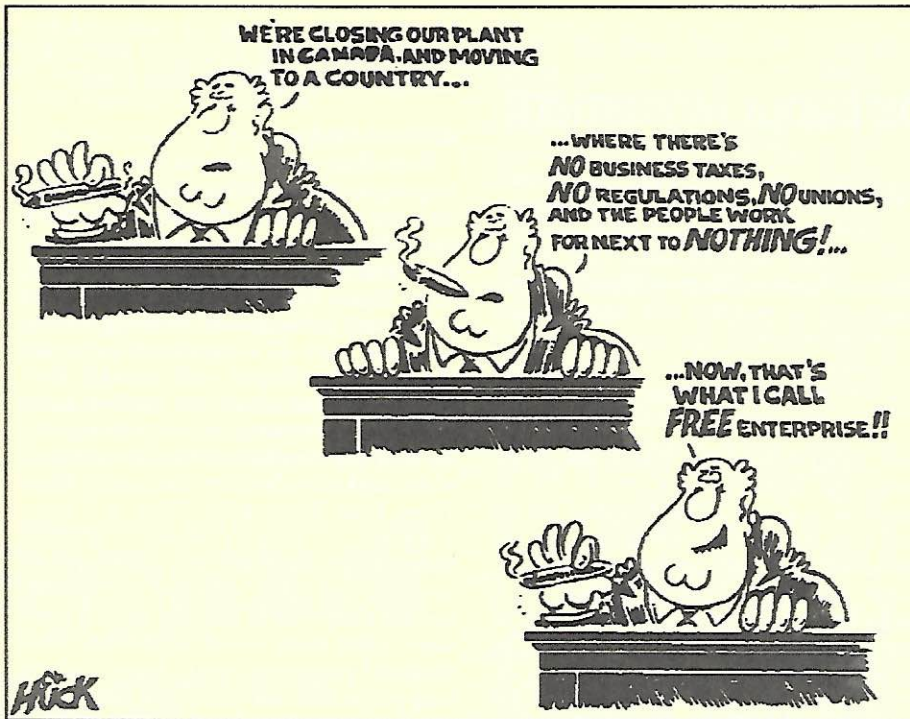
31; third, the growth of rank-and-file movements; fourth, organizing the South; and fifth, independent political action.

Militant Strikes

Now, first, on the way strikes are being waged: we saw at Pittston different tactics than we saw at A.T. Massey. You think about Pittston you think about workers with their camouflage outfits; you think about Camp Solidarity; you think about people out in the streets blocking traffic, and these were all a significant part. And the unprecedented solidarity that developed with it, thousands and thousands of workers from many unions pouring into the area. The single most significant aspect of that strike involved the takeover of Moss Three Coal Preparation Plant in Cargo, Virginia. Ninety-eight United Mineworkers members and one supporter occupied the plant, expelled the guards, and got away with it, because outside there were 5,000 trade union supporters. Five thousand people out there, that's a pretty long picket line, and you know the saying, “the longer the line, the shorter the strike.” And that action sent shock waves through the coal bosses. The workers there defied injunctions, and they broke laws, shades of the '30s.

Similarly at Sonia Fashions today in El Paso there's an ILGWU strike involving garment workers, which is in its third month. One hundred and twenty Hispanic women are holding firm after occupying the plant. And in Brampton, Ontario, the workers have occupied the Caterpillar plant. So we see these growing incidents of a more advanced form of waging a strike, occupying the plant, stopping production.

Another example of a change in how strikes are waged occurred right here in Pittsburgh with the Giant-Eagle strike. [See article in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, No. 88.] Giant-Eagle involved a strike of over 5,000 supermarket workers against a *Fortune* 500 company, and I can speak from firsthand experience, because I was involved in it. There was a dynamic there. The question was whether, since the company was determined to stretch the strike out, we would be able to win it. There's a rule of thumb in supermarket strikes that if they go beyond three weeks you're in deep trouble, and this one went six weeks. But we were successful in winning this strike, mainly because of the solidarity and community support activity which featured a coalition which was established in Pittsburgh that included every union in the area, that included community groups, social-minded organizations, radicals, in a united front. This coalition eventually included over 100 organizations, and you had trade union officials of very high rank sit-



ting there, and you had socialists and communists, and all kinds of other people. This, to my knowledge, is the first time that sections of the labor movement—certainly our union—has engaged in a coalition that was wide open, since unions are very careful who they coalesce with and what the circumstances are. But this one was wide open, and nobody ever raised any questions about it. And because it was so open, in addition to having the strength and power and resources of the organized labor movement, we were able to tap the talent and ideas and assistance of many other people, including, by the way, two members of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency who played a very important role: Claire Cohen, who helped organize pro-strike leaflet distributions and activities in the African American community, especially at a Malcolm X commemorative event attended by over 1,000 people; and Carol McAllister, who drew up a statement in support of the strike directed to women consumers, a statement our whole International union is now using. These were very important contributions to the strike effort. And others participated as well and helped, including Barney Oursler, of the Mon Valley Unemployment Committee, who gave indispensable aid in helping to put that coalition together and guide it. So it broadened and became very powerful, and we just busted that employer, so finally the company gave in even though 1,300 workers had gone back to work and there were more in the offing. The consumer support and labor solidarity which the coalition was able to generate proved to be just too much.

Now there's an 1199P strike going on in Canonsburg, Pa., at a hospital. The hospital moved to replace the workers, so the workers sat down, they reached out for labor and community support, they committed civil disobedience, and they raised hell. State leaders of the AFL-CIO showed up together with thousands of supporters. In one action there were enough people on the scene to overwhelm the cops. The cops tried to arrest the workers and put them in buses but somebody opened the back of the buses and everybody poured out. All of a sudden the bus tires were deflated, and finally the cops just gave up. They said, "Look, if you'll just go back we'll cancel the arrests." And that's what happened.

Now there are many more examples that could be given, I'm sure, if we had people here from all over the country. But one thing is clear. While it is true that many strikes are going to be waged on a business-as-usual basis, employers can no longer count on this. Workers and unions are open to innovations, to creative means, to mass action, to civil disobedience, to defying injunctions, to breaking the law, to doing what has to be done, with examples of success, some of which I have cited. More and more you hear the term, we've got to get back to the '30s. And all this is helping to break up these class-collaboration policies of much of the labor leadership, which by the way is not responded to in kind by the employers. All they want to do is break the unions.

So, we have a whole new dimension to the way struggles are being waged in this country today. What's needed is for this to

spread and become generalized. Much of what's happening is new, providing openings that didn't exist before.

Solidarity Day Demands

Secondly, on mass mobilizations: talking now specifically of Solidarity Day 1991, which the AFL-CIO has called in support of three demands—antiscab legislation, health care legislation, and the right of association. I want to talk briefly about these three demands. This antiscab legislation says that an employer cannot permanently replace workers. He can temporarily replace them; you can go out on strike and the workplace can be full, and the plant can continue to operate just as it did when you were in there. It doesn't prevent that at all. What it does do is in case you surrender, give up the strike and go back in, you're assured of getting your job back. Of course, if you win the strike, you don't need this legislation because you negotiate your way back in. But, of course, if workers know that they cannot be permanently replaced, they are more likely to hold out longer. That's one aspect of it. However the proposed legislation is really quite mild. It's certainly no panacea. And even if it were enacted, it would not basically alter the relationship of forces in this country. The way to win strikes is through mass picket lines, through stopping production, through unifying the labor movement, through solidarity, through reaching out to labor's allies, through militant mass demonstrations, through electing trade unionists to legislative bodies, and so on. And this kind of legislation is far down on the list. However, there's nothing wrong with it. It would be helpful, so it's something we can certainly support.

Now on health care there are 14 proposals that have been introduced in Congress. Not a single one of them calls for comprehensive, universal, free, quality health care, accessible and available to all. There is going to be some kind of health care passed sometime in the not too far away future probably, because a section of the capitalist class has decided that this is feasible and necessary. But it will probably end up being a bonanza for the insurance companies, instead of knocking them out altogether and having a health care system that is paid for by the rich and that is available to everyone. But this is a big issue. Seventy-eight percent of all striking workers were walking the picket lines in 1989 because of their bosses' efforts to cut their health benefits, and the Harris poll shows that 89 percent of the American people think that there has to be some fundamental change. So, although it's not spelled out what this demand will entail, we are all for health care and that is some-

thing we can support just as we can support the third demand, freedom of association, which is the right to organize unions.

So, it's important to support this, because there's agreement with the demands, because this is a big mass mobilization out in the streets, and it is going to be big. Everything indicates that it will be hundreds of thousands. I know in Cleveland alone 91 buses have been chartered. It is an important development to have masses of workers taking to the streets. It gives them a sense of power, confidence, and strength, coming as they will from many areas of the country and united around a series of demands. By forcing these demands for even modest legislative relief on the two parties of the corporations, it helps to expose them when they fail to respond—either doing nothing or by adopting mild reforms. We're not going to get antiscab legislation adopted into law, certainly not with the present relationship of forces. Even if it went through Congress Bush would veto it, and the veto would be upheld. But the process, the power, the fight, it's important that it be waged, and it presents us with an opportunity to be with workers, to educate, to agitate, to talk about Labor Party Advocates and other social issues of concern to us.

Rank-and-File Movements

Now, third, is the continued growth of rank-and-file movements. Of course, the Teamster development is by far the most important. We have the elections coming up in December, and unquestionably if Ron Carey wins it will provide some openings. The impact on the Teamsters themselves will be great, but it goes far beyond that. It will encourage other movements within other unions, encourage the rank and file to organize. The program that Carey is running on is for democracy, for involvement of the membership, greater militancy in dealing with employers, for organizing the unorganized, for a curb on high salaries of union officials. There is a fundamental weakness to the Carey candidacy. He's still wedded to the two-party system. He invokes the long-dated bromide of "reward your friends and punish your enemies." He substitutes support for the Democrats for the Teamsters' current support to the Republicans, instead of shelving both and calling for an independent labor party. This in itself is significant but does not negate the need to be part of the movement to support Carey, in my opinion, as important as this difference is. It is an issue that will have to be fought out within the Teamsters union, as it will be fought out in other unions.

But together with this highly positive development within the Teamsters, there is

at the same time the extremely negative factor of the government's intervention. I think here the left and the radical movement has failed to sufficiently warn about the dire potential consequences of what happens when the government gets involved and starts running unions. The fact is that the government's involvement with the Teamsters represents the most blatant seizure of a labor union ever. At their convention just held in Orlando, there were 65 federal agents on the scene, running everything, while judges were behind the scenes pulling the strings. All of this was the result of a consent decree to settle the RICO anti-racketeering lawsuit. The union leadership, in order to hold on to their positions, agreed to turn the union over to the government, just to save their own skins. The Teamsters' treasury is being raided; it's costing millions of dollars for the government to come and administer this, and all this is being paid for by the workers' dues.

Now, unfortunately, the condemnation of this is coming mainly from union leaders, and we are not doing what we should be doing. The latest *AFL-CIO News* quotes Lane Kirkland as saying about the RICO lawsuit: "It's the kind of legislation that the Gestapo or security services of any totalitarian country would regard as a perfect sort of mask or cover for anything they wanted to do." And he is right. Many of our accounts in our publications just talk about the Carey candidacy and don't even mention this. And some people are saying that the right to vote and some of the other reforms in the Teamsters are all a hand-me-down from the government, but that's an oversimplification, because this comes after many years of earned and persistent and tenacious and courageous activity by rank-and-file movements within the Teamsters, Teamsters for a Democratic Union. They helped to lay the foundation for this. The government was under some pressure to do something. To show you the extent of what the TDU had accomplished, let me read you a paragraph from this book, *Rank-and-File Rebellion* by Dan La Botz—and Dan is here today, I want to plug his book, and I'll get my share of the royalties later on. Let me just read you a paragraph. It says: "TDU's members are activists, and its committees of freight workers, car haulers, UPS workers, Kroger's and Roadway employees, and its local chapters are dynamic groups of volunteer organizers. The TDU newspaper *Convoy-Dispatch* reaches somewhere between 50,000 and 75,000 rank-and-file Teamsters each month, and local TDU chapters produce another 25 local newsletters—some simply mimeographed sheets, others tabloid newspapers that reach thousands more. The TDU officers in a

score of unions across the country are not merely functionaries; they are opinion-makers and shapers of local union policy. For all these reasons TDU has the capacity to grow rapidly and become the decisive factor in determining the future of the union." So the background was laid. And I think the position to be taken in this situation is clear. If the government intervenes, we oppose it. But if the intervention provides openings to reform the union, they should be taken advantage of and used. But at the same time we make clear from the get-go that we are not in favor of the government's involvement. We don't want to instill any illusions that that is the way to correct problems. The way to clean up the Teamsters union is within the Teamsters union, by the membership, and without recourse to the government. That's true of every other union.

Now, just briefly on some other developments: I had the opportunity to talk with the national co-chair of New Directions [opposition movement in the UAW] just a week or so ago, and I asked him how things are going. And he said they're going pretty well. He said it's slow, it's going to take time; but he told me how they had run somebody in a plant where they had had nobody before. Although this guy didn't win he got a respectable vote. They're probing, and they're finding a lot of areas of discontent by the membership, and they're contacting and moving out just like TDU did, and it's going to be a process just like TDU's. We shouldn't think that these rank-and-file movements are confined to these two unions or a couple of others, because they are all over the place now. There are rank-and-file movements in the unions from coast to coast, and this kind of activity is growing all the time.

Organizing the South

Now the fourth important, more recent, development has to do with organizing the South. There will be no major advance for the labor movement on a national level in this country unless and until this open shop citadel of the South is breached. The labor leadership does not really understand this, but episodically they make some moves to try to do some organizing in the South, and one such move came several years ago with the Houston Project. The idea behind that was, we're going to concentrate on one city. We'll assign a number of crack organizers, we'll give it resources, including computers; and they put at the head of it a guy I know, he's quite talented, been successful, and there he went. But the project didn't go. It sputtered, and it finally collapsed. And there was a lesson: you do not implant unions in the South by bringing in people from the outside, primarily white people, people who don't know the area.

What you have to do is work with the indigenous forces there and give them support; in the course of it recognize that to organize the South, Black workers are going to be in the lead. Black workers work in the South in large numbers; they are the most oppressed; they are clearer on what has to be done, more organized, more militant, and more able to lead the entire labor movement. That's why the forming of Black Workers for Justice has been such an important development, and why the men and women who have been involved have demonstrated such courage, placing their physical and economic fates on the line and paying a price. That's why this is a movement that we have to encourage and give every kind of physical and material support to that we can, and the most important support we can give is to get our unions involved in supporting their efforts. Saladin [Muhammed] [another panelist] will speak on this, so there's no need for me to belabor it. I just want to make one more observation about organizing in the South and nationally which has to do with what Carol McAllister said yesterday: the changing nature of the workforce, the fact that the majority of the workforce is now women and oppressed minorities. This can dramatically affect the course and direction of the labor movement.

Independent Political Action

The last item I want to talk about is independent political action. All roads to progress for the labor movement lead in this direction. Historically, when the labor movement has been in retreat on the economic front, when it suffered losses, has been deprived of its rights, like the railroad workers, has seen other avenues of relief closed off, it's turned to political action, and this is more necessary than ever today. Today we have a development of something concrete, something we can get our hands on, and that's Labor Party Advocates. It's a significant step. For the first time in many years we have a specific initiative going beyond the left. It's been made possible by the changing consciousness of workers, by their growing disenchantment, by the fact that polls show that 50-60 percent of workers in one union after another are open to the idea of a labor party. As a result, the main advocate of a labor party, Tony Mazzocchi, secretary-treasurer of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union, who has propagandized for a labor party within the labor movement for the past ten years, felt that the time had come to translate advocacy into some kind of organizational action.

None of the major problems that workers face today are being dealt with by the two parties, so there's this growing disenchantment. I've been talking labor party in my union and in other unions for many years, and my personal experience has been, you talk to workers, they listen and sort of look at you funny, and then they go on to the next thing. And then they will tell you when you get friendly with them, well, I didn't say much because I really think it's kind of a communist thing. That's been the experience over the years. This has just totally changed. You can get up now at any kind of meeting and talk labor party, and not only will you get a hearing but you will likely be applauded.

Now, you can, if you want to, pick Labor Party Advocates apart, just like you can pick apart some of the independent political initiatives in the Black community around Ron Daniels and the development around NOW. They don't represent yet a definitive break with the Democratic Party; there are certain reformist formulations, there's the "inside-outside" strategy, and so on. Mazzocchi expresses illusions in the Democrats and Roosevelt. But to join Labor Party Advocates you don't have to buy into any of that. All you're buying into, all you're agreeing to, is that you want a labor party, you believe in advocating a labor party. That's all that membership entails. The whole challenge is to get on the inside and help to shape this important development, and to do so with a certain projection in mind: that this disillusion with the Democrats is going to grow in the period ahead. The Democrats are not perceived the way they used to be.

So what needs to be done at this stage in regard to Labor Party Advocates? Well, there's several things, in my opinion. One is to join; a second is to get others to join; a third is to help establish local chapters, and when you do that you don't need to start with people who are necessarily committed. You might find people who are interested in having Mazzocchi come and speak, who are open, so you can have a free-wheeling discussion. So we need to be very flexible. And fourth, we need a structure nationally. We can't have a development of this importance and this magnitude just revolving around a single individual. And so, even though Tony foresees some kind of structure down the line, there ought to be some kind of preliminary structure, some kind of collective, that will involve representatives of the workforce, women, Blacks, minorities, young workers, from the beginning. And eventually we'll have to begin to talk about a program going

beyond the advocacy of a labor party. That's essential in order to give this thing flesh and bones, so it's not an abstraction to workers. You know, labor party, what is it? And to advance demands that are in conflict with what the Democrats and Republicans are doing or not doing. We're not going to have a full-blown program at this early stage. But we are forming Labor Party Advocates chapters. Right now the priority is to *educate*, to discuss, to provide workers with a picture of what a labor party would look like, what its program would be, and so on. And fifth, I think we have to begin the possibility of running candidates. Now it's true that under the Mazzocchi plan you don't run candidates until much later, but this thing is acquiring a momentum of its own, which even Labor Party Advocates at its present stage cannot ignore. They have in their last mailing, sent out by Labor Party Advocates, "Labor Mulls Its Own Political Party," and it says that while most of the political frustration among workers is still at a talking stage, things are starting to happen. We saw that in Virginia with Jackie Stump, who ran a write-in campaign and beat the incumbent Democrat. So, this is not pie in the sky. This can all happen very fast. After the First World War in 1919 under the leadership of John Fitzpatrick they formed a labor party in Chicago, and he ran for mayor. And then they formed it for the state of Illinois, and the next year in 1920 they were already running for president. So once it really breaks loose it can happen fast.

Now, to conclude: there's a lot happening. With all the unevenness you can point to, the inconsistencies and the contradictions, these are exciting times for the labor movement. The sleeping giant of labor is beginning to stir. New and more militant ways of conducting strikes, a new grassroots formation to organize the South, movements developing within unions to change them into fighting instruments of the workers, mass actions in the streets, with a march on Washington in front of us, and concrete steps in the direction of a labor party. It's embryonic, it's just getting started in this period, but it provides some hope and promise for the future. What is needed to push all of these developments forward is a growing core of conscious and knowledgeable trade unionists who know something about labor's history and who have a vision about what its future must be. Our job is to help assemble this core and to help arm it with a program that will not only transform the labor movement but will transform all of society. □

APPEAL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA

Given the new dangers for the Cuban people in the face of an emboldened U.S. imperialism, an international campaign has been initiated to end the U.S. economic blockade and any possibility of military aggression against Cuba. We are hoping to help gain as many signatures as possible for the statement below, which is a slightly modified version of an appeal being circulated in Europe, and signed so far by Etienne Balibar, Costa-Gavras, Janette Habel, Alain Krivine, Alain Lipietz, Michael Lowy, Francois Maspero, Michele Ray, Daniel Singer, Ahmed Ben Bella, and others. The appeal and signatures will be published in Europe and North America.

The statement which is being circulated in the United States reads as follows:

In Cuba today, the combination of the U.S. embargo—which has continued for thirty years—and the drastic reduction in trade with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has created a dramatic situation. There are growing shortages. The undoubted gains in matters of health and education are likely to come under threat. Criticisms are made of Cuba's shortcomings in terms of democracy, in the name of human rights. But this criticism does not give the right—in the name of human rights—to economically suffocate a country. We have different positions on the Cuban regime. We join together to denounce a situation which aims to bring down a regime by starving a people. This one-sided aggression from the world superpower can in no way be justified. The Cuban people themselves must determine the future of their country. We thus demand an end to the blockade which is an attack on the lives and dignity of the Cuban people.

Our hope is to have a broad, unified campaign in support of this statement, in terms of signatories and circulation. We are open to ideas on how to accomplish this most effectively. Any help that you can give in this effort will obviously be extremely important at this grave moment. The initial U.S. signatories should be obtained as soon as possible. Please, let us know what you think and what you can do. An advertisement for this appeal will have appeared in the November 27 issue of the *Guardian* newspaper. Contributions to help finance this and other advertisements are needed and greatly appreciated.

Signatures, monetary and other contributions can be mailed to: John Daniel, c/o Progressive Action Center, 1443 Gorsuch Ave. Baltimore, MD 21218.

(Initial list of names gathered in the U.S., organizations for purposes of identification only)

Bo Adan
Concerned Faculty for Peace and Justice
University of Oregon

Muhammad Ahmed
Institute of African American Studies

Stanley Aronowitz
Professor of Sociology
City University of New York Graduate Center

Medea Benjamin
Executive Director, Global Exchange

John Beverley
Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Blase Bonpane
Director, Office of the Americas

Elombe Brath
Chairman, Patrice Lumumba Coalition, Harlem

Lenni Brenner
Author

Robert Brenner
Professor of History
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Howard Brick
Professor of History
University of Oregon

Dennis Brutus
Professor of African Literature
Department of Black Studies
University of Pittsburgh (and South African exile)

Mari Jo Buhle
Professor of History
Brown University

Paul Buhle
Lecturer
Rhode Island School of Design

Val Burris
Professor of Sociology
University of Oregon

Noam Chomsky
Institute Professor
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dan Cohen
Cultural Editor, *Guardian*

David Cohen
Council Member
Philadelphia City Council

Thomas Palne Cronin
President, District Council #47,
Philadelphia
American Federation of State, County,
and Municipal Employees

Lloyd D'Aguliar
WBAI-FM journalist,
Caribbean activist

Alan Dale
Co-Founder, Persian Gulf Crisis
Coalition, Minneapolis-St. Paul

Ron Daniels
African-American activist

Carl Davidson
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Michael Dawson
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Matthew Dennis
Professor of History
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Cliff DuRand
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Morgan State University

Waverly Easley
Chairman of the Board
Martin Luther King Association

Samuel Farber
Editorial Board
Against the Current

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The Open University (London)

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Thomas Merton Center

Mark Hoyt
Guardian staff

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Linda Kintz
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Attorney at Law

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Harry Magdoff
Editor, *Monthly Review*

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University of Oregon

Eli Messenger
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New York Medical College

Joe Miller
Philadelphia SANE-Freeze

Sidney Mintz
Professor of Anthropology
Johns Hopkins University

David Montgomery
Professor of History
Yale University; NWU-UAW

Geraldine Nichols
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Council

Howard L. Parsons
Professor Emeritus
University of Bridgeport

Gary Prevost
Professor of Government
St. John's University

Franklin Rosemont
Poet

Penelope Rosemont
Secretary-Treasurer
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Editorial staff, *Monthly Review*

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Michael Tanzer
Author and Economist

Frank Thompson
Professor of Economics
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Jean Tussey
Vice President
Greater Cleveland Labor History Society

Alan Wald
Professor of Literature
University of Michigan

This is part of an international campaign, whose initial signatories include: Neville Alexander, Tariq Ali, Etienne Balibar, Ahmed Ben Bella, Tony Benn, Tomás Borge, Omar Cabezas, Costa-Gavras, Regis Debray, Ana Guadalupe Martinez, Janette Habel, Michelle Lee, Ken Livingston, Michael Löwy, Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva, Ernest Mandel, François Maspero, Daniel Singer, Jeanne Singer, Joaquin Villalobos, and many others.

Imperialist Barbarism and Popular Response in the Northern Frontier—Part 2

by Manuel Aguilar Mora

Frontier of Contradictions

The “binational territorial integration” is a fact that has historical antecedents, cultural foundations, and evident social causes. By definition, a comprehensive evaluation should take all these aspects into consideration. Historically, the region was the source of a “frontier way of life.” Until the end of the last century this was epitomized by the cowboys of both sides of the border. For all practical purposes this border was a bureaucratic fiction coordinated in distant Washington and Mexico City. From a social viewpoint, agriculture, livestock raising, and mining were not much different on either side of the line until the turn of the century. Culturally there developed a generally bilingual population, with the powerful influence of English extending to the south, and Spanish penetrating deep into the north.

But historical and anthropological analyses can never serve as a substitute for a well-rounded and integrated understanding, only an enrichment of it. Today, such an understanding tells us that the most decisive impetus for change is found in the development of world capitalism, which is being powerfully concentrated and expressed in a region that has become a vast campsite for a population in transit to the U.S.—as a vital part of its reserve army of labor—as well as the seat of a newly accelerated process of internal proletarianization.

How does one fully comprehend this extremely peculiar and contradictory reality—expressing as it does at one and the same time contradictory forms and a richness of reality that defies any simple explanation. The northern frontier divides and separates, but at the same time it unifies distant neighbors in spite of themselves. It is a factor of integration and dislocation. It completely polarizes racists and chauvinists, while forging an internationalist working class solidarity. It separates two nations—one an oppressor, the other oppressed—and unites two peoples (or several?) equally subjugated to the might of the transnational monopolies. It increases the misery and degradation of those condemned to live along the border—including on the North American side, starting with the residents of El Paso, Texas, who are among the poorest in the U.S.—while concentrating the most technologically advanced means of production in ultramodern factories. It exacerbates the socioeconomic differences between each nation, each day creating a wider gulf between them, while at the same time preparing, for the first time in the history of both nations, a real process of integration at all levels. We must have a dialectical vision, an internationalist vision, a vision with a perspective on the 21st century, a vision in which one sees the gestation of another, possibly better world, a vision of unique and particularly pregnant revolutionary possibilities that will transform the history

of both peoples—whom this line, this river, unifies and divides, separates and unites.

Comprehending this irreducible complexity it is possible to conceive of the next step, to forge a strategy for the revolutionary struggle.

Imperialism and National Struggle

The binational, or rather, internationalist focus is key to successfully resolving the problem of a revolutionary strategy. For this objective the apologetic slant taken by the great majority of those who analyze the processes of the northern frontier—who work in the universities or institutes of higher education—help us very little. Without pointing out specific cases of objective analysis, the majority of frontier specialists are “organic intellectuals” who support and justify the government’s proimperialist and antinational policy toward the U.S.

The policy of Salinas de Gortari [Mexican president since 1988], with its goal of the complete economic integration of the Mexican and U.S. economies, establishes other points of reference. The Salinist “cosmopolitanism” will surely translate into new analyses of the economic integration promoted and deepened by a “free trade agreement.” But as we have seen throughout this essay, this “cosmopolitanism” will take place completely under the direction of transnational capital, to the detriment of the national interest of the Mexican people.

In the face of the social and political richness that exists in the region, the Marxist approach cannot, precisely because of this complexity, be limited to only one or several dimensions. The challenge consists of globally understanding a revolutionary struggle with varied and deep effects and with historical dimensions.

One question clearly arises. Being a region forged principally by the dynamic of international capital, which is of course imperialist, the struggle of the oppressed and exploited against that capital will logically be expressed as a struggle *against imperialist capital, that is, as an anti-imperialist struggle*. The contradiction between capital and labor, the source of all the other contradictions resulting from the fundamental imperialist character of capital in the northern frontier, necessarily requires an anti-imperialist aspect to the revolutionary struggle.

It can be immediately understood from this that a true anti-imperialist struggle cannot be conducted in alliance with one of the most proimperialist forces in Mexico—the large bourgeoisie and the most influential sectors of the national bourgeoisie. Equally, a real anti-imperialist policy would immediately reject the PRI-ist regime, loyal to and therefore a

necessary ally of imperialism, a regime that is repaid by the imperialists with vital support.

Thus the Mexican anti-imperialist struggle, whose front line is to be found along the border, takes on an internationalist character from the outset—because the basic allies needed for success are *on the other side of the border*. They are the North American workers, white workers as well as those of various minorities: Blacks, Asians, Chicanos of Mexican origin, immigrant Mexicans, Latin Americans, etc. U.S. workers likewise confront, in Washington, the representatives of their class enemies. The people of the U.S. should also actively struggle against imperialism, for example, against wars that the White House undertakes all over the world now that it has assumed the role of world policeman.

But the solidarity of two working classes across a border that separates them does not eliminate that border nor make it disappear. Internationalist proletarian solidarity does not contradict the national struggle (including a nationalist struggle, as the old Engels recalled). And in Mexico the internationalist proletariat must take this “national struggle” seriously into account if it aspires to capture leadership of it from the bourgeoisie and win class hegemony on a national level. Revolutionary struggle takes place in a concrete country. Mexico is the territory of an oppressed nation. It is something real when we speak about five centuries of colonialism and dependency—under different forms—imposed by those who have intervened in the affairs of the Mexican people. In order for the peoples of the U.S. and Mexico, as a consequence of their internationalist struggle, to really unite democratically in a federation of nations, they must first begin by being equals—sovereign and independent republics—something which has never been the case. The fight for *authentic national sovereignty and independence* arises as the most important expression in our country of the fundamental contradiction in the epoch of imperialism: the oppression and exploitation of the majority of nations and humanity by a small group of countries, the imperialist powers which dominate the world economically and politically.

The Challenge to the Left

In the vast northern region, in particular in the frontier region, the impact of the left, especially the socialist left, has been modest and highly restricted. Nevertheless, there are historic native revolutionary traditions, as was well demonstrated in the period of 1910-19.

With the coming to power and consolidation of the Mexican Bonapartist regime, its control of the north of Mexico expanded. This interventionist influence, together with the powerful, almost direct presence of imperialism and its unconditional ally, the northern bourgeoisie, produced one of the most stable forms of domination in the form of dictatorship by the so-called revolutionary governments. After the 1940s with the flood of immigrants coming from the south, the region experienced a turbulent demographic growth. The ideological motivation of a revolutionary tradition was diluted in favor of pragmatism, more easily integrated into the frenetic race for the dollar.

Here and there however, there were outbreaks which showed that the people had not given up everything. This was manifest

in numerous important peasant struggles that took place from Sonora—especially in 1976—to Tamaulipas, in the Popular Assembly of Chihuahua at the start of the 1970s, in innumerable university struggles from Baja California to Tamaulipas, etc. But it is since the appearance of the new proletariat of the maquiladoras in the 1970s (and above all in the 1980s) that an opportunity for a radicalization with socialist, anticapitalist, and anti-imperialist potential has opened up. The challenge is formidable, but the possibilities make it fully worthwhile.

In this area, competition with nationalist currents will be an important aspect of the debate in democratic and revolutionary ranks. A unified fight against imperialism of all national forces, including nationalists of the type represented in the Partido de la Revolución Democrática [PRD or Party of the Democratic Revolution] will be one guarantee of forging an effective obstacle to imperialist penetration.

But in this united front the ideological and political polemic will also be vital, since the Marxist, socialist, class, or internationalist positions will promote a strategy of a *united front across the border*, with workers of the United States, in order to undertake a *more effective fight* against imperialism. In this political debate, for example, the opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on the part of the two currents which are fighting against imperialism will be based on different logic and different objectives. The nationalist currents will retreat to bourgeois protectionist positions in defense of an outdated capitalist system that corresponds to the past, to the years of the “Mexican Miracle” and “stabilized development.” Socialist forces will seek to put into practice a revolutionary strategy that converges with the popular struggles in the U.S., in a joint effort to seek the broadest united front to defeat imperialism in *both countries*. Obviously a higher level of combativity of the struggle in Mexico should not be subordinated to the slower rhythm of anti-imperialist opposition in the United States. Starting today the Mexican people should combat imperialism, without waiting until the fight against capitalism becomes a massive reality in the United States. But to begin the fight first does not mean to fight in isolation or only with your own forces. In order to assure the revolutionary triumph it is vital to have militant, effective solidarity from the natural, strategic allies of the Mexican people—the workers of the United States.

The contradiction of the left bourgeois opposition, in particular the PRD, is complemented by its incapacity. Apart from general declarations, the PRD has not distinguished itself through its analysis of the issues. As generally happens in this party, it was left to its principal leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, to develop the fundamental line. Deeply involved in electioneering, immersed in the struggle between political candidates, and working in the background to secure the best possible deal with those in power, the PRD has not been able to delineate any alternative to the NAFTA—other than putting itself in power.

But Cárdenas has tried to counterpose a Latin American union to the NAFTA, which is of course not a bad thing, but it does not address the real problem. With regard to the U.S., the strategy of Cárdenas is to seek an alliance with liberal sectors of the Democratic Party, including the bureaucracy of the AFL-CIO, to resurrect a kind of *New Deal* at the end of the

century. Of course the liberals with whom Cárdenas hopes to unite are becoming fewer and fewer each day, dedicated as they are to an imperialist policy that has nothing of a reform nature left, but is very bellicose. Consequently, there is no future for Roosevelt-style liberals in the U.S. Cárdenas is destined to seek negotiations directly with the White House, which may be Republican at least until 1996.

Revolution Without Frontiers

History has much to say to the children of the present. Our predecessors already had responded to the needs of international unity that capitalism itself created and continues to create in the region. The Mexican revolution cannot be understood without this internationalist dimension—not surprisingly one that the dominant ideology, with so much mystification from the Thermidorian and Bonapartist governments of Carranza, Obregón, and their successors, has tried to erase from the consciousness of the Mexican working class.

The crisis of PRI-ist ideology, which deepened after 1968 and was shown to be on the defensive in 1988, is breaking through the monopoly on historical interpretation previously enjoyed by that dominant ideology. New and rigorous studies have recovered for a revolutionary consciousness our own internationalist heritage of the battles of the Mexican proletariat. The book by Jorge Aguilar Mora, *Una muerte sencilla, justa, eterna: Cultura y guerra en la revolución mexicana* [A simple, just, eternal death: Culture and war in the Mexican revolution], contains several contributions that confirm the international dimension of the Mexican revolutionary struggle along the frontier. His innovative analysis of a forgotten movement, the so-called Plan de San Diego, especially stands out. This plan was forged in the heat of the revolutionary impetus created by the battles led by Lucio Blanco in Tamaulipas, in the communities of Mexican origin in the south of Texas.

On the other hand, Javier Torres Pars has given us another fundamental book.¹ In it he tracks, analyzes, and documents in considerable detail the rise of the revolutionary workers' movement of the north of Mexico, how its development immediately took on an internationalist dimension through the solidarity of miners and workers from the southeast part of the United States. He shows how the Partido Liberal Mexicano (PLM) (of which the only thing left that was "liberal" was the name) evolved under the Magonist leadership into a revolutionary workers' party. This evolution resulted directly from the influence of two factors: first the Magonism of the south, and second the influence from the U.S.—of the Socialist Party and, among others, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The radical evolution of the PLM towards anarcho-sindicalism—which explains as much about its place on the far left of the Mexican revolutionary movements as about its struggle against imperialist war in the U.S.—made this party representative of the international workers' movement, on both sides of the frontier.

History points to the revolutionary sources and internationalist forces in the binational region at the beginning of the century. Now at the end of the century, after 70 years of suffocation under the ideology of the nationalist bourgeoisie, these forces are resurfacing due principally to the rapid inter-

nationalization of capital during this phase of imperialist decline. In the 1990s the conditions in which the new generations of proletarians will play the leading, internationalist role are at the same time more mature and less favorable. They are more mature because world capitalism has arrived at a level of internationalization that over a century ago only the most lucid Marxists could conceive of. Less favorable because the shipwreck of nationalism, reformism, and Stalinism in the popular consciousness is a difficult obstacle to overcome in the confusion and disorientation now prevalent.

But the fascinating, though likewise terrible, historical moment that the northern frontier now finds itself in prevents us from ending these lines under the sign of intellectual pessimism, even less a pessimism of will. This Gramscian watchword, dear as it is to us, cannot be transported from the almost enclosed Italian spaces to the deserts and infinite mountains of the continent where our two countries meet. Certainly there is no room for banal optimism, which, at the end of the 20th century, would be like the senselessness of a sleepwalker strolling unruffled through the terrible decades of this century. Without a facile optimism nor a sterile pessimism, the situation in the northern frontier creates potential opportunities for socialist revolutionaries, and for the Mexican workers and popular movements. We can take advantage of these opportunities if we have a firm will to win and if we deploy the greatest intelligence possible in the face of a powerful enemy who nevertheless, in each moment and everywhere, shows its inhumanity, its talent for destruction, and its absolute incapacity to satisfy the unfulfilled yearnings of the frontier masses for a better life for themselves and their descendants.

Although still confined to one sector, the course of the fight is being conducted today by workers in the vanguard of their class. These workers are the unionists who are forging, in the three countries of North America, a "network against the NAFTA." In the factories of the Ford Motor Company in Hermosillo, Chihuahua, and Cuautitlán they are already forging an international union with their brothers and sisters in Detroit, Minnesota, and Toronto. A process of international organization that will soon be front-page news has already begun.

The steady and patient popular organizing will continue. History has not paused and we should not speak of the end of history. In reality it has some notable surprises in store for us. These surprises lurk in the fissures of a tangled labyrinth like one carved by the tireless labor of worker ants.

Precisely on the border between the United States and Mexico the innumerable worker ants are now carving galleries where a change of world-historical significance will develop. Isn't it comforting to think that we will be able to see and, even more, to be privileged protagonists in these events. One of the best ways to prepare ourselves for them is to understand the peculiarities of the region. This is a collective labor for all those interested in social change. These lines are my contribution to this task.

June 1, 1991

Note

1. Javier Torres Pars, *La revolución sin frontera: El Partido Liberal Mexicano y las relaciones entre el movimiento obrero de México y el de Estados Unidos, 1900-1923*. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, UNAM/Ediciones Hispanic.

I appreciated your contribution, "On Socialist Regroupment: Solidarity's Perspective," in the November issue of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*. We in the Fourth Internationalist Tendency think it's important for our two organizations to have a frank exchange of views on this subject. I also found the recent visit I made, along with Paul Le Blanc, to Detroit for formal discussions with your National Committee and Fourth International Caucus leadership to have been extremely valuable. It helped me better understand some of the points you address in your article.

There are, of course, many things we still need to talk about. But I want to focus here on a single problem. It is one that, I'm sure you will agree, has been the biggest stumbling block in the path of improved relations between Solidarity and FIT: our fundamentally different approaches toward building a revolutionary organization in the U.S. today. We have, of course, long known that this divides us. But only recently have I become aware that we have been working with two completely different, and *previously unstated*, assumptions about how this difference ought to be resolved.

Those of us in the FIT who have urged a real effort to explore possible fusion with Solidarity felt that our present commitment, which as you know is to build a cohesive organization based on certain specific programmatic perspectives, was not by itself *in conflict* with any of Solidarity's *stated* points of unity—although it was clearly *different* from your overall organizational goals. When we talked about creating a common group, therefore, our idea was always to try to work out some way in which *our* organizational perspective could find an appropriate expression within your broader regroupment—which, of course, has to mean one that is compatible with that broader effort. It seemed obvious to us that we needed to talk with you about whether it was possible to accomplish this, and if so how.

You, on the other hand, assumed that our joining Solidarity would mean that we were willing to simply drop our present "sectarian" notions about how to work toward building a real vanguard party in the United States. Once we did so, you reasoned, no significant obstacles would remain in the way of our joining forces. There was, therefore, not much for us to discuss in advance.

It's not surprising under these circumstances that considerable tensions have arisen. I think we will be able to understand the problem better if we take a closer look at some of what you have to say in your discussion article.

You pose things correctly at the outset: "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." You then go on to describe your own approach:

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.)

So far, so good. We agree with all of these points, and also that they are essential as a common basis for building a revolutionary political organization in the U.S. today.

Later, however, you take up another side of the problem: "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."

Here, even leaving aside your pejorative description ("tightly defined sect"), I have a problem. It is not with the general idea that historical and theoretical matters, such as "the interpretation of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution," can be left open, for leisurely debate, with "no timetable contemplated for resolving them." (I know that a caricature of the FIT's attitude on this has been prevalent in Solidarity, the idea that we somehow insist on homogeneity around that particular issue as a prerequisite to becoming part of a broader organization. But this has never been true.) In the FIT we have comrades who will express widely divergent points of view on many historical and theoretical issues. The difficulty lies elsewhere. Because, in the midst of this sentence you throw in, seemingly as an afterthought, a question which is *not historical or theoretical at all*. Rather it is one that poses profound questions about what we need to do in the United States today: the *desirability* of a Leninist party.

Isn't it clear that if we all simply leave this "open," with "no timetable . . . contemplated for resolving [it]," then by failing to take positive action to advance toward building a Leninist party we will, in fact, have *already responded with a resounding "no"* to the question of *whether* one is desirable? What would it mean in the union movement today, for example, to leave the "desirability" of a labor party "open" with "no timetable contemplated for resolving [it]"? It would mean to do nothing about a labor party, thereby clearly stating that we do *not* think it is desirable to take even preliminary steps toward building one at the present time. What would it have meant during the Persian Gulf war had we left the questions of building a united coalition and mass demonstrations open, with no timetable contemplated for resolving them? It would have meant doing nothing about creating or building a coalition and

Open Letter to Solidarity's Political Committee

by Steve Bloom

mass demonstrations. The list could continue, but the point should be clear enough: To leave a question open, when action on it is required, is not really leaving it open at all. It means making a negative decision by taking no action to advance toward a particular goal.

For us in the FIT, the *desirability* of a Leninist party—whatever disagreements and debates we may have about its functioning and organization—is not an open question in the sense you imply, of one on which it is inappropriate or unnecessary to draw working conclusions that affect our present-day activity (more on this question of how we might understand the word “open” in a moment). The desirability of a Leninist party, *properly understood*, is one of the foundation stones of our organization. And we completely disagree with any idea of waiting until some point in the far-off, misty future before we begin the process of constructing such a party.

Even if we were to concede that a conscious vanguard, able to act in a disciplined fashion, is necessary only in the actual course of a revolutionary upsurge we would still reject the idea of waiting to begin building one—since there is no guarantee of sufficient time (indeed, there is every indication that there will *not* be sufficient time) to create a *genuine* vanguard party in the heat of revolutionary events. *And we do not for a moment concede this point*, since we are also convinced that participa-

tion in the class struggle by a conscious and disciplined revolutionary cadre organization is a vital prerequisite even for the victory of *preliminary* struggles, creating more favorable conditions for any revolutionary upsurge when it does take place.

The history of the 20th century has seen too many rapid transformations in the objective situation, which in turn rapidly transform the consciousness of working people, which in turn places struggles on the agenda that bypass even the most dedicated and honest revolutionists who are not organizationally prepared for them. We cannot wait until the storm clouds are on the horizon before we begin. For us there is overwhelming historical evidence to sustain the validity of this conclusion. We do not agree with you that the caricatures of Leninism created by myriad groups—ones which, we believe, never really understood what Leninism meant in the first place—should cause us to now “leave open” the question of working to build a vanguard party.

Of course, in some senses this *is*, and *should remain*, an “open” question. It is, for example, one on which we are open to discussion with those—including members of Solidarity—who disagree with us about it. We do not dismiss anyone *simply* because we have a difference with them about this, or any other idea, no matter how important we might consider it to be. And in a larger, historical sense, the desirability of a Leninist party is a question that will remain open until we actually succeed in making the world socialist revolution, look back on the process, and see how it was done. After all, even the socialist revolution itself is an “open” question from that point of view—one which might some day be revealed, should the working class ultimately prove incapable of shouldering the burden of building a new society, to have been a utopian schema on the part of Marx and all the rest of us down to the present day.

But it seems clear that neither of these ideas is what you intended to express in your article. Rather, you are suggesting that *for each and every member, for each and every current of thought* in Solidarity, the question of creating a Leninist party must remain open *in the sense of a question on which you at least agree that no action need be taken today, or any time soon, by revolutionists in the U.S.—even though some may well believe it remains a desirable goal in the abstract. This is the only interpretation consistent with including it, as you do, in the category of general theoretical and historical questions which can remain unresolved for an extended period of time.*

It should be obvious that as long as you insist on agreement around this as a fundamental basis of your organization it will profoundly affect relations between us—especially the possibility of unity. If the FIT should decide to join in the kind of effort you describe, to “seek unity around a broad revolutionary program,” it could never be with a requirement that we give up, in advance, our commitment to building a Leninist organization, no matter how much we might find that we agree with all the positive points in Solidarity’s platform.

Yet there is an alternative way to achieve unity between us, as I suggested at the beginning of this letter. It *is* possible for a tendency which wants to work actively to build a Leninist organization to become part of a broader current of revolutionaries which includes individuals who disagree about this, and which as a broader group takes no position on the question—without anyone having to give up ideas that are

Question from a Reader:

Is the FIT Sincere in Its Unity Perspective?

Dear *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*,

I have heard it said recently by both members of Socialist Action and of Solidarity that the “unity” perspective which the Fourth Internationalist Tendency has been pursuing over the past year is a fake, that it is insincere and just a maneuver. What do you have to say to such a charge?

A Long-time Reader

Bulletin In Defense of Marxism Replies:

There is no truth whatsoever to that statement. The source of it lies in the failure of both Socialist Action and Solidarity to understand the FIT’s approach to unity. We reject the idea that any genuine and lasting unification between ourselves and either of the other two groups can be achieved without some effort to understand, and overcome, the factors which created our present disunity in the first place. One of the most important of these questions, as Steve Bloom points out in this “Open Letter to Solidarity’s Political Committee” has been our different conceptions of what kind of revolutionary organization is necessary today in the USA. In the end, of course, this is not really an organizational question, but a profoundly political one.

Solidarity and SA both see things differently. Neither of them has been willing to recognize that there are any substantive questions that need to be discussed, or problems to be overcome, in order to bring about a lasting reunification of our forces. So the FIT’s insistence on such a process is seen as a maneuver of some kind. As far as they are concerned, if the FIT really wanted unity we would just give up our independent existence and join them. As long as we reject this, they reason, we are obviously insincere in saying that we want unity.

essential to their political integrity. Our comrades of the Fourth International in Brazil, for example, function effectively along these lines within the PT, to the mutual benefit of both their specific current and the PT as a whole. For this to work, however, it is necessary that everyone involved be conscious of the differences, the potential problems that can arise, and seek mutually agreeable ways of resolving any conflicts as they develop. That would require an effort *on your part*, not just on ours, if we are ever to truly seek a unity between our organizations *which is based on collective respect and understanding* (the only kind of unity that would be worth having), instead of on what I can only characterize as your demand for a one-sided capitulation by the FIT.

I ask you, therefore, to consider whether a change might be appropriate in the approach you have taken so far toward relations between us. The next time we have an exchange of views, whether it be in writing or during a face-to-face meeting, let it be with some recognition on your part that *our* political and organizational concerns are a legitimate part of that exchange. Once you decide to make such an effort, we might well be able to make real and rapid progress in thinking through possibilities for a unification of our forces.

If, however, you choose not to address the problem in this way, if you continue to insist that the FIT must, as a prerequisite even to discussions about unity, adopt your *already established* collective appreciation on the question of a vanguard party, then at least speak honestly with us and with yourselves. Drop the pretense that this is an “open” question, since you are clearly not “open” to our views on it. Acknowledge that it is settled, at least for now, within Solidarity, and that agreement not to challenge this settlement (in addition to agreement around the rest of your “broad revolutionary platform”) is necessary for anyone to become a member of your organization. If you honestly state these things then the FIT and Solidarity will have no basis for discussing unification. But we *will* have a basis for developing a genuine fraternal working relationship based on a *clear* understanding of what we have in common, and of what keeps us apart. That would go a long way toward relieving the tensions that have existed between us.

I might add that your discussion article itself, in a number of ways, clearly underlines the important place this *rejection of* (not openness on) Leninism has in your overall explanation of “socialist regroupment.” You never even talk about Leninism, or those who try to practice it, except to denounce them and contrast your own approach. For example, your final paragraph speaks of “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.” Earlier, in contrasting Solidarity to SA, you pose a similar dichotomy: “While struggling with uneven success to overcome [our] weaknesses, we refuse to *disguise* them with fake Bolshevik posturing and commandism dressed up as democratic centralism.”

I will assume that you honestly believe in this caricatured counterposition, since otherwise you would be ill-advised to put it in an article addressed to FIT members. We certainly find it unconvincing.

You ought to realize by now that we reject building “a single-tendenced Trotskyist sect,” and also “fake Bolshevik posturing and commandism.” We insist that there is a *third*

possibility: a genuinely *democratic* centralism. And we think that in the FIT we have set a concrete example of how it can work, at least on a small scale—as members of Solidarity are sometimes willing to acknowledge. Like you we favor an open, multitendenced, revolutionary organization. But we reject any counterposition of such nonsectarianism to working for programmatic clarity and real unity in action.

We have been given no arguments by you why *our kind of Leninism* cannot be developed on a broader basis provided there is a conscious and active membership combined with a leadership committed to real rank-and-file decision making—both within the revolutionary movement and in the broader class struggle. Instead of presenting such arguments, you *simply refuse to discuss* the matter with us. Socialist Action, by the way, reacts similarly. Both of you insist that we accept *your* understandings of Leninism (which are, I might point out, remarkably similar—the most tangible distinction being that SA embraces it and you reject it). And you each propose that we simply join your organization as it stands now, dismissing our alternative approach out of hand. That always has been, and will remain, unacceptable to us.

The FIT’s perspectives regarding fusion between *any* of our forces is predicated on the possibility of a change in attitude on this question by you and/or SA. You may well fail to develop the more rounded appreciation of Leninist functioning and its truly democratic spirit that we would like. But, as noted above, you must *at least* acknowledge that this *is a legitimate subject for discussion*. In other words, you must show us that you are, truly “open” on the matter, not just in words but in life.

It is also my opinion that something important might well happen if either you, or SA, or both of you begin to take the FIT’s organizational conceptions seriously. What you now describe in your article as “a perfect fantasy in practice”—the idea that at some point in the future (we have never projected this as a realistic possibility in any immediate sense) a convergence could take place between SA and Solidarity—could begin to seem not quite so outlandish. At a minimum, you need to understand that our present vision, of a reconstituted section of the FI including current members of SA and your FI Caucus as well as the FIT, and working if at all possible in the context of a broader current of revolutionary forces in the U.S., *is predicated on change*. I will be the first to acknowledge that such an idea is *indeed pure fantasy if we project a simple continuation of each of our three currents* maintaining all of the same ideas we now have.

One final word. Many members of Solidarity have expressed to FITers their admiration for our coherence, our ability to get things done, something they feel is lacking in your organization. You acknowledge this problem when you write: “Our structures are weak, our ‘response time’ to political events often slow, our level of political development below what we would like.” But isn’t it just possible that it is precisely the FIT’s commitment to building a politically well-defined current, one that takes collective responsibility for questions of program and theory, providing full democracy for its members but also committed to unity in action, which has enabled us to accomplish the positive things which we have? (Though of

(Continued on page 40)

Notebooks for the Grandchildren

by Mikhail Baitalsky

50. Vorkuta—My Alma Mater

A camp amalgam consisted of real and fabricated criminals. The latter category included more likely than not those who allowed themselves to think about their surroundings. The Kherson electrician Lenya, author of an anonymous letter to Stalin, was not a very literate person but a thoughtful one. Even those who only began to express doubt found in the shortest possible time that an investigator was enlightening them with the help of a kilowatt bulb, abusive language, and other methods of agitation and propaganda.

It was not when we were free but when we were imprisoned that we thought as much as we wanted, analyzing and discussing all kinds of things about which we knew little before we were arrested and about which we spoke even less.

In the camp near Moscow, I met many good people. There was a vast abyss between my boss at the Akhtar machine-tool plant (who fired me for expressing a very tiny bit of truth) and these new acquaintances of mine. He was an engineer and so were they. It was not only that he was a wheeler-dealer and a thief while they hated swindlers and tufta.¹ More important was the fact that high moral standards are the basis for developing new interests which a wheeler-dealer does not and cannot have.

On New Year's Eve going into 1951, Aleksandr and I were discussing the fact that we were right in the middle of the twentieth century. What would the second half be like? We saw how Stalinism tried to cut the fruit of knowledge in two: one half being knowledge of the laws of nature and the other being knowledge of the laws of history. Stalin projected an unrealistic goal: to attract talent into technology and thereby to create things immediately necessary to the state while leaving the social sciences in the hands of talentless and servile popularizers. We saw no less clearly that cutting a fruit in half does not keep it from rotting. The best proof of this was the pathetic fate of our cybernetics, sociology, and biology. We knew that the day would come when the technician who is totally indifferent to sociology will ask himself: how did this happen? And on that day, he will forget about going to the football game which had until then successfully helped him

stifle any interest in the fruit with which the treacherous serpentine tempters had tried to seduce him.

Because we foresaw that this day would come, we were heartened. We said to ourselves: "The lie will perish" not only because the human conscience by nature believes truth will prevail, and not only because we linked our release with the triumph of truth. But deprived of our freedom, we had to think day and night whether we liked it or not about something that would not even have occurred to us had we been free: how science and truth are related and the indivisibility of the fruit of knowledge.

Tell me: who is the real optimist? We, who although condemned to indefinite terms of confinement, never lost confidence in the ultimate triumph of truth during all the darkest years? Or those who called their optimism "life-asserting," while behind their backs the lives of people who had hoisted the red banner over Russia were snuffed out? Are we the ones or was it those who knew very well that books were being destroyed and history was being falsified but consoled themselves by thinking that those who were being fooled would never know what had happened? Which of us is looking forward and which backward?

Our optimism was our light in the darkness of the Black Marias and their optimism was like the white curtains over the Black Marias' phony windows.

* * * *

The time has long since passed when all of this should have been publicly discussed. Freedom of speech—an expression which during Stalin's time was considered suspect—concerns every last citizen. It has a direct connection with socialist democracy, the problem of wages, the position of women, and all problems of everyday life. If Stalinism had actually established socialist democracy, agricultural production would have already been able to attain very high levels of productivity. The most ordinary collective farmers understood the root of the evil.

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.

But they were silent. The collective farmers who were elected to the Supreme Soviet also understood the problem and they also remained silent. Why? Because there was no freedom of speech and any remark about any action of the government was interpreted as an effort to discredit it. Freedom of speech is the practical (and not just the declared) possibility to openly criticize actions of any government representative without being afraid that you will be dragged away for it.

For the electorate to be able to criticize, they must know what is going on. Calls for self-criticism, when the voters know no more than what is going on at home and in their factories, is a hypocritical call. The idea of socialism is not discredited by some sort of anecdote but by a wildly exaggerated fear of broadly distributing information. As a result of this fear, everything is kept a secret: taxes are disguised; the history of collectivization turns it into a festive occasion; figures on crime are buried under percentage indicators; the history of the 1930s is illuminated like the moon, one side only; the scope of the problem of alcoholism is carefully concealed; the Bolshevik slogan of 1917 "Down with secret diplomacy!" has given way to general phrases in vague communiques; and such an event as the resignation of the first secretary of the CC—the ultimate voice in state policy, the individualist, volunteerist Khrushchev—falls like snow on the stunned heads of the voters, who just yesterday would never even have dreamed of his demise.

The logic of facts cannot be fooled. The only people who will not understand this are those who don't want (or are psychologically unable) to do so—those who always have reason to fear that the "unstable" might be taken in by finding out too much. Nikita Sergeevich [Khrushchev] loved to roar about the unstable minds of the youth. The writer Gribachev referred to them in a more kindly way: "not very experienced." How many people are there in this country who are "not very experienced"? Obviously about as many people as there are people who have been shielded from experiences, which means all of us. That means we are all stupid, naive little people who are "not very experienced." This is a fine opinion for a protector of a people to have about them! And at every step their contempt for the people and their lack of confidence in them shows itself.

The knights of the Middle Ages, when they set off for many years in the Crusades to conquer Palestine from the heathens, wanted to be sure that the wives they were leaving behind would be faithful. Considering women unstable beings and "not very experienced," the knights invented chastity belts with which they sealed shut the loins of their wives, to have, if you will, an ironclad guarantee of fidelity. In the same way, a spiritual chastity belt protects us from a reprehensible intimacy with information with which even mere familiarity is dangerous. According to Gribachev's convincing explanation, such familiarity means to learn only part of the truth when we need to know the whole truth, and not just part of it.

Therefore, those who have read about the execution of the delegates to the 17th Party Congress know only *part* of history while those who have never found anything about it at all in any textbook know *all* of it. What curious logic!

We began to see with our own eyes and also find out from books that almost all the people—in our country and in other countries—had gradually learned a new way of measuring social success, which had formerly been of interest to very few:

measuring of justice. Justice lends itself poorly to statistical calculations and strongly differs from the recognized systems of measurement applied in the press and on the radio. Attaining goals in tractor production and increasing the total number of sheep per hundred hectares of arable land can be easily documented. However, people today have begun to understand that the figures given reflect the truth these figures have been programmed to reflect, whether it is for everyone or for the unstable. If a factory produced 100 tractors, but because of the lack of spare parts or some other factor to do with our planning, the tractors stand idle 25 percent of the time during the production season (the number of days of which is also figured into the plan), then the real truth is that the tractor output was only 75 and not 100. We can correctly say that the whole figure—100 tractors—is only part of the truth, and the entire truth about the planning is that part of the whole that serves the people and is not for show, i.e., the figure of 75. The whole truth is less impressive, but it is real.

In order to ascertain the whole truth, it is necessary to give every worker the opportunity to correct the happy figures and words—which do not mobilize people but on the contrary lull them to sleep—by introducing information that he or she knows from experience to be reliable

Only *glasnost* will mobilize the people.

During Stalin's time, the very word "freedom" was used most often ironically, in articles about bourgeois freedom or in a judicial sense—deprivation of freedom. But between the grandiloquent words which my investigator had total freedom to use—from "the shimmering heights of communism" to "I will wear down your soul"—and the words for which one could expect immediate punishment, there stretched a vast zone of words that could be punishable depending on how they were looked at. I would call this the ambiguous zone. The people in charge of it were the investigators, the main linguistic authorities of the epoch.

During the time Khrushchev was in power, he himself exercised unlimited freedom of expression of his opinions (his and those of his aides), giving the impression that with a few unfortunate interruptions, the civil liberties proclaimed in 1917 had been routinely realized in almost all of the subsequent years even though everyone—including Khrushchev himself—knew very well that Stalin had abolished them.

Khrushchev's fate showed how changeable the very content of the formula "freedom of speech" is. Had you said one day before his removal that he was vulgarizing Marxism, what would have happened to you? You would have been quickly hauled away to the linguistic experts. Then the day after his removal, all his speeches, collected in such thick volumes, and his portraits and edicts as well, were consigned to the garbage heap. Your words about him, that had yesterday been considered seditious, had moved into the zone of free allusion, a zone which is dear to me, where the literary lefties forge shoes for fleas, and the atamen Platovs, the Don Atamen from that same Leskov story, examine every little letter under a specially perfected microscope and every chance they get shout for the unforgettable troikas, and the poor creature "Lefty" gets rushed off to prison to meet with the linguists in civilian clothes.²

The problem of freedom of speech is actually a problem of having links back to the society—links which even Garun al Rashid realized in his own way.³ Of course, as regards the

camps, the link with the masses of ZKs was not particularly important: the camps were not thought of as a republic. At the same time, it was precisely in the camps that they tried zealously, if in a rather unique way, to keep things in order, i.e., find out what the attitude of the masses was, with one aim: to nip any resistance in the bud while it was still in the air in the form of attitudes. A box was added for statements, stoolpigeons were encouraged, conversations were listened to and censorship was implemented. These were Stalin's favorite means for becoming familiar with the will of the people, the best detectors indicating precisely what they had to quickly put a stop to and where it was. Other detectors fell into disuse. Why have freedom of speech if we can find out what they are thinking without it?

But there are cases when even without a communique from the local party organization the district committee of the party can learn quite distinctly the innermost thoughts and hopes of the workers. One such incident occurred in Vorkuta and it is so amusing that I must relay it to you.

In the extraordinary first months of camp liberalization, when some campmates even expected their godfather [camp supervisor] might come kiss them three times as was done on Easter to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, one night somebody or other knocked the head off the granite Stalin monument that stood on one of the central streets.

And not satisfied with that, they had also tried to pull over the headless shoulders a ragged prisoner's peajacket. From very early morning, from dawn itself, traffic as had never been seen before appeared on this ordinarily fairly quiet street. Because of their innermost feelings, the workers hurried to see this leader without a head.

The officialdom issued orders for several sheets sown together to be immediately flung over the beheaded trunk—that continued to remain sacred—in order to disguise (that is, cover over) this indecent occurrence. But the sight suited the spectators, and the traffic did not let up. There were some who could not deny themselves the pleasure of passing along the street

two or three times in order to enjoy the entrancing view. The officials were so upset and bewildered that they did not have the presence of mind to organize a registration of the passers-by.

This politically comic Extraordinary Situation came to an end with the head being reattached. The seam was rather obvious but the officials decided that they could not on their own remove the statue. How could they do that without a command from above? And they had to wait several years for that to come down. So the monument remained standing with the evidence of repair reminding everyone of the joyous event.

There were two Stalin monuments in Vorkuta and one of Lenin—but they were more modest in size and not located in the central square. The second Stalin monument—a bronze one—stood high on a pedestal in the very center of the city, opposite the Vorkuta coal headquarters. It stood there for many years. Finally, after a general command affecting the entire country, it was removed from its pedestal and delivered to the Vorkuta machine factory to be melted down. However, the factory administration was in no way empowered to make a decision to lay a hand on this sacred piece of sculpture. So it remained there.

It was lying in the smelting area in a rather unseemly pose, with its face down; and the foundry workers expressed their attitude toward this monument to Stalin by performing several necessary functions on its head. Apparently this latter circumstance finally forced the factory administration to make the decision to have the statue destroyed.

Because of such incidents, my dear Vorkuta—city of undisguised social phenomena, city with a serious problem of alcoholism and unconcealed pursuit of rubles—you speak, though in a crude way but on the other hand without beating around the bush, about things other cities try to keep silent. Even in your hypocrisy you are more open than the other hypocrites. Thank you for the knowledge you imparted to me—my polar university, my snowy alma mater!

51. The Poisonous Weapon of Hushing Things Up

Nothing that happened passed without leaving a trace. I have spoken about the past and now I will speak of something that took place recently.

I was working in my garden, prying rocks out with a crowbar when my neighbor came up to the fence. He is a son of one of the populations subjected to repression by Stalin, a Balkar.

"Hello, neighbor," he says. "I've been watching the way you are digging in your garden and handling those rocks. I must say I am really amazed. You don't have soil there but a rockbed. And for a man of your nationality to do this—I am truly amazed!"

I looked up. I had heard this many times before. Ivan Matveyevich Chernusov undoubtedly hiccoughed: this was his thinking exactly, if you can call it thinking.⁴ I should add that my neighbor does managerial work. He built himself a nice little house after he returned from exile; but I never did see him lift a shovel. It is the same with him as with Ivan Matveyevich:

They talk about how Jews hate physical labor while avoiding physical labor themselves.

It is very easy to convince these people that the entire history of my people, and particularly that part which unfolded in that small country between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, is no more than a dubious sounding legend. However, this small country did make some contributions to world culture and even numerous expressions that are used by these very people (while they are not even aware of it) were taken from the oldest book that was written by my people in this very land, its former cradle.

For example, "dove of peace," "daily bread," "forge swords into plowshares," "Tower of Babel," "cornerstone," "holy of holies" are just a few of dozens of such expressions. The history of these people is a legitimate part of world history which in the first decades after the revolution no one tried to hush up. Perets Markish, Samuel Galkin, David Bergelson, and other Jewish writers calmly wrote about the ancient heroes of their

people and no one condemned them for it. But now Makavei is considered a "Zionist."

My grandson is learning Greek myths and knows about the apple of discord.⁵ But who will tell him about the fruit of knowledge? The Mr. Fidgets [jailers] have no need to tell him about this. All their ideas are poured into a dozen ironclad formulas.

When the Mr. Fidgets shed tears for those who perished, I do not believe them. They mourn nothing and love no one. Love for one's people is an animal instinct if it is not accompanied by human feelings for other peoples.

It is not only Jews who are buried at Babi Yar, the Mr. Fidgets assert. That is, of course, true. But why did the Mr. Fidgets for so many years—not without success!—level this terrible grave to the ground? Wasn't it precisely because it had become a symbol of the suffering of the Jewish people when they wanted to convince everyone that no such suffering had ever taken place? Thus they were not simply burying the matter but walking over it with dirty feet.

There is a documentary film called "Before the Court of the People." It is not new, but from time to time it is shown again on television. It is about the Nuremberg trials. You can hear the speeches of the accusers. The makers of the newsreel hurried around from one death camp to another—Osventsim, Treblinka, Maidanek. We see the semi-corpses behind barbed wire, almost all of whom have Jewish faces. The narrator informs us that in the death camps the Nazis tortured to death twelve million people: Russians, Poles, Norwegians, French. I wait to hear who else the narrator will name. But not a word is mentioned about the Jews. Not one reference is made to this people whose victimization, one could say, touched the conscience of humanity.

Humanity does, all the same, have a conscience. It is not something the Mr. Fidgets could stamp out. When I spoke about their favorite method for hushing things up, I spoke in all my notebooks not only about its application to the Jews. I gave enough examples of the day-to-day use of this method to deprive all the masses of the ability to reason, which with each passing day is perfected and advanced, keeping pace with the technological progress of our century.

In a historical account, I am told, there must be a balanced distribution of light and dark, corresponding to the way it was in real life. True. If five-sevenths of the members of the Central Committee elected to the 17th Party Congress (98 of 141) were killed by Stalin, what percentage of light do we have?

If the curriculum of the history of the CPSU taught to correspondence students at the Institutions of Higher Learning have not a word about the repression, and there is only one theme of 58 (a ratio of 1:58) devoted to the events of those years when the repression took place, and if that one is about over-

coming the consequences of the repression that occurred 19 years after the repression itself, then what is the relationship in this case between light and dark? What kind of historical science is there when an event is presented not in connection with other events that occurred at the same time or preceding it but in connection with *subsequent* events occurring 19 years later? Doesn't this make a mockery of both science and history?

If those things about which they keep quiet really do not deserve attention, they why is so much attention devoted to making sure that not even one *inconsequential* detail about this past is allowed to appear in print.

At one time they wrote about the "years of unjustified repression." Later they stopped writing that and in biographies of prominent party workers who became victims of Stalin, they began to write this way: "He left us when he was forty years old." In one short phrase, they are keeping silent about two important details: in what year he "left us," and in what manner he "left us." Did he go away himself or was he carried away on a stretcher soaked with blood?

A biography of this type does not immortalize but rather insults the memory of the person it is about—just as a history mentioning a popular tragedy in the 1930s only in connection with events taking place two decades after their deaths is an insult to the memory of the entire Leninist guard, almost every one of whom was murdered by Stalin.

Such a hushing up of facts not only violates the moral standards of working people, but also poor planning. Twice in our lives we were convinced that this poisonous weapon serves only an unreliable cause and it destroys those who use it. History gets revenge in its own way. However, oblivion is only the first act of its retribution, and it does not stop there. Hushing things up, which frequently goes along with a wish to conceal one's own role, cannot become the last word in history. History is above petty vanity and vile combinations. It restores the obliterated name in order to investigate the reasons for its glorification or its disappearance and places it in its proper place on the stage of the past.

[Next month: "Love and Hatred"]

Notes

1. Tufta was a term used by prisoners to refer to the officially encouraged practice of pretending to work so as to look busy and fulfill production quotas while the actual products that resulted were shoddy or worthless.

2. This is an allusion to the Leskov story "Shoes for Fleas."

3. In an earlier episode, Baitalsky referred to the alleged practice of this Asian potentate of walking about his kingdom dressed as an ordinary citizen to learn what people were really saying about him.

4. Ivan Matveyevich Chermusov was an anti-Semite in charge of prisoners in the Vorkuta coal mines where Baitalsky performed forced labor.

5. This refers to the ancient Greek myth about an apple with the inscription "the very best" which was thrown by Erida, Goddess of Dissension, with the hope that it would cause dissension among the other goddesses.

More on Leonard Jeffries

In the several years I've been sympathetic to or a member of the Fourth Internationalist Tendency, I have learned to respect Steve Bloom for the acuity of his analysis and his political judgment. I usually find myself agreeing with him not just about general political matters, but also about questions internal to the FIT. So I was all the more surprised to read what seems to me his one-sided and distorted analysis of the "crisis in Black-Jewish relations" (*Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, Oct. 1991).

Steve's general introduction to anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism, and his overall conclusions, seem to me unexceptionable. What I object to are his analyses of the two specific incidents he discusses in his article, the Leonard Jeffries speech and the Crown Heights conflict. Here I think he goes wrong for two reasons: he overlooks his own important recognition of the need to separate Zionism and Judaism as such, and he fails to analyze the rightward movement of the *Black* (not just the Jewish) middle class in recent years.

I'm not familiar with Leonard Jeffries's scholarly work, and I'm not a historian. But I know enough to know that some of the statements in his speech as represented in the October *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* are outrageous—that they are not only ideological distortions but plainly false. Jeffries describes Hollywood movies' stereotypes of African Americans as the result of a conscious conspiracy by *Jews as such*, and he claims that *Jews as such* organized and financed the African slave trade from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries—in conscious collaboration with the Catholic Church! If this is not "singling out Jews" from other members of the Euro-American ruling class, as Steve denies it is, then I suggest that Steve is not using language carefully—which is not a habit I've learned to associate with him.

Steve evidently believes it's necessary to defend Jeffries on the ground of "multiculturalism," and because most of the attacks on him have come from the right. This is careless reasoning: it's not necessary or correct to defend bigots no matter who their enemies (or friends) are, and as for the reformist ideology of multiculturalism, I think it requires a more detailed analysis than Steve gives it in his article.

What lies behind this carelessness on Steve's part, I believe, is a one-sided concern with the rightward movement of many Jewish intellectuals and institutions over recent decades. This process is undeniable. Steve apparently fails to recognize, though, that a similar process has gone on

with privileged Blacks—and college professors certainly deserve that characterization; I speak as one. Middle-class layers of African Americans have increasingly adopted reformist politics, and sought to "cover" their rightward movement with ever-so-radical (usually "nationalist") rhetoric. There is nothing surprising or especially shameful about this process, but Marxists of all people ought to recognize and describe it for what it is. We must not be disabled by our general sympathy for "the Black liberation movement" (is there in fact such a *unitary* movement anymore?).

Steve's discussion of the Crown Heights incident seems to me more seriously flawed. He is not at all careful in describing the history of relations between the two communities, and seems to give in to his distaste for the Lubavitchers as "fanatics." The mistaken conclusions this leads him to are evident in his comparison of the Crown Heights affair to Zionism and the *intifada*! Steve must know that the Lubavitchers, like other ultraorthodox Jewish sects, are anti-Zionist, and he himself correctly pointed out in his introduction that it's vitally important politically to distinguish between Zionism and *Jews as such*. Yet like Leonard Jeffries in this instance, Steve runs the two together, and claims (on very slight evidence) "that the role of the Lubavitchers in collaborating with the police and otherwise promoting the oppression of Blacks within Crown Heights [—how? Steve has only offered examples of their arrogance and paranoia, not of active racism] is, on a small scale, analogous to the collaboration of Israel with the imperialist governments . . ." (p. 35). The Lubavitchers may indeed be fanatics, but this does not necessarily make them racist—unless one believes *Jews as such* are.

I've said that I agree with Steve's general introduction and conclusions. Why make an issue of what seems to me weaknesses in his concrete analyses? Because I expect better of him and of *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, and because I think it's not accidental that August Bebel, Marx's and Engels's comrade in the German Social Democratic Party, once described anti-Semitism as "the socialism of fools."

Doug Buchholz
Philadelphia, PA

Steve Bloom Replies

I welcome Doug Buchholz raising his concerns regarding my article on Blacks and Jews. When writing on such a complicated subject it is easy for anyone to lean

too far to one side or another, and thereby fail to present a balanced analysis.

However, looking carefully at the points Doug raises, it seems to me that he is either inaccurate, or his concerns are secondary to the main problem I was trying to discuss.

I fully agree when Doug says that "some of the statements in [Jeffries's] speech as presented in the October *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* are outrageous." My article explained: "Revolutionary Marxists would certainly find fault with many ideas that Jeffries expressed in his July 20 speech—from a philosophical, ideological, and even purely factual viewpoint." And I specifically criticize the assertion about a Hollywood Jewish conspiracy that Doug also takes up.

But it seems to me that Doug could not have read the excerpts from Jeffries very carefully when he tells us that Jeffries believes "*Jews as such* organized and financed the African slave trade." Here is what Jeffries had to say: "Now, we're not talking about most Jews. Most Jews were being beat—up and down Europe—persecuted for being Jewish. We're talking about rich Jews, and we specifically make that distinction."

I tried to make it clear in my article that I was not defending Jeffries against the right-wing's attacks because I agreed with his political philosophy. At the same time, I do not personally feel that I understand enough about the various currents and trends of thought in the Black community to pass definitive judgment on the social roots of the ideas held by Leonard Jeffries or anyone else. Certainly the phenomenon that Doug discusses—an increasing conservatism on the part of middle class Blacks trying to hold onto relatively privileged positions vis-à-vis others in the Black community—is real. The Clarence Thomas phenomenon shows this above all. But I must say that it has far less weight in terms of molding public opinion in the Black community than the analogous process amongst Jews.

And such developments are never quite so simple. Black college professors do, indeed, represent part of this middle class—as do white college professors. Yet I'm sure that Doug would be among the first to agree that we should not pass any *collective* judgment on the ideas of Black college professors *in general* based solely on this fact.

It is true that today the multiculturalist movement is essentially reformist in character—acting as if rearranging the educational system so that Black children are taught to respect their own history and traditions can somehow, by itself, bring

about real changes in this racist U.S. society. That is an illusion. But it seems to me that in this approach the multiculturalists reflect mostly the *generalized* political crisis of leadership in the Black community and among U.S. working people as a whole.

The present reformist philosophy of most of those who advocate multiculturalism should not determine the attitude of revolutionists any more than the reformist nature of most Black nationalism that arose during the 1960s and '70s should have caused us to reject the importance of that movement, or underestimate its impact on the development of revolutionary consciousness among Blacks. A genuinely revolutionary outlook in the U.S.—whether by Blacks or whites—will have to embrace the goals of multiculturalism as legitimate, just as we have to embrace the positive contribution of Black nationalism.

We agree that Black children, and not only Black children, should be able to get a broader appreciation of the proud history and cultural achievements of African peoples, and of their descendants in the Western Hemisphere. We cannot just sit on the sidelines and denounce the current philosophy of those who have taken the lead in advocating this. The task is to get involved in the movement and try to help it evolve in a revolutionary direction.

All of this will require a broad discussion and debate. Within that debate revolutionary Marxists will explain both where we agree with the ideas of Leonard Jeffries and where we disagree. But it will hardly advance that essential discussion if we start by repeating the right-wing's denunciations of him as an anti-Semite. From a simple, factual point of view I don't believe that this can be demonstrated from an honest reading of his speech. The rabid denunciations in the bourgeois media quote *very* selectively—and dishonestly. But even if Jeffries *does* indeed have an anti-Semitic philosophy, isn't it still necessary to discuss his ideas on their merits? Are his pronouncements about Jews any worse than the racist attitudes expressed on numerous occasions by uncounted other heads of departments on New York City University campuses? Is his reformism any worse than their political outlooks? Why is it Leonard Jeffries who is being singled out for attack?

The answer is obvious. The questions Jeffries poses in his speech—regardless of whether he is right or wrong in all of his answers—represent a threat to our present racist system of education, and therefore to our broader racist society.

As far as the Lubavitchers and Crown Heights is concerned, I can be briefer. Doug is simply misinformed about the support of this particular sect to Israel—

though he is right about the Hasidim in general. This is, in fact, one of the main points of friction between the Lubavitchers and other Hasidic Jews.

But whether or not the Lubavitchers are supporters of Zionism, it seems to me that my analogy between the role they play in Crown Heights and that of the Israeli state stands up. The question in both cases is whether a Jewish minority can defend its interests through an alliance with the oppressor (either imperialism in the Middle East or a racist, capitalist state apparatus in New York City) rather than through forging ties with the majority of the oppressed (either Arabs or Blacks) in order to help them fight for their liberation.

I think that the incidents I cited in my article make it clear that there *is* racism practiced against Blacks by the Lubavitchers *as an institutional social force* and an alliance by this same social force with the police and other forms of state oppression against the Black community.

Correction:

In my article in *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* No. 89, "New Crisis in 'Black-Jewish Relations'" the following sentence appears:

If this is true then a rebellion which directs itself against that oppression—whether it be rock and bottle throwing and even attacks against individual Jews in Crown Heights, or the Intifada in the occupied territories—has to be seen as a normal and positive response on the part of the oppressed peoples concerned—regardless of whether the specific tactics used are effective, and regardless of whether an anti-Semitic ideology may play a role.

This gives the wrong impression: that it is "attacks against individual Jews" which have to be seen "as a normal and positive response. . . ." The intent, rather, was to explain that the *Crown Heights rebellion* was "a normal and positive response" to oppression *despite* the fact that it resulted in the death of a Jew who was not personally involved in the incident that triggered it. I apologize for the involved syntax and poor choice of words which create here a meaning that I never intended.

Steve Bloom

On Solidarity and Regroupment

As regular readers of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism* and active members of the FIT, we are in favor of a broad regroupment of *revolutionary* forces on the

American left, and more importantly, within the workers' movement, which most of the far left seems to have long ago lost touch with. We therefore welcome the contribution of Solidarity's Political Committee entitled "On Socialist Regroupment: Solidarity's Perspective" which appeared in the November issue.

Solidarity's stated goal is "to seek unity around a broad revolutionary program" that recognizes the historic bankruptcy of social democratic reformism while reaffirming the "inseparability of socialism from democracy and working class power." This approach seems to be a far more valid perspective than the continued existence of a myriad of equally irrelevant "vanguard" sects and splinter groups based upon sets of shibboleths that only serve to legitimize their isolated existence over and apart from the workers' movement in general and their nearest competitors on the far left in particular. And, needless to say, all in the name of some sacred "programmatic" principles.

Furthermore, we concur with Solidarity that the FIT faces "a clear choice. . . not between organizations but between perspectives, between seeking regroupment on a broad revolutionary program and seeking yet again to create a single-tendencied Trotskyist sect." Socialist Action is clearly engaged in carrying out the latter endeavor with the same sad results as its predecessors and competitors in orthodox purity have had and will continue to have. Their pretentious visions of grandiosity remain confined to and reflective of the splendid isolation that the walls of their self-defined ghetto permit and totally at odds with the real world existing beyond its borders.

We, on the other hand, want to see the FIT a part of the former project. That way it can and will have a part to play in any real regroupment of revolutionary forces that takes place—one that is predicated upon and a part of a radical recomposition of the workers' movement as a whole. That is why we support a much more active orientation on the FIT's part toward similar forces in Solidarity.

But all of us—whether in FIT or in Solidarity—have to appreciate that there are differences between our organizations that will require a mutual effort before they can be overcome. Our disagreements will have to be discussed and worked through in a comradely manner, with an effort by *both* groups to take the concerns of the other seriously. *We are both hopeful and confident that this can be done.*

Roy Rollin
Randal Hepner
New York

Comment on the Ron Daniels Campaign

I was fortunate to receive copies of the *Bulletin In Defense of Marxism*, and I would like to comment on the article in the October '91 issue regarding the Ron Daniels presidential campaign. I do not know him personally, but I first became aware of Mr. Daniels at the founding convention in Philadelphia of the National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP). I've recently heard him express his views here in Washington on TV and radio, and he is most impressive. I am still somewhat bitter regarding the demise of NBIPP, but I do try to keep an open mind when hearing Mr. Daniels as well as other former co-chairs of NBIPP speak on various issues.

Mr. Daniels would agree that in declaring himself as a serious candidate for president, he faces a monumental task, and I am wondering why he has chosen to do so

without a political party. He's stated that his campaign will address the issues in ways that neither the Democrats nor the Republicans will, and intends to use his campaign to begin a movement for social change among African Americans as well as other progressive people. I know that many in the African American community are ready for the message carried by Mr. Daniels, for much of what he says needs to be done is right on target. I'm concerned, however, that African Americans supporting him will have no national, indigenous, permanent structure within which we can unite to create political, economic, and social changes. If Mr. Daniels wishes to see that whatever gains made *during* his campaign will remain long after November 1992, the formation of an independent political party is absolutely imperative.

African Americans must have confidence in each other, and need to know that we have the ability to take our destiny

into our own hands, but we cannot continue to place our destiny into the hands of individuals, even impressive individuals such as Mr. Daniels. At the moment, anyone who joins a campaign *only* joins a campaign; only joins forces with another human being who may at any time change their views, methods, or goals. Those who join a revolutionary party become part of a structure committed to engaging in struggle every day of the year. NBIPP's charter was not a charter of compromise; it was a declaration outlining a revolutionary program for fundamental change. In my opinion, if he is interested in connecting his campaign to a revolutionary political party, there's no need for Mr. Daniels to reinvent the wheel. The re-creation of NBIPP will more than adequately fill the bill.

Naima Washington
Washington, D.C.

Ron Daniels (Continued from page 18)

upon objective developments and pressures which are assuming a more and more explosive character—and his methodology, while serious, do not justify drawing final conclusions now about his candidacy or the movement he is struggling to build. What has to be determined is whether and how his positions are evolving, and whether sufficient openness and fluidity exist to intervene in his campaign to help

shape its program and direction. Obviously, that is a matter of interest not limited to revolutionary socialists, but one that will also concern other activists who are ready to fight for fundamental social change and who see the Daniels campaign as a potential vehicle for advancing that fight.

For now, revolutionary socialists should support Daniels's effort to the extent it advances the cause of independent class

politics. We should struggle against any and all tendencies and positions which compromise that objective. The outcome of that struggle will determine whether *at some future date* support—critical or otherwise—should be given the Ron Daniels campaign for president of the United States. □

October 28, 1991

Open Letter (Continued from page 33)

course we, too, feel far from adequate in terms of our ability to do what really needs to be done.)

After all, if we look at individuals with past experience as political organizers, Solidarity has at least as many resources as the FIT, and probably more. So it seems that something other than a simple difference in organizational skills is involved here.

I hope that our discussion on this and other matters will continue, both on a formal and on an informal level. It is incumbent on all of us—as serious revolutionary activists trying to find a way forward in a country where our success or failure may well determine whether there is a future for the human species—to fully clarify, and if at all possible resolve whatever differences keep us apart. □

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